

# A Twist of Dickens



Newsletter of the Cleveland Branch,  
International Dickens Fellowship

[www.clevelanddickensfellowship.org](http://www.clevelanddickensfellowship.org)  
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## Meeting Schedule

2018-2019 Book of the Year:

*Nicholas Nickleby*

Meetings, free and open to all admirers of Charles Dickens, usually begin at 7:00 pm on available weekdays at various Regional County Libraries. To use the County Library meeting rooms, our scheduler must be flexible. When in doubt, check the website calendar.

**Thurs. May 9. Richmond Hts. County Library, 5235 Wilson Mills Rd. (Store front in strip east of Richmond Mall) Come to this closing discussion with open-ended questions about NN, its characters, plot, etc. Bring your opinions about afternoon meetings.**

**Thurs. June 6. Annual Cleveland Fellowship Memorial Dinner. Nighttown, 6:00 to 9:00. See p. 4 for reservations, etc.**

**July 26 – 29, 2019. International Conference, Eastbourne, UK. Our own Beth Bliss will be one of the speakers.**

**Thurs. Aug. 8. Planning Meeting. Beachwood County Library, Rm. B. Bring program ideas for next season's study of *Old Curiosity Shop*.**

**Book of the Year for 2019-2020:  
*The Old Curiosity Shop***

*Bring a guest.  
Your friends are always welcome.*

May 2019

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## Geraniums and blogs

Google "Dickens, flowers" and you'll find a blog from the Dickens Museum, "Dickens's Favourite Flower" by



Jenny Hartley (Emeritus Professor, University of Roehampton). Her article was picked up by *The Dickensian*.

She quotes his daughter Mamie: "...scarlet geraniums were his favourite of all." She includes the famous photo of CD and his daughters posing in front of Gad's Hill's geranium theater (staged flower pots) outside the big bay windows. She notes the geranium button-hole Ruth Pinch makes for her brother Tom in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and David Copperfield's mention that the scent of the leaves always reminds him of Dora. She confirms the geranium's popularity with Victorians. They prized it for being sturdy, colorful, adaptable to a border or a pot. She doesn't mention the rationale I prefer, that in dirty old London where coal fires turned the air dark and black clothes were considered de rigueur in many social situations, bright red geraniums might have lifted his heart—maybe even more than his much criticized brightly colored waistcoats.

Visit the Museum's blogs (Google "Dickens Museum, Your Visit, Blog") for entertainment and education on many topics. —K. S.

## Who's real in NN?

As we end our book of the year study, here's a review of some characters and their real-life counterparts.

Always confused, Mrs. Nickleby was based on CD's mother, Elizabeth Dickens. Luckily, she didn't recognize herself in the character. In fact, she asked someone if they really believed there was such a woman.

Mr. Squeers and Dotheboys Hall were originally suggested by advertisements sent by Lord Robert Grosvenor to Dickens in 1838 about the Yorkshire schools.

Williams Shaw is the supposed model for Wackford Squeers. Mr. Shaw ran a Yorkshire school with similar treatments. Dickens met him, and his appearance probably suggested Squeers.

Smike, son of Ralph Nickelby and Nicholas's cousin, is probably based on 19-year-old George Ashton Taylor, who died suddenly in 1822. Taylor's grave is in Shaw's school's graveyard tucked under a bush.

— Beth Bliss

## Spin-offs from Dickens: Detective tales

### Heather Redmond. *A Tale of Two Murders*, 2018

Not a bad idea to make the unmarried young Charles Dickens and Catherine Hogarth ad hoc detectives in a neighborhood mystery. While working at the *Morning Chronicle* and becoming very interested in his editor's daughter, Dickens and she find time to investigate a neighbor's death and a few more. When he has a few minutes, he works on one of his *Sketches*.

The author dives into Dickens's London with gusto. CD's feet are always wet and cold, the rain and sleet drip down under his collar, the coal fires roast him when he's too close and don't penetrate the cold a few feet away. Folks smell sweaty, the streets are muddy and squishy with horse manure, women's hems pick it all up. Dickens, a 22-year-old man, is always hungry and very conscious of the female Catherine. Redmond usually writes historical romances; she's good on characterization and atmosphere. —K. S.



### Gary Blackwood. *Bucket's List*:

#### *A Charlie Field Victorian Mystery*, 2017

Dickens, an old friend, gives Charlie Field permission to market himself as PI Inspector Bucket (since Field served as the model for the Tec in *Bleak House*), even though Field has been retired from the force for a while. Dickens helps him solve murders and right wrongs. He even writes a rant in *Household Words* to improve London's coffee, Field's favorite drink. A Victorian/modern mix. —K. S.

## CD's novels and more in large print

Do you need your Dickens in large print? If you can use the web, go to the following dot coms:

**Large Print Book Company.** Choose "catalog" and "classic fiction."

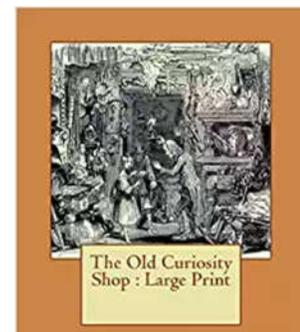
**Barnes and Noble's site** responds to "large+print-Dickens." The sheer numbers of *Christmas Carol* alone will knock you over.

**Amazon's** the big boy. You can probably find all the novels here as well as just about anything you need. Start your search with "large+print-Dickens". Scroll down to *Old Curiosity Shop* (paper, \$5.98) and order it for our next season. Or shuffle through the list for odd offerings: word search puzzles from *Great Expectations*, or Dickens's *Ghost Stories*, *Pictures from Italy*.

You'll find them all in large print on the internet.

Check out *Tale of Two Cities, Part 1* in "Large Dyslexia-Friendly Print"!

If you can't make use of the web, visit brick and mortar Barnes and Noble and ask for help. Their staff are trained to search the web as well as the shelves.



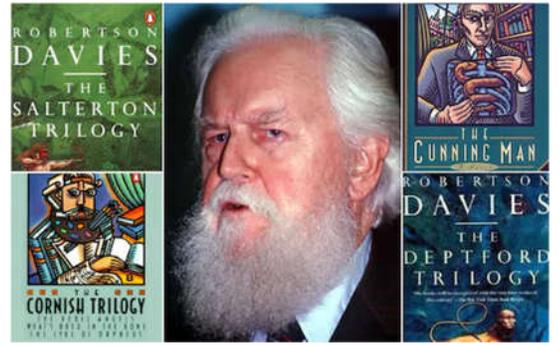
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## It's not Dickens, but...Robertson Davies *A recommendation from Michael Wells*

What a pleasure to write a short note about one of my favorite authors, Robertson Davies. Davies was a Canadian playwright, novelist, critic, journalist, and professor. In the latter, he taught literature at Trinity College in the University of Toronto from 1960 until 1981, and he also served UT as the founding Master of Massey College (a graduate school) from 1963 until 1981. His early career as a student at Balliol College in Oxford University (B.Litt., 1938), as an actor outside of London and with the Old Vic Repertory Company, as a literary editor at the *Saturday Night* magazine in Canada, as the editor and then publisher of the *Peterborough Examiner* in Peterborough, Ontario, and finally as a member of a Davies family group owning several Canadian newspapers, and radio and television stations meant that his students, playgoers, and later his novel readers could enjoy the distillations of a well-educated, well-read, and well-experienced man who knew well how to tell an engaging story dealing with life's troubles and pratfalls and myths and magic.

And what novels! I was drawn into the Davies spell by the *Rebel Angels*, a wonderful far-ranging academic novel engaging theology, biology, politics, and the advancement of women in the university. This became the first volume in Davies' *Cornish Trilogy*. It led me to Davies' other trilogies, the *Salterton*, the *Deptford*, and the incomplete *Toronto*. All are also cultural histories of Canada. Davies' extensive interaction with print and electronic media also informs them.



I note that the Davies biography by Judith Skelton Grant has many Dickens citations in its index. Davies was taken with the tradition of ghost stories at Christmas. He entertained Massey College yearly with a recitation of *A Christmas Carol* and later published his own collection of ghostly delights in *High Spirits*.

Davies' first love was the theater. His *Eros at the Breakfast Table* won the 1948 award as Canada's best play from the Dominion Drama Festival. In the 1950s Davies was instrumental in starting the Stratford Shakespearean Festival of Canada and later collaborated with Sir Tyrone Guthrie in 3 books about the festival. Perhaps a 1960 flop in NYC persuaded him to retire as a playwright. If so, perceptive book lovers can rejoice at the failure.

## *Walter and Elizabeth Zborowsky: Kathy Broz remembers*

On February 22, 1984, I faced those interested in forming a Cleveland branch of the Dickens Fellowship. Of the 11 assembled before me, only a few would continue on as stalwart members of the branch. Walter Zborowsky was one of them. Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Walter earned degrees in Canada as well as in New York as a social worker specializing in counseling children with intellectual disabilities. For over 36 years he worked as Executive Director of HELP Foundation, Inc., advocating for children and adults with ID. This passion informed Walter's reading of Dickens, and he contributed much to our



discussions of Dickens's works. During a turn as chairman, Walter brought out the first issue of our newsletter in 1987, naming it *A Twist of Dickens*. Walter's creative talents were on display in print making, using linoleum and wood blocks (I am lucky to have his print of Dickens), and in baking. (His Christmas cake was the favorite at many holiday gatherings.)

Walter's elegant wife, Elizabeth, couldn't be persuaded to join fellowship meetings, although she brought Walter when he could no longer drive himself; and the couple came to the memorial dinners as long as Walter was able. A social worker specializing in serving the elderly, Elizabeth devoted herself to Walter and was with him when he died at age 89 on January 23, 2019 after which she checked herself into hospice. Her own death from pancreatic cancer soon followed on March 9, but not before she had planned a Joint Life Tribute service to be held on their 45<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, May 18.

## *Dickensian studies: what's happening now*

### **Dickens tried to have Catherine committed.**

"I think during this period he was mad effectively and their lives were thrown into turmoil," comments Clare Tomalin, a Dickens biographer.

Catherine spilled the beans in a correspondence with friends/neighbors during the weeks before her death when she was on morphine for pain. She recalled that a family friend, Dr. Thomas Harrington Tuke of Manor House Asylum in Chiswick, refused CD's request to certify her. By 1864 Dickens was calling him "a wretched Being" and a Medical Donkey." Prof. John Bowen, Dickens scholar at University of York, combed through the letters held by Harvard University and assembled the story.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens's fellow novelist and close friend, successfully committed his wife Rosina. She escaped to write her story, *A Blighted Life*. She labelled Dickens "that patent humbug." Wilkie Collins based his novel *The Woman in White*, which Dickens published in his periodical *All the Year Round*, on a true story of a wife locked away in a Paris asylum.

### **Dickens Museum still collecting to bring the Lost Portrait home to Doughty Street.**

Go to the Museum's website, click on "Support Us" in the top tool bar and you'll find the appeal for funds to buy the portrait of young Dickens discovered a few months ago. Cleveland Fellowship sent a contribution. You can too.



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*Don't miss the social event of the year!*  
**Cleveland Dickens Fellowship Annual Memorial Dinner**

*Patio at Nighttown (Cedar and Fairmount)*  
*Thursday, June 6, 2019 6 to 9 pm*  
*\$50.00 per person. Checks to "Dickens Fellowship"*  
*Speaker, Mrs. James Garfield (aka Anita Benedetti)*

*Reserve your place with Beth Bliss: [bbliss67@msn.com](mailto:bbliss67@msn.com)*