

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC  
FICTION**

Charles Dickens  
**Bleak House**

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



NA944312D

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1	<b>Chapter 1</b> In Chancery	6:33
2	<b>Chapter 2</b> In Fashion	6:22
3	<b>Chapter 3</b> A Progress	5:51
4	On the day after my poor good godmother was buried...	6:17
5	Six quiet years I had passed at Greenleaf...	6:46
6	<b>Chapter 4</b> Telescopic Philanthropy	6:15
7	<b>Chapter 5</b> A Morning Adventure	5:19
8	Ada's colour had entirely left her...	4:52
9	<b>Chapter 6</b> Quite at Home	5:50
10	When we went downstairs we were presented...	6:14
11	<b>Chapter 7</b> The Ghost's Walk	4:35
12	As is usually the case with people who go over houses...	5:07
13	<b>Chapter 8</b> Covering a Multitude of Sins	6:49
14	Mrs Pardiggle conducted us into a cottage...	3:56
15	<b>Chapter 9</b> Signs and Tokens	3:53
16	I took care that the necessary preparations...	4:26
17	With the morning, there came a letter...	4:48
18	<b>Chapter 10</b> The Law Writer	3:13
19	Here, in a large house, formerly a house of state...	5:06
20	<b>Chapter 11</b> Our Dear Brother	5:52
21	Next day the court is all alive.	5:01

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22	<b>Chapter 12</b> On the Watch	5:36
23	At length, one afternoon a little before sunset...	3:31
24	<b>Chapter 13</b> Esther's Narrative	5:00
25	Dinner was now announced, and we went downstairs.	4:59
26	<b>Chapter 14</b> Deportment	5:16
27	I found the academy established in a sufficiently dingy house...	4:32
28	By this time we were come to Mr. Krook's...	5:35
29	<b>Chapter 15</b> Bell Yard	7:08
30	Mr. Jarndyce was turning to speak to us...	5:37
31	<b>Chapter 16</b> Tom-all-Alone's	7:02
32	<b>Chapter 17</b> Esther's Narrative	5:28
33	If I could have made myself go to sleep...	7:04
34	<b>Chapter 18</b> Lady Dedlock	7:46
35	The week had gone round to the Saturday following...	5:19
36	<b>Chapter 19</b> Moving On	6:49
37	Enter Mr. Guppy.	6:25
38	<b>Chapter 20</b> A New Lodger	7:05
39	<b>Chapter 21</b> The Smallweed Family	6:49
40	There comes a knock at the door.	7:35
41	<b>Chapter 22</b> Mr. Bucket	3:32
42	When they come at last to Tom-all-Alone's...	7:58

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43	<b>Chapter 23</b> Esther's Narrative	5:18
44	At last we came to Soho Square...	4:17
45	The house in Thavies Inn had bills in the windows...	4:49
46	<b>Chapter 24</b> An Appeal Case	4:08
47	In the business of preparation and equipment...	4:50
48	When we came to the court, there was the Lord Chancellor...	5:25
49	We then took a hackney-coach and drove away...	4:36
50	<b>Chapter 25</b> Mrs. Snagsby Sees It All	6:55
51	<b>Chapter 26</b> Sharp Shooters	4:02
52	<b>Chapter 27</b> More Old Soldiers Than One	8:19
53	<b>Chapter 28</b> The Ironmaster	7:12
54	<b>Chapter 29</b> The Young Man	6:53
55	<b>Chapter 30</b> Esther's Narrative	3:37
56	Caddy told us that she was going to be married in a month...	5:00
57	<b>Chapter 31</b> Nurse and Patient	5:22
58	There was more movement and more talking than usual...	3:40
59	<b>Chapter 32</b> The Appointed Time	6:25
60	<b>Chapter 33</b> Interlopers	5:59
61	<b>Chapter 34</b> A Turn of the Screw	6:26
62	When they present themselves in Lincoln's Inn Fields...	3:28
63	<b>Chapter 35</b> Esther's Narrative	6:37

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64	My guardian now came every day.	6:02
65	<b>Chapter 36</b> Chesney Wold	4:51
66	I cannot tell in any words what the state of my mind was...	6:06
67	Stunned as I was, as weak and helpless at first...	3:38
68	<b>Chapter 37</b> Jarndyce and Jarndyce	5:40
69	Richard was a little late in the morning...	6:18
70	As they were to remain with us that day...	4:54
71	<b>Chapter 38</b> A Struggle	6:32
72	<b>Chapter 39</b> Attorney and Client	4:01
73	Richard, emerging from the heavy shade of Symond's Inn...	5:00
74	<b>Chapter 40</b> National and Domestic	5:56
75	By the light of the fire, which is low, he can be seen...	3:05
76	<b>Chapter 41</b> In Mr. Tulkinghorn's Room	6:09
77	<b>Chapter 42</b> In Mr. Tulkinghorn's Chambers	5:52
78	<b>Chapter 43</b> Esther's Narrative	5:06
79	I could have no anticipation, and I had none...	5:42
80	<b>Chapter 44</b> The Letter and the Answer	6:32
81	<b>Chapter 45</b> In Trust	7:39
82	There was a concourse of people in one spot...	4:10
83	<b>Chapter 46</b> Stop Him!	6:55
84	<b>Chapter 47</b> Jo's Will	5:30

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85	Phil Squod and Jo are sent out immediately on this work...	3:58
86	Jo is very glad to see his old friend...	5:06
87	<b>Chapter 48</b> Closing In	7:03
88	Lady Dedlock dines alone in her own room today.	5:14
89	<b>Chapter 49</b> Dutiful Friendship	4:42
90	These blandishments have entirely won the family heart.	4:13
91	<b>Chapter 50</b> Esther's Narrative	7:41
92	<b>Chapter 51</b> Enlightened	3:39
93	We were soon equipped and went out.	5:32
94	<b>Chapter 52</b> Obstinacy	4:27
95	The door had been opened to admit another soldier-looking man...	4:49
96	<b>Chapter 53</b> The Track	5:40
97	<b>Chapter 54</b> Springing a Mine	5:43
98	At this juncture a considerable noise of voices is heard...	3:30
99	'Then,' says Mr. Bucket, 'let's hear Mr. Chadband.'	3:59
100	Mr. Bucket rings, goes to the door...	7:29
101	<b>Chapter 55</b> Flight	6:17
102	My Lady is in that room in which she held her last conference...	7:00
103	<b>Chapter 56</b> Pursuit	6:52
104	<b>Chapter 57</b> Esther's Narrative	7:55
105	The whole household were amazed to see me...	6:13

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106	<b>Chapter 58</b> A Wintry Day and Night	7:11
107	<b>Chapter 59</b> Esther's Narrative	4:04
108	We all three went into the house together.	3:28
109	It was my mother's.	5:39
110	<b>Chapter 60</b> Perspective	6:59
111	We sat down to dinner, and I had an opportunity...	4:33
112	<b>Chapter 61</b> A Discovery	4:59
113	And now I come to a part of my story touching myself...	5:56
114	<b>Chapter 62</b> Another Discovery	4:47
115	We went our way too, which was to Lincoln's Inn...	4:01
116	<b>Chapter 63</b> Steel and Iron	7:56
117	<b>Chapter 64</b> Esther's Narrative	7:49
118	When we came home we found that a young man had called...	4:34
119	<b>Chapter 65</b> Beginning the World	5:04
120	In the afternoon my guardian walked with me to Symond's Inn...	3:12
121	<b>Chapter 66</b> Down in Lincolnshire	3:48
122	<b>Chapter 67</b> The Close of Esther's Narrative	5:25

**Total time: 11:15:48**

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## Charles Dickens

# Bleak House

Dickens's ninth novel, *Bleak House*, was published between March, 1852, and September, 1853, in twenty monthly parts. It has two narrators, the not-altogether-omniscient authorial voice and the personal testimony of the central female figure, Esther Summerson. The action of the story largely revolves around one particular mystery: that of Esther's true parentage.

The novel opens in the Court of Chancery, the Lord Chancellor's court, to which cases were referred which had no remedy in common-law courts. Abuses at the time had led to demands for reform and Dickens uses the fictional suit of Jarndyce v. Jarndyce – based on a real instance, a case that had begun in 1834 and had still reached no conclusion – to satirise and condemn the worst excesses of an absurd, sclerotic system.

This lawsuit, as the novel opens, is continuing to spread its net far and wide, connecting Lord and Lady Dedlock of Chesney Wold; Ada Clare and Richard Carstone, orphans given into the care of the

philanthropical Mr. Jarndyce (who has so jaundiced a view of the proceedings of the court that he forswears all dealings with it and counsels others, Richard in particular, to do likewise); Esther Summerson, Jarndyce's other ward; the powerful and sinister lawyer Tulkinghorn; and so on, all the way down to the lowliest of the low, the unfortunate crossing-sweeper Jo. In other words, it entraps, confounds and frequently condemns to a premature end, persons from all levels of society.

The severe social criticism of *Bleak House* aroused indignation among some of Dickens's contemporaries and led to unfavourable reviews in such publications as Blackwood's, the *Westminster Review* and *Saturday Review*.

In the *Dictionary of National Biography* Leslie Stephens's complaint seems to have been that the novelist was too popular among the lower orders:

If literary fame could safely be measured by popularity with the half-educated, Dickens must claim the highest position

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among English novelists.

Dickens was evidently paying insufficient homage to the social system and failing to appreciate the status quo. He was particularly accused of being unable to portray a gentleman, i.e. a sympathetic member of the upper classes. In *Bleak House* the chief representative of the higher orders is Sir Leicester Dedlock, baronet. But although his readiness to bridle at any manifestation, however slight, of Wat Tylerish *lèse-majesté* is preposterous, he is shown to be a tender and considerate husband; and when struck down by serious illness, his pathetic prostration and anxiety for his wife is rather moving. Dickens's social criticism is not monochromatic.

Some early readers thought the novel rambling and ill-constructed but John Forster, a friend and Dickens's first biographer, formed quite the opposite view: 'Nothing is introduced at random, everything tends to the catastrophe, the various lines of the plot converge and fit to its centre.' That Dickens ever managed this, in view of the fact that the novel was published serially, is astonishing. The first-time reader may wonder how Mrs. Jellyby, Guppy, Mr. Smallweed, Trooper George and

Mr. Bucket (to pick a number of characters out at random) can all be relevant and not simply incidental, but all the threads are drawn together with great skill.

The modern view of *Bleak House* is that it counts as one of Dickens's masterworks. J. Hillis Miller in his 1971 introduction to the Penguin edition writes: 'Dickens constructed a model in little of English society in his time. In no other of his novels is the canvas so broad, the sweep more inclusive, the linguistic and dramatic texture richer, the gallery of grotesques more extraordinary.'

The function of Esther Summerson in this complex tale – or set of neatly dovetailed intertwining tales – is to allow the reader a view of what the ordinary individual's response might be to a social organisation that is eating itself away, a social (dis)order that is a ghastly parody of what a just human society ought to be, and could be.

She is far from being alone in attempting to set right what is wrong. Society around her is a-bristle with well-meaning souls who struggle to reform and correct whatever is amiss. However, they are mostly ineffectual either because, as with Mrs. Jellyby, attracted by the exotic woes of 'savages', they ignore the problems under

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their own noses, which consequently worsen by dint of their neglect – or because they aim, like Mrs. Pardiggle, to bully those whose behaviour they disapprove of into reforming themselves. The zeal of such charitable busybodies results in no perceptible alteration, let alone amelioration, of affairs. All that is enhanced is the do-gooders' own self-satisfaction.

There are, of course, individuals who act in less ambitious, less ostentatious and more fruitful ways to bring about changes and improvements. Mr. Jarndyce provides for the apparently orphaned Esther; pays the debts of his self-centred friend Skimpole (largely to help out his neglected family); rescues Charley's family when they are orphaned; approves of Esther's desire to take in the stricken Jo; and so on. It is true that he does not act altogether altruistically in taking Esther under his wing, hoping that one day she will be his wife but he can surely be forgiven for desiring to have such a companion. There is also the doctor, Woodcourt, who most actively helps the needy and, during his adventures at sea, saves countless lives after a shipwreck.

Dickens appears to be saying that only by such individual actions is the world in any

way redeemed and that to expect institutions to reform themselves and society to change for the better is mere folly. It may seem to be a message not wholly unlike that of Voltaire's *Candide*: to cultivate one's own garden, not, cynically, as an act of selfish disregard for the rest of suffering humanity, but in recognition of the fact that the best one can do – or that some can do – is to set an example by doing what little one can directly (rather than at several removes through cumbersome bureaucratic charitable organisations), even though one's efforts may not always be crowned with success.

Esther's attempts throughout her life to alleviate the sufferings of others are for her just part of what it is to be human. She is regarded by some readers as an idealised, unreal figure but it is made clear that her early life of emotional poverty and rigidity has left her highly self-critical and fearful that she is undeserving, so that she fights to be felt worthy of love and acceptance. Her warmth of personality and tireless selflessness are somewhat saintly but she is perhaps to be viewed rather like the lost princess in a fairy tale, howbeit one gone wrong. She may be a marvel of generosity of

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spirit and goodness but Dickens does not make of her a magician. Her successes are limited (understandably, given the recalcitrant nature of the circumstances she comes up against). She cannot save Richard, Jo, nor the bricklayers' families, but she inspires Caddy, Mrs. Jellyby's put-upon daughter, to break away and make a life for herself, gives her good advice concerning her engagement to Prince and demonstrates to her good housekeeping practices; she does her best to teach Charley how to read and write, and on a personal level triumphs over her disfiguring illness, the shock both of the discovery of her true identity and of the almost immediate loss of the real mother who informs her of it; and ultimately she does not let the severe warning of her adoptive mother ruin her life.

*Bleak House* is far from being a gloomy novel albeit that there is much darkness in it – darkness which links the sterile, deadened world of the Dedlocks of Chesney Wold and the wretched infernal region of Tom-all-Alone's. It is lightened by means of comedy and those positive endeavours by such characters as Esther and her guardian to counter the evils of the world.

The comedy is very powerful but never

merely for its own sake. The depiction of the Court of Chancery and its futile dealings or pseudo-dealings is itself humorous but that humour is dark and at times disperses to reveal the stark realities of the London of the time with its wretched slums and huddled poor hunting for scraps on the human dung heaps and in the muddy sludge that befouls the streets.

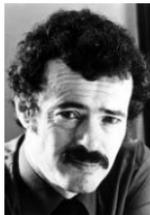
The domestic arrangements of Mrs. Jellyby, for another instance, are both very funny and at the same time pitiable, as she ignores her own children in favour of wretches across the seas. The Reverend Mr. Chadband, with his orotund vacuities boomed into the receptive ears of mean-spirited souls like the desiccated Mrs. Snagsby, is an entertaining figure but he is one of those for whom words supersede deeds and he unsurprisingly reveals himself to be perfectly hypocritical in seeking to make pecuniary profit from his knowledge of 'a sinful secret'.

Such characters, in which the novel abounds, are, as ever with Dickens, wonderfully named: Guppy, Skimpole, Turveydrop, Tulkinghorn, Dedlock. They seem to sum up the individual concerned, sometimes more or less literally (Dedlock),

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but more often by association. Such names are fantastical but *Bleak House*, is not a naturalistic work. Its most famous incident is the manner of the death of Krook, which may surprise the newcomer to the novel. In 1872 G. H. Lewes published an essay criticising Dickens for his distortions and grotesque exaggerations. To his friend Forster, Dickens commented: 'in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like... I have an idea... that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment.'

Critics have noted affinities with Balzac and Gogol, and certainly Dostoevsky was an admirer. When a friend asked him what reading matter he should offer his daughter, he wrote: 'All Dickens' books, absolutely without exception.' Some have sought to make a case that Kafka's work shares characteristics with those of Dickens. Be that as it may, our greatest novelist aimed, in the words of Graham Storey, 'to be master of both factual truth and imaginative life.'



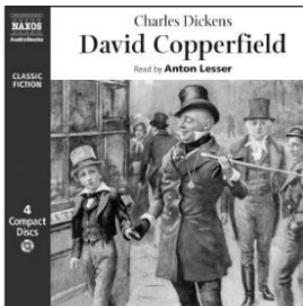
**Sean Barrett** started acting as a boy on BBC children's television in the days before colour, when it went out live. He grew up through *Z Cars*, *Armchair Theatre*, *Minder* and *Father Ted*. His theatre credits include *Peter Pan* at the old Scala Theatre and Noël Coward's *Suite in 3 Keys* in the 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.



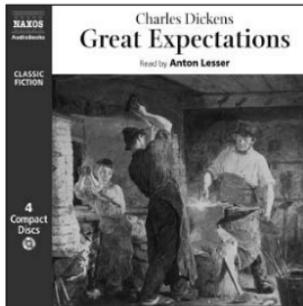
**Teresa Gallagher** has performed in many leading roles in both plays and musicals across the country, London's West End and Broadway. In addition, she is a well-known voice to listeners of BBC Radio Drama. Her work on film includes *The Misadventures of Margaret* and Mike Leigh's *Topsy Turvy*. For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

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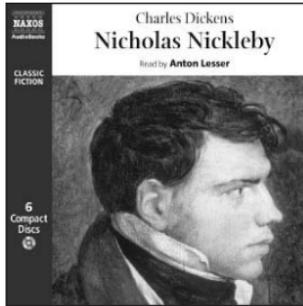
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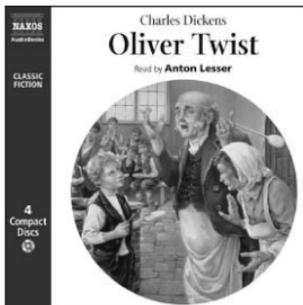
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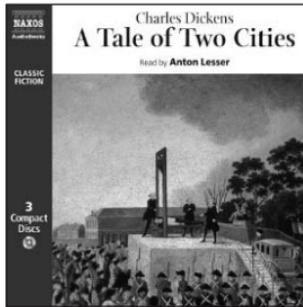
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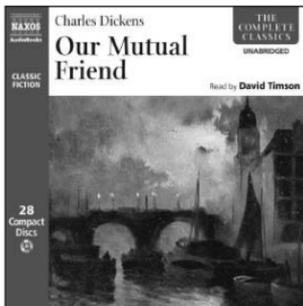
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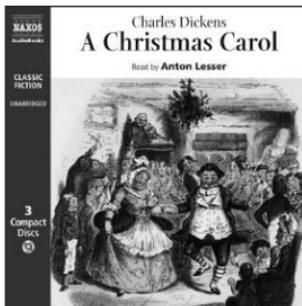
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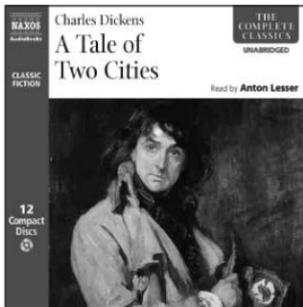
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ISBN 9789626344316

# Charles Dickens

# Bleak House

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

In *Bleak House* Dickens presents a critical picture of England in 1853. He condemns the insidious power of a hidebound legal system which creeps like a London fog into the lives of every character in the book. Dickens ingeniously links characters from all backgrounds from Esther Summerson, an orphan given support by the kindly Mr Jarndyce, owner of Bleak House, to Lady Dedlock who lives with a secret she can't reveal. Tulkinghorn, the ruthless lawyer, Krook the shop-keeper and Jo, the pathetic crossing-sweeper, are all finely drawn characters that enrich this story of the unravelling of Lady Dedlock's secret by Inspector Bucket, whose appearance in this novel can give it a claim to be the first English detective novel.

CD ISBN:

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