John Jarndyce uses the quote above to describe the apathy that so many poor and orphaned citizens of England faced in the 19th Century. *Bleak House*, by Charles Dickens, follows the trajectories of a large cast of characters from various social statuses and backgrounds but all of whom are tightly tangled in the infamous case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The case is a symbol of the greed and exuberance demonstrated by the British elite and those in power of the civil court system. The stark contrasts between the wealthy and the destitute are highlighted within the novel. The novel follows the story of Esther Summerson, an orphan who becomes an unwilling participant in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case. The story also revolves around the mystery of Esther’s identity as several links to wealthy and fashionable aristocrats are quickly established. Esther’s closest friends, Ada Clare and Richard Carstone, conversely tumble into poverty and destitution as the novel unfolds.
Bleak House, along with many others of Dickens' novels, was originally published in serial installments. There were a total of 20 installments and each one contained 32 pages of text, two illustrations, and 16 pages of advertisements. Dividing the novel into installments was an effective use of marketing. It allowed Dickens to have a wider audience because more people were able to afford it. People could sign up for an installment plan and pay one shilling a month over paying 21 shillings for the novel.

Major Themes

Government/Legal System Corruption

"Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day; in the sight of heaven and earth(14)".
The heavy, dirty, suffocating fog that the narrator describes in the opening pages of Bleak House symbolizes the ubiquitous corruption of the government and legal system of Victorian London. Just as there is “fog everywhere,” a murky force seeming to suffocate the city, the High Court of Chancery seems to slowly suck the life out of nearly everyone who has been unfortunate enough to be involved in a suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce; a case that has dragged on for generations. Miss Flite, the oldest living ward of the case, has gone insane from her years of waiting. She keeps caged birds and gives them the names of Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach; all symbolizing the victims of the suit. Richard, one of the newest wards, succumbs to the involvement of the Chancery and becomes so obsessed with the suit that he is unable to find passion for anything else in life. The case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce symbolizes the corrupt legal system that ruined, rather than represented, the people of Victorian London.

Echoing the corruption of the Court of Chancery is the parody of the members of Parliament. In chapter 40, the narrator describes the corrupt process of electing a new leader in Government. Like the lawyers of Chancery, the politicians are only concerned with power and personal gain. The narrator of Bleak House even suggests that the leader of Parliament was elected through bribery money given by Sir Leicester Dedlock, a prominent member of the aristocracy.

Below: A caricature of William Ballantine, a famous Queen's Council member. Vanity Fair. 1870. (Wikimedia Commons).

[DW] The parody of England’s Parliament, while entertaining, doesn’t seem to help to move the plot along in any way. What point is Dickens trying to make by including this chapter that connects government corruption to the aristocracy? What does this parody add to the meaning of the title, Bleak House?

Failures of Fashionable Society: The Blindness of the Aristocracy

"Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage; over-sleeping Rip Van Winkles, who have played at strange games through a deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties, whom the Knight will wake one day, when all the stopped spits in the kitchen shall begin to turn prodigiously!" (20).

In the second chapter of Bleak House, Dickens introduces the reader to the Dedlocks who are members of the London aristocracy and the “world of fashion.” Dickens seems to want to establish immediately the stagnancy, decay and ennui of the Dedlock legacy. The narrator tells the reader that the Dedlocks, or the aristocracy they represent, are “wrapped up in too much jeweler’s cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air “ (20). The members of the aristocracy, or fashionable society, are completely wrapped up in their own trivial existence that they have become completely oblivious to the social problems of Victorian London. And the problem with this is that they are the people that could do something about all these problems as they are they are the people who sit in government offices and influence policy and law.

Below: "The Bunch of Lilacs" by James Tissot. 1875. (Wikimedia Commons).
Throughout the novel, Sir Leicester Dedlock is portrayed as being a truly noble character who is capable of real love; and at the end of the novel, is able to forgive Lady Dedlock for her bringing shame and embarrassment upon his family. If Sir Leicester is symbolic of the aristocracy and can care about something beyond himself, beyond what is fashionable, then what does this reveal about Dickens’s stance on the aristocracy’s ability to change?

Dickens’s pessimistic view of philanthropists is best illustrated by the character of Mrs. Pardiggle. In chapter 8, Mrs. Pardiggle takes Esther and Ada to the home of a poor brick maker on one of her “visiting rounds.” Mrs. Pardiggle barges in uninvited, reads from the bible, and lectures the family about their lifestyle. The brick maker tells Mrs. Pardiggle that he has no intention of making any effort, whatsoever, to change his ways, and Esther comments to the reader that Mrs. Pardiggle’s “mechanical way of taking possession of people”; of treating them as being beneath her, had put an “iron barrier” between she and the brick maker’s family (133). Nonetheless, Mrs. Pardiggle vows to come back again and again until the brick maker and his family are in “regular order.” She seems to fail to see that she has not done anything for these people; that their situation is so dire and their future so bleak that they cannot even fathom the life she says they ought to be living. What they need is not a lecture, but help finding adequate shelter, clothing, food, medical care and most of all a sympathetic friend.

Immediately following this scene, Dickens gives what appears to be his idea of real charity when Esther comments on an exchange between the brick maker’s wife, Jenny, and a friend of hers when Jenny’s baby dies: “I thought it touching to see these women, coarse and shabby and beaten, so united; to see what they could be to one another; to see how they felt for one another…. What the poor are to the poor is little known, excepting to themselves and GOD” (135). Dickens seems to view the work of “philanthropists” such as Mrs. Pardiggle as false charity done only because it is “fashionable” and bolsters one’s own self image.

Below: “Over London” by Rail Gustave Doré. 1870. (Wikimedia Commons).
How is Mrs. Pardiggle’s “charity” work like the work of the lawyers of the Chancery?

Neglect and Abandonment of Children and “Telescopic Philanthropy”

“He is not one of Mrs. Pardiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs. Jellyby’s lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borriboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish.”

One of Dickens’s major concerns about Victorian society was the number of children growing up without any real home or family. The most obvious examples in Bleak House are of course the orphans such as Jo, Charley and her two siblings, and Esther. Jo is unable to read, thinks of himself as kind of an animal, lives in filth and his very life seems to be on the line every day of because he has no real shelter, very little food, and no access to medical care—not to mention the dangers of living in the Tom-all-Alones. Charley, although she is not on the streets, is made to grow up all too quickly: “It was a thing to look at. The three children close together, and two of them relying solely on the third, and the third so young and yet with an air of age and steadiness that sat so strangely on the childish figure” (246). Then there is Esther who suffers psychological scarring from the way she never had the love of a mother figure. But less obvious examples of the children suffering from a lack of home and family are the children of Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle. These too women are too focused on their “charitable” affairs to properly care for their own children. They all run around like animals; unwashed and improperly groomed or fed: Their lives lack any kind of order or routine and their own mother spends so little time tending their emotional needs that they may as well be orphans. Esther tells the reader, “We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazen and shrieveled, though they were certainly that too, but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent. At the mention of the Tockahoopo Indians, I could have really supposed Egbert to be one of the most baleful members of that tribe….” (125).

David Plotkin, in his essay, “Home-made Savages: Cultivating English Children in Bleak House,” explains that these children exemplify “what happens to children when they do not have proper families or homes, or even the possibility of these…that the lack of cultivation leads to a kind of savagery” (Plotkin 18). Dickens seems to think that it is ridiculous for one to concern themselves with the children of foreign countries, with this “telescopic philanthropy” at the neglect of their own. This goes for parents such as Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, but also for England itself as a parent. Dickens is concerned that if government doesn’t find a way to remedy this ‘breakdown of family,’ England could become an entire nation of savages (Plotkin 17).

Below: “Orphans” by Thomas Kennington. 1885. (Wikimedia Commons).

Mr. Jarndyce, Esther’s guardian, is the only character portrayed as genuinely charitable and gives Esther opportunities she may otherwise never have had: including a loving father figure. Would Dickens have been an advocate for a system similar to that of the foster care system we have in the United States today. What criticisms might he have?

The Moral Burden of Women
In Victorian England, women were viewed as being pure and clean and were expected to follow a strict moral code. Women who deviated from this code were often ostracized from both their families and respectable society because of the shame it brought. Dickens uses Lady Dedlock’s and Esther’s characters to illustrate how this kind of attitude causes a culture of secrets and cover-ups that eventually ruins families. Esther, one of the novel’s narrators, is abandoned, emotionally abused, and psychologically scarred as an illegitimate child. Lady Dedlock is unable to have an intimate relationship with her husband because of the shame and guilt she must constantly suppress under a demeanor of coldness. When her secret is finally exposed, Lady Dedlock feels that her only option is suicide; never even considering that her husband, Sir Leicester Dedlock might still love and would forgive her. Sir Dedlock lives on, but the shock gives him a stroke, and he spends the rest of the novel grieving for his dead wife. Nemo, Lady Dedlock’s ex-lover and Esther’s father, wastes away, self-medicating with opium; for he was cast out from respectable society as well. Dickens seems to be using these momentous consequences to build a case against this attitude toward women; arguing that the destruction it causes is far worse than the original transgression.

Why did Dickens choose to have Sir Leicestor Dedlock forgive his wife? How would it have changed the story if Lady Dedlock had not run away and committed suicide? Would it have had any effect on Esther’s narrative?

The Players

Esther Summerson (Hawdon)

Esther is the main character of the novel and is one of the two narrators. She is the chosen companion for Ada Clare, one of the newest wards in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case. Her character is very complex and she deals with much self-doubt and self-loathing throughout the novel. This behavior likely stems from the way in which her godmother treats her while Esther is under her care. This behavior is later exacerbated in the novel after Esther is disfigured due to smallpox. Much of the novel is experienced through Esther’s eyes. [SA] It is also discovered that Esther is, in fact, the illegitimate child of Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon (Nemo).

"I hope it may not appear very unnatural or bad in me, that I then became heavily sorrowful to think I had ever been reared. That I felt as if I knew it would have been better and happier for many people, if indeed I had never breathed" (583).

John Jarndyce

John Jarndyce is the last living Jarndyce. His relatives were the one’s who first instigated the case of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce. He stands as the voice of reason throughout the novel and arguably most closely shares the sentiments of Dickens. He is level-headed and wealthy which is a rare combination within the novel. He uses his wealth to benefit others and truly seems to care about the less fortunate in the novel. He takes Ada, Richard and Esther under his wing and provides them with a place to live.
“Trust in nothing but Providence and your own efforts. Never separate the two, like the heathen wagoner. Constancy in love is a good thing; but it means nothing, and is nothing, without constancy in every kind of effort. If you had the abilities of all the great men, past and present, you could do nothing well, without sincerely meaning it, and setting about it” (213).

Richard Carstone

Richard is a cousin of John Jarndyce and one of the two newest wards. He is romantically linked to Ada Clare, an estranged cousin. The two later secretly marry. He quickly begins to fall victim to the greed and obsession surrounding the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case. His behavior is quite similar to that of Mr. Skimpole. [SA] Once the case of Jarndyce is solved, Richard dies as well since he was never able to have any passion as great as that for the case.

“Richard's energy was of such an impatient and fitful kind, that he would have liked nothing better than to have gone to Mr Kenge's office in that hour, and to have entered into articles with him on the spot” (272).

Ada Clare

Esther becomes Ada’s companion after she is taken in by Mr. Jarndyce. Another ward of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Ada falls for her distant cousin Richard Carstone. [SA] Much later, the young couple chooses to get married in secret, and then have a child.

“…which even called my attention from Ada, who, startled and blushing, was so remarkably beautiful that she seemed to fix the wandering of the little old lady herself” (70).

Mr. Tulkinghorn

Mr. Tulkinghorn is the secretive lawyer to the rich and wealthy. Like a black hole, he absorbs the secrets of the aristocrats. His presence always seems to intimidate his clients, especially Lady Dedlock. Taking note of the strange behavior exhibited by Lady Dedlock and the interest she takes in the mysterious “Nemo”, Tulkinghorn tries to figure out the scandal before anyone else. [SA] He eventually solves the mystery - realizing that Lady Dedlock was involved with the now deceased law writer and Esther Summerson is their illegitimate child. [SA] He is later murdered for his constant intrusion into people's privacy.

“He is Sir Leicester Dedlock's lawyer; mechanically faithful without attachment, and very jealous of the profit, privilege, and reputation of being master of the mysteries of great houses... His calling is the acquisition of secrets, and the holding possession of such power as they give him, with no sharer or opponent in it” (851).

[SA] Which character(s) could possibly be seen as younger versions of Tulkinghorn? What do the differences between these characters and Tulkinghorn suggest about the practice of law in 19th century Britain?

Jo

Jo is the poor orphaned boy of Tom-All-Alone’s where he is a crossing sweeper. He is depicted as being honest and hardworking although his sickness plays an important role in the novel, severely disfiguring the main character - Esther. "Nemo" the law writer shows rare kindness to the homeless boy and helps him to the best of his ability. Jo’s character is one that can be similarly found in many Dickens' novels and represents the wasted potential of English youth during this time.

"Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heard of sich a think. Don’t know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for him... He don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. He can’t spell it. No father, no mother, no friend. Never been to school. What’s home? Knows a broom’s a broom, and knows it’s wicked to tell a lie” (177).

[SA] What could Dickens be trying to achieve through the use of this form of narration seen in the quote above? What are some other instances in the novel where we see the line between third and first person narration blurred?

Mr. Harold Skimpole
A friend of Mr. Jarndyce's, Mr. Skimpole is a man with child-like qualities. Although usually being chased for debt payments, Mr. Skimpole is one of the happier characters in the novel. He turns out to be a rather dangerous force within the novel as he leads Richard into corruption as he instills him with an improper and careless outlook on debt, loans and money.

“But I know nothing about it, I assure you; for I am a mere child, and I lay no claim to it, and I don’t want it!” (294).

Sir Leicester Dedlock

A strong man, until it comes to his much younger wife. He is the master of Chesney Wold and would do anything in the world for Lady Dedlock. Mr. Dedlock allows himself to become pleased with his wife’s involvement with Jarndyce and Jarndyce, believing it will reflect well and distinguish his family name.

“...and is my Lady to understand: he brings her in thus specially, first as a point of gallantry, and next as a point of prudence, having great reliance on her sense” (452).

Lady Dedlock

Undeniably a major player in the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce [SA] due to her illicit affair with Captain Nemo. [SA] She is the biological mother of Esther and kept the secret of her birth due to the belief that she died. After bringing the truth out in the open, she is uneasy about pursuing any sort of connection because of the fear of Sir Leicester’s reputation suffering.[SA] In the end she dies completely mortified with herself, and believes her husband would never forgive (when in fact he had).

“I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will. From day to day, sometimes from hour to hour, I do not see the way before my guilty feet. This is the earthly punishment I have brought upon myself, I bear it, and I hid it”.

Lawrence Boythorn

A loud man, who is actually good-natured, he speaks only in superlatives. He’s a neighbor of Sir Leicester Dedlock, yet their relationship has been strained due to quarrels over property. Boythorn fell in love with Miss Barbary, Lady Dedlock’s sister, who left him to take care of Esther.

“I saw him so often, in the course of the evening, which passed very pleasantly, contemplate Richard and Ada with an interest and satisfaction that made his fine face remarkably agreeable...” (146).

Mr. William Guppy

Guppy holds a job as a law clerk at Kenge and Carboy, a law firm at the Chancery. Eventually he falls completely in love with Esther, and dives into her past. After time, his love spurs him to ask her hand in marriage, she declines. [SA]Later he stumbles upon the discovery of Lady Dedlock being the mother of Esther. After Esther's disfiguring sickness, Guppy "coincidentally" loses interest in her.

"Is this the full purpose of the young man of the name of Guppy, or has he any other?... He is a match for my Lady there” (468).

Other Characters

Mr. Snagsby: a law writer who becomes wrapped up in all of Tulkinghorn and Bucket's mysteries and secrets. He spends most of his time sneaking around and pays Jo to keep his mouth shut. His wife, Mrs. Snagsby, thinks she's on to him.

Miss Flite: Deemed insane, Miss Flite has an unhealthy obsession with Chancery. Her history with Chancery goes back to a case similar to Jarndyce and Jarndyce that ended with the fallout of her family. Her odd obsession fluctuates between comedic and tragic proportions.

Inspector Bucket: A man who was employed by Tulkinghorn to be search through Lady Dedlock's past. After Tulkinghorn was murdered, Bucket exposed Mademoiselle Hortense in the case.

Mr. George (Rouncewell): A man of mystery. [SA]Mr. George ends up being a prime suspect in the murder of Tulkinghorn, and that later reveals his true family lineage. In actuality he is the son of the Dedlock’s maid. In the time line of the book, he owns a shooting gallery. Aside from his work, he trains in the fighting arts. He was the student of Nemo, and trained Richard Carstone.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caddy Jellyby</td>
<td>This young woman is the eldest of the Jellyby children and has a difficult relationship with her “charitable” mother. She feels neglected, but finally finds a friend in Esther. Through that friendship, her spirit is revived. She falls in love with Prince Turveydrop, whom she marries and has a child with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krook</td>
<td>A rag and bottle merchant. Alongside his work, he collects various types of papers for enjoyment. In a twist, he is the landlord the building in which Miss Flite and Nemo live. It is also the place where Nemo dies. He dies from an odd case of spontaneous combustion, erupting into flames from nothing. Later, the piece of evidence solving Jarndyce and Jarndyce is found among his vast amounts of papers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allan Woodcourt</td>
<td>A wealthy and kind man, Mr. Woodcourt is a physician. He finds himself attracted to Esther, who feels the same feelings, but both mutually agree to back away due to Esther’s relationship with John Jarndyce. [SA]After Mr. Jarndyce releases Esther from his affections, Woodcourt and Esther marry and raise a happy family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. and Mr. Jellyby</td>
<td>This couple has a very one-sided relationship, with Mrs. Jellyby being the individual holding the power. Mrs. Jellyby has an obsession with charity towards a distant African tribe, yet fails to show any sort of emotion to her present family. Her familial neglect has turned her husband, Mr. Jellyby into a rather defeated man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather Smallweed</td>
<td>Grandfather Smallweed can hardly be described as a sweet old man. On the contrary, he is one of the most loathsome characters in the novel. This man delights in emotional torture, and continues to exploit the monetary issues of Mr. George, eventually driving him into bankruptcy. In an ironic sense of fate, Tulkinghorn is the lawyer of this evil man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Smallweed</td>
<td>She acts as the wife of Grandfather Smallweed and is Krook’s sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Vholes</td>
<td>Mr. Vholes is a lawyer working for Chancery that takes on Richard Carstone as a client. After getting all of the money he possibly can out of him, Vholes drops Carstone as soon as Jarndyce and Jarndyce comes to an end.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Gridley</td>
<td>He is a man unwittingly drawn in by Jarndyce and Jarndyce. After threatening Mr. Tulkinghorn, Gridley is put under arrest by Inspector Bucket. Later, due to his declining health from the struggles with Chancery, he dies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Hawdon (Nemo)</td>
<td>He is secretly [SA]Esther’s father. Once upon a time, he was the lover of Lady Dedlock, however, his original job given to the reader was a law writer. He also contains a third alter ego, called Captain Hawdon whom served in the British Army.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Snagsby</td>
<td>Mrs. Snagsby is a paranoid woman. She is constantly eavesdropping and listening into multiple conversations. Some of her skewed listening leads to believing that her husband is the father of Jo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mademoiselle Hortense</td>
<td>Hortense originally seems like a completely normal young woman, only jealous of the attention Lady Dedlock is giving to Rosa. [SA]Much later though, another side of her is shown when she is exposed as Tulkinghorn’s killer, and frames Lady Dedlock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. and Mrs. Badger</td>
<td>Mrs. Badger is an overly talkative woman who insists on speaking about her previous husbands with unnecessary amounts of enthusiasm. Mr. Badger is a working doctor who kindly takes on Richard as an apprentice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil Squod</td>
<td>An assistant to Mr. George at his Shooting Gallery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Matthew Bagnet and Mrs. Bagnet</td>
<td>Though Mr. Bagnet specialized in the selling of musical instruments; and was kind enough to incur debts to help Mr. George, his wife Mrs. Bagnet does most of his talking for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Woodcourt</td>
<td>The widowed mother of Allan Woodcourt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Pardiggle</td>
<td>Mrs. Pardiggle has a large problem of wanting to do massive quantities of good for the world, without realizing how incredibly unhelpful she is. On top of her odd giving nature, she insists that all the money her children make be paid to charities as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Rosa acts as a lady maid to Lady Dedlock. A young woman to be her protégée, Rosa falls in love with Rouncewell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guster</td>
<td>She is the niece of the Snagsby’s and acts as a servant to them. Guster is prone to having fits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neckett</td>
<td>Neckett acts as a debt collector for the Coavinses business firm, and referred to as such by Harold Skimpole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volumnia</td>
<td>She is a distant cousin of Sir Leicester Dedlock. She has a knack for being a drama queen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dickens commissioned "Phiz" to do steel plate etchings for ten of his novels including Bleak House. For Bleak House, Phiz did one dark steel plate for each installment of the novel. His real name was Hablot Knight Browne, although he was recognized most often by the alias, "Phiz". (1) Browne's first alias was "Nemo". He changed it after completing his first couple etchings for Dickens' because "Phiz" sounded better with Dickens' alias, "Boz".
THE MAN

**Born:** February 7th, 1812 in Landport, Portsmouth, England

**Died:** June 9th, 1870. Buried in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey (died of stroke)

**Son of:** John and Elizabeth (Barrow) Dickens

**Married to:** Catherine Thomson Hogarth

**Father of:** Charles Jr., Mary, Kate, Walter, Francis, Alfred, Sydney, Henry, Dora, Edward

**Alias:** "Boz"

**Famous Works:** Oliver Twist, A Christmas Carol, A Tale of Two Cities, David Copperfield, Great Expectations, Bleak House, and Hard Times
**THE PHILANTHROPIST**

**Urania Cottage:** A home created with Angela Burdett Coutts for "Fallen Women," Dickens took a very hands on and personal approach to the running of it. Some of the women who lived in Urania Cottage became characters in Dickens' novels.

**Recruitment:** Dickens would send letters to women he viewed as candidates for living in Urania Cottage addressed as 'An Appeal to Fallen Women.' He would scout prisons and workhouses for these women and sign each letter cordially 'Your Friend' and those women who responded would be personally interviewed by Dickens for consideration.

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**THE ANTI-SEMITIC?**

**Fagin in Oliver Twist:** Viewed to be one of the most grotesque Jews in all of English literature and one of Dickens' most vivid, according to Paul Valley of The Independent.

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**The Infamous "Boz"**
More than anything, Charles Dickens played and wrote to his audience, which made him one of the few authors who are not only classic and famous now, but were during their lives as well. Dickens made much of his literary works by way of periodicals, released weekly or monthly, a chapter or section at a time. This format allowed for a lot of flexibility and room to improvise that many authors did not have the luxury of. Depending on how the public responded to a certain style or plot, Dickens would manipulate the next section to better fit the audience that a particular piece was reaching. He reached immediate fame with his first novel "The Pickwick Papers" by writing in a very ordinary and expected way yet weaving an intricate plot and some of the most fantastic characters ever created. While he would venture away from this 'ordinary style' in some novels, particularly the double narrative in "Bleak House" his style never needed to change. His ability to draw an audience in with no gimmicks, just a great story and great characters is what made him a legend in his time and in ours. While his characters and stories live on, larger than life and larger than the books they are a part of, Dickens will always be the legend and the crowd pleaser he was in his time, always taking the extra time and creativity to make characters and plot extraordinary and telling an 'ordinary' story.

Below: Dickens with his daughters, Katey and "Mamie" (Mary). 1865. (Wikimedia Commons).
### Resources and Links

**PBS - Dickens Page**  
An informational site with historical, cultural information on Charles Dickens

**Illustrations of Bleak House**  
This site has all of the original illustrations (done by Phiz) from Bleak House.

**Tim Lambert's thoughts on 19th Century life**  
A Blog-like website but an interesting read

**Hidden Lives - Poverty of the Victorian Era**  
Specific information on the poverty of the times. This reality is heavily focused on by Dickens.

**Victorian Web**  
A great website that has a lot of cultural information on the Victorian Era.

**Victorian Crime & Punishment**  
An interactive website on the judicial system of England during the 19th century.

**Paranormal Encyclopedia - Spontaneous Combustion**  
This website has some information on spontaneous combustion.

**Adams Hamilton - Dickens Handwriting**  
See some images of a handwritten Dickens letter. This letter can be bought for $12,500.

**Sparknotes Quiz on Bleak House**  
Take a plot quiz on Bleak House. Designed by Sparknotes.com

### Footnoted Works


### Video Gallery

**PBS Series - Bleak House**

**Videos on Spontaneous Human Combustion**
All images on this page were found from Wikimedia Commons.

"The Bunch of Lilacs" by James Tissot (1875)

"Dickens' Dream" by Robert Buss (1870)
Hablot Browne - the Phiz

Dickens with two daughters

"The Outcast" by Richard Redgrave (1851)

"Over London" by Rail Dore (1870)

1871 - alley in the slums (unknown)

A caricature of William Ballantine
“Orphans” by Thomas Kennington (1885)

Bleak House illustration by Phiz
Spontaneous Human Combustion (SHC) has been an argued phenomenon for hundreds of years. There are many hypothesized causes of SHC. Some of the most historically noted causes are God striking down a sinner, drinking too much alcohol and standing near a source of heat, and in more recent years - aliens.

Charles Dickens prefaced his novel, Bleak House, in 1853 by stating:
“There is only one other point on which I offer a word of remark. The possibility of what is called Spontaneous Combustion has been denied since the death of Mr. Krook; and my good friend Mr. Lewes (quite mistaken, as he soon found, in supposing the thing to have been abandoned by all authorities) published some ingenious letters to me at the time that event was chronicled, arguing that Spontaneous Combustion could not possibly be. I have no need to observe that I do not willfully or negligently mislead my readers, and that before I wrote the description I took pains to investigate the subject”.
Although this seems laughable today and obviously brought Dickens a good deal of criticism in his own time, it is still a debated subject and is often made into a pop culture reference. To see some modern videos on spontaneous human combustion see our video gallery.

[Q] Why do you think Dickens chose this form of death for Mr. Krook and what does it say about Dickens' opinion of this type of character?