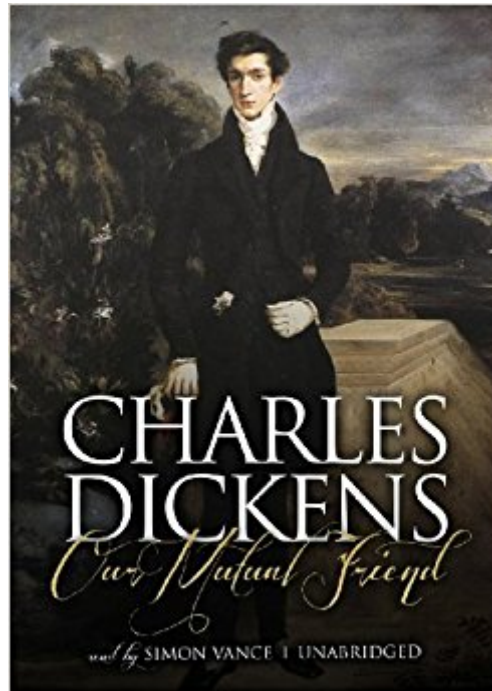




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Our Mutual Friend



Synopsis

[Read by Simon Vance] This sinister masterpiece was Dickens's last completed novel and perhaps his ultimate vision of a dark, macabre London and the corrupting power of money. Opening with a father and daughter scavenging for corpses on the Thames, this chilling tale unfolds around drownings, disguises and doubles, violence, murder, and triumphant love. Young John Harmon, presumed killed on his return home to England, is very much alive. The heir to a dust merchant's fortune, he goes to work under an assumed name for his father's current heirs, the amiable, elderly Boffins - who are about to be blackmailed by the unscrupulous one-legged Wegg. So begins the intrigue in a novel that is quintessentially Dickensian in flavor - in its grotesque caricatures, its rich symbolism, and in the astonishing realism of its heroine, Bella Wilfer, one of Dickens's most splendid female characters.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Our Mutual Friend was the last novel Charles Dickens completed and is, arguably, his darkest and most complex. The basic plot is vintage Dickens: an inheritance up for grabs, a murder, a rocky romance or two, plenty of skullduggery, and a host of unforgettable secondary characters. But in this final outing the author's heroes are more flawed, his villains more sympathetic, and the story as a whole more harrowing and less sentimental. The mood is set in the opening scene in which a riverman, Gaffer Hexam, and his daughter Lizzie troll the Thames searching for drowned men whose pockets Gaffer will rifle before turning the body over to the authorities. On this particular night Gaffer finds a corpse that is later identified as that of John Harmon, who was returning from abroad

to claim a large fortune when he was apparently murdered and thrown into the river. Harmon's death is the catalyst for everything else that happens in the novel. It seems the fortune was left to the young man on the condition that he marry a girl he'd never met, Bella Wilfer. His death, however, brings a new heir onto the scene, Nicodemus Boffin, the kind-hearted but low-born assistant to Harmon's father. Boffin and his wife adopt young Bella, who is determined to marry money, and also hire a mysterious young secretary, John Rokesmith, who takes an uncommon interest in their ward. Not content with just one plot, Dickens throws in a secondary love story featuring the riverman's daughter, Lizzie Hexam; a dissolute young upper-class lawyer, Eugene Wrayburn; and his rival, the headmaster Bradley Headstone. Dark as the novel is, Dickens is careful to leaven it with secondary characters who are as funny as they are menacing--blackmailing Silas Wegg and his accomplice Mr. Venus, the avaricious Lammles, and self-centered Charlie Hexam. *Our Mutual Friend* is one of Dickens's most satisfying novels, and a fitting denouement to his prolific career. --Alix Wilber --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Grade 7 Up-With a cast of characters that covers the whole spectrum of London life, Dickens weaves a tapestry of tales that are by turn funny, moving and tragic. Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Although not quite the equal of the great late work "Hard Times", this last completed novel of Charles Dickens has much to recommend it. "Our Mutual Friend" is particularly memorable for its symbolism, the way it uses a series of "dust mounds" (huge heterogeneous piles of waste, primarily of cinders and ash, waiting to be recycled as bricks) owned by the "Golden Dustman" to represent great fortunes, their barrenness and avarice, and their harmful effects on an increasingly money-mad society. Another of the most prevalent symbols in "Our Mutual Friend" is that of the River Thames, and the river is linked to major themes of the novel, rebirth and renewal. Water is seen as a sign of new life, and associated by the Christian Church with the sacrament of Baptism. "Our Mutual Friend" also contains -- as does all Dickens -- a range of vivid scenes and memorable characters: harrowing glimpses of riverfront lowlife contrasted with wonderful comic scenes of nouveau riche display, a particularly vicious pair of married grifters, an ambiguous young lawyer and dandy who turns out to be something like a hero, and (perhaps a late apology for Fagin) an evil goy moneylender who uses a kindly Jew as a front. Characters like John Harmon and Eugene Wrayburn end up in the waters of the river, and come out reborn as new men. Wrayburn emerges from the river on his deathbed, but is ready to marry Lizzie to save her reputation. He

surprises everyone, including himself, when he survives and goes on to have a loving marriage with Lizzie. John Harmon also appears to end up in the river through no fault of his own, and when Gaffer pulls his "body" out of the waters, he adopts the alias of John Rokesmith. This alias is for his own safety and peace of mind; he wants to know that he can do things on his own, and does not need his father's name or money to make a good life for himself. One reason this novel has gained in popularity during the last century is that it is as close as Dickens ever gets to a meta-fiction. The reading and interpretations of various texts -- exemplified by Silas Wegg's oral reading of Gibbon's "Decline and Fall" to the illiterate Noddy Boffin, and their subsequent discussions -- is an important metaphor here.

I love Dickens! And, I thoroughly enjoyed this audio edition of the book; the reader was fantastic with his many voices and his great inflections; he did a superb job. Having said that, however, I need to add that I wish I had listened to the unabridged version, even though it's much longer. Here's why: some of the characters are missing in this version. And, of course, some of the little plot twists are not covered. While I love listening to audio books (it makes exercising so much more tolerable!), I need to remember that where Dickens is concerned, it's best to listen to the entire book...I mean, what's the hurry when I need to keep exercising anyway??!?!? Now, about the book itself; it is not my favorite. For me, the characters were not as intriguing as they are in Bleak House - still one of my favorites. The plot line is not as engaging. However, true to form, Dickens has some of the most classic lines ever written; as in, "Why ain't you ugly?" Now, that caused me to laugh out loud! Or how about this section: "As is well known to the wise in their generation, traffic in Shares is the one thing to have to do with in this world. Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no manners; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares. What are his tastes? Shares. Has he any principles? Shares. What squeezes him into Parliament? Shares. Perhaps he never of himself achieved success in anything, never originated anything, never produced anything? Sufficient answer to all; Shares. O mighty Shares!" Or the lovely heroine, Bella who proclaims: "I have made up my mind, Pa, that I must have money. And I feel that since I cannot beg, borrow, or steal it, I am resolved, I must marry it!" I think Dickens is sheer genius in his writing. And, he knows the human heart in terms of the power of money over some people. Money is such a theme in this book; we see it in the Lemmles, Riderhood, Veneerings, etc. And, even in Bella Wilfer, who does change her mind about the value of love over money as the story progresses. I recommend listening to an audio

version, but be sure to go for the unabridged. And, I highly recommend Dickens; for me, there's not many to compare.

This book is long, grim and a tougher read than even most of Dickens' other novels, but it is by far the best. While Dickens is known for his life-like quirky characters, you'll find plenty of well-developed and complex characters to root for and against in *Our Mutual Friend*. The writing and plot are also wonderful. It is a shame this book is eclipsed by lesser works such as *Great Expectations* and does not garner the attention it deserves.

I would never have tackled this novel if my daughter hadn't given it to us for Christmas and kept asking if we had read it. So when we needed a good book to read aloud in the spring, my husband and I began *Our Mutual Friend*. What a treat! I am amazed by any novelist's ability to create an array of characters and circumstances and then weave them all together in surprising ways. Dickens not only does this with great skill; he is also a caustic satirist of great humor, an absolute genius of character study, and a spirited social critic to boot. When the wicked finally get their comeuppance, those who apply the verbal medicine do so with an articulate fervor that is deeply satisfying. Not always an easy read, this book is definitely worth the effort.

This is one of my favorite Dickens novels. But this production of the novel is wretched. "Illustrated" but none of the illustrations have anything to do with the text. They were so distracting. I never listened to the accompanying audiobook. It was probably crap ad well.

What a CLASSIC! And so good to read again after so many years- after being suggested to me by my fav. author, Micheal Maxwell, I am so glad I re-read it! Charles Dickens is one of our Author Treasures- to be treasured!

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