

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

Charles Dickens  
**The Old  
Curiosity Shop**

**THE  
COMPLETE  
CLASSICS**

**UNABRIDGED**

Read by **Anton Lesser**

**CLASSIC  
FICTION**



NAX89512D

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1	Chapter 1	6:47
2	'Who has sent you so far by yourself?'	6:42
3	While we were sitting...	6:44
4	Kit, who in despatching...	12:06
5	Chapter 2	6:31
6	It was perhaps not very unreasonable...	6:31
7	'Why do you hunt and persecute me, God help me!'	1:52
8	Chapter 3	6:12
9	Without waiting for the permission he sought...	11:20
10	Chapter 4	7:31
11	'It's all very fine to talk,' said Mrs Quilp...	5:51
12	'Go on, ladies...'	6:19
13	Chapter 5	7:19
14	It was flood tide...	5:21
15	It was a dirty little box...	2:30
16	Chapter 6	5:10
17	With that, Mr Quilp suffered himself...	5:42
18	Mrs Quilp departed according to order...	5:53
19	'She's tired you see, Mrs Quilp,'	3:58
20	Chapter 7	6:44

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21	Richard Swiveller, who had been looking...	7:40
22	Chapter 8	6:21
23	Having made up his mind...	6:46
24	At this momentous crisis...	4:05
25	Hard by this corner...	4:47
26	Chapter 9	6:45
27	One night...	6:32
28	The old man answered...	8:03
29	'I'm sorry I've got an appointment...'	3:01
30	Chapter 10	6:55
31	Not deriving from these means...	4:49
32	Chapter 11	6:37
33	'How kind it is of you, Sir...'	4:53
34	One night, she had stolen...	6:42
35	Chapter 12	6:03
36	In a small dull yard...	6:22
37	From many dreams of rambling...	4:03
38	Chapter 13	7:10
39	'Now, Mrs Quilp,'	7:07
40	By this time...	6:15

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41	Chapter 14	6:26
42	They went, as it was easy to tell...	5:13
43	There was a short silence...	2:54
44	Chapter 15	7:28
45	At length these streets...	5:33
46	They were now in the open country...	5:23
47	'How far is it to any town or village?'	3:02
48	Chapter 16	7:00
49	While she was thus engaged...	6:01
50	Chapter 17	6:19
51	The child left her gathering the flowers...	8:18
52	Mr Grinder's company...	3:31
53	Chapter 18	6:04
54	Overpowered by the warmth...	6:25
55	In some versions of the great drama...	4:02
56	Chapter 19	6:17
57	The child began to be alarmed...	6:37
58	The public-houses by the wayside...	6:12
59	As the morning wore on...	4:48
60	Chapter 20	7:10

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61	The faces had not disappeared...	3:57
62	Chapter 21	5:49
63	It would be difficult to say...	7:08
64	The summer-house...	8:00
65	Chapter 22	7:11
66	Kit looked about him...	4:45
67	Chapter 23	8:03
68	The dwarf had twice encountered him...	6:59
69	With his head sunk down...	7:47
70	Chapter 24	7:03
71	As they stood hesitating...	7:00
72	Chapter 25	6:50
73	Oh! How some of those idle fellows...	6:27
74	Towards night an old woman...	5:11
75	Chapter 26	5:48
76	It happened that at that moment...	5:22
77	While they were thus engaged...	4:24
78	Chapter 27	5:41
79	When she had brought...	5:43
80	Mrs Jarley was a little disconcerted...	5:36

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81	The street beyond was so narrow...	4:13
82	Chapter 28	5:30
83	Mrs Jarley's back being then towards him...	6:26
84	When Nell knew all about Mr Packlemerton...	2:32
85	Chapter 29	6:46
86	One evening...	7:30
87	The landlord had placed a light...	6:53
88	Chapter 30	5:28
89	When she re-entered the room...	7:03
90	Chapter 31	3:56
91	She had no fear as she looked...	6:19
92	When they presented themselves...	6:03
93	A deep hum of applause...	6:33
94	Chapter 32	5:03
95	It was now holiday-time at the schools...	7:28
96	Chapter 33	6:51
97	One morning Mr Sampson Brass...	7:27
98	If Mr Quilp spoke figuratively...	5:32
99	Mr Swiveller pulled off his coat...	3:00
100	Chapter 34	5:30

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101	He was occupied in this diversion...	6:46
102	Chapter 35	4:19
103	Mr Brass had evidently a strong inclination...	7:26
104	'There are his boots, Mr Richard!'	5:45
105	Greatly interested in his proceedings...	5:26
106	Chapter 36	6:00
107	One circumstance...	6:45
108	Chapter 37	5:43
109	As Mr Swiveller was decidedly favourable...	6:02
110	Their entertainer had sat perfectly quiet...	4:02
111	Chapter 38	6:43
112	One morning Kit drove Mr Abel...	5:10
113	There was a simplicity in this confidence...	5:49
114	As Whisker was tired of standing...	2:58
115	Chapter 39	6:39
116	However, it was high time now...	8:00
117	Chapter 40	6:24
118	Kit did suffer one twinge...	6:46
119	When they reached the Notary's house...	4:21
120	Chapter 41	7:20

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121	Ill-luck would have it...	5:08
122	His mother was not a little startled...	3:14
123	Chapter 42	5:21
124	There were no women or children...	5:56
125	Isaac List, with great apparent humility...	4:14
126	The remainder of their conversation...	5:39
127	Chapter 43	6:32
128	Nell was rather disheartened...	4:51
129	Not knowing...	3:31
130	Chapter 44	6:28
131	'Speak again,' it said...	5:49
132	The warmth of her bed...	5:35
133	When she awoke again...	3:08
134	Chapter 45	5:51
135	But night-time in this dreadful spot!	5:17
136	In the centre, stood a grave gentleman...	4:18
137	Chapter 46	6:23
138	The landlady, by no means satisfied...	6:36
139	They arranged to proceed upon their journey...	6:15
140	They admired everything...	3:39



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141	Chapter 47	6:02
142	The single gentleman, rather bewildered...	6:30
143	Chapter 48	7:51
144	That Quilp lied most heartily in this speech...	4:16
145	Burning with curiosity...	8:58
146	Chapter 49	6:29
147	There were also present...	7:35
148	Chapter 50	6:13
149	Being roused in the morning...	6:29
150	Disguising his secret joy...	6:32
151	The first sound that met his ears...	2:58
152	Chapter 51	7:19
153	These complimentary expressions...	4:59
154	'Don't let's have any wrangling,' said Miss Sally...	3:47
155	Chapter 52	6:54
156	They repaired to the other tenement...	4:48
157	It was long before the child closed the window...	4:33
158	'You are Mr Marton, the new schoolmaster?'	7:17
159	Chapter 53	6:37
160	'What is it but a grave!' said the sexton...	8:13

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161	Chapter 54	6:09
162	Now, the man who did the sexton's duty...	6:14
163	The second or third repetition of his name...	7:06
164	The poor schoolmaster made her no answer...	5:17
165	Chapter 55	6:21
166	It happened, that, as she was reading...	7:17
167	Chapter 56	6:15
168	Mr Chuckster paused, rapped the fox's head...	5:46
169	Mr Brass and his lovely companion...	5:41
170	'Kit,' said Mr Brass, in the pleasantest way...	4:33
171	Chapter 57	5:39
172	Whenever Kit came alone...	6:55
173	Chapter 58	6:30
174	With this parting injunction...	7:17
175	The more he discussed the subject...	7:29
176	Chapter 59	5:16
177	'Why don't you leave him alone?'	7:53
178	Chapter 60	6:48
179	Absorbed in these painful ruminations...	4:12
180	The notary was standing before the fire...	5:33

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181	'Is it not possible,' said Mr Witherden...	6:06
182	Chapter 61	6:37
183	During this melancholy pause...	7:16
184	Chapter 62	6:07
185	Now, the fact was, that Sampson...	8:14
186	'Discharge Mr Richard, sir?'	7:38
187	Chapter 63	5:47
188	Now, Mr Brass's gentleman...	5:21
189	Well; Richard took her home.	3:34
190	Chapter 64	6:54
191	'Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller...	6:15
192	At this point, Mr Swiveller...	10:14
193	Chapter 65	3:18
194	She had hardly taken this position...	8:11
195	Chapter 66	7:08
196	Dick received this project...	6:24
197	'Miss Brass,' said the Notary...	4:59
198	The charming creature...	3:52
199	The three gentlemen looked at each other...	7:13
200	'Gentlemen,' said Brass...	6:08

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201	Chapter 67	6:45
202	These taunts elicited no reply...	7:18
203	While he was collecting a few necessaries...	7:09
204	Chapter 68	6:58
205	Well! In that place...	5:04
206	When the first transports...	4:32
207	Chapter 69	6:54
208	Little Barbara was not of a wayward...	7:27
209	'There were once two brothers...	6:53
210	The narrator, whose voice had faltered...	1:34
211	Chapter 70	7:00
212	His first shout was answered...	7:06
213	Chapter 71	7:04
214	He pressed them to his lips...	7:52
215	The old man looked from face to face...	6:10
216	Chapter 72	7:10
217	Decrepit age, and vigorous life...	6:00
218	If there be any who have never known...	5:17
219	Chapter 73	6:07
220	The body of Quilp being found...	8:11
221	Mr Swiveller, having always been...	7:56

**Total time: 22:19:30**

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Charles Dickens  
(1812–1870)

# The Old Curiosity Shop

*'I am breaking my heart over this story, and cannot bear to finish it.'* (Dickens)

*The Old Curiosity Shop* was never intended to be a novel; it began life as a short story. In 1840 Dickens had decided to launch a new periodical entitled *Master Humphrey's Clock*, containing a random selection of stories, satires and articles linked by 'Master Humphrey', who stored them in his clock for the enlightenment and enjoyment of his literary friends. This 'club' was reminiscent of Dickens's first great success *The Pickwick Papers*. Nevertheless, the project was a gamble for Dickens; the stakes were high, and he was attempting to try something new on a weekly basis. The first issue introduced his narrator figure, Master Humphrey (Dickens himself, thinly disguised), who wanders the streets of London observing the day-to-day life there – its buildings and people.

At its first appearance *Master Humphrey's Clock* sold 70,000 copies and it appeared that it might be a successful venture. Dickens had visions of earning £10,000 a year. However, by the third issue, public interest in a magazine that seemed to be merely a disparate and random collection of pieces had sharply fallen away. Dickens's intuition told him his public was disappointed in him, and he set about making amends by abandoning *Master Humphrey* and his clock and writing a new full-scale novel in weekly instalments, based on a story Humphrey had already begun to tell, of a chance meeting with a face in the crowd – Little Nell.

The plight of Little Nell – an innocent child-victim, like *Oliver Twist* – had probably already prompted Dickens to start thinking

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about expanding the 'little child-story' (as he referred to its first incarnation). The theme of childish innocence threatened, a major theme of his output, seemed to stimulate his creative powers, and the character of Little Nell came to obsess him at this time with the morbidity that always lay beneath the surface of his personality. Recent tragic events in his life encouraged this state of mind. Mary Hogarth, his wife's youngest sister, moved into the Dickens household in 1836, shortly after his marriage. At seventeen she was taken ill after a family trip to the theatre and died suddenly in Dickens's arms. He was shattered by the experience and wore a ring which he had taken off her dead finger for the rest of his life. In an excess of grief he kept her clothes and asked to be buried with her upon his death. He relived his grief in the creation of Little Nell, closely modeling her character on his ideal 'child' – Mary Hogarth.

In order to concentrate exclusively on writing the novel, Dickens took a house away from London at Broadstairs in Kent. He worked daily from seven o'clock in the morning to two o'clock in the afternoon

uninterrupted – and the characters and ideas flowed. This was just as well, for he had set himself an arduous task in providing weekly instalments, rather than his usual monthly parts. Sometimes he was barely two weeks ahead of printing.

Dickens structured his book around a journey. A journey gives opportunities for improvisation week by week; anything can happen. This structure also pays tribute to the genre of the Picaresque novel – the novels of journeying and rambling such as *Don Quixote* and *Humphrey Clinker* were both influences from Dickens's childhood reading. Nell and her Grandfather venture into the unknown landscape of Victorian England, pursued by the evil dwarf Quilp. The two innocents, wandering abroad without purpose or plan, discover a world full of as many curiosities as they have left behind in their shop. The countryside and the emerging industrial landscape of the Midlands and the North provide a backdrop to the story, whilst encounters with puppets, wax-works, giants, dwarfs and performing dogs provide a grotesque illusion of life, adding a fantastical dimension to Nell's fears and dreams.

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The journey seems to go by way of Hampstead through Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire and on to Birmingham, where Dickens creates a picture of industry destroying nature: ‘...coal-dust and factory smoke darkened the shrinking leaves, and coarse rank flowers; and... the struggling vegetation sickened and sank under the hot breath of kiln and furnace...’

The journey may end in Shropshire, which Dickens once admitted was the county of Nell’s death, but he is deliberately imprecise as to topography (contributing to the book’s eeriness). City-born, there is no doubt that Dickens was more at home describing an urban scene than a rural one – he was no Thomas Hardy, though there is more of the country in this than in any other of Dickens’s novels. On one level the book is an *allegorical* journey – where innocence will be tested and tried, ultimately to fracture and break. The end is a foregone conclusion, pervading the whole book with a biblical tone. Little Nell has to be sacrificed. In an early chapter Nell identifies herself and her grandfather with Christian in Bunyan’s

great allegorical tale of a man’s journey to salvation *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Later, in her trials, fearing for her grandfather, Nell cries out, ‘What shall I do to save him?’, echoing Christian’s great lament.

With the allegorical, Dickens blends the grotesque and the naturalistic to create one of his most haunting and bizarre novels. The grotesque is represented by the misshapen dwarf Quilp and his twisted world of vice, intimidation and corruption. Dickens glories in Quilp’s excessive vulgarity – his deplorable habits, which both disgust and entertain. Quilp’s encounter with Little Nell is full of darkly perverse sexuality, and is brilliantly repulsive:

Quilp looked after her with an admiring leer, and when she had closed the door, fell to complimenting the old man upon her charms. ‘Such a fresh, blooming, modest little bud, neighbour,’ said Quilp, nursing his short leg, and making his eyes twinkle very much; ‘such a chubby, rosy, cosy, little Nell!’

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Quilp provides a real sense of menace throughout the book with his manic energy, and his ability to turn up when least expected.

The character of Dick Swiveller links the two worlds of allegory and the grotesque, and represents a more natural and balanced view of the world. He was Dickens's favourite character in the book. His burgeoning relationship with the Marchioness provides a heart to the novel. The Marchioness is never overly sentimental – the romance between her and Swiveller is underplayed, with always a vein of humour through the whole. Despite her physical frailty she is willing to face anything, and stands in pointed contrast to the heroine of the book, Little Nell. Nell is often morose, depressed and lacking in any sense of irony. As her grandfather rapidly diminishes into his second childhood, Nell is forced to develop rapidly from a child into a woman. The feckless grandfather sucks the life out of his granddaughter, and she never has the opportunity to develop her personality; she is an empty shell. With no prospect of life before her, she is morbidly

drawn to graveyards and death-beds – ultimately her own. The Marchioness, like Nell, takes on the burden of responsibility for a weaker soul, in this case the wastrel Dick Swiveller, but the effect on the Marchioness is in vivid contrast to Nell's situation. She blossoms in her care for Dick. She learns and grows from the experience. Her hard and cruel life as a Slavey does not result in the development of a morbid streak, but gives her strength to come to terms with change. She makes a success of her lot, becoming a lover, a wife and a mother. Unfortunately Dickens did not choose to develop her further, no doubt because her interesting character was in competition with his heroine's.

The great set-piece of the novel is the death of Little Nell, and as the time approached to write it, Dickens was possessed with a kind of creative madness: 'All night I have been pursued by the child, he wrote at the height of the novel's creation. He cried as he wrote, as he felt inevitably that Nell would have to die. 'I am slowly murdering the poor child,' he wrote to the actor Macready. After he had written her death scene,



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the transferred emotion of his grief as he recalled Mary Hogarth's death resulted in his getting a bad cold and an attack of rheumatism in his face. He seemed to have to experience these extremes of emotion to be able to write about them. There is no doubt he suffered for his art. 'Nobody will miss her like I shall,' he wrote to his friend Forster, who had been the first to suggest tentatively that Nell should die.

The world-wide response to the death of Little Nell is legendary. In New York, it was reported, passengers disembarking from England were asked eagerly: 'Is Little Nell dead?'

England itself was in an ecstasy of imagined grief and wrote letters to Dickens bitterly complaining of his brutal decision to kill her, and begging him if it were not too late to change his mind. Grown men wept and women became hysterical. It was a new concept in 1840 to make a child the symbol of domesticity and security, which is all Nell wanted from life. The public seemed to need an expiation of its collective guilt; a child was left to roam the streets alone, uncared for, and vulnerable in a corrupt society of

their making. The book's pathos touched a nerve – innocence, Dickens seems to be saying, must die for the world to learn and move on. It belongs to a sentimental age: later generations would not be so moved by Nell's protracted journey towards her end. It was Oscar Wilde who famously said: 'You would need to have a heart of stone not to laugh at the death of Little Nell.'

The novel finished, Dickens was able to relax and say with confidence: 'I think it will come famously.'

The character of Little Nell took the public by storm. They loved and pitied her with a passion, and by the end of the novel's run the sales figures of *Master Humphrey's Clock* had been raised to 100,000. *The Old Curiosity Shop* strengthened the bond between Dickens and his public: 'It made a greater impression,' Dickens said, 'than any other of my writings.'

**Notes by David Timson**



One of Britain's leading classical actors, **Anton Lesser** has worked extensively at the National Theatre, and is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company. His many television appearances include roles in *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Vanity Fair*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Dickens*. Films in which he has appeared include *Charlotte Gray*, *Fairytale – A True Story*, *Imagining Argentina*, *River Queen* and *Miss Potter*. He is a familiar voice on radio, and has become particularly associated with his award-winning readings of Dickens for Naxos AudioBooks.

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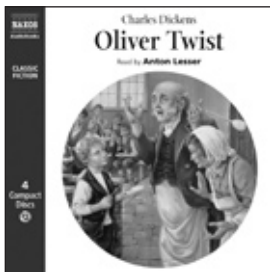
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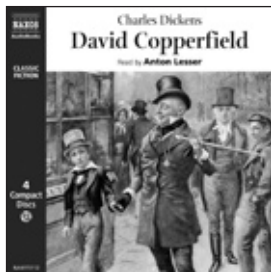


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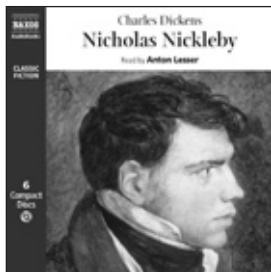
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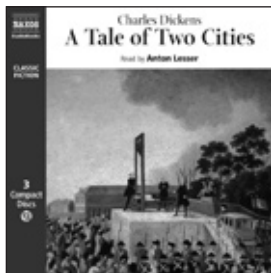
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Charles Dickens  
**The Old  
Curiosity Shop**

Read by **Anton Lesser**

Death, innocence, sacrifice and corruption – *The Old Curiosity Shop* is vintage Dickens. Provoking an unprecedented outpouring of public grief when it was first published, it follows the story of Little Nell and her feckless grandfather. Forced to leave their magical shop of curiosities in London, they are pursued across the English countryside by the grotesquely evil dwarf Quilp. They escape – but at what cost? Part tragedy, part allegory, this is Dickens at his most intense; drawing on his own experiences, he weaves a story of extraordinary emotional power.



One of Britain's leading classical actors, **Anton Lesser** is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company, where he has played many of the principal roles, including Romeo, Troilus, Petruchio and Richard III. A familiar voice on radio, he has become particularly associated with his award-winning readings of Dickens for Naxos AudioBooks.

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Total time  
22:19:30