Prologue: Somebody and Nobody

One's real life is so often the life that one does not lead.
—Oscar Wilde

London, 1855. The old city is being swallowed up by change. Underfoot the ground trembles as excavation machines carve out new subway tunnels, adding a dull, thudding bass to the city's soundtrack and belching their fumes into the thick yellow air. Sleek steam-gurneys chug their way past a backdrop of nodding cranes and buildings furred with scaffolding. Shops hum with activity, as assistants key each customer's personal identification number into a credit machine, and then pull on the ebony handle to print out a receipt. Inventors gather to whip up public interest in the latest must-have gadgets: devices for crimping hair by electricity, or children's toys that play Beethoven, or schemes for electroplating the dead. And lurking behind everything else, out of sight but never quite out of mind, are the biggest and most sophisticated machines of all: the computers spawned by Charles Babbage's Difference Engine thirty years ago. It is Babbage whose vision saved Britain from anarchy in the 1830s, when the Reform Bill was defeated, Wellington was assassinated, and Lord Byron's Industrial Radical Party swept to power. Now it is his engines that dominate every aspect of life, from entertainment to national security, with their shiny cogs and pistons, their precisely engineered punchcards, their dedicated army of clackers.

This isn't the Victorian age familiar from history books. That's because it didn't happen—at least not then, and not in this way. The Reform Bill was passed. Byron died fighting in Greece. Most important, the Difference Engine remained only a gleam of possibility until the end of the twentieth century, when technology finally became capable of realizing Babbage's plans. (A real version of the machine, massively yet delicately constructed from bronze and steel, now forms one of the key exhibits in London's Science Museum.)[1] The London of steam-gurneys and punchcards is a fiction—a revisionary alternative to the real city of 1855—created by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling in their 1990 novel *The Difference Engine*.[2] It is a story whose in-jokes and tricks of historical perspective start with its own title, which draws attention to the fact that a novel is another kind of difference engine: a verbal machine designed to help us look differently at the world. But although Gibson and Sterling set out to disorient us, their tactics are familiar enough.

Reimagining the past has long been a popular parlor game for historians, for whom what did happen cannot always be disentangled from what might have happened in its place. These counterfactual investigations are especially drawn to questions of "what if": "What if there had been no English Civil War? What if there had been no American War of Independence? What if Ireland had never been divided? What if Britain had stayed out of the First World War? What if Hitler had invaded Britain?"[3]

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, Becoming Dickens (2011)

Prologue: The Inimitable

1840

14 January 1840, London. An inquest is being held at Marylebone Workhouse, a muddled complex of buildings spread over a large area between the Marylebone Road and Paddington Street. The Beadle, a parish officer responsible for persuading householders to do their duty as jurors at such inquests, has assembled twelve men. Most of them are middle-aged local tradesmen, but one stands out among them as different. He is young and slight, smartly dressed and good-looking, neither tall nor short at five foot nine inches, with dark hair falling in curls over his forehead and collar. He is a new resident who has just moved into a fine airy house with a large garden, close to Regent's Park at York Gate: it is No. 1 Devonshire Terrace, from which the Beadle has made haste to summon him to his duty.

It is only a short walk from Devonshire Terrace to the workhouse, but it is a different world he has entered through its gates. He is directed to a room in which the other jurors are talking among themselves as they wait for the inquest to begin. They have come to pronounce on a case of suspected infanticide, a servant girl accused of killing her newborn baby in the kitchen of her employers' house. One of the jurors immediately declares himself in favour of the utmost rigour of the law being applied to the young woman. The new young juror recognizes him as a furniture-dealer he suspects of cheating him over the recent purchase of a pair of card tables. Another solid parishioner presses his card into his hand, murmuring that he hopes to be of service to him in the future: he is an undertaker.

Before they can settle down for the inquest the jurors must be taken downstairs to the workhouse mortuary in the basement to be shown the body of the baby. It is lying on a box set upon a clean white cloth, with a surgical instrument beside it that has been used to open it up for examination. The baby has been sewn up again. The new juror, who has a two-month-old baby daughter of his own at home – Katey – reflects that it looks as though the cloth were laid and the Giant coming to dinner, but he does not share this thought with his fellow jurors. They agree among themselves that the mortuary is clean and well whitewashed, the foreman says, 'All right, gentlemen? Back again, Mr Beadle,' and they troop upstairs. The coroner is Thomas Wakley, a surgeon and until recently a Member of Parliament. The new juror is Charles Dickens.

This is a very small episode in the life of Dickens, but it allows us to see him in action, going to the workhouse just along the road from his own home, and deciding to help a young woman whose character and history are quite without interest or colour, and who comes from the very bottom of the social heap, a workhouse child, a servant and a victim – a victim of ignorance, of gullibility, of an unknown seducer and a harsh employer, and of the assumptions made by respectable jurors. He is at his best as a man, determined in argument, generous in giving help, following through the case, motivated purely by his profound sense that it was wrong that she should be victimized further.

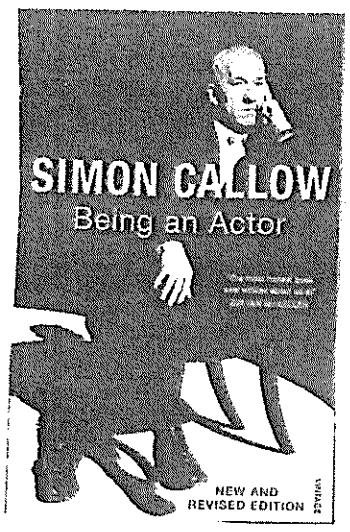
Claire Tomalin, Charles Dickens: A Life (2011)

FOREWORD

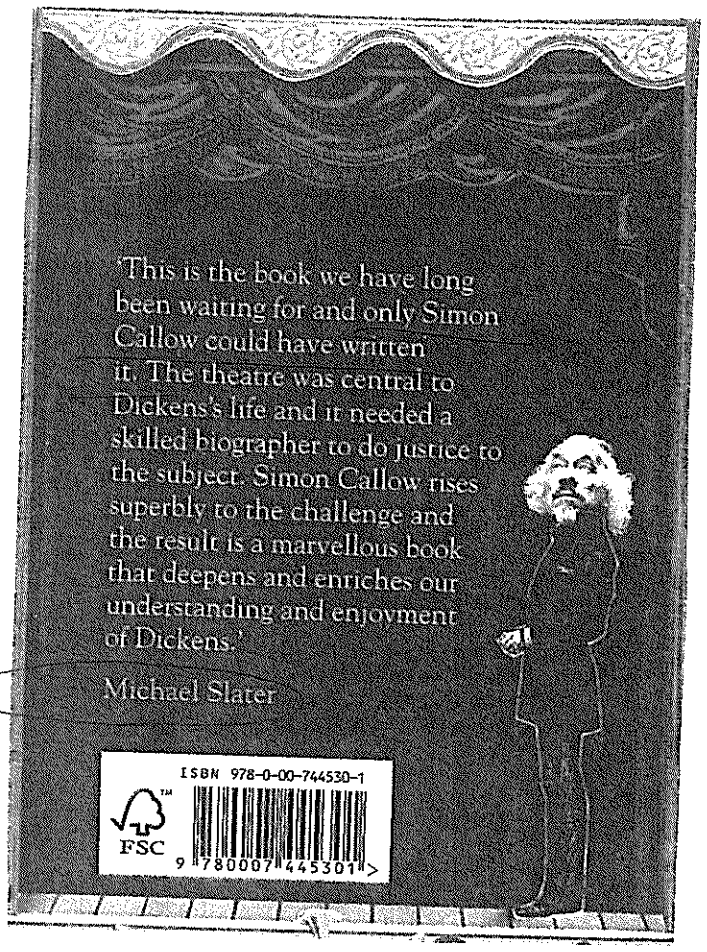
When he was a young graduate, Michael Slater, the current doyen of Dickens studies, was asked by his tutors at Oxford what he wanted to study for his PhD. When he said 'Dickens', they looked at him aghast. Dickens was simply not part of the accepted canon. After vainly trying to dissuade him, they sent him off to Another University for advice and guidance, after which he then commenced his life's work, to the benefit of all Dickensians everywhere. Half a century later, the situation is entirely reversed: there is a non-stop tsunami of scholarly studies of Dickens from every possible angle. Dickens and Women, Dickens and Children, Dickens and Food, Dickens and Drink, Dickens and the Law, Dickens and Railways, Dickens and the Americans, Dickens and Europe, Dickens and Homosexuality, Dickens and Magic, Dickens and Mesmerism, Dickens and Art, Dickens and Stenography, Dickens and Publishing. As yet, I have not come across a book on Dickens and Dogs, but it can only be a matter of time: a perfectly interesting and not especially slim volume is just waiting to be written. The multifariousness of Dickens makes him virtually inexhaustible as a subject. These studies have run alongside and to some extent been the outcrop of the huge transformation in academic attitudes to Dickens, particularly with regard to the later novels, which were largely dismissed by critical opinion in his lifetime.

There has also been a magnificent procession of major biographies, from Edgar Johnson in the 1950s to Fred Kaplan in the 1980s, Peter Ackroyd's sublime act of creative self-identification with Dickens in the 1990s, Michael Slater's revelatory account of, as he puts it, a life defined by writing, to the most recent, Claire Tomalin's vivid survey of the Life and Work. Dickens has never been more present. So it takes some cheek on the part of one who is by no means a Dickens scholar to offer yet one more account of the man who called himself Albion's Sparkler. I dare to do so because my relationship to the great man is a little different from anyone else's. In an exchange that Dickens himself might have relished, the late dramatist Pam Gems went to see one of her plays performed by that fine actor Warren Mitchell. She noticed that one or two lines in the text had changed. Reproached by her, Mitchell replied, 'Pam, Pam: you only wrote 'im. I've *been* 'im.' I have, over the years, been Dickens in various manifestations, from reconstructions of the Public Readings on television, to one of Dr Who's helpers; I have also been involved in telling his life story, through the wonderful play that Peter Ackroyd wrote for me, *The Mystery of Charles Dickens*. Presently I am involved in performing two of his monologues, *Dr Marigold and Mr Chops*, and his solo version of *A Christmas Carol*. In order to do all of this, I have needed to find out what it was like to be him, and what it was like to be around him. I have immersed myself, on an almost daily basis, over a period of nearly fifteen years, in the minutiae of his life, above all seeking out personal reminiscences and his own utterances rather than exegetic texts.

Simon Callow, Charles Dickens and the Great Theatre of the World (2012)



Simon Callow is an actor, director and writer. He has appeared on the stage and in many films, including the hugely popular *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Callow's books include *Being an Actor*, *Shooting the Actor*, a highly acclaimed biography of Charles Laughton, a biographical trilogy on Orson Welles (of which the first two parts have now been published), and *Love is Where it Falls*, an account of his friendship with the great play agent, Peggy Ramsay.



From my point of view as an actor, I had the odd sensation that I had found my perfect author. He fitted me like a glove. This was a little regrettable in that he had neglected to write any performable plays, so I would always – or so I assumed – be at the mercy of adaptations. The distinction between drama and theatre is a profound one, and it is not a paradox to say that our greatest novelist is our most theatrical writer.

My Life in Pieces (2010)

井「国民劇場、チャールズ・ディケンズ」
※ C.トマリンのメロドラマ批判

(4)

<1> It is melodrama, but with moments of real terror, as Oliver tries to escape the villains and they in turn are hunted to the death. Apart from the colourless virtuous characters, the chief failure of the book is Nancy, on whom Dickens lavished great care and whom he claimed to have modelled on a young woman he had known. He was proud of his portrait and said it was drawn from life, but he fails because he makes her behave like an actress in a bad play; she tears her hair and clothes, writhes, wrings her hands, sinks to her knees and contrives to lie down on a stone staircase in the street. She has visions of shrouds, coffins and blood, and is loaded with false theatrical speeches. 'I am that infamous creature,' she tells a would-be benefactress. 'The poorest women fall back, as I make my way along the crowded pavement . . . the alley and the gutter were mine, as they will be my death-bed.' Again, 'Look before you, lady. Look at that dark water. How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing, to care for, or bewail them . . . I shall come to that at last.'[17] Dickens must many times have observed prostitutes in the streets, yet he is creating a stereotype here, one he used again in later novels: the penitent woman who tears her hair and seeks the river to make an end of things. But Nancy's falsity could not spoil the success of *Oliver*, which rose to a fearful conclusion with her murder by Sikes and his subsequent grisly end. Fagin is hanged, and the Artful Dodger redeems the criminal classes with his great performance in the dock, cheeking the magistrate and making even the jailer grin.

<2> Florence does not inhabit the same world as her businessman father, although she is loved by his office boy, and Dickens tells the reader disappointingly little about the business of Dombey, or the reasons for its failure. He is more interested in describing Dombey's second marriage, to Edith, a young widow who agrees to become his wife while making it plain she does not care for him. She is following her mother's instructions to marry money, and Dickens underlines ※ the point by giving her an unknown cousin Alice, who also sells herself, in her case as a prostitute. His intentions are serious, but undermined by his inability to present real women: Florence has to be a fairy princess; Edith is a leading lady in a *mélodrame*, Alice also. All Edith's behaviour is taken from the theatre, whether she is tearing the diamonds out of her 'rich black hair' and throwing them on the floor, trampling on her expensive bracelets, beating her hand against the marble mantelpiece until it bleeds, or puffing herself up as a sign of rage, inflating her nostrils, swelling her neck and dilating her whole form, like an angry toad (Dickens had been watching actresses carefully). Her face becomes that of a beautiful Medusa, looking on her husband to strike him dead.

<3> Dickens naturally excluded any allusions to sex, as the conventions of the time required, but the deeper reason was that he did not know how to write or think about it, at any rate in relation to adult women. There are moments when he apostrophizes Edith in the course of the narrative: 'Oh, Edith! It were well to die, indeed, at such a time! Better and happier far, perhaps, to die so, Edith, than to live on to the end!' He repeats the suggestion that it would be better to die than to be sexually disgraced in his next book, thinking of Little Em'ly, and in both cases it sounds like a piece of piety offered to a public that expected this sort of thing, either because he could not bring himself to write truthfully on this subject, or because he did not know how to.[23]

※「メロドラマ」をキャロウはどう捉えるか

<4> 'In Paris,' said Forster, 'Dickens's life was passed among artists, and in the exercise of his own art.' This was also true. If Wilkie was his companion in the *boîtes*, Forster accompanied him to the salons. He was a regular visitor to the theatre, where, whenever he could, he saw the actor he admired above all others, even above Macready: Frédérick Lemaître, immortalized by Pierre Brasseur in Marcel Carné's great film *Les Enfants du Paradis*. 'Incomparably the finest acting I ever saw,' Dickens said of Lemaître in the melodrama *Thirty Years of a Gambler's Life*. 'Two or three times a great cry of horror went round the entire house: the manner in which the crime came into his head – and his eyes – was as truthful as it was terrific.' Dickens notes one of Lemaître's great 'points', as Victorian critics called them: crystallizing gestures:

> such an extraordinary guilty wicked thing he made of a knotted branch of a tree which was his walking stick … he sat at a little table in the inn-yard, drinking with the traveller; and this horrible stick got between them like the Devil, while he counted on his fingers the uses he could put the money to.

This could be a passage from one of his own novels, describing a Bill Sikes or a Jonas Chuzzlewit. It is a kind of acting for which we no longer have any use, but which was exactly what Dickens sought to do in *The Lighthouse*, and later in *The Frozen Deep*. Later still, and in a different form, he attempted it in the public readings from his own work that dominated his last years. He and most of his contemporaries saw it as an essential part of the actor's job to be memorable, and these 'points' were what people remembered: not their *interpretations* of roles, a word that would have seemed bewildering to a Victorian theatre-goer, if not actually impertinent. Acting, Dickens and his contemporaries believed, was the art of gesture, no more and no less.

<5> The playwright and critic John Oxenford wrote of Wardour's appearance in Act II that

> such a man as Mr Dickens presents – a man strong in the command of his voice, but weak in suppressing the language of his eyes and facial muscles, a man whose constant attempts to hide the internal storm by slight simulations of good fellowship only renders more conspicuous the vastness of that which he would conceal – a man who has a habit of losing his temper in a manner that mere external circumstances do not warrant – such a man is a just object of terror. Richard Wardour, as depicted by Mr Dickens, is the most perfect representation of dogged vindictiveness that the imagination could conceive.

This suggests a positively Stansislavskian degree of many-layered inner life. When melodrama is taken as seriously as this, it can become overwhelming, as it evidently did in this case. In the reviewer's opinion, Dickens's performance 'might open a new era for the stage, if the stage had the wisdom to profit by it'.

<6> . Dickens owed a great deal to current theatrical conceptions in his creation of character. But he transformed those prototypes out of all recognition, giving them – as in the case of Sam Weller – immortality in exchange for the shallow, cardboard lives they had known before.

<1>

Before long, Dickens was somewhat embarrassed by the operetta's naivety: like virtually everything Dickens wrote for the stage, it suffered from his abject adoration of the theatre of his day, which he dutifully reproduced. It would be hard to find a sentence in any essay, novel, story or letter of Dickens's that does not have some authentic flavour, but you will search the plays in vain for a single Dickensian turn of phrase. He was, surprisingly, the most uninspired of dramatists, though the most theatrically obsessed of men. Every episode of *Pickwick* introduced new editions of old stage characters; the spirit of Charles Mathews was everywhere in its pages. Dickens had put all of his love of the theatre, all of his 'strong perception of character and oddity', all of his pleasure in the stage devices of coincidence and contrivance, into it. Before long, other people would respond to the inherent theatrical potential in his fiction and start restoring them to the stage to which, in an important sense, they belonged.

<2>

But his novels, paradoxically, are supremely theatrical. 'Dickens enters the theatre of the world through the stage door,' as Santayana memorably remarked. He himself longed to go on stage, and participated, with some distinction, in innumerable theatrical productions as an amateur, playing a fine Falstaff and a better Bobadill; he even secured an audition with a famous actor-manager. The very form of his novels, the structure of his characters and the arc of his dialogue, are derived from popular theatrical forms of his time, in which he would play many characters in the course of an evening. Eventually, Dickens fused his talents in the public readings which dominated his last years, in the course of which he astounded huge crowds on both sides of the Atlantic with his histrionic genius, producing uncontrollable mirth and asphyxiating horror in his listeners, and inhabiting no less than eighty-nine characters in the course of eighteen different readings, seeming to become each in turn.

Dickens is the Writer as Actor.

My Life in Pieces

<3>

Beyond his sense of the theatre-as-world was his sense of the world-as-theatre, of the charivari, the endless parade, each man in his time playing many parts, absurd, grotesque, battered, damaged, ridiculous, briefly glorious. It is a carnival view of life, in which we are all, like members of a theatre company, dependent on each other, all limbs of one body, all human, and therefore all flawed, all beautiful.

<4>

The thing that pulses through his work like an electric current is his almost carnal need to communicate with his readers. His relationship with them far exceeds in intensity any other relationship in his life: those with his children (devoted but formal), his wife (initially affectionate, ultimately disgusted), his friends (passionate but erratic), or even his hidden mistress, Ellen Ternan, thirty years his junior; we can only conjecture at the nature of his feelings for her, though it is safe to say that an element of play-acting—he adopted the persona of 'Mr Tringham' to throw the curious off the trail—must have formed a large part of them.

His relationship with his public was something quite different, altogether more real. Simply put, he needed their love in order to exist. Like a lover, he responded instantly to their moods and to their wants; they for their part expected him to speak for them, to express their joys and their miseries, to create for them their monsters and their comic heroes. Almost shamanically, he was possessed by their spirit, the great popular Carnival spirit.

※

Being An Actor (2004)

<5>公開朗読会

The reading lasted three hours, with a ten-minute break. That would change, as would many other things. He immediately sensed the extraordinary potential of this form of acting. It was in fact an extension of his procedure as a writer. With Dickens, the reader is always conscious of his presence: the author is performing his characters. His daughter Mamie reported that when he was writing, he would leap up to the mirror to observe the expression on his face as the character's words passed through his mind. Their utterances are brilliantly constructed performances, brilliantly shaped with a view to the reader's reactions. Even the descriptive passages have the quality of arias, often, tellingly, falling into blank verse. And indeed, the books, as they appeared in their instalments, were frequently read aloud within family groups. Given Dickens's very particular gift as an actor, his incomparable mimicry and his fascination with transformation, performing his own texts in public was a perfect fusion of the narrator's voice, delivered with unique authority, with Mathewsian monopolyloguing. Despite the relative lightness of his voice and the lisp that in the end, after long and arduous work, he almost completely eliminated, there has never been another author-reader even remotely as well-equipped to perform his own work. His experience with amateur productions in huge halls across the country had strengthened his vocal instrument and taught him how to fill the spaces with vocal energy, not simply relying on volume. His palpable joy in responding to the audience set the place on fire: it was genuine interaction, with real give and take. His listeners were not passive auditors of the master's voice: they were participants. A year after these first readings, he told an audience in Bradford that if they felt disposed 'as we go along to give expression to any emotion, whether grave or gay, you will do so with perfect freedom from restraint, and without the least apprehension of disturbing me'. He asked them to imagine the event as 'a small social party assembled to hear a tale told round the Christmas fire'. What he wanted, he said, 'was the establishment among us, from the very beginning, of a perfectly unfettered, cordial, friendly sentiment.' And that is what he got – plus, to his great gratification, a great deal more. The fervour of his audiences, their passionate approval of him and everything he stood for, were mother's milk to him.

(ex.)

The first issue of *Household Words* appeared in March 1850, and one of Dickens's earliest dreams was finally realized. 'We aspire,' he wrote in the first edition,

> to live in the Household Affections, and to be numbered among the Household thoughts, of our readers. We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions, on whose faces we may never look. We seek to bring into innumerable homes, from the stirring world around us, the knowledge of many social wonders, good and evil, that are not calculated to render any of us less ardently persevering in ourselves, less tolerant of one another, less faithful in the progress of mankind, less thankful for the privilege of living in this summer-dawn of time.

At last he had a direct line to his readers; and for the first time he was master of his own destiny, with freedom of action. In fact it would turn out that he was more bound than ever, obliged to step in (like an actor-manager taking over a part when one of the actors is ill or drops out), to say nothing of the demands of day-to-day business.

<6>

'A story of his is like a drama for the fireside,' said *Fraser's Magazine*,

> furnished not only with situations and dialogue, but with appropriate scenery, gestures, action, by-play; the author, scene-painter, stage-manager, and moreover the whole company, tragic and comic, male and female, from 'stars' to 'supers', being one and the same skilful individual. The figures impress one rather as impersonations than persons. But how telling they are, and what a list of dramatis personae is that of the *Theatre National Charles Dickens!*