

Dickens's Old Men, comments to accompany slides

- 1 Title page
- 2 Dickens's old men are some of the most charming characters in his books, some of the nastiest, and some of the most controversial. They also have the ability to transform themselves or be transformed.
- 3 'Responsibility for the toast', John McLenan's illustration of the Aged P for the US version of *Great Expectations*, published alongside the *All the Year Round* numbers.
- 4 Harry Enfield's 1990s comic character 'You don't want to do it like that' looks back to the ten-year old Charles Dickens's first piece of writing, a description of an old barber who liked to set Napoleon straight.
- 5 His modern Italian counterpart, known as 'umarell', who comment on building works.
- 6 Mr Pickwick, Dickens's first extended character. Newly retired from business and on his retirement 'gap year'. In Peter Ackroyd's words 'the embodiment of natural benevolence'.
- 7 Pickwick's almost instant global reach: bloodstained copy of a 1850s Russian translation, found on the corpse of a soldier in the Crimean War.
- 8 From nicest to nastiest: Fagin, like Pickwick, escapes from the confines of his novel into the public imagination.
- 9 An emanation of the city's lower depths, but Fagin does give Oliver sausages and laughs. Cruikshank does a lot with Fagin, as we can see from these illustrations.
- 10 Fagin's den.
- 11 Fagin with Noah Claypole
- 12 Fagin with Monks at Oliver's window.
- 13 This illustration by Cruikshank for Grimm's *Fairy Tales* a decade earlier suggests a precursor for Fagin in Rumpelstiltskin, mischievous malign goblin.
- 14 Krook in *Bleak House*, by Phiz. Another foul old man. Just as Fagin was controversial in the 20th Century for being an antisemitic caricature of a Jew, Krook was controversial in Dickens's time for the method of his death.
- 15 'The appointed hour' by Phiz. Krook's death by 'spontaneous combustion' led to a public spat between Dickens and G. H. Lewes, who accused Dickens of a 'vulgar error'.
- 16 More nasty old men, here Grandfather Smallweed in *Bleak House*, described by Dickens as a 'baleful old malignant'.

- 17 But on the whole the old men in Dickens's novels evoke compassion rather than
repulsion. This is Old Chuffey, Anthony Chuzzlewit's clerk in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.
- 18 Chuffey was played by John Mills, bottom right, in the 1994 BBC dramatization.
- 19 The figure on the left of this Phiz illustration is Old Nandy, in *Little Dorrit*. Let out of the
workhouse, he visits the Marshalsea prison, where he is patronized by Mr Dorrit.
- 20 Mr Omer in *David Copperfield*, one of the many convivial old men in Dickens's novels,
what we might call the room warmers.
- 21 Transformations and revelations: as a young novelist Dickens took on the persona of old
man author as he edited and wrote the weekly magazine *Master Humphrey's Clock*.
- 22 John Alderton as the Patriarch Casby in BBC's 2008 dramatization of *Bleak House*. He is
revealed as a fraud when Mr Pancks cuts off his flowing locks at the end of the novel.
- 23 The most famous of Dickens's old men transformations: horrible mean old Scrooge
melts into charity and jollity, and even becomes younger. This is Alistair Sim in the 1951
film.
- 24 Another old man who becomes younger in the course of the book: Dr Manette in *A Tale
of Two Cities*.
- 25 'Fagin in the condemned cell'. Caricature from Cruikshank, but Dickens's prose takes us
inside the character during his trial and last hours alive.
- 26 Cruikshank's early sketches for this illustration.
- 27 These first sketches by Cruikshank seem to me less caricatured than the final version, in
particular the face on the bottom right of this sheet.
- 28 Detail of the face on the bottom right of preceding slide; what looks like real anguish
here, and what Dickens gives us in his intense prose.