

# Dickens comedy in the pickwick papers

[People](#), [Charles Dickens](#)



Dickens comedy in The Pickwick Papers The Pickwick Papers has been one of the most read and most popular novels of all time since its publishing in 1836. This novel exalts the joys one can live as Dickens portrays the pleasures of travel, food and drink, companionship between men, benevolence, the joys of youth and romance. While the novel primarily deals with issues of a serious nature, they are disguised and portrayed to the readers in the guise of comedy. Dickens manages to blend these serious issues with humour by contrasting them with some unpleasant aspects of reality. Dickens plays good standard luxurious food and drink off against the bog standard victuals and grubby wine in that is seen in prison. Male friendships are ignited by overbearing and predatory wives and widows. By doing this, Dickens manages to prove to the readers just how important these realities. By mixing harsh realities and comedy together, we are able to view life on a much larger scale and the reader comes to realise the importance of the everyday ordinary as it is embodied in Dickens' character Mr Pickwick. Signs of change began emerging in not only Dickens' private life, but also in his writing where new styles and techniques were being introduced to us. The comic plot widens slowly throughout the novel through a slightly predictable pattern of adventures (or misadventures) which tend to repeat themselves. The comical personalities of the characters create an even more humorous scene to the adventures in which they are caught up in. Each of the characters has a different personality which portrays them as the comic-type. Mr Pickwick is kind-hearted, yet very gullible. Tracy Tupman is overweight and middle-aged however sees himself as quite the ladies' man. Nathaniel Winkle is an incompetent sports man, and Augustus

Snodgrass is a talentless poet, unable to write any lines to a verse. The first new acquaintance we meet is Sam Weller where he is working at the inn. Sam's character is that of a "chirpy cockney" and greatly boosts the novel's circulation as he uses phrases such as "sorry to keep you a-waitin' sir," (Chapter 10, Pickwick Papers). Dickens wants the reader to be able to experience the accent in order to achieve the comical side. Alfred Jingle is seen later again in the fleet prison and again is a character crafted out of language. It is not so much his outrageous stories/lies that bring the humour element to the novel, but the unusual way in which he speaks. It is compressed, cutting, and breathless. In chapter 2 of the novel Jingle says: "Ah! you should keep dogs—fine animals—sagacious creatures—dog of my own once—pointer—surprising instinct—out shooting one day—entering inclosure—whistled—dog stopped—whistled again—Ponto—no go; stock still—called him—Ponto, Ponto—wouldn't move—dog transfixed—staring at a board—looked up, saw an inscription—" Gamekeeper has orders to shoot all dogs found in this inclosure"—wouldn't pass it—wonderful dog—valuable dog that—very." Dickens has given Jingle an idiosyncratic speech pattern and we see how he uses language and speech in a comic form. He uses it as a material and not a transparent medium onto the world. In fact, the majority of the humour in the novel actually comes from the language of these characters and not the incidents that they are stuck in themselves. Sometimes the reader is left having to try make sense of these fragmented and broken lines however for Dickens, this form of parataxis probably came to him with ease and he once learnt shorthand as a legal and a parliamentary reporter. While the characters themselves bring a comical aspect to the novel, the situations

that they get themselves into are also very humouring to the reader. As stated previously in this essay, Dickens is dealing with the harsh realities of these characters and is searching for a balance or even an imbalance between humour and harshness, tragedy and comedy, and gloom and mirth. Comedy lays completely bare in *The Pickwick Papers* and dominates the bleak and harsh surroundings of the scene and characters. Even in chapter one Dickens manages to portray a sense of humour in the sense that he creates an atmosphere in the club that is filled with a number of childish men who have come together to get away from their predator wives and act like schoolboys again. A name calling session arises when Mr Blotton calls Mr Pickwick a “humbug”. Dickens has created a setting in a club full of adult men, but is dominated by this boyhood spirit, just as one would see in a young fraternity group. This opening scene sets the sense of youth and fun that continues throughout the entire novel. Chapter five shows Dickens using contrasting again while trying to blend humour and serious life together. Pickwick bumps into Jemmy who is on the brink of committing suicide (or so he says). To get the Wardle’s manor farm Winkle is riding by horseback, in which his experience is next to none. Of course Winkle manages to lose his horse while the other men are overturned. This combined with the struggles that these men face trying to make their way to Wardle’s manor farm, make their arrival there, just that little bit more cherished as Dickens is creating a highly amusing scene for the readers to visualise. A little later on Tupman becomes injured which leaves him in the one places he would like to be in which back at home with women who fuss and bustle over him. Dickens introduces a new and exciting fresh element into the comical side with Sam

Weller. When Mr Pickwick wants to hire Sam, he goes about it in a way that many would in reality and begins to beat around the bush. Sam simply tells him to get the point. When they have made their agreement it is established that Sam will take over the role of Mr Blotton which is speaking only the truth no matter what, however going about it in a pleasant and witty way. Dickens portrays how in reality, truthfulness is not something that people take seriously and this scene shows how much he really values honesty and trust. This scene sets out the new plot for the rest of the novel. When the men are invited to a costume breakfast, Mr Pickwick is now learning that dishonesty really does exist and that it is everywhere. He looks to Weller as his ally and expose it all. Mrs Hunter's costume breakfast party is funny all by itself. Costume parties are usually set at night time and not at the crack of dawn as people begin to settle into their day. What's even funnier is the costumes that the men chose to go as. While Tupam is quite fat and middle aged, decides to go a romantic bandit. Winkle turned up as a sporting man even though his coordination is appalling, and Snodgrass as a troubadour even though he is constantly unable to write one single verse. Dickens so effortlessly leaves the reader grinning during this scene as its absurdity is nothing other than hilarious, and outrageous. While still with keeping in the comical side of things, Dickens also tries to portray the importance of comradeship in the novel. Both Weller and Mr Pickwick are fooled by Job Trotter which not only embarrasses them, but also causes their pride to take a hit. Because of this however, Sam and Mr Pickwick grow closer emotionally. It isn't long before Mr Pickwick's sense of humour is regained and his usual good spirits are seen again. Dickens is trying to get the point across that we

need to bounce back after incidences like this as they are merely just minor setbacks which shouldn't change how we are or what we value. In some sense, the master — servant relationship is much like the father — son relationship: One person has the higher authority, and the one in the minority often mimics the other. When Weller is able to expose Jingle later on in the novel, Sam proves how he is valuable to Mr Pickwick as his fines are cancelled and bail is authorised. The two now not only share their previous mutual humiliation from the costume breakfast party, but also this mutual success. Dickens again is reiterating the importance of fellowship. Dickens captures humour in even the smallest of objects such as Mr Pickwick's top hat, or the lantern in chapter 39 as he describes as "the most extraordinary lantern I ever met with — in all my life!" as it causes chaos and almost ruins the intimate rendezvous he has with Arabella. He is somehow charging these everyday objects with humorous and clownish properties. Towards the end of the novel in its' final chapters, the comical side of things is toned down. As time has passed, the men have grown and matured. When the will of Sam's mother is made out, he finds that he has been left 200 pounds for himself leaving the rest with Tony Weller who takes it to be invested which results in over 1, 100 pounds. Usually during the announcement of someone's will, the grieving process and sense of depression and bleakness is apparent however in the novel, Dickens manages to create a vibe in which the characters are not hung up at this moment and are getting on with their lives. Mr Weller tries to give his money to Mr Pickwick but he refuses the money. As Sam restrains him so that he can give him the money Mr Pickwick plans to use it to set up business for

Sam. Dickens is constantly portraying the importance of loyalty and trust by showing how deep of a relationship these two men have come to have. In *The Pickwick Papers* Dickens is acknowledging the rough times that people go through in life and some of the darker aspects that are not always talked about, however he tries to focus on the brighter aspects and outcomes that they bring. The warm and comforting feeling of a relationship or comradeship between two people, the joys and importance of friendship and being able to trust in someone, the sensational feeling you get when you find someone you love — these are things that Dickens valued hugely in his life. He believed that without these aspects that the value of life was not at its' highest potential and that it is vital not to overlook them. This novel shows Dickens celebrating humanity. He is celebrating all the good, while moving forward from the bad. He manages to mark the line between the novel's main plot and the tales that are told, and the separation of what is horrific or tragic, or wonderful or exciting. Dickens tries to accomplish all this in the novel through the medium of comedy. His comic techniques stood out creating a fun youthful and fast moving setting for the stories told. Dickens' personal attitude towards life is seen in this novel and is one of that on a lighter side and as Dr Seuss once said "I like nonsense, it wakes up the brain cells. Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope. Which is what I do, and that enables you to laugh at life's realities." Works Cited Dickens, Charles. *The Pickwick Papers*. London. Penguin Books Ltd. 2003. Stein, Bysshe. "The Aspern Papers: A Comedy of Masks". *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 14. 2 (1959): 172-78. Herbert, Christopher. "Converging Worlds in *Pickwick Papers*".

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