

# Dickens and His Lists of Names

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Novelists, it seems, tend to use proper names in a particular way to express an attitude or to reveal character. Dickens is one of the more supreme examples among English novelists in this respect. Since I have dealt with this tendency elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> I should like to note briefly the lists of names that Dickens left in his "Book of Memoranda," compiled between 1855 and 1865,<sup>2</sup> a kind of notebook in which he put down or jotted hints and suggestions for stories, pieces of imagery that apparently he wished to use later, outlines of characters, titles that could be used, of which some note will be made later, and some lists of names to use in the stories. Dickens, a close observer of speech, also preserved oddities of speech.<sup>3</sup>

The names a novelist uses in his works indicate to some extent the way in which he or she modifies or otherwise transforms raw material, so to speak, into a final form. Actually, Dickens transforms the names as little as possible, sometimes not at all. The few modifications seem to be for the better, however. Names that are real ones have become less and less like fiction. Parents visit some terrible sounds upon their children, not curses or verbal abuse, but names. We are all familiar with that sort of thing and some of us live through it and with it, etc. Dickens apparently scanned public lists of names, possibly also newspaper stories also, to find ones that to him revealed character. Two such lists are taken from the Privy Council Education lists.<sup>4</sup> He noted the following names for girls:

Lelia  
Menilla

Etty  
Rebinah

Doris  
Balzina

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<sup>1</sup>"Charles Dickens Names His Characters," *Names*, VII (1959), 34-42.

<sup>2</sup>The lists are reprinted in John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), pp. 262-266, and are further annotated for correctness in J.W. T. Ley's edition of Forster (New York: Doubleday Doran, [1928], pp. 757-760. I have also made extensive use of Alex. J. Philip, *A Dickens Dictionary* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1909).

<sup>3</sup>Forster, *idem*. See also G.L. Brook, *The Language of Dickens* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1970), the best available study of the language as used by Dickens.

<sup>4</sup>Although the "Book of Memoranda" is dated as compiled between 1855 and 1865, some sheets must have been compiled earlier and later inserted or written into the "Book."

|           |          |          |
|-----------|----------|----------|
| Rubina    | Seba     | Pleasant |
| Iris      | Persia   | Gentilla |
| Rebecca   | Aramanda | Amanda   |
| Ethlynida |          |          |

Gentilla is not singled out for any special purpose, but it does remind me of a story told by Eudora Welty recently on a PBS interview: She knew a woman who wanted to name her child Placenta, since she thought it was such a beautiful name and she had heard it several times in the hospital. She thought it was a name of a nurse or some person connected with the hospital. So can Wassermann Test Jones and Venereal D. Wilson arise. The latter smell of the lamp, night imagination, or just sick.

Much as anyone does who scans a list of names, Dickens searched out those that struck his fancy, ones that had a pleasant sound or connotation to him or appealed to his sense of the grotesque. Of the list, we can now find in existence with any degree of prominence only Doris, Rebecca, and possibly Iris. These do not make the list of the most popular names, nevertheless. They predominantly end in the normal *-a* that typifies names given to females, not only then but now. I do know a man named Pleasant, but the others definitely belong to a class usually reserved for females. Young girls, however, do not receive grotesque names in the Dickens canon. From this list, he took only three for characters: Etty appears in *Old Lamps for New Ones*; Persia in *Smuggled Relations*; and Aramanda was changed into Araminta for *Gone to the Dogs*.

The list of boys' names reflects a different attitude, for they do not have any sentimental connotations — to me — and probably not to Dickens. Here, the names definitely move into the curious, but not too far out of the ordinary, although they could have ludicrous associations, as can be seen:

|         |             |         |
|---------|-------------|---------|
| Doctor  | Zerubbabel  | Pickles |
| Homer   | Maximillian | Orange  |
| Oden    | Urbin       | Feather |
| Bradley | Samillas    | Boltius |
| Boetius |             |         |

Of these he chose only Pickles and Urbin, the latter changed to Urbino in *Old Lamps for New Ones*. Mr. Pickles becomes a type-name, the fish-monger in *Holiday Romance*. Both lists were labeled "Christian names."

A supplement lists both boys and girls (separate columns). No doubt these names appeared in contemporary papers or were known to Dickens through other means. The two lists, 14 each, if any significance can be attached to that, are noted here:

## Boys

|                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Robert Ladle      | George Muzzle             |
| Joly Stick        | Walter Ashes              |
| Bill Marigold     | Zaphaniah Ferry (or Fury) |
| Stephen Marquick  | William Why               |
| Jonathan Knotwell | Robert Gospel             |
| Philip Browndress | Thomas Fatherly           |
| Henry Ghost       | Robin Scrubbam            |

## Girls

|                  |                   |
|------------------|-------------------|
| Sarah Goldsacks  | Alice Thorneywork |
| Rosetta Dust     | Sally Gimlet      |
| Susan Goldring   | Verity Hawkyard   |
| Catherine Two    | Birdie Nash       |
| Matilda Rainbird | Ambrosina Events  |
| Miriam Denial    | Apaulina Vernon   |
| Sophia Doomsday  | Neltie Ashford    |

The boys' names definitely were chosen for their surnames that could easily fit into type-names, since, with the exception of Zephaniah, all name objects or actions, and as Forster writes, "Some would have been reckoned too extravagant for anything but reality." Nothing surrounding the listing suggests the origin of the names, but they can be found among English surnames even now. The same is true of the surnames of the girls' names. The first names of the girls, however, had interest, especially Verity, Ambrosina, and Apaulina. Nothing is uncommon about the surname *Vernon*, but Apaulina, which could very probably be a typesetter's error, is different.

Then appears a list of 172 "available names," out of which Dickens took 74 names. The 172 are copied here as they were listed by Dickens: ((I have omitted the single quotes (Forster's) and the periods (Dickens)).

|            |                |             |
|------------|----------------|-------------|
| Towndling  | Slyant         | Pedsey      |
| Mood       | Queedy         | Duncalf     |
| Guff       | Besselthur     | Trinklebank |
| Treble     | Musty          | Sapsea      |
| Chilby     | Grout          | Readyhuff   |
| Spessifer  | Tertius Jobber | Dufty       |
| Wodder     | Amon Headston  | Foggy       |
| Whelpford  | Strayshott     | Twinn       |
| Fennerck   | Higden         | Brownsword  |
| Gannerson  | Morfit         | Peartree    |
| Chinkerble | Goldstraw      | Sudds       |
| Bintrey    | Barrel         | Silverman   |
| Fledson    | Inge           | Kimber      |

|                |               |                 |
|----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Hirll          | Jump          | Laughley        |
| Brayle         | Jiggins       | Lessock         |
| Mullender      | Bones         | Tippins         |
| Treslingham    | Coy           | Minnitt         |
| Brankle        | Dawn          | Radlowe         |
| Sittern        | Tatkin        | Pratchet        |
| Dostone        | Drowvey       | Mawdett         |
| Cay-lon        | Pudsey        | Wozenham        |
| Snowell        | Warbler       | Stiltwalk       |
| Lottrum        | Peex-Speex    | Stiltingstalk   |
| Lammle         | Gannaway      | Stiltstalking   |
| Froser         | Mrs. Flinks   | Ravender        |
| Holblack       | Flinks        | Stiltington     |
| Mulley         | Jee           | Podsnap         |
| Redworth       | Harden        | Clarriker       |
| Redfoot        | Merdle        | Compery         |
| Tarbox (B).    | Murden        | Striver-Stryver |
| Tinkling       | Topwash       | Pumblechook     |
| Duddle         | Pordage       | Wangler         |
| Jebus          | Dorret-Dorrit | Boffin          |
| Powderhill     | Carton        | Bantinck        |
| Grimmer        | Minifie       | Dibton          |
| Skuse          | Slingo        | Wilfer          |
| Titcoombe      | Joad          | Glibbery        |
| Crabble        | Kinch         | Mulvey          |
| Swannock       | Mag           | Horlick         |
| Tuzzen         | Chellyson     | Doolge          |
| Twemlow        | Blennam—Cl.   | Gannery         |
| Squab          | Bardock       | Gargery         |
| Jackman        | Singsworth    | Willshard       |
| Sugg           | Swenton       | Riderhood       |
| Bremmidge      | Casby—Beach   | Pratterstone    |
| Silas Blodgett | Lowleigh—Low  | Chinkible       |
| Melvin Beal    | Pigrin        | Wopsell         |
| Buttrick       | Yerbury       | Wopsle          |
| Edson          | Plornish      | Whelpington     |
| Sanlorn        | Maroon        | Gayvery         |
| Lightword      | Bandy-Nandy   | Wegg            |
| Titbull        | Stonebury     | Hubble          |
| Bangham        | Magwitch      | Urry            |
| Kyle-Nyle      | Meagles       | Kibble          |
| Pemble         | Pancks        | Skiffins        |
| Maxey          | Haggage       | Etser           |
| Rokesmith      | Provis        | Akershem        |
| Chivery        |               |                 |

Out of the 200 names in the three lists, Dickens took 74. Obviously, the names provided a store from which he drew on from 1853 on, although

Forster seems to claim 1855 as the beginning. That he used other names besides these is something that I should not even mention. Our concern here is with the ones he worked into his fiction. Where he found the names is really not important at this point, although much can be written in speculation of the originals. He may have created some of the names but never found a chance to use them, or even a reason to incorporate them. Sometimes he seems to have forgotten that he had used one before; for instance, Muzzle had appeared as George Muzzle in *The Pickwick Papers* (1837). Once, I wrote that the appearance of Muzzle in the list may have resulted from the copying of names from contemporary material and now Dickens was only confirming his earlier creation. My doubts nag me now. Carton was used twice, *Perils of Certain English Prisoners* (1857) and *Tale of Two Cities* (1859).

The names are listed below according to the works in which they appear. In one column, the names are given as they were written (not as they appear) in the "Book of Memoranda." In the second column are the names as Dickens finally used them:

|                             | "Book of Memoranda"   |
|-----------------------------|---|
|                             | <i>Bleak House</i> (1853), but ran in installments in 1852) |
| Walter Ashes                | Ashes (a bird)  |
| Mood                        | Moodle  |
| Guff                        | Guffy   |
| Dufty                       | Duffy   |
| (possibly a printing error) |   |
|                             | <i>Wreck of the "Golden Mary"</i> (1856)                    |
| Ravender                    | William George Ravender                                     |
|                             | <i>Perils of Certain English Prisoners</i> (1837)           |
| Pordage                     | Pordage (a family)  |
| Carton                      | Carton (a family)   |
|                             | <i>Little Dorrit</i> (1857), formerly <i>Nobody's Fault</i> |
| Bangham                     | Mrs. Bangham  |
| Blennam-Cl.                 | Arthur Clennam  |
| Casby                       | Mr. Christopher Casby                                       |
| Chivery                     | Chivery (a family)  |
| Dorret-Dorrit               | Dorrit (a family)   |
| Haggage                     | Doctor Haggage  |
| Mag                         | Maggy   |
| Maroon                      | Captain Maroon  |
| Meagles                     | Meagles (a family)  |
| Merdle                      | Mr. Merdle  |

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Nandy                       | Mr. John Edward Nandy                    |
| Pancks                      | Mr. Pancks                               |
| Plornish                    | Plornish (a family)                      |
| Slingo                      | Slingo (dealer in horses)                |
| Stiltington                 |  |
| Stiltwalk                   |  |
| Stiltingstalk               |  |
| Stiltstalking               |  |
| Stiltstalking               | Stiltstalking (a family)                 |
| Wodder                      | Wobbler (? possibly)                     |
|                             | <i>Tale of Two Cities</i> (1859)         |
| Carton                      | Sydney Carton                            |
| Striver-Stryver             | C.J. Stryver                             |
|                             | <i>Commercial Traveler</i> (1861)        |
| Bones                       | Banjo Jones (a comic)                    |
| Titbull                     | Sampson Titbull                          |
| Swenton                     | Mrs. Sweeney (? possibly)                |
| Chinkible                   | Chink's Basin                            |
| Clarriker                   | Clarriker and Co.                        |
| Compery                     | Compeyson                                |
| Etser (possibly a misprint) | Estella                                  |
| Gargery                     | Joe Gargery                              |
| Hubble                      | Hubble (a wheelwright)                   |
| Magwitch                    | Abel Magwitch                            |
| Provis                      | Provis                                   |
| Pumblechook                 | Mr. Pumblechook                          |
| Skiffins                    | Skiffins (brother and sister)            |
| Wopsle                      |  |
| Wopsell                     | Mr. Wopsle                               |
|                             | <i>Somebody's Luggage</i> (1862)         |
| Pratchet                    | Mr. and Mrs. Pratchett                   |
|                             | <i>Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings</i> (1863)   |
| Edson                       | Mr. Edson                                |
| Jackman                     | Major Jackman                            |
| Maxey                       | Caroline Maxey                           |
| Wozenham                    | Miss Wozenham                            |
|                             | <i>Dr. Marigold</i> (1865) (CS)          |
| Bill Marigold               | Dr. Marigold                             |
|                             | Willum Marigold (father of Dr. Marigold) |
|                             | <i>Our Mutual Friend</i> (1865)          |
| Akersham                    | Horatio and Sophronia Akersham           |
| Boffin                      | Boffin (a family)                        |

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Glibbery              | Bob Glibbery (potboy)                                 |
| Amon Headston         | Mr. Bradley Headstone (schoolmaster)                  |
| Higden                | Mrs. Betty Higden                                     |
| Jump                  | Jumble (?) (the school)                               |
| Kibble                | Mr. Jacob Kibble                                      |
| Lemmler               | Alfred Lemmler (adventurer)                           |
| Lightwood             | Mortimer Lightwood (lawyer)                           |
| Podsnap               | Podsnap (a family)                                    |
| Redfoot               | George Redfoot  |
| Riderhood             | Roger Riderhood ("A Thames 'night-bird' of ill fame") |
| Rokesmith             | Rokesmith (a family) <sup>5</sup>                     |
| Snigsworth            | Lord Snigsworth                                       |
| Tippins               | Sir Thomas Tippins                                    |
| Twemlow               | Melvin Twemlow  |
| Wegg                  | Silas Wegg (has a wooden leg)                         |
| Wilfer                | Wilfer (a family)                                     |
|                       | <i>No Thoroughfare</i> (1867)                         |
| Bintrey               | Mr. Bintry  |
| Goldstraw             | Mrs. Sarah Goldstraw                                  |
| Robert Ladle          | Robert Ladle  |
|                       | <i>George Silverman's Explanation</i> (1868)          |
| Sally Gimblet         | Brother Gimblet <sup>6</sup>                          |
| Verity Hawkyard       | Mr. Verity Hawkyard                                   |
| George Silverman      | George Silverman                                      |
|                       | <i>Holiday Romance</i> (1868)                         |
| Neltie Ashford        | Nettie Ashford  |
| (possibly a misprint) |   |
| Drowvey               | Drovy (a teacher)                                     |
| Grimmer               | Miss Grimmer (a teacher)                              |
| Matilda Rainbird      | Alice Rainbird  |
| Tinkling              | William Tinkling                                      |
|                       | <i>Edwin Drood</i> (1870)                             |
| Sapsea                | Mr. Thomas Sapsea                                     |

Several type-names appear in the list, as can be expected with such a compilation: Banjo Bones, Headstone, Hubble, Drowvy, and Grimmer suggest personalities to which the names are assigned. Others, such as

<sup>5</sup>Sally Simblet and Verity Hawkyard appear in the list of girls' names. In the assignment in the Works, Gimblet appears as a drysalter, and Mr. Verity Hawkyard becomes a "Yellow-faced, peaknosed gentleman, clad all in iron grey to his gaiters."

<sup>6</sup>"The Naming of Characters in the Works of Charles Dickens," *Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism*, No. 1, (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska, 1917), p. 2.

Podsnap, Wegg, Riderhood, Twemlow, and Glibbery are more in keeping with earlier choices. These names are vaguely suggestive, and can be analyzed for their phonetical suitability; but phonetical analysis of names, although a fascinating game, has little validity and even less truth. Professor Elizabeth Gordon, after pointing out the fun that can be obtained through analyzing names in this way, says, "The subject of the phonetic suggestiveness of names may very easily be pushed too far."<sup>7</sup> This may be an apt observation when certainly Dickens was suspected of ransacking newspapers, as well as names he knew, for the curious name, the eye-catching one.

Dickens chose his names with care and with no small amount of frustration. Forster chased through the various forms used for Chuzzlewit: Sweezleden, Sweezleback, Sweezlewag, Chuzzletoe, Chuzzleboy, Chubblewig, Chuzzlewig, "nor was Chuzzlewit chosen at last until after more hesitation and discussion." G.L. Brook has discussed many of the other names, such as Wegg, "a telescoped form of wooden leg," and "that Estella Provis, Bella Wilfer and Helena Landless owe some part of their name to Ellen Lawless Ternan."<sup>8</sup>

Probably the best place to turn for comments on the names used by Dickens is to the biography by Forster, where throughout comments, explanation, and sometimes speculations on names occur. Boz is noted by almost everyone who discusses Dickens, for it became his nickname through different pronunciations of the nickname of his brother Augustus, who was called Moses, which became Boses, then, Boz probably pronounced /boz/, then adopted by Charles Dickens himself. Bob Fagin befriended Dickens when he worked in a blacking warehouse; Fagin was repaid curiously by becoming a major figure in *Oliver Twist*, although nothing rancorous seems to have been applied to the use, for Dickens probably identified with the orphaned real-life Fagin. We could go with these.

One can only surmise what use Dickens would have made of such unused names as Dostone, Snowell, Tarbox, Duddle, Powerhill, Titcombe, Squab, Pudsey, Joad, Whelpford, Doolge, and Sudds. A novelist who had already used Mobbs, Sowerberry, Blimber, Jeddler, Noggs, Chuzzlewit, and Pecksniff could hardly have passed over the others. Perhaps time was of the essence, and we have only an inert list of names

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<sup>7</sup>Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman & Hall, [n.d.], Vol. I, 313-314; also, Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 93; and Brook, p. 222.

<sup>8</sup>Brook, p. 208, following Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" in *The Wound and the Bow* (1941), rev. ed., 1952), p. 62.



without the magic wand of Dickens to wave them into life. Still, if a Victorian could hoodwink unwary Victorians and many latter-day readers with the name Master Bates, then he probably could be Slyant in other ways.

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English Puritanism must stand the guilty cause of much modern humour, not to say extravagance, in American name-giving. Puns compounded of baptismal name and surname are more popular there than with us. Robert New has his sons christened Nothing and Something. Price becomes Sterling Price; Carol, Christmas Carol; Mixer, Pepper Mixer; Hopper, Opportunity Hopper; Ware, China Ware; Peel, Lemon Peel; Codd, Salt Codd; and Gentle, Always Gentle. It used to be said of the English House of Commons that there were in it two lemons, with only one Peel, and the Register-General not long since called attention in one of his reports to the existence of Christmas Day.

Charles Wareing Bardsley, *Curiosities of Puritan Nomenclature* (1897), reprinted, Gale Research Co. (1970), p. 211.