

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

LIFE AND WORKS

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, on the southern coast of England. He had an unhappy childhood. His father was imprisoned for debt and Dickens had to leave school and, at the age of twelve, he was sent to work in a factory, a traumatic experience which marked him for life.

According to some critics, this event had an influence on his work as a novelist and on his sense of social commitment.

After his father's financial position improved, he went back to school.

He became a parliamentary reporter and then a journalist.

In 1833, his first story appeared, and in 1836, still a newspaper reporter, he adopted the pen name “Boz”, publishing *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of articles describing London’s people and scenes, written for a magazine.

It was followed by *The Pickwick Papers*, which was published in episodes and revealed Dickens’s humoristic and satirical qualities.

After the success of *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens started a full-time career as a novelist, producing work of increasing complexity at an incredible rate: between 1837 and 1857 he published fourteen novels, all in the form of serial publication.

The protagonists of his autobiographical novels, *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *David Copperfield* (1849-50) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), became symbols of an exploited childhood confronted with the sad realities of slums and factories.

Other works include *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Great Expectations* (1860-61), which deal with social issues such as the conditions of the poor and the working class in general.

Dickens also published many short stories. The most famous is *A Christmas Carol* (1843), which shows Dickens at his most sentimental.