

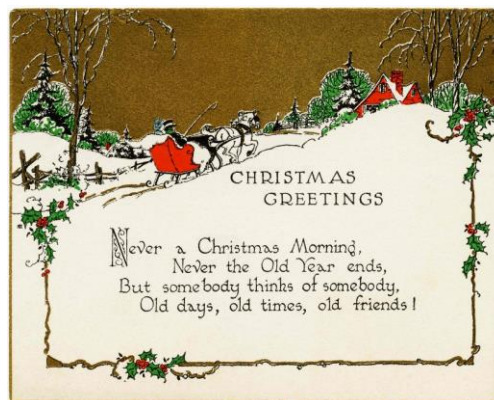


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From the Editor



Merry Christmas! We're closing in on Christmas – just a few days away. And then the hustle and bustle that has consumed our lives for the past few weeks (months?) will be over and we'll be into a new decade – 2020!

This week, who else could we have for our author spotlight, but the author that revolutionized the way we think of Christmas – Charles Dickens. He's also agreed to come back for a repeat interview where we'll get into more writing specifics.

The entries for our first Flash Fiction contest are in. The stories will run in the first 2020 issue, January 3rd. We're planning on having a quarterly contest. The next one will have a March 20 deadline for April 3rd publication. New photo prompts and details will be revealed in the January 17th issue.

We skipped an article about writing this week. Everyone is short on time, so in an effort to keep this shorter, we're only running the Charles Dickens interview and highlighting one book from the 1910s.

Merry Christmas y'all!

Trisha

texastrishafaye@yahoo.com



'Tis the season – the Christmas season, that is. And who else would we want to interview at this last issue before Christmas, but the man known as the one who revolutionized Christmas as we know it – Charles Dickens.



Mr. Dickens, welcome as our spotlighted author in Pages of the Past this week. We're honored that you've joined us and hope to hear about your writing journey and glean some writing advice from such a prolific and well-known author. Of course, with this being the Christmas season, we'll be asking about one of your most popular books, *A Christmas Carol*. But before we get to that, could you share a bit about your career? You've written so many works that have stood the test of time, you make it seem that's it's been an easy journey for you.

Easy? If anything but. No, this career of writing has been a laborious one – albeit one I wouldn't change. I fear you look at some of my works, such as *A Christmas Carol*, which you've mentioned, or *Oliver Twist* or *A Tale of Two Cities*, and it appears that that's where I began. But 'tis not so. No, I started at the bottom of the rungs, much like any other diligent, striving author does.

The bottom of the rung? Surely you jest. I've grown up hearing about the great Charles Dickens. I can't imagine you as anything but a successful author.

The 12-year old boy working ten-hour days in the blacking-warehouse pasting labels on pots of paste-blackening would scoff at who you call a successful author. Those were days of survival. Working under horrid conditions. Have you ever worked in a crazy, tumble-down old house full of decay and rotten floors, a place literally overrun with rats?

Thankfully, due to an impending inheritance, my father was finally released from the debtor's prison and I could return to my studies. My next employment was in a law office. I was a junior clerk there and taught myself shorthand in my spare time, giving me the skills to become a freelance reporter. I was sixteen then, in 1828, when I received my first paid gig as a professional writer, working as a freelance reporter covering the courts.

Is this journalism route what drew you into writing?

I believe it was a combination of factors. The journalism and the craft of writing were certainly there. But I believe that my unhappy younger years, coupled with seeing the degradation of the living and working conditions of people of our class and accentuated with my love of the theater all combined to spin the tales in my head.

The theater you say? I've never pictured you as a lover of theater.

Certainly. Why, in the period that I was employed by the law office of Ellis and Blackmore, why, I attended the theaters obsessively – most near every day for three years. Why, I've also written four plays, which I oversaw the production of. But it wasn't a quick and easy road to travel.

How long did it take you to achieve the writing visions you set for yourself?

Let's see...it was 1828 when I began working as a reporter, but yet, my first published piece of fiction didn't appear until 1833. That's what...five years? I still remember the day I held my first story in my hand. It was a short story called "A Dinner at Poplar Walk", published by Old Monthly Magazine. It was another three years after that, 1836 before my first book was published, *Sketches by Boz*.



And it was 1843 before *A Christmas Carol* was published. In fact, since its publication, 176 years ago this month, it's never been out of print and has sold millions of copies. Was the Christmas tale simmering in your mind for any length of time before you wrote it? Was it your great passion to tell this great story?

Oh, gracious, no. It was written for one reason. I was in dire need of cash. You may laugh and call me crass for attaching a monetary amount to the written word. But, a man needs to provide for his family. I was experiencing financial problems. I had a mortgage. My wife, Catherine, was pregnant with our fifth child. And sales were declining on *Martin Chuzzlewit*. My publishers threatened to reduce my monthly income if sales dropped any further.

So I set off on a writing frenzy. I began writing in October and the book was finished in early December. I wrote like a mad man, writing throughout the day, then taking night-time walks of 15 to 20 miles each evening around London. I walked about the black streets of London fifteen or twenty miles many a night when all sober folks had gone to bed.

But it was finished and the first printing was published on December 19th. I'm quite proud of the fact that the first run of 6,000 copies sold out by Christmas Eve that year. Second and third editions were issued before the New Year began and by the end of 1844, eleven more editions had been released.

That's less than a week! It's amazing that many copies sold so quickly. As a writer myself, not nearly in your realm, I'd be thrilled if I sold that many copies in a year. Let alone a week. That must have solved your financial worries for a time.

Not hardly. It helped, but not to the extent one would think. But, that's mostly my own fault and my decision is not one I'd change.

How is it that it's your fault?

After much disagreement with my publisher, I had my way and the price was reduced to only five shillings. I paid for the production out of my own pocket, but I hoped to make my work more affordable to the masses.

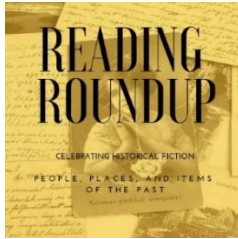
I could chat with you for hours, Mr. Dickens. There's so much we all could learn from your vast experience, alas, it's shortly before Christmas and our readers are run ragged themselves this time of year. Is there anything you'd like to share with us about Christmas, as you're now referred to as 'The Man Who Invented Christmas'?

Understandable. Understandable. From what I see on this side of the heavenly veil, it appears that life runs at a much faster pace than the one I knew when I walked this Earthly planet. Please, invite me back, because there's more I'd love to share with your readers about my experiences in installment stories, or serial publications. But, yes, Christmas was one of my popular themes. Not from my own childhood experiences, mind you, but from my beliefs formed as an adult. Several of my tales involved Christmas and the traditions and thoughts that surround the season. In my later life, I began referring to it as my "Carol Philosophy".

I describe the holidays as "a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of other people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys."

Thank you for those wondrous thoughts and for sharing your Carol Philosophy with us. We'll most certainly have you back for another interview when we talk more writing, although I have a feeling that the Christmas theme may pervade that discussion also. Merry Christmas!

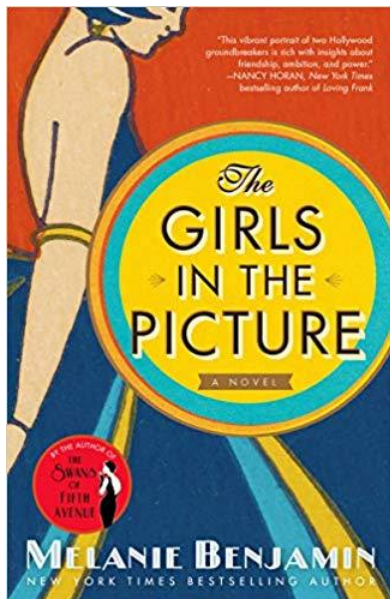




The 1900s/1910s

The Girls in the Picture

Melanie Benjamin



It is 1914, and twenty-five-year-old Frances Marion has left her (second) husband and her Northern California home for the lure of Los Angeles, where she is determined to live independently as an artist. But the word on everyone's lips these days is "flickers"—the silent moving pictures enthralling theatergoers. Turn any corner in this burgeoning town and you'll find made-up actors running around, as a movie camera captures it all.

In this fledgling industry, Frances finds her true calling: writing stories for this wondrous new medium. She also makes the acquaintance of actress Mary Pickford, whose signature golden curls and lively spirit have earned her the title "America's Sweetheart." The two ambitious young women hit it off instantly, their kinship fomented by their mutual fever to create, to move audiences to a frenzy, to start a revolution.

But their ambitions are challenged by both the men around them and the limitations imposed on their gender—and their astronomical success could come at a price. As Mary, the world's highest-paid and most beloved actress struggles to live her life under the spotlight, she also wonders if it is possible to find love, even with the dashing actor Douglas Fairbanks. Frances, too, longs to share her life with someone. As in any good Hollywood story, dramas will play out, personalities will clash, and even the deepest friendships might be shattered.

With cameos from such notables as Charlie Chaplin, Louis B. Mayer, Rudolph Valentino, and Lillian Gish, *The Girls in the Picture* is, at its heart, a story of friendship and forgiveness. Melanie Benjamin brilliantly captures the dawn of a glittering new era—its myths and icons, its possibilities and potential, and its seduction and heartbreak.

Authors: Do you have a historical fiction book or short story that you'd like featured in Pages of the Past? Email me at texastrishafaye@yahoo.com to see about scheduling your book or short story in a future issue.

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