Insights from Charles Dickens

Several weeks ago, while browsing at a library, I happened upon a CD set of two novels by Charles Dickens. I thought I had read *A Tale of Two Cities*in high school, but no. I read *Great Expectations,* supplemented by a comic book, *Cliff’s Notes,* and a movie. What surprised me in listening to the audiobooks was the power of Dickens’ insights and the brilliance of his language. Both are as relevant today as back when he died in 1870.

*A Tale of Two Cities* has perhaps the best opening in all of literature, which sets the tone, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times…”. And the best closing, the words conveyed from the scaffold, “It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done…”. Well suited for the masterpiece which lies between the pages.

The French Revolution was bloody, but Dickens was not without a gallows sense of humor. In *A Tale of Two Cities,* Dickens refers to the guillotine as “that sharp female newly-born…It was the National Razor shaved close…”. Invented for mass beheadings, the guillotine was last used in 1977, four years before the French outlawed Capital Punishment.

In *Great Expectations,* Dickens opens the story of an orphan by closing the first paragraph with, “I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.” One friend said he related to a starving man bolting his food since he was one of six children and instinctively knew when his older brother eyed his plate of food. Another friend told me that she had lunch with a woman raised in an orphanage. The woman looked around suspiciously and hardly chewed her food before it disappeared down her gullet.

One of the most telling passages in *Great Expectations*deals with what today we call gaslighting. Pip is deeply troubled by a young man who turns every complaint against him. According to www.nbcnews.com/health, gaslighting is “always a serious problem, according to psychologists.” That’s another story.

Have you ever gotten insights from Charles Dickens? Please email jcromshow@yahoo.com.