

MASTERPIECE™ Classic

From the depths of debtor's prison...a captivating love story

THE TALES OF CHARLES DICKENS LITTLE DORRIT

On MASTERPIECE CLASSIC

Sundays, March 29 through April 26, 2009 at 9pm ET on PBS

Charles Dickens gave Jane Austen, mistress of the slow-burning romance, a run for her money with his smoldering, sprawling, much neglected love story, *Little Dorrit*. Famed screenwriter Andrew Davies brings this gripping tale of intimacy, incarceration, and the misery of debt to the small screen in a sumptuous five-part adaptation on MASTERPIECE CLASSIC, airing on Sundays, March 29 through April 26, 2009 at 9pm ET on PBS (check local listings).

Widely acclaimed during its recent UK broadcast, *Little Dorrit* received this glowing recommendation from *Variety*: "totally absorbing, a master class in period literary drama."

And in the *Daily Mail*, noted English author A. N. Wilson had this observation: "In the light of what has happened in Wall Street, Iceland, and our own banks, the terrible trail of sadness caused by bad debt seems all too plausible. It is a powerful reminder of Dickens's perennial relevance to our lives."

Little Dorrit is the third installment of MASTERPIECE CLASSIC's "The Tales of Charles Dickens," a feast of four works by the greatest storyteller in the English language.

Screenwriter Davies also wrote MASTERPIECE's multi-award-winning retelling of Dickens' *Bleak House*, and he is especially noted for his Jane Austen adaptations—four out of her six immortal works, including *Pride and Prejudice* with Colin Firth as Darcy.

As fate would have it, *Little Dorrit* stars another former Darcy, Matthew Macfadyen, who appeared with Keira Knightley in the 2005 feature film of *Pride and Prejudice*.

In *Little Dorrit*, Macfadyen (*MI5*) plays hero Arthur Clennam, opposite the title character, Amy "Little" Dorrit, acted with innocence and charm by newcomer Claire Foy.

They are joined by a stellar cast, including Tom Courtenay (*The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, *The Golden Compass*) as Little Dorrit's world-weary father, William; Judy Paritt (*Girl with a Pearl Earring*) as Arthur's tormented mother, Mrs. Clennam; Alun Armstrong (*Bleak House*) as

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Mrs. Clennam's conniving retainer, Jeremiah Flintwitch; Andy Serkis (*Lord of the Rings*) as the homicidal extortionist, Rigaud; plus a diverse ensemble playing scores of other quirky, eccentric, and unforgettable Dickensian characters.

Little Dorrit opens in 1820s England, where the penalty for unpaid debts is imprisonment—as indeed has befallen William Dorrit, resident of London's notorious Marshalsea debtor's jail for so long that he is called the “Father of the Marshalsea,” and his daughter Little Dorrit has known no other home for her 22 years.

Unlike her father, Little Dorrit is free to come and go, and one day she is summoned by a fierce and forbidding stranger, Mrs. Clennam, who insists on employing her as a seamstress.

Just returned from two decades abroad, Mrs. Clennam's son, Arthur, finds this unprecedented act of charity by his stern mother suspicious. Is she making amends for a past wrongdoing? Furthermore, why has she reacted so oddly to Arthur's news of his dying father's last request to her—“Do not forget”?

These mysteries bring out the detective in Arthur, who follows Little Dorrit to the Marshalsea, introduces himself to Little Dorrit and her father, and begins helping them in small ways. Most of all, he wants to get to the bottom of Mr. Dorrit's plight, which takes him to one of Dickens' most inspired creations, the Circumlocution Office—the bureaucracy from hell.

Naturally, the plot thickens—or rather the plots and sub-plots thicken, bringing sudden transformations, romantic quandaries, economic meltdown, Ponzi-like machinations, miraculous deliverance, and blackmail. Constant throughout is a growing bond of affection between Arthur and Little Dorrit.

Perhaps it's her nickname or her childlike demeanor, but Arthur can't quite see Little Dorrit as anything but a young friend in distress—until fate reverses their roles.

Little Dorrit's plight was of great importance to Dickens, since his own father was imprisoned in the Marshalsea for three months for a debt of 40 pounds. The family's money problems led to a sequence of grim experiences for the young Dickens, which figure prominently in many of his other novels, including *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*.

Little Dorrit is a BBC/WGBH Boston coproduction. It was adapted by Andrew Davies from the novel by Charles Dickens. The directors are Adam Smith and Diarmuid Lawrence. The producer is Anne Pivcevic. The executive producers are Kate Harwood for the BBC and Rebecca Eaton for WGBH. MASTERPIECE has been presented on PBS by WGBH since 1971. Rebecca Eaton is executive producer. Laura Linney is the host of MASTERPIECE CLASSIC. Public television viewers provide funding for MASTERPIECE.

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