Mr. Dickens and His Carol - Discussion Questions

1. The Story: The book weaves true elements of Dickens' life with pure fiction. For those who know his history—such as his massive fame, large family, and ultimate marital fallout — how do you feel about the creative liberties Silva took?

2. Dickens' character: Do you view Dickens as a selfless artist or an insecure celebrity driven by public approval and financial stress? How does his childhood poverty influence his behavior and ultimately inspire him?

3. Time: Clocks appear constantly throughout the story, from Dickens throwing a clock out the window in frustration to meeting Eleanor by a clock tower. What do these symbols say about Dickens' relationship with time, deadlines, and aging? How does Dickens' view of time, and his own history, change over the course of these pages?

4. Who is Eleanor Lovejoy: How did you interpret Dickens' complicated relationship with Eleanor? Was she a romantic interest, a literal ghost, a psychological manifestation of his subconscious, or simply a muse? Were you surprised by the twist? How did you interpret Eleanor's existence?

5. London: The fog, the winding streets, and the poverty of Victorian London heavily shape the atmosphere of the novel. How does the city itself act as a mirror for Dickens' internal mental state? How does London inspire Silva's story? Is it consistent with Dickens' Christmas Carol?

6. Dickensian Critics: In a couple of scenes, we see other famous Victorian writers, including William Makepeace Thackeray, discussing (and disparaging) Dickens' novels. Thackeray, a satirist, criticizes Dickens' "gushing displays of the heart," while for Dickens, "It was all heart, or nothing." How does Silva play with sentimentality and other "Dickensian" qualities in Mr. Dickens and His Carol?

7. Theatre: Dickens is obsessed with the theater, costumes, and acting throughout the book. How does his love for "putting on a performance" reflect how he lived his real life versus how he wrote? Dickens dreams throughout the novel of going to India with Macready and performing Shakespeare. Why do you think acting holds such interest for him? What is the significance of his staged reading of A Christmas Carol at the end of the story?

8. Truth or Deception: On one of his London walks, Dickens watches a magic show and reflects on "the truth at the bottom of every illusion, every fiction is our own great desire to believe." Do you agree?

9. In her author's note, Samantha Silva writes: "A good biography tells us the truth about a person; a good story, the truth about ourselves." What "truth" about human nature, charity, or seasonal joy did you find in this book?

10. Did Samantha Silva's novel change how you viewed the classic?