



GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Charles Dickens

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY RADHIKA JONES

GEORGE STADE
CONSULTING EDITORIAL DIRECTOR



BARNES & NOBLE CLASSICS
NEW YORK



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FROM THE PAGES OF GREAT EXPECTATIONS

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip. (page 3)

I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends. (page 23)

In the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice. (page 60)

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Paul, you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day. (page 69)

It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home. (page 103)

Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts. I was better after I had cried, than before—more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle. (page 153)





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CHARLES DICKENS

Born on February 7, 1812, Charles Dickens was the second of eight children in a family burdened with financial troubles. Despite his deprived beginnings, he became the best-selling writer of his time.

In 1824, young Charles was withdrawn from school and forced to work at a boot-blackening factory when his improvident father—in fact, his entire family, except for him—was sent to debtor's prison where they remained for three months. Once they were released, Charles attended a private school for three years. The young man then became a solicitor's clerk, mastered shorthand, and before long was employed as a Parliamentary reporter. When he was in his early twenties, Dickens began to publish stories and sketches of London life in a variety of periodicals.

It was the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836—1837) that catapulted the twenty-five-year-old author to national renown. Dickens wrote with unequalled speed and often worked on several novels at a time, publishing them first in monthly installments and then as books. His early novels *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), and *Christmas Carol* (1843) solidified his enormous, ongoing popularity. When Dickens was in his late thirties, his social criticism became biting, his humor dark, and his view of poverty darker still. *Dave Copperfield* (1849-1850), *Bleak House* (1852-1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860- 1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865) are the great works of his masterful and prolific later period.

In 1858 Dickens's twenty-three-year marriage to Catherine Hogarth dissolved when he fell in love with Ellen Ternan, a young actress. The last years of his life were filled with intense activity: writing and managing amateur theatricals, and undertaking several reading tours that reinforced the public's favorable view of his work but took an enormous toll on his health. Working feverishly to the last, Dickens collapsed and died on June 9, 1870, leaving *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* uncompleted.

THE WORLD OF CHARLES DICKENS AND GREAT EXPECTATIONS

1811 Jane Austen publishes *Sense and Sensibility*, arguably the first modern English novel.

1812 Charles John Huffam Dickens is born at Portsmouth to John and Elizabeth (nee Barrow) Dickens.

1817 The Dickens family moves to Chatham, in Kent. Charles begins reading the books in his father's library; his favorites include the works of Miguel de Cervantes, Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett.

1822 The Dickens family moves again, this time to Camden, in North London. Charles quickly and fastidiously learns the landscape of London, an invaluable resource for his later writing.

1824 Charles is sent to work at Warren's Blacking Factory, a manufacturer of boot-blackening. His father is arrested for debt and imprisoned for three months, and while the rest of his family stays with John Dickens in prison, Charles lodges elsewhere and continues pasting labels onto bottles of blacking at Warren's.

1825 John Dickens retires on a naval pension, and Charles attends Wellington House Academy, a private school where he wins a prize in Latin.

1827 Dickens becomes a clerk in a solicitor's office.

1829 After learning shorthand, Dickens establishes himself as a reporter for the law courts, Parliament, and various London newspapers. He meets Maria Beadnell and falls in love with her.

1831 Dickens joins the journalistic staff of the *Mirror of Parliament*; he transcribes speeches by the members of Parliament on such topics as factory conditions, penal reform, education reform, the Poor Law Commission, and the First Reform Bill of 1832.

1833 After four arduous years, Dickens's affair with Beadnell dissolves in the face of her family's disapproval. Dickens's first rejection and subsequent self-doubt are essential to his later composition of *Great Expectations*. He publishes his first story, "A Dinner at Poplar Walk," in the *Monthly Magazine*.

1834 Dickens becomes a journalist for the *Morning Chronicle*, a job that requires frequent travel and attendance at political meetings. He continues to publish stories and sketches in periodicals.

1835 Dickens becomes engaged to Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of George Hogarth, editor of the *Evening Chronicle*.

- Dickens writes in several different genres and achieves significant literary success.—
- 1836 Adopting the pseudonym Boz, based on his pronunciation as a young child of Moses as “Boses,” Dickens publishes in volume form *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of his earlier writings. Dickens marries Catherine Hogarth; the couple eventually will have ten children. He becomes intensely and unceasingly prolific, continuing to write feverishly throughout his life. He begins *The Pickwick Papers*, his first novel, which sets the precedent of serialization that he will follow for nearly all of his novels. He meets his future biographer John Forster.
- 1837 Victoria is crowned queen. Dickens becomes the editor of *Bentley’s Miscellany* and begins publishing installments of his novel *Oliver Twist* in the journal.
- 1838 *Oliver Twist* is published in three volumes, while the serial publication in *Bentley’s* continues. The novel is extremely popular, and three dramatic versions are produced in London theaters in the winter of 1838-1839.
- 1839 *Nicholas Nickleby* is published. Because of tension with Richard Bentley, Dickens resigns his editorship and devotes himself fully to writing. The Dickens family moves to Devonshire Terrace.
- 1840 Dickens establishes his own weekly miscellany, *Master Humphrey’s Clock*, and writes all the content himself. After eighteen months, sales fall off, and he is forced to abandon the periodical. To generate capital, he quickly begins serial publication of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.
- 1841 Dickens publishes *Barnaby Rudge*. He publicly denounces the child labor laws and abysmal factory conditions of the times; he lambastes the Tories, who oppose humane labor laws.
- 1842 Accompanied by Catherine, an exhausted Dickens travels to America, where he is lionized. His popularity there falters upon the publication of *American Notes*, a chronicle that records his negative reactions to the United States.
- 1843 Dickens publishes the most famous and best-loved of his annual Christmas books, *A Christmas Carol*, which had taken him only a matter of weeks to write.
- 1844 The Dickens family relocates to Genoa, Italy, where they remain for a year.
- 1846 Dickens signs on as the first editor of the *Daily News* but soon leaves because of disagreements with the publishers. The family moves to Switzerland, then Paris, and remains abroad for six months.
- 1847 Upon his return to London, Dickens helps Miss Angela Burdett Coutts start a home for reformed prostitutes, which he later runs. William Makepeace Thackeray begins publishing *Vanity Fair* in monthly parts.
- Dombey and Son*, published in one volume, heralds Dickens’s more mature and decidedly dark period, which over the next two decades yields such major works as *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities*

- 1848 (1859), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). Dickens begins to run a private theater, in which he acts and performs for charity. His company of amateurs includes painter Augustus Egg, who depicts scenes from novels by Sir Walter Scott, Thackeray, and other writers.
- 1850 Realism becomes a conscious agenda among artists working in media such as painting, literature, and theater. Dickens establishes his magazine *Household Words*, which will be succeeded by the end of the decade by his publication *All the Year Round*.
- 1851 Dickens's father dies. The author meets landscape painter Wilkie Collins, who has a gift for mystery writing; Dickens admires him greatly. Dickens's theater troupe performs before Queen Victoria.
- 1857 Dickens's marriage becomes increasingly strained. *The Frozen Deep*, a melodrama written jointly by Dickens and Collins, stars Dickens and the enchanting actress Ellen Ternan, with whom he falls in love. Ternan, twenty-seven years Dickens's junior, haunts the author's fiction from this time on. Dickens tours Switzerland and Italy with Collins and Egg.
- 1858 Dickens embarks on an exhausting series of public readings, which earn money but take a toll on his physical health. He and Catherine separate.
- 1860 *Great Expectations* begins appearing weekly in *All the Year Round*. Dickens settles in rural Gadshill, his residence for the rest of his life.
- 1861 The serialization of *Great Expectations* concludes, followed by the novel's publication in three volumes. Dickens begins a second series of public readings that lasts two years.
- 1863 Dickens's mother dies, followed by his son Walter's death in India. After quarreling with Thackeray, Dickens reconciles with him just before Thackeray's death. The world's first subway, the Metropolitan Railway, opens in London.
- 1865 A shaken Dickens survives a disastrous train accident after he returns from France with Ellen Ternan, who is rumored to be his mistress.
- 1867 Dickens journeys again to America, where he reads publicly in Boston, New York, and Washington.
- 1868 After returning to England, Dickens continues to give public readings despite his declining health.
- 1870 Dickens begins his last series of readings in London. He publishes six parts of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, but the novel's composition is halted by his sudden death in June. Charles Dickens is buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

INTRODUCTION

Whatever expectations Charles Dickens had for his thirteenth novel, he probably did not anticipate that it would someday come to exemplify the Victorian novel itself. But to the countless contemporary readers who follow the adventures of young Pip, the convict he fears, the girl he loves, and the strange old woman he thinks will make his fortune, *Great Expectations* is in many ways the quintessential nineteenth-century story: part mystery, part bildungsroman, or novel of education, in which our hero rises above his modest beginnings, moves to London, prospers, and eventually (he hopes) gets the girl. Pip's course, however, does not run so smoothly, and it is the variations Dickens plays on the theme that prompt us to read *Great Expectations* both with and against the grain of the Victorian novel. At times it is less an emblem of tradition than a marker of change in both the English society it depicts and the English novel it represents. There are surprises at work in *Great Expectations* for both its characters and its readers, who bring to it their own expectations of what a novel should be and do.

A caricature of Dickens displayed in bookstores when the first sections of *Great Expectations* appeared (in serialized form, as was common for novels in the Victorian era) shows the author at his desk, pen in hand, hair standing on end, exuding genius. The caption reads, "Charles Dickens, from whom we have *Great Expectations*." Though the pun is obvious, it is worth recalling for the simple reason that it sounds oddly forward-looking, like something one would say of a promising young writer at the beginning of his career. When Dickens began *Great Expectations*, at age forty-eight, he already had a dozen novels to his name, as well as countless short stories; he was also an accomplished and experienced editor, a powerful publisher, and a prolific generator of nonfiction—articles, editorials, sketches, and so on. Thanks to both his own prodigious skills and the remarkable rise in literacy rates in nineteenth-century England and America—a fortuitous combination of talented writer and eager new readership—Dickens was one of the first bona-fide mass-market writers in history, a best-selling author and, as novelist Jane Smiley observes in a recent biography, "maybe the first true celebrity in the modern sense." If the world had great expectations of Dickens, those expectations could be only that he would continue to deliver a product of which he himself was the most significant producer: compelling stories that appeared in monthly or weekly installments to entertain and inform. And so the caricature's caption reminds us of Dickens's intimate relationship to his readership; the novels he produced went from his pen to their hands with a kind of immediacy that no longer exists in the world of fiction outside of journalism. With every installment of his new novel Dickens would fulfill expectations, even as he stoked the public's appetite for more.

The writing of *Great Expectations* coincided roughly with a new phase in Dickens's life and career. He had recently left his wife, Catherine, mother of his ten children, and had embarked on a very private affair with a young actress, Ellen Ternan. He had also discontinued his immensely popular weekly journal *Household Words*, of which he was editor and part-owner, after his copublishers took issue with his decision to print a personal statement, intended to refute rumors about his dissolving marriage, on the front page. Now Dickens was editor of a replacement journal, *All the Year Round*, in which his historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities* debuted. Shortly after finishing that work, he began contributing chapters of *Great Expectations* to boost the circulation, which was sagging due to a lackluster serial by Charles Lever that was then running. (As Dickens's friend and biographer John Forster wryly notes: "A tale, which at the time was appearing in his serial, had disappointed

expectation.”) Dickens called a staff meeting to discuss options, but he had already decided on a course of action: It was time for him to “strike in.” His faith in his selling power did not go unrewarded; circulation of the weekly rebounded and remained healthy for the rest of Dickens’s career. But his decision had an impact on the story he was envisioning before it even reached the page. According to Forster, Dickens was planning to compose his new novel—for which he had already conceived the pivotal relationship, between a young boy and a convict—in monthly serial form comprising twenty numbers, which would have made it a much longer work on the scale of such previous hits as *Dombey and Son* and *Little Dorrit*. Publishing it in his weekly journal would require Dickens to reconfigure his idea into a shorter book, along the lines of its predecessor, *A Tale of Two Cities*. The result is a novel more pruned in its plots, more limited in its cast of characters than other of Dickens’s great works. It was a “sacrifice,” Dickens told Forster, “really and truly made for myself”—a compromise between Dickens the publisher and Dickens the writer. Thus was *Great Expectations* born: out of disappointed expectation, transformed from its creator’s original expectation. The meanings inscribed in its title had already begun to multiply.

With twelve novels behind him, Dickens could not afford to proceed without first making certain he was breaking fresh ground, and his correspondence with Forster shows him quite studiously—and somewhat amusingly—taking stock of his oeuvre, placing *Great Expectations* in contrast to his earlier works before it has even breathed life. “You will not have to complain of the want of humour as in the *Tale of Two Cities*,” he writes in autumn 1860, acknowledging criticism of his last work. (For Dickens, whose career was jump-started in 1836 by the picaresque romp *Pickwick Papers*, humor was a serious consideration. His public never tired of it—twenty-five years after his death in 1871 *Pickwick* remained his top seller.) Nor would readers need to worry that, in choosing a young man as his protagonist, Dickens was revisiting paths successfully trodden by his much-loved hero and partial alter-ego David Copperfield some ten years earlier. “To be quite sure I had fallen into many unconscious repetitions,” he assures Forster, “I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.”

Forster views it as a mark of Dickens’s genius that Pip and David, though clearly related, emerge as two distinct sensibilities, and as we shall see, later critics would agree; they would count it as among Dickens’s chief strengths that he could create characters similar enough to bear the burden of comparison even as they react in very dissimilar ways to the machinations of their individual plots. It is this talent, perhaps, that has helped to foster our sense of Dickens’s world as complete unto itself. Just as the author could embark on a new work by setting it in the context of old ones, so can we read any Dickens novel in relation to another, such is the wealth of characters and themes with which they supply us. *Great Expectations* is remarkable in that in addition to creating its own terrain of interpretation, it offers a kind of reading of its predecessors as well. By demonstrating, through the mishaps of Pip, certain pitfalls associated with the workings of Victorian plots, it digests the novels that have come before it and plays on the very expectations they raised in their readers. Thus *Great Expectations* earns its title as it instructs us, sometimes bleakly, in the dangers of harboring too-great expectations, in life and in fiction.

What would a reader, then and now, expect of a Victorian novel? More than any other nineteenth-century writer Dickens was instrumental in shaping its form. *Pickwick Papers* predated the crowning of Queen Victoria by a year, and as Dickens continued to produce fiction through the 1840s, ‘50s, and ‘60s—along with such figures as the Brontës, as well as Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell, who were his protégés—the novel gained strength and legitimacy as a genre; it became the literary show

piece of the Victorian era. It is possible, indeed, to watch it evolve through Dickens's own prolific career. *Pickwick* bears a striking resemblance to the early novels of the eighteenth century, the work of Henry Fielding in particular. Light-hearted in tone and spirit, it chronicles the adventures of a group of intrepid gentlemen who eat and drink their way through the English countryside, falling in and out of trouble but never so far as to arouse anxiety. Its most remarkable quality, in contrast to Dickens's later works, is its lack of a complicated plot; the events of *Pickwick* unfold anecdotally and seemingly effortlessly, without the kind of master plan evident behind the workings of, say, *Bleak House*. Moreover, as Dickens gained in popularity, he began to put his fiction to work for social cause. *Oliver Twist*, for example, responds directly to the recently instituted and vastly unjust Poor Laws of 1834, while *Nicholas Nickleby* takes to task England's school system and *Little Dorrit* its official bureaucracy. And the more focused Dickens's social critiques became, the more focused his plots grew—for he shared with most writers of the era the sense that, in fiction if not in reality, events could be ordered and arranged to right society's wrongs and come to a fruitful conclusion.

To understand that general sensibility of the Victorian novel, we might do well to consider it in contrast to what came afterward. The modern novel of the twentieth century coincided with a world that was being wrenched apart—by world wars and revolutions, the roots of decolonization, Freud's theories of psychoanalysis, Einstein's theories of relativity, the displacements of Picasso, the dissonances of Schoenberg. It represented that world by incorporating those developments not only in content, but in style and form as well: the stream-of-consciousness narration developed by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, for example, which precludes an omniscient narrator and highlights an insistent subjectivity. In the Victorian novel, that world had not yet come apart. There was pressure on it, to be sure—from figures such as Darwin, whose theories of evolutionary biology would transform the way man was understood to exist in nature, and Charles Lyell, whose account of geological change would require a new conception of historical time. But the novels of the Victorian era demonstrate an overall faith in certain truths: the integrity of the human spirit, the possibility of moral development, the inevitability of scientific progress. Their plots, even the most complex ones, cohere; indeed, they are made complex precisely to emphasize their ultimate coherence. Characters are shown to connect meaningfully to one another. Good intentions are rewarded, evil punished. The novels are comprehensive: They show us extended families and multiple generations, even complete towns, as in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. The works themselves, with their intimate and familiar prose styles, establish a direct connection to the reader. They are not only highly readable, but also eminently satisfying in their sense of resolution. *Great Expectations* follows many of the conventions, particularly those that have to do with plot. But as to the question of satisfaction—the very question a book with the word “expectations” in its title explicitly raises—it marks a shift both in Dickens's oeuvre and in the direction of the novel as a whole.

Great Expectations begins in that place where all expectations come irrevocably to an end—the graveyard. In a letter to Forster, Dickens described his idea for the novel's opening episodes as a “grotesque tragic-comic conception” (Pip's encounter with Magwitch) tempered by the light-hearted interaction between the child and a “good-natured foolish man” (his foster father, Joe Gargery). His description applies to the novel on the whole, for its blend of terror and comedy is one of *Great Expectations*'s greatest achievements. Pip is introduced at the cemetery, studying the headstones of his father, mother, and five deceased siblings, gaining his “first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things” from pursuing this morbid pastime on a cold, inhospitable winter afternoon. Observing his infant brothers' graves, Pip remarks that they “gave up trying to get a living

exceedingly early in that universal struggle” (p. 3); this Darwinian language, just entering Victorian discourse (The Origin of Species was published in 1859), reminds us that if Pip is to survive, let alone thrive, he will be forced to struggle himself. Scarcely a page elapses before the fearsome convict appears on the scene. But it is worth noting that before his arrival young Pip is already depicted as “small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry” (p. 4); his burgeoning self-awareness, marked by fear and tears, sets the stage for Magwitch’s appearance rather than establishing a contrast to it. The landscape to which Dickens introduces his readers is characterized by death and savagery—of nature and of man—and Magwitch, though he certainly heightens the effect by frightening Pip further, is at ease in that landscape. He belongs there. Whether Pip, as a child, can claim to be innocent of it seems a moot point. Oliver Twist, perhaps Dickens’s best-known orphan, remains miraculously untainted by the crime and greed surrounding him even as he trains to be a child pickpocket, but Dickens grants Pip no such immunity. Rather, he is faced immediately with a dilemma: He must steal for Magwitch or meet physical harm, and by choosing the former option he confirms his place, however unwilling, in the Darwinian scheme of survival of the fittest.

Yet during this grim opening episode, a spark of humor burrows its way into the narrative, setting the stage for similar comic interludes throughout the novel. Much of this effect has to do with Pip’s presence as an adult narrator recalling his youthful self. For even as he recounts the most frightening night of his childhood, the night when he must raid his formidable sister’s larder on behalf of an even more formidable criminal, the language of a more mature, more knowing Pip—one with a large vocabulary, a knack for turning a phrase, and a clear appreciation of physical humor—governs the description. It is hard not to laugh at the spectacle of young Pip hurriedly stuffing his hunk of bread down his pants leg, saving it to stave off the convict’s hunger and risking his sister’s wrath in the process, then trying manfully to complete his evening chores while keeping the bread from slipping out at his ankle. The older Pip is able not only to describe him with mirth, but also to articulate what that hunk of bread might symbolize: “Conscience is a dreadful thing when it accuses man or boy; but when, in the case of a boy, that secret burden co-operates with another secret burden down the leg of his trousers, it is (as I can testify) a great punishment” (p. 12). The literal hunk of bread so troubling to Pip is made figurative by the narrative voice, which mediates the child’s simple worldview by assigning meaning to its various images. Thus the act of narration incorporates the act of interpretation, for Pip bolsters his description of those concrete things that troubled him as a child with analyses of what they might represent. In choosing a first-person narrator, Dickens brings to the foreground the constant duality of action and interpretation; we are shown an event, and we are shown what it signifies. Our reading of Pip will always be determined, at least in part, by Pip’s reading of himself.

Because of this gap between his older and younger selves, Pip’s narrative is infused throughout with a deep sense of nostalgia. Dickens has often been heralded for his ability to convey childhood convincingly, especially in an era when for many (including Dickens himself), childhood was a fraught and difficult period. But in *Great Expectations* we are always aware that childhood—even its most terrifying—is a precious thing lost, something seen from a distance rather than inhabited again. And so we find Pip in his narrative mode lingering on moments in the past, adding commentary from the present, mixing recollection with a tender regret. More often than not, these moments involve Joe Gargery, for whom the adult Pip bears an affection that his more callous and conflicted youthful self could not appreciate. Here is Pip describing his efforts to pass on to Joe the benefit of the reading lessons he receives from Bidley:

Whatever I acquired, I tried to impart to Joe. This statement sounds so well, that I cannot in my conscience let it pass unexplained. I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella's reproach.... I never knew Joe to remember anything from one Sunday to another, or to acquire, under my tuition, any piece of information whatever. Yet he would smoke his pipe at the Battery with a far more sagacious air than anywhere else—even with the learned air—as if he considered himself to be advancing immensely. Dear fellow, I hope he did. (pp. 105-106)

Both Pips appear in this passage: the one who, as a youth, grew ashamed of his ungentle background and blamed the blacksmith for it; the other who, having learned the benefit of Joe's steadfast nature, wishes him well in retrospect.

This pervasive retrospective gaze is a quality shared by many first-person narratives, but in a novel about expectations it takes on a particularly poignant air. Pip's eagerness to embrace his "Expectations"—the package deal designed by a secret benefactor to set him up as a London gentleman—goes hand in hand with his eagerness to shed the blacksmith's apprenticeship and count the connections that he feels have kept him down in the world. To look back, once he has magically obtained the means to go forward, would be to acknowledge his origins—the very act from which his expectations are to free him. Pip's frequent backward glances in narrative mode thus highlight the tension central to Dickens's plot. What these great expectations ultimately do, as the plot unfolds, is to send Pip right back to his story's beginning, to the stolen file and pork pie that bind his fate to that of a convict. All Pip's hopes for the future lead him straight to his past.

Our sense of the futility of Pip's expectations is heightened by their very arbitrariness. Pip differs from many of his Victorian orphan counterparts in that his parents are comfortably accounted for from the outset. If there were any substantial inheritance headed Pip's way—any missing rich uncle (à la *Jane Eyre*) or benevolent family friend (à la *Oliver Twist*)—those persons would certainly have stepped forward by now to claim him. Pip's past, the reader assumes, is not a question open to debate. We read the details of his genealogy, along with the shivering boy, on the Pirrip family tombstone. And though his parents are indeed dead, Pip is not from a material point of view so badly off as many of his peers in Victorian fiction. Mrs. Joe may torture him regularly with Tar water and Tickler, but at least Joe is on hand to comfort him with extra helpings of gravy. If there is a flaw in the story of Pip's childhood, as far as romance goes, it is precisely that there is no mystery about it. Pip recognizes the deficiency himself; it causes him to shamelessly exaggerate the events of the first day he spends at Miss Havisham's to his increasingly astounded audience of Joe, Mrs. Joe, and Pumblechook. When the "Expectations" magically appear, complete with unidentified benefactor and strange conditions of acceptance (among them the stipulation that Pip must officially retain his childhood nickname, which ensures he will stay in some form at least that little shivering boy in the graveyard), they supply the mystery that seems—thanks in part to Dickens's own efforts—requisite to a Victorian plot. It is not surprising, then, that not only do the expectations become the central occupation of Pip's life, but they also entice the reader to associate Pip alone with the book's title and its revelations. Expectations become a form of property, over which Pip can feel himself master—as if there were a finite amount to go around and he had got them all.

But of course Pip's expectations, literalized though they are in a list of conditions and bequests, exist in the context of countless expectations held by the characters around him—more amorphous expectations in some cases, but articulated quite clearly in others. The Pockets (Matthew and Herbert aside) have expectations of inheriting Miss Havisham's fortune. Miss Havisham expects Estella

exact her melodramatic revenge on the male sex. Magwitch expects to make Pip an English gentleman and earn his affection in so doing. Herbert expects that by vigorous bouts of looking about him at the office, he will someday make his fortune. To assume that the novel's great expectations are Pip alone is to fall into the same trap Pip falls into when he assigns to Miss Havisham and Estella roles in his future fulfillment—his logic being that, if these characters are here, it must be because they have something to do with him. Thus Dickens, whose plots have frequently been argued to rely unrealistically and excessively on coincidence (even his staunch admirer and fellow novelist George Gissing notes that Dickens displayed “astonishing lack of skill when it came to inventing plausible circumstances”), plays coincidence against his hero, punishing Pip for assuming that Miss Havisham, who looks and acts like his benefactor, is his benefactor. Once the patron's true identity is revealed, Pip must redraw his expectations to such a great extent that he cannot hold his position at the center of the narrative. The story that unfolds in *Great Expectations* is, to his and our surprise, not really about Pip at all.

Pip's hope that Estella will prove part of the package places him yet more firmly in the position of embodying the views of the reader, who—based on the experience of reading nineteenth-century novels—expects precisely the same thing. The tradition of the marriage plot was established most famously by Jane Austen's novels early in the nineteenth century: Her works bring together some man and some woman of suitably matched temperament in felicitous union. (That is not all her novels do by any means, but it is their main impetus.) With good and bad marriages alike, the reader senses that each character seems to get what he or she deserves. Dickens acknowledges that manner of resolution but he enlarges its scope—and thus the scope of the novel—to include the entire family, not just man and wife. His plots are family plots. Writing at a time when child welfare was of increasing interest to the lawmakers and citizens of England (because metaphorically speaking, a healthy English family meant a healthy English state) and when Poor Laws split up families according to each individual's earning power with tragic results (as happens in *Oliver Twist*), Dickens shows us in his novels and stories every imaginable example of parenting, every imaginable child, and in best-case scenarios he comes up, as Austen does, with a match. In *Great Expectations*, Pip's sense of individual destiny centered on himself, must necessarily sacrifice itself to the tale of the collective fate of a family. Pip gains agency not in a journey of self-discovery, but in the process of discovering Magwitch's estranged wife and stolen child. The final reunion of Estella and Pip, though ostensibly a happy ending, pales in dramatic import and effect when compared to the reunion of Magwitch with his adoptive son, or Pip's revelation to Magwitch of the fate of his long-lost daughter. Likewise, Joe and Biddy's marriage, so abruptly revealed, takes its ultimate significance from its product: little Pip. *Great Expectations*—like *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House* before it—is a family novel, and in that sense Dickens's original ending (see “The Original Ending to *Great Expectations*,” p. 467) seems much more to the purpose, for it highlights the novel's next generation: Young Pip is mistaken by Estella for Pip's own son, and the resolution between the elder characters comes through the kiss Estella gives the boy—a kiss that calls to mind the one she granted Pip long ago at Satis House. It takes the presence of the child to bring their relationship full circle.

In providing models of families, parents in particular, Dickens is at his most dexterous. The first parents we encounter in *Great Expectations* are dead ones, and the more we see of live parents in the novel, the more we wonder whether these dearly departed have done their children a favor. Joe, though childlike in his ability to love unconditionally (and oversentimentalized by Pip and Dickens alike), is a good friend to Pip, especially when it comes to letting him go, leading us to speculate whether a la

of biological ties might not be best when parenting is involved. Mrs. Joe, the sibling as default parent brings Pip up “by hand”—sparing no rod—while in the Pocket family, siblings act as de facto parents. Mrs. Pocket’s children “tumble up” haphazardly, the younger ones turning (quite wisely) to older sister Jane instead of their ineffectual mother. Miss Havisham’s outward maturity (in her decaying gown and yellowed hair she is age incarnate) masks a stunted growth marked by deep bitterness and a dark spirit; her obsessive devotion to Estella is clearly a poor substitute for actual nurturing. As for Magwitch, he “grow’d up took up” (p. 334), as he explains to Pip—that is, he was in and out of prison from an early age. Yet criminal record aside, Magwitch is undeniably a hard worker and a good provider, and as long as he remained safely at a distance, Pip could hardly have asked for better.

And if Pip does not get Estella—or gets her imperfectly, only after she has thrown herself away on Bentley Drummle and Dickens has thrown away his original ending—then we must remember that our expectation of finding marital bliss at the end of a novel does not go unfulfilled. Wemmick, at his casually charming best, marries his Miss Skiffins; the steadfast Herbert successfully woos Clara Barley; and Joe finds happiness (and possibly more surprising, literacy) with the faithful Biddy. Again, Dickens finds a way to deflect our expectations from his narrator, directing us instead toward characters who seem marginalized by Pip’s version of his plot, but who in fact harbor many of the virtues the novel’s hero conspicuously lacks and reap their rewards in turn.

In their 1970 study of Dickens’s work, influential British critics F. R. and Q. D. Leavis argue that Dickens’s plots comprise series of parallel or comparable events, both among and within his novels that illuminate his broader themes. Pip’s actions, therefore, must be contrasted with those of his fellow characters, who often find themselves in similar situations to which they react in very different ways. This exercise can operate among many of Dickens’s novels—critics have noted provocative similarities, for example, between Pip and the first-person narrator of *Bleak House*, Esthonia Summerson, who as an illegitimate child also carries a burden of shame and guilt with her from her early years—but for our purposes there is plenty to examine within *Great Expectations* itself. Take the recurring issue of social expectations—in the form of etiquette. At the beginning of the novel, Pip devotes a paragraph to describing Magwitch’s desperate manner of eating, likening him derisively to “a large dog of ours” (p. 19). At Miss Havisham’s, however, it is Pip who is made to resemble an animal; he says of Estella that she serves him his meal “as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry—I cannot hit upon the right name for this smart—God knows what its name was—that tears started to my eyes” (p. 60). Once Pip has moved to London, aware that his manners are countrified at best, he asks the affable Herbert (who has already given him a more gentlemanly nickname) to correct him at the table, a request that results in one of the novel’s most entertaining exchanges:

We had made some progress in the dinner, when I reminded Herbert of his promise to tell me about Miss Havisham.

“True,” he replied. “I’ll redeem it at once. Let me introduce the topic, Handel, by mentioning that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth—for fear of accidents—and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put further in than necessary. It is scarcely worth mentioning only it’s as well to do as other people do. Also, the spoon is not generally used over-hand, but under-hand. This has two advantages. You get at your mouth better (which after all is the object), and you save a good deal of the attitude of opening oysters, on the part of the right elbow.”

He offered these friendly suggestions in such a lively way, that we both laughed and I scarce

Pip's offenses continue apace (he turns his glass upside-down on his nose, then attempts to stuff his napkin into it), and we can only imagine what an uncouth picture he must look. But Herbert's gentle nature—unspoiled, as we soon learn, by false hopes of patronage—allows him to assist Pip without causing hurt or humiliation. That is exactly what Pip cannot do for Joe, who, when he comes to London, drives Pip to distraction by first hanging tenaciously onto his hat, then placing it precariously on the mantel, from which it proceeds to fall periodically through his visit. (The narrator, after mulling over Joe's obvious discomfort, admits, "I had neither the good sense nor the good feeling to know that this was all my fault, and that if I had been easier with Joe, Joe would have been easier with me" [p. 214].) Nor can he do it for Magwitch. When the latter arrives unannounced and unwanted from Australia, Pip can only comment again that "as he turned his food in his mouth, and turned his head sideways to bring his strongest fangs to bear upon it, he looked terribly like a hungry old dog" (p. 318). In short, though he continues to be pained by the condescension Estella shows him, Pip seems determined to replicate it at the expense of those who care most for him. Herbert's social ease throws Pip's unease into relief, showing us by example what Pip must struggle to learn.

By virtue of his expectations, Pip is "not designed for any profession" (p. 188), which further puts him out of step with his fellow characters, removing him wholly from the novel's provocative depiction of the world of employment. The topic of labor provides Dickens with a palette for both psychological and physical humor, and the more cheerless Pip grows as narrator, the more fun is to be found in the schizophrenic antics of his acquaintances at work and play. Wemmick is a person split irrevocably in two by labor—the cold clerk in Jaggers's office bears virtually no resemblance to the friendly lord of Walworth Castle, and the two beings are separated irreconcilably by a morning and evening commute. But once readers have distilled Wemmick's Walworth self—his true self, we are encouraged to believe—we find him laudably grounded, possessing two commodities quite rare in Dickens's world: a contented parent and, by novel's end, a suitable bride, with the promise of a future generation of Wemmicks. Likewise, Herbert's work self is so divorced from his leisure personality that Dickens never shows us Herbert at the office—though we know that Pip goes to visit him occasionally. But like Wemmick, Herbert in the sanctity of his home exudes ease and camaraderie. Joe Gargery, on the other hand, is so comfortable in his working clothes that he looks artificial when he is out of them, masquerading around town in his stiff Sunday best to Pip's undying mortification. And Magwitch, who works his way from transport to freeman in New South Wales, makes his manual toil into one extended gesture of generosity, putting away every penny that he might give it to Pip, though Pip might become a gentleman and never have to lift a finger.

Magwitch's determination to make Pip a man of leisure, his revenge on the stratified English society that kept him low, feeds the novel's temporal tensions, for it too seems like a backward move. The nineteenth century in England, after all, is the age of industrialization and labor, and Pip's "expectations," though ostensibly forward-looking, exclude him from it completely. Dickens has considered the term "self-made man" in his fiction before (he used it in *Hard Times*, to describe what Mr. Bounderby is not); here he fashions Pip into a man-made man, with Magwitch at the controls. Pip is the product of Magwitch's labor. It is thus fitting that, once the convict is out of the picture, Pip should earn redemption (and pay off his debts) by learning to labor himself, and that he should do so for Herbert, whose entry into a business partnership Pip has surreptitiously funded, first with Magwitch's money, then with Miss Havisham's.

Pip's paying off of debts represents a final settling of accounts on a larger scale, a kind of literary

calculus or summing up of the score that characterizes the end of so many Victorian novels. It consists of the responses to a set of rather cold-blooded questions: Who marries? Who dies? Who inherits? Where does the money go? What happens to the property? Who, in short, is rewarded, and who is punished? Pip, Estella, and Herbert are the young generation at *Great Expectations*'s beginning, and frankly, the prospects for this trio look grim; it is no accident that on the opening page, five out of six of the children we encounter are already dead. By the novel's end, new marriages have taken place, creating new potential parents, and a new generation (embodied in a second Pip, no less) has arrived on the scene. What do England and its colonies hold in store for these parents and children? How will they live? What are their expectations? The power of this novel is that in literalizing a set of hopes for its protagonist, enumerating his "expectations," it brings these questions to the fore, making them the focus of the story even as it elbows Pip off to the sidelines. From the moment when Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe speculate that Miss Havisham will make Pip's fortune, to Wemmick's constant reminders in favor of securing portable property, to Pip's realization that where his benefactor goes, so go his assets, we are encouraged to follow the money trail. In so doing, we imitate not Pip but Jaggers, who makes no assumptions but operates solely on the basis of evidence. In this light, *Great Expectations* acts as a kind of object lesson to its readers, exhorting them to observe carefully and jump to no conclusions—especially when being baited by the likes of Dickens. Pip learns this lesson once he has turned from his own affairs to those of Magwitch, when he finds himself a different role in the story, no longer its subject, but its author. Thus his most triumphant moment in the entire novel is his revelation to Jaggers of Magwitch's connection to Estella, when he presents Jaggers with a piece of information the all-knowing lawyer lacked—in other words, when he assumes the powerful position of storyteller. Pip may be childless at the end of the novel, but in piecing together the puzzle of Magwitch's past, he shows himself able to generate a story—and, more important, a family.

As for Dickens, who gave life to so many fictional families, he has proved himself able to generate a whole world. Dickens's nineteenth-century England is ours. His plucky orphans and angelic maiden aunts, jolly bachelors and eccentric spinsters, child pickpockets and criminals in the dock, Scrooges and Tims, and Tims—these are our Victorians; we recognize them when we see them. His scenery—the prisons, the orphanages, streets, the "London particular" (the dense fog peculiar to the English capital in the nineteenth century of industrialization), the small English towns whose roads lead to the big city: These set the scene of the Victorian stage. His plots of long-lost children reunited with long-lost parents, missing wills and seemingly magical inheritances, identities concealed and revealed on sentimental deathbeds, are the plots we now associate with the English novel at the height of its powers, and no one has done them better. Within twenty years of Dickens's death his name began to appear in adjective form: Dickensian or Dickensy, describing both the good and the bad of the world he depicted—both the festive roadside inn, for example, and the brutal conditions of the poorhouse, a fresh Christmas snowfall and a bleak November drizzle. More than any nineteenth-century writer, Dickens came to embody the figure of the novelist itself. It is hard to imagine a time when novels were not considered a viable literary genre, but we now recognize Dickens as one of the writers who made them so.

Dickens was also one of the first writers—if not the first—to marry literary ambition with the desire to entertain a mass audience, attempting a union of what we now call high and low culture that to this day eludes most authors who aspire to it. In fact, Dickens's legendary middle-class appeal kept literary critics away from his work for decades in the early twentieth century, during the time when to be a serious writer in the manner of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf was to produce difficult texts that baffled readers instead of inviting them in. Next to these figures, Dickens seemed hopeless

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