

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford New York Toronto
Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi
Petaling Jaya Singapore Hong Kong Tokyo
Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town
Melbourne Auckland
and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

Great Expectations was first published in *All the Year Round* from 1 December 1860 to 3 August 1861. The novel was first published in book form in America in 1861 and in England in 1862.

In *The Oxford Illustrated Dickens* (known before 1966 as *The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens*) it was first published, with illustrations by F. W. Pailthorpe (1885), in 1953, and reprinted in 1959, 1960, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1970, 1973, 1978, 1987, 1989.

Published in the United States by Oxford University Press, USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Oxford University Press

This volume: ISBN 0 19 254511 6

21-volume set: ISBN 0 19 254522 1

Printed in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

by FREDERICK PAGE

I

ALMOST we might have had from Dickens a preface to *Great Expectations* such as Henry James would have written had the novel been his. In James-like fashion Dickens, in a letter to Forster, tells of the genesis and germ of the book:

For a little piece I have been writing—or am writing; for I hope to finish it today—such a very fine, new, and grotesque idea has opened upon me, that I begin to doubt whether I had better not cancel the little paper, and reserve the notion for a new book. You shall judge as soon as I get it printed. But it so opens out before me that I can see the whole of the serial revolving on it in a most singular and comic manner.

And, at once, like James, he had to consider the problems of length and serialization, no less pressing for Dickens that he was his own magazine-editor. He had soon decided that the 'little piece' should be a novel, to be issued in twenty numbers. But his magazine, *All the Year Round*, was in difficulties. Its readers found Charles Lever's novel, *A Day's Ride a Life's Romance*, disappointing, and the sales fell off seriously. Dickens must come to the rescue, and serialize his own new novel in the magazine.

Last week [end of September 1860] I got to work on the new story. I had previously very carefully considered the state and prospects of *All the Year Round*, and, the more I considered them, the less hope I saw of being able to get back, now, to the profit of a separate publication in the old 20 numbers. However, I worked on, knowing that what I was doing would run into another groove; and I called a council of war at the office on Tuesday. It was perfectly clear that the one thing to be done was, for me to strike in. I have therefore decided to begin the story as of the length of the *Tale of Two Cities* on the first of December—begin publishing, that is.

Forster seems to have expressed his doubts or regrets on the necessity of magazine publication, and Dickens writes at some length reassuring him, especially on the financial advantages.

By dashing in now [to the rescue of the magazine], I come in when most wanted; and if Reade and Wilkie [Collins] follow me, our course will be shaped out handsomely and hopefully for between two and three years. A thousand pounds are to be paid for early proofs of the story to America.

In a few days he writes again, sending a first instalment of the story.

The book will be written in the first person throughout, and during these first three weekly numbers you will find the hero to be a boy-child, like David [Copperfield]. Then he will be an apprentice. You will not have to complain of the want of humour as in the *Tale of Two Cities*. I have made the opening, I hope, in its general effect exceedingly droll. I have put a child and a good-natured foolish man, in relations that seem to me very funny.

And here one must interrupt Dickens to protest that 'grotesque', 'comic', 'droll', 'foolish', 'funny', all do injustice to the story and to Joe Gargery; but it is likely that Dickens was dashing off his letter too quickly to pick and choose his words. The critic who should adopt them would write himself down an ass. And then Dickens is James-like again:

Of course I have got in the pivot on which the story will turn too— and which indeed, as you remember, was the grotesque tragi-comic conception that first encouraged me. To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.

2

But *Great Expectations* had another inspiration beyond the one that Dickens mentions. The book is his *Wuthering Heights*. The moors are, it is no exaggeration to say, part-author of the one book, and the Kentish marshes are at least the foster-mother of the other. Rochester, of course, is really and spiritually present in *Edwin Drood*, and London and its river are everywhere in Dickens, but only in *Great Expectations* is the story centred in a definite country-side.

Five years before he began the story he had made arrangements to buy Gadshill, fulfilling a dream of his childhood. To Wilkie Collins he wrote in July 1856: 'I am glad to hear of your having been in the neighbourhood. There is no healthier (marshes avoided), and none in my eyes more beautiful. One of these days I shall show you some places up the Medway with which you will be charmed.' Forster tells us that

To another drearier churchyard, itself forming part of the marshes beyond the Medway, he often took friends to show them the dozen small tombstones of various sizes adapted to the respective ages of a dozen small children of one family which he made part of his story,

though, with the reserve always necessary in copying nature not to overstep her modesty by copying too closely, he makes the number that appalled little Pip not more than half the reality. About the whole of this Cooling churchyard, indeed, and the neighbouring castle ruins, there was a weird strangeness that made it one of his attractive walks in the late year or winter, when from Higham he could get to it across country over the stubble fields.

One is free to think that the churchyard, and the historic memory (if not the actual sight) of the prison-hulks anchored off the Kentish shore of the Thames estuary, together account for the story. They account for Compeyson and Provis, for Pip and his sister and Joe; and the near neighbourhood of Rochester accounts for Miss Havisham and Estella—and there is the story!

3

I remember Alice Meynell lamenting to me that her young people read *Great Expectations* to the exclusion of all the other Dickens novels. It was Henry James who then had their devotion. She herself had a robust enjoyment of Dickens's extravagances and caricature, and liked them none the less that she could not regard Pecksniff as a serious satire on hypocrisy, nor really care that Mr. Micawber should 'make good' at last. But this was only as she would have protested against any such stress on Shakespeare's tragedy or romance as should push Falstaff off the stage. Noting that Dickens has many saints, and Thackeray none, she names Joe Gargery, and along with Little Dorrit and Lizzie Hexam she would surely have been willing to include Biddy. So that before one goes on to allow that there is something which sets *Great Expectations* apart from every other Dickens novel, we ought to recognize what it has in common with them. Not much in the way of great comic characters: only Uncle Pumblechook, Trabb, and Trabb's Boy. Gruffandgrim is an amalgam of Joey Bagstock and Captain Cuttle's friend, but he is only heard and never seen.

But consider the good characters—not goody-good, nor conventionally good, nor simply good (no one could call Jagers 'simply good'), but humanly good, as Marty South said of Giles Winterborne in Hardy's *Woodlanders*: 'he was a good man, and did good things'. There are these seven: Joe, Biddy, Mr. Jagers, Herbert Pocket, and his father ('generous, up-

right, open, and incapable of anything designing or mean'), Wemmick, and his Aged P. Who does not see that they are from the same mint as the Peggottys (male and female), Traddles, and the younger Turveydrop?

The good daughter, the good son, are frequent in Dickens. The Doll's Dressmaker, Little Dorrit, young Turveydrop—their fathers are 'assorted, various', and all 'damaged goods', but between Bella and Richard Wilfer, between Wemmick and his Aged, the relations are mutually beautiful. That Pip should fail—before he succeeds—in his quasi-filial relation first to Joe and then to Provis is precisely the theme of the book.

Along with the good people who need no repentance there are Mrs. Joe, Estella, Miss Havisham, Pip—redeemed by suffering, remorse, penitence.

But beyond both groups there is the heroic figure of Pip's convict benefactor. He has Joe's simplicity. He has always been sinned against, brought up to be a 'warmint', 'in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There you've got it. That's my life, pretty much, down to such times as I got shipped off, arter Pip stood my friend.' His only sin is revenge on Compeyson, vengeance on society. The little boy's compassion on him has redeemed him from animal sinlessness to human affection.

The book is apart from all the other Dickens novels in that it has a theme which prevents it from being picaresque like *Nicholas Nickleby*, and forbids it to have any such episode as *Martin Chuzzlewit* had, or to have no other unity than that of its central character, like *David Copperfield*. The theme is Pip's discontent with his actual benefactors (cold word!): first with Joe, later with Provis; his innocent misattribution of his fortune to Miss Havisham; his supposition that she must intend Estella for him. But this theme is carried out by a design. Pip's discontent, his unwilling injustice to Joe, is confronted with Wemmick's perfect service of his Aged P., by Clara's uncomplaining tendance on Gruffandgrim. Pip's thoughtless cruelty to Bidly in tantalizing her with an imaginary proposal made impossible by his love for Estella, is balanced by the young love of Herbert and Clara, by the half-comic, wholly sincere love of Wemmick for Miss Skiffins. Joe and Bidly find their deserved reward in each other.

It is surely a merit in this book that its theme is not intruded upon by any merely topical polemics on work-houses or York-

shire schools or the Court of Chancery. It is part of the narrative that this passage should occur:

At this time, it was the custom (as I learnt from my terrible experience of that Sessions) to devote a concluding day to the passing of Sentences, and to make a finishing effect with the Sentence of Death. But for the indelible picture that my remembrance now holds before me, I could scarcely believe, even as I write these words, that I saw two-and-thirty men and women put before the Judge to receive that Sentence together. Foremost among the two-and-thirty, was he; scated, that he might get breath enough to keep life in him.

There, with no violence, is an indictment—not of our imperfect human justice—but of inhuman callousness. One easily persuades oneself that Dickens—the newspaper reporter—*had* seen this.

And this leads me to speak of his perfect reporting. Alice Meynell praises his management of narrative: ('these things happened so') and his style; 'he had style, but no great body of style': his perfect passages are comparatively infrequent, but the ten pages reporting Provis's midnight visit to Pip in the Temple (Chapter XXXIX) are among them, and so is the attempted escape on the Thames (Chapter LIV).

In a book so nearly perfect one would like to think that Dickens's ear for dialect was infallible, that his understanding of the inarticulate man's helplessness with language was intuitive, but one cannot always give credence to Joe's words; yet one is glad to count them with those caricatures which we accept with delight in Dickens.

4

That Pip and Estella should be united at last we owe to the pleading of Bulwer Lytton. This happy ending has been called inartistic. That, it assuredly is not. What pessimist, speaking in his own person, would so blaspheme against life? Not Hardy, for one. But it is only right that the rejected ending should be offered to the reader as an alternative ending, and this is done in an appendix to the present edition.

If any one wishes to satisfy himself that Dickens could be as inexorably just as life can be unforgiving, it is in *Our Mutual Friend* that he may find the proof. Charley Hexam follows up his consummate ingratitude to his sister by his dastardly repudiation of his second benefactor, Bradley Headstone. 'He

began moving towards the door', formulating all the time his complete egoism, his preposterous charges of ingratitude, and, going out of the door, he goes out of the story. There is no forgiveness for him, no later reconciliation with Lizzie. He is abolished silently. But one's idolatry of art, or one's own misreading of life, should not make one regret that for Estella and Pip there *was* forgiveness and reconciliation.

FREDERICK PAGE

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	v
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xiii
<i>List of Characters</i>	xv
<i>The First Stage of Pip's Expectations</i> CHAPTERS I TO XIX	i
<i>The Second Stage of Pip's Expectations</i> CHAPTERS XX TO XXXIX	153
<i>The Third Stage of Pip's Expectations</i> CHAPTERS XL TO LIX	309
APPENDIX: <i>The Cancelled Conclusion</i>	461