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Great Expectations

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Introduction

“For a mind diseased with vain longings after unattainable advantages,” says Doctor Johnson, “no medicine can be prescribed but an impartial enquiry into the real worth of that which is so ardently desired.” *Great Expectations* is the narrative of such a search, taking a single consciousness through a series of personal relationships, each of which contributes to its education. Although the book was welcomed as a belated resurgence of Dickens’s comic spirit, the simple and cheerful confidence of his earliest novels had long vanished, and he had turned to a series of explorations of twisted and thwarted love in a world figured forth as increasingly labyrinthine: in *Bleak House* a world wrapped in fog and cotton wool, in *Hard Times* a world of muddle mocked by the cold serenity of the stars, in *Little Dorrit* a world of prison within prison, a world of inversion and negation, of frustrated dreams and chastened hope. The comic flashes are surrounded by darkness, despair is relieved by rare and hard-learned charity. In *Great Expectations* these themes and images recur, but with an economy, forthrightness, and ironic humour that make it Dickens’s masterpiece. Its irony keeps returning Pip from a world of vain longings to a world of hard experience, contrasting expectation against realization, forcing the “impartial enquiry into the real worth of that which is so ardently desired”.

An orphan, Pip acquires three mothers and three fathers who serve to form his personality and standards of judgment. As an orphan, he is both the typical Dickensian hero and a characteristic figure of modern literature, the alienated man, a product of his civilization but somehow detached from it, and lonely, wishing to belong, but unable to feel at one with it. On his own confession, Pip is not only an orphan but an injured orphan:

My sister’s bringing up had made me sensitive. 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. It may be only small injustice that the child can be exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is small, and its rocking-horse stands as many hands high, according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. Within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with injustice. I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me.

From this core of Pip's experience, radiating into his personal and social life, stems Pip's major difficulty in assessing things and people for what they really are: he can find no accord between love and justice. Like King Lear he feels himself more sinned against than sinning, craves love but is too self-centred in his injured sensitivity to see where it really is. Dickens keeps the theme of love *versus* justice before us, and elaborates its complexity, both in the novel's pervasive atmosphere of crime and in the variations he plays on the child's first figures of tenderness and authority, his mother and father.

Pip's three mothers are psychologically the three aspects any mother presents to her child: queenly protector, lover, and devourer. "Brought up by hand" in more senses than one, Pip sees his sister as, to use Joe's term, "a buster" (pronounced "as if it began with at least twelve capital Bs"). He accepts Miss Havisham as a kind of "fairy godmother", though she too is a devourer; it is as though she were David Copperfield's Aunt Betsey turned sour. Estella, formed to order by Miss Havisham, is simply an attractive extension of her, the queenly lover before whom Pip would abase himself despite her scorn. Chastened by disillusion, Pip returns home to marry Biddy, the mild comforter who replaced his murdered sister. It never occurs to him that she might love someone else; he takes her acceptance of him for granted. Similarly, his three fathers are psychologically familiar aspects of any father: the savage who may make one impotent and destroy one's chances, the king who astonishes with his power, and the kindly protector. In the key-setting first scene of the novel, Magwitch, in fact, rises like a terrible apparition from among the graves where Pip's dead parents lie, and as he retreats, he seems to Pip "as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people stretching up cautiously out of their graves to get a twist upon his ankle and pull

him in". When Pip's rise in fortune takes him to London he acquires the godlike Jaggers as his guardian, though not without misgivings. Only gradually does Pip learn to respect his affectionate protector, Joe. As Pip's involvement with these characters makes clear, however, the florid provincial prose of his town newspaper is, for all its comedy, quite accurate in calling him "our young Telemachus", Homer's epitome of the boy who, in finding his father, becomes a man.

Inherited from Fielding, from the stage, and from fairy tales, all of them formative influences on Dickens's creative imagination, the technique of splitting one figure into several characters, or developing one idea through compared and contrasted sets of characters, recurs at various levels of sophistication throughout Dickens's works. Pickwick and Sam Weller are paired off against Jingle and Job Trotter, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Dombey and Son* are full of characters presenting the various faces of selfishness and pride respectively. As his art progressed and deepened, this device for ordering the abundant variety of his imagination in the wide compass and considerable length of his novels became less mechanical, integrated more thoroughly with theme and texture, articulated with greater psychological subtlety. *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, both autobiographical narratives, refine the technique further by splitting the potential narrator; David's darker feelings being transferred to his sinister friend, Steerforth, and leaving David rather colourless; young Pip's hostilities being transferred to Old Orlick. The irony developed between Pip's childish and adult viewpoints, however, prevents Pip from becoming as simply priggish as David. Seeing Orlick as Pip's "shadow", however, takes us out of the realistic confines of the novel's own world, where Pip is Pip, and Orlick, however enigmatic, is somebody else. Pip's substitute mothers and fathers, on the other hand, not only "stand for" his parents metaphorically but in Pip's own consciousness act as parents and guardians. With this in mind, therefore, there is nothing extra-literary in our seeing in the pattern of Pip's relationships and his search for real worth what Freud describes as the tasks "laid down for every man":

From the time of puberty onward the human individual must devote himself to the great task of *freeing himself from the parents*; and only after this detachment is accomplished can he cease to

be a child and so become a member of the social community. For a son, the task consists in releasing his libidinal desires from his mother, in order to employ them in the quest of an external love-object in reality; and in reconciling himself with his father if he has remained antagonistic to him, or in freeing himself from his domination if, in the reaction to the infantile revolt, he has lapsed into subservience to him.

By dividing and patterning as he has done, Dickens clarifies Pip's ordeal while retaining its full complexity.

Pip starts with a double difficulty: not only are his sister and Joe not his real parents, but their proper roles are reversed, his sister being the tyrant, Joe the comforter. Thus starts a stream of reversals and inverted values in the book. Pip's sense of injustice comes from his sister's example as well as her harshness: "It's bad enough to be a blacksmith's wife (and him a Gargery) without being your mother." Joe, whose understanding Pip patronizingly underrates, knows well enough what motivates her. Ironically she wants what she constantly deplores, building her self-esteem on the injustice of her status: "'And she ain't over partial to having scholars on the premises,' Joe continued, 'and in partickler would not be over partial to my being a scholar, for fear as I might rise. Like a sort of rebel, don't you see?'" Enjoying her reputed martyrdom, she uses it as a lever to govern: "'Given to government,' said Joe. 'Which I meanersay the government of you and myself.'"

Miss Havisham reveals a similarly upside-down logic. Betrayed by her lover, she seals herself up like a hermit in her decaying house, stops the clocks, and becomes a living symbol of unjustly treated love:

"Do you know what I touch here?" she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

"Yes, ma'am." (It made me think of the young man.)

"What do I touch?"

"Your heart."

"Broken!"

She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it.

As with Pip's sister, grievance is reversed into vanity, "the vanity

of sorrow which had become a master mania,” and as Pip’s sister delights in “government”, Miss Havisham, pretending to have done with the world, plots to revenge herself on it, not just by forcing it to recognize the evil done her, but vicariously, by fashioning a child into the instrument of her will to wreak vengeance in kind. Intent on making her betrayal the mark of her superiority and the meaning of her life, she tries to prevent the normal dissipating effect of time by stopping it, and thus creates a mask of death: “Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long veil so like a shroud.” Unwilling to accept the temporal condition of humanity, but not really able to reject it, she enters a malignant form of it, the form of decay and corruption expressed in her physical surroundings and furthered in her relationship with Estella. Rebelling against the world as it is, she impiously becomes her own inadequate god to set it right: “in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; . . . in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; . . . her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker.” The religious connotations are not fortuitous. Miss Havisham is a reworking of the intensely zealous Mrs. Clennam of *Little Dorrit* (1857), also voluntarily imprisoned for years in a decaying house, scrupulously remembering sins committed against her and appointing herself as avenger: “she still abided by her old impiety – still reversed the order of Creation, and breathed her own breath into a clay image of her Creator.” In both cases, vanity leads to a withering, ironic reversal. Miss Havisham’s idea of love is a telling example:

She said the word often enough, and there could be no doubt that she meant to say it; but if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love – despair – revenge – dire death – it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse.

“I’ll tell you,” said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, “what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter – as I did!”

Miss Havisham's definition of love is significant. It reveals the distortion and ambivalence of her own character; her emphasis on annihilation is violence not only against herself but, through Estella, outwards against the world. For her, love has become equated with death. At first glance, moreover, her definition seems to agree with Pip's own experience of love, and Dickens stresses Pip's confession as essential to a right understanding of the book:

. . . I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is that, when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection.

The subtle but significant difference here is between Miss Havisham's gloating emphasis on blindness, and Pip's repeated "I knew". However miserable, however compelled, Pip keeps one part of himself in reserve, observing, judging, seeing clearly – not later, when he can look back in tranquility, but at the very moment of obsession. It is the clue to his maze because here, at his most impassioned, he sees without illusion, and the rest of his story consists of the stripping away of illusion until he is left with a true estimate of himself and of the world. The result is a special tone in the work. With his peculiar knack for seizing the quality of a work in a phrase or two, Chesterton describes it as "a quality of serene irony and even sadness, which puts it quite alone among [Dickens's] other works. At no time could Dickens possibly be called cynical, he had too much vitality; but relatively to the other books this book is cynical; but it has the soft and gentle cynicism of old age, not the hard cynicism of youth."

Biddy, like Joe, receives scant respect or consideration from Pip.

Arriving to run his home, she becomes merely a sympathetic ear for his longings and vanity, not to be permitted any personal views or feelings. Chapter 17 plumbs the depths of Pip's egregious asininity with her: "I should have been good enough for *you*; shouldn't I, Biddy? . . . If I could only get myself to fall in love with you. . . ." When she suggests the uncomfortable idea that Joe might be content to remain in his social station, Pip is startled by the suspicion of a personal reflection on himself and reprimands her loftily for presuming to envy him: "It's a – it's a bad side of human nature." Biddy, in short, is the first aspect of the mother, the unqualified, unquestioning comforter. Pip, therefore, never suspecting that she might refuse him, can postpone coming to terms with her until very late in the book. His attitude to Joe is equally simple. Offering no threat, Joe can be patronized: "I always treated him as a larger species of child, and as no more than my equal." Reconciliation with Joe and Biddy is a matter neither of overcoming antagonism, nor of rising from subservience, but of giving humble respect to what had been taken for granted. Pip manages it after their wedding.

The problems of antagonism and subservience come in very strongly, however, with Magwitch and Jaggers. Just as Miss Havisham and Estella, scorning him as "a common labouring-boy", give a social formula to the inchoate feeling of injustice inspired in Pip by his sister, so Magwitch provides a focus for his feelings of guilt. As a criminal whose name is Abel, Magwitch has an obvious relationship to the theme of love and justice. Pip dates his strange encompassment "by all this taint of prison and crime" from his coerced assistance to Magwitch, but his real complicity was less in aiding than in sympathizing with Magwitch: "I thought what terrible good sauce for a dinner my fugitive friend on the marshes was. . . . they were all in lively anticipation of 'the two villains' being taken. . . . the pale afternoon outside almost seemed in my pitying young fancy to have turned pale on their account, poor wretches." The separation in attitude between Pip and his respectable elders, implied in the quotation marks around the phrase "the two villains", is not a matter of Pip's mature reflection; he is describing his pitying *young* fancy, and later Pip "treasonably" whispers to Joe, "I hope, Joe, we shan't find them." Though young Pip is no more easy in his conscience about the virtue of his actions and feelings than is Huck Finn in refusing to betray the

PIP'S LONDON

After Leigh's
"New Picture of London", 1827

To Soho, Hammer Smith and Richmond

To Walworth

escaped slave Jim, he refuses to side with the law and thereby anticipates his own eventual acceptance of the sinner, his answer to Cain's aggrieved cry, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

In the patterning of the novel, Magwitch neatly parallels Miss Havisham, each of them appropriating another human being as a personal extension and means to power. "I'm your second father," says Magwitch. "You're my son – more to me nor any son. . . . If I ain't a gentleman, nor yet ain't got no learning, I'm the owner of such." With his record, his fearful appearance, his threat of a deputy with "a secret way pecooliar to himself of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver", and his claim of ownership, Magwitch is a sombre figure. "The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast." Pip's moral transformation and freedom from childhood fears and antagonisms, nevertheless, depend on his reconciliation with this terrible father. Dickens, therefore, makes Magwitch a more sympathetic figure, both for Pip and the reader, by allowing him extenuations of his criminality, extenuations that Dickens would hardly have tolerated in real life by the sixties, when he had become rather reactionary in his views on penology, and that he certainly does not allow Compeyson. In Chapter 42 society is made to share part of the guilt for Magwitch's career: "they measured my head, some on 'em – they had better 'a' measured my stomach." A second way of making Magwitch more tolerable to the reader was to date the story's main action somewhere between thirty and sixty years before the date of the novel's publication, so that while the reader might well have direct knowledge of the horrors of public execution (abolished in 1868) outside Newgate, he would probably be unaware that the sentence of execution was rarely carried out on returned transportees (though Dickens does have the judge emphasize that Magwitch's is an "aggravated case").

Social and religious themes blend again in Pip's gradual acceptance of Magwitch. Pip's basic desire is to be beyond reproach, in social terms respectable, in religious terms innocent. His concern for respectability, his perennial worry about guilt and injustice, his anxiety about the atmosphere of crime surrounding him, his loathing for the returned criminal, are social attitudes revealing a deeper reluctance to accept the lot of fallen, imperfect humanity. His profound anxiety

about personal dignity occasions the great encounter with “that unlimited miscreant”, Trabb’s boy, an episode thematically as well as comically perfect. With uncanny penetration, Trabb’s boy cuts to the centre of Pip’s vanity:

Deeming that a serene and unconscious contemplation of him would best beseem me, and would be most likely to quell his evil mind, I advanced with that expression of countenance, and was rather congratulating myself on my success, when suddenly the knees of Trabb’s boy smote together, his hair uprose, his cap fell off, he trembled violently in every limb, staggered out into the road, and crying to the populace, “Hold me! I’m so frightened!” feigned to be in a paroxysm of terror and contrition, occasioned by the dignity of my appearance. As I passed him, his teeth loudly chattered in his head, and with every mark of extreme humiliation, he prostrated himself in the dust.

Pip’s dignity, of course, is merely vulgar respectability, as he makes clear at once in protesting to Trabb against the employment of a boy “who excited loathing in every respectable mind”. Initially Pip takes responsibility for the inconveniently returned convict for the most bourgeois of motives, indebtedness for money paid down, money to which he had no right, the tainted money of a criminal. He immediately resolves to take no more of Magwitch’s compromising wealth, having already felt some queasiness about Wemmick’s less complicated views on portable property. As Pip involves himself in Magwitch’s affairs, however, what began as burdensome obligation turns into genuine compassion. Nice discriminations of debt and justice cease to be of such great account. The trial, with its shaft of sunlight linking judge and condemned, reminds Pip “how both were passing on, with absolute equality, to the greater Judgment that knoweth all things and cannot err”. In some ways the scene reminds one of the trial that turns Camus’s character, Tarrou, into an anarchist in *The Plague*. All the young Tarrou can see is the full majesty and zealotry of the legal system bent on the destruction of an owl-like little man (“To my mind the social order round me was based on the death-sentence. . .”). Pip, however, cannot condemn the social order as easily, since by now he has already lost his naïve illusion of his own innocence. Critics have, indeed, disputed the point because of his

reaction to Magwitch's death: "I thought of the two men who went up into the temple to pray, and I knew there were no better words that I could say beside his bed than 'O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!'" Pip's use of the pronoun "him" instead of the biblical "me", it is argued, shows that Pip, even here, remains the snob and excludes himself from the idea of involvement in sin. Such an interpretation is both uncharitable and ridiculous. "Me" would be logically impossible in the situation; "us" would be a hideous elaboration of the quotation. Magwitch is a sinner, and recognition of the fact, coming after Pip's reflection on the equality of judge and condemned, is simple, direct and unpretentious, not an insinuation that Pip, even in the act of recalling the Pharisee, becomes one. Considered either morally or psychologically, Magwitch's role in Pip's life is to implicate him in humanity, to give him strength in the knowledge of their common weakness.

One of the most ambiguous figures in the puzzle of relationships with which Pip and the reader must struggle is Pip's third father, Jaggers. He is the one character in the plot of the book who can put all the pieces together; more imposing still, he has a special air of knowing secrets, "a manner expressive of knowing something secret about every one of us that would effectually do for each individual if he chose to disclose it"; even Estella believes he is "more in the secrets of every place" than anyone else. His second attribute is power. "It's impossible to say what he couldn't get," says Wemmick, "if he gave his mind to it." To say that Jaggers *pleads* a case would hardly be the truth; the very judge is convulsive with awe of him: "The magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thief-takers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction. Which side he was on I couldn't make out," says Pip, "for he seemed to me to be grinding the whole place in a mill." His power is enhanced by remoteness: "He's always so high. His constant height is of a piece with his immense abilities", says Wemmick. Jaggers washes his hands and his face, scours them round with a towel, gargles his throat, scrapes his nails, until his clients are, in the strictest sense, washed off. Even in the street, where his anxious suitors slink about in wait for him, "there was something so conclusive in the halo of scented soap which encircled his presence that they gave it up for that day." Jaggers's ability to manipulate, his power, knowl-

edge and detachment, have suggested to critics that he stands for the artist or even God himself. And it must be noticed that Dickens encourages the reader, even taunts him, to fathom Jaggers. The dinner he gives for Pip and his friends concludes with Jaggers asking Pip, "You know what I am, don't you?" And Pip's visit to Newgate ends with the turnkey shrewdly observing to Wemmick, "Why then, . . . he knows what Mr. Jaggers is." Pip does not know what Jaggers is, but before long the question crops up again, this time in a comic key (an ironic trick Dickens often reserves for his deepest themes) when Pip visits Wemmick's Castle and tries to chat with the Aged: "Curious to know how the old gentleman stood informed concerning the reputation of Mr. Jaggers, I roared that name at him. He threw me into the greatest confusion by laughing heartily and replying in a very sprightly manner, 'No, to be sure; you're right.' And to this hour I have not the faintest notion of what he meant, or what joke he thought I had made." What, then, does one make of Jaggers?

Neither passionate like Magwitch, nor affectionate like Joe, but cold in his secret knowledge of malice, guilt, or stupidity, Jaggers is familiar enough as that aspect of the father the child both admires and resents: the kingly, knowing, rule-maker, seeing through all the petty artifices of the child's world, remote in his cunning and authority. Until the end of the book, Jaggers seems compounded of two of the three main attributes of God: omnipotence and omniscience. Benevolence seems to be lacking. The absence of feeling is particularly distressing to Pip: "that my feelings should be in the same place with him – *that* was the agonising circumstance." Jaggers, indeed, is cynicism raised to a general principle. To Pip's criticism of Orlick, he characteristically replies, "Why, of course he is not the right sort of man, Pip, . . . because the man who fills the post of trust never is the right sort of man." He is exactly the right mentor, however, for the second stage of Pip's expectations, when Pip is learning the rules and conventions of respectable society. For Jaggers, the law, the great codification of social rights and obligations, the grand fabric of justice, is without any aura of sentiment. Law is a game he plays ruthlessly, and his view of it is clear in the episode where he is prepared to use a false witness so long as the rules are observed and no one openly admits the falsity. In short, he demonstrates what Bumble suspected in *Oliver Twist*: "the law is a ass – a idiot." In the description and behaviour of

Jaggers and Wemmick, the disparity between love and mortal justice is generalized to grand proportions. Wemmick, who at home is amiability itself, is metamorphosed to a thing as he approaches Little Britain, cold, hard, "with a square wooden face whose expression seemed to have been imperfectly chipped out with a dull-edged chisel". No wonder that the respectable young Pip, the aspirant bourgeois with a deep sense of his rights and dues, his mind diseased with vain longings, should heartily wish for "some other guardian of minor abilities". Like Magwitch, but in a different way, Jaggers teaches an unwilling Pip the ambiguity and imperfection of human nature; with his air of secret knowledge he keeps Pip conscious, when Pip would most like to forget it, that his dignity is not impeccable, that he can claim no perfect justice in the fallen world. How, then, avoid the cynicism Jaggers seems to embody? Just as Pip must gain respect for Joe and compassion for Magwitch in order to grow up and accept the world for what it really is, so he must find an unexpected bond with Jaggers. It turns out to be charity, the one godly attribute that Jaggers notably seems to lack. Dickens prepares the ground by elaborating the deceptive split between Wemmick's private and public faces and finally, when we learn how Jaggers saved the infant Estella, reveals a similar, much better hidden, split in Jaggers. The result is comedy without sentiment, for though charity may compensate for the limitations and cruelty of the world, no more than in *King Lear* does it turn the world into paradise. For a moment, indeed, it threatens to reduce order into chaos between Wemmick and Jaggers: "each of them seemed suspicious, not to say conscious, of having shown himself in a weak and unprofessional light to the other. . . . I had never seen them on such ill terms." Just at this crisis, however, the unfortunate suitor Mike comes tearfully in:

"What are you about?" demanded Wemmick, with the utmost indignation. "What do you come snivelling here for?"

"I didn't go to do it, Mr. Wemmick."

"You did," said Wemmick. "How dare you? You're not in a fit state to come here, if you can't come here without spluttering like a bad pen. What do you mean by it?"

"A man can't help his feelings, Mr. Wemmick," pleaded Mike.

"His what?" demanded Wemmick, quite savagely. "Say that again!"

"Now look here, my man," said Mr. Jaggers, advancing a step, and pointing to the door. "Get out of this office. I'll have no feelings here. Get out."

With the observance of the rules re-established, Jaggers and Wemmick get down to work again "with an air of refreshment upon them as if they had just had lunch".

If the ordinary world of law and business rises fitfully and at moments towards charity, it also at times sinks back to the realm of primordial malice. For the most part, Pip's vain aspirations are the expression of thoughtless inexperience, but behind his thoughtless snobbery, Dickens suggests something darker and more malignant. His sister's dominance, Miss Havisham's and Estella's class distinctions, these give Pip formulations for understanding his longings for distinction and his sense of unjust treatment. Underlying the social formulations, however, is a suspicion of aboriginal evil. And at its centre we find Old Orlick. Like Pip, he suffers a sense of exclusion and injustice, insisting on his rights with Joe, and slinking about "like Cain", another sufferer from injustice. He gives young Pip to understand "that he knew the fiend very well" and might give Pip to him for fuel. Orlick's very name, Dolge, is in Pip's view imposed on the village "as an affront to its understanding". His home is on the marshes, and he rises to confront Pip and Biddy "from the ooze (which was quite in his stagnant way)". As Miss Havisham's gate-keeper he looks like "a human dormouse". Everything about Orlick suggests primordial, subhuman malice beyond all psychological or social explanation. And in the end, though Orlick is guilty of two attempted murders, all we hear of him is that he has been arrested for housebreaking. Orlick is the core of a host of consonant images of decay, corruption and envelopment in the book: the marshes, called "meshes", Miss Havisham's sombre room with its smoke and candelabra like the mist and wintry branches of the marsh, and its wedding cake "like a black fungus" with blotchy spiders running about, the ruined garden, the decay of Barnard's Inn, the mud of the Thames in the attempted escape. With the maze of reversed and ambiguous personal relation-

ships through which Pip travels, these images of malignant growth and obfuscation lend the book its peculiar tone and rhythm. The mists especially serve an ironic function, as when Pip first leaves for London: "And the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me." The suggested clarity of vision is just an illusion, and shortly Pip is wondering whether London is not "rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty". The effect is repeated, mist and clarity counterpointed throughout the novel, until Pip has lost his illusions and, free of both longings and resentment, acquired the most valued possession a Dickens character gains, an educated heart. The story having come full circle, with another young Pip hedged in behind Joe's leg and about to begin his own voyage of discovery, the final line of the first ending, which describes Pip's chance encounter with a remarried Estella but without bestowing on him any "poetic" reward, clinches the theme of the work: "I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for in her face, and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be."

Dickens's emphasis on the educated heart, and especially on imagination as a means of educating it, finds expression in his approximation of fairy tale, a type of literature that engrossed him all his life. Pip imagines himself as a prince of the *Arabian Nights* and Estella as the princess to be won. The texture of Dickens's world itself, however, brings us closest to fairy tale: objects have a perverse and curious life of their own; people approach the state of inanimate objects; the world shades off into tones of the divine and demonic. A great master of the child's vision, Dickens happily begins this work with his most convincing description of a child's response to the world, and its surrealism never altogether vanishes. In *Pendennis*, though not in the first person, Thackeray also describes the vicissitudes of growing up, drawing on his own experience as Dickens had done in *David Copperfield*, but Thackeray's delight is in depicting the violent convictions and infatuations of adolescence and shading them with the mellow wisdom of the Old Foggy. His world is substantial, realistic, socially articulated to the finest degree of class distinction. In *Great Expectations*, on the other hand, we have little more than the Finches of the Grove to give us an idea of the distinction to which Pip aspires.

George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, with its precise sociological and psychological dissection of the relationships and motives of individuals and groups, forms a contrast still more extreme. Even when compared with Dickens's other works, however, *Great Expectations* reveals a rare detachment from specific social issues. Not only is it set back in time (roughly between 1807 and 1826), but it contains virtually no implied or direct criticism of contemporary institutions, such as we find, for example, in *Little Dorrit*, where the story is also placed somewhat in the past. Compared with *David Copperfield* (1849-50), his earlier attempt at autobiographical form, *Great Expectations* avoids the surface events of Dickens's own career – however true the novel may be to those inner grievances and longings that impelled him with such amazing intensity – just as it avoids the air of self-justification that makes one uneasy about *David Copperfield*.

In all these ways, as well as in the device of retrospective narration, Dickens achieves detachment and distance without any loss in concreteness. The story's vigour is heightened by its pattern and unity. Though he wrote *Great Expectations* in weekly instalments for his periodical, *All the Year Round* (his usual practice being to write in monthly numbers), Dickens was by now a consummate artist in serial publication; and even among his late works *Great Expectations* is architecturally brilliant. Not that he found it easy. Accustomed to the monthly unit, he found the compression imposed by weekly publication sheer agony. As early as *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), he was complaining, "Oh! If I only had him, from this time to the end, in monthly numbers." *Hard Times* (1854) was the same: "I am in a dreary state, planning and planning the story . . . (out of materials for I don't know how long a story), and consequently writing little." *A Tale of Two Cities* gave him "the utmost misery", and so did *Great Expectations*: "As to the planning out from week to week, nobody can imagine what the difficulty is, without trying." A mark of how superbly he overcame the difficulty is the impression he creates of equal effortlessness and control. Even the style, perhaps because of the very necessity to be terse, is more taut, less given to attacks of verbose facetiousness than that of *David Copperfield*.

Combining the vivid surrealism of a child's perception with the mature reflection of adult experience and insight, Dickens has created an intricate masterpiece that engages our imagination on several levels

at once to take us through the pattern of exchanging illusion for wisdom. Aptly called a fable for Dickens's times, *Great Expectations* can no doubt be seen to epitomize satisfactorily the selfish aspirations and status-seeking of mid-Victorian society, but its connection with that particular society must remain loose and general at best – for in what period have men been any less possessed by the disease of vain longings? A strange alliance of the grotesque with the universal makes *Great Expectations* a fable not just for its own but for all times.

Note on the Text

Great Expectations first appeared in weekly instalments of one or two chapters in Dickens's periodical, *All the Year Round*, from December 1, 1860, to August 3, 1861. He collected and republished the novel with minor revisions in three volumes in 1861. His final revision was for the Charles Dickens Edition of 1868. Since the 1868 edition represents Dickens's final judgment on how his text should stand, it is the basis of the present edition. Dickens, however, tended to introduce revisions without always catching errors that had crept into the text in successive editions. Where I have found these, I have corrected and noted them, except for obvious trifles of spelling which I have just silently corrected. In these notations *All the Year Round* appears as *AYR*. Partial modernization of punctuation and capitalization has been carried out for the reader's greater ease. Dickens's punctuation, however, combines logic with what Eric Partridge would call orchestration; therefore, while I have made a considerable number of deletions and a few changes, the punctuation remains closer to Victorian than to twentieth-century usage.

As is well known, Dickens had finished the novel and was reading the proofs when his aristocratic friend, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, a popular novelist for whose opinions Dickens seems to have had inordinate respect, saw and objected to the then unconventional ending. Dickens therefore substituted a different ending in which hero and heroine are reunited. Whatever one may think of Dickens's wisdom in changing the text, the changed form is the one he printed and the one the majority of readers know; it is therefore printed as usual. The original ending, however, is added in an appendix.

Descriptive head-lines that Dickens added to the 1868 edition are preserved here; however, since the present text has much less type on each page, the two editions do not match page for page, and the head-lines are therefore more widely spaced.

An unusual but useful addition to the present text is the notation (in brackets above the appropriate chapter headings) of where the original serial divisions occur: thus, [Part 6 – JANUARY 5, 1861] signifies the sixth instalment of *Great Expectations*, first published on that date. Recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of knowing these divisions for a proper understanding of Dickens's techniques of pace and structure. Until fairly recently, naïve ideas about the bad effects of serialization were commonplace. Here, in one of Dickens's best-constructed works, the reader can judge for himself.

The following dedication appeared in the original edition:

Affectionately inscribed to

CHAUNCY HARE TOWNSHEND

Charles Dickens

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

All Dickens's novels were first published in serial form, monthly or weekly; the dates in parentheses indicate the years in which the instalments appeared.

- 1812 Born at Portsea (now part of Portsmouth) February 7, son of a navy clerk.
- 1817 Family moves to Chatham, a naval dockyard and ship-building town near the cathedral city of Rochester. Dickens attends preparatory day-school.
- 1821-22 Attends William Giles's school. Discovers a collection of books belonging to his father that are to affect his imagination profoundly: *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Tom Jones*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, *Robinson Crusoe*, the *Arabian Nights*, *Tales of the Genii*, the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, the *Idler*, *Citizen of the World*, and Mrs. Inchbald's *Collection of Farces*.
- 1822 Family moves to London, and his schooling is interrupted.
- 1824 Is sent to work, probably for about six months, in a shoe-blackening warehouse, pasting labels on bottles; resents what he considers to be his family's callousness, and feels "my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast". Two weeks after he begins, his father is imprisoned in the Marshalsea Prison for debt (three months), whereupon his mother and the other children move into the prison as well, leaving Charles alone in a lodging-house.
- 1824-27 Attends Wellington House Academy for two and a half years, the last of his formal schooling.

- 1827-28 Works in a solicitor's office.
- 1828-32 Becomes a law-court reporter at Doctors' Commons. In 1830 meets Maria Beadnell, his first love, who rejects his addresses; and misses an acting audition before Charles Mathews and Charles Kemble because of "a terrible bad cold and an inflammation of the face".
- 1832 Becomes a reporter for the *True Sun* and parliamentary reporter for the *Mirror of Parliament*.
- 1833 Begins submitting sketches of London life to various periodicals.
- 1834 Becomes parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*.
- 1836 Collects most of his sketches in *Sketches by Boz* (First Series, February; Second Series, December). Marries Catherine Hogarth on April 2. In the same month, starts the monthly publication of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-37); after a slow beginning, it makes Dickens famous.
- 1837-39 While finishing *Pickwick* and going on to *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), edits the monthly *Bentley's Miscellany* in which he publishes *Oliver Twist* (1837-39). Subsequently quarrels with Bentley and resigns.
- 1840 Starts *Master Humphrey's Clock*, a weekly miscellany in which he publishes *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841).
- 1842 Visits America, irritating Americans with attacks on slavery and literary piracy. Canadian part of tour includes Niagara, Toronto, Kingston, Quebec, and Montreal; directs and performs in an amateur theatrical production for charity in Montreal. Incenses Americans further with *American Notes*, the account of his observations.
- 1843 Satirizes America in parts of *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44). Publishes *A Christmas Carol*.
- 1844-45 Travels to Italy.
- 1846 Publishes a travel book, *Pictures from Italy*, and begins *Dombey and Son* (1846-48).
- 1848 Tours as director and actor with his own amateur theatrical troupe, performing Bobadil in *Every Man in His Humour* and Shallow in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

- 1849 Draws on much of his own life for *David Copperfield* (1849-50), a novel in autobiographical form.
- 1850 Conducts a new weekly periodical, *Household Words*, which continues until 1859.
- 1852 Begins *Bleak House* (1852-53).
- 1853 Gives the first public readings from his books, for charity.
- 1854 Publishes *Hard Times* in *Household Words*.
- 1855 Begins *Little Dorrit* (1855-57).
- 1857 Meets Ellen Ternan, an actress, while producing and acting in Wilkie Collins's *The Frozen Deep*, and becomes deeply involved with her.
- 1858 Separates from his wife after twenty-two years of marriage and ten children. Gives his first professional readings from his works.
- 1859 Concludes *Household Words* and begins *All the Year Round*, another weekly periodical. Publishes *A Tale of Two Cities* as its first serial.
- 1860 Begins *Great Expectations* (1860-61) in *All the Year Round*.
- 1864 Begins *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), his last completed novel.
- 1865 Shows first signs of failing health, after a railway accident in which he vigorously helps to rescue other passengers.
- 1867-68 Another five-month tour of America, this time more sympathetic, giving public readings.
- 1869 Despite the severe strain of public performance, especially in the murder scene from *Oliver Twist*, and despite repeated warnings from his friends, he gives seventy-four of a proposed hundred farewell readings in Britain before breaking down.
- 1870 Gives a final series of readings in London. Begins *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870, left unfinished). Dies June 9 of a stroke at his home at Gad's Hill, Rochester. Buried in Westminster Abbey June 14.