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经典世界文学名著丛书

远大前程

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

CHARLES DICKENS

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Charles Dickens

With an Introduction by

Kate Flint

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作者简介

查尔斯·狄更斯(1812—1870),英国作家。生于朴次茅斯,父亲是海军工资办的职员。狄更斯在查塔姆度过了他最幸福的童年时光,其后则饱偿了生活的艰辛。10 岁那年父亲被逮捕,进了马歇尔西的债务监狱,次年,年仅 11 岁的狄更斯被迫去一家鞋油厂当童工,经历了他一生中最屈辱的日子。这段痛苦的回忆后来激发他创作了《大卫·科波菲尔》的前几章。15 岁时狄更斯到一家律师事务所作缮写员,其间自学速记,后来成为法庭速记员和专门报道议会会议的记者。

狄更斯 21 岁开始文学创作,早期作品后来收入《波兹特写集》。24 岁开始创作长篇小说《匹克威克外传》,该书在期刊上发表后轰动整个伦敦,并因此一举成名。从此狄更斯一发而不可收,一生笔耕不掇,共创作 15 部长篇小说,两部旅行札记,许多中篇小说及儿童读物。其代表作除《远大前程》外,还有《奥列佛·特维斯特》、《老古玩店》、《大卫·科波菲尔》及《荒凉山庄》等。狄更斯积劳成疾,于 1870 年猝然离世,年仅 58 岁。

引人入胜的情节,栩栩如生的人物形象,强烈的幽默感,以及对社会弊端入木三分的讽刺和批判,这些构成了狄更斯永久的魅力。

内容简介

匹普是个穷苦的乡下孤儿，由泼辣的姐姐和诚实厚道的姐夫，铁匠乔抚养大。来到贵族小姐哈维香家之后，匹普被上流社会的浮华生活所迷惑，开始鄙视善良但缺乏“教养”的乔，并为自己卑微的出身感到羞耻。哈维香小姐被恋人抛弃后，精神处于半疯狂状态。她收养了少女埃斯特拉，将她当作自己报复男人的工具，教她如何用美貌去折磨男人。匹普爱上埃斯特拉后受到她的嘲笑和挖苦，于是更加渴望出人头地，做一个“上等人”。恰在此时，一匿名人给匹普一笔财产，让他去伦敦接受所谓“上等人”教育。匹普以为是哈维香小姐为成全他和埃斯特拉的婚事而有意栽培他，觉得自己终于有了“远大前程”。他在伦敦过起了纸醉金迷的生活。然而不久他的绅士梦就破灭了：原来资助他的恩人不是什么贵族，而是他小时曾帮助过的一名苦役流放犯，接着他所钟情的埃斯特拉又嫁给了别人。生活终于教育了匹普，他开始重新认识生活中的真与美，丑与恶。他又回到了一直关心他、呵护他的乔身边，甚至开始同情那个苦役流放犯……

通过匹普的命运，狄更斯不仅揭示了一个时代的世态人情，更揭示了匹普追求的“远大前程”的虚幻性。匹普的理想实际上是19世纪英国上层社会的共同理想：依靠遗产或剥削他人的血汗来维持自己奢华无度的生活。狄更斯描写了整个社会如何为这种价值观所支配，从而揭露了这个社会的腐败性。

THE WORLD'S CLASSICS

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

CHARLES DICKENS was born in 1812 at Landport near Portsmouth, where his father was a clerk in the navy pay office. The family removed to London in 1816, and in 1817 to Chatham. It was here that the happiest years of Dickens's childhood were spent. They returned to London in 1823, but their fortunes were severely impaired. Dickens was withdrawn from school, and in 1824 sent to work in a blacking-warehouse managed by a relative when his father was imprisoned for debt. Both experiences deeply affected the future novelist. Once his father's financial position improved, however, Dickens returned to school, leaving at the age of fifteen to become in turn a solicitor's clerk, a shorthand reporter in the law courts, and a parliamentary reporter. In 1833 he began contributing stories to newspapers and magazines, later reprinted as *Sketches by 'Boz'*, and in 1836 started the serial publication of *Pickwick Papers*. Before *Pickwick* had completed its run, Dickens, as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, had also begun the serialization of *Oliver Twist* (1837–8). In April 1836 he married Catherine Hogarth, who bore him ten children between 1837 and 1852. Finding serial publication both congenial and profitable, Dickens published *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9) in monthly parts, and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–1) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) in weekly instalments. He visited America in 1842, publishing his observations as *American Notes* on his return and including an extensive American episode in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4). The first of the five 'Christmas Books', *A Christmas Carol*, appeared in 1843 and the travel-book, *Pictures from Italy*, in 1846. The carefully planned *Dombey and Son* was serialized in 1846–8, to be followed in 1849–50 by Dickens's 'favourite child', the semi-autobiographical *David Copperfield*. Then came *Bleak House* (1852–3), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Little Dorrit* (1855–7). Dickens edited and regularly contributed to the journals *Household Words* (1850–9) and *All the Year Round* (1859–70). A number of essays from the journals were later collected as *Reprinted Pieces* (1858) and *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861). Dickens had acquired a country house, Gad's Hill near Rochester, in 1856 and he was separated from his wife in 1858. He returned to historical fiction in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and to the use of a first-person narrator in *Great Expectations* (1860–1), both of which were serialized in *All the Year Round*. The last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, was published in 1864–5. *Edwin Drood* was left unfinished at Dickens's death on 9 June 1870.

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Edited by

MARGARET CARDWELL

Introduction by

KATE FLINT

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INTRODUCTION

Great Expectations (1861) is characterized by a peculiarly nostalgic, retrospective tone. Despite the title which points towards the future, this is a novel in which many of the characters attempt to deny the passage of time, or to refashion their own pasts through manipulating the course of others' lives. It focuses not so much on the idea of forward progression as on the motif of returning, or trying to return. Even the narrator and central character's name Pip Pirrip, is palindromic, turning in, like the narrative movement, upon itself.

Given the pessimism which this novel manifests about being able to shape the future with any success or confidence, it is perhaps surprising to find that *Great Expectations* was welcomed by contemporary critics as a return to Dickens's old manner. 'Mr Dickens has in the present work given us more of his earlier fancies than we have had for years', wrote E. S. Dallas in *The Times*. '*Great Expectations* is not, indeed, his best work, but it is to be ranked among his happiest. There is that flowing humour in it which disarms criticism . . .'[1] The enthusiastic reception of *Great Expectations* came as a relief to Dickens. He had begun writing the novel in late September 1860: it soon became clear to him that instead of publishing it in monthly parts, as he had initially intended, it would have to appear weekly in his magazine *All the Year Round*, in an attempt to boost circulation, which was flagging as a result of the unpopularity of the current serial, Charles Lever's *A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance*. In October he sent his friend Forster a letter accompanying the opening chapters:

> 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] . . . You will not have to complain of the want of humour . . . 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. Of course I have got in the pivot on which the

[1] [E. S. Dallas], *The Times* (17 Oct. 1861), 6.

story will turn too—and which indeed, as you remember, was the grotesque tragi-comic conception that first encouraged me.[2]

The language of this final sentence prepares one for the theatricality of much of the text, whether in literal terms—Mr Wopsle's unconvincing career on the stage—or in relation to the continual play of disguise and deception, or to the mingling of burlesque, satire, and pathos that one encounters, particularly in the minor characters. Humour, even as seen in Joe's early relations with Pip, or the behaviour of Trabb's boy towards him, or the chaos of the Pockett household, is, though, almost invariably edged with unease, even pain. The inventive energy of language and situation which the early critics were pleased to find may mask, but does not displace, anxieties about the cruelty, carelessness, and competitiveness which inhere both within families and within social relations.

Humour, however, did not provide the only grounds for contemporary critical commendation. Partly, Dickens's new novel was praised because of the way in which he deployed techniques of suspense and mystery. Publication in weekly parts demanded even more cliff-hanging moments than the production of the monthly episodes with which Dickens was more familiar. Moreover, the sensation novel was just coming into fashion (Dallas compared the construction of *Great Expectations* to Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860); Ellen Wood brought out *East Lynne* in 1861), and the combination of crime, violence, a self-sequestrated woman, and the revelation of her ward's parentage which *Great Expectations* contains ensured that it both fed off and helped to form the new trend. Above all, Dickens's work was welcomed after the panoramic social criticism which had characterized his major novels of the 1850s. 'After a long series of his varied works—after passing under the cloud of *Little Dorrit* and *Bleak House* . . . *Great Expectations* restores Mr Dickens and his readers to the old level', claimed the *Saturday Review*,[3] doubtless relieved to read a novel which was set back in the past of Dickens's boyhood rather than in more-or-less contemporary Britain, and which was free from the

[2] Letter to John Forster, 6 Oct. 1860, quoted in John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley (1928), 734.

[3] *Saturday Review*, 12 (20 July 1861), 69.

fierce attacks on specific abuses and institutions which characterize the two novels mentioned.

Or so critics chose to believe. For the assault on snobbery, on people who privilege social status above individual worth or justice, and on the idea that money can purchase a gentleman is an essential part of this novel. And, in many ways, *Great Expectations* is more pessimistic than either of the two works which the *Saturday Review*'s correspondent regretted. Each of them has a complicated narrative structure that, when the connections between individuals are laid bare, suggests that a complex logic of cause and effect underpins not just fiction, but the social fabric. In them, revelations of interconnectedness underscore the importance of fulfilling those responsibilities which are attendant on one's position in society. The connections in *Great Expectations* do not offer any such comforting pattern, however. Uncovering the links which bind together characters in this novel raises the question of whether knowing of these connections brings satisfaction. Despite the fact that Pip invites the reader to consider the continuity between past and present—'Pause 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' (p. 71)—Dickens implicitly queries whether knowledge of the past offers any kind of guidance to how one might shape the future. Pip may trace the connection which binds him, fetter-like, to the convict Magwitch, but notwithstanding his retrospective recognition of how the future course of his life is determined by the chance graveyard encounter between the two, Pip is largely a passive subject in this process. The novel thus calls into question how one may understand the processes of history themselves, and the extent to which it is possible to play an active part in the shaping of one's own, or society's, future.

Great Expectations is permeated with Dickens's own past history, which accounts in part for the falling cadences of the backward-looking prose ('I thought it a strange thing then, and I thought it a stranger thing long afterwards' (p. 63); 'I did not know then, though I think I know now' (p. 94)). Pip's life history does not correspond with the author's own to the same degree as David Copperfield's had done. Nevertheless, it is significant that Dickens, before beginning the novel, reread *David Copperfield* (1850) to ensure

that he did not fall into any unconscious repetition. Some of the autobiographical details are more prominent than others. The Kent setting owes a good deal to Chatham and its surrounding countryside, where Dickens lived between the ages of 5 and 10. Dickens's own woman in white, Miss Havisham, is a composite ghost of figures from his memory. In her, he blends childhood recollections of the 'White Woman' of Berners Street (about whom he subsequently wrote in a *Household Words* article of 1853, 'Where We Stopped Growing') with hints taken from the circumstances of another recluse, Martha Joachim, whose death was reported in his *Household Narrative* for January 1850, a number also containing material relating to emigrant life in Australia and to a woman rescued by a young man when her gauze dress catches fire. There is a sense that Dickens is repetitiously working over literary material when one compares *Great Expectations* with the chilling story of guilt and revenge, 'The Bride's Chamber', which he wrote in 1857 for the series of travel articles he put together with Wilkie Collins, *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*. This, too, has an incarcerated bride— a white wreck of hair, and dress, and wild eyes'—who spends eleven years imprisoned in a decaying mansion highly similar to Satis House.[4] Smaller details are telling, too. That Joe and Mr Wopsle should make a tourist pilgrimage to the Blacking Factory makes sense as a piece of encoded autobiography (as well as yet another illustration of disappointed expectations: '. . . me and Wopsle went off straight to look at the Blacking Ware'us. But we didn't find that it come up to its likeness in the red bills at the shop doors' (p. 219)).

Dickens's circumstances at the time of the writing of *Great Expectations* are interesting, too, and indicate the degree to which he did not feel entirely in control of his own life. He had the sensation of being 'quite weighed down and loaded and chained in life'[5] at the time, anxious about the marriage of his daughter Katie, about his son Charley's career, and was suffering from poor health and a sense of exhaustion. He had separated from his wife in 1858, and his relationship with Ellen Ternan and the secrecy it

[4] For details of the women in white from Dickens's past who may have found their way into *Great Expectations*, see Harry Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Novel-Making* (Macmillan, 1979), 279–97.

[5] Letter to W. H. Wills, 11 Mar. 1861, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter (3 vols., Nonesuch Press, 1938), iii. 212.

involved put him under further strain. Apprehension that his private life would be uncovered may have led him, Claire Tomalin has suggested, to become peculiarly fascinated with those who keep part of their identity deliberately concealed.[6] Moreover, Dickens was unsettled by disturbances occurring beyond the domestic sphere. He observed the events which led up to the breaking out of the American Civil War in 1861, and he knew that this 'American business' was causing unease among Lancashire mill-owners, who were concerned that problems with importing raw cotton would lead to cut-backs, and consequently understandable unrest among their employees. And in Italy, 'the state of things is not regarded as looking very cheerful', at the outset of the struggles which led to unification.[7] Articles in *All the Year Round* also testify to a preoccupation with difficulties in the Far East: 'Flaws in China' (9 February 1861, pp. 414–19), for example, chronicles the growing number of rebellions in that country. Trading in these markets might seem on the surface to provide a convenient location in which both Herbert and Pip (and, hopefully, Charley Dickens) could demonstrate responsibility and become prosperous, but current events failed to guarantee stability to this career.

This concatenation of circumstances was set against a further background of change which is quietly alluded to within the novel. The primal Kent marshes may remain the same, but the London with which Dickens had been so familiar was rapidly changing: major thoroughfares were extended, old bridges demolished, and large-scale demolition was necessary for the construction of the London Underground system. These alterations in the urban landscape provided tangible evidence of a lack of continuity between the young man he had been and the man he had become.

But it is not, of course, necessary to root *Great Expectations* in biographical detail to recognize that it is a novel preoccupied with the precariousness of identity. Right on the opening page Pip's name, his marker of individuality, is shown to be self-created, rather than bestowed by his parents: he is thus severed from any process of continuity between generations. His orphan status, like that of other protagonists of mid-Victorian first-person narratives (Jane

[6] Claire Tomalin, *The Invisible Woman: The Story of Nelly Ternan and Charles Dickens* (Viking, 1990), 192.

[7] Letter to M. de Cerjat, 1 Feb. 1861, *Letters*, iii. 209.

Eyre, Lucy Snowe, David Copperfield, Aurora Leigh, ensures that he is placed in the optimum position to star in a *Bildungsroman* chronicling his own, independent growth to self-sufficiency and self-knowledge. Yet this growth is a complicated one, since Pip is in many ways extremely passive. He does not maintain his capacity for self-creation for long: rather, he retrospectively shows us the forces which work on him. His moral timorousness and extreme sensitivity result from the unjust and vindictive way in which his sister sets about bringing him up 'by hand'; and his dissatisfaction with his social environment is shaped, initially, by Estella's scathing comments ('He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy! . . . And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!' (p. 59)). Rather than letting whatever natural talents he may possess determine Pip's course in life—indeed, rather than even suggesting that he has any—Dickens chooses to dramatize what might happen to someone who is singled out to 'be immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place [the forge and the Kent marshes], and be brought up as a gentleman—in a word, as a young fellow of great expectations' (p. 135). 'Expectations' is a word with both financial and emotional resonances: perhaps inevitably, given his fixation on Estella, Pip focuses on the latter, and his views on his probable future can be seen as projections of his own wish-fulfilment.

Yet Pip's imagination is not an adequate tool to help him to self-knowledge. Assuming that others—or, more particularly, one other, in the shape of Miss Havisham—have mapped out his life for him leads him into relative complacency, and into that state of mind which George Eliot, more overtly stressing the moral imperative to active duty, was to criticize in *Middlemarch* (1871): 'We are on a perilous margin when we begin to look passively at our future selves, and see our own figures led with dull consent into insipid misdoing and shabby achievement' (chapter 79). The older Pip who narrates the story allows the reader no chink through which to recognize that the young Pip mistakes the foundations of his expectations (although silences, particularly those of Jaggers, seem retrospectively telling). So the shock of discovering that Magwitch has been behind Pip's trajectory works to show the reader how she or he may, like Pip, form expectations according to a non-questioning habit of accepting, in reading as in life, what one wishes to be true.

Up to this point, one of the ways in which Pip has been defining his identity is by a process of exclusion and self-protection, attempting to ensure that as wide a gap as possible exists between himself and all forms of lower life. In the first instance, and reprehensibly, in moral terms, if sneakily understandable in purely circumstantial ones, this means drawing a barrier between himself and Joe, staying at the Blue Boar rather than the forge when he returns to visit Miss Havisham. But class segregation cannot be practised as rigorously as Pip had hoped, and such faddishness about his previous company is obliterated, in his mind, when he realizes that his rise, if one may call it that, to the status of gentleman is not dependent on the leisured, moneyed, if eccentric, Miss Havisham, but on a convict. This convict, he tries to protest, is of not just a different class, but a different species from himself: 'The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, would not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast' (p. 315). Magwitch compounds Pip's repulsion when he claims that a form of family connection binds them: 'Look'ee here, Pip. I'm your second father. You're my son—more to me nor any son' (p. 315).

In one sense, the paternal relationship which Magwitch claims with Pip is highly suspicious, since it implies that family relationships can be bought, and this is clearly a false piece of wishful thinking, comparable to the idea that a gentleman can be acquired as a piece of capital investment, in the same way that other convict settlers might purchase stock or land. But the pair are shackled together in other ways. Magwitch shares Pip's misapprehension that the qualities of a gentleman lie in surface appearances: '"Look'ee here!" he went on, taking my watch out of my pocket, and turning towards him a ring on my finger, while I recoiled from his touch as if he had been a snake, "a gold'un and a beauty: *that's* a gentleman's, I hope! Look at your linen; fine and beautiful! Look at your clothes; better ain't to be got!"' (p. 316). And Dickens's manipulation of the plot consolidates the bonding. Infatuation with Estella, and the belief that Miss Havisham has chosen them for each other, fuels both Pip's actions and daydreams, but the eventual realization that Magwitch was her father gives a retrospective ironic ring to Pip's shudder of abhorrence at the 'contrast between the jail and her'.

Moreover, in Pip and Estella, Dickens gives us parallel case studies of how the self may be moulded by others so as vicariously to fulfil their desires, and shows how this shaping may prove to be detrimental to those who are acted upon. The cases are not direct parallels. Magwitch was more concerned with creating the external signs of a gentleman; Miss Havisham with the formation of Estella's character. In many ways, she is chillingly successful. Estella's cold-bloodedness and hard-heartedness are foregrounded on several occasions. When Miss Havisham berates her for being emotionally frigid, she replies, 'I am what you have made me.' 'Who taught me to be hard?' The fact that Miss Havisham is peeved and indignant—'But to be proud and hard to *me*!' (p. 301)—suggests the uncompromising nature of the lesson of upbringing which has been thoroughly learnt. When Estella calmly retorts, 'I have never been unfaithful to you or your schooling. I have never shown any weakness that I can charge myself with' (p. 301), we are shown that she has been as model a pupil as Bitzer, in *Hard Times* (1854), who, when asked by the broken, submissive Mr Gradgrind, 'Have you a heart?', replies, 'smiling at the oddity of the question', 'The circulation, sir . . . couldn't be carried on without one.' Estella reiterates her position a little later when Pip fully declares his love for her. She tells him once again that she had continually said that he touched nothing in her breast, but that he would not be warned:

> 'I thought and hoped you could not mean it. You, so young, untried, and beautiful, Estella! Surely it is not in Nature.'
>
> 'It is in *my* nature,' she returned. And then she added, with a stress upon the words, 'it is in the nature formed within me.' (p. 358)

Estella forms the prime exhibit in Dickens's demonstration, in this novel, of the effect of the environment upon the individual. The juxtaposition of hereditary and circumstantial factors in relation to the formation of an individual's subjectivity is an issue recurred to constantly in *Great Expectations*. It is tempting to see this, in part, as Dickens entering into the debates following the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. The main tenets of Darwin's book were outlined to Dickens's public in two articles in *All the Year Round* during the summer of 1860, with the author of these articles reluctant to deliver a final verdict on the

viability of Darwin's theories of adaptation and natural selection, or on the scientist's view that—as one of the articles put it—'We are no longer to look at an organic being as a savage looks at a ship—as at something wholly beyond his comprehension; we are to regard every production of nature as one which has had a history.'[8]

But how far back should this history be traced before we can come to understand any given human individual? And do the same laws apply to humans, in any case, as to the rest of the animal kingdom? Parallels between humans and animals are drawn with notable frequency in *Great Expectations*, even allowing for Dickens's fondness for suggestive metaphor: both Magwitch and Pip eat or are fed like dogs; Pip's juvenile career is apostrophized in the same breath as that of a Christmas porker; the convicts on the coach to the Dockyard have a 'coarse mangy outer surface, as if they were lower animals' (p. 225); Bentley Drummle is dubbed 'the Spider' (p. 210); Jaggers's housekeeper is 'a wild beast tamed' (p. 199), and so on. Newgate sits cheek by jowl with Smithfield; Orlick brains Mrs Joe Gargery with a sawn-off prisoner's leg-iron as though she were 'a bullock' (p. 423). But notwithstanding the novel's fascination with the closeness of animals and humans, it also examines the possible unsettling effects of examining origins too closely. As happens frequently in Dickens, this is dramatized at a satiric as well as at an entirely serious level. Mrs Pocket's family tumbles around her chaotically, at some risk to its own imminent survival, whilst she is immersed in reading about titles and family genealogies, trying to find out when her grandfather should have come into his baronetcy. Obviously the revelations, to Pip, of the source of his financial prosperity (or potential for prosperity), and of Estella's parentage, shock him deeply, although ultimately they lead to a breaking down of his snobbish assumptions. But it is precisely in relation to snobbism that, when it comes to individual histories, Dickens shows up the folly of placing too much weight on origins. For the marriage of Herbert Pocket is one of the two conspicuously happy marriages in the book (three, if one counts the future partnership of Wemmick and Miss Skiffins) and, as Herbert reminds Pip, 'The blessed darling comes of no family, and hasn't

[8] 'Natural Selection', *All the Year Round*, 3 (7 July 1860), 299. The other article on *On the Origin of Species*, entitled 'Species', appeared on 2 June 1860, pp. 174–8.