

Signet Classics

CHARLES DICKENS

With a New Introduction by Stanley Weintraub



GREAT EXPECTATIONS



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藏书章

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CHARLES DICKENS was born February 7, 1812, at Landport, near Portsmouth, England. He died at Gads Hill, his home in Kent, on June 9, 1870. The second of eight children in a family often plagued by debt, Dickens at ten saw his father arrested and confined in the Marshalsea, a debtors' prison in London, and although a small boy he was placed in a blacking factory where he worked at labeling bottles, visiting John Dickens on Sundays. Charles returned to school on his father's release, taught himself shorthand, and at sixteen became a parliamentary reporter. At twenty-four his career took off with the publication of *Sketches by Boz* (1836), which was followed by *Pickwick Papers* the next year. As a novelist and magazine editor he had a long run of serialized successes through *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65). His family life had ended earlier, in 1858, when fame drew him apart from his wife of twenty-three years, Catherine, and (although his readers never knew) into the arms of young Ellen Ternan, an actress. Ill health slowed him down but he continued his popular dramatic readings from his fiction to an adoring public that included Queen Victoria. At his death he left *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* unfinished.

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Introduction



Bleak House and *Little Dorrit* are often considered Dickens's greatest works, but their dark qualities have left them behind *Great Expectations* in popularity. Bernard Shaw in a memorable essay called it Dickens's "most compactly perfect book." To modern readers a novel of five hundred pages seems less than compact, but to Victorians, who purchased (or rented) their novels in three volumes or in monthly segments, the pace of *Great Expectations* was swift, and its close satisfying.

Neither outcome was planned. Dickens was editor of *All the Year Round*, a weekly that published fiction in serial format. A novel begun there in August 1860, Charles Lever's *A Day's Ride, A Life's Romance*, had failed to arouse reader enthusiasm. Circulation lagged as much as did Lever's sprawling narrative. By late in September Dickens realized that he would have to "strike in" and insert his own tale.

Dickens had expected his novel to be serialized elsewhere, as usual, in twenty lucrative monthly parts, which would afford him the opportunity to gauge reader response for possible restructuring of plot or redefinition of characterization. Instead, the story he had in mind would have to be recast in a form for weekly serialization, which meant filling, for six or seven months, about 150 of *All the Year Round*'s closely printed pages. He broke the bad news to Lever, and on October 27, 1860, announced the appearance of *Great Expectations*, to begin in the issue of December 1, pushing Lever's unpopular story to the back pages. The new novel would run for thirty-six weeks, concluding on August 3, 1861. Relinquishing the monthly income from a better-paying magazine than his own was a financial blow,

but he could not afford to bankrupt his publication by staying out of it.

He was then maintaining three domiciles and needed all the earnings he could secure. The quintessential Victorian man of family values had separated from his wife, Catherine, in 1858 and lived apart while also maintaining a mistress with whom he was obsessively infatuated.

Despite the first-person form of *Great Expectations*, few elements in the plot were closely autobiographical, as in his earlier novel *David Copperfield*. The atmosphere of *Great Expectations*, however, reflected his preoccupations at the time—his concerns with faithfulness and disloyalty, with money and gentility, with guilt and deceit.

At the time the novel took shape, Ellen Ternan was the love of Dickens's fading years—furtively visited, her affections purchased. Yet a life of gentility with her, given the social circumstances, remained an impossible dream. Although Ellen was transformed with a suggestive name into the beautiful Estella, playing opposite a projection of the novelist's boyhood, Dickens's haughty heroine may have much in her also of Maria Beadnell, who spurned him as a suitor when he was a young man with few expectations. His rejected wife, Catherine, was in some ways reflected in the new novel in Pip's elder sister, with whom he lives, and her equally uncouth husband, Joe Gargery. While grown away, in sophistication, from Catherine after twenty-three years and seven living children, Dickens could have remained nominally with his family by maintaining the fiction of a legal address at his former domicile. The customary life of a gentleman of means, however self-made, was often maintained among others of his sex, with a wife kept apart and at home. Sometimes a kept woman was hidden away elsewhere. But Dickens's obsession with Ellen overrode the Victorian familial code, prompting him to chance his unique public standing. What he risked was being found out—and losing his readers and his reputation. A gentleman of property might keep a music hall dancer, but not the respected limner of family sanctity who was invited into one's home on the printed page.

Almost as vicarious self-punishment, Dickens intended that his hero should be denied the woman he loved, but—working some weeks ahead—he decided to consult with his friend Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the novelist and play-

wright. A writer who always kept both his audience and his income in mind, Bulwer-Lytton warned against denying Pip the happiness that most readers craved for the characters with whom they identified. Restoring the original ending for a new edition in 1937 (in the present text the original ending follows the published one), Shaw wrote in his preface, "I will not go as far as to say that Dickens's novels are full of melancholy intentions which he shrank from carrying through to their unhappy conclusions; but he gave us no vitally happy heroes and heroines after Pickwick. . . . Their happy endings are manufactured to make the books pleasant."

Dickens sent his rewritten concluding chapter to Bulwer-Lytton, explaining that his difficulty was "to avoid doing too much. My tendency, when I began to unwind the thread that I thought I had wound for ever, was to labour it and get it out of proportion." He accomplished it, then, "in as few words as possible." Whether he did an injustice to all the chapters that preceded the last remains for each reader to judge. Shaw thought that the rewritten ending was "psychologically wrong" yet "artistically more congruous," even "beautifully touching and exactly right." Dickens, deftly employing ambiguity, concludes with an intimation of darkness, "I saw no shadow of another parting from her." Subtly, Dickens hints here of the opposite. Pip fails to see any shadow, but one may emerge. And the word itself—*shadow*—is darkly suggestive. In the ostensibly happy ending so desirable in the literary marketplace, Dickens touches his tale with art as well as commerce.

Since his readership ranged from subscribers far his superior in formal learning to the barely literate, Dickens wrote for all levels of his clientele at once. It was his genius to be able, almost always, to achieve a multiple vision. *Great Expectations*, although memoir, mystery, and romance, never loses sight of the social ills of the time. Bernard Shaw, a confessed disciple, would observe that comedy was the jam that made the critical pill go down. Every novel by Dickens demonstrated that principle.

Great Expectations—the title itself suggests in Victorian terms a grand inheritance forthcoming—begins with the memoir and the mystery. Both are combined in the fearsome childhood experience of that characteristic Victorian type, the orphan, who recalls to us on the first page of his

own story the brief lives of his parents, whose graves are accompanied by "five little stone lozenges," each the tiny tombstone of a dead brother who "gave up . . . exceedingly early in that universal struggle." In that bleak symbol of the harshness of early-nineteenth-century life, the weed-overgrown cemetery, within sight of the convict hulks anchored in a broad estuary, Pip will acquire, as yet unknowingly, his surprising expectations. Dickens's narrative advances on the momentum of the mystery while Pip matures into young manhood.

Although the label *Victorian* is usually associated with the novel, Pip grows up in the earliest years of the nineteenth century. Writing the novel, Dickens recalled seeing unseaworthy convict ships—a grim solution to overcrowded prisons—in the Medway, south of the Thames, and onshore a line of felons bound together by iron chains, very likely destined for empty Australia. In 1860, the last hellish hulks were gone, penal transportation to New South Wales had ceased, and among the prison reforms was the rescinding of illegal return, Abel Magwitch's offense, as a capital crime. An early date is also established by such remarks as that of Pip's sister, exasperated at some unexpected scrubbing brush work, asking Joe Gargery (in chapter 12) "why he had not married a Negress slave." The slave trade had been abolished by Parliament in 1807, and slavery became illegal in the colonies under British rule in 1834, long after it had fallen into disuse in England.

Writing background notes about the ages of his characters before he plunged into the weekly pace of the serial, Dickens did not set down the actual year of the fateful Christmas eve in which Pip's story begins, but the date is earlier than the author's own beginnings in 1812. Throughout there are references to the English king, who could only be George III (yet not identified until chapter 46). Victoria would succeed, after George IV and William IV, only in 1837. Pip is age six when he encounters, in the village cemetery, the manacled convict who will alter his life. About seventeen years elapse in the bulk of the tale, for in chapter 39, when Magwitch returns in unlawful stealth, Pip is twenty-three. Midway through the following year Pip leaves England, the promise of wealth extinguished, to take up his job with the firm to which, in flush times, he had

staked the loyal Herbert Pocket. In the epilogue, a December eleven years later, Pip revisits England and encounters Estella in Piccadilly some two years earlier than he would have in the cancelled ending, where "It was two years more before I saw herself." Pip and Estella then, at thirty-five (they are the same age), are belatedly about to fulfill their long-thwarted destiny.

In Dickens's haste (one can perceive some intention, too, to relate the story more closely to the lives of his readers) he alludes to matters beyond his chronology. On Magwitch's behalf, Pip pilfers his sister's pantry (in chapter 2) in darkness, "for there was no getting a light by easy friction then"—an allusion to the invention of phosphorus ("lucifer") matches in 1827. Dating the narrative by inference, Dickens alludes to the investigation of the sister's bludgeoning by "Bow Street men from London—for, this happened in the days of the extinct red-waistcoated police" (chapter 16). Many of the novel's earliest readers would remember the establishment, in 1829, by Sir Robert Peel, of the Metropolitan Police—"Bobbies" or "Peelers" after their founder. Fewer would be able to fix the story from Pip's receiving, from a stranger at the Three Jolly Bargemen, representing the unidentified Magwitch, "two fat sweltering one-pound notes" (chapter 10), which were discontinued in 1821 and soon worn out. Later reference to "clean and new" one-pound notes (chapter 39) confuses matters—Dickens is too hasty here—for Pip is now just past twenty-three, and such notes could not have been issued in 1825. (A good guess for his birthdate is 1802.)

In a specific dating, clearly Dickens's intention, when Pip comes of age (chapter 36) he consults the shrewd if eccentric John Wemmick about using some of the money due then on the unfolding expectations to sponsor a business partnership for Herbert Pocket, and Wemmick is dubious. He scoffs that the investment would be like pitching the pounds off a bridge crossing the Thames, and he names the six spans upriver then as far as Chelsea Reach. Unnamed is New London Bridge, begun in 1824. Graphically setting time and place is a Dickens hallmark, but a few slips arose as he hurried to meet the deadlines he set himself as editor of his weekly. Since he painstakingly constructed his time frame, some anachronisms may be ruses to relate readers to their own experience, as when, on the very first page, Pip

refers in his memory of the graveyard to "that universal struggle" to survive—almost certainly tipping the reader to Darwin's controversial *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859, only the year before. Pip, then, is narrating his story at age fifty-seven or thereabouts.

When he declares (in chapter 4), "I moved the table, like a medium of the present day," Dickens was writing, and Pip remembering, in the heyday of spiritualism in England; but when Pip's sister calls young Pip "Rantipole" (chapter 13), the jibe may be intended only in the dictionary definition of an ill-behaved person, but that obscure meaning could only have occurred to Dickens because it was used in England as he was writing to refer to Napoleon III of France, a disturber of the peace. "Mrs. Joe" by then is long dead.

Readers would have been untroubled by other stray lapses, such as an allusion to the penny post (chapter 57), which suggests 1840 or later, and it may seem an inadvertence to neglect giving "Mrs. Joe" a Christian name until the penultimate chapter (58), when her name, Georgiana Maria, is divulged to be that of her long-dead mother. The disclosure may be part of the piled-up mysteries cleared up in a rush as the novel closes, much as the sudden disappearance of Pip's expectations, which vanish "like our own marsh mists before the sun." His inheritance, legitimately earned in Australia by Magwitch, is lawfully confiscated as the fortune of a returned felon, leaving Pip penitent and too poor to pay his bills. The humble and hardworking Joe of the forge-blackened hands rescues him. Pip, whose unearned gentlemanly leisure had been supported by Magwitch's anonymous largesse, at long last learns humility and the Victorian satisfactions of work.

While it may appear also an anachronism to plunge the now moneyless Pip into a sponging house (chapter 57) when he is arrested for his unpaid jeweler's bill—Dickens choosing an expenditure identified with vanity—such alternatives to prison existed as long as did imprisonment for debt, something Dickens knew from his father's experience. Such lodgings kept by a bailiff or sheriff's officer as places of preliminary confinement for charged debtors until they paid up or were sentenced were profit-making sidelines that existed until imprisonment for debt was abolished only in 1869. Seemingly a pre-Victorian anomaly, they sur-

vived beyond Pip's time, dying the year before Dickens himself.

Dickens so loved the theater that into his ailing last days he regaled audiences with dramatic readings from his works. *Great Expectations* is itself filled with theatrical allusions. Mr. Wopsle forsakes his sexton's job to chance the stage, and his favorite play is *Hamlet*. Even Pip dreams "miserably" of playing "Hamlet to Miss Havisham's Ghost" (chapter 31), a foreshadowing, perhaps, of her death. The fiftyish Miss Havisham, revenge-seeking, still, like the murdered king in Shakespeare, and spectral in her decayed bridal lace (Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* is often suggested as a source), echoes the dead Ophelia in John Millais's Pre-Raphaelite painting from *Hamlet* of 1852. There she lies drowned by her own hand when spurned as a bride, in a remarkable canvas that was a sensation at a Royal Academy exhibition in the decade before Dickens began his novel. A ghastly Ophelia, the dead hymeneal flowers still in her hair as in the celebrated picture, Miss Havisham nurses her grievances in the nightmarish setting of her aborted nuptials, her living death.

Pip once imagines her as a suicide, too, hanging from a beam. But it is Millais's echo from Shakespeare that in Dickens's time memorably dramatized Ophelia's death. The mid-Victorian years were the great era of such anecdotal art—a story within a frame, symbols within the dramatic images: the wretched Christmas dinner, Gargery's glowing forge, the manacled convict in the marshes, the disintegrated birthday feast, Wemmick's eccentric "castle" and his curious "Aged," Pocket's rooms in the dilapidated Barnard's Inn, Pip's being fitted at Trabb's for a gentleman's suit, Jaggers intimidating a jury at the Old Bailey, a convivial evening at the Three Jolly Bargemen, a dreary afternoon at Pumblechook's, catching, in the mists of dawn, a morning coach at the Blue Boar.

The fifty-nine chapters furnish at least that many mental pictures, some imbedding moralities about selflessness, usefulness, gentlemanliness, and the other Victorian virtues that are to prevail in the narrative over false values. Dickens's penultimate completed novel (the last was *Our Mutual Friend*), *Great Expectations* encompassed all the themes of a writing life that began with *Sketches by Boz* and *Pickwick*

Papers in 1835–36—about the time that this novel concludes. While Pip rediscovers himself, Dickens is revisiting himself, and through the writer's artistry the reader inhabits both worlds.

—Stanley Weintraub

DEDICATION OF THE ORIGINAL EDITION



Affectionately Inscribed

TO

CHAUNCY HARE TOWNSHEND

Chapter 1



MY FATHER'S FAMILY NAME BEING PIR RIP, AND MY CHRISTIAN name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name on the authority of his tombstone and my sister—Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above*," I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine—who gave up trying to get a living exceedingly early in that universal struggle—I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence.

Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles of the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, Late of this Parish, and Also Georgiana Wife of the Above, were dead and buried; and

that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dikes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry was Pip.

"Hold your noise!" cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. "Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat!"

A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared, and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head, as he seized me by the chin.

"Oh! Don't cut my throat, sir," I pleaded in terror. "Pray don't do it, sir."

"Tell us your name!" said the man. "Quick!"

"Pip, sir."

"Once more," said the man, staring at me. "Give it mouth!"

"Pip. Pip, sir."

"Show us where you live," said the man. "Pint out the place!"

I pointed to where our village lay, on the flat in-shore among the alder-trees and pollards, a mile or more from the church.

The man, after looking at me for a moment, turned me upside down, and emptied my pockets. There was nothing in them but a piece of bread. When the church came to itself—for he was so sudden and strong that he made it go head over heels before me, and I saw the steeple under my feet—when the church came to itself, I say, I was seated on a high tombstone, trembling, while he ate the bread ravenously.

"You young dog," said the man, licking his lips, "what fat cheeks you ha' got."

I believe they were fat, though I was at that time undersized, for my years, and not strong.

"Darn me if I couldn't eat 'em," said the man, with a threatening shake of his head, "and if I han't half a mind to't!"

I earnestly expressed my hope that he wouldn't, and held tighter to the tombstone on which he had put me; partly to keep myself upon it; partly to keep myself from crying.

"Now lookee here!" said the man. "Where's your mother?"

"There, sir!" said I.

He started, made a short run, and stopped and looked over his shoulder.

"There, sir!" I timidly explained. "Also Georgiana. That's my mother."

"Oh!" said he, coming back. "And is that your father alonger your mother?"

"Yes, sir," said I; "him, too; late of this parish."

"Ha!" he muttered then, considering. "Who d'ye live with—supposin' ye're kindly let to live, which I han't made up my mind about?"

"My sister, sir—Mrs. Joe Gargery—wife of Joe Gargery, the blacksmith, sir."

"Blacksmith, eh?" said he. And looked down at his leg.

After darkly looking at his leg and at me several times, he came closer to my tombstone, took me by both arms, and tilted me back as far as he could hold me, so that his eyes looked most powerfully down into mine, and mine looked most helplessly up into his.

"Now lookee here," he said, "the question being whether you're to be let to live. You know what a file is?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you know what wittles is?"

"Yes, sir."

After each question he tilted me over a little more, so as to give me a greater sense of helplessness and danger.

"You get me a file." He tilted me again. "And you get me wittles." He tilted me again. "You bring 'em both to me." He tilted me again. "Or I'll have your heart and liver out." He tilted me again.

I was dreadfully frightened, and so giddy that I clung to him with both hands, and said, "If you would kindly please to let me keep upright, sir, perhaps I shouldn't be sick, and perhaps I could attend more."

He gave me a most tremendous dip and roll, so that the

church jumped over its own weathercock. Then he held me by the arms in an upright position on the top of the stone, and went on in these fearful terms:

“You bring me, to-morrow morning early, that file and them wittles. You bring the lot to me at that old battery over yonder. You do it, and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning your having seen such a person as me, or any person sumever, and you shall be let to live. You fail, or you go from my words in any partickler, no matter how small it is, and your heart and your liver shall be tore out, roasted, and ate. Now, I ain’t alone, as you may think I am. There’s a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a angel. That young man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way pecooliar to himself of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. It is in wain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open. I am a-keeping that young man from harming of you at the present moment with great difficulty. I find it wery hard to hold that young man off of your inside. Now, what do you say?”

I said that I would get him the file, and I would get him what broken bits of food I could, and I would come to him at the battery, early in the morning.

“Say, Lord strike you dead if you don’t!” said the man.

I said so, and he took me down.

“Now,” he pursued, “you remember what you’ve undertook, and you remember that young man, and you get home!”

“Goo-good night, sir,” I faltered.

“Much of that!” said he, glancing about him over the cold wet flat. “I wish I was a frog. Or a eel!”

At the same time, he hugged his shuddering body in both his arms—clasping himself, as if to hold himself together—and limped towards the low church wall. As I saw him go, picking his way among the nettles, and among the brambles that bound the green mounds, he looked in my young eyes 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.