



Great Expectations

Charles Dickens

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Dickens's magnificent novel of guilt, desire, and redemption

The orphan Pip's terrifying encounter with an escaped convict on the Kent marshes, and his mysterious summons to the house of Miss Havisham and her cold, beautiful ward Estella, form the prelude to his "great expectations." How Pip comes into a fortune, what he does with it, and what he discovers through his secret benefactor are the ingredients of his struggle for moral redemption.

Great Expectations Details

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From Reader Review Great Expectations for online ebook

Chicklet says

Boring, dull, lifeless, and flat. This is so drawn out and boring I kept having to remind myself what the plot was.

Best to get someone else to sum up the story rather than undergo the torture of reading it.

Renato Magalhães Rocha says

Excuse me for this infamous pun - which I'm sure has been wearily used since the book was first published -, but I had *great expectations* about it. Not only had I never read anything by Charles Dickens - who seems to be one of those polarizing authors that continues to inspire, decade after decade, a love/hate relationship with his readers -, but also because Great Expectations is regarded as one of his most important works. For someone as anxious as myself - I should really look into that - it seems expectations and anxiety are like non-identical twins: they're born together - or just few minutes apart from each other - but while the first born is a hopeful and optimistic attitude about something to come, his younger brother denotes an unpleasant state of inner turmoil, a sensation that his good twin may never come to fruition.

I expected Dickens's text to be dark and bleak, with touches of sadness and even over-sentimental at times. More, I expected a black and white - heavy, sluggish - Béla Tarr film. Because of that, I was anxious and feared that if I wasn't in the right state of mind or in a proper setting (which is a fair feeling, I guess: it's curious how much external variables - as the rain leisurely falling outside or infuriating noises of beeps and horns in a rush hour in traffic - can have effects on our most internal sensations; it's amazing how physical can also have control over psychological and the brain isn't always the commander in chief), I wouldn't be able to properly enjoy and absorb what the novel was about.

As it turned out with Great Expectations though, I really appreciated the book (whenever and wherever I spent time with it) and actually found the story to be humorous - as I caught myself giggling on more than three or four occasions - and even have a gothic touch - which I never supposed about it. Parts of the novel - volume 2, as to be completely clear - were harder to get through, which only came to add up to my initial concern about the remaining of the book.

Divided in three volumes, the book has different paces and approaches for each one: Volume 1, as it happens with every book we're starting to read, feels slower and more descriptive. We get to observe everyone - and the places, and people's manners - like we've just arrived to a party that's been famous for years and we've been anxious to attend to, still a little shy to go around meeting and talking to the other guests. Volume 2, as important as it was to determine Pip's character - and also for covering an important part of his life and setting the stage for the final and striking act -, I must confess, dragged a little bit and added to my anxiety that while I was enjoying the book, it might not have what it takes to carry it to the next level, to a great 5 stars book - and to think it was supposed to be twice as long! Volume 3, on the other hand, has a rapid pace and is surprisingly quite a page turner! Everything unfolds and we find out that the characters and events were a lot more connected than we could ever have suspected them to be and, because it was so masterfully written, it never felt like those common and overused cheap plot twists.

I expected Pip's great expectations to fail as I resented him and I intimately cheered that he wouldn't become

a rich man because I worried he wouldn't do Joe and Biddy - always there for him, always his faithful companions - justice if his design and ambition to become a gentleman was successful. On the other hand, I never expected that Joe would turn his back when Pip needed him again, and I was glad to find out that Joe never did - it was never even an option for him.

I never expected that Pip's journey would be all about self-understanding and education: what first seemed to be a simple quest for society and financial triumph, turned out to be much deeper than I had anticipated at first. In offering Pip money, Magwitch thought he was doing his dear boy a big deed and changing his life for the better; eventually, what accomplished that was something much simpler: Magwitch's presence. Ashamed of the past - his life conditions, his friends, the house he lived in - Pip was all about living in the future, erasing his childhood and trying to write himself a future like he was writing a book - conversely, the book he ended up writing was all about his past. Ashamed of his relations with an ex-convict, initially he tried everything he could to avoid being associated with Provis, worrying about the damage it would do to his own reputation. As the story went on, Pip was able to reconnect with his past and free himself from all the shame, assuming Provis as his benefactor and fighting to save his life. Without realizing it, Pip was becoming a better person.

Like our narrator - a boy who would grow up to be a gentleman as opposed to a man who was unsuccessful for most of his life and looked down in society for being an ex-convict -, Estella is also a product of frustration, a creation of Miss Havisham: a girl who would become a heartbreaker to revenge Miss Havisham's own broken heart. It's interesting, to say the least, to follow their stories to find out if they'll be able to cut their puppets strings and become their own selves without having to comply to what was initially expected and planned for them and - as those expectations were blurred with what they wanted for themselves - unveil their free will to live on a future they could be active parts of.

There are two different endings to this story: Dickens's original intended finale and that which became the official one - although nowadays both are included in most of the editions published. On Dickens's original manuscript, Pip was to have a brief and random encounter with Estella, after being many years apart, where he would see that she had experienced sufferings in her own life and was lonely as himself:

"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."

After having his friend, also a writer, Edward Bulwer-Lytton to read the novel, he was then convinced to change the ending so it would be more romantic and not so much hopeless. The "new" ending, although being controversial for its many interpretations, implied that Pip and Estella would end up being together in some way or another - if not as lovers, at least as good friends:

"I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw the shadow of no parting from her."

Although both conclusions work and are satisfying as far as my tastes go - and both are so beautifully worded as well! -, I prefer Dickens's original ending as it seems to be more consistent with the story, also more psychologically believable and less sentimental, less "everything works out perfectly in the end".

Rating: for what I was expecting - to not say, again, "my great expectations" - have been met with acclaim and success, 5 stars.

Emily May says

“There was a long hard time when I kept far from me the remembrance of what I had thrown away when I was quite ignorant of its worth.”

I first read *Great Expectations* when I was thirteen years old. It was the first of Dickens' works that I'd read on my own volition, the only other being *Oliver Twist*, which we'd studied parts of in school. You know, I missed out on a lot when I was thirteen; by this, I mean that I didn't always understand the deeper meaning lying beneath the surface of my favourite classics. I favoured fast-paced and gritty stories and didn't understand the love for Austen (later cured). But there was something about *Great Expectations* that hit me hard on all levels and there was a deeper understanding I took from it even back then.

I should say first of all, this book makes me feel sad. Not a Lifetime movie emotionally overwrought pass-me-the-kleenex kind of sad. I have read it several times and have never once cried while reading it. But the book never fails to leave me with this **hollow feeling that things could have been so different**. When I was a kid, I often wished I could jump inside the TV and warn the good guys not to do something, stop something horrible from happening. This is that kind of book for me. All the not-knowing and mistaken assumptions that float between the characters in this novel is torture.

Some readers don't like Dickens. He's been called melodramatic and lacking in style, as well as a bunch of other things. Well, I think he's like the Stephen King of the Victorian era. He loves his drama, his characters are well-drawn but sometimes edging towards caricatures, he has a wonderful talent for painting a vivid picture of a scene in your mind but a bunch of his books are a hundred pages too long. Whatever. I love his stories. And I love his characters, especially in this book.

In *Great Expectations*, you have the orphaned Philip "Pip" Pirrip who has spent his short life being poor and being bullied by his sister who is also his guardian. You have Joe Gargery, a kind man who also allows himself to be bullied by Pip's sister (his wife). Then you have the infamous Miss Havisham who was abandoned at the altar and now spends her days wandering around her mansion in her old wedding dress, hating men and raising the young Estella to be just like her.

“You are in every line I have ever read.”

At its heart, this is a book about someone who is given an opportunity to have all their dreams come true, to be better than they ever thought they could be, to be loved by someone who they never thought would look at them. We all yearn for something badly at times; imagine having the chance to get exactly what you always wanted. Imagine becoming better and higher than you knew was possible. Imagine having all of that and then realizing that perhaps the most important thing you ever had got left behind.

Pip was always my favourite Dickens protagonist because he wants so much and I sympathise with him. I can understand why he does what he does and why he wants what he wants. But the saddest thing is that ambition can make you lose sight of other important things and Pip has a lot of hard lessons to learn along the way. It's a book that was extremely relevant to the times when social class was of utmost importance in

Britain. Essentially, the book deconstructs what it means to be a "gentlemen" and makes a not-so-subtle criticism of a class-based society.

Who are the real gentlemen? The top hat wearing men of London with all their fine china and ceremony? Pip, who gets a chance to become one of them? Or Joe Gargery, the rough-talking blacksmith who even years later tells Pip: "you and me was ever friends"?

There is a powerful lesson in here and I love it. Even after all these years.

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??????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

Μαρ?σει η γε?ση που σου αφ?νουν κ?ποια βιβλ?α στο μυαλ?.
Η μυρωδι? που πλυμμηρ?ζει την ψυχ? και την αναστατ?νει, αφ?νοντας της για π?ντα αναμν?σεις.
Η μελωδ?α που βλ?πεις να πα?ζεται μπροστ? στα μ?τια σου και να σε παρασ?ρει σε τοπ?α και μ?ρη του κ?σμου που ?σως να ε?ναι φανταστικ?, ξεχασμ?να, αλλοτιν?ς εποχ?ς, ?σως ?μως να ε?ναι τα ?δια με αυτ? που ζεις.

Μεγ?λες προσδοκ?ες, ε?ναι μοναδικ?ς στιγμ?ς που ?λα τα «μακ?ρι» γ?νονται «επιτ?λους».
Π?ντα θα λατρε?ουμε τις μεγ?λες προσδοκ?ες, μ?νο αυτ?ς αντιπροσωπε?ουν ?λες τις αμαρτ?ες που δεν ε?χαμε το θ?ρρος ? την ευκαιρ?α να κ?νουμε.

Λ?τρεψα αυτ? το κλασικ? μυθιστ?ρημα ?που τα π?ντα παρασ?ρονται στο τ?λος τους, ?πως ακριβ?ς και στην ζω? μας.

Δεν καταγρ?φονται απλ?ς τα γεγον?τα, δημιουργο?νται και παρ?γονται απο το μυαλ? του συγγραφ?α κ?τω απο συνθ?κες που θεωρε? πως ε?ναι φυσικ?ς εξελ?ξεις της ανθρ?πινης ν?ησης.
Διεισδ?ει στην πραγματικ?τητα και γρ?φει για ?λα αυτ? που ε?μαστε φτιαγμ?νοι για να ζ?σουμε και τρομ?ζουμε ?ταν τα σκεφτ?μαστε.

Μεγ?λες προσδοκ?ες.....

Αυτ? το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι μια αξεπ?ραστη καλλιτεχνικ? δημιουργ?α που φανερ?νει τη σαφ?στερη αντ?ληψη και γν?ση αυτο? που ονομ?ζεται ζω?-κ?σμος.
?χει μια δ?ναμη παρατηρητικ?τητας βαθι? και λεπτομερ?στατη που ορ?ζεται ως διαλογισμ?, ως ?να ?ργο που ξεπερν? κ?θε μορφ? εξουσ?ας ? κοινωνικ?ς αποσ?νθεσης.
Οι μεγ?λες προσδοκ?ες ?χουν τις ρ?ζες τους στις κοινωνικ?ς πραγματικ?τητες του συγγραφ?α, μα στην ουσ?α η διαχρονικ? του ανεκτ?μητη αξ?α ε?ναι η παγκ?σμια ?κκληση ερωτημ?των που θ?τει με ζητο?μενο τις προσδοκ?ες της ανθρ?πινης ψυχ?ς.

Μ?σα απο χαμ?νες προσδοκ?ες και τα κατεδαφισμ?να ?νειρα βρ?σκεται π?ντα μια ?λλη χαμ?νη ελπ?δα που ειναι ικαν? να προκαλ?σει επαν?σταση επιθυμ?ν.

Συνειδησιακ? π?λη, σκοτεινο? χαρακτ?ρες, β?α, εγκληματικ?τητα, ποιν?ς φυλ?κισης, ?νιση κοινωνικ? διαστρωμ?τωση, ορισμ?ς της ανθρ?πινης οντ?τητας με β?ση την μ?ρφωση, ορισμ?ς εκτ?μησης,τιμ?ς και αξιοπρ?πειας με β?ση την καταγωγ? και τον πλο?το.

Και ο ?ρωτας ; Ο ?ρωτας που δεν μαθα?νεται... γιατί απλ? συμβα?νει ε?ναι το βασικ? συστατικ? της ιστορ?ας μας. Ε?ναι η ενοχ?, η ψευδα?σθηση, το ?νειρο, η περιφρ?νηση, η συγχ?ρεση, η καταν?ηση, η λ?πηση, η τρυφερ?τητα, ε?ναι η πραγματικ? ουσ?α της ζω?ς.

Η διορατικ?τητα στην ανθρ?πινη φ?ση ε?ναι η δ?ναμη του ?ρωτα, μια αν?γκη για αγ?πη και π?θος, το θ?μα, ο θ?της και το θ?μα των μεγ?λων προσδοκι?ν. Η αναζ?τηση της ψυχικ?ς μεγαλοπρ?πειας και καλοσ?νης μ?σα στα σκοτ?δια των επιφανειακ?ν εντυπ?σεων και της ψε?τικής κυριαρχ?ας.

Ο Ντ?κενς μας περν?ει με την ιδιοφυ? π?να του απο τη μια κατ?σταση στην ?λλη για να αποδε?ξει πως το π?ρασμα αυτ? ικανοποιε? επιφανειακ? και αναποτελεσματικ? τις προσδοκ?ες μας. Η ?ρνηση του πραγματικο? εαυτο? μας και η απεμπ?ληση των δεσμ?ν με το παρελθ?ν μας προκαλο?ν ηθικ? φθορ? με τερ?στιο συνειδησιακ? αντ?τιμο απενοχοπο?ησης.

Η διαδρομ? της καρδι?ς προς το ?νειρο των μεγ?λων προσδοκι?ν οδηγε? σε αδι?ξοδο αν χ?σεις την ουσ?α της ζω?ς, προσπαθ?ντας να ξεφ?γεις απο τη μο?ρα.

Κι ?ταν μοιρα?α αποκαλ?πτεται η αλ?θεια ?σως ε?ναι αργ? για μεταστροφ?. Εκτιμ?με βαθι? αυτ? που χ?σαμε. Κατανοο?με πως τα χ?σαμε επειδ? δεν τα εκτιμ?σαμε.

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Καλ? αν?γνωση
Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς.

Kalliope says

LITERARY EXPECTATIONS

It is said that Satisfaction is equal to Reality minus Expectations.

I reckon then that my rating should be around Eight Stars since Reality would be Five Stars and as my Expectations were on the negative axis—with an absolute value of about three--, it has resulted in a positive eight. The Great Eight, I should anoint this book, then.

How and when were my expectations formed? If I depart on search of my forgotten memories, I think it all started with those black & white films, possibly filmed in the 1940s, watched on TV a couple of decades later and depicting bleak houses, miserable families, desolate cemeteries, poor and unhappy children. A child

horrified by cruel settings.

Then it followed a couple of encounters with the somewhat compulsory activity of reading still incomprehensible text with abstruse terms, obscure and alien meaning and unpronounceable titles. *The Pickwick Papers*... phew...!!!

That was Dickens for me. Clearly on the negative values.

Expectations were affected by my relatively recent read of *Bleak House*. The humour and the excellent construction of the plot were the reality checkers. That could have also been an exception, though.

But yet again, the humour in GE captivated me, both in some of the situations, the characterisation and the language -- with the effective use of repetitions. Yes, I also appreciated Dicken's campaign against the social injustices, the moral hypocrisies and the quagmires of the legal system of his time. But these I observed more from the box of a historian and not from the sentiments of a citizen. The world has changed too much for engaging that kind of empathy. And the somewhat caricatured characters, drawn in black and white, gained the solidity of statues. If not made of flesh they were imposing.

Full redemption was sealed when I then watched this filmed version, one of the many old versions that may have daunted me years ago...and found it delightful... and funny. My thinking of Dickens now is of a sophisticated facetious writing, and this I could now detect in the filmed version. May be the quality of the camera work, surprisingly sophisticated, as well as the excellent acting, enchanted me. No longer perceived as dreary, the old prejudices have positively been dissolved. Even the filmed version has been exorcised.

Braced with courage, I took the risk to watch a newer filmed version. This is dangerous because often modern renditions of classics which have been filmed many times, is to depart from the book and offer us an excursion into the sensational, with explicit passion and sex, and modern dialogue. Well, this 2012 production was another joy. Excellent acting and filming. But the most interesting feature was their fleshing out the somewhat caricatured characters. Modern psychology has been infused in the reasoning and motivations of the personalities, so that we understand them more. Yes, even the eccentric Miss Havisham or the much more complex Estella come across not as endearing characters thanks to their peculiarity, but as multifaceted individuals. Likelihood at the expense of the humour,-- but everything has a price.

This other version used the original ending, since Dickens changed it after his friend Edward Bulwer-Lytton advised him to do so. This was another perk of watching this excellent version.

We expect expectations to be better than reality.... It is nice when reality is the other way around.

Nayra.Hassan says

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Michael Kneeland says

My students (and some of my friends) can't ever figure out why I love this novel so much. I explain how the characters are thoroughly original and yet timeless, how the symbolism is rich and tasty, and how the narrative itself is juicy and chock-full of complexity, but they just shake their heads at me in utter amazement and say, "What's wrong with you, dude?"

What's wrong, indeed.

I give them ten or fifteen years. Perhaps they'll have to read it again in college, or maybe they'll just try reading it again as an adult to see if they can try to figure out why it's such a "classic," but after some time has passed from their initial encounter with the novel, they will find that I am not so crazy after all and that the book is in fact one of the best examples--if not *the* best example--of the novel. This happens to me all the time: I will re-read something I was forced to read in middle school and high school, remembering how much I hated it then, and will find that I actually love it now, as an adult. Sure, those "classics" may have taught me something about literary analysis, symbolic patterns, and the like, but I couldn't appreciate it for its complexity until I was older. I guess the rule of wine appreciation applies here, too: good taste only comes after much patience and experience.

Perhaps the thing I love best about this novel is the cast of characters--their names as well as their personalities. Ms. Havisham is one of my favorite characters to ever appear in all of the literature I have read. There is so much density and complexion to her character that I could literally make an entire career out of writing discourses on her characterization. She has even invaded the way I think about the world and the people I have met: I have, for instance, started referring to those instances where parents try to achieve success through their children "the Havisham effect" (unfortunately, you see this all too often in the world of teaching). Havisham's name is another exasperatingly fantastic aspect of her character: like the majority of Dickens' characters, you pretty much know what you're in for when you first read her name--she is full of lies, tricks, and deceits (or "sham"s). You don't get this sort of characterization much of anywhere else in the literary scene.

Another reason I love this novel so much is its plotting. Remember, Dickens was writing in a serialized format so he needed to keep his readers hooked so that they'd want to buy the next issue of his periodical, *All the Year Round*, in order to see what happens next. Thus, the plot of *Great Expectations* is winding, unpredictable, and quite shocking at points. Certainly, in terms of heavy action--well, what our youngsters these days would call action, fighting and big explosions and what-not--there is none, or very little at most, but that's not the thing to be looking for. Figure out the characters first, and then, once you've gotten to know and even care for them (or hate them), you will be hooked on the plot because you will want to know what happens to these people who you've invested so much feeling into. This is, of course, true of all novels, but it's what I tell my students when they read *Great Expectations* for the first time, and by gum, it's helped more than a few of them get through the novel successfully.

So, if you read *Great Expectations* in middle school, high school, or college, but haven't picked it up since, I urge you to do so. With a more patient and experienced set of eyes, you just might surprise yourself.

Matt says

Admittedly, I can be a bit dismissive of the classics. By which I mean that many of my reviews resemble a drive-by shooting. This annoys some people, if measured by the responses I'm still getting to my torching of *Moby Dick*.

Even though I should expect some blowback, I still get a little defensive. I mean, no one wants to be called a "horrendous" person just because he or she didn't like an overlong, self-indulgent, self-important "epic" about a douche-y peg leg and a stupid whale.

I'm no philistine. I console myself with the belief that I have relatively decent taste. For instance, I don't listen to *Nickelback*; I read the *New Yorker*; and I haven't seen an Adam Sandler film in theaters since *Punch-Drunk Love*. Hating Melville does not make me a backwater provincial, drunk on Boone's Farm, Ken Follett novels, and the cinema of Rob Schneider.

Indeed, I have two principled reasons for not liking many certified classics. Strike that. I have one paranoid reason, and one semi-principled reason.

The paranoid first.

Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to read so many so-called classics? From the endless torments of Dostoyevsky to the prodigious length of Tolstoy to the impenetrability or weirdness of Joyce, Faulkner or Pynchon, the world's great novels seem needlessly excruciating.

I think it's a conspiracy. A conspiracy of English majors and literature majors and critics all over the globe. These individuals form an elitist guild; like all guilds and licensing bodies, their goal is to erect barriers to entry. In this case, the barriers to entry are *Finnegan's Wake* and *In Search of Lost Time*. This snooty establishment has elevated the most dense, inscrutable works to exalted status, ensuring that the lower classes stay where they belong: in the checkout aisle with *Weekly World News* and *Op Center* novels.

Isn't it possible that the only reasons the classics are classic is because "they" tell us they're classic? What if they are wrong? More frightening, what if I'm right? Isn't it possible that all the "greatest" novels in history actually suck? Am I the only one who thinks it possible that true greatness lies within *Twilight*? I am? Okay, moving on.

My principled objection to various classic novels is that I love reading, and have loved to read from an early age (I also loved to complain from an early age). To that end, classics are the worst thing to ever happen to literature, with the exception of Dan Brown. Every drug dealer and fast-food marketer knows that you have to hook kids early in life. Forcing students to consume classics too soon is akin to the neighborhood dope peddler handing out asparagus and raw spinach. The problem is worst in high schools, where English teachers seem intent on strangling any nascent literary enjoyment in the crib. At a fragile time in a young person's life, a heaping dose of Homer (not Simpson) can be enough to break a reading habit for life.

At least, that was my experience. I first came across Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* when it was assigned my freshman year of high school. It was a confusing time, caught between lingering childhood (I still had toys in my room) and emerging adulthood (by the end of the year I'd get my drivers' license). Even though I'd been a voracious reader, it had always been on my own terms. When my teacher tried to shove Dickens down my throat, I started to lose interest in the written word, and gain interest in the girls on the cheerleading chess team.

Thankfully, I regained my joy of reading, but it wasn't until I graduated from law school. At that time, I decided to go back and read all the stuff that was assigned in high school, that I'd either skimmed over or ignored completely. *Great Expectations* was one of the first classics to which I returned. Returned with a shudder, I might add.

First off, it wasn't as bad as I remembered. Heck, I liked it even. So there. Save your hate mail. I do not come here to condemn Dickens, merely to damn him with faint praise.

In many ways, *Great Expectations* is prototypical Dickens: it is big and sprawling; it is told in the first person by a narrator who often seems resoundingly dull; it is peopled with over-eccentric supporting characters with unlikely names; and its labyrinthine structure and unspooling digressions defy ordinary plot resolutions. This is not a book that is getting to a sole point; rather, it's more the tale of a boy's life, with few details withheld. It also limps to an unsatisfactory ending (one of two endings, actually, since Dickens couldn't make up his mind) that brings to mind the hastily reshot finale to the Jennifer Aniston/Vince Vaughn movie, *The Break-Up*.

The central character, the first person narrator, is an orphan (surprise!) named Pip. He lives with his mean sister and saintly husband, Joe (the simplest named of all Dickens' creations). This small, unhappy family (Pip's sister is forever peeved at the burden of taking care of her younger brother) live in the marshes,

vividly described by Dickens as a cold, creeping, lunar landscape, where prisoners rot in offshore prison hulks, and cannons boom to raise the drowned.

It was a rimy morning, and very damp. I had seen the damp lying on the outside of my little window, as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief. Now I saw the damp lying on the bare hedges and spare grass, like a coarser sort of spiders' webs, hanging itself from twig to twig and blade to blade. On every rail and gate, wet lay clammy, and the marsh-mist was so thick that the wooden finger on the post directing people to our village – a direction which they never accepted, for they never came there – was invisible to me until I was quite close under it. Then, as I looked up at it, while it dripped, it seemed to my oppressed conscience like a phantom devoting me to the Hulks.

Pip's conscience is oppressed because of his Christmastime meeting with an escaped convict named Magwitch. Pip helps Magwitch out of his shackles, and steals him a pie and some brandy. Later, Magwitch is recaptured, though Pip remains fearful that his role in the attempted escape will be discovered.

Later, young Pip is taken to the home of the wealthy old Miss Havisham, to play with her adopted daughter, Estella. Miss Havisham, of course, is one of Dickens' most famous creations. She was left at the altar as a younger woman, and now whiles away her days in her crumbling wedding dress, all the clocks in her house stopped at 8:40. Miss Havisham's sole delight seems to be in Estella's cruel treatment of poor Pip. Nevertheless, Pip falls in love with Estella.

Eventually, Miss Havisham pays Joe for Pip's services, and Pip returns to the marshes as a blacksmithing apprentice. Once, Pip found Joe's profession to be honorable. Now, however, after all of Estella's scornful jibes, Pip finds the work beneath his dignity. This begins the long period of insufferable Pip, who will constantly struggle to rise above his station, while simultaneously racking up debts and alienating the people who truly love him.

At some point, Pip is approached by Mr. Jaggers, a cunning lawyer with many clients who end up at the end of a noose (he also has a compulsive propensity towards hand-washing). Jaggers informs Pip that he has a benefactor, and that this benefactor has "great expectations" for Pip. To receive his money, Pip is told he must travel to London, become a gentleman, and retain his name. Pip does so, believing all the while that his benefactor is Miss Havisham.

If there is a spine to this book, a central narrative thread, it is Pip's pursuit of the lovely, acidic Estella. To this end, Pip acts poorly in society, goes in hock to his creditors, and spars with Bentley Drummle for Estella's affections. Of course, this being a Dickens novel, there is a lot more swirling about.

Everywhere you look, there are colorful satellite characters who seem all the more lively for orbiting Pip. (Though unlikeable at times, Pip is mostly dull. Mainly, I attribute this to the first-person narrative. It is easy to look out onto the world, and harder to look inward. Thus, Pip is better at dramatizing the people he meets than in understanding himself). One of the typical Dickensian eccentrics Pip encounters is John Wemmick, a clerk for Mr. Jaggers. Wemmick lives in a house modeled after a castle and has a father, "The Aged P," who has an affinity for firing off a cannon. There is also Herbert Pocket, who becomes friends with Pip, even though their relationship begins with near-fisticuffs. Pocket comes from a huge, dysfunctional family, that Dickens describes with apparent glee.

Though *Great Expectations* is not as long as *David Copperfield* or *Bleak House*, it sprawls enough to cause confusion. Character lists may become necessary. Of course, Dickens hates randomness, and it is worth bearing in mind that most of the people you meet, even the secondary personages, will tie back into the main story. In Dickens' London, everybody knows everybody else, and all are ruled by the Gods of Coincidence.

Great Expectations involves a bit of a twist. I won't assume you know the substance of this twist, the way Pip assumes the identity of his benefactor, so I will not spoil it. (If it is possible to spoil something published in 1861).

I feel like I have a hit-and-miss relationship with Dickens' work. Usually, I'm a fan of big, messy epics. The bigger and messier the better. However, with regards to Dickens, I've found that I like his shorter, more economical stories (*A Tale of Two Cities*, *A Christmas Carol*) to his bursting-at-the-seams behemoths.

I think this has something to do with payoff. Usually, when you read a novel, it moves towards some sort of climax, a set piece of action or emotional upheaval and resolution. With Dickens, though, you are moving towards a lesson. He was a great moralizer and critic, and he used his novels as a canvas on which to make his points.

Great Expectations is no exception. It is a homily directed at a Victorian England stratified by class and family background, where station was defined even more by lineage than by wealth. Against this backdrop, young Pip goes out into the world, abandons his family and faithful old Joe, makes horribly inaccurate judgments about people, and finally learns that there is no place like home.

That's all well and good, but not much of a reward for the days or weeks you devote to *Great Expectations*, especially when you can learn the same thing after two hours of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Bionic Jean says

Great Expectations. What a superb title this is; wonderful, in the best and truest sense of the word. It is upbeat, exciting, and full of intrigue. It quickens our pulse and gives us a little thrilling frisson. Who is it, who has these "Great Expectations"? We want to meet them. We want to share their anticipations and their pleasure. We are hooked into the story by these first two words.

Perhaps most significant of all is that it is a short, memorable title. **Great Expectations** is one of Charles Dickens's latest novels, his thirteenth in fact, serialised weekly, in his newspaper "*All the Year Round*" in nine monthly sections between December 1860 and August 1861. It was also serialised in the US – oddly a few days before - and on the continent. Then Dickens's publishers, Chapman and Hall, published the first edition in book form in three volumes in 1861, with five subsequent reprints, and a one-volume edition in 1862. Sadly Dickens had quarrelled with his great friend and illustrator Hablot Knight Browne, "Phiz", so there are none of his quirky and instantly recognisable illustrations. The silver lining in this cloud is that there are a plethora of illustrations by other artists, both contemporaneous and later. They vary from the absurd, clearly mimicking Phiz's caricatures, to increasingly ghastly ghouls, and stuffed shirt heroes. Some are darkly effective, capturing the gothic mood, but others make the reader yearn for Phiz's perception and insightful eye.

Dickens was only to write more novel, "*Our Mutual Friend*", plus an unfinished one, aptly named "*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*" (a mystery never to be solved, although plenty have tried).

By now Dickens was a master of his craft. He had abandoned the lengthy titles, which sometimes took up half a page and which are rarely used in full. He had also learned, wisely, that his public liked optimism. Other short titles such as "*Hard Times*" and "*Bleak House*" had preceded this one, but they reek of Victorian deprivation and hardship. They do not attract us in the same way, nor are they timeless in appeal, whereas the title **Great Expectations** could have been coined yesterday.

In other ways too this novel stands head and shoulders above some of the others which precede it. Dickens always had an eye to his popularity, and whereas "*Bleak House*" may well be his greatest novel, it is not, and has never been, his most popular. It is so weighty that it is in danger of toppling over, and many readers struggle with the complexity of it. There are several interwoven plots, and although it contains some of his finest writing, Dickens makes few concessions to those who prefer one strong thread to follow. Conversely **Great Expectations** has a streamlined plot which moves along at a good pace. We are mesmerised by the forceful characters, and crave desperately to unravel the mysteries. It could be argued that of Dickens's novels, **Great Expectations** makes the greatest use of plot, characterisation and style, sacrificing a little of the dense maze of "*Bleak House*"'s annals for more urgency, a simpler story focus, and a strong sense of direction.

In **Great Expectations** Dickens returns to one of his favourite themes: the story of a young man, and how he grows and learns through his various experiences. It is at heart a bildungsroman, or "coming of age" story. Some of the best loved novels by Dickens follow this format, for instance, "*David Copperfield*", "*Nicholas Nickleby*" and most notably, the hugely popular rags-to-riches story, "*Oliver Twist*". Yet the difference in execution between these two is startling.

"*Oliver Twist*" is recognisably an early work by Dickens and has all his idiosyncratic features. It has a myriad of cameos, both comic and grotesque. It has a strong social conscience, humour, and tragedy. But it also has all the faults of a young writer fully on display. It is overful of hyperbole, with a cardboard hero who is well nigh a saint. It is overwritten. We are shocked at the social conditions, but swayed by the pathos rather than by the author's writing skills. By the time of his autobiographical novel, "*David Copperfield*", Dickens had honed his skills. In fact before embarking on **Great Expectations** he reread "*David Copperfield*", fearing that he might unintentionally repeat himself.

With **Great Expectations** Dickens has reached his pinnacle. He has written a novel full of heartbreak and obsessions of various kinds, and the reader is putty in his hands. He has learned to control his expostulations; his declamatory outbursts, his overt theatricality, and therefore has written a much more gripping and persuasive novel.

This is a novel with everything you could want. There is adventure, excitement, horror and passion. There is madness and vast wealth beyond imagination, and a benefactor who is to remain mysterious until the denouement. There are vicious crimes, wife-beating and murders, duplicity and depravity, malicious cruelty, and characters crazed by love and obsession. There is humour, ridicule, absurdity - and overwhelming sadness and grief. It is, in short, a perfect Dickens novel. It is a gothic masterpiece. You will thrill to the horrors of Satis House and its half-crazed inhabitant. You will despair at the ineptitude of the hero, blinded by his passion for a young woman whose heart has been turned to stone. You will cry for the nobility of the steadfast Joe, wanting nothing for himself; only wanting to do what is right.

The central character is Pip, Philip Pirrip, plagued by his feelings of inferiority at his thick boots and coarse

hands. He desires wealth and status, and for some part of the novel it looks as if he might be groomed for this. We do not have much compassion for Pip. He seems an insensitive, selfish and self-centred brat of a boy, for more than half the novel. Once destined to become a gentleman, Pip becomes increasingly arrogant and embarrassed by what he sees as his humble origins - and unforgivably casts off the man who had been his protector. We wonder how he will ever become the Dickens hero we feel he must inevitably become. For Dickens's novels are not tragedies, although they have tragic elements among the mix. The deserving are usually rewarded in the end, and the cruel, wicked or manipulative characters usually suffer an ignominious fate. Dickens liked to please his readers; to make them feel life was as it should be. It reassured them that however messy their own lives were, things would work out alright for the heroic characters they had been reading about and championing in their newspapers, for over a year.

Is this then an exception? Do we have a "bad boy"; an anti-hero against the usual Dickens type? The answer is no. Dickens, once more, has used his skill and created a superb subtly layered novel. The novel is straightforward in its time frame, with events moving forward logically, except where there is some reported history which is usually crucial to move the story along, by one of the characters. But in among the intrigue and the action, we hear the voices of three Pips, and occasionally an omniscient narrator (and occasionally even Dickens himself, when he cannot resist giving an opinion or two, or poking fun at one of his creations).

Five voices? Surely then, it must be hard to read? And again, the answer is no. It moves seamlessly between the voices, yet they add a richness and depth. We know that Pip is to become a deserving character; an upright young man. And we know this because we see him there on the page, in every word that he narrates. We see the characters through his eyes, and we gain a full picture of them. We see the young boy's impressions, doubts and fears; the older boy's vanity, shallow ambitions and intolerance, and we see the older, wiser Philip Pirrip, now grown into his full name and maturity, and reporting as truthfully as he can on the vagaries of his youth.

And the story he has to tell thrills us. Dickens himself referred to it as "*a grotesque tragicomic conception*". It is unbelievably grotesque and riddled with gloom, full of coincidences, with highly exaggerated vivid characters, yet we believe every word, and are compelled to keep turning the page. We soak up the darkly terrifying descriptions, and the ominous sense of place. We wonder - surely these places could not exist. Nor the characters? But yes, they could, and yes, sometimes they did.

Great Expectations begins in a churchyard where Pip's family is buried, and where he is to have a devastating meeting with someone who strikes terror into his very soul. The churchyard is based on a desolate church in the village of Cooling, lying out among the marshes seven miles from "*Gads Hill*", Dickens's family home at that time. He describes Cooling Castle ruins and the marshes evocatively, imbuing the narrative with dark foreboding and menace. The young Pip, visiting his family's graves, is very close to Dickens's heart. As a young child himself, between the ages of 5 and 11, he had lived in Chatham, and this is only a couple of miles away from Cooling. In fact this is when he first admired "*Gads Hill*", the house he was later to buy. These descriptions were all transcribed from memory – complete with the young child's terror at the stark scene, the unforgiving bleak marshes, the sea, the swirling mists, wind and rain, the beacon of distant light, and the gibbet and chains.

These early scenes are very ghoulish, for instance as the stranger threatens to cut out Pip's heart and liver, but they exemplify the morbid relish Dickens excels in. They are a perfect example of black humour, because the events are described from a child's point of view, as he is almost petrified with fear. Even the tombstones of Pip's siblings, the "*five little stone lozenges*", is a light-hearted reference to something common enough, but really full of pathos and tragedy. Cooling churchyard actually contains not just five but thirteen child graves all together, from two families in the village who were related. Perhaps Dickens -

unusually - toned this down, for fear of scepticism on the part of his readers.

Pip is brought up by his termagant of a sister, full of bitterness and self-inflicted martyrdom, knocking her husband Joe's head against the wall or banging Pip's head like a tambourine with her thimble. She is proud of having brought Pip up "*by hand*" - such a sarcastic double-edged phrase - making copious use of "*the Tickler*" - such a gentle name for something which was capable of inflicting a great deal of pain! The lively and caustic descriptions make us smile, although the smile may well be a rueful grimace. Joe Gargery's forge, incidentally, where Pip lives with them both, really exists. It is located at Chalk village in Kent. Dickens and his wife Catherine had stayed there on their honeymoon in 1836.

What about the historical facts; are they accurate? The answer is mostly, yes, although some dramatic license has been taken with the timing. Convicts in Britain were not actually sent to America any more at the time of **Great Expectations**. It had stopped in 1776, and after then they were sent to Australia. It is estimated that 140,000 criminals were transported to Australia between 1810 and 1852 and this is 8 years before this novel was published. Transportation was abolished in 1857, but was as the novel says, for life. If a convict ever returned to Britain, they were hanged (by law, until 1834), even though the original offences were sometimes quite minor by modern standards.

Dickens was also particular as to detail. There are two exciting and dramatic river scenes in the book, one at the beginning in the marshes, and an echo of it as the novel rushes headlong along the river to its climax. Dickens wanted to ensure that his description of the course of the boat was authentic under these conditions. In order to make absolutely sure, and perhaps explore further possibilities, he hired a steamer for the day of 22nd May 1861. The route was from Blackwall to Southend. Accompanying him on board were eight or nine friends, and also three or four members of his family. They all assumed Dickens was enjoying a relaxed summer day out, as he entertained them as usual. But in truth, his mind was working overtime, keenly observing and noticing every single detail. Nothing escaped his attention, as he made a mental note of what happened on each side of the river during the course of their journey.

The vast edifice, "*Satis House*", home of the decrepit and grief-stricken Miss Havisham, was based on "*Restoration House*" in Rochester, Kent. Charles II had stayed there on his return to England in 1660, restoring the English monarchy after Oliver Cromwell. Dickens turned it into a crumbling ruin, full of cobwebs (and their menacing lurkers), rats and dust. The only light to be seen is Estella, the "star", either as herself, or by the candle she bears amidst the gloom. Yet even now you can visit "*Restoration House*" if you choose, and marvel at how it was transformed into a temple of filth, ruin and chaos, rotten with decay and perversion, an almost living presence, when the master magician Dickens wove his spell.

So we see chapter and verse about the places. They do exist, yet the view of them here is unique and powerful, seen through Dickens's eyes. We also know that he often liked to include people he knew in his novels, sometimes in homage, but with notorious or famous celebrities of his time, it was more often to poke fun at them. Are there any such in **Great Expectations**. Certainly there are, yes. Just think of the most likely character, the most over-the-top grotesque imaginable. Are you thinking of Miss Havisham, crazed by her grief and loss (view spoiler)? For, incredibly, she is based on a real person.

She is very probably based on Eliza Emily Donnithorne of Camperdown, Sydney, Australia. Miss Donnithorne was a recluse and an eccentric. (view spoiler)

At the time of writing this novel, Dickens was 48 to 49 years of age. His domestic life was in tatters, as it had rapidly gone downhill in the late 1850s, and he had now separated from his wife, Catherine. He was having a secret affair with an actress, the much younger Ellen Ternan, who could well be the basis for the character of

Estella.

During the writing of *Great Expectations*, Dickens went on tour, reading and acting out parts of his immensely popular novels. In March and April 1861 alone, he gave six public readings. More like performances, they were very successful in every way, but it took a terrible toll on his health.

There are so many ways of sharing reactions to this novel. I have just tried to give a few here. You will find unforgettable characters here, as in all Dickens's novels. You will laugh at Crabb's boy's antics and Uncle Pumblechook's absurd pomposity. You will loathe the brutish bully, Bentley Drummle and the sly lazy Orlick. You will be in fear and awe of Abel Magwitch, and also, in a different way, of Mr Jaggers, the Old Bailey lawyer. Clever and sharp, "*putting a case*" but never admitting anything, he remains clinically dispassionate to the last, forever and literally, like Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of the dirty business he had to follow.

You may learn to love his clerk, the kind-hearted Wemmick, with his "*postbox*" of a mouth, his insistence of the value of "*portable property*", and keeping a nice distinction between home life and business life; not to mention the "*aged P*", nodding away enthusiastically. Both of these provide some much-needed light relief, in their fortified miniature haven, away from the throng and bustle of the avaricious, mercantile, heartless capital, with its filth, grime and squalor. Wemmick says one may get "*cheated, robbed, or murdered in London*".

Such affectionate portraits, these. There is Pip's true friend, the "*pale young gentleman*" Herbert Pocket, and his hilariously feckless family; loyal to a fault, but hopelessly impractical, and at a loss to organise their lives. Herbert is so good-natured; the scenes where he demonstrates how to behave in polite society are a delight. Immediately saying that he and Pip are harmonious, he asks if he might call him Handel, because of the "*charming piece of music, by Handel, called the Harmonious Blacksmith*". Herbert uses the words "*dear*" and "*good*" whenever he refers to Pip, and is genial, frank, friendly, and decent, which Pip has rarely seen.

Perhaps you will admire quiet Biddy and her simple wisdom, seeing far and away more than any other character, or sturdy Joe, the salt of the earth, who offered Pip unconditional love and friendship, and taught him life's true values. Perhaps you too will be besotted with haughty, beautiful Estelle, who unknown to both Pip and herself is equally a puppet, or cry at the hopelessness of Miss Havisham's situation, driven half-mad by her obsession and surrounded by sycophantic relatives.

Whenever I see people refer to Dickens's simpering women, I think of the myriad of strong female characters such as she, or Pip's demonic whirlwind of a sister, who was "*always on the rampage*", or the venomously vindictive Madame Defarge from "*A Tale of Two Cities*", or the duplicitous lady's maid Hortense in "*Bleak House*", who was based on a real life murderess, or Nancy, the tragic prostitute in "*Oliver Twist*". And there are many, many more. Dickens's novels are packed with strong women, both good and bad. It is merely that Dickens conformed to the Victorian ideal of female goodness for his heroines. They were to be virtuous, competent, intelligent and compliant, and these are not seen as quite such admirable qualities in the present century.

No, **Great Expectations** is peopled with characters I am always sad to leave, as I turn the final page. Each time I read it I feel despair, horror and joy in equal measure, and surprised in such a novel to find I burst out laughing at some ridiculous aside or eccentric cameo I had forgotten. Each time I am completely taken up in the twists and turns; one plot twist close to the end will take your breath away when you first learn it. It feels so right, yet Dickens manages to conceal it all the way through. This is a novel where the intrigue is laced

throughout. I defy you to guess the ending, should it not be already familiar to you.

Do you want a happy ending for young Pip? He does have one, of sorts. But Dickens was still not satisfied that it was acceptable, after his friend, the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton had said it was too sad, so he wrote an alternative couple of paragraphs at the end, slightly changing its course, and leaving it deliberately vague. The original ending was not revealed until after his death, when his mentor and biographer John Forster wrote of it. Many critics do prefer the original darker ending, as being more in keeping with the dark nature of the story. Perhaps you may prefer the Victorian rewrite however, and to imagine a more upbeat and better future for our young hero. Most editions print the original ending afterwards, so the choice is yours.

But please, if you have never read this novel, make sure you leave a place for it in your reading life. I am sure you won't regret it.

“We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I.”

“Wot larks Pip ol' chap, wot larks!”

Bookdragon Sean says

"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."

That is such a quote. If there was ever a novel that shows us the dangers of false perceptions then it's *Great Expectations*. Pip is such a fool; he constantly misjudges those around him, and he constantly misjudges his own worth. This has lead him down a road of misery because the person who held the highest expectations for Pip was Pip himself. But, in spite of this, Pip does learn the error of his ways and becomes a much better person, though not before hurting those that have the most loyalty to him.

The corrupting power of money is strong through this novel

The money Pip received clouds his vision completely. He, in his innocence, longed to be a gentleman, but when he has the chance he forgets everything thing he is. In his self-imposed aggrandisement he can only deduce that his money came from a source of respectability; his limited capacity has determined that only he, a gentleman, could receive money from a worthy source. But, what he perceives as respectable is the problem. Indeed, Dickens contrasts societies' gentleman (created through social station) with the true gentleman of the age who may, or may not, have any money. Pip has falsely perceived that to be a gentleman one must have money, and must have the social graces that comes with it. However, this is far from the truth as Pip later learns. He thinks Joe is backward and ungentlemanly, but Joe, in reality, is more of a gentle man than Pip could ever be.

In this, he has forgotten his roots and his honest, if somewhat rough, upbringing. He has been tainted by money and the rise in class that came with it. I think if he never received the allowance he would have eventually been happy at the forge. He may have sulked for a year or two, but, ultimately, he would have got over himself as he does eventually do. The money gave him hope; it gave him a route in which he could seek his Estella. Without the money he would have realised she was, in fact, unobtainable regardless of his class;

he would have moved on and got on with his life. But, that wouldn't have made for a very interesting novel.

Pip's journey of morale regeneration is the key

Indeed, Pip wouldn't have learnt a thing. Through the correcting of his perceptions he learns the value of loyalty and simple human kindness. This changes him and he is, essentially, a much better person for it. He learns the errors of his ways, and how shameful and condescending his behaviour has been to those that hold him most dear, namely Joe. You can feel the pain in his narration as he tells the last parts of his story; it becomes clear that Pip could never forgive himself for his folly. He wishes forgiveness from those that love him that's why he forgives Havisham, but I don't think he fully deserves it. He is repentant, but the damage is done.

Heaven knows we never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of the earth, overlaying our hard hearts.

Pip's morale regeneration was a necessary facet for the brilliance of this work. It creates an ending that, for me, was perfect. It is not the ending that Pip thought he would get, but it is the ending this novel deserved. Pip's morale regeneration and revelations are just not enough to offset the past. He has grown but, like Havisham, cannot turn back the clocks. The ending Joe receives signifies this; he, as one of the only true gentleman of the novel, receives his overdue happiness. Whereas Pip is destined to spend the rest of his life in a state of perpetual loneliness, he, most certainly, learnt his lesson the hard way.

"Suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but - I hope - into a better shape.

Anguish is in equal measures

Pip's story though, ultimately, sad is not the most woe begotten of the character stories in this novel. Abel Magwitch and Miss Havisham are two incredibly miserable individuals because life has really got them down. Havisham is the caricature of the spinster; she is stuck in the past (quarter to nine to be precise) and is unable to move on; she has turned bitter and yellow; she has imposed herself to perpetual agony. Despite her harshness and venom there is a flicker of light within her soul that Pip unleashes. For me, she is the most memorable, and well written, character in this novel because her story transcends that of Pip's.

And then there is the lovable Abel Magwitch. The poor man had been used and cheated; he had been bargained away and sacrificed. He has been shown no kindness in his life and when he meets a young Pip in the marshes he is touched by the small measure of friendship the boy offers him. His response: to repay that debt, with what he believes to be kindness, in turn. These characters are incredibly memorable and harbour two tragic and redemptive stories. But, in order to display their anguish to the world and society, they both use another to exact their revenge. Havisham uses Estella to break the hearts of men, like hers was once broken; Magwitch creates his "own" gentleman as a revenge to the world of gentleman that betrayed him.

I love *Great Expectations*. It is more than just a story of love; it is a strong story about the power of loyalty

and forgiveness; it is a story about falsehoods and misperceptions; it is a story of woe and deeply felt sadness: it is about how the folly of youth can alter your life for ever. It is an extraordinary novel. I've now read it three times, and I know I'm not finished with yet.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose had shrunk to skin and bone."

How do you do Miss Havisham? She makes many lists of the twenty greatest characters from Dicken's novels.

I hadn't ever met Miss Havisham officially, although I knew of her. I have heard of her circumstances, discussed her in English Literature classes, and even referenced her in a paper. She is a tragic figure tinged with true insanity; and yet, someone in complete control of her faculties when it comes to talking about HER money. She was jilted at the altar and like a figure from mythology she is suspended in time. She wears her tattered wedding dress every day and sits among the decaying ruins of her wedding feast.

We meet our hero Pip when in an act of charity born more of fear than goodwill he provides assistance to a self-liberated convict named Abel Magwitch. It was a rather imprudent thing to do similar to one of us picking up a hitchhiker in an orange jumpsuit just after passing a sign that says **Hitchhikers in this area may be escaped inmates**. Little does he know, but this act of kindness will have a long term impact on his life.

Pip and the Convict.

Pip is being raised by his sister, an unhappy woman who expresses her misery with harsh words and vigorous smacks. *"Tickler was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame."* She also browbeats her burly blacksmith husband Joe into submission. Mr Pumblechook, Joe's Uncle, is always praising the sister for doing her proper duty by Pip. *"Boy, be forever grateful to all friends, but especially unto them which brought you up by hand!"* In other words she didn't spare the rod or the child. Mr. Pumblechook is one of those annoying people who is always trying to gain credit for anyone's good fortune. He intimates that he was the puppet master pulling the strings that allowed that good fortune to find a proper home. Later when Pip finds himself elevated to gentleman's status Pumblechook is quick to try and garner credit for brokering the deal.

Things become interesting for Pip when is asked to be a play companion of Miss Havisham's adopted daughter Estella. The girl is being trained to be the architect of Miss Havisham's revenge...on all men. She is the brutal combination of spoiled, beautiful, and heartless. She wants Pip to fall in love with her to provide a training ground for exactly how to keep a man in love with her and at the same time treat him with the proper amount of disdain.

As Pip becomes more ensnared in Estella's beauty Miss Havisham is spurring him on.

"Love her, love her, love her! If she favors you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces,— and as it gets older and stronger it will tear deeper,— love her, love her, love her!" Never had I seen such passionate.

Estella, the weapon of man's destruction, walking with Pip.

Pip is fully aware of the dangers of falling in love with Estella, but it is almost impossible to control the heart when it begins to beat faster. *"Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it."* His hopes, almost completely dashed that he will ever have a legitimate opportunity to woo Estella properly are buoyed by the knowledge of a benefactor willing to finance his rise to gentleman status. No chance suddenly becomes a slim chance.

Pip is not to know where these **great expectations** are coming from, but he assumes it is Miss Havisham as part of her demented plans for exacting revenge by using Estella to break his heart. He is willing to be the patsy for her plans because some part of him believes he can turn the tide of Estella's heart if he can find one beating in her chest.

"You must know," said Estella, condescending to me as a brilliant and beautiful woman might, "that I have no heart,— if that has anything to do with my memory."

The book is of course filled with Dickensonian descriptions of the bleaker side of Victorian society.

"We entered this haven through a wicket-gate, and were disgorged by an introductory passage into a melancholy little square that looked to me like a flat burying-ground. I thought it had the most dismal trees in it, and the most dismal sparrows, and the most dismal cats, and the most dismal houses (in number half a dozen or so), that I had ever seen."

As I was reading the book it felt like the plot suddenly sped up from a leisurely world building pace that permeates most Dickens novels to the final laps of an Indy 500 race. I was not surprised to discover that Dickens had intended this novel to be twice as long, but due to contractual obligations with the serialization of the novel Dickens found himself in a quandary. He had a much larger story percolating in his head, but simply out of room to print it. Nothing drives a reader crazier than knowing that this larger concept was realized, but never committed to paper.

The rest of Great Expectations exists only in the lost dreams of Dickens.

Pip is a willing victim; and therefore, not a victim because he fully realized that Miss Havisham was barking mad, and that Estella had been brainwashed into being a sword of vengeance. He was willing to risk having his heart wrenched from his body and dashed into the sea for a chance that Estella would recognize that happiness could be obtained if she would only forsake her training.

Pip like most young men of means spent more than his stipend allowed and as debts mount he is more and more anxious to learn of his benefactor's intentions. It will not be what he expects and provides a nice twist to the novel. There are blackguards, adventures, near death experiences, swindlers, agitations both real and imagined, and descriptions that make the reader savor the immersion in the black soot and blacker hearts of Victorian society. Better late than never, but I now have more than a nodding acquaintance with Miss Havisham, Pip, and the supporting cast. They will continue to live in my imagination for the rest of my life.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Stephen says

Great Expectations...were **formed**...were **met**...and were thoroughly **exceeded**!

The **votes** have been **tallied**, all doubts have been **answered** and it is **official** and in the **books** ...I am a **full-fledged**, foaming **fanboy** of **Sir Dickens** and sporting a massive **man-crush** for literature's master **story-teller***.

**Quick Aside: My good friend Richard who despises "Chuckles the Dick" is no doubt having a conniption as he reads this...deep breaths, Richard, deep breaths.*

After love, love, loving *A Tale of Two Cities*, I went into this one with, you guessed it [insert novel title] and was nervous and wary of a serious let down in my sophomore experience with Dickens. Silly me, there was zero reason for fear and this was even more enjoyable than I had hoped. Not quite as standing ovation-inducing as *A Tale of Two Cities*, but that was more a function of the subject matter of *A Tale of Two Cities* being more attractive to me.

PLOT SUMMARY:

Here Dickens tells the story of the growth and development of young Philip Pirrip ("Pip") who begins his life as an orphan, neglected and abused, by his sister (Mrs. "Joe" Gargery). *"I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born, in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends."* Through a series of chance encounters, Pip rises above his disadvantaged beginnings to become a gentleman in every sense of the word. Pip's journey is not a straight line and his strength of character and inner goodness are not unwavering, but, in the end, they shine through and he the better for it.

THOUGHTS & GUSHINGS:

Dickens prose is the essence of engaging and his humor is both sharp and subtle and sends warm blasts of happy right into my cockles.

My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbors because she had brought me up "by hand." Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.

In addition to his ability to twist a phrase and infuse it with clever, dry wit, Dickens is able to bring similar skill across the entire emotional range. When he tugs on the heart-strings, he does so as a maestro plucks the violin and you will feel played and thankful for the experience.

For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy

through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe.

...

We spent as much money as we could, and got as little for it as people could make up their minds to give us. We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition. There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did. To the best of my belief, our case was in the last aspect a rather common one.

Dickens never bashes over the head with the emotional power of his prose. In fact, it is the quiet, subtle method of his delivery of the darker emotions that make them so powerful.

Okay...okay...I'll stop on the prose. I think I've made my point that I love his writing.

Combine his polished, breezy verse with his seemingly endless supply of memorable characters that is his trademark and you have the makings of a true classic...which this happens to be. There are so many unique, well drawn characters in this story alone that it is constantly amazing to me that he was able to so regularly populate his novels with such a numerous supply. To name just a few, Great Expectations gives us:

- the wealthy and bitter Miss Havisham,
- the good-hearted but often weak social climbing main character Pip,
- the good-hearted criminal Magwitch,

- the truly evil and despicable Orlick and Drummle,

- the virtuous, pillar of goodness "Joe" Gargery
- the abusive, mean-spirited, never-to-be-pleased Mrs. Joe Gargery,
- the cold and unemotional Estella,
- the officious, money-grubbing Mr. Pumblechook, and
- the iconic Victorian businessman Mr. Jaggers.

It's a veritable panoply of distinct personalities, each with their own voice and their own part to play in this wonderful depiction of life in 19th Century London.

The only criticism I have for the book is that I tend to agree with some critics that the original "sadder" ending to the story was better and more in keeping with the rest of the narrative. However, as someone who doesn't mind a happy ending, especially with characters I have come to truly care for, that is a relatively minor gripe.

4.5 to 5.0 stars. HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS!!!

P.S. A few bonus quotes that I thought were too good not to share:

Pip: *"In a word, I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong."*

Joe to Pip: *"If you can't get to be uncommon through going straight, you'll never get to do it through going crooked."*

Henry Avila says

A young, amiable boy Philip Pirrip with the unlikely nickname of Pip, lives with his older, by twenty years, brutal, (no motherly love, that's for sure) unbalanced married sister, Georgiana, his only relative which is very unfortunate, strangely the only friend he has is Joe, his brother-in-law . She, the sister, beats him regularly for no apparent reason, so the boy understandably likes to roam the neighborhood for relief, thinking about pleasant things, the dreams of escape...anything is better than home. One night while visiting the graves of his parents, a desperate, fugitive convict finds him, and threatens the boy in the dark, disquieting, neglected churchyard cemetery, the quite terrified juvenile fears death , the man , a monster in his eyes... he complies with the demands... Pip provides the criminal with food, stealing from his sister but always with the threat of discovery and vicious punishment, the whipping, he knows will follow . Later this has surprising consequences in the future when Pip becomes older, if not wiser. An unexpected invite from the eccentric, man -hating Miss Havisham the riches person in the area, (who is nuttier than a Fruitcake) changes Pip prospects for the better. How weird is Miss Havisham? This recluse still wears her wedding dress, that is literally falling apart, repairs can only do so much decades after being jilted at the altar, she can never forget the unworthy, treacherous fiance who took advantage of the naive woman, for financial gain and move on...sad . Mysterious money given to the lad arrives, from who knows where but Pip is happy and doesn't ask too many questions , would you in his bad situation? So he goes to London to become a gentleman, the poor boy now can have a real life, is happy for the first time and even better has a chance, maybe, a hope, to be honest a miracle would have to occur to win the affection of Estella, the beautiful, intelligent, however somewhat arrogant girl... Miss Havisham foster daughter. Unusual ending keeps this always interesting, as we the reader follow lonely Pip , in his almost fruitless struggle for success, yet this famous classic has one of the most original characters ever imagined in literature . Miss Havisham...you begin by laughing at this pathetic woman until the melancholy shows and your heart changes little by little, you feel...and realize the anguish , the hurt deep inside her, and sympathy goes out to the unhappy lady, her pain is real. A "person" that cannot be forgotten.

Kai says

"You are in every line I have ever read."

Why couldn't every line in this book be this good? I took me nearly three whole months to finish it. Not because it was bad, but because it dragged and dragged and there are far more intriguing books out there than *Great Expectations*.

The good stuff:

An exciting cast of characters, most of them very weird, extravagant and almost to completely ridiculous. By far my favourites are Joe - because he's such a goodhearted person - and Miss Havisham - because I totally look up to her dedication to melodrama.

What also got me hooked were the huge revelations in this book. There were a few things that I did not see coming.

The bad stuff:

Too many words, too many pages. I was completely demotivated to ever finish this, which is why I made

myself write a term paper about it so that I would actually pick it up again and read all of it. I worked. Honestly, though, this book was originally published in a Victorian Periodical. Imagine watching your favourite TV Show and waiting for a new episode every week. Well, it was like that with this novel. It was published in several instalments. The readers needed to be entertained enough so that they would buy next weeks magazine copy. This also means that Charles Dickens needed to fill the pages every week so that the readers got what they paid for. And I'm afraid it also reads like that. If this novel was 200 pages shorter, I might have enjoyed it more. There was so much going on that I didn't care about, so many details that could have been omitted.

Overall a fine classic and a well-plotted story that bored me with its obsession for things unimportant. I can't wait to watch the adoption with Helena Bonham Carter, though!

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Lisa says

It is almost hard to believe that Dickens stays the same when you read him on several occasions in your life. Somehow, the words and their meanings seem completely different. Obviously, it is my life experience that has changed, not the story. I find that to be one of Dickens' major achievements: the storytelling excellence that captures a teenager's need for complicated plots as well as the cynical grown-up's wish for reflection on human behaviour.

Great Expectations has both, and I found myself deeply engaged in the development of the immature character of the narrator, amazed at the techniques Dickens used to show the treachery and snobbery of the person who is in charge of telling the story - not an easy task, but wonderfully mastered. How is Pip going to show his faithlessness towards Joe if he is telling the story from a perspective where he is unaware of it? Dickens does it not so much through flashback moments (as in David Copperfield), but rather by describing the setting in a way that gives the reader more knowledge than the narrator. Very interesting.

And yes, I enjoyed the drama of the plot as well. There is no one like Dickens to make you shiver in the face of convicts, or shake inside Newgate prison!

Hard times ahead, picking another Dickens to read or re-read!

Update on the night I am wrapping up Bleak House: it is now my son's turn to start Great Expectations, and he is reading it for the first time, a young teenager. I can't wait to disagree with him in the same pleasant way we disagreed on David Copperfield.
