

Literary Criticism

APPENDIX A

The End of the Novel

DICKENS, at the last moment, changed his original ending to *Great Expectations*. His friend Edward Bulwer Lytton the novelist, pleaded with him to unite Pip with Estella and supported his view with such good reasons' (Dickens told Forster) 'that I resolved to make the change. . . I have put in as pretty a little piece of writing as I could, and I have no doubt the story will be more acceptable through the alteration'. The cancelled ending has only once been preferred to its successor by the editor of a printed text, [George Bernard Shaw] with his familiar iconoclasm, used it in a limited edition of the novel, published in 1937, for which he wrote a most interesting preface. He argued, with Shavian perversity, that the first ending 'was, in fact, the truly happy ending. WHY?'

The manuscript of *Great Expectations* is lodged at the Wisbech Museum. With it, there is a sketch of the conclusion of the novel, headed 'General Memos.', which Dickens seems to have noted down after completing Chapter 33, to guide him over the rest of the novel. It reads as follows:

Miss Havisham and Pip, and the Money for Herbert. So Herbert made a partner in Clarriker's. Compeyson. How brought in? Estella. Magwitch's daughter. Orlick and Pip's entrapment - and escape - To the flight

Start
Pursuit
Struggle - Both on board together - Compeyson drown (sic) - Magwitch rescued by Pip. And taken ~

Then:
Magwitch tried, found guilty, & left for Death

APPENDIX

Dies presently in Newgate
Property confiscated to the crown.
Herbert goes abroad:
Pip perhaps to follow.
Chambers in Fever. Ministering Angel Joe

recovered again, Pip goes humbly down to the old marsh Village, to propose to Biddy.

Finds Biddy married to Joe
So goes abroad to Herbert (happily married to Clara Barley), and becomes his clerk.

The one good thing he did in his prosperity, the only thing that endures and bears good fruit.*

explain

It appears, therefore, that the rewritten ending muffles the moral lesson which Dickens wished to draw most forcibly from the tale - that Pip's one unselfish use of his good fortune is the only source of future blessing to him. As it is, he is now conspicuously rewarded, as well, for his infatuated folly in worshipping Estella.

The original ending was as follows. There was no Chapter 39. The passage which opens it followed immediately upon Pip's entreaty on Herbert at the end of Chapter 58. When Biddy asked him, 'You are sure you don't fret for her?' Pip's original reply was, 'I am sure and certain, Biddy.' Then came a final paragraph which read:

It was two years more, before I saw herself. I had heard of her as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, brutality, and meanness. I had heard of the death of her husband (from an accident consequent on ill-treating a horse), and of her being married again to a Shropshire doctor, who, against his interest, had once very manfully interposed, on an occasion when he was in professional attendance on Mr Drummle, and had witnessed some outrageous treatment of her. I had heard that the Shropshire doctor was not rich, and that they lived on her own personal fortune. I was in England again - in London, and walking along

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Piccadilly with little Pip - when a servant came running after me to ask would I step back to a lady in a carriage who wished to speak to me. It was a little pony carriage, which the lady was driving; and the lady and I looked sadly enough on one another. 'I am greatly changed, I know; but I thought you would like to shake hands with Estella too, Pip. Lift up that pretty child and let me kiss it!' (She supposed the child, I think, to be my child.) 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 teachings, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be.*

Position #1
Position #2
 This is moving in its very sobriety, and commends itself above the present conclusion when we consider that the remorseful, probing, brooding tone of disillusionment which pervades the first person narrative of the novel, most notably in the passages dealing with Estella, is rendered more than slightly nonsensical if the supposed author is both successful and happily married. It is, besides, merely more probable than its successor. **Reality = social norms**

Yet, as Dickens hoped, the present ending is a 'pretty . . . little piece of writing', which we would be loath to lose. Furthermore, the added chapter is no frolicking catalogue of blessings and infants, as happy endings tend to be. It is harmonious with the tone of the rest of the book in its restraint and beauty. **Shaw** himself gives us the best of all reasons for not wishing to have the original restored:

Chapter 59, he says, though psychologically wrong, is artistically much more congruous than the original. The scene, the hour, the atmosphere, are beautifully touching and exactly right.

Dickens's labours with his conclusion did not end with its first publication. The last phrases, in the final weekly part and the first bound edition, read . . . and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, *I saw the shadow of no parting from her.* Comparison with the amended 1868 version printed in this edition suggests that, in revision, Dickens perhaps intended to make the last phrase less definite, and even ambiguous. For the later version hints at the buried meaning: . . . at this happy moment, I did not see the shadow of our subsequent parting coming over us.

* This is preserved in a footnote in Forster's *Life*. Forster himself preferred it, as 'more consistent with the drift, as well as natural working out, of the tale'.

APPENDIX B

'Dates'

THE Manuscript of *Great Expectations* at Wisbech is also attended by two half-sheets of paper headed 'Dates'. These carry Dickens's calculations, based on his first forty-two or forty-three chapters, of the characters' ages in the concluding stage of the novel.

Pip, it seems, is 'about 7 at the opening of the story'. Since he would have been apprenticed at fourteen, the usual age, he is about eighteen when he goes to London. In the third stage of Pip's expectations, Pip is twenty-three, and so are Estella and Herbert. Magwitch is sixty; 'Compey' is fifty-two or fifty-three (at this point, that was Dickens's name for Compeyson). Miss Havisham is fifty-six - he writes 'I judge her to have been the elder in the love time'. Biddy is twenty-four or twenty-five, Joe forty-five, Jaggers fifty-five, and Wemmick near fifty.