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The Grotesque and Tragicomedy in Dickens' Great Expectations[1]

"Such a very fine, new and grotesque idea has opened upon me, that I begin to doubt whether I had better not cancel the little paper, and reserve the notion for a new book" (Forster ii, 284). These are the words that announce, in a letter, the origins of *Great Expectations*, a major novel which is initially conceived, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, as a small component of another work—in this case *The Uncommercial Traveller*. At least one commentator has challenged their significance: Frederick Page, writing in the introduction to the *Oxford Illustrated Dickens*, argues that they are hasty and ill-chosen, and that "the critic who should adopt them would write himself down as an ass" (*GE* vi). Yet Dickens appears to have stuck to them over a period of weeks, if not months, in 1860, jogging Forster's memory of the formulation after completion of the first number of the new novel: "Of course I have got in the pivot on which the story will turn too—and which indeed, as you remember, was the grotesque, tragicomic conception that first encouraged me" (Forster ii, 285).

The words "grotesque" and "tragicomic" seem to refer, above all, to the relationship between Magwitch and Pip, which is characterised from the start by mixed emotions. Magwitch terrifies Pip in the first scene with his threats to have his "heart and liver out," (*GE* i, 11) but he is also a comic ogre, his sadistic bullying appearing transparently fictitious to an adult reader. When it comes to the transformation scene, where Magwitch unmasks himself as Pip's benefactor, the roles are partly reversed, but the feelings similarly complicated. Magwitch speaks "with a smile that was like a frown, and a frown that was like a smile" (*GE* xxxix, 240); and Pip reacts to his repeated apologies for "lowness" with nervous giggling: "some

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[1] This essay is a revised version of the chapter in the author's book: Michael Hollington, *Dickens and the Grotesque* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

sense of the grimly-ludicrous moved me to a fretful laugh" (*GE* xl, 249). Both scenes contain those "grotesque features" that—at Dotheboys Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*—, "in a less interested observer than Nicholas, might have provoked a smile" (*NN* viii, 88-9).[2]

Yet at the same time, if we take the scene—which Harry Stone refers to as a "magical inversion" in his excellent discussion of the relationship of Pip and Magwitch (Stone 309-12, 327-37)—to be that "pivot" on which the novel turns, more than merely local effects are involved. With Magwitch's appearance, essentially, Pip's "great expectations had all dissolved, like our own marsh mists before the sun" (*GE* lvii, 348). The fantasy narrative he has constructed for himself, as Miss Havisham's heir, destined to marry Estella, is revealed as the equivalent of the many "castles in the air" of previous novels—*Martin Chuzzlewit, Little Dorrit*, etc. A complex of ironies unfolds: the contrast between the "low" Magwitch and the '"high" Miss Havisham collapses, both of them having attempted the creation of a "gentleman" or "gentlewoman" with equally disastrous consequences, as a revenge for the wrongs they have suffered, and both of them regarding the products as their possessions: "all on you owns stocks and land: which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman?" (*GE* xxxix, 242). At the same time, paradoxically, the loss of his expectations is to offer Pip, for the first time, an opportunity for real change and personal development through the acceptance of and assumption (or resumption) of responsibility for his despised benefactor.

Paradoxicality, in fact, is one of the most important and distinctive features of the novel.[3] It has its genesis in the special combination of grotesque and tragicomic effects that the first person narrative is so skilfully calculated to articulate. Pip's is at once the most self-conscious first-person narrative in Dickens's work—more so than David Copper-

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[2] Dickens himself sometimes felt similarly inclined to laugh in the wrong places. Thus for instance he writes in a letter (dated 3/5/1843) to Douglas Jerrold about how he could have better endured an awful Hospital dinner (attended by "sleek, slobbering . . . overfed cattle") with someone to share his perception of its comic side: "But if I could have partaken of it with anybody who would have felt it as you would have done, it would have had quite another aspect—or would at least, like a 'classical' mask (oh damn that word!) have one funny side to relieve its dismal features" (Dickens, *Letters* iii, 482).

[3] The prevalence of structural paradox in *Great Expectations* may be one of many indications of Dickens's urge, at this stage of his career, to shape his novels into unified artistic wholes.

field's, and certainly than Esther's in *Bleak House*—, and yet at the same time the consciousness it records is the most self-deluding. "All other swindlers on earth are nothing to the self-swindlers" (*GE* xxviii, 174) is perhaps the crucial formulation of a paradox in the novel, whose significance is more than merely psychological. It serves also to illuminate the subtle, profound and profoundly distressing contradictions of a society where oppression has become learned behaviour and internalised self-suppression. Voluntarily dedicating himself to money, class and status, the hero does his own self-exploiting, losing himself in a labyrinth of mistaken needs and desires, from which he can only be liberated by the destruction of his most cherished hopes.

Great Expectations, like *David Copperfield*, is thus a *Bildungsroman*, asking as its central question how a young person may change and develop in an unpropitious social context. The stress on constraining material circumstances is of considerable significance, even if—characteristically, for this stage of Dickens's career—its expression is at least partly symbolic. The formative conditions of life in which Pip grows up, the surroundings out of which his mistaken perceptions are developed, are the Kent marshes near the mouth of the Thames, a "flat dark wilderness" (*GE* i, 9) which is worked into a many-sided allegory and determinant of consciousness.

The first significance-bearing aspect of the marsh landscape—its dull monotony—had been used in earlier works. In *David Copperfield*, Steerforth expresses his bitter sense of the futility of life with an appeal to the countryside at Yarmouth: "look to the right, and you'll see a flat country, with a good deal of marsh in it; look to the left, and you'll see the same" (*DC* xxiii, 342). In *Bleak House*, Phil Squod has only been outside the city once—to see what he describes as "*the* marshes"—and his view of them is taciturnly unromantic: "They was flat. And misty" (*BH* xxvi, 365). In *Great Expectations*, the convicts are almost as terse, but more emphatic: "a most beastly place. Mudbank, mist, swamp, and work: work, swamp, mist, and mudbank" (*GE* xxviii, 177). Pip is glad to leave such a flat and tedious world behind, its "lowness" interpreted by him in terms of class hierarchy: "no more low wet grounds, no more dykes and sluices . . . farewell monotonous acquaintances of my childhood" (*GE* xix, 115).

A second, paradoxically distinctive feature of the marsh countryside is its indistinctness. It is almost a *tabula rasa* upon which the mind may project its own significances: "The marshes were just a long black horizontal line then, as I stopped to look after him; and the river was just another horizontal line, not nearly so broad, nor yet so black; and the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed" (*GE* i, 9). At least Pip certainly does project his own fantasies on it, at first gloomily, like Steerforth, constructing the prospect into a kind of allegory of the course of a dull life:

> I remember that at a later period of my "time," I used to stand about the churchyard on Sunday evenings, when night was falling, comparing my own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were, and how on both there came an unknown way and a dark mist and then the sea. (*GE* xiv, 87)

Later, he converts the scene into a more flattering *Gestalt*, in which Estella and Miss Havisham are interwoven with what is presented to his sight: "When we passed the village and the church and the churchyard, and began to see the sails of the ships as they sailed on, I began to combine Miss Havisham and Estella with the prospect" (*GE* xvii, 101). He appears to turn towards the conventionally "picturesque," —a word with which he glamorously softens the rather sordid mysteries of Satis House at xv, 89—when he obsequiously returns to his home town at Miss Havisham's bidding and avoids the forge in favour of "the country on Miss Havisham's side of town—which was not Joe's side; I could go there tomorrow—thinking about my patroness, and painting brilliant pictures of her plans for me" (*GE* xxix, 178-9).

Yet, as in other novels, the "grotesque" is to be preferred as a truer mode of representation than the "picturesque," as a third emphasis that is placed on the marsh landscape in this novel, highlighting the mists and the visual tricks that they play, suggests. Going out to meet Magwitch in the early morning, Pip encounters all manner of ghosts and hallucinations in the mist:

> 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 at it, while it dripped, it seemed to my oppressed conscience like a phantom devoting me to the Hulks.

> The mist was heavier yet when I got out upon the marshes, so that instead of my running at everything, everything seemed to run at me. (*GE* iii, 19)

The passage suggests, not only the illusoriness of "prospects" and "expectations,"—in the marsh-world, nothing reveals itself for what it is until one comes upon it—but the weird and fantastical shapes that are constructed by an intense imagination. The mists accompany Pip indoors, especially to Satis House, where "the reluctant smoke which hung in the room seemed colder than the clearer air—like our own marsh mist" (*GE* xi, 69). In this peculiarly intense environment, they provide further fuel for the active shaping of fantasy: "Is it to be wondered at if my thoughts were dazed as my eyes were, when I came out into the natural light from the misty yellow rooms?" (*GE* xii, 77). And in this interior, the most powerful grotesque images of *Great Expectations* are presented. The theatrical lighting there is an important aspect of the effects created; everything takes place "in a pretty large room, well lighted with wax candles. No glimpse of daylight was to be seen in it" (*GE* viii, 49). The central figure is dressed in white, "faded and yellow," herself associated with the wax of the candles:

> Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me. I should have cried out, if I could. (*GE* viii, 50)

In this brilliant image, Miss Havisham appears as an intensified version of another grotesque—Mr Murdstone, whose "squareness about the lower part of his face, and the dotted indication of the strong black beard he shaved close every day, reminded me of the waxwork that had travelled into our neighbourhood some half-a-year before" (*DC* ii, 22). Others like her make an appearance before Pip in the surreal colours of Satis House—in particular the Arcimboldesque Sarah Pocket, "a little dry brown corrugated old woman, with a small face that might have been made of walnut shells," (*GE* xi, 71) who undergoes a bilious metamorphosis when she sees Pip in his London gentleman's outfit: "her walnut-shell countenance . . . turned from brown to green and yellow" (*GE* xix, 122).

But of course the most important and essential tragicomic feature here is that Pip, perceiving Miss Havisham as a grotesque, is nonetheless

prepared to construct her into a suitable benefactress. In *David Copperfield*, the connection David makes between Murdstone and the waxwork exhibition is the sign of quick, live, imaginative perception, placing Murdstone as a monstrosity. Here everything is more complicated and blurred. From one perspective at least Miss Havisham's ghastly Gothic skeleton form can be seen simply as a particularly vivid example of a system of appearances in the novel. The society of *Great Expectations*, it might be said, is represented wholesale as an exhibition of weird monstrosities and freaks.

At any rate Miss Havisham's voluntary self-incarceration as a waxwork—which reproduces in some respects Mrs Clennam's in *Little Dorrit*, a novel which also explores ironic parallels between the world "convict and free" (*GE* xxviii, 175)—is certainly to be linked metaphorically, in the first instance, with the state apparatus on view here, which locks prisoners up and at the same time treats them as exhibits too. Such is the case of the two who travel to the dockyard in Pip's company with their keeper, who has "an air as if the convicts were an interesting Exhibition not formally open at the moment, and he the Curator" (*GE* xxviii, 214). The waxwork image in fact spreads well beyond the "curiosity shop" of Satis House, to include the Lord Chief Justice in the London lawcourts, where "an exceedingly dirty and partially drunk minister of justice" accosts Pip, "mentioning that awful personage like waxwork, and presently offering him at the reduced price of eighteen pence" (*GE* xx, 131). It includes the "dreadful casts on a shelf, of faces peculiarly swollen, and twitchy about the nose" (130) that adorn Jaggers's office and stand as monuments of his professional stature. "Famous clients of ours that got us a world of credit," boasts Wemmick; "They're curiosities. And they're property" (*GE* xxiv, 156, 157).

But its most intense moment of tragicomedy may come as Pip reads to Magwitch, at his command, in foreign tongues:

> he, not comprehending a single word, would stand before the fire surveying me with the air of an Exhibitor, and I would see him, between the fingers of the hand with which I shaded my face, appealing in dumb show to the furniture to take notice of my proficiency. The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made, was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion, the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me. (*GE* xl, 253-4)

Here Magwitch exhibits his reified "curiosity" Pip as a property eligible to incite the admiration of other objects, his rhetorical question "which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman?" addressed, apparently, to the chairs. It is the evident consequence of the treatment of convicts in this society, exhibited with "great numbers on their backs, as if they were street doors" (*GE* xxviii, 175). Magwitch simply shows his gentleman as he himself has been shown. And in the exhibition, Pip becomes both Frankenstein and his monster, made into a grotesque by his puppet-master, and experiencing him likewise.

In this novel Dickens thus makes acute and sustained probings of that "fantastic" paradox that had fascinated him at the outset of his career.[4] He goes beyond the complex relations of the "real" and "fantastical" to consider some fundamental contradictions in nineteenth-century society. Progress, comfort, material wealth, empire, power: the novel shows how these bring, not contentment, but newer and greater unhappiness: "I drew away from the window, and sat down in my one chair by the bedside, feeling it very sorrowful and strange that this first night of my bright fortunes should be the loneliest I had ever known" (*GE* xviii, 114). Paradox engulfs Pip's relationship to Joe as soon as the consciousness of money, class and status sets a barrier between them, causing Pip to feel ashamed at being seen by Bentley Drummle in the company of Joe: "So, throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise" (*GE* xxvii, 169). And Pip's love for Estella is similarly shot through with fundamental ambiguity:

> Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection. (*GE* xxi, 179)

This, then, is Pip's "poor labyrinth" (179). As soon as he leaves Joe and Biddy, he finds himself "lost in the mazes of my future fortunes," (*GE* xviii, 111) as he follows a false star, Estella.

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[4] For this concept see M. Hollington, "The Fantastic Paradox: An Aspect of the Theory of Romantic Realism," *Comparison* no. 7 (Spring 1978), 33-44.

Elsewhere in Dickens's work, stars are felt as remote and indifferent to human suffering.[5] Even in this novel Pip recognises what is implied in her name before he meets her:

> A man would die to-night of lying out on the marshes, I thought. And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude. (*GE* vii, 43)

He is soon to get a glimpse of how "awful" such a state might be, as he bays to the stars, as it were, at Satis House, and gets no answer, " . . . in the dark, in a mysterious passage of an unknown house, bawling Estella to a scornful young lady neither visible nor responsive, and feeling it a dreadful liberty so to roar out her name" (*GE* viii, 51). Set up on a pinnacle by Pip—she makes his rustic stars appear "low" by comparison (*GE* xviii, 113)—, she inevitably causes him unhappiness. "Oh! She is thousands of miles away, from me," (*GE* xxx, 190) declares Pip in Werther-like fashion; until the revised ending of the novels, the only stars he appears likely to achieve are those offered by Orlick as a *quietus*: "I'll let you go to the moon. I'll let you go to the stars" (*GE* liii, 402).

The chief point of this mournful tragicomedy, of course, is that Pip learns to accept the class divisions of nineteenth-century England through his contact with Estella. "Why, he is a common labouring-boy!" (*GE* viii, 51) is the taunt that wounds him; instead of rebelling against it—as earlier heroes from Oliver Twist to David Copperfield do—Pip accepts the categories and power relationships involved. As an apt pupil, he very quickly learns to employ them himself, even in the supposedly "free" and rebellious lies he tells about Satis House, where his fantasies seem to centre upon his own enslavement: "And we all had cake and wine on gold plates. And I got up behind the coach to eat mine, because she told me to" (*GE* ix, 57). Later, he multiplies fetishes, and debases himself in front of a

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[5] The 1863 series of *The Uncommercial Traveller* contains a piece entitled "Birthday Celebrations" which describes a childhood visit to an Orrery which may underpin this association. The atmosphere is anything but festive as the child learns what the stars are like: "All this time the gentleman with the wand was going on in the dark (tapping away at the heavenly bodies between whiles, like a wearisome woodpecker), about a sphere revolving on its own axis eight hundred and ninety-seven thousand millions of times—or miles—in two hundred and sixty-three thousand five hundred and twenty-four millions of something else, until I thought if this was a birthday it were better never to have been born" (*UT* 200).

whole series of idols—one term of which is provided by the fashionable restaurant at which he feels compelled to eat with Herbert Pocket: "We went and had lunch at a celebrated house which I then quite venerated, but now believe to have been the most abject superstition in Europe" (*GE* xxii, 146).

Learning to look up, Pip also learns to look down; at this stage at least, his is unquestionably an "authoritarian personality."[6] But his assertions of power and dominance remain largely at the level of fantasy—chafings that other impulses have to suppress. Like Dombey, he wants money to be all-powerful, and finds it isn't—in cases like keeping Joe away from him, for instance: "If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money" (*GE* xxvii, 169). Like Dorrit, he learns that the shame of the past—"I had been brought up a blacksmith in a country place" (*GE* xxii, 140)—isn't easily erased; when an oarsman praises Pip for the strength of his arm, economic sanctions have again to be held in check: "This practical authority confused me very much, by saying I had the arm of a blacksmith. If he could have known how nearly the compliment lost him his pupil, I doubt he would have paid it" (*GE* xxiii, 153).

But in *Great Expectations* the tragicomic effects are, if anything, sharper yet. Autobiography is close at hand, and *blacksmithery* an obvious encoding of the *blacking factory*, the transmutation from uncreative to creative labour involved, in the figure of Joe, perhaps expressing that revaluation of childhood suffering upon which Dickens in this novel—as other critics, Stone in particular, have noted—appears to be engaged. The most immediate impression, however, is that Pip—covering up, not the bitterest experiences of his life, but the most joyous—is more pitiful than Dorrit. Especially since—now like Merdle rather than Dorrit—he creates for himself a servant in *boots* to haunt and torment:

> I had even started a boy in boots—top boots—in bondage and slavery to whom I might have been said to pass my days. For, after I had made this monster (out of the refuse of my washerwoman's family) and had clothed him with a blue coat, canary waistcoat, white cravat, creamy breeches, and the boots already mentioned, I had to find him a little to do and a great deal to eat; and with both of these horrible requirements he haunted my existence. (*GE* xxvii, 169)

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[6] A Frankfurt School concept, particularly associated with Adorno. See Paul Connerton, ed., *Critical Sociology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 25.

Here Pip appears in the position of the fowl that Mr Pumblechook serves up to celebrate his "well-deserved" fortune, congratulated in phrases that reverberate deliciously: "Ah! poultry, poultry! You little thought . . . when you was a young fledgling, what was in store for you" (*GE* xix, 120). The grotesque art of the novel generates such connections between people and animals, or people and things. As a child Pip is both—"I often served . . . as a connubial missile" (vii, 14). As the Gargeries and Hubbles and Wopsle and Pumblechook sit down to Christmas dinner, he is tortured by the company's comparison of him to the pig they eat. Pumblechook and friends elongate the sadism of the occasion with their slow narrative elaboration of the slaughter:

> "You would have been disposed of for so many shillings according to the market price of the article, and Dunstable the butcher would have come up to you as you lay in your straw, and he would have whipped you under his left arm, and with his right he would have tucked up his frock to get a penknife from out of his waistcoat-pocket, and he would have shed your blood and had your life." (*GE* iv, 27)

By comparison, the cannibalism of Magwitch appears mild, funny, and excusable: "You young dog . . . what fat cheeks you ha' got . . . . Darn Me if I couldn't eat them" (*GE* i, 10).

From such reification, though, Pip learns to reify himself and others. The heartlessness that Kafka noted as a feature of Dickens's style[7] is to be noted in Pip's language—the servant is from "the refuse of my washerwoman's family," and later he is replaced by "an inflammatory old female, assisted by an animated rag-bag whom she called her niece" (*GE* xl, 245). Magwitch is imagined as a clock—"something clicked in his throat as if he had works in him like a clock, and was going to strike" (*GE* iii, 21)—and Wemmick's mouth is a slit into which he throws pieces of biscuit, "as if he were posting them" (*GE* xxiv, 155). People seem to work on mechanical rather than organic principles—one of the convicts met in the stagecoach, for instance, seeming "to have more breathing business to do than another man," (*GE* xviii, 176) and one of Mr Pocket's pupils appearing to possess a delicate and dangerous electric brain: "Startop . . . was

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[7] In his diary, 8/10/1917: "There is a heartlessness behind his sentimentally overflowing style. These rude characterizations which are artificially stamped on everyone and without which Dickens would not be able to get on with his story even for a moment." (quoted from Wall 258).

reading and holding his head, as if he thought himself in danger of exploding it with too strong a charge of knowledge" (*GE* xxiii, 149). The animate and inanimate are frequently confused, or left undistinguished: Jaggers appears to laugh with his boots, for instance, and Wemmick produces a key from his coat-collar that is "like an iron pigtail" (*GE* xxiv, 155).

So that when Joe arrives in London and vigorously clasps Pip by both hands, and "worked them straight up and down, as if I had been the last-patented Pump," (*GE* xxvii, 170) the ironies are sharp. Pip perceives the accost as an affront that reifies him—yet he'd wanted to keep Joe away by paying money. The vigour of the blacksmith's arm is again an uncomfortable reminder of the past, as are the implications of "work," for which Pip as a gentleman has now conceived a distaste. It is for him now —personified in Joe—a form of "dull endurance," (vxiv, 87) assimilated to the routines of convict life, as described by the two men in the coach: "mudbank, mist, swamp, and work; work, swamp, mist, and mudbank" (*GE* xxviii, 177).

For the conceptions of work dominant in *Great Expectations* form an essential part of the analysis of the reification of the self and others. Miss Havisham's "employment" of Pip sets the tone: she needs someone to watch at play, engaged in meaningless and destructive activity (neighbour-beggaring) with Estella, in order to fill the void of her "leisure." She gets angry when this occupation appears not to inspire him (*GE* xi, 69), and proposes other unproductive labour instead: walking her around in a circle. "Gentlemen" mustn't do anything useful, though brewing, whose end product might be thought of as stupefaction, appears to be an exception, as Herbert explains: "while you cannot possibly be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew" (*GE* xxii, 142). And so Pip quickly learns "loitering along the High Street" (*GE* xv, 93)—very much like Orlick, ironically—in anticipation of his preferment to gentlemanly status. Meanwhile, the female consorts of "gentlemen" are brought up in the manner of Mrs Pocket, "who in the nature of things must marry a title, and who was to be guarded from the acquisition of plebeian domestic knowledge" (*GE* xxiii, 148).

Bourgeois distortions of work take a different form. Mr Jaggers is the opposite of the gentleman amateur, collapsing distinctions between the world and his work. Where Wemmick separates the personal from the

professional, he scrambles them, so that even in his dining-room, "in a corner was a little table of papers with a shaded lamp: so that he seemed to bring the office with him in that respect too, and to wheel it out of an evening and fall to work" (*GE* xxvi, 164). People for him are objects upon which to conduct professional operations and manipulations—at dinner he "works" on Bentley Drummle, attempting "to screw discourse out of him." Children, he acknowledges to Pip late in the novel, "he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into the fish that were to come into his net—to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, be-devilled somehow" (*GE* li, 307).

The fraudulence of such practices requires protection, of course, through the erection of "professional mysteries," and Jaggers is a major exemplar of what Miss Mowcher calls "the rule of secrets in all trades" (*DC*, xxii, 332). Yet he has colleagues of the same stripe in this respect, if not in others—the Bow-Street Men from London, for instance, who come to capture Mrs Joe's assailant, with their "mysterious manner of taking their drink, that was almost as good as taking the culprit," (*GE* xvi, 98) and the funeral mutes who stage theatrical mysteries at her funeral, "two dismally absurd persons, each ostentatiously exhibiting a crutch done up in a black bandage—as if that instrument could possibly communicate any comfort to anybody" (*GE* xxxv, 212). Yet the gentlemanly pursuit of leisure might be said to have its own gruesome pantomime: "there was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did." (*GE* xxxiv, 209). Pip the gentleman can appear as a "ghastly waxwork" on display, alienated from work and from himself.

Yet, after Magwitch's return, Pip is allowed the chance to recover the values he has so mindlessly discarded. These of course reside in Joe—a "true" gentleman who represents the "real" world. He stands in the tradition of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and this book can again be seen as a Wordsworthian memorialising of the unremembered lives of supposedly insignificant people: "it is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable honest-hearted duty-doing man flies out into the world" (*GE* xiv, 87). There is an absence in him of any theatrical ostentation—of anything in the nature of an exhibit or "curiosity"—and yet he makes his presence felt across the airwaves that surround him: "Looking towards the open window, I saw light wreaths from Joe's pipe floating

there, and I fancied it was like a blessing from Joe—not obtruded on me or paraded before me, but pervading the air we shared together" (*GE* xviii, 114). The mundane, humdrum pipe-smoke appears as a kind of solid counter-image to the feverish vapours conjured up in the marsh-mists.

And Joe's contentment is the sign of a capacity to recognise and create, in ordinary things, the marvellous and fantastic. For him the words "common" and '"uncommon" carry meanings that are different from those put upon them by Pip or Pumblechook, and have no connection with class or taste. "Uncommon plump," for instance, (*GE* xix, 116) translates as "remarkably sudden". It is a perception of the world that can be regained, it seems, through deprivation; Magwitch is to resemble Joe in the novel's latter stages in a number of respects, including a capacity to appreciate "common" things because they are new to him again: "If you knowed, dear boy, . . . what it is to sit here alonger my dear boy and have my smoke, arter having been day by day betwixt four walls, you'd envy me" (*GE* liv, 325). The novel thus undertakes an ironic adjectival inversion of its title, demonstrating the virtues of "small expectations."

And these Pip, also by a process of rediscovery, is beginning to learn in the novel's later stages. He begins to see Magwitch for what he is—not to compose him in a picturesque and self-centred landscape prospect: "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" (*GE* liv, 332). Looking out of the window—that quintessentially Dickensian activity, with its romantic antecedents[8]—at dawn on the day of Magwitch's escape, Pip sees a transposed world, where marshes are no longer flat and dull. The mists within and without appear to be lifting:

> The winking lights upon the bridges were already pale, the coming sun was like a marsh of fire on the horizon . . . . As I looked along the clustered roofs, with Church towers and spires shooting into the unusually clear air, the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon the waters. From me too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well. (*GE* liii, 322)

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[8] The visual paradigm might be Caspar David Friedrich's painting *Frau am Fenster* (see Jens Christian, *Caspar David Friedrich: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: Verlag M. DuMont Schauberg, 1974) 128, 244).

The promised land glimpsed here, does not of course materialise. In the novel's first version, there is no apotheosis at the end of the novel either; an emphasis, rather, upon Pip's return to Biddy and Joe, and upon Estella's visit. Revising it, Dickens added a Miltonic close in which Pip and Estella may appear united at the last, perhaps, if one wishes to read it thus, and where certainly the mists are now dissipated:[9]

> 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. (*GE* lix, 358)

He wrote to Forster describing it—"I have put in as pretty a little piece of writing as I could" (Forster ii, 289)—and it may be felt that the "prettiness" is false, a lapse into the conventionally picturesque. The novel it concludes, at any rate, has certainly been of a rather different kind, in which the grotesque, and tragicomedy, have held sway.

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[9] cf. *Paradise Lost* XII, 628ff: "...on the ground / Gliding meteorous, as Ev'ning Mist / Ris'n from a River ore the marish glides / And gathers ground fast at the Labourers heel / Homeward returning.

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