

The Author's Dilemma

We changed, and I had not made up my mind, and still reflected
(*Great Expectations*, I, ch. 19)

We have every reason to assume that Charles Dickens every so often reached a point in his writing from which the narrative might have proceeded in different directions. This required a decision on his part, which was not always forthcoming. As we have shown in an earlier chapter, the fate of young Walter Gay in *Dombey and Son*, whom Dickens had initially intended to go to ruin, remained undecided for several monthly issues. This must have put some strain on the readers of the novel since the various anticipatory references pointing to the downfall of the boy in the printed numbers had to be left standing. When the author eventually decided on an alternative development, the ominous forebodings were reoriented towards a different ruin. Walter is sent to sea and is reported drowned. There are numerous other cases in which the author's indecision appears very distinctly.

In a crucial scene in *A Tale of Two Cities* (that we have noted), Ernest Defarge, manager of a wine-shop but now a leader of an incited crowd who have stormed the Bastille, enters one of the prison cells in search of a document. He seems to know that Doctor Manette, who was imprisoned in this room, hid a secret writing here in which he recorded his sufferings at the hands of the Evrémone brothers. But despite his intensive labours the search is in vain, upon which he orders the furnishings to be set afire, presumably to give vent to a sense of frustration. Conversely, the destruction of these objects recalls an event in England when Doctor Manette's friends break up his shoemaker's bench and tools to eradicate the traumatic memories of his incarceration (TTC, II, ch. 19). Only several years later, at the second trial of Charles Darnay (TTC, III, ch. 9) does Defarge disclose that he did in fact discover the writing at the time, in a hole in the chimney of the cell, and had kept it a secret. It will now serve as an

indisputable indictment of the accused aristocrat, whose relinquishment of his title and estate does not count with the tribunal. Why did Defarge, or really why did the narrator, keep this highly relevant find to himself, and over such a long period?

There are several explanations for this somewhat startling omission. Considering that the text was written under considerable pressure, an oversight might indeed have occurred on part of the author and his proofreaders. On the other hand, Dickens may have resorted to a narrative strategy to keep his readers in the dark and thus heighten their suspense. Defarge's abortive search is narrated in a weekly issue (number 18) of the serial *All the Year Round*, his submission in court at the end of another, far more advanced weekly instalment (number 26). Conversely, there may have been yet another reason for the omission. Dickens may have been genuinely uncertain of how to proceed at this point. Given that a record of Manette's ordeal was to play a significant part in the tale, the circumstances of its unexpected retrieval at a critical moment could have taken a variety of forms. After all, Manette having been released from prison many years ago, the tell-tale document could have fallen into somebody else's – an official's, a fellow prisoner's – hands. It might have been passed on to a person of authority, who could have made an entirely different use of it. Ernest Defarge might even have chosen to destroy it to spare his former master Doctor Manette the embarrassment its disclosure would entail. It remains a matter of speculation what ideas may have entered the author's mind as the narrative progressed. What we can be sure of, however, is that he disciplined his imaginative flights and opted for a solution to the mystery that had an element of the ordinary about it. He may have felt that the utterly romantic turn of introducing a secret testament that a prisoner had recorded in his own blood required a less fanciful resolution if it was to satisfy as an integral part of a realistic narrative. A presentation of evidence in court is after all a rational, even sober affair, though the document may be read to a savagely tempered audience.

The omission of the discovery of the document by Defarge, which is yet to prove so very relevant in the course of the narrative, is only one of numerous cases where an indeterminacy or an obvious gap in the narration seems to point to an uncertainty on part of the author. Needless to say the context of the divergence and Dickens's handling of the matter differ from one case to the other. The unexpected reprieve of the weak-minded,

and yet at times distinctly aggressive title figure of the early novel *Barnaby Rudge* points to a very belated change of mind of the author. In the following example the dilemma is dealt with in a less obtrusive manner. The passage in question occurs at the very end of the eighteenth monthly issue of *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865) where Lizzie Hexam and the severely injured Eugene Wrayburn, having gone through the rites of marriage with considerable difficulty, are left to themselves again. Considerably enfeebled by the exertion, Wrayburn is now fast declining and seems to expect his rapid demise. Looking back on his “wasted, trifling youth” and on the high expectations that Lizzie still places in him, he muses that it were best if he didn’t recover – “There is a sharp misgiving in my conscience that if I were to live I should disappoint your good opinion and my own – and that I ought to die, my dear!” (OMF, IV, ch. 11).

The question whether Wrayburn should come to an end or recover towards a new life seems to have occupied the author for quite a while. A pertinent entry in Charles Dickens’s *Book of Memoranda*, presumably written shortly before the passage in question, would leave little doubt about the outcome:

As to the question whether I, Eugene, lying ill and sick even unto death, may be consoled by the representation that, coming through this illness, I shall begin a new life, and have energy and purpose and all I have yet wanted: ‘I hope I should, but I know I shouldn’t. Let me die, my dear’.¹

The working notes certainly confirm the impression that death might be inevitable at this stage. A note in the extant number plan bluntly states “Eugene dying”, whereas the chapter plan anticipates the final text through the entry “then the marriage: ‘I think upon the whole I had better die, my dear’”. We also have to bear in mind that Eugene was in fact pronounced beyond hope by the attending surgeon earlier on when Lizzie Hexam had brought him ashore (OMF, IV, ch. 6) after a murderous attack. Finally, a testimony of the illustrator of the publication supports this conclusion. Years after the author’s death, Marcus Stone revealed that Dickens had indeed intended to let Eugene Wrayburn die.²

The contemporary reader had to wait for another monthly number to get a glimpse at least of the patient’s state. Chapter 15 of Book IV (in the final number) includes what may be a reference to a news report, implying that Eugene Wrayburn, as yet in a critical condition, is slowly improving. A whole year is then supposed to pass by. It is only in the following chapter (OMF, IV, ch. 16) that Eugene, still relying on a stick when walking,

seems to be fully restored; and very happy to share a modest life with a loving companion.

There remains little doubt that Dickens's audience must have waited for this turn of the narrative with considerable impatience. We may equally take it for granted that the author was quite aware of what a high measure of suspense he had raised. Conversely, the anticipatory notes offer sufficient evidence for the conclusion that he had been wavering over the issue for a considerable time. Should *Our Mutual Friend*, which sets in with a man saved from drowning who is compelled to establish a new identity for himself, be wound up with yet another rescue in which another survivor will start a new life? The narrator, it is true, has almost imperceptibly laid the ground for a moral redemption of Eugene, paralleling the transformation of Bella Wilfer, the spoilt heroine of the other main plot. Dickens might nevertheless have felt at this point that the symmetrical structuring of the novel ought not be carried too far; that the two love entanglements need not conclude in two happy endings. It might even be argued that a highly idealised, romantic figure like Lizzie Hexam ought to be cast as a healer figure in her widowhood, assisting the poor and consoling the stricken, on the model of George Eliot's *Romola* of 1863. There is no need to go any further. We know what decision was reached in the end.

In considering narrative situations of this category, in which Charles Dickens seems to have remained temporarily undecided as to which direction his tale ought to proceed in, we will often find that each of the options has been carefully anticipated through various references, which occasionally even take the form of a proleptic statement on part of the narrator. This is certainly the case in *Dombey and Son* where the destructive consequences of the ill-advised marriage of the protagonist to the recalcitrant Edith Granger are anticipated in various ways. The merchant Paul Dombey, immensely proud of his bourgeois attainments, still wishes to raise his station through an alliance with a beautiful woman of rank, and to gain an heir to the commercial enterprise that means the world to him. It seems out of the question that a woman should not feel highly gratified to be chosen for this high office. But Edith is a proud woman, who regards the arrangement as a form of prostitution, which fills her with increasing revulsion. Nevertheless, the narrator brings in some circumstances which might be conducive to a more favourable outcome of the match. Like her suitor, Edith has also lost a little son from a previous

marriage, which goes far to suggest that the two partners could arrive at a mutual understanding, their contrary dispositions notwithstanding. And why should two people so dominated by pride not work out a satisfactory relationship after all? It can hardly have escaped the first readers of the novel that their first encounter bears a comic aspect. Walking along a promenade of Leamington Spa with his socially so very competent friend Major Bagstock, Mr Dombey apprehends a bizarre spectacle –

a wheeled chair, in which a lady was seated, indolently steering her carriage by a kind of rudder in front, while it was propelled by some unseen power in the rear. Although the lady was not young, she was blooming in the face – quite rosy – and her dress and attitude were perfectly juvenile. Walking by the side of the chair, and carrying her gossamer parasol with a proud and weary air, as if so great an effort must be soon abandoned and the parasol dropped, sauntered a much younger lady, very handsome, very haughty, very wilful, who tossed her head and drooped her eyelids, as though, if there were anything in all the world worth looking into, save a mirror, it certainly was not the earth or sky. (DS, ch. 21, p. 280)

The ironically emphasized contrast between the two female figures goes far to enhance the emblematic quality of the group. *Vanitas vanitatum* is here visualised in different aspects: Exhibitionism on the one hand, narcissistic self-regard on the other; old age unwilling to face mortality, youth heedless of its surroundings. One detail especially worth noting in the description is the reference to a mirror. Contrary to the ostentatious carelessness she evinces later on, the proud beauty still wishes to make most of her attractions. Even more noticeable is her petulant, even infantile conduct in her petty quarrels with her mother. Edith's wilful bantering in the presence of men just stops short of coquettishness.

The stern Mr Dombey evidently makes little of these impressions. He is soon determined to gain the beautiful woman for himself, her wilfulness notwithstanding. A serious note enters the narration several chapters later, which is now several times interrupted by interferences hinting at an impending disaster. They gain in weight once Dombey's manager and confidant James Carker has entered the picture. Well aware that he has perceived her predicament, Edith feels a strong revulsion towards the intriguer; who nevertheless begins to exert a hold on her. The evolving triangular relationship must lead to a violent dissolution of Dombey's dominance. Even young Florence, to whom Edith has shown much affection and care, senses the rising tension in the house. In a nightmarish dream the girl sees her new mother lying on the bottom of a grave (DS, ch. 35, p. 488).

While the figure of Edith Dombey has by and large met with approval among critics of the novel, the presentation of this highly complex character is usually censured as overdrawn and theatrical.³ What objections of this kind fail to realise is the difficulty of the task Dickens had set for himself in this case. For once he could not draw on the stereotypes which the tradition of the English novel held. Neither the soulful heroines of his earlier narratives, nor a conventional *femme fatale* in the French manner could have come close to the psychogram of an introverted, self-destructive personality whose aversion towards the opposite sex verges on the pathological. In retrospect, Edith herself perceives her former conduct as "mad" (DS, ch. 61, p. 824). Dickens would have required the concepts of modern analytical psychology to arrive at a wholly individualised description. It must have been the very absence of psychological models that made him resort to the properties of melodrama, whose stock types and patterns offered material for his imagination to work on. Or, to put the matter differently, we would fail to comprehend Dickens's character drawing if we were to employ realistic criteria to assess a figure that convinces through its imaginatively drawn features. To question the artistic purpose in the frequency with which Edith's attributes – her flashing eyes, heaving bosom, disdainful curling of lips – are evoked as a "fallen spirit's majesty of scorn and beauty" (DS, ch. 47, p. 631), would be tantamount to a miscomprehension of a tragic figure whose self-immolation wreaks ruin on the house of Dombey and Son.

It may be assumed that Dickens had initially meant Edith to take her own life after an affair with James Carker, to whom she would have yielded to revenge herself on her husband. A letter to John Forster refers to her hatred for Carker, and quite expressly to the "effect of her death" (CDL, V, p. 197). Conversely, the irrational motivation of her elopement might also instigate an action on Edith's part that would destroy both men. Once again the author seems to have been uncertain how to proceed. The fact that he had originally planned to insert a whole chapter between chapter 46, which is entirely devoted to Carker's meanderings and reflections, and what is now chapter 47, bearing the title 'The Thunderbolt', in which the crisis reaches its climax, points in that direction. We have no reason to doubt that it was indeed Lord Jeffrey's advice that finally persuaded the author to opt for the second alternative. A passage in a subsequent letter to John Forster indicates, however, that this solution had indeed occurred to him before,⁴ and

that it answered to ideas and images that had floated through his mind for some time –

Note from Jeffrey this morning, who won't believe (positively refuses) that Edith is Carker's mistress. What do you think of a kind of inverted Maid's Tragedy, and a tremendous scene of her undeceiving Carker, and giving him to know that she never meant that. (CDL, V, p. 211; cf. DS, p. xxxv)

It is significant that Dickens should without hesitation have resorted to a dramatic pattern for a confrontation in which the stageyness of the characters involved in the entanglement is fully realised. The first paragraphs of chapter 54 in which the encounter takes place amount to a detailed stage direction:

The time, an hour short of midnight; the place, a French apartment, comprising some half-dozen rooms; – a dull cold hall or corridor, a dining-room, a drawing-room, a bedchamber, and an inner drawing-room, or boudoir, smaller and more retired than the rest. All these shut in by one large pair of doors on the main staircase, but each room provided with two or three pairs of doors of its own, establishing several means of communication with the remaining portion of the apartment, or with certain small passages within the wall, leading, as is not unusual in such houses, to some back stairs with an obscure outlet below. (DS, ch. 54, p. 719)

The precise enumeration of rooms and doors is indeed of some importance, as they will provide an escape route for Edith, who exits first, and then for Carker, who gains the back stairs just in time before his pursuers, clamouring in the wings, force an entrance to the set. The theatricality of the showdown notwithstanding, Edith's defiance comes over as convincing through the charges which she levels at the "destroyer" (as the stock figure of the seducer is called in Victorian fiction), and in which his abusive conduct towards her in the past is recalled. Not only do the accusations conform to specific moments in the preceding narrative, they also lend support to Edith's desire for retaliation against the men who have victimised her. In the illustration to this scene the artist Hablot K. Browne added some semiotic details to underline the significance of the confrontation. While Edith, with her left arm levelled against the cringing Carker, occupies the foreground, the interior behind them includes two items seldom found in separate chambers of French hotels. A picture of Judith having killed the tyrant Holofernes and a small sculpture of an Amazon riding on a horse symbolise the transformation that Edith has effected. Her right arm, hidden from view, might hold a dagger. In her firm self-reliance and unrestrained recklessness she has become an epitome of

nineteenth-century male concerns and fears: woman liberating herself from subjection and boldly asserting her individuality. This amounts to a very satisfactory closure that is worlds apart from Carker's vision of woman "down among his horse's feet, fallen and in the dust" (DS, ch. 46, p. 618). Can we doubt that this follow-up to the narration of the married life of Mr and Mrs Dombey, however spontaneously conceived, brought ideas to the fore that had lain dormant in Dickens for quite a while?

In every one of these examples Dickens's temporary irresolution can be inferred on the basis of the text and from his working notes, and can quite often be deduced from references in his letters. There is, however, only one case in which each variant of a crucial turn in the narrative is extant. Following an advice from Edward Bulwer-Lytton, to whom the final part of the novel *Great Expectations* had been submitted, Charles Dickens wrote a different conclusion, which was duly published. The discarded variant was, however, preserved by John Forster, who included it in his monumental *Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–1874). The two different versions of the closure of *Great Expectations* have split critical opinion ever since the discarded variant was published. John Forster had already expressed a preference for what he called the first ending, which he regarded as "more consistent with the drift, as well as natural working out, of the tale" (Forster, p. 737). George Gissing condemned the second ending outright,⁵ John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson censured it for its artificiality,⁶ Q. D. Leavis could not comprehend how anybody could do so⁷; Any Sadrin found both versions acceptable as remarkable instances of Dickens's craftsmanship.⁸

Today both versions are published side-by-side in most editions, leaving it to the reader which to prefer. Our approach in the following will be to treat both of them as possible solutions to an issue that had to be mastered before the narrative, designed as a brief work that was not to exceed a planned number of weekly instalments, could finally be laid aside.

Having disentangled the salient knots in the plot (to borrow an image from Charles Dickens) the author would have noticed that there was still some unhandled information extant that ought to be dealt with before he could formally complete his tale. Pip's benefactor Magwitch has died in prison and his property has become forfeit. Miss Havisham also has died, leaving most of her estate to Estella, who has married the unspeakable brute Bentley Drummle. Herbert Pocket has entered into a commercial partnership (which Pip had secretly provided for him) and has gone to

Egypt. The hero himself has been nursed through a severe illness by Joe Gargery, who has also paid his debts. Having lost all the financial support he ever had, he will now have to strive for himself, but must realise that he has not gained any training that would enable him to do so, unless Joe were to let him work at his blacksmith's forge. Conversely, Herbert's offer of clerical employment abroad may not be so easily realised. It seems only natural then that the poor invalid should go back to the village where he came from. Where else could he turn to for comfort and commiseration in his dire situation? There is, however, yet another motivation behind this step, which would go far to prove that he still harbours some illusions. If this be so, Pip must meet with yet another humiliation.

At this point Dickens resorts to a traditional motif to heighten the didactic significance of the realistic presentation that prevailed in the last chapters. Having failed to win the heart of a fairy-like beauty, the hero perceives that he has overlooked the merit of the plain girl next door. It may seem probable that reflections of this kind might occur to a downcast Pip. Considering his precarious situation, it is hardly credible though that he should now think of declaring himself to Biddy, who he imagines will immediately accept him. Characteristically, he still employs her pet name, even in this context, as if the polarity between the two heroines still had to be stressed. But then even her proper name, if it was ever disclosed, would never bear comparison with the romantic "Estella". The love theme which has been so dominant throughout enters the narrative again, but in an inverted form. The heartbroken youth has risen to the role of the confident wooer whose appeal to a woman's kindness makes still for an assertive bid.

Nursing these new expectations Pip returns home again, where his downfall has already become known. At the hotel where he spends the night he is reviled by the pompous Mr Pumblechook (who seems to have repressed his own proleptic degradation at the hands of the murderous Orlick when his house was burgled). In an inordinately extended scene, Pumblechook holds forth on Pip's ingratitude to his benefactors, but says nothing whatever about Joe's impending marriage. This revelation will have to be more dramatically rendered.

Only on arriving at the old place where he finds Joe and Biddy bedecked in festive garments, does Pip find out that the girl he so long neglected now belongs to another and more deserving man. With this final blow to his self-esteem has the education of Pip Pirrip reached its

termination. Having been disappointed in all his expectations he now knows where his future lies. He will accept Herbert Pocket's offer to join his commercial enterprise in Egypt, and devote himself to hard work rather than to unattainable fancies. With this commendable resolution the novel might presumably come to an end, verifying the narrator's prediction that the outcome of his courtship for Bidley would be "all I have left to tell" (GE, III, ch. 18, p. 468).

But has the narrator really covered every issue that was left for him to tell? The analogy of Dickens's other narrative work shows that a novel for him came close to a system, a bounded structure of correlated constituents that in its entirety should not contain discontinuities, *lacunae* or fragmentary parts. Hence a final chapter or supplementary section is usually added to the denouement in which the future careers of all the characters involved in the plot are summarised. It is not a mere speculation then to assume that the author of *Great Expectations* would have remembered at this stage that the various forecasts of Estella's fate at the side of a brutal mate on the one hand, or the completely unanticipated marriage of Joe and Bidley on the other, called for further treatment. More, perhaps, might be made of Estella's obscure parentage, which Pip has taken such pains to reconstruct, or of the likelihood of his resigning himself to a celibate life.

The first ending, which found so little favour with Bulwer-Lytton, provides an answer to most of these points. Several years are supposed to have passed when Pip returns to the forge on a visit to England. The unequal marriage of his friends has turned out very happy and been blessed with children, one of whom has been named after him. Pip takes a strong interest in the boy, but shows no inclination to marry himself, Bidley's matronly appeal notwithstanding. Estella has fared very badly at the hands of Drummle, but is said to have made a better match after his death in an accident. Pip knows as much about her situation when they meet entirely by chance in a busy street of London. Estella, on the other hand, imagines that he is married, mistaking little Pip, who accompanies him, for his son. Summing up the brief encounter, the narrator expresses his satisfaction about the noticeable change in her bearing, but does not offer any explanation about his failure to put her right as regards his single state. Pip's silence might derive from embarrassment; conversely, it might also be motivated by a latent wish for retaliation. There is no doubt though about the conclusive import of the chance event.

There is equally little doubt about the matter-of-fact mode in which Pip's great expectations are finally wound up in this short supplement to the narrative. We do not know what Bulwer-Lytton's reasons for his censure of the ending were. As Edwin M. Eigner has attempted to show,⁹ he might have referred to general aesthetic principles or warned Dickens against a sober conclusion that was sure to displease his readership. The author's response to Bulwer's remonstrances, on the other hand, is well documented, if incomplete. The first person to be made acquainted with the alteration was Wilkie Collins. Bulwer had argued so strongly against the first version, explains Dickens in a letter to him, that he felt compelled to rewrite what he very precisely calls "the extreme end" (CDL, IX, p. 428). A letter to Bulwer written one day afterwards adds a further note by stating that the objections of the former had prompted him to enlarge on an entirely refashioned finale that the restrictions of the publication schedule apparently forced him to keep comparatively short:

My difficulty was, to avoid doing too much. My tendency – when I began to unwind the thread that I thought I had wound for ever – was to labour it, and get out of proportion. So I have done it in as few words as possible. (CDL, IX, pp. 428f.)

Informing his usual adviser John Forster, somewhat apologetically, about the change, the author states to "have put in as pretty a little piece of writing as I could" (CDL, IX, p. 433). This would argue for an aesthetically more satisfactory, even poetic ending to the novel. Dickens's avowal of its brevity notwithstanding, the new text is about three times longer than the original one. Considering the import of the encounter between the two main characters in this version, a mere summary of the event would hardly have answered the author's purpose.

It is again a meeting by coincidence and hardly more improbable than a chance encounter in Piccadilly. But whereas the noise and hustle in the centre of the West End are not even noted in the original text, an uncanny, dreamlike atmosphere is here evoked. Night is falling in as Pip crosses the ivy-clad ruins of Miss Havisham's residence, and the mist lingering on the ground is slowly broken by the rising moon. Who else should the solitary figure be that Pip perceives advancing towards him in these atmospheric surroundings but Estella? A theatrical setting of this kind will not admit of casual exchanges and the ensuing dialogue between the two characters is indeed evocative and meaningful. At the same time, the scene cannot be wound up by a definite statement or the stereotypical gesture of an

embrace. To censure the ambiguity of the last lines, as some readers have done, would run against the poetic tone of the preceding description. This is as far as the narrator can go, as far as Dickens wishes to go:

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, III, ch. 20, p. 480)

John Forster, against whose opinion the second ending had been incorporated, commented somewhat drily on the excessive speed "with which the heroine, after being married, reclaimed, and widowed, is in a page or two again made love to, and remarried by the hero" (Forster, p. 737). But does this reading really correspond to the tenor of the narration, which is tentative rather than conclusive? It has indeed become customary to refer to the second variant as to the "happy ending", but criticism of the novel has fallen short of offering proof for this classification. It might be argued that the term is anything but definite and hence often loosely employed. Conversely, it seems to be generally accepted that such a closure implies an outlook for a satisfactory future. But this is not a prospect that could be assumed without hesitation for the hero and heroine as they exit from the dream-like scene.

Is it to be imagined that Pip will bring a lady of indescribable majesty and charm to Joe and Biddy and their little children, whom he left only a short time ago for a postprandial stroll; or must we suspect that he will again evade the rustic ambience of the forge as he used to do when Miss Havisham called? He certainly seems to have forgotten that the Christmas season is once again coming on, which his little namesake, in whom he professed to take a strong interest, would be looking forward to. Will he now, if marriage is in fact contemplated, reveal his knowledge of Estella's parentage to her? Which might suggest the query of whether a woman descended from a violent criminal and a murderess, who has been "bent and broken" by abuse over many years, might really be regarded as a suitable match. These are, it goes without saying, rhetorical questions, which could not be accommodated by any theory of fiction. Conversely, they may draw attention to the romance aspect of the description. The enhanced beauty of Estella that bewitches the hero instantly is as unreal as the scenic ruins of Satis House that are so hauntingly evoked. Obviously the fateful meeting of the two lovers, which could not come about in the broad daylight, demands an ideal setting rather than a tangible environment. This is not

to say that the narrator, who is thought to recall the events of the past, should be considered the creative inventor of the nocturnal scene. Even though the meeting could never happen in real life, it is still an experience that might have suggested itself to the romantic Pip, the “visionary boy” as Estella called him. Looking back on the events of his life, the narrator reveals a dream sequence, an attempt at self delusion, that took his mind when he recalled his early days and the intensity of his emotional attachment to an attractive young woman who coldly refused him.

The two variants of the “extreme end” of *Great Expectations* adhere to two different worlds of fiction. One, the first closure, is meant to represent real life. Two people who have once known each other closely meet coincidentally in the streets of London, exchange a few words of recognition and drift apart again. The other is set in a landscape of the soul, a dream world in which hopes long abandoned and desires that have lost their fervour take shape again. Once again the mind is activated by obsessive images, but their effect is soothing and elevating rather than disturbing. Pip’s erstwhile expectations may not have gained fruition, but he has learnt to internalise his illusions and seems to be content with what the external world holds for him.

This may not have been the way in which the contemporary reader comprehended the second version of the close of *Great Expectations*. As John Forster’s comment indicates, it may have been generally received as an overture to an eventual marriage between the two leading figures of the novel, which the author had been compelled to leave untold for lack of space. We wish to argue though that the reading which has been attempted above would correspond to the author’s innermost, possibly unacknowledged desires. Had Dickens intended to let *Great Expectations* come to an entirely convincing “happy ending”, he would surely not have opted for the ambiguous, mysterious description that now terminates the narrative. He could after all have found examples of a definite conclusion on such lines among the denouement scenes in his earlier novels. We would also maintain that the text of the novel contains diverse references in which the highly subjective romance ending as it appears in the published text is indeed anticipated. Conversely, there is equally considerable textual evidence to be found that might point forward to a realistic closure as it is offered in the first ending.

There are indeed numerous references that prepare the reader for the final dream-like scene in which Pip encounters a chastened but inde-

scribably charming Estella. That she should have called him a "visionary boy" when he once pleaded with her not to throw herself away on Bentley Drummle (GE, III, ch. 5, p. 362) carries more weight than a plain condescending rebuff. After all even Herbert Pocket, whose sympathetic understanding of him goes deeper, regards Pip as a "boy whom nature and circumstances made so romantic" (GE, II, ch. 11, p. 250). As a child he already evinces an inclination to indulge in fantastic imaginings. On returning from his first visit to Miss Havisham he keeps his elders spell-bound with a tall tale about bizarre entertainments at Satis House. Conversely, he himself becomes the victim of strange delusions when walking about the grounds of Miss Havisham's residence. His very imaginative response to changes in the environment or atmosphere should also be noted as descriptions of this kind add further significance to the drift of the narration. Deeply depressed by a spate of foul weather, Pip reacts nervously upon hearing footsteps on the stairs. The late visitor is the convict Abel Magwitch, who will presently reveal himself as Pip's benefactor and thus dash all hopes for a brilliant future that the young man had nursed. Demented by horror and sorrow, he now imagines having received "mysterious warnings of this man's approach" during the preceding weeks (GE, II, ch. 20, p. 321). Conversely, it seems equally in harmony with the romantic side of his personality that he should respond so sympathetically to the fairy-tale retreat that the lawyer John Wemmick has secretly conjured up at Walworth for himself and his quaint old father. Entranced by the rising mist that marks his reunion with Estella, the narrator recalls his erstwhile departure from the village when "the light mists were solemnly rising, as if to show me the world" (GE, I, ch. 19, p. 158). Or could the remembrance of this critical moment have led him to envisage a miraculous scene that might finally bring peace into his life?

On the other hand, Pip's account is certainly not everywhere coloured by fanciful notions. The planned escape of the convict is recalled step by step in every factual detail that might come to mind (GE, III, ch. 15). Like Wemmick he is quite capable of turning to an orderly, factual way of dealing with the events of the day when compelled to do so, although his innermost self may still be yearning for excitement. On such occasions, the narrator concedes, he is still inclined to feel as if "a thick curtain had fallen on all [life's] interest and romance, to shut me out from anything save dull endurance" (GE, I, ch. 14, p. 107). The chance encounter with a visibly changed Estella among thousands of passers-by in a busy part of

London, however improbable, is merely an incident in the actual everyday world in which Pip has found his place. In this context it is not to be expected that the sight of his former idol should rouse strong feelings any longer, and so this version of the closure ends with a brief moralising tag in which the narrator declares himself satisfied with Estella's improvement.

As each of the alternative endings of *Great Expectations* has been anticipated in the preceding text, a declared preference for one would come close to an assessment in which the realistic side of Pip's narration on one hand, and its spiritual undertones on the other, were weighed against each other. Yet how could an analysis that was so narrowly framed do justice to a comprehensive novel that has been ranked among the greatest works of English fiction? It would go too far to suppose that Dickens remained long unaware of the polarity between the factual and romantic aspects of Pip's story. What we may assume with some confidence is that towards the end of writing *Great Expectations* he became fully conscious of this dichotomy and hence uncertain about the mode in which the conclusion should be cast.

It is sometimes held that the letters cited above indicate a lingering feeling of doubt about the text that Dickens had finally chosen for an ending. This may well have been the case, yet would hardly justify the deduction that the first version comes closer to his true intentions. As we have tried to show, both endings correspond respectively to different modes of writing, or even thematic strands that comprise *Great Expectations*. What makes the issue of the two versions so very significant is that they offer textual evidence of the uncertainty that the author seems to have felt so often, his continual wavering about the way in which his narration should best proceed. It must not be forgotten that we owe the discarded text solely to John Forster's vexation at having been passed over. Bearing in mind to what extent Dickens used to heed the response of his friends and readers, there must have been numerous unrecorded instances in which a piece of personal advice, an unsought opinion, or a published assessment moved the author to turn his tale into a pertinent direction, which might differ substantially from the initially conceived sequence but would still agree with the preceding parts. As far as its composition is concerned, the genesis of a Dickensian novel might be comprehended as a loosely assembled set of numerous individual pieces which only gradually come to coalesce into a closed system.