Feeling for the Future: The Crisis of Anticipation in *Great Expectations*

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I

It is often observed that *Great Expectations* (1860–61) is a novel about the enduring presence of the past, about the binding force of Pip's personal history, and about his inability to escape the 'primal scene' of his childhood encounter with the convict on the marshes. The other side of the case has been less often discussed. The novel is centrally about Pip's aspirations for his future, as its title hints. It is about the emergence of his ambitions and the challenges levelled against them. Its central plot event registers the catastrophe of finding that the future he was living in hope of was an illusion. This essay investigates the critically under-explored delineation of Pip's future-oriented psychology. In particular, it looks at Dickens's deft representation of Pip's feelings of uncertainty about the future and at the catastrophe of the revelation that it would not be what he expected. It considers Dickens's sharp recognition, in principle and in practice, that those undefined feelings of anxiety and then paralysis regarding the future had to be retrieved from an end-directed narrative form that could make attitudes towards the future more distinct and purposive than was Pip's experience.

Dickens draws very finely the difficulty of imagining an unpredictable, unknown future, and the shock of learning that it will not turn out the way it was hoped. The interest in Pip's future — in his capacity for anticipation — is not a slight concern that gives way to a deeper recognition of the burden of his past; but it generates the emotional subtlety and deep psychological complexity that are central to Dickens's achievement in this novel. Depicting attitudes to the future is a necessarily vexed practice, because an individual's apprehension of the future is likely to be a confusion of thoughts and feelings, certainties and uncertainties, likelihoods and improbabilities. Aspects of the imagined future will be vague as often as they are specific. In writing about Pip's troubled expectations and anticipations, Dickens confronts the several challenges involved in instantiating in narrative those feelings for the future. In this case, these difficulties particularly include the bewildering heterogeneity of the potential future and the inevitably subjective nature of Pip's anticipations. They also include the difficulties of giving narrative structure to such anticipatory feelings because narrative form itself does not always do justice to half-

felt apprehensions of the open-ended future. This is because inclinations about the future may take on a sharper form when they are given utterance in narrative and because narrative, especially narrative fiction, typically requires the future to be less open-ended and unpredictable than it might be felt to be. The limitations of narrative form in expressing feelings for the future are again felt in those moments when characters, such as Pip, do not or cannot look ahead, because the future-directed quality of narrative, especially in a plotted, end-directed novel, is oriented towards the future in a way which the characters may not be.

Raymond Williams has written influentially about what he terms 'structures of feeling' in literature.[1] For him, cultural forms and societal formations give shape to these 'structures of feeling', which, in turn, offer ways of accessing perceptions of, and effects of, the society in which the text was written. As Brian Cheadle has noted, Williams believes Dickens's social criticism to be distinguished by the author's ability to imbue innumerable details with a single 'structure of feeling'.[2] Certainly, the central feelings that Dickens depicts in *Great Expectations*, and in novels such as *Bleak House* (1852–53), *Little Dorrit* (1855–57), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65), among others, are not simply idiosyncratic quirks of his characters, cut off from their and his broader understanding, experience of, and response to, the wider world. But they *are* often idiosyncratic, nonetheless (as in the case of Pip's early guilt-ridden anticipations), and they respond to the private, local conditions of the character's experience, as well as to shared experiences of Victorian society. On the one hand, to talk of Pip's 'feeling for the future' seems right, because it suggests a tentative reaching forward, suited to the vague, half-felt quality of many of his anticipations. On the other hand, this is not to preclude the fact that the over-reliance of his expectations and aspirations on Miss Havisham's being his benefactor seems more like a heavy-handed grasping. This paper focuses on the personal and psychological aspects of the feelings for the future experienced by Pip, rather than their social burden or effect. The investigation takes us into the techniques and textures of the writing where those feelings are expressed and evoked. The essay considers the future-directed structures of narrative and of syntax, as well as the resource of repetition, to explore the way Dickens expresses Pip's feelings for the future, and elicits the reader's engagement in that affective and cognitive drama.

Since narrative itself is future-directed, in that it exists in time, and it invites readers to anticipate the future of the story and then to follow its outworking, it is capable

of raising the reader's feeling for the future as well as dramatizing the expectations of its characters. Yet the kind of expectation elicited in the reader is not likely to be identical to the anticipations of the characters. A character's experience of the potentiality and incomprehensible plurality of the possible futures can be at odds with the fact that the rest of his or her narrative is contained in the book in the reader's hands. In publishing his novels serially, Dickens avoided the contradiction in its starkest form, but his novels frequently exploit the distinction between a character's limited knowledge of the future, his reader's informed but still fallible anticipations, and at least the possibility that he, as the author, knows all along how things will turn out. Indeed, it is not only the conditions of publication that constrain the felt multiplicity of the future, but the novel's internal logic. Many writers and critics have felt that the parameters of what is possible are narrower in fiction than they are in real life. In his enduringly valuable book, *The Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode writes:

> whereas there may be, in the world, no such thing as character, since a man is what he does and chooses freely what he does — and in so far as he claims that his acts are determined by psychological or other predisposition he is a fraud, *lâche*, or *salaud* — in the novel there can be no just representation of this, for if the man were entirely free he might simply walk out of the story, and if he had no character we should not recognize him.[3]

The implication here is that there are artistic demands upon a novelist that constrain the future that can be described. Gary Saul Morson puts the case more strongly when he says that in the context of a heavily plotted novel, 'narratives, insofar as they rely on structure, are predisposed to convey a sense of fatalism, determinism, or otherwise closed time'.[4] A finished narrative can therefore foster a sense that the future lines up ahead of a character in as orderly a way as the past extends behind him or her, and yet that character's anticipation of the unknown future is likely to be qualitatively different from his or her recollection of the past. For example, Donald Polkinghorne has pinpointed exactly this difficulty with understanding human thought in narrative terms: 'A problem may arise […] because the past story is a recollection of what has already been, and the future story, although it needs to be a continuation of the past, requires an open and adaptive character.'[5] While the past appears relatively stable and so can be narrativized less problematically, in anticipation, the future can seem uncertain, multifaceted, and open-ended. This is a quality that Pip identifies as characteristic of his own expectations. Waiting for his benefactor to reveal herself (as he thinks), he confides to Herbert:

> I cannot tell you how dependent and uncertain I feel, and how exposed to hundreds of chances. Avoiding forbidden ground, as you did just now, I may still say that on the constancy of one person (naming no person) all my expectations depend. And at the best, how indefinite and unsatisfactory, only to know so vaguely what they are![6]

A short time later, his anticipations are more excited, but no less indefinite and unsatisfactory:

> But we had looked forward to my one-and-twentieth birthday, with a crowd of speculations and anticipations, for we had both considered that my guardian could hardly help saying something definite on that occasion. (*GE*, p. 282)

And yet narrative imposes structure and order on the felt heterogeneity of the future, made all the more evident in this case where the past perfect tense ('we had looked forward') pushes the hope further into the past and reminds us, even in the moment that the anticipation is being described, that the future is no longer as open as Pip had felt it to be. A novel — this novel — can certainly gesture towards and propose several possible futures, and it does do that, but the demands of genre, plot, the reader's expectations of consistency, of plausibility as well as surprise, mean that the future is likely to be narrower than 'hundreds of chances' suggests.

The novel contains its own moment of recognition that narrative imposes 'form and purpose' on otherwise vague feelings about the future. Once Magwitch has returned at the end of Volume Two, he subsequently tells Pip the story of Compeyson and their mutual animosity. Pip observes:

> A new fear had been engendered in my mind by his narrative, or rather, his narrative had given form and purpose to the fear that was already there. (*GE*, p. 349)

Pip's qualification gives voice to Dickens's understanding that there are levels of human consciousness that defy and precede our best descriptions of them. The uncertainty of Pip's feelings about the future may derive not only from the future's unknowability, but from the unknowability of his own inner self. Dickens deftly demonstrates the mysterious motives and impulses to which Pip is subject, the often irrational, perhaps finally unknowable quality of the self, as Dickens apprehended it. The recognition that the narrative had added 'form and purpose' to Pip's fear suggests an understanding of the relationship between feeling and narrative, between experience and explanation, that is not a straight transition but a mediating translation. Pip's vague, unarticulated feeling about the future in this instance, as elsewhere, is sharpened by the process of narrativization.

Narrative has that tendency to discern order and structure among the chaotic and messy, or to impose it, and this is true of feelings about the future as well as of events. Narrative not only selects and presents events from a range of contingencies according to its own internal logic, it also *articulates* feelings about the future in both senses of that word: it gives them verbal specificity and it orders and arranges them.

Dickens's achievement is to create a sense of the felt multiplicity of the future in a narrative form that tends towards ordering it into a neat chronology, structurally equivalent to the past. At the climax of the novel, it is also to create a sense of the shock that occurs when the future no longer conforms to previously anticipated narrative structures and to do so in a narrative that constantly creates a sense of onward movement through its own logic, its organization, and even through the syntax of its individual sentences.

The most shaping force of the narrative is of course Pip himself. We learn as early as the first paragraphs that this is to be his story. This is implicit in the well-known third paragraph which sweeps around from the evidence of the gravestones eventually to Pip himself:

> At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond, was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip. (*GE*, p. 1)

This is an often-quoted passage, in which the orphan Pip recovers a sense of personal identity from the world around him, and in relation to his buried family. The little 'Pip' to which the sentence is magnetically drawn reminds us that Pip is to be the organizing focus of this narrative, that events and circumstances will be selected and arranged as they bear upon him.

The constraints of narrative form in expressing the unwieldy future are all the stronger in the case of retrospective first-person narratives, such as this one. Since in hindsight the future can appear to have been more predictable, inevitable, less troublesome, less resistant to forecast, than had been feared, a retrospective first-person

narrative such as *Great Expectations* might start to tidy away the messy, complex feelings for the unknown future that were the character's initial experience of looking ahead. This is especially true in a narrative that is end-directed, in a narrative that privileges plot and teleology over description, digression, and potentiality. In *Great Expectations*, as in much of Dickens, these rival forces are held in tension; that is to say, it remains an open question as to whether the emphasis is on plot or story.

Dickens's fine balance in the narrative voice between the young Pip's viewpoint and the adult Pip's perspective from beyond the close of the novel is especially pertinent in the case of the young Pip's anticipations. In *Great Expectations*' first-person narrative mode, two versions of Pip's future collide: one where it is unknown, often frightening and yet to be reached, the other where it can be safely described from hindsight. The balance between the immediate and the reflective modes of relating Pip's anticipations and the way that narrative structure can constrain the felt potentiality of the future are evident when Pip learns of his benefaction and prepares to leave the forge:

> I was lost in the mazes of my future fortunes, and could not retrace the by-paths we had trodden together. I begged Joe to be comforted, for (as he said) we had ever been the best of friends, and (as I said) we ever would be so. (*GE*, p. 139)

The first sentence here creates symmetry between past and future, between memory and anticipation. Its chiastic structure and the alliterative parallels of 'future fortunes' and 'trodden together' claim an equivalence between Pip's capacity for prospective and retrospective thought. And yet its point is to draw attention to a telling contrast. The contrast between future mazes and former by-paths subtly sets the homely simplicity of Pip's past against the expansive and bewildering future he anticipates. Then, the parenthetical insertions disentangle Pip's voice from Joe's. Joe's is seen to be the backward-looking reflection upon their previous friendship, while Pip's, appropriately, is the optimistic but self-deluding confidence in their future indestructible bond. The second insertion not only distinguishes Pip's voice from Joe's but touchingly sets his youthful confidence in the future against his maturer, humbler, recognition of his own naivety.

Indeed, faced with the uncertainty of the future, Pip himself uses narrative conventions to give a basis and a prompt to his feelings about the future, as a way of negotiating what he calls the 'poor labyrinth' of what lies ahead (*GE*, p. 299, Chapter 29). He believes himself to be the hero of a Romance plot set in motion by Miss Havisham:

> She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin — in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess. I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. (*GE*, p. 299)

Pip's vision of the future, in which he is the brilliant hero, draws on generic Romantic tropes not only to structure his thinking about the future, but also to give it content and colour. The piling up of detail in Pip's vision for his heroic future encapsulates the extent to which everything in his life is shaped by and towards a longed-for future. The verbal profusion as he describes the shining deeds he conceives himself enacting and in the description of the house as he passes, testify to the extensive and diffusive influence of his expectations, transforming all he sees into part of his own heroic quest, imbuing all around him with meaning, making everything understood in the reflected glory of the intended future of his plot. Narrative description competes with narrative drive here, especially in that last sentence, where the late appearing verbs 'had made up' and 'of which I was' struggle to reassert a sense of progress and teleology. We might even hear in 'made up' an ominous anticipation of Pip's later recollection that this is all an illusion. This is also another of those sentences that wind their way round to Pip, but with an awkwardness —— 'of which I was the hero' may appear uneasily appended — that half-anticipates the novel's later revelation that Pip is actually in a plot in which he may not be so surely the main protagonist, perhaps registering in its protracted prose Pip's version of David Copperfield's query 'whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life'.[7] Nonetheless, Pip is able to make progress, to contemplate his future, because he gives it this narrative shape. It is the clue to the labyrinth of his future, even though it leads him down a dead end.

II

Dickens's careful delineation of Pip's feelings towards the future, in a narrative that is itself relentlessly pressing forward (and at a more rapid weekly pace than all but one of his serialized novels), has, as I have suggested, received little discussion in criticism of the

novel. Critics have been much more alert to Pip's growing awareness of the inescapability of his past, which for a long time haunts him and eventually intrudes upon him catastrophically.

In her summary of the novel, Lyn Pykett suggests that *Great Expectations* demonstrates 'the turn to history and to the personal past' on Dickens's part and says that the novel 'explores the processes of history and the links between past and present.'[8] In this case, as often elsewhere, the critical emphasis on the insistent past in *Great Expectations* occludes a sense that the novel is also about the challenge of anticipation and expectation for a character intent on remaking himself and his future. In her book on the family in Dickens, Catherine Waters suggests that the prominence of the past in Pip's story compromises the novel's purported interest in the anticipatory dimension of Pip's narrative: 'While its title promises an orientation towards the future, the novel is preoccupied with a return to the past and the exploration of its determining influences upon the development of identity.'[9] David Trotter's introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel finds in Pip's early fear that he will be arrested a haunting of the past that will characterize his other expectations throughout the novel:

> Pip's expectation, before his expectations, is that he will be shown to have already committed a crime. It is an expectation about the past, about the re-emergence of the past in the future, about the return of the repressed.[10]

These assessments of *Great Expectations*, with their emphasis on the return of the past, reflect the legacy of Peter Brooks's compelling psychoanalytic reading of the novel, entitled 'Repetition, Repression and Return: the Plotting of *Great Expectations*', the fifth chapter of his groundbreaking 1984 book *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Brooks focuses on the frequent reappearance in Pip's life of the past that he thought he was leaving behind. For Brooks, the re-emergence of Pip's past, especially the primal scene of his communion with the convict Magwitch, represents 'the return of the repressed', the intrusion of unbound psychic and textual energies into the Romance narrative that Pip desires alternatively to inhabit. The novel is about 'the return of and to' the constraining past. As Brooks comments about Pip's encounter with the convict whom he overhears talking about Magwitch and the two one pound notes with which he repaid Pip:

> The return to origins has led to the return of the repressed, and vice versa. Repetition as return becomes reproduction and re-enactment of infantile experience: not simply a recall of the primal moment, but a reliving of its pain

> and terror, suggesting the impossibility of escape from the originating scenarios of childhood, the condemnation forever to replay them.[11]

Brooks's reading of Pip's psychology emphasizes the past over the future, the return of repressed memories, rather than the difficulties involved in anticipating a future. His rhetoric frequently tends towards the abstract terminology of psychoanalytic theory, in a way that assimilates his reading of Pip's narrative to the psychoanalytic master plot of repression and repetition bequeathed by Freud.

This commitment to the decisive influence of the past on Pip's narrative is the product not of Brooks's particular account alone, but of Freudian psychoanalytic readings of the novel per se. Freud wrote little about the influence of imagined futures upon present behaviour. His theories were more drawn to the past. Freudian psychoanalysis is to that extent backward-looking. Even when it did seek to account for the influence of imagined or apparently foreseen futures on the present, it recast them as projections of the subject's past history. Freud assailed premonitory dreams and fortune-telling on the basis that they are only replications of the past, projections of the past into the future, whereas the future is not yet determined, not yet written.[12] He famously finished his 1900 treatise on *The Interpretation of Dreams* by dismantling the credibility of supposedly previsionary dreams: 'But this future, which the dreamer takes as the present, has been moulded by his indestructible wish into a perfect likeness of the past.'[13]

Commentators including Jean-Paul Sartre and Ernst Bloch have critiqued the predisposition of Freudian psychoanalysis towards the past. In his 1943 *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre wrote:

> the dimension of the future does not exist for psychoanalysis. Human reality loses one of its ekstases and must be interpreted solely by a regression toward the past from the standpoint of the present. […] In spite of everything, [the subject's] acts are only a result of the past, which is on principle out of reach, instead of seeking to inscribe their goal in the future.[14]

In 1957, Ernst Bloch identified the same shortcoming: 'Up till now [the future] has remained completely beyond conceptual reach, there is as yet no psychology of the unconscious of the other side, of forward dawning.' He sought to redress this deficiency in his extensive, three-volume study, *The Principle of Hope*, a lyrical-philosophical investigation, from a Marxist perspective, into the influence of the future on human and social behaviour. His study addressed 'that preconscious which does not suit Freud's

system at all, the preconscious in its other meaning, over on the other side, in which no repressed material, but rather something coming up, is to be clarified'.[15]

Such revisionist critiques of psychoanalysis suggest that desire was rooted in the past for Freud not solely because that was how he found it but because that was what his analytic method presupposed. Psychoanalysis was essentially backward-looking because its bid for scientific authority rested on its use of empirical data. By studying the psychological history of patients, the raw material was factual, traceable, and recordable. To attempt to study cloudy anticipations and tentative expectations would be like chasing shadows.

The reasons why criticism of *Great Expectations*, under the long influence of psychoanalytic readings, is predisposed towards the return of and to the past in Pip's story, rather than his feelings for the future, are deeply embedded in the methodological predispositions of Freudian psychoanalysis. Carolyn Dever has recently noted that

> [f]or Dickens as for Freud, history resolutely refuses to stay in the past, instead inhabiting the present as the not-quite-visible, not-quite-knowable ghost in the machine of orderliness and reason. To be a subject is, for both authors, to live at once in the present and the past.[16]

The comment assumes symmetry between Dickens and Freud in its occlusion of the future in favour of the past. For Freud, it may be that to be a subject is 'to live at once in the present and the past'. For Dickens, throughout his career, the forward orientation of human life comprises a principle of his representation of human behaviour and thought. It is more accurate to say that for Dickens, his view of the ideal subject accords with the declaration of the transformed Scrooge, which Dever echoes and shrinks, that he should 'live in the Past, the Present and the Future'.[17]

III

The hallmark of psychoanalytic readings of the novel is their attention to the trope of repetition, as a point of contact between the structuring operations of narrative and the procedures of the mind according to Freudian theory. Their readings of repetition associate the trope firmly with the return of the past. Brooks writes: 'Repetition in the text is a return, a calling back or a turning back. And […] repetitions are thus both returns to and returns of: for instance, returns to origins and returns of the repressed.'[18] There are

certainly many well-known returns in the novel. Pip makes several returns to Miss Havisham. Magwitch returns, of course, bringing with him reminders of the opening scene on the marshes that had haunted Pip. The mists on the marshes, in that first encounter with Magwitch, are recollected, as is well known, at the end of the first and third volumes. The two one pound notes which Magwitch sends to Pip via an emissary recur twice. Pip later overhears Magwitch's emissary talking to another convict about 'Two One-Pound notes' and when Magwitch returns Pip attempts to repay him that money. The file that Pip delivered to Magwitch in the opening scene makes several returns. It is shown to him at the Jolly Bargemen, after which Pip says: 'I was haunted by the file too. A dread possessed me that when I least expected it, the file would reappear' (*GE*, p. 77). The file does indeed reappear, for Magwitch shows it to him as proof of his identity when he makes his return. But there are lexical as well as literal returns in the novel. The file reappears verbally in Magwitch's account of Compeyson: 'He'd no more heart than a iron file'; and through the 'file of soldiers' that Pip runs into at the forge at the outset, thinking they have come to remand him. These lexical returns create a sense that the narrative is strangely, eerily, permeated by its own past, reflecting Pip's own sense of being haunted by the file and by his own guilt. The same is true of the word 'Jack'. Pip's embarrassment before Estella at cards, when he calls the knaves 'jacks', long bothers him and it haunts the novel, as when Magwitch returns and brandishes his 'jack-knife', or when the narrative records the 'jack-towel' that is earlier present at the forge or notices the 'unusually large' jack-towel found in Jaggers's office. When Pip stops at a public house by the river while smuggling Magwitch away, he converses with 'the "Jack" of the little causeway'.

As these examples testify, there is good reason to recognize that the novel's repetitions are often returns, of and to the past. But just as I have suggested that the novel is about the problem of the future as well as the return of the past, so too is the significance of repetition in the novel located in its threat to progress, to thinking about and working towards the future. This is another angle on the same insight and it is one that is not overlooked by Brooks and others, but is underemphasized. In a narrative form that insistently moves forward, pressing on into its own future, one function of repetition is not only to return to the past, but to stall the forward movement of the narrative, to offer a moment of defiance against the hegemony of the narrative's chronological structuring, in

this case reasserting Pip's present tense experience against the retrospective imposition of a teleological narrative.

The effects of repetition are multiple, too, which is a function of the fact that repetition is not only structural, but also a feature of style, especially in its syntactical manifestations. Dickens variously uses repetition in his prose to create a sense of monotony, permanence, and resilience. It can be eerily resistant to normal patterns of change, decay, progress. In a character's voice it can be rigidly assertive ('Fact, fact, fact!') or feelingly plaintive (Little Dorrit's, 'No, no, no!'). It can be wearying or comic, or both (as in Pumblechook's 'May I?'). It is by repetition in Dickens's novels that manners become mannerisms, that characters acquire characteristics. In Dickens's prose, repetition sometimes bespeaks an attempt to carve out permanence from a world in flux. It often, and this is true in *Great Expectations*, calls forth a sense of dramatic intensity as it gives pause to the onward flow of our reading.

The repetition that Brooks and others have seen as a hallmark of the plot and prose of *Great Expectations* is most richly associated with Miss Havisham, whose desire to suspend time by obsessively sticking to routines of repetition (walking around the table, for example) stands as a counterpoint to the progressive ambitions of Pip. As with many of the novel's repetitions, although they imply the enduring presence of the past, they gain much of their force precisely by their being at odds with forward movement. When Pip leaves Miss Havisham for the last time, late in the novel, she is still repeating herself:

> Towards midnight she began to wander in her speech, and after that it gradually set in that she said innumerable times in a low solemn voice, 'What have I done!' And then, 'When she first came, I meant to save her from misery like mine.' And then, 'Take the pencil and write under my name, "I forgive her!"' She never changed the order of these three sentences, but she sometimes left out a word in one or other of them; never putting in another word, but always leaving a blank and going on to the next word. (*GE*, pp. 398–99)

The curious detail that Miss Havisham omits words without replacing them in the compulsive repetitions of her speech refigures in her language the same obsessive repetition without structural variation, and despite deterioration, that characterizes her life in the novel. Her repetitions are obsessive, futile attempts to defy time. They draw our attention to the fact that there can be no true repetition in our time-bound lives, that what is most defiantly repetitive must also be obstinately and resolutely moving forward. This

passage also alerts us to the fact that characters' attitudes to their future may be evidenced in the rhythms of their speech as much as by the patterns of their behaviour.

This is demonstrably true of Pip. Earlier in the novel, his failure to make headway in living out his Romantic aspirations, the absence of the anticipated orderly movement towards the future, was registered in the emergence into his voice of Miss Havisham-esque repetitions. His resigned lament over Estella, 'I love her, I love her, I love her' (*GE*, p. 241), not only reflects Miss Havisham's influence (she had told him: 'Love her! Love her! Love her!' (*GE*, p. 237)), but testifies to the impossibility of moving forward: he sees no plot or narrative to offer an outlet or a future to this love.[19]

Pip's ability to organize his feelings in relation to a desired future is compromised by the novel's returns and repetitions. The reader is encouraged to share in that imaginative, psychic blockage by the repetitive style. This is most evident in the famous 'recognition scene', often discussed by critics of the novel, where Magwitch returns to Pip and announces himself as his benefactor. In the recognition scene, the frequent use of a repetitive style is not only about the return of the past, but the blocked progress towards the future and about the consequently overwhelming present. It is about the psychic catastrophe that ensues when one's future falls apart. Pip recognizes that his crisis is specifically a catastrophic blow to his feelings for the future. Magwitch's return prompts a crisis because Pip is suddenly brought to understand the utter falsity of the narrative that had previously given shape to his future, which had enabled him to conduct his life thus far in the hope of a better future to come. His crisis is manifest in his inability to think about his future in the absence of the deposed plotline: 'As to forming any plan for the future, I could as soon have formed an elephant' (*GE*, p. 325). The nonsense remark reveals the sheer and absurd impossibility of rational future planning amid the immediate aftershocks of Magwitch's return, despite the suitability for Pip's future of an animal that legendarily never forgets.

Repetitions in Pip's voice in the recognition scene appear to be a means by which he seeks to impose order on a situation that is slipping from his control. He tells Magwitch:

> I am glad to believe you have repented and recovered yourself. I am glad to tell you so. I am glad that, thinking I deserve to be thanked, you have come to thank me. But our ways are different ways, none the less. (*GE*, p. 312)

The insistent repetitions reflect the urgency and compulsion of Pip's response, as if he intends to leave no omission that would invite further comment from Magwitch. The repetition of his own purported welcoming of Magwitch's reformation, as if Magwitch had no further claim upon him than such a response, reveals and reasserts Pip's pride at exactly the moment when his self-esteem is most threatened, a pride that is all the more evident if Dickens had it in mind for Pip to echo the words of God's rebuke to the Israelites in the book of Isaiah: '"neither are your ways my ways", saith the Lord'.[20]

The repetitions in Pip's voice here become characteristic of Dickens's prose in the wake of Pip's disappointment, reflecting the sudden accumulation of implications and the stifling of forward movement. Consider the repetitions at the moment of recognition:

> No need to take a file from his pocket and show it to me; no need to take the handkerchief from his neck and twist it round his head; no need to hug himself with both his arms, and take a shivering turn across the room, looking back at me for recognition. (*GE*, p. 311)

> I relinquished the intention he had detected, for I knew him! Even yet, I could not recal a single feature, but I knew him! […] I could not have known my convict more distinctly than I knew him now, as he sat in the chair before the fire. […] I knew him before he gave me one of those aids […] (*GE*, p. 311)

Clearly, the repetitions associated with Magwitch's return are stylistic as well as plotted. They serve to accentuate the drama of the present moment. Consider the repetition of 'that', along with the grammatical parallelism, shortly afterwards:

> In every rage of wind and rush of rain, I heard pursuers. Twice, I could have sworn there was a knocking and whispering at the outer door. With these fears upon me, I began either to imagine or recall that I had had mysterious warnings of this man's approach. That, for weeks gone by, I had passed faces in the streets which I had thought like his. That, these likenesses had grown more numerous, as he, coming over the sea, had drawn nearer. That, his wicked spirit had somehow sent these messengers to mine, and that now on this stormy night he was as good as his word, and with me. (*GE,* p. 319)

The passage mediates between a retrospective analysis of anxiety and the possibility of mysterious foreknowledge. Its repetitions record a heightened sensitivity to the circumstances of the present and the immediate past. They imply a radical revision of Pip's understanding of his own history. They register the shock of recognition and revelation in the present. By staging return after return, and by their resistance to onward advancement, they constitute a denial of the possibility of expectation or of any plan for the future. This inability to conceive of any future is part of the nature of Pip's

disappointment and is coextensive with the revisions of his past and the focus on the present. The passage matches the returns of character and plot with returns of grammatical formulations.

Barbara Hardy has pointed out that even 'the wind and the rain' return from the initial encounter with Magwitch on the marshes.[21] One other feature of that opening scene that returns here is the syntactical structure of the much-discussed paragraph that ranges round the environment before homing in on the identification 'that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip'. In both cases, and in the passage that ends with Pip reasserting his own importance in the Romance narrative 'of which I was the hero', the long sentences move inexorably towards Pip, who is the object rather than the subject of the action. They reflect his nagging sense of being helplessly imposed upon by circumstances, by the taint of crime, and by Magwitch. Where he had hoped to emerge as the active agent in his plot, he comes to seem at its mercy.

Since, as I have been claiming, narrative is ordinarily future-directed, Pip's crisis of expectation has to be reflected in the breakdown of the forward-dynamics of his narrative, in the prose and its rhythms. The challenge to teleology, to anticipation, is reflected in features of Dickens's style and syntax, other than repetition alone. It is often in the details of Dickens's prose that the challenge of disappointment to the conventional forward movement of narrative is most evident. In coming to terms with his disappointment, Pip had to learn, among much else, that past events did not have the purposive direction that he had ascribed to them when he imagined himself the hero of a Romance, that his confidence in Miss Havisham's 'intention' and the responsibility and hope of reward that consequently devolved upon him were illusions. Dickens's style conveys the disturbance of Pip's capacity for orderly thought: 'Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me.' (*GE*, p. 319). This revision of his earlier understanding finds expression as a set of facts, where the breaking down of the prose into a mere list reflects Pip's state of mind, the sudden absence of main verbs neatly indicating the removal of any underlying purposive agency from Pip's understanding of events.

Part of the shock prompted by his recognized failure to inhabit the Romance narrative, as he had hoped, is the result of the return of the chaotic plurality of the potential future that I discussed earlier, without the ordering function of narrative. Pip is

shaken to the core by the welter of possible futures, of possible future implications, that come rushing in upon him and this is also registered in the movement of Dickens's prose:

> All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew. (*GE*, p. 314).

Dickens's piling up of nouns ('disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences') combines with his choice of verbs to convey the welter of consequences, the torrent of revised expectations, that 'rush in' without any order, capturing the trauma of the sudden removal of the narrative by which Pip had understood his life and his future. The 'in in' is poised just on the safe side of incoherence, as if the sentence is struggling to bear its own weight. Pip's previous understanding of his story is swept away and now the most fundamental and basic of human sequences — that of breathing — becomes an effort, alerting us to the fact that this is also the crisis of another kind of sequence, that of the narrative coherence of his story and of his feelings about the future.

The crushing blow of Pip's disappointment and the depth of its psychological effect, as depicted in the novel, result from the awareness that the consequences are not limited to a reordering of Pip's aspirations, since those aspirations are both a part of his future, and a part of his past and of his own being, especially insofar as they involve and imply Estella. He later tells her:

> You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read, since I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since — on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets. (*GE,* p. 360)

Even as it says so much about the extent of her influence, 'prospect' is tellingly reduced to the suggestion of scenic outlook rather than substantive expectations or feelings for the future. The loss of the possibility of anticipation is reinforced by the repetitive concurrence of these scenes, 'in the …, in the …', where stasis replaces the forward movement of the syntax — a Miss Havisham-esque stilling of time, where the elegant rhythm of the line is, as it were, compensation for the lack of forward momentum, as if seeking refuge from the sudden loss of the plot in which his hopes were invested in the beautiful unfolding of the descriptive prose and in the ever widening set of current vistas. The crisis that Pip experiences radically transforms his understanding of his own life, past,

present, and future. The flood of consequences and the myriad manifold implications of his realization are best captured in all the urgency and immediacy of their psychological effect in the structures, especially the repetitions, of Dickens's prose. Despite the relative critical neglect of the futural dimensions of Pip's thinking, Dickens's ability to wrest a sense of the devastating unknowability of the future from a narrative that he knew, in its larger and smaller structures, its story and its sentences, offered models of neat progression towards a possibly predictable future, is one of the novel's great accomplishments.

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[1] Raymond Williams, 'Social Criticism in Dickens: Some Problems of Method and Approach', *Critical Quarterly*, 6 (Autumn 1964), 214–27 (p. 226).

[2] Brian Cheadle, 'The Late Novels: *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. by John O. Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 78–91 (p. 79).

[3] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 138.

[4] Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 8.

[5] Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 107.

[6] Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. by Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 245. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

[7] Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. by Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 1.

[8] Lyn Pykett, *Critical Issues: Charles Dickens* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 165.

[9] Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 150.

[10] David Trotter, 'Introduction' to Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. by David Trotter (London: Penguin, 1996), p. xii. Trotter's introduction gives more space to the future-directed aspect of Pip's psychology than do many other accounts, although other critics who pay attention to the futural dimensions of *Great Expectations* include Nicola Bradbury, 'Dickens's Use of the Autobiographical Fragment', in *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. by David Paroissien (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 18–32 (pp. 30–31); Baruch Hochman and Ilja Wachs, *Dickens: The Orphan Condition* (London: Associated University Presses, 1999), p. 167; and James E. Marlow, *Charles Dickens and the Uses of Time* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994), especially Chapter 3.

[11] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 126.

[12] See John Forrester, '"A perfect likeness of the past" (Freud): Dreaming of the Future', in *Writing the Future*, ed. by David Wood (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 98–105.

[13] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. by James Strachey and others, Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–74), V, 621.

[14] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1958), p. 458.

[15] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), I, 116.

[16] Carolyn Dever, 'Psychoanalyzing Dickens', in *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*, ed. by John Bowen and Robert Patten (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 216–33 (p. 219).

[17] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, in *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Books*, ed. by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Stave V, p. 77.

[18] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, p. 125.

[19] Robert Douglas-Fairhurst makes this point in his 'Introduction' to *Great Expectations*, ed. by Cardwell, p. xvi.

[20] Isaiah 55. 17.

[21] Barbara Hardy, *Dickens and Creativity* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 153–54.