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"GREAT EXPECTATIONS"

Dickens Masterpiece Adapted by BBC

GR**EAT EXPECTATIONS**, by Charles Dickens, is the new serial play starting from 3YA at 8.0 p.m. on Saturday, October 22. It was originally broadcast to listeners to the BBC's Home Service, and the adaptation (in 12 episodes) was done by Mabel Constanduros and Howard Agg, who have made the most of the book's rich resources of plot and character. Humphrey House, writing in the *Radio Times* at the time of the serial's first broadcast in England, described *Great Expectations* as "unique for the detailed insight and imaginative tenderness with which it treats the class structure of early Victorian England—one of the few great works of art produced by the society it describes."

It was originally published week by week in Dickens's own periodical *All the Year Round*, between December 1860 and August 1861. The policy Dickens had laid down for fiction in his popular twopenny weeklies—that it should be short and dramatic—disciplined his own work in construction and style, and was one reason, according to House, for the book's unified development of plot. Although the theme of *Great Expectations* is not directly autobiographical, Dickens carefully re-read *David Copperfield* before writing it, thus avoiding repetitions. He also acquired a greater degree of detachment from his remembered self in the character of Pip than he did in David. The style, House points out, is almost entirely free from Dickens's peculiar vices—circumlocutory facetiousness and wordy rhapsodies on insipid virtue. The comic characters—Pumblechook, Wopsle, and Bill Barley—do not swell out of control, while the great descriptions of the marshes and the river are written in the author's most economical and energetic prose, contributing much to the work's total effect.

Snob's Progress

Both Pip and Estella are victims of perverted power, for, with money as their instrument, Miss Havisham and Magwitch each use a child as the channel of their revenge upon society. The book tells the story of a young snob's progress through the many gradations in Victorian society, and a main theme is provided by what can be described as the sexual element in all male snobbery—Pip wanted to become a gentleman long before the mysterious money came his way, for he saw in Estella a glamorous young "lady" for whom he might

one day become the elegant lover in a brilliant setting of wealth and luxury. The themes of Pip's illusions about Estella, and of his expectations of money, are finally brought together in the discovery that both the fortune and the girl derive from the terrifying criminal whom the little boy had met on the marshes. In the original ending Pip overcomes his infatuation for the girl and they part for good. The present conventional happy ending (tacked on, according to Forster, in deference to the opinion of Bulwer Lytton) certainly



BBC photograph
HOWARD AGG who, with Mabel Constanduros, was responsible for the BBC adaptation of "Great Expectations"

seems, as Bernard Shaw has said, an outrage on public taste.

Attempts have been made to interpret *Great Expectations* as a political allegory, showing that just as Pip's expectations depended on the patronage of a criminal, so the wealth of mid-Victorian society depended on depressed and exploited labour. But although most of Pip's hopes failed, and his wealth half corrupted him, neither the ruin nor the corruption was absolute. He was left with his new class character, holding a safe genteel job in a good business—all through Magwitch's money.

In this BBC version of the novel Cyril Cusack and Hermione Hannon play the grown-up Pip and Estella, Gladys Young is Miss Havisham, Laidman Browne plays Joe Gargery, and William Devlin makes an impressive Magwitch. Walter Goehr conducts the Philharmonia Orchestra in his specially written musical score, and the production is by Raymond Raikes.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT.

WE**EKLY** Review No. 423 issued by the National Film Unit for the week beginning October 14, contains the following items: "N.Z. Boxing Championships" held at Wellington's Town Hall; "£75,000 Fire" at Auckland; "West Coast Hospital"—showing the foundation stone for a new hospital being laid, and the opening of a nurses' home at Reefton—and "Battle of Britain," in which Wellington honours a great day.

N.Z. LISTENER, OCTOBER 14, 1949.