

SCREEN ADAPTATIONS

CHARLES DICKENS'
GREAT EXPECTATIONS

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEXT AND FILM

BRIAN MCFARLANE

EDITED BY IMELDA WHELEHAN

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Bloomsbury Methuen Drama
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

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Bloomsbury Methuen Drama

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Imprint previously known as Methuen Drama

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

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First published in 2008 by Methuen Drama

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: PB: 978-0-7136-7909-0
ePDF: 978-1-4081-4902-7
ePub: 978-1-4081-4901-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Series: Screen Adaptations

contents

Introduction and acknowledgments	v
Filmography and credits for key films	xi
Part One: Literary contexts	
An enduringly popular novel	3
Part Two: From text to screen	
Adaptations and extrapolations across the media	41
<i>Great Expectations</i> on television	63
<i>Great Expectations</i> (1934): a Hollywood studio romance	83
<i>Great Expectations</i> (1975): a musical sans songs	95
<i>Great Expectations</i> (1998): from estuary to gulf, to Manhattan and back	111
<i>Great Expectations</i> (1946): something like a classic	127
Part Three: The afterlife of Lean's film	
A film of its time – and for other times	163
Bibliography	175
Index	181

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introduction

Dickens has been immensely popular with filmmakers, though it cannot be said that the resulting films have often been of major interest. Because he is, by common consent, a highly 'visual' writer, it may have been assumed that this means he is a gift to the cinema; this book will take issue with this on several grounds.

Sergei Eisenstein, the great Russian filmmaker, compared American film pioneer, D.W. Griffith to Dickens for 'their spontaneous childlike skill in story-telling'¹ and goes on to discuss Dickens as a forerunner of cinematic techniques such as the close-up. George Bluestone in one of the first studies of adaptation claimed that 'Griffith found in Dickens hints for every one of his major innovations'.² In my view the comparison has been too easily accepted, not sufficiently scrutinised. However, there is no denying the prolificacy of films derived from Dickens, and *Great Expectations* alone has attracted at least ten versions as well as several television

 ¹ Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form*, ed. and trans. Jan Leyda, New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949, p. 196.

² George Bluestone, *Novels into Film*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957, p. 1.


adaptations. David Lean's 1946 film will be a major focus of this book: it has acquired an almost impregnable reputation and is generally held to be superior to Lean's version of *Oliver Twist* two years later. Both these contentions seem to me to be at least open to discussion.

The first recorded film adaptation appears to have been an American silent screen version in 1917, followed by a Danish silent in 1922, a US talkie in 1934, Lean's celebrated 1946 classic, the UK version of 1975 (made for TV but also widely shown in cinemas), an animated Australian film in 1980, and a modern reworking in the US-made adaptation of 1997. In addition, there have been at least five major television mini-series derived from the novel: in 1959, 1967, 1981, 1989, and 1999. There have also been many radio versions; at least three adaptations to the stage; an Australian mini-series, *Great Expectations: The Untold Story* (1986), which pursues Magwitch's antipodean adventures; at least three theatrical adaptations; and at least four novels inspired by aspects of Dickens's story; and a graphic novel version. I shall take up some of these other kinds of adaptation in the second chapter to emphasise the enduring appeal of this novel.

My aim in discussing the novel in the opening chapter is not to offer another, let alone definitive, reading of *Great Expectations*, but to consider some of the reasons for its continuing and widespread popularity and to explore some of the elements which one would need to have in mind when considering how it has been adapted, especially to the screen. Certainly, it is a novel which has had an unusual hold on the popular imagination. Later I will consider how two of the television serial versions have gone about their task; and will discuss the film versions made in 1934, 1975 and 1998 respectively. I have deliberately left Lean's 1946 film till the end, and have written it last. Having written about it at length before, I wanted to see how it stood up to comparison with the

other, less well-known, less critically regarded versions, and to the passage of sixty years. Further, because the film has such a high critical standing, I wanted readers to have in mind, before reading about it at length, the other kinds of treatment the novel has attracted, without their simply being seen as cowering in the long shadow of the Lean film.

Great Expectations is one of those fictions which has taken on a longer and larger life than its maker can have envisaged. As recently as November 2006, objections were being raised to the Thames Gateway development partly on the grounds of violation of locations sanctified by Dickens having set part of *Great Expectations* there.³ Indeed, one opposing voice claimed that the planned Thames Gateway would destroy, 'the old places where Magwitch tried to escape'. In the following month, playwright Patrick Marber talked of writing the screenplay for *Notes on a Scandal*, starring Judi Dench as a manipulative teacher, in these terms, claiming that he 'loves screen bitches': 'I remember seeing David Lean's *Great Expectations* when I was about 10. Miss Havisham and the cruel Estella always intrigued me. I was terrified. But one couldn't help wanting to have Estella be one's friend - as Pip did.'⁴ And a recent Australian novel, Andrew McGahan's *White Earth* (2004), concerning the influences on a young boy's growth towards manhood, led one reviewer to conclude by saying: 'Those who have read Dickens will draw parallels between Uncle John and Miss Havisham and be aware of the Dickensian feel to both the progression of the tale and the overall tone'.⁵

 ³ See *The Times*, 14 November 2006, for one account of the proposed development and the opposition to it.

⁴ Quoted in Liz Hoggard, 'Far deadlier than the male', in *The Observer*, 3 December 2006.

⁵ Sally Murphy, 'Book Review: *The White Earth*, by Andrew McGahan' (Melbourne: Allen & Unwin, 2004.) See www.aussiereviews.com/article1611.html

These three recent random examples suggest that *Great Expectations* is a novel whose afterlife is assured. Of the various adaptations that will be discussed in this book, one can only speculate on how long each will be remembered, but Patrick Marber's comment suggests that at least one – Lean's – is well on the way to having a place in the collective memory.

Acknowledgments

In helping me to obtain access to viewing copies of various film texts referred to in this study, I am indebted to Tom Burstall, who also answered many questions relating to his father Tim Burstall's television mini-series, *Great Expectations: The Untold Story*; and to Siobhan Dee and Helen Tully, respectively Collections Access and TV Acquisitions Officer at the National Film and Sound Archive, Melbourne. I thank David Field, Managing Director, Burbank Animation Studios Ltd, Sydney, who answered questions about the animated version of *Great Expectations*; and Trish Hayes, Archives Researcher, BBC, London, and Justine Sloan, of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's radio drama department, were extremely helpful about the extent of radio adaptations of the novel. On the matter of stage adaptations of *Great Expectations*, Jonathan Croall (London) and Monica Maughan (Melbourne) offered very useful first-hand impressions. I am grateful to my Monash University colleague, Dickens scholar Alan Dilnot for many helpful suggestions, and to Robert De Grauw for drawing my attention to the *South Park* episode which takes off from Dickens and to the graphic novel version of *Great Expectations*; to Terry Hayes, who brought Andrew McGahan's novel to my attention; to Ian Britain who put me on to Sue Roe's *Estella: Her Expectations*, and to Philippa Hawker for alerting me to Lloyd Jones's novel *Mr Pip* and for arranging with Text Publishing, Melbourne, to secure an advance copy for me. At the

British Film Institute, London, John Oliver, of the National Film and Television Archive, helped me considerably in researching various versions of the novel. To Oxford University Press, my thanks are due for permission to reproduce a table from my book *Novel Into Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (1996). I thank Imelda Whelehan, the editor associated with the production of this book and the staff of A&C Black Publishers.

And finally, my thanks are due to my wife Geraldine for all kinds of support during the writing, including a lot of valuably critical reading of the manuscript.

Brian McFarlane

Melbourne, December 2007

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filmography and credits for key films

Television mini-series (page 52)

Great Expectations: The Untold Story (1986)

Director	Tim Burstall
Screenplay	Tim Burstall
Producer	Tom Burstall, Ray Alchin, for Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Hemdale Film Corporation, International Film Management
Photography	Peter Hendry
Costume design	Quentin Hole
Production design	Laurie Johnstone, John Pryce-Jones
Editing	Tony Kavanagh, Lyn Solly
Music	George Dreyfus

Running time 300 minutes (approx); also in a 102-minute tele-movie version

Main cast

Abel Magwitch	John Stanton
Tankerton	Ron Moody
Bridget Tankerton	Sigrid Thornton
Compeyson	Robert Coleby
Jaggers	Noel Ferrier
Pip (adult)	Todd Boyce
Pip (child)	Danny Simmonds
Estella	Anne Louise-Lambert
Miss Havisham	Julia Foster
Joe Gargery	Bruce Spence
Mrs Joe	Annie Byron
Wemmick	Alan Tobin
Herbert Pocket	David Sandford
Uncle Pumblechook	Brian Moll
Biddy	Nell Schofield
Molly	Jennifer Hagan
Sergeant	Tony (Anthony) Wager
Tooth	Gerard Kennedy

Television adaptations (page 65)

1981 mini-series

Director	Julian Amyes
Screenplay	James Andrew Hall
Producer	Barry Letts, for the BBC
Photography	John Kenway, Bob Hubbard
Costume design	Ann Arnold
Production design	Michael Edwards
Editing	Oliver White
Music	Paul Reade (composer/conductor)

Running time 290 minutes

Main cast

Pip (adult)	Jerry Sundquist
Pip (child)	Gordon McGrath (aged 8) Paul Davies-Prowles (aged 12)
Estella (adult)	Sarah-Jane Varley
Estella (child)	Patsy Kensit
Magwitch	Stratford Johns
Miss Havisham	Joan Hickson
Joe Gargery	Phillip Joseph
Mrs Joe	Marjorie Yates
Mr Jaggers	Derek Francis
Wemmick	Colin Jeavons
Herbert Pocket	Tim Munro
Uncle Pumblechook	John Stratton
Bentley Drummle	Iain Ormsby-Knox
Mr Pocket	Timothy Bateson
Biddy	Christine Absolom
Orlick	Lionel Haft
Molly	Julie Buckingham
Compeyson	Peter Whitbread
Aged P.	Tony Sympson

1999 mini-series (page 72)

Director	Julian Jarrold
Screenplay	Tony Marchant
Producer	David Snodin, for BBC and WGBH Boston
Photography	David Odd
Costume design	Odile Dicks-Mireaux
Production design	Alice Normington
Editing	Chris Gill
Music	Peter Salem

Running time 180 minutes

Main cast

Pip (adult)	Ioan Gruffudd
Pip (child)	Gabriel Thomson
Estella (adult)	Justine Waddell
Estella (child)	Gemma Gregory
Abel Magwitch	Bernard Hill
Miss Havisham	Charlotte Rampling
Joe Gargery	Clive Russell
Mrs Joe	Lesley Sharp
Mr Jaggers	Ian McDiarmid
Wemmick	Nicholas Woodeson
Herbert Pocket	Daniel Evans
Uncle Pumblechook	Terence Rigby
Bentley Drummle	James Hillier
Mr Pocket	David Horovitch
Biddy	Emma Cunniffe
Orlick	Tony Curran
Molly	Laila Morse
Compeyson	Donald Sumpter
Aged P.	Hugh Lloyd

Cinema films

1934 film (page 83)

Director	Stuart Walker
Screenplay	Gladys Unger
Producer	Stanley Bergerman, for Universal Pictures
Photography	George Robinson
Costume design	Vera West
Production design	Albert D'Agostino
Editing	Edward Curtiss
Music	Edward Ward

Running time 96 minutes

Main cast

Pip (adult)	Phillips Holmes
Pip (child)	George P. Breakston
Estella (adult)	Jane Wyatt
Estella (child)	Ann Howard
Abel Magwitch	Henry Hull
Miss Havisham	Florence Reed
Joe Gargery	Alan Hale
Mrs Joe	Rafaela Ottiano
Mr Jaggers	Francis L. Sullivan
Herbert Pocket	Walter Armitage
Uncle Pumblechook	Forrester Harvey
Bentley Drummle	Philip Dakin
Biddy	Valerie Hobson (scenes deleted)
Orlick	Harry Cording
Molly	Virginia Hammond
Compeyson	George Barraud

1975 film (page 95)

Director	Joseph Hardy
Screenplay	Sherman Yellen
Producer	Robert Fryer, for Incorporated Television Company (ITC) and Transcontinental Films
Photography	Freddie Young
Costume design	Elizabeth Haffenden, Joan Bridge
Production design	Terence Marsh
Editing	Bill Butler
Music	Maurice Jarre (composer/conductor)

Running time 124 minutes

Main cast

Pip (adult)	Michael York
Pip (child)	Simon Gipps-Kent
Estella	Sarah Miles
Abel Magwich	James Mason
Miss Havisham	Margaret Leighton
Joe Gargery	Joss Ackland
Mrs Joe	Rachel Roberts
Mr Jaggers	Anthony Quayle
Wemmick	Peter Bull
Herbert Pocket	Andrew Ray
Uncle Pumblechook	Robert Morley
Bentley Drummle	James Faulkner
Mr Pocket	David Horovitch
Biddy	Heather Sears
Molly	Celia Hewitt
Compeyson	Sam Kydd

1998 film (page 111)

Director	Alfonso Cuarón
Screenplay	Mitch Glazer
Producer	Art Linson, for 20th Century Fox
Photography	Emmanuel Lubezki
Costume design	Judianna Makovsky
Production Design	Tony Burrough
Editing	Steven Weisberg
Music	Patrick Doyle

Running time 111 minutes

Main cast

'Finn' Bell (adult)	Ethan Hawke
Finn (child)	Jeremy James Kissner
Estella (adult)	Gwyneth Paltrow
Estella (child)	Raquel Beaudene
Arthur Lustig	Robert De Niro
Nora Dinsmore	Anne Bancroft
Uncle Joe Coleman	Chris Cooper
Jerry Ragno	Josh Mostel
Maggie	Kim Dickens
Walter Plane	Hank Azaria
Lois Pope	Isabelle Anderson

1946 film (page 127)

Director	David Lean
Screenplay	David Lean, Ronald Neame, Anthony Havelock-Allan, with Kay Walsh and Cecil McGivern
Producer	Ronald Neame, (executive producer) Anthony Havelock-Allan, for Cineguild, Independent Producers
Photography	Guy Green (Robert Krasker opening sequences)
Costume design	Sophia Harris, with Margaret Furse
Production design	John Bryan, with Wilfred Shingleton
Editing	Jack Harris
Music	Walter Goehr (composer/conductor)

Running 118 minutes

Main cast

Pip (adult)	John Mills
Pip (child)	Anthony Wager
Estella (adult)	Valerie Hobson
Estella (child)	Jean Simmons
Abel Magwitch	Finlay Currie
Miss Havisham	Martita Hunt
Joe Gargery	Bernard Miles
Mrs Joe	Freda Jackson
Mr Jaggers	Francis L. Sullivan
Herbert Pocket (adult)	Alec Guinness
Herbert (child)	John Forrest
Wemmick	Ivor Barnard
Uncle Pumblechook	Hay Petrie
Bentley Drummle	Torin Thatcher
Biddy	Eileen Erskine
Molly	Valerie Hobson (uncredited)
Compeyson	George Hayes
Aged P.	O.B. Clarence
Sarah Pocket	Everley Gregg
Mr Wopsle	John Burch
Mrs Wopsle	Grace Denbigh-Russell
The sergeant	Richard George

Other films referred to

The Age of Innocence (1993) Directed by Martin Scorsese, for Cappa Productions.

The Barretts of Wimpole Street (1934) Directed by Sidney Franklin, for MGM.

Black Narcissus (1947) Directed by Michael Powell, for Archers Film Productions.

Bleak House (1921) Directed by Maurice Elvey, for Ideal Film Company.

Brief Encounter (1945) Directed by David Lean, for Cineguild, Independent Producers.

Brighton Rock (1947) Directed by John Boulting, for Charter Film Productions and Associated British Picture Corporation.

Cavalcade (1933) Directed by Frank Lloyd, for Fox Film Corporation.

Children of Men (2006) Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, for Universal Pictures, Strike Entertainment, Hit & Run Productions, Quietus Productions Ltd.

David Copperfield (1914) Directed by Thomas Bentley.

David Copperfield (1934) Directed by George Cukor, for MGM.

David Copperfield (1970) Directed by Delbert Mann, for Omnibus Productions.

Dr Zhivago (1965) Directed by David Lean, for MGM.

The Fallen Idol (1948) Directed by Carol Reed, for London Film Productions.

Frankenstein (1932) Directed by James Whale, for Universal Pictures.

Henry V (1944) Directed by Laurence Olivier, for Two Cities Films.

In Which We Serve (1942) Directed by Noël Coward and David Lean, for Two Cities Films.

The Invisible Man (1933) Directed by James Whale, for Universal Pictures.

- Jane Eyre* (1971) Directed by Delbert Mann, for Omnibus Productions.
- Kidnapped* (1971) Directed by Delbert Mann, for Omnibus Productions.
- The Lady in the Lake* (1946) Directed by Robert Montgomery, for Loew's Incorporated.
- Lawrence of Arabia* (1962) Directed by David Lean, for Horizon Pictures.
- A Little Princess* (1995) Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, for Baltimore Pictures and Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Millions Like Us* (1943) Directed by Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, for Gainsborough Pictures.
- Mr Quilp* (1975) Directed by Michael Tuchner, for Reader's Digest Films.
- The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1935) Directed by Stuart Walker for Universal.
- Notes on a Scandal* (2007) Directed by Richard Eyre, for BBC Films, DNA Films, Scott Rudin Productions and UK Film Council.
- Oliver!* (1968) Directed by Carol Reed, for Romulus Films and Columbia Pictures Corporation.
- Oliver Twist* (1948) Directed by David Lean, for Cineguild, Independent Producers.
- A Passage to India* (1982) Directed by David Lean, for G.W. Films, John Heyman and Edward Sands.
- The Passionate Friends* (1948) Directed by David Lean, for Cineguild and Pinewood Films.
- Random Harvest* (1942) Directed by Mervyn LeRoy, for MGM.
- Rebecca* (1940) Directed by Alfred Hitchcock, for Selznick International Pictures.
- Room at the Top* (1959) Directed by Jack Clayton, for Remus Films.

Ryan's Daughter (1970) Directed by David Lean, for Faraway Productions.

Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1960) Directed by Karel Reisz, for Woodfall Film Productions.

Scrooge (1970) Directed by Ronald Neame, for Waterbury Films.

A Tale of Two Cities (1935) Directed by Jack Conway, for MGM.

The Third Man (1949) Directed by Carol Reed, for London Film Productions.

This Happy Breed (1944) Directed by David Lean, for Cineguild and Two Cities.

The Way Ahead (1944) Directed by Carol Reed, for Two Cities Films.

The Wings of the Dove (1947) Directed by Iain Softley, for Miramax Films and Renaissance Films.

The Winslow Boy (1948) Directed by Anthony Asquith, for London Film Productions and British Lion Film Corporation.

Y tu mamá también (2002) Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, for Alianza Films International Inc., Anheló Producciones, Besame Mucho Pictures and Producciones Anheló.