

# DRAMATURGY NEWSLETTER

VOL

3



## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Join us in exploring the life and times of Charles Dickens and the world and history of his classic novel.

### READ ALONG WITH US

*Great Expectations* was originally published in weekly installments in the magazine *All the Year Round* from December 1860 - August 1861. We will likewise send portions of the novel to you in our biweekly summer newsletters.

**CHAPTERS 15-19**

# WHAT THE DICKENS?

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Dickens started *Great Expectations* in October 1860, not long after separating from Catherine, his wife of 22 years and the mother of his ten children. On top of that, his son was running up gambling debts, his daughter married a man Dickens didn't like, and his elderly mother was showing signs of dementia. All this was on his mind as he started to write.

Dickens had become smitten with a young actress named Ellen Ternan when he hired her to perform in the play *The Frozen Deep*. While Ellen seems to have resisted Dickens's advances at first, she eventually became his mistress. Many biographers think that the beautiful and unloving character of Estella may have been Dickens's view of his early relationship with Estella.

## ART RESPONDING TO ART

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*The Outsiders* (2024 Tony Award Winner, Best New Musical) features a song titled "Great Expectations," in which a poor young man named Ponyboy, having read the novel, imagines addressing the author about what he can and should expect from his life.

**[Listen to the song on Spotify HERE.](#)**

**[Watch Brody Grant perform on The Tonight Show HERE.](#)**

# “A MERE BLACKSMITH”

Historically, the blacksmith was a central and respected figure in the community, often enjoying higher status due to the indispensable nature of his work. Mrs. Joe's complaints tell us more about her than her husband; the Gargery family would have been far more comfortable than many others in the village.

Blacksmithing required physical strength, precision, and an understanding of metallurgy. Entering the trade required a seven-year apprenticeship. Only after becoming a “journeyman” was a blacksmith allowed to work for pay. To becoming a master blacksmith, they would demonstrate their skill to a local guild or organization, and then were permitted them to open their own forge and train apprentices.



Pip would have first learned basic tasks like operating the bellows, simple forging tasks like nails and horseshoes, and gradually progressed to more complex items like tools, weapons, and decorative ironwork (which was very popular in Victorian architecture).

Apprenticeships were about more than learning a trade; they were also a means of education and cultural transmission. Apprentices often adopted the social, religious, and cultural practices of their masters. The master blacksmith was a mentor as well as a teacher, responsible for instilling values such as hard work, integrity, and the importance of quality in craftsmanship. The master's reputation was reflected in the quality of the apprentice's work, making their training a matter of professional pride.



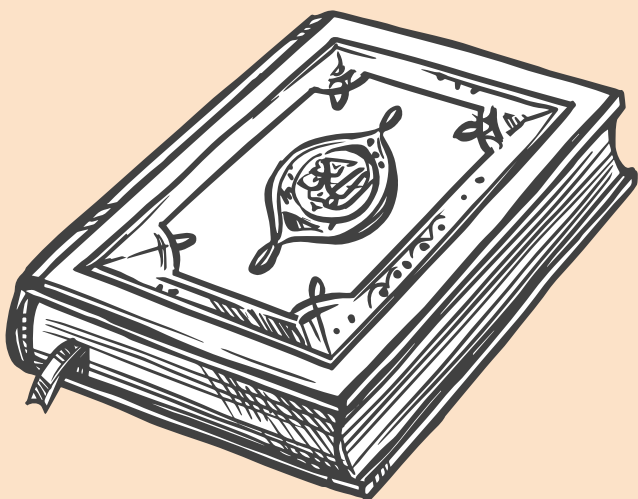
As the Industrial Revolution prompted greater urbanization, there was reduced need for village blacksmiths, though many learned to repair the machines that were transforming industry and horses always needed shoeing.

However, in Victorian Britain, there emerged a nostalgic and romantic view of the blacksmith, and the role was idealized in art and popular culture as a figure of strength, honesty, and traditional values, a symbol of a simpler, bygone era. Writers and poets like Dickens often depicted blacksmiths as noble, stalwart figures, echoing a yearning for a connection to the past. Despite the romanticized image, the reality of blacksmithing during the Victorian era was far from idyllic. Blacksmiths faced long hours of physically demanding work in often harsh and dangerous conditions.

*What do you imagine it would feel like to enter the smithy? What would each of your senses experience there?*



*How would this work impact Joe Gargery? How would this apprenticeship impact Pip's growing body?*



## CHAPTER & SCRIPT ANNOTATION

Need to find the chapter that matches your scene?

[FIND IT HERE](#)