Great Expectations once seemed an unlikely candidate for the cultural status it now enjoys. In 1861 the Morning Post denounced Dickens’s thirteenth novel as “a phantasmagoria of eccentricities” that “offends against all the laws of probability, and outrages all the laws of execution” (243). Yet in 1937 George Bernard Shaw pronounced it a “most compactly perfect book ... all of one piece and consistently truthful as none of his other books are” (28). What generated this dramatic shift in critical opinion? How and why did Great Expectations emerge as one of the world’s favorite Dickens novels in the twentieth century? Will the text continue to endure? These are among the questions that prompt rich archival work and some speculation in Mary Hammond’s account of the surprising cultural life of Great Expectations.

Hammond’s approach is indebted to the seminal work of Patsy Stoneman in Brontë Transformations (1995), which traced the afterlives of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights via numerous adaptations, reworkings, and continuations with a particular focus on their ideological import. Hammond is similarly interested in the cultural resonances of a canonical text, but unlike Stoneman, she foregrounds the “pragmatics of publishing” (3): the commercial motives and factors that kept reviving Dickens’s novel. Hammond’s book thus takes its place in the Ashgate/Routledge series, ”Studies in Publishing History: Manuscript, Print, Digital,” which supports innovative research at the intersection of publishing history, book history, and literary and cultural studies. As the second study in this series to focus on a single Dickens novel, Hammond’s book follows Sean Grass’s Charles Dickens’s Our Mutual Friend: A Publishing History (2014). Common to both books is a depth of archival research, comprehensive appendices, and a revisionary impulse. But while Grass stays close to the original text, Hammond ranges widely—though more selectively—in tracking the multifarious afterlives of GE across adaptations, translations, and remediations.

Hammond aims to develop fresh perspectives on a history that is familiar, at least in part, to most Dickens scholars. Besides offering some delightful detours in her history of GE’s afterlives, later chapters highlight adaptations that have so far received little attention. Starting with the first decade of the novel’s cultural life (1860-70), Hammond explains its genesis, composition, and early marketplace performance in lively terms. In revealing that regional newspapers reprinted extracts from GE alongside local news, she indicates some more unusual formats and contexts in which readers met the novel—a recurrent theme that blossoms in consideration of GE’s recent afterlife. Yet despite GE’s extractable, episodic qualities (Hammond, drawing on Rachel Malik’s work, uses the term “capsular”), its dramatic potential was slow to be recognized. No British stage version was produced in this decade, although a number of short-lived dramatic adaptations appeared in America.

Having tracked GE to 1870, Hammond considers how—in the decades after Dickens’s death—it was repackaged and culturally disseminated in Britain and America. To assess adaptations by means of criteria other than their fidelity to the original, Hammond adopts the term “remediation,” by which she means not “correction” but rather major transformation or modest enhancement: “radical[ly] refashioning” a text as a play or a film, or making “smaller changes or improvements” in it --such as a fresh introduction or new illustrations-- “in order to widen its consumer base” (55). Exploring both types of remediation here, Hammond cites numerous sources--reviews, editions, playbills, scripts--to show how different adaptations reflect cultural and commercial trends. For example, W.S. Gilbert wanted to change the way Dickens’s work was presented and perceived on stage, Responding, for instance, to a moment of “cautious innovation and experiment” (67) in theatre history, W.S. Gilbert sought to change the way Dickens's work was staged, but his adaptation failed to reconcile generic innovation with melodramatic convention, or convince critics that Dickens was suitable for serious drama. In staging GE, Gilbert left out Miss Havisham and Pumblechook, and in America GE was often reworked and retitled to highlight the story of Pip and Magwitch. Hammond also explores Dickens's posthumous reputation more broadly. Here as elsewhere she unearths interesting and memorable details, from the semantic range of the phrase "great expectations" to speculation on the state of Dickens's soul: was he, American newspapers asked, a fit cultural icon for a post-bellum nation?

Turning to the appropriation of GE by new media between 1900 and 1945, Hammond argues that GE fed their need for legitimation. They mined the novel, she writes, not so much for its transcendent value as for its unexceptionable morality and the familiarity of its author's name. She illustrates this point particularly well in her discussion of early radio plays, explaining that the newly established BBC co-opted Dickens in its “self-defined mission as quintessentially English, informative, educative and entertaining” (105).
Given the proliferation of screen, stage, and radio adaptations after World War II, Hammond wisely opts to be selective, building on existing criticism in order to fill historical gaps. For instance, while she says enough about influential productions (such as David Lean’s 1946 film version) to set later developments in context, she spotlights overlooked topics such as radio adaptations and cyclical patterns of remediation. Media industries, Hammond notes, presented *GE* as an artifact of the Victorian past, but their versions of the novel were influenced by contemporary social, economic, and political factors—as suggested by the ascendency of Miss Havisham in Alan Bridges’ 1967 TV adaptation and the relocation of Pip and Herbert to India rather than Egypt in a 1989/91 miniseries.

In the final chapter, Hammond doubles back chronologically to show how *GE* was revived in different national, linguistic, and generic contexts from 1861 to the bicentenary of Dickens’s birth. Invoking Franco Moretti’s concept of “literary geography,” she examines patterns of translation and influence as well as explaining why the novel did or did not appear in different contexts. The second part of the chapter considers adaptation in the freest sense, including foreign language films, an episode of the American TV show *Wagon Train*, fan fiction, a werewolf and zombie version of *GE*, and graphic novels. But since serious neo-Victorian novels such as Lloyd Jones’s *Mister Pip* (2006) have already attracted critical scrutiny, she treats them succinctly.

Hammond’s survey of late twentieth century “misshapings of every stamp” (175) has a playful humor reminiscent of Stoneman’s account, although there is some unevenness. For example, while she spends four pages on *Wagon Train*, she gives tantalizingly short shrift to fan fiction and graphic novels. While she can hardly give equal amounts of attention to all adaptations, her selections sometimes seem opportunistic rather than systematic. For the most part, however, the examples she highlights tend to support the book’s broader argument: that the idea of “Dickensian essence” (114) is historically and culturally formed, and mutates in response to historical circumstance and market need.

Hammond’s study is valuable both for its interpretations and its information. Supplementing and occasionally correcting previous scholarship, the appendices present carefully compiled lists of editions, translations, and adaptations of *GE*. In addition, one appendix offers extracts from contemporary British and American reviews, including a number of regional newspapers. Nearly twice as long as the space allotted to reviews of *GE* in Phillip Collins’s indispensable *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (1971), this appendix shows much more richly how critics on both sides of the Atlantic read the novel in the context of Dickens’s previous work. Nevertheless, given Hammond’s commitment to turning “lists into patterns” (2), the appendices could have benefited from some data visualization. For example, mapping the dates of first published translations in different countries would have made this data more digestible as well exposing cold spots in Dickens’s global transmission.

In isolating the afterlives of *GE* from those of Dickens’s fiction as a whole, Hammond provides the most comprehensive survey of the novel’s reception and adaptation to date and exposes as myth the idea that *GE* has always been considered a timeless classic. Gathering insights from different strands of Dickens criticism—on the cultural dissemination of his work, on its publication history, and on its adaptation in different media—she tests their conclusions against her own findings in a specific case. To accent the distinctiveness of the afterlives of *GE*, she might have compared its fortunes to those of *David Copperfield* or *Barnaby Rudge*—although Grass’s book allows easy comparison with the fortunes of *Our Mutual Friend*.

This study will particularly interest scholars working on Dickens’s posthumous reputation and on the cultural transmission of his work. Rich in unexpected details and written in engaging, uncluttered prose, the story Hammond weaves from dry publication facts and extensive archival research invites a broader readership. For example, comparing *GE* to two of Dickens’s earlier novels, Hammond writes:

> Darkly comic, subtly ironic and genuinely moving, it rolls the kind-hearted misled orphan protagonist of *Oliver Twist* into the abused, lonely child at the centre of *David Copperfield*, gives him a darker road to travel, and lashes him unmercifully all the way. (19)

Later on, while archly discussing critiques of contemporary reworkings of *GE*, she argues that we need to move beyond debates about textual fidelity:

> These examples usefully demonstrate how difficult we often still find it to speak or write about misshapen Dickens using anything but the old lexical binaries of fidelity and iconoclasm. This is surely the result of the fact that most of this criticism adheres to middlebrow remediations which depend on a familiarity with the original: in “writing back” to *Great Expectations*, these authors almost always assume -- must assume, if their critiques are to work -- that we have read it, that we recognise its cultural prejudices, though the kindest criticism is usually reserved for remediations which on some level prove that they also, on some level, admire it. (177)

Witty, insightful, and determined to look beyond the well-worn grooves of Dickens scholarship, this book is an important contribution to the field.

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