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How to cite this article: Kennedy, Valerie J. (1982). Evil and anarchy in Great Expectations: a note on Orlick. Langues et Littératures, 2, 63-69.
EVIL AND ANARCHY IN GREAT EXPECTATIONS 
A NOTE ON ORLICK

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0. Introduction

Great Expectations is a complex novel. It has been called «the most completely unified work of art that Dickens ever produced.» (1) It is at once satire, psychological study, and fairy-tale or allegory. It satirizes the mid-Victorian ethic of gentility, offers an extensive exploration of an individual psyche, and dramatizes the conflict between good and evil through myth, fairy-tale, and allegory (2). Yet one element, one character, in the novel remains largely unexplained, if not entirely unexplored: Orlick.

Few critics have satisfactorily accounted for Orlick’s presence and role in the novel. To Dorothy Van Ghent he is «undefined evil,» «pure ‘thingness’ emerging without warning from the ooze where he has been unconsciously cultivated.» (3) To Angus Wilson he is «not so much a criminal but a man with a hatred of being a subordinate, of being set low in life.» To Harry Stone he has a triple significance: «In storybook terms he is a villain; in psychological terms a projection of Pip’s darker self; in cosmic terms a manifestation of nascent evil.» (5) It is true, of course, that Orlick does have a

(4) Wilson, p. 528.
(5) Stone, p. 674.
mythic, Satanic dimension: his nickname for himself, «old Orlick,» which is very close to «Old Nick» or the devil, testifies to that clearly enough. He may also, with some justice, be seen as Pip's «alter-ego counterpart.»(6) Yet Angus Wilson, it seems to me, offers the most plausible interpretation of Orlick's malignancy when he identifies it as that of a man who hates his lowly position in society. Orlick's hatred of Pip, after all, is a personal antipathy fostered and expressed through class differences. Pip is the sorcerer's apprentice who succeeds and rises in the world, Orlick the journeyman assistant who fails and falls and that, partially, by Pip's hand. When Orlick is first introduced he is shown as being anxious lest he be displaced at work by the new apprentice, Pip.(7) Later Pip, through the agency of Jaggers, causes Orlick to lose another job, the post of gate-keeper at Satis House (XXX, 231). Again, Pip as an adolescent also urges Biddy not to encourage the journeyman's advances (XVII, 124-125). Thus Pip and Orlick are not only rivals in terms of class and work, but also sexual opponents, at least implicitly.

In fact, I would suggest that Orlick has two main functions in the novel. First, he suggests that there exist both in society and the individual forces of violence and anarchy which can never be assimilated. Secondly, he provides the final and most brutal comment on the exposure of Pip's spurious transformation from apprentice blacksmith to superficial gentleman. These two functions are realized through three specific aspects of the novel: the parallel between Orlick and Drummle, the dialogue between Pip and Orlick at Satis House during the time when Orlick is gate-keeper there, and the scene in the lime-kiln towards the end of the novel, when Orlick captures Pip and torments him, intending to kill him.

1. Orlick and Drummle

The parallel between Orlick and Drummle is first suggested in Pip's and Orlick's potential rivalry for Biddy in the early part of the novel. Pip, of course, has no intention of courting Biddy. Nonetheless, he still resents Orlick's attentions to her. Moreover, this potential rivalry between Pip and Orlick foreshadows the actual and more important rivalry later in the novel between Pip and Drummle, this time for Estella. Thus Orlick and Drummle are paralleled in their opposition to Pip in relation to Biddy and Estella respectively. However, the parallel between Orlick and Drummle may also be drawn in terms of class, of violence, and of indiscriminate hostility. Both

(6) Stone, p. 671.
(7) Great Expectations, New Oxford Illustrated edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), XV, 105. All references to the novel in the text are to this edition by chapter and page number.
men are perfect examples of what Coleridge calls «motiveless malignancy.» Both are consistently and unreasoningly aggressive.\(^{8(8)}\)

In terms of violence, Drummle is quite simply Orlick's upperclass counterpart. The two men's least movements reveal violence and aggression. Drummle takes up a book «as if its writer had done him an injury» (XXV, 192); his verbal retorts are limited to the inarticulate exclamation, «Oh Lord,» and his usual means of reply is «glass or crockery» (XVI, 203-204 and XXXVIII, 294). Drummle «lolls» (XXV, 192). Orlick's usual mode of walking is a «slouch» (XV, 105). Both men are associated with mud and water, Orlick with the marshes around the village, Drummle with the river Thames. As well as being identified with the devil, Orlick is also described as being «like Cain or the Wandering Jew» (XV, 105), both outsiders par excellence. As a child Pip notices that although Orlick does not verbalize his hostility to him, the older man «always beat his sparks in my direction, and... whenever I sang Old Clem, he came in out of time» (XV, 105). Thus through the hostility they express towards Pip and towards the world in general, both Orlick and Drummle have a larger significance in the novel. They represent the negation of human sympathy and community.

Orlick is the more complete realization of this negation of friendship and community. Not only do these mythic dimensions identify him conclusively as an outsider, he also refuses, on occasion, to give his consent to the medium which expresses and creates a sense of human community: speech. Orlick deliberately invents words which others cannot understand, including his own name. «He pretended that his christian name was Dolge — — a clear impossibility,» says the narrator, but one which Orlick wilfully «imposed... upon the village as an affront to its understanding» (XV, 105). Similarly, Orlick's other peculiar linguistic invention, the word, «jiggered,» has «no definite meaning,» but is used, Pip says, «to affront mankind, and convey an idea of something savagely damaging» (XVII, 124).

It is striking that these two figures, Orlick and Drummle, spring from the lowest and highest classes respectively. They embody violence in various forms. For them there is no salvation. There is no suggestion that they are redeemable. For the middle-class Pip, on the other hand, and for the pathetic aspirant to vicarious enjoyment of respectability, Magwitch, there is salvation, of a kind. Pip and Magwitch are allowed to realize the error of

\(^{8(8)}\) See John Lucas, The Melancholy Man (London: Methuen, 1970). To Lucas, Orlick is the «most inhuman character in the novel, because he is totally uncommitted» (p. 305). Orlick's total lack of commitment is surely expressed most of all through his refusal to communicate on any terms but his own.
their ways, and repent. Even if Pip is not allowed to resume his place in English society as a gentleman, still, he survives abroad and is reborn in Joe and Biddy’s little son, the new Pip. Magwitch dies a tame and Christian, if not exactly respectable death. As in the novel by Dickens preceding Great Expectations, A Tale of Two Cities, it is the proletariat and the aristocracy who embody evil and destruction, while the middle classes, if eminently corruptible, nonetheless also hold out the possibility of repentance and redemption. However, before Pip in Great Expectations can be redeemed, he must suffer mockery and extreme danger at the hands of Orlick. First there is the mockery of the interview at Satis House.

2. At Satis House

In the scene between Orlick and Pip at Satis House, Pip, arriving in his home town on a summons from Miss Havisham, finds Orlick installed as gate-keeper at her house. Part of the dialogue between them runs as follows (the first question is Pip’s):

«How did you come here?»
«I come here.» he retorted, «on my legs. I had my box brought alongside me in a barrow.
«Are you here for good?»
«I ain’t here for harm, young master, I suppose.»
I was not so sure of that. I had leisure to entertain the retort in my mind, while he slowly lifted his heavy glance from the pavement, up my legs and arms, to my face.
«Then you have left the forge?» I said.
«Do this look like a forge?» replied Orlick, sending his glance all round his with an air of injury. «Now, do it look like it?»
I asked him how long he had left Gargery’s forge?
«One day is so like another here,» he replied, «that I don’t know without casting it up. However, I come here some time since you left.»
«I could have told you that, Orlick.»
«Ah!» said he, drily. «But then you’ve got to be a scholar.» (XXIX, 220).

On four occasions in this dialogue, Orlick not only refuses to communicate in a normal way with Pip, but also, by exploiting hidden or latent ambiguities in Pip’s speech, makes Pip look very foolish, and completely undermines his pretensions to gentility. Ironically enough, Pip as a child had performed a similar feat with the mystifying pretentions of the hypocritical adults surrounding him.
In his answers to Pip’s first two questions here, Orlick shows great quickness of wit in picking up the potential double meanings of «How» (physically or more abstractly) and «for good» (permanently or to do good) in order to avoid satisfying Pip’s curiosity. Pip as a child had used the same tactic in relation to Mrs. Joe’s famous apron. For it is Mrs. Joe’s constant, self-righteous complaint that she can never take off her apron, a fact which she makes «a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe,» although Pip adds, «Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all: or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off every day of her life» (II, 6). Through Pip’s questioning interpretation, Mrs. Joe’s complaint is exposed as a part of her entirely false and self-created persona of the over-worked and badly-treated wife. Pip as a child interprets what she says about the apron in a literal, denotative way which is apparently innocent, but which of course is actually directed by the satiric impulse of the older Pip as narrator. In the same way in the later scene, Orlick takes up the literal, physical meaning of the word, «how,» in order to avoid answering Pip’s question concerning the agency of his own arrival in Satis House. Both Pip in the earlier scene and Orlick in the later one subvert the mystifying pose of the other speaker by exploiting linguistic ambiguity in order to make them look foolish. In the first case, it is Mrs. Joe’s hypocritical persona which is exposed; in the second it is Pip’s quite spurious role as the young gentleman about town asking impertinent questions which is made exceedingly suspect.

Orlick’s answer to Pip’s third question shows the journeyman using a rather different tactic. Pip’s first two questions, after all, had nothing intrinsically absurd about them. When, however, Pip asks, «Then you have left the forge?» Orlick takes advantage of the obvious superfluity of the question to score a point against Pip by appealing to the reference of the words to their immediate surroundings. In the same way, Pip as a child tries to make sense of the words, «by hand» (II, 6), and «walk in the same all the days of my life» (VII, 39). The latter phrase comes from the catechism and refers to the «paths of righteousness,» but Pip takes it to mean that he is obliged «always to go through the village from our house in one particular direction, and never to vary it by turning down by the wheelwright’s or up by the mill» (VII, 39). Now it is Orlick instead of Pip who is given this power to explore the relation of words to reality and, in doing so, to reveal the frequent absurdity of the speech of the would-be genteel. Finally, in the dialogue quoted above, Orlick gives a perfectly true answer to Pip’s question as to how long he has been at Satis House, but it is nonetheless an answer which gives Pip no definite information at all. Pip cross-examines Orlick quite in vain. The devil is more than a match for Jaggers’ apprentice-
lawyer. Orlick refuses to answer Pip’s questions, or answers them evasively, playing with words just as effectively as Pip had done in the past, and exposing Pip’s genteel airs and graces as powerless and futile. The exposure is extremely effective, and it is all the more mordant since Orlick uses the very tactics which Pip himself had used earlier in the novel.

4. In the Lime-Kiln

If Orlick gains the upper hand verbally in the scene at Satis House, then in the confrontation in the lime-kiln, his advantage over Pip is pushed even further. In the lime-kiln, Orlick has complete physical and verbal control over Pip. Indeed, he ties him up and intends to kill him. But first he forces Pip to listen to his taunts and gibes, to a series of accusations and hometruths about Pip’s old life and his new «gentle» existence. «Afore I kill you like any other beast,» says Orlick, «I’ll have a good look at you and a good goad at you. Oh, you enemy» (LIII, 404). Instead of being forced by his employment to listen to Pip’s questions and avoid them as best he can, Orlick now asks the questions and gives the answers as well. He has all the power, for in this novel it is the questioner, whether it be Mrs. Joe, or Jaggers, or Pumblechook, or Pip, who has control of the situation.

Not only does Orlick repeatedly insult Pip in this scene, calling him time after time «you enemy» and «wolf,» he also gloats over Pip’s present misfortune. Moreover, he forces Pip to listen to the recital of his «crimes» against Orlick, and to the bitter truth of his own present status as a gentleman. He accuses Pip, and quite accurately too, as we have seen, of causing him to lose his place at Satis House and of warning Biddy against him. In support of the latter accusation, indeed, Orlick quotes back at Pip his own words to Biddy, which Orlick, unknown to Pip, had overheard. Orlick also accuses Pip of being the real cause of the death of Mrs. Joe (who died of a blow given her by Orlick) because, as he says, «You was favoured, and he [Old Orlick] was bullied and beat.... Now you pays for it. You done it ; now you pays for it » (LIII, 404-405). This accusation, unlike the others, is not literally true. Nonetheless, it may be related to Pip’s instinctive feeling of guilt when he hears of the attack on his sister. Now, Pip feels guilty because he knows he has wished his sister ill on countless occasions. Of course, his feeling of guilt may also be partially explained by the fact that he has just been forced to listen to Mr. Wopsle’s melodramatic reading of the tragedy of George Barnwell, in which the hero, identified with Pip, murders a near-relation who is his patron and protector. Even without George Barnwell, however, Pip’s repressed resentment of his sister is enough to make him feel guilty when she is attacked. It is as though Orlick is carrying
out the attack on Pip's behalf, using, of course, the leg-iron of the convict Pip had helped to escape. In his own eyes, and in the reader's too, Pip seems guilty of complicity in his sister's sufferings, at the very least. In addition to all this, Orlick has discovered the existence of Magwitch and his true identity. He is able to reveal Pip's «uncle,» Provis, as a fiction, and Pip's own newly-created genteel identity as a complete sham. Orlick sees Pip's newly-created self for what it is: a mere facade based on crime and dirty money.

5. Conclusion

Of course, it is true that Pip escapes, rescued from Orlick by the real «young gentleman,» Herbert, and the parody of the young gentleman, Trabb's boy. However, Orlick gets away too, although the last we hear of him in the novel is that he is in the county jail for «bustin' open» Pumblechook's house and attacking the corn and seed merchant (LVII, 441). This last incident is reported to Pip and to the reader in Joe's best unforgettable comic style yet despite its comedy, the incident nonetheless serves to make the implicit parallel between Pip and Orlick even closer. Not only has Orlick already taken revenge, on Pip's behalf, on Mrs. Joe; here he has also humiliated Pip's other childhood torturer, Pumblechook.

Finally, then, Orlick is Pip's, and society's, id: anarchic, unassimilated, unabsorbed, he remains at the end of the novel as a pertinent reminder of Pip's own personal deficiencies, and of the deficiencies of the world in general. Like the figure of Jaggers still at his guilt-ridden work, the image of the imprisoned Orlick casts a shadow over the novel's modified happy ending. As usual in Dickens' mature works, the couples who survive at the end of the book — Joe and Biddy and, in the revised version, Pip and Estella — represent only oases of calm and content in a desert of guilt and disorder.