

CHAPTER 8 ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED ENGLISH NOVELS

GREAT EXPECTATIONS BY CHARLES J. H. DICKENS

Introduction

This is one of the books we will study in Book 2. The aim of studying these books is to put into practice things you have learnt in earlier chapters on how to study or appreciate novels, plays and poems known as Literary Appreciation.

Great Expectations is one of the numerous novels written by Charles J. H. Dickens. This novel began as a serialized story in a weekly magazine owned by Charles Dickens on 1st December, 1860. The name of the magazine is '**All the Year Round**'. The last instalment of the story was published as a novel for the first time in 1861. It is one of Dickens' satires on society in which he shows that those who get their wealth by hard work are much better than the idle rich people-- aristocrats (upper class).

Novelist's Background

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth England on 7th February 1812. He was an English writer and social critic who fought vigorously for children's rights, education and other social reforms. He is the most popular novelist of his period and he remains one of the best known and most read of English authors. He is loved and remembered even today because he came from a poor background and he worked very hard to succeed. His other works include very popular novels like *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *David Copperfield*. He made use of his childhood experiences in his works. He highlighted the plight of the forgotten and disadvantaged poor. On the whole, he wrote many novels, a large number of short stories, a handful of plays and several non-fiction books. Great Expectations was written between 1860 and 1861. Charles Dickens died on 9th June, 1870.

Plot of the Story

The whole story revolves around Pip. It is divided into three stages or episodes. In the first stage, he is filled with the desire to become uncommon. The second stage is concerned with his development into a gentleman and his life in London which was shattered with Magwitch's disclosures. The third stage involves a total collapse of all Pip's expectations. He is deeply in debt and very sick.

The resolution of all these leads to Pip having a more mature attitude to life. He learns to appreciate the correct values in life.

On Christmas Eve, Pip, an orphan, who is staying with his elder sister, Mrs Joe and her husband, encounters an escaped prisoner in the village churchyard. Pip has gone there to visit the graves of his mother, father and his dead siblings – Alexander, Bartholomew Abraham, Tobias and Roger – all die in their infancy. Pip steals food and a file which he took to the prisoner. The prisoner is eventually rearrested. Later, Pip goes to play at Miss

Havisham's Satis House, and meets Estella who he falls in love with and hopes to marry. So many other minor incidents lead up to Pip desiring to be uncommon and thus become a gentleman. This eventually happens through an unknown person, and Pip leaves for London where he leads the life of idleness and wastefulness.

Pip visits Miss Havisham and Estella and confesses his love for Estella. She turns him down and tells him she intends to Marry Drummle.

While in London, Pip learns that Magwitch was the unknown person who sends him money to become a gentleman. He visits Satis House again. He finds Miss Havisham very lonely and sitting by the fire. Pip tells her he is giving some of his money to help Herbert Pocket but has to stop because he himself has stopped taking money from his benefactor. She then asks Pip for forgiveness. Miss Havisham's clothes catch fire and Pip puts out the fire. Miss Havisham is badly burnt, and Pip sustains serious injuries too.

Magwitch is taken to Clara's house for safety where he tells Herbert and Pip his life story. Herbert and Pip plan to rescue Magwitch out of danger. They meet Compeyson in another boat trying to stop them. Compeyson dies in the encounter, and Magwitch is sent back to prison where he dies. Pip learns a lot from all his experiences. He starts working with Herbert.

Pip becomes sick for nearly one month. Joe nurses him back to health and pays off all his debts. Miss Havisham dies during Pip's illness and leaves her wealth to Estella, and a great deal to Matthew Pocket.

Pip returns to Joe to apologise for everything he has done wrongly and probably ask Biddy to marry him (Pip). He finds that Joe has married Biddy and he is happy for them. Pip goes to work for Herbert's company and lives with Herbert and his wife Clarra. Within a year, he becomes a partner and pays off his debts.

Eleven years later, Pip returns to his village to visit Joe and Biddy. He finds them very happy with two children. He goes to Satis House to check Estella. He meets her there and she tells him that Drummle has died. She is a widow and has changed as a result of suffering. She asks Pip to forgive her. They walk out of the garden hand in hand, and Pip 'saw no shadow of parting from her.'

Setting

Setting in time: The novel is set in Dickens's time which is 19th Century England when people are discriminated against if they are of low birth. Everyone is aspiring to rise in the societal ladder or at least pretending to be what they are not. Poor people are looked down upon.

Setting in space: The setting of the play is English Marshland and London generally. A few exceptions are 'abroad' where Estella goes to study.

Themes

In writing Great Expectations, Charles Dickens has many themes:

Ambition and self improvement: Pip is told by Estella that he is common and he aspires to cross social boundaries and become a gentleman. When he is given the means, he discovers that wealth brings idleness. He learns that true happiness in life can be achieved through hard work. Idleness can only lead to tragedy and heartache.

Dignity of labour: Dickens prefers characters that earn their fortune through hard work. Joe, Biddy and Magwitch are examples. They are capable of giving affection, kindness and loyalty. A person's actions matter more than his possessions.

Appearances and reality: Most characters pretend to be what they are not. Miss Havisham pretends to be Pip's benefactors. Magwitch is not totally bad.

Goodness will always defeat evil: Many of the bad characters change before the end of the story. Pip realizes that no amount of money can take the place of goodness. Miss Havisham apologizes to Pip, Mrs Joe changes before she dies.

Other themes include class discrimination. Pride goes before a fall – Pip become very proud and was ashamed to be seen with Joe and Biddy. He stayed at the Blue Boar instead of Joe's house. Contentment, humility and honour are preferable to pride, over ambition, envy, greed and arrogance.

Adult/child relationship: Many adults in the novel ruin the lives of their children or wards. Miss Havisham raises Estella to break men's hearts, Joe's father is cruel to Joe and his mother; Miss Havisham is spoilt by her father.

Transformation and human growth: Pip turns out to be a totally mature human being because of his experiences. Charles Dickens achieves a lot of change in the society with this book.

Fortune hunting and sycophancy: Virtually all the characters want to be in Miss Havisham's good book despite her queerness and rude behaviour. They want to benefit from her wealth.

Characterisation

Charles Dickens uses a wide range of characters to achieve his aims. He draws characters that resemble the people he knows in real life. Examples are Phumblechook and Mrs Joe. He also draws exaggerated characters that will be difficult to find in real life, Miss Havisham and Magwitch.

The following are important characters of Great Expectations:

Pip: He is an orphan, the main character and narrator of the story. The whole story revolves around him. The book is about his psychological journey from childhood to middle age.

Joe Gargery: Joe is married to Pip's elder sister. He is Pip's friend and is kind to him till the end. Pip always tells Joe and Biddy the truth and they are the family he always goes back to. When Pip is very sick, Joe cares for him and pays all Pip's debts.

Miss Havisham: She is a wealthy and eccentric woman who suffers from being jilted. As a result of this, she becomes hard-hearted and raises her adopted daughter, Estella, to break men's heart. She pretends to be Pip's benefactor. She later apologises to Pip for how she treats him concerning Estella.

Estella: She is Miss Havisham's adopted daughter. Pip loves her but she does not return his love. Miss Havisham uses her as a weapon of revenge on men. She warns Drummle and they have an unhappy marriage. Pip later

discovers that Estella is the child of Magwitch and Molly.

Matthew Pocket: He is one of Miss Havisham's cousins. He is not a fortune hunter like his other cousins who are after Miss Havisham's money. He has a large family and a useless wife. He is a teacher of young gentlemen like Pip, Drumule, Startop and others.

Herbert Pocket: He is a pale young gentleman of Miss Havisham house. He fights with Pip when they first meet at Satis House. He is Matthew Pocket's son. When Pip meets him in London, they become great friends. He shares Pip's happiness and problems.

Biddy: She is another orphan of Pip's acquaintance. She is Wopsel's relative who helps Pip learn to read, takes care of Mrs Joe after she is attacked and is married to Joe.

Magwitch: He is called Pip's convict. He escapes from a prison ship and Pip brings him food and a file. He later decides to secretly make Pip a learned gentleman from the money he gets from Australia. Pip refers to him as an uncle to save him from execution. He also uses the names Provis and Campbell to hide his identity. He is Estella's real father. Dickens shows him as a victim of the society – One who becomes bad because of circumstances beyond his control. He does not know his parents or his hometown, and has no one to help him.

Mr and Mrs Hubble: They are from Pip's village. They pretend to be more important than they really are.

Mr Wopsle: He is the church clerk in Pip's village. He leaves the church for London to become an actor. His acting name or pseudonym is Mr Waldengarver.

Jaggers: He is a prominent London lawyer who represents the interests of both good and bad clients. He represents Magwitch, Havisham and some other criminals in the story (Pages 162 – 163)

Wemmick: He is Jaggers' clerk that takes care of Pip in London. He lives with his father, 'The Aged'. He lives in a castle-like house.

Pumblechook: He is Joe's uncle who pretends to be good when he is not. He is a rich corn merchant and Mrs Joe has a lot of respect for him. He connects Pip to Miss Havisham.

Molly: She is Jagger's house-help who he saves in a murder case. It is revealed that she is Magwitch's ex-wife and the real mother of Estella.

Compeyson: He is Magwitch arch enemy. He introduces Magwitch to a life of crime. He is a professional swindler and an expert in duping and forgery. He jilts Miss Havisham. He dies while he is trying to prevent Magwitch from escaping from the law.

Orlick: He is Joe's assistant in the forgery. He is rude and violent. He fights with Joe, injures Mrs Joe and attacks Pip. He is discovered and arrested.

Bentley Drummle: Jaggers calls him 'spider'. He is from a rich family and is taught by Matthew Pocket how to be a gentleman. He dislikes Pip and marries Estella. He dies in the course of treating Estella badly.

Clara Barley: Herbert marries her. She does not like Pip initially but later changes her mind. She helps Pip, and Pip lives with her family for a long time.

Miss Skiffins: She is married to Wemmick. She pays regular visits to Wemmick's castle.

Startop: He is one of Matthew Pocket's students. He is kind, and he helps in planning Magwitch's escape.

The Age: Wemmick's father

Those who are after Miss Havisham's money

Uncle Raymond
Camilla
Georgiana
Sarah Pocket

Narrative Techniques

Great expectations is written in the 1st person Point of View. Pip tells the story from the beginning to the end. *Great expectations* belongs to a type or kind of novel that follows or explores the development of a character from childhood to middle age. We see Pip as a seven-year old boy and follow him till he becomes 'quite an old bachelor'.

The book is divided into Pip's three stages of Expectations: The first stage deals with simplicity of childhood memories. Stage two deals with his development into a gentleman. Stage three deals with the total collapse of Pip's expectations.

Language: The language is not simple. Dickens uses old English for lowly and uneducated characters. This needs a lot of explanations and notes to understand, e.g. Neterally wicious, pg 23.

Literary Devices

Dickens uses similes – like an unhooped cast upon a hole – pg 5.

Metaphors – Where have you been, you young monkey? He also uses a lot of honour –pg 7.

Conclusion

Remember that some of the uses of Literature are that it corrects the society and teaches moral lessons. Great Expectations has done that. Critics of Literature say that immediately after reading Great Expectations, the government made so many changes in the society. They improved the welfare of children and the poor in England Class, and racial discrimination reduced greatly and people stopped being ashamed of their background. Even the very rich people started looking for work to do. Charles Dickens uses his novels to criticize wrongs in the society and Great Expectations did just that.