

STRUCTURE

7.0 Objectives**7.1 List of Characters****7.2 Plot Summary****7.2.1 Plot Construction****7.3 Character Analysis****7.4 Let Us Sum Up****7.5 Key Words****7.6 Book Suggested****Answers**

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading the previous unit, now you have some idea about the author, the genre and the historical background to the novel *Great Expectations*. The main objective of this unit is to:

- Analyse structure and plot of the novel and learn to critically evaluate it.
- Examine the characters while understanding their growth and development in the course of the novel

7.1. LIST OF CHARACTERS

Let us get familiar with the names, relations and tasks assigned to the characters in the novel.

Main Characters:

- Pip (Philip Pirrip): An orphan boy who is being raised by his sister and her husband- Mr. and Mrs. Joe.
- Estella: Miss Havisham's adopted daughter and Pip's beloved
- Abel Magwitch: A fearsome criminal who offers his fortune to Pip
- Miss Havisham: A wealthy woman who lives in Satis House
- Joe Gargery: Pip's brother-in-law and the village blacksmith

Secondary characters:

- Herbert Pocket: first a foe but later Pip's true friend and companion
- Mr Jaggers: A lawyer and Pip's guardian in London
- Mr. Wemmick: Mr.Jaggers's clerk and Pip's friend

Minor characters:

- Mrs Joe: Pip's sister
- Dolge Orlick: A labourer at Joe's forge
- Bidly: a country girl and Pip's friend

- Mr Pumblechook: Joe’s uncle
- Compeyson: A criminal and Magwitch’s partner
- Bentley Drummle: Estella’s husband
- Molly: Jagger’s housekeeper who later turns out to be Estella’s real mother
- Mr Wopsle: The Church clerk

There are many other less important characters whom we meet during the course of the novel.

7.2 PLOT SUMMARY

In the previous unit, you have read that the novel has fifty-nine chapters and is divided into three sections of about twenty chapters each. Now let us see how, through a well-knit plot, these three sections justify the title of the novel *Great Expectations*.

- **The First Stage of Pip’s Expectations :**

Great Expectations opens with a seven-year-old orphan, Philip Pirrip who introduces himself as “Pip” and is visiting the graves of his parents on the Christmas Eve. Here he encounters an escaped convict Magwitch who threatens Pip to his life and asks him to get some food and a file from Joe’s forge. Pip lives with his cruel sister “Mrs. Joe” and blacksmith brother –in-law Joe Gargery. He steals food and file to help the convict next day. Soon the convict Magwitch is caught and is brought back to the prison ships – “Holks” – from which he had escaped.

One day, a wealthy woman of the town, Miss Havisham, invites Pip to play with her adopted daughter, Estella, at her gloomy Satis House. On his visit, Pip finds Miss Havisham to be an extremely eccentric woman. Pip continues to visit Satis House and falls in love with Estella. One fine day Miss Havisham tells Pip to apprentice his brother-in-law Joe and to discontinue with his services at Satis House. Meanwhile, Biddy, an orphan and poor girl, who tutors Pip, falls in love with him. Pip continues to visit Satis house every year on his birthday, and constantly desires for a more comfortable lifestyle.

Sometime later Pip is informed that a mysterious benefactor would like to transform him into a gentleman. Pip plans to move to London assuming that Miss Havisham is his benefactor. Pip buys new clothes for himself and bids farewell to his family and sneaks away to London.

- **The Second Stage of Pip’s Expectations:**

In London, Pip stays with Miss Havisham’s relative Pocket’s son Herbert. He also becomes friends with John. Jagger, who is Pip’s advisor, turns out to be a famous lawyer of London and Wemmick, Jagger’s clerk, becomes Pip’s a good friend . One night Pip is invited to dinner at Jagger’s house where he meets their sullen housekeeper Molly. Later, in the novel, Pip reveals that Molly is Estella’s real mother.

Sometime later, Joe comes to visit Pip with a message from Miss Havisham to come to see Estella. The gentleman Pip is embarrassed to have poor Joe visit him. Soon Pip learns about the death of his sister and returns home for her funeral. Pip promises Bidley that he will keep on visiting Joe in future, but Bidley expresses her doubts:

"Are you quite sure, then, that you WILL come to see him often?" asked Bidley, stopping in the narrow garden walk, and looking at me under the stars with a clear and honest eye.

"O dear me!" said I, as if I found myself compelled to give up Bidley in despair. "This really is a very bad side of human nature! Don't say any more, if you please, Bidley. This shocks me very much."

... Once more, the mists were rising as I walked away. If they disclosed to me, as I suspect they did, that I should not come back, and that Bidley was quite right, all I can say is,—they were quite right too." (Chapter 35)

- **The Third Stage of Pip's Expectations:**

One day, a stranger visits Pip and he immediately recognizes him to be the convict Abel Magwitch whom he had helped years ago. Magwitch informs Pip that he has made a fortune as a farmer in Australia and he is the one who has made Pip a gentleman. Pip is startled to learn that it is Magwitch, the convict, who has fulfilled his "Great Expectations" and not the wealthy woman Miss Havisham. Pip, with the help of Herbert, plans to help Magwitch to escape unnoticed. Planning to leave the country with Magwitch, Pip pays a visit to Miss Havisham where he learns about Estella's marriage with Bentley Drummle. On returning London, he comes to know about Magwitch's wife who is none other than Molly, and therefore, Magwitch turns out to be Estella's father and Pip discloses this to him.

After Eleven years, Pip returns home and finds Joe and Bidley happily living with their family. He also meets Estella who has left her husband, living alone at Satis House.

In Dickens' original version of *Great Expectations*, Pip and Estella part with an understanding to separate, but in the revised version, by offering more optimistic ending to the novel, Dickens has shown them to have a future together someday.

7.2.1 Plot Construction

The class system of the Victorian England is at the base of the plot in *Great Expectations*. Throughout the novel, Dickens portrays various characters representing a clear hierarchy of class system; ranging from the criminal like Magwitch; to the poor peasants of the marsh country Joe; to the middle class Mr. Wemmick to the very rich Miss Havisham. Not only the theme of social class; but also the main characters' ultimate realizations that wealth and class are less important than loyalty, inner worth and selfless human relations are central to the plot of the novel.

Let us see how the story develops throughout the well-constructed plot of the novel. *Great Expectations* portrays the childhood and young adult years of Pip who is introduced as an apprentice of a blacksmith in a country village of England. He meets escaped convict Magwitch and

assists him too. His expectation is to live the life of a ‘gentleman’. Meanwhile he also meets Estella, a young woman whom he adores but the lady fails to return his love and plans to marry Bently Drummle. He suddenly receives a large fortune from a secret benefactor. Pip moves to London to fulfil his expectations and enters into the high society. Soon Pip learns that his secret benefactor is Magwitch who dies in prison and Pip loses his fortune. He learns to differentiate between the great expectations and the true meaning of life. Mature and wise Pip returns to his family home and meets Estella once again.

Let us understand how the plot of the novel is constructed; apt and required for mastering the art of writing a novel. The plot is constructed in the following manner:

Exposition, Rising Actions, Climax, Falling Actions and Resolution

- **Exposition:** Significant characters are introduced in the opening chapters. Pip meets convict Magwitch who forces Pip in helping him to get free. Pip begins to visit Satis House to play with Estella whom he adores, and declares his expectation as well as decision to become a gentleman.
- **Rising Actions:** Pip receives a large fortune from a secret benefactor and moves to London in order to become a ‘gentleman’. He soon realises that life in high society is not what he had expected at all. Eventually he falls in love with Estella and learns about her plans to marry Bently Drummle.
- **Climax:** On his 23rd Birthday, Pip comes to know about his secret benefactor who is none other than convict Magwitch. Moved by young Pip’s help, the convict had decided to offer him a better life by giving away his fortune.
- **Falling actions:** Pip plans to smuggle Magwitch out of the country, but fails and the convict Magwitch is put behind bars by the police. Pip falls sick, returns home for a while and leaves for Egypt.
- **Resolution:** After eleven years, Pip returns home and finds a little Pip- Joe and Biddy’s son. He visits the Satis House to meet Estella and decides never to part again

7.3 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Dickens’ characters, in his novels, face huge social transitions, both from property to wealth and the other way round. Dickens, as a novelist, was not fascinated by the similarity among people from a particular class, but was interested in projecting differences as a social realist. Hence, a variety of characters can be found in *Great Expectations*. Technically speaking, these characters can be called ‘rounded Characters’ as they grow from ignorance to enlightenment. Their ultimate realization is the need for moral balance in life and not material success. These characters become mouthpieces of the novelist in converging an important message that true and ultimate happiness does not reside in social class nor can be found in wealth.

- **Pip:** The protagonist and the narrator of *Great Expectation* is Philip Pirrip who introduces himself as “Pip”. The world of *Great Expectation* is

the world created by Pip and we see it through his eyes only. He begins his story as a young orphan boy being raised by a cruel sister and a blacksmith brother-in-law Joe in the marsh country of Kent. The story that projects the protagonist, in the beginning, as an innocent, passionate and romantic young boy who is too unrealistic in his expectations; ends with the protagonist who is mature enough in understanding ways of the world and accepts the realities of life. As a young boy, Pip perceives the world from a very narrow perspective and gets attracted towards superficial values by oversimplifying situations. Consequently, he behaves rudely with people who genuinely care for him especially Joe and Biddy. For instance, as soon as he enters into the London Society aspiring to become a gentleman, he turns snobbish and indifferent believing them as traits of gentlemen. However, as Pip himself tells his readers that at the bottom of his heart he is not what he projects as a gentleman. The reader's perception of the character of Pip is shaped by his own thoughts and narration.

Pip is, at heart, a very decent, sensitive young man stumbling in his quest for self-knowledge. Unlike a fairy-tale hero, Pip's ultimate heroism is not enacted through outer daring – do but by showing moral courage of comprehending his own weakness in having unrealistic expectations. Compared to David Copperfield, Pip's character has been portrayed with real psychological depth and complexity. His slow pursuit towards attainment of self-knowledge is the journey of every sensitive soul on the earth beyond time and place. Pip is the hero and Pip is the sinner; an ordinary boy with the distorted vision of the world makes him a fine realistic study of dark side of human beings along with his optimistic moral growth.

- **Estella:** Estella's character has been portrayed by Dickens to be used as a bitter criticism against the class system in England. Estella has been raised by Miss Havisham to torment men and break their hearts to take revenge because she was jilted on her wedding-day. Consequently, Estella becomes snobbish, cold, cynical and manipulative. She is trained by Miss Havisham to look down on those below them in rank to prove her higher place belonging to the upper class. Dickens consciously uses this paradox to show real irony of class distinctions; because Estella, being Magwitch's daughter, should have been placed at the lowest rank of the class ladder. On the contrary, being raised by Havisham, she looks down on each and every one. Pip loves Estella passionately, but she remains Pip's unattainable dream throughout the novel:

“When I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be”. (Chapter 29)

Unlike conventionally 'good' heroines, Dickens' Estella is entirely different. She is cold, harsh and proud. It is only after her marriage with abusive Drummle, she realizes how vulnerable she is in the loveless relationship. The final chapter of *Great Expectations* is

suggestive of Estella's inner development when Estella tells Pip: "... suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but – I hope – into a better shape" (Chapter 59).

- **Miss Havisham**

A revengeful wealthy woman, Miss Havisham, lives in an elevating mansion Satis House. She is portrayed as an eccentric woman who wears her old wedding dress every day because she was betrayed by her groom on the wedding day at twenty minutes to nine. Havisham stops all the clocks in Satis House at the same time on that particular moment. She adopts and raises Estella not for the humanitarian cause, but as a weapon to take revenge on men.

In the first half of the novel, Miss Havisham is portrayed as a grotesque and an eccentric woman with a dark and secret past. Later, when Pip learns about a tragic mishap in Miss Havisham's life, he understands her pity and becomes little more compassionate towards her. But he still finds in her "something positively dreadful" (Chapter 38). In the second half of the novel, Miss Havisham's repentance makes her readers compassionate.

At the end of the novel when she begs Pip for forgiveness, her character compensates the earlier deeds. The Moral perspective of the novel is also reinforced with Miss Havisham's repentance.

Miss Havisham is the example of divided – self due to imbalance of social and personal life created by her expectations, desires and dreams. Miss Havisham is a psychological case who fails to bridge or fill the gap between her desires and reality of life.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

1. Give a brief summary of the novel *Great Expectations*.
2. Critically evaluate any two of the characters from the novel.
3. Elucidate upon the construction of the plot.
4. Trace the development of Pip-the protagonist and Pip-the narrator.
5. Discuss intricate relationships portrayed by Dickens in *Great Expectations*.
6. Write a note on how the title of the novel, *Great Expectations*, has been justified by the author.
7. Discuss the women characters portrayed in *Great Expectations*.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

Fill In The Blanks By Choosing The Correct Option

1. _____ is Miss Havisham's adopted daughter.
 - a. Biddy
 - b. Mrs. Joe
 - c. Estella
 - d. Molly
2. Pip's brother-in-law Mr. Joe Gargery is a _____.
 - a. Lawyer

- b. Blacksmith
 - c. Businessman
 - d. Owner of Satis House
3. Pip's mysterious benefactor is _____.
- a. Miss Havisham
 - b. Joe Gargery
 - c. Bentley Drummle
 - d. Abel Magwitch
4. Initially Estella plans to marry _____
- a. Herbert Pocket
 - b. Mr. Wemmick
 - c. Bentley Drummle
 - d. Pip
5. _____ is Estella's real mother.
- a. Miss Havisham
 - b. Molly
 - c. Biddy
 - d. Mrs. Joe

7.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt about

- how the plot of the novel has been constructed in a well-knit manner
- how the novel successfully displays the growth and development of his major characters from ignorance to enlightenment
- how a character of the novel can be critically analysed

7.5 KEY WORDS

Benefactor	helper, financial supporter
David Copperfield:	Protagonist of Charles Dickens' autobiographical novel <i>David Copperfield</i> (1850)
Eccentric	strange and unconventional
File	blacksmith's tool
Foe	enemy, opponent
Forge	blacksmith's workshop
Optimistic	hopeful about future
Paradox	contradiction
Quest	hunt, pursuit
Torment	suffering

7.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. Bloom, Harold ed. *Charles Dickens's Great Expectations*. Infobase Publishing, 2010.

2. Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition. Penguin, 2010.
3. Hall, Oakley M. *The Art and Craft of Novel Writing*. Story Press, 1994.
4. Tredell, Nicolas. *Charles Dickens: "Great Expectations"*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

ANSWERS

1-c, 2-b, 3-d, 4-c, 5-b