

STRUCTURE**8.0 Objectives****8.1 Themes in Great Expectations****8.1.1 Alienation & Loneliness****8.1.2 Ambition & Self-Improvement****8.1.3 Elusiveness of Dreams****8.1.4 Fairy Tale Motif****8.2 Other Literary Elements in *Great Expectations*****8.2.1 Symbolism****8.2.2 Realism****8.2.3 Gothic Elements****8.2.4 Diverse Approaches****8.3. Narrative Technique****8.3.1 Use of Language****8.4 Let Us Sum Up****8.5 Key Words****8.6 Books Suggested****Answers**

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In the previous two units, you have learnt about the text, its context, the genre, the characters and the plot construction. Now, let us

- Try to understand the text based on various critical approaches
- Analyze various literary elements that provide distinctiveness to the novel
- Discuss the effective use of language

8.1 THEMES IN GREAT EXPECTATIONS**8.1.1 Alienation and Loneliness**

Although the central theme of *Great Expectations* is Pip's moral and ethical development beyond material wealth, the theme of alienation and loneliness of many of the characters is also prominent. A few orphan characters like Pip, Mrs. Joe, Biddy, Magwitch and Estella face the harsh realities of lonely life. However, the ways in which these characters react to circumstances and respond to life are quite different in many ways. As a young child Pip is shown despicable and forlorn, visiting the graves of his parents; and vulnerable in the company of his cruel sister who eventually dies. Magwitch, too, narrates his own childhood experiences to

Pip about how he used to roam around on the streets of London forlorn and careless, a possible reason of tuning him into a criminal. Estella, like her caretaker Miss Havisham, is portrayed as a person who does not enjoy an intimate company, and hence, does not have good friends. Miss Havisham invites Pip, a boy from lower class to play with Estella at her mansion. This gesture shows that women at Satis House are trying to alleviate loneliness. The final resolution of Pip and Estella is also the result of their desire to get rid of life-long alienation and loneliness. Ultimately, they decide to reap the pleasure of family love and friends after final realization.

8.1.2 Ambition and Self – Improvement

Other themes that are woven throughout the novel are ambition and self- improvement. These themes can be traced in three forms – moral, social and educational. Pip wants educational improvement deeply because of his ambition to be a gentleman; a condition to marry Estella that is his ultimate dream. He also desires moral improvement which gets reflected in his journey as a protagonist whose material expectations are replaced by moral behavior.

8.1.3 Elusiveness of Dreams

The dreams of major characters in *Great Expectations* are too elusive to be realized. For instance, in order to impress Estella, Pip dreams of being a gentleman. To pursue this dream, he gets into the company of those who belittle him at the cost of those who really care for him like Joe and Biddy. Another major character Miss Havisham’s dream of raising Estella by protecting her from the cruelties of men does not get fulfilled as she fails to shield her against the cruelties of Bentley Drummle. Finally, Able Magwitch also fails in his dream of producing a gentleman, as Pip decides not to pursue Magwitch’s dream on moral basis.

8.1.4 Fairy Tale Motif

Majority of the literary critics believe that Dickens uses the fairy tale motif of an orphaned poor child brought to prosperity by his virtuous nature. Protagonist Pip’s journey is from rags to riches as he is rewarded by his mysterious benefactor whom he had helped. Though the motif is clearly visible, the novel moves beyond the fairy tale motif, as Dickens vividly shows how gaining wealth does not necessarily lead to absolute happiness.

There are other apparent themes like social standings, suffering, parenthood and revenge. Throughout the novel Dickens offers a clear contrast between lower class and the high-class society. Pip is constantly exposed to characters like Magwitch, Joe and Biddy representing the low end and the other hand Miss Havisham, Compeyson and Drummle from the high class simultaneously. The lower class suffers despite their honest and loyal frailties and the high class is not happy despite their material wealth. By showing, this contrast Dickens makes Pip realize that there is no correlation between a person’s true character and one’s social standing. Miss Havisham’s wish to take revenge, growing pain and

sufferings of Pip and Estella and the problem of parenthood in the case of Estella are significant themes depicted by Dickens in *Great Expectations*.

8.2 OTHER LITERARY ELEMENTS IN *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*:

8.2.1 Symbolism

In any work of art, symbols are objects, elements or characters used to represent something more significant than itself. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens cleverly used symbols like the rising mists, the Satis House, the stopped clocks, shadow and places to convey contrast between mysterious and pleasant, love and revenge, innocence and intelligence as well as between life and death, lower class and high class, material gains and moral standings. By creating gothic atmosphere, Dickens symbolically presents the inner selves of the characters like Miss Havisham and Magwitch who are haunted by their own past deeds.

Dickens also attributes colours to exhibit certain qualities of a character or situation. For instance, he uses “yellow” to feature decay and decrepitude throughout the novel like the walls of Satis House or Miss Havisham’s bridal dress, shows and stockings gives the impression of slowly deteriorating house and inner of characters.

8.2.2 Realism

During the 19th Century, the concept of realism developed in writing novels as a response to the idealistic world of romanticism that had dominated the past literary age. According to critics, realism was an aesthetic movement, which experimented in holding up a mirror to its society in order to show the true reflection of reality. As you have studied in previous units that Charles Dickens’ novels vividly, reflect the life and times of the Victorian age. However, at the same time whether we can classify *Great Expectations* a realistic novel is a debatable issue. Although critics raise doubts due to Dickens’ use of gothic and sensational elements in the novel, the representation of reality is clearly evident throughout the novel to a greater extent. Though the constructed realism is essentially the representation of reality based on Dickens’ own values, attitudes and ideology, the novel offers like and struggles of Pip’s everyday existence that might be common to nineteenth century England.

One of the significant characteristic that defines realism in *Great Expectations* is the exploration of the internal states of characters and their inner worlds. Pip’s sense of guilt is projected throughout the story. He feels guilty of living a low life and ashamed of his background which eventually drags him towards becoming a ‘gentleman’. Pip’s internal struggle, for gaining more from life and getting more than he has; changes him ultimately at the end of novel. Pip’s final realization itself demonstrates reality of life that not all dreams are worth pursuing, they can be elusive.

Another element that makes the novel realistic is the complicated and ambiguous natures of its characters. Instead of showing the human nature into black and white or as good or evil, Dickens offers a grey shade. For instance, the convict turns out to be Pip’s mysterious benefactor and Miss Havisham, whom Pip assumes to be his benefactor, outwits him.

Dickens' thorough description on different social classes also provides the realistic picture of his age. Hence, if not absolutely, to a great extent the element of realism dominates *Great Expectations*.

8.2.3 Gothic Elements

In literature, the term 'Gothic' refers to a style of writing that is featured by elements of horror, gloom, fear, death and eccentric romantic emotions containing mystery and suspense. Dickens creates a menacing atmosphere that dominates *Great Expectations* right from the very first chapter. The novel opens in a sinister and scary Gothic setting. The first chapter introduces an orphan who is endangered by Gothic horror, visits the grave of his parents and five little brothers in a foggy churchyard. Soon he is threatened by a scary convict who asks for the food and a file. The mist of the marshes indicates wicked, sinister and criminal happenings, "... the weather was cold and threatening, the way dreary, the footing bad darkness coming on" (*Great Expectations* 29). The hunt for the convicts takes place in this fearful Gothic atmosphere.

Satis House, in *Great Expectations*, is a relict of the Gothic castle because it is ruinous, decayed, mazy mansion possessed by a grotesque owner, Miss Havisham. Dressed in a faded yellow wedding dress and with white hair, Miss Havisham looks like a "Skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress" (*Great Expectations*, Ch.8). When Pip enters into Miss Havisham's room, he smells oppressive odour, dim candles hardly eradicate darkness, everything is "covered with dust and mould and dropping to pieces" (*Great Expectations*, Ch. 11) and finds mice, black beetles and vermin like spiders crawling around. On an age old dusty banquet table is a wedding cake "like a black fungus" (*Great Expectations*, Ch.11) overhung with cobwebs. Thus, Dickens creates dark ghastly, frightening mysterious atmosphere of Satis House and Miss Havisham through detailed description. Hence, the entire novel seems charged with the forces of the Gothic.

The Gothic element is felt persistently throughout the novel. For instance, in the very first chapter, when Magwitch leaves the graveyard, Pip finds him "as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in". (*Great Expectations*, Ch.1) What Pip feels is also felt by the reader. It is due to Dickens' description. Dickens drags his readers into the dead alive world of the novel with the help of Gothic symbols.

8.2.4 Diverse Approaches

Here, you have learnt about a few critical ways of reading the novel, but there are multiple approaches that define the novel from a different angle. These approaches include Psychological, Feminist, Historical, Social and many more offered by Post-Colonial Criticism. For instance, all the characters as well as the author can be analyzed based on psychoanalytic theory. How Dickens' childhood experiences have been reflected in the novel stems discussion on the relationship between the author and the text. The psychological approach can also be applied in analyzing characters like Miss Havisham, Mrs. Joe and Mrs.

Pocket in order to understand eccentricities in their behavior. How their identity is constructed and disturbed by inner and outer forces can be critically analyzed. In the similar manner, if we apply feminist theories a different perspective emerges. Although the novel is narrated by Pip, the descriptions are predominated by male point of view, but it can be read as how the events might seem different if narrated by one of the women characters. A feminist reading tells us that women in the novel are victims of the great expectations of the patriarchal society that define and affect their roles and behaviours-Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella and Mrs. Pocket are the examples.

Great Expectations can also be read from New Historicist approach by emphasizing upon the historical, social, political and cultural contexts. How a number of issues have been directly addressed in the novel like crime and punishment, class and social hierarchy, role of money, individual and educational opportunities, the matters of legitimacy etc. can be discussed. Thus, at a deeper level, *Great Expectations* can be read by applying various critical approaches.

8.3 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

As discussed in previous units, *Great Expectations* is an autobiographical novel narrated by the first person Pip. This type of narrative technique is not new to literature, but the remarkable aspect about the opening of the novel is the way Dickens employs the flexibility between the speaking voice of Pip and the different perspective of other characters'. For instance, the first few lines of the novel immediately establish a connection with the narrator Pip and the reader:

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

(*Great Expectations*, Ch.1)

This is the voice of a mature man, and not of a boy. Suddenly, the direct speech has been erupted by the threatening voice of a stranger: "Hold your noise!" The first shocking appearance of the convict is presented not by description, but in the narration: "Hold your Noise! Keep still your little devil, or I'll cut our throat!" (Ch. 1). Dickens makes him appear like a fairy-tale monster following the ancient art of storytelling. The flexibility of who sees and who speaks makes the narrative interesting and informal as well.

In the opening chapters, Dickens' narrative style is complex too. He switches from a childish description to an adult speaker's comment and back again within a sentence. For instance, how young Pip is teased and tortured at Christmas dinner in chapter 4, and how the adult narrator Pip comments upon the adults and describes child's fears.

Thus, it is through this complex narrative technique, the development of Pip's character can be measured and events can be visualized. There is no exaggeration in saying that *Great Expectations* is a masterpiece of first person narration, the voice of someone talking to himself and others, rather than the author addressing his readers.

8.3.1 Use of Language

A good narrative technique also involves effective use of language. Dickens' use of language plays a vital role in making the novel an exceptional one. Pip's struggles, sufferings and surroundings as well as his other experiences are unfolded in the remarkable use of language by Dickens.

At Satis House, Pip hears very different language that he has heard at his home in Chapter 11. Once again, characters are shown using different language in London. For instance, the conversation between Wemmick and Pip in Chapter 24. On the other hand, convict Magwitch uses dialect appropriate to his status. For example, in Chapter 1, he threatens Pip: "Show us where you live", said the man. "Pint out the place" or "Darn me if I couldn't eat 'em" Highly individual speech of every character not only reflects the social background of Victorian class system, but also charts dynamics of individual development through Dickens' subtle use of language in the novel.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: 1

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION

1. Write a detailed note on various themes used in *Great Expectations*.

2. Discuss how Dickens employs a unique narrative technique for his novel.

3. Explore different literary elements used in the novel.

4. Discuss how a novel can be read by applying diverse approaches.

5. Describe in detail Dickens' use of language with appropriate examples.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: 2

Fill In The Blanks By Choosing The Correct Option

1. _____ among the following is not an orphan character in *Great Expectations*.
 - a. Biddy
 - b. Pip
 - c. Herbert Pocket
 - d. Abel Magwitch
2. Miss Havisham tries to alleviate their loneliness by inviting _____ to play with Estella at Satis House.
 - a. Mrs. Joe
 - b. Bentley Drummle
 - c. Biddy
 - d. Pip
3. Pip's great expectation and ambition in life is to become a _____.
 - a. Lawyer
 - b. Blacksmith
 - c. Gentleman
 - d. Businessman
4. Horror, gloom, death and fear feature _____ element in the *Great Expectations*.
 - a. Romantic
 - b. Gothic
 - c. Natural
 - d. Classic
5. In the very first chapter of the novel, at the graveyard, the convict asks for _____ from Pip.
 - a. Food and file
 - b. Food and money
 - c. Food and clothes
 - d. Food and knife

8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, you have learnt about

- How *Great Expectations* can be read critically.
- How Dickens has used various literary elements.
- How the effective use of language makes a work of art more realistic, genuine and authentic.

8.5 KEY WORDS

Alienation sense of isolation or detachment

Alleviate	reduce, weaken
Belittle	downgrade, trivialize
Critical Reading	a process in which the reader goes beyond reading the text by applying various theories, models, questions or certain processes in order to comprehend the text with clarity.
Decrepitude	weakness, frailty
Despicable	villainous, hateful
Dialect	local or regional variety of language
Elusive	difficult to catch
Erupt	break out or happen suddenly
Feminist	person who supports feminism or women's cause
Forlorn	unhappy, dejected, sad
Gothic	a style of architecture that was common in England during 12 th and 16 th Century, but in literature the word is used to describe writings in which strange things happen at frightening places.
Legitimacy	state of being fair and honest and as per the rule of law
Mazy	confusing, puzzling
Mist	fog
Outwit	make fool of, trick someone
Post-Colonial	occurring or existing after the end of Western Colonial rule
Realism	style of representation based on accurate depiction of details and facts.
Relict	a thing, which has survived from earlier or primitive ages
Ruinous	causing harm and destruction
Sinister	evil-looking, menacing
Symbolism	use of symbols to represent something or indirect way of suggesting ideas, feelings etc. with the use of symbols.
Vulnerable	helpless, unsafe

8.6 BOOKS SUGGESTED

1. Leavis, F. R. *Dickens the Novelist*. Faber & Faber, 2012.
2. Ledger, Sally and Holly Furneaux. *Charles Dickens in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
3. Miller Joseph, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*. Harvard University Press, 1958.
4. Pearson, Gabriel and John Gross. *Dickens and the Twentieth Century (RLE Dickens): Routledge Library Editions: Charles Dickens, Volume 6*. Routledge, 2013.

ANSWERS

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