

Lecture 11

Great Expectations: Narrative Structure and Brief Chapter Summaries

*** Part 1 (chapters 1 to 19) :**

- 1- Christmas Eve, afternoon: Pip meets the convict (Abel Magwitch); Pip asked to steal file and "wittles"
- 2- Joe and Mrs. Joe introduced; guns signal escaped convicts; Pip steals food
- 3- Christmas Day: Pip at the Battery; tells Magwitch of the "young man" (Compeyson)
- 4- Christmas Dinner - we meet Pumblechook, Wopsle, the Hubbles; Pip said to be "naterally wicious"; tar-water; the sergeant
- 5- The soldiers; Magwitch and Compeyson; Magwitch "confesses" to Pip's crime; the Hulks
- 6- Pip's guilt; Pumblechook describes Magwitch's "theft"
- 7- Pip's education (from Biddy); Joe's lack of learning; Miss Havisham wants Pip to visit; Pip goes to stay with "Uncle"
- 8- Pip sees Estella, Miss Havisham at Satis House; twenty to nine; Estella seen as "a star"; Pip "calls knaves, Jacks"
- 9- Pip's lies about Satis; Pumblechook pretends to know; Pip tells Joe the truth; first "link" of "long chain" .
- 10- The stranger in the Three Jolly Bargemen; the file and the two one-pound notes (see Chapter 28 for the sequel)
- 11- Miss Havisham's birthday; Sarah Pocket, Camilla, Raymond condemn Matthew; Pip sees Jaggers; fights Herbert
- 12- More guilt; Pumblechook's hypocrisy; Pip to be apprenticed - Mrs. Joe slighted not to see Miss Havisham
- 13- Joe at Satis House - given twenty-five guineas; Pip bound apprentice; dinner at the Blue Boar
- 14- Reflection on Pip's shame and ingratitude; Joe's virtues described
- 15- The half-holiday: Joe fights Dolge Orlick, Pip visits Miss Havisham, Estella abroad; Mrs. Joe assaulted
- 16- Pip's guilt at the weapon (the leg-iron); Biddy moves in; Mrs. Joe "asks" for Orlick
- 17- Biddy's virtues praised; she becomes Pip's confidante but is pursued by Orlick

18- Jaggers tells Pip of his "great expectations" and secrecy of benefactor; Joe refuses payment for Pip's release

19- Pip argues with Biddy; Pumblechook is smug; Mr. Trabb; Miss Havisham knows all; Pip leaves home .

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***Part 2 (chapters 20 to 39) :**

20- Little Britain and Newgate; Jaggers at work; Wemmick; Pip to lodge with Herbert

21- Wemmick takes Pip to Barnard's Inn; Pip recognizes Herbert as "pale young gentleman"

22- Herbert tells Miss Havisham's story; the counting house; he and Pip visit Hammersmith

23- The Pockets' establishment; Drummle and Startop; Pip takes up rowing; the drunk cook

24- Pip decides to stay with Herbert; Wemmick and "portable property"; Jaggers at work

25- Drummle, Startop, Camilla described; Pip visits Walworth; the Castle and the post-office; the "Aged"

26- Jaggers at home to Pip, Herbert, Drummle and Startop; Molly's wrists; Jaggers' interest in Drummle

27- Biddy's letter; the Avenger; Joe visits Barnard's Inn; calls Pip "Sir"; Joe's "simple dignity"

28- Pip goes to the Blue Boar; the convicts; Pip reads in local paper that Pumblechook is his "patron"

29- Pip visits Miss Havisham; Orlick is gatekeeper; Sarah Pocket, Estella and Jaggers;

30- Pip has Orlick dismissed; Trabb's boy; Herbert tells of Clara; the playbill

31- Mr. Wopsle/Waldengarver appears as Hamlet Prince of Denmark

32- Pip waits for Estella who is visiting London; Wemmick shows him Newgate (convict motif)

33- Pip takes Estella to Richmond; she tells him of Miss Havisham's flatterers

34- Pip's and Herbert's debts; the "Finches of the Grove"; "leaving a Margin"; Mrs. Joe dies

35- The funeral; Biddy to leave the forge, mentions Orlick; Pip reproaches her unfairly

36- Pip comes of age (November); becomes responsible for finances; asks Wemmick's advice for Herbert

37- Pip at Walworth; meets Miss Skiffins; her brother to advance Herbert's affairs; Clarriker's House

38- Estella at Mrs. Brandley's; Pip to escort Estella; takes her to Satis; quarrels with Miss Havisham; Drummle as suitor

39- Pip (now twenty-three) has moved to the Temple; Magwitch returns - he is Pip's benefactor .

***Part 3 (chapters 40 to 59) :**

- 40- The man on the stairs; "Provis" to stay; Jaggers confirms his story; Herbert meets Magwitch
- 41- Herbert advises Pip to take Magwitch out of the country; they ask him about his life
- 42- Compeyson, Sally; the death of Arthur Havisham.; the trial; Herbert's deduction about Compeyson's identity
- 43- Pip to visit Miss Havisham; Drummle in the Blue Boar; the man "like" Orlick (it probably is him)
- 44- Pip asks Miss Havisham. to help Herbert; tells Estella he loves her; Estella to marry Drummle; Wemmick's note
- 45- Pip goes to Walworth via the Hummums; Magwitch moved to Clara's house
- 46- Mrs. Whimple's: Clara and Old Barley; the boat at Temple Stairs; Pip feels he is watched
- 47- Pip fears Estella is married but will not make sure; Mr. Wopsle sees Compeyson in audience
- 48- Pip dines with Jaggers; Estella is married; Pip recognizes Molly as her mother; Wemmick tells of Molly's trial
- 49- Miss Havisham's confession and repentance; Estella's adoption; the fire; "I forgive her"
- 50- Herbert tells of Magwitch's child; Pip knows Estella is his; Magwitch has said Pip. reminded him of her
- 51- Pip receives money for Herbert; Jaggers explains Estella's adoption and advises that he keep it secret
- 52- Herbert to go East; Startop to row: Orlick's note (in Compeyson's hand); Pip accused of "ingratitude" to Pumblechook
- 53- Orlick's confession and attempted revenge; Pip rescued by Trabb's boy and Herbert
- 54- Magwitch's escape thwarted; Compeyson drowned; Pip reconciled to his benefactor, Magwitch
- 55- Pip's wealth forfeit to the crown; Herbert offers job; Old Barley dying; Wemmick marries Miss Skiffins
- 56- Magwitch convicted and sentenced; Pip tells him, before his death, of Estella
- 57- Pip ill, arrested for debts; rescued by Joe; Orlick in jail; Miss Havisham's will; Pip plans to propose to Biddy
- 58- Pumblechook at the Blue Boar; Satis House for auction; Joe marries Biddy; Pip joins Herbert abroad
- 59- Eleven years later, Pip returns; sees young Pip; meets (widowed) Estella at Satis; "no shadow of...parting" .

Lecture 12

Great Expectations: Themes, Motifs, Symbols, and Objects

Themes : -

***Ambition and Self-Improvement :**

- The moral theme of *Great Expectations* is quite simple: affection, loyalty, and conscience are more important than social advancement, wealth, and class.
- Dickens establishes the theme and shows Pip learning this lesson, largely by exploring ideas of ambition and self-improvement—ideas that quickly become both the thematic center of the novel and the psychological mechanism that encourages much of Pip's development.
- At heart, Pip is an idealist; whenever he can conceive of something that is better than what he already has, he immediately desires to obtain the improvement.
- When he sees Satis House, he longs to be a wealthy gentleman; when he thinks of his moral shortcomings, he longs to be good; when he realizes that he cannot read, he longs to learn how.
- Pip's desire for self-improvement is the main source of the novel's title: because he believes in the possibility of advancement in life, he has "great expectations" about his future.

***Social Class :**

- Throughout *Great Expectations*, Dickens explores the class system of Victorian England, ranging from the most wretched criminals (Magwitch) to the poor peasants of the marsh country (Joe and Biddy) to the middle class (Pumblechook) to the very rich (Miss Havisham).
- The theme of social class is central to the novel's plot and to the ultimate moral theme of the book—Pip's realization that wealth and class are less important than affection, loyalty, and inner worth.

- Pip achieves this realization when he is finally able to understand that, despite the esteem in which he holds Estella, one's social status is in no way connected to one's real character. Drummle, for instance, is an upper-class lout, while Magwitch, a persecuted convict, has a deep inner worth.

- Perhaps the most important thing to remember about the novel's treatment of social class is that the class system it portrays is based on the post-Industrial Revolution model of Victorian England.

- Dickens generally ignores the nobility and the hereditary aristocracy in favor of characters whose fortunes have been earned through commerce. Even Miss Havisham's family fortune was made through the brewery that is still connected to her manor.

- In this way, by connecting the theme of social class to the idea of work and self-advancement, Dickens subtly reinforces the novel's overarching theme of ambition and self-improvement.

*Crime, Guilt, and Innocence :

- The theme of crime, guilt, and innocence is explored throughout the novel largely through the characters of the convicts and the criminal lawyer Jaggers.

- From the handcuffs Joe mends at the smithy to the gallows at the prison in London, the imagery of crime and criminal justice pervades the book, becoming an important symbol of Pip's inner struggle to reconcile his own inner moral conscience with the institutional justice system.

- In general, just as social class becomes a superficial standard of value that Pip must learn to look beyond in finding a better way to live his life, the external trappings of the criminal justice system (police, courts, jails, etc.) become a superficial standard of morality that Pip must learn to look beyond to trust his inner conscience.

- Magwitch, for instance, frightens Pip at first simply because he is a convict, and Pip feels guilty for helping him because he is afraid of the police.

- By the end of the book, however, Pip has discovered Magwitch's inner nobility, and is able to disregard his external status as a criminal. Prompted by his conscience, he helps Magwitch to evade the law and the police.

- As Pip has learned to trust his conscience and to value Magwitch's inner character, he has replaced an external standard of value with an internal one.

Motifs : -

*Doubles :

- One of the most remarkable aspects of Dickens's work is its structural intricacy and remarkable balance.
- Dickens's plots involve complicated coincidences, extraordinarily tangled webs of human relationships, and highly dramatic developments in which setting, atmosphere, event, and character are all seamlessly fused.
- In *Great Expectations*, perhaps the most visible sign of Dickens's commitment to intricate dramatic symmetry—apart from the knot of character relationships, of course—is the fascinating motif of doubles that runs throughout the book.
- From the earliest scenes of the novel to the last, nearly every element of *Great Expectations* is mirrored or doubled at some other point in the book.
- There are two convicts on the marsh (Magwitch and Compeyson), two invalids (Mrs. Joe and Miss Havisham), two young women who interest Pip (Biddy and Estella), and so on. There are two secret benefactors: Magwitch, who gives Pip his fortune, and Pip, who mirrors Magwitch's action by secretly buying Herbert's way into the mercantile business.
- This doubling of elements has no real bearing on the novel's main themes, but, like the connection of weather and action, it adds to the sense that everything in Pip's world is connected. Throughout Dickens's works, this kind of dramatic symmetry is simply part of the fabric of his novelistic universe .

*Comparison of Characters to Inanimate Objects :

- Throughout *Great Expectations*, the narrator uses images of inanimate objects to describe the physical appearance of characters—particularly minor characters, or characters with whom the narrator is not intimate.
- For example, Mrs. Joe looks as if she scrubs her face with a nutmeg grater, while the inscrutable features of Mr. Wemmick are repeatedly compared to a letter-box.
- This motif, which Dickens uses throughout his novels, may suggest a failure of empathy on the narrator's part, or it may suggest that the character's position in life is pressuring them to resemble a thing more than a human being.

- The latter interpretation would mean that the motif in general is part of a social critique, in that it implies that an institution such as the class system or the criminal justice system dehumanizes certain people.

Symbols : -

***Satis House :**

- In Satis House, Dickens creates a magnificent Gothic setting whose various elements symbolize Pip's romantic perception of the upper class and many other themes of the book.

- On her decaying body, Miss Havisham's wedding dress becomes an ironic symbol of death and degeneration.

- The wedding dress and the wedding feast symbolize Miss Havisham's past, and the stopped clocks throughout the house symbolize her determined attempt to freeze time by refusing to change anything from the way it was when she was jilted on her wedding day.

- The brewery next to the house symbolizes the connection between commerce and wealth: Miss Havisham's fortune is not the product of an aristocratic birth but of a recent success in industrial capitalism.

- Finally, the crumbling, dilapidated stones of the house, as well as the darkness and dust that pervade it, symbolize the general decadence of the lives of its inhabitants and of the upper class as a whole.

***The Mists on the Marshes :**

- The setting almost always symbolizes a theme in *Great Expectations* and always sets a tone that is perfectly matched to the novel's dramatic action.

- The misty marshes near Pip's childhood home in Kent, one of the most evocative of the book's settings, are used several times to symbolize danger and uncertainty.

- As a child, Pip brings Magwitch a file and food in these mists; later, he is kidnapped by Orlick and nearly murdered in them. Whenever Pip goes into the mists, something dangerous is likely to happen.

- Significantly, Pip must go through the mists when he travels to London shortly after receiving his fortune, alerting the reader that this apparently positive development in his life may have dangerous consequences.

Objects and Places :-

The Marshes: Pip grows up on the marshes and returns there many times when he's older. The rough marshes stand in contrast to the civilized city of London.

The Three Jolly Bargemen: The Bargemen is a bar in Pip's village that serves as a meeting place--important news and characters are often discovered here.

Mr. Wopsle's Great Aunt's school: Not much learning takes place here, for the Great Aunt sleeps instead of teaching and all the books are about a century out-of-date. Pip attends the school for years, and only learns what Biddy, the real teacher there, teaches him.

Twenty before nine: Miss Havisham realized she had been stood up at twenty 'til nine on her wedding day. She stopped all the clocks in her house at that precise moment.

The Temple: The second, and more respectable of lodgings into which Pip and Herbert move, in London.

Barnard's Inn: Pip moves into Herbert's place at Barnard's Inn in London, and they live there for several years. Barnard's is quite decrepit and disrespectable, although Pip uses some of his benefactor's money to fancy-up his and Herbert's rooms.

Hammersmith: The suburb where Pip's tutor, Matthew Pocket, and his family, live.

Richmond: The suburb where Estella lives when she moves to London.

Walworth (or Wemmick's Castle): Wemmick has built a very impressive homestead, sort of a miniature castle, in the suburbs. He lives here with his father, the Aged P, and has invented all sorts of novelties and rituals around the house for the Aged P's amusement.

Finches of the Grove: A snobby sort of boy's club that Pip and Herbert join in London. Bentley Drummle is also a Finch, and he and Pip get in an argument over Estella at one of the Finch dinners.

Chink's Basin: A location on the river where Magwitch is to lie in wait until Pip comes to fetch him for their escape. Herbert's fiancé and her father also live in the house at Chink's Basin.

The Blue Boar: An inn in Pip's village where he often stays on his visits home.

London: On the news of his inheritance, Pip travels to London, where his gentlemanly education is to begin. London is most often portrayed as full of suspicious, cutthroat characters, men like Jaggers and his clients. The innocent life of the marshes stands in contrast to life in this city.

wittles: Or 'vittles,' another word for 'food'