

Lecture 8

Great Expectations: The Novel and the Author at a Glance

* The Novel at a Glance :

full title : *Great Expectations*

author : Charles Dickens

type of work : Novel

genres : Bildungsroman, satirical/historical/regional novel, autobiographical fiction

time and place written : London, 1860-1861

date of first publication : Published serially in England from December 1860 to August 1861; published in book form in England and America in 1861

narrator : Pip

climax : A sequence of climactic events occurs from about Chapter 51 to Chapter 56: Miss Havisham's burning in the fire, Orlick's attempt to murder Pip, and Pip's attempt to help Magwitch escape London.

Protagonist : Pip .

Antagonist : *Great Expectations* does not contain a traditional single antagonist. Various characters serve as figures against whom Pip must struggle at various times: Magwitch, Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella, Orlick, Bentley Drummle, and Compeyson. With the exception of the last three, each of the novel's antagonists is redeemed before the end of the book.

setting (time) : Mid-nineteenth century

settings (place) : Kent and London, England

point of view : First person

falling action : The period following Magwitch's capture in Chapter 54, including Magwitch's death, Pip's reconciliation with Joe, and Pip's reunion with Estella eleven years later .

foreshadowing : *Great Expectations* contains a great deal of foreshadowing. The repeated references to the convict (the man with the file in the pub, the attack on Mrs. Joe) foreshadow his return; the second convict on the marsh foreshadows the revelation of Magwitch's conflict with Compeyson; the man in the pub who gives Pip money

foreshadows the revelation that Pip's fortune comes from Magwitch; Miss Havisham's wedding dress and her bizarre surroundings foreshadow the revelation of her past and her relationship with Estella; Pip's feeling that Estella reminds him of someone he knows foreshadows his discovery of the truth of her parentage; the fact that Jaggers is a criminal lawyer foreshadows his involvement in Magwitch's life; and so on. Moreover, the weather often foreshadows dramatic events: a storm brewing generally means there will be trouble ahead, as on the night of Magwitch's return.

Tone : Comic, cheerful, satirical, wry, critical, sentimental, dark, dramatic, foreboding, Gothic, sympathetic .

***The Author at a Glance :**

- One of Charles Dickens' friends, watching the author at work, described him as so: "It was interesting to watch ... the mind and muscles working (or if you please, *playing*) ... as new thoughts were being dropped upon the paper."
- Dickens, one of history's most prolific authors, is remembered as a curious picture of playfulness, energy, and stubborn will, a man given to working on three huge books at the same time and dashing off to the English countryside for twelve-mile constitutional walks.
- In a life that spanned fifty-eight years, Dickens wrote fifteen novels, most of which were over a thousand pages, in addition to countless novellas, stories, articles, sketches and letters.
- Charles Dickens was born in 1812, in Portsmouth England. His father was eager to climb the social ladder, and to make more of his life than his parents had been able, who were illiterate servants.
- When Dickens' father was hired as a clerk, this shaky ascent up England's relatively hostile social ladder began.
- Charles' childhood was subsequently rocky--lots of moves and minor financial windfalls, followed by bad wipeouts. By the early 1820s, Charles was living with six siblings and his parents in a four-room house, with bill collectors banging at the door and no money left to send Charles to school.
- To help his family, Charles was sent to work in a rat-infested shoe polish factory, where he worked twelve-hour days sticking labels on pots of polish.
- This job seemed to scare something in the young Dickens--perhaps showing him how easily one's hopes and ambitions could be cast aside by circumstance. Things got even worse when, just a week into the factory job, his family was thrown in a debtor's prison.

- As a result, Charles was determined to be more successful than his father. He taught himself shorthand as a teenager and became a court reporter, allowing him to resume his education.
- Soon after, some of his character sketches were accepted into monthly magazines. These were gathered later into a book, which sold well.
- From there, Dickens launched his lifelong career as a novelist, work that he supplemented with long hours in the theater and publication businesses.
- Most of his books were published serially, in magazines, during his lifetime.
- His more popular works include *Oliver Twist* (1838), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *David Copperfield* (1849), *Hard Times* (1854), *Great Expectations* (1860), was also published serially but under a stricter length requirement, and is considered a more polished example of his work.
- Charles Dickens was happy in his life, although his marriage, which lasted twenty-two years, was mutually unrewarding. By the time he wrote *Great Expectations*, Dickens was separated from his wife and was involved in a trying affair with a young actress.
- Perhaps as a consequence, the ending Dickens wrote for Pip and Estella (in which the two characters presumably never reunite) was not a happy one. But an editor convinced Dickens to change his novel's conclusion to the sunnier one which now remains.
- Charles Dickens does have his share of critics. Some say his characters are flat, his writing is moralizing, his plots arbitrary.
- A common criticism is that his characters are exaggerated.
- Many critics find the glimmering, colliding worlds of Dickens' novels delightful.
- Dickens died in 1870, and was laid under a tombstone that read: "England's Most Popular Author." More than a century later, his books continue to charm and engage young children, and eminent literary critics alike.