

Lecture 10

Great Expectations: Major and Minor Characters

*** Major Characters :**

- **Pip** : Pip is an orphaned boy raised by his domineering sister and her kind husband, and his life and expectations make for the drama of the novel. A mysterious benefactor enables Pip to escape a destiny as the village blacksmith, and he travels to London as a teenager to become a 'gentleman.' Pip's perception of his life and prospects (especially his prospects with Estella) change dramatically when he's twenty-three, when he learns that his benefactor is not a rich old lady, but a common convict. Ultimately, Pip comes to appreciate the convict as a benefactor and a friend.

- **Miss Havisham** : A bitter old woman, whose life effectively stopped when she was abandoned on her wedding day. Half a century after this disappointment, Miss Havisham still wears a yellowing wedding gown, and has made it her life's purpose to raise Estella, whom she's adopted, as a cruel-hearted woman who'll break the hearts of men. Havisham is rich too, and deceives Pip by implying that she's his benefactor. Near the end of the novel she realizes her cruelties are nearly unforgivable, although she dies not long after this realization.

- **Magwitch (or Provis, Mr. Campbell, the convict, the shackled man)**: Magwitch and Pip first meet when Pip is a boy and Magwitch an escaped convict. Magwitch does not forget Pip's kindness in the marshes, and later in life devotes himself to earning money that he anonymously donates to Pip. Eventually, Magwitch comes to London to see his 'gentleman,' and after Pip's shock and shame wear off, the two become friends. Ever a convict, however, Magwitch is captured by the police. Just before he is sentenced to hang, Miss he dies.

- **Estella**: Estella is Miss Havisham's adopted daughter and her project in cultivated cruelty. Raised by the old woman to be cruel and hard to men, Estella, a great beauty, entrances Pip. She is mean to Pip for most of his life, although at the novel's end they meet again, and she seems to be a softened, changed woman. Estella is another child of mysterious parentage, and Pip eventually learns that she's Magwitch's daughter.

- **Herbert (or the pale young gentleman)** : Pip first meets Herbert as a boy at Miss Havisham's, where they get into an odd sparring match. Later, when Pip travels to London, he is reunited with Herbert, who is his tutor's son. Herbert is Pip's greatest friend and closest confidant,

and the only person Pip can confide in when he discovers his benefactor's identity. Herbert and Pip eventually leave London and work together in Cairo.

- **Joe** : Joe is Pip's sister's husband, a kind-hearted blacksmith who Pip greatly admires as a boy. With the onset of his riches, however, Pip becomes ashamed of Joe, and the two don't see each other much for many years. Later, when Pip falls sick, Joe nurses him back to health and pays off all of his debts. Joe is often in Pip's mind as a reminder of the simple and honest life he left behind, when he left the marshes.

- **Mrs. Joe** : Mrs. Joe is Pip's sister, who raises Pip with a heavy hand and is a generally unpleasant woman until a mysterious intruder clobbers her with an iron shackle. After this, Mrs. Joe turns kind, though she is almost completely incapacitated. She dies while Pip is in London.

- **Jaggers** : Jaggers is the conniving lawyer that handles Pip's money affairs. A hard man with little sympathy, he keeps the identity of Pip's benefactor a secret for many years.

- **Biddy** : Biddy is an orphaned girl about Pip's age who is Pip's first real teacher, and then lives in Pip's childhood home as Mrs. Joe's caretaker. Pip sometimes gets romantic notions that he can live a simple married life with Biddy, but it's ultimately Joe that she marries.

- **Wemmick** : Wemmick is a clerk in Jaggers' office, and in that setting he's a fairly tight and unsympathetic man. But when Wemmick leaves the office and returns to his home and his old father, he turns into a completely different person. The 'home Wemmick' becomes a friend of Pip's, who gives him advice and helps with Magwitch's escape.

- **Compeyson (or the second shackled man)** : Compeyson is the second, and cruel-hearted convict that young Pip encounters on the marshes. Compeyson is the groom-in-abstencia who swindled Miss Havisham, and he was once Magwitch's criminal boss. Compeyson and Magwitch hate each other, and it's Compeyson that points the police to Magwitch during his escape.

- **Molly** : Molly is Jaggers' housekeeper, a suspected murderess that Jaggers successfully defended and afterwards took on as a domestic helper. Pip discovers that Molly and Magwitch were once in love, and that she is Estella's mother.

- **Older Pip** : The narrator of the novel is Pip, recounting his story as an older man. Older Pip often gives comments to indicate he's learned some lessons as a result of living through the story he's telling .

* **Minor Characters** :

- **Uncle Pumblechook** : Uncles P is Joe's uncle, and a particularly sycophantic man. Pumblechook is mean to Pip when he's poor and without expectations, and then fawns over him when he becomes rich, even encouraging a rumor that he is Pip's benefactor.
- **Mr. Wopsle** : Mr. Wopsle is a friend of Pip's family. Tremendously fond of his own voice, Wopsle comes to London when Pip is living there, and stars in some dreadful theater productions.
- **The Hubbles** : They are a silly husband and wife who come to Christmas dinner at Mrs. Joe's early in the novel.
- **Trabb's boy** : The village tailor's son, he taunts Pip.
- **Orlick** : A gruff and unpleasant character, Orlick works for a time as Joe's journeyman. He has a crush on Biddy.
- **Matthew Pocket** : Pocket is Pip's frazzled, but kind-hearted tutor. Mr. Pocket is Herbert's father and Miss Havisham's cousin.
- **Mrs. Pocket** : She is married to Mr. Pocket, and a spacey woman obsessed with the slight possibility that she might be related to royalty.
- **Startop** : He is a friend Pip makes in London. Startop is also one of Mr. Pocket's tutorees, and he eventually helps Pip and Magwitch in their escape.
- **Bentley Drummle** : Bentley is a brutish boy, who Pip despises. Drummle pursues Pip's love, Estella.
- **Sarah Pocket** : Sarah is one of Miss Havisham's groveling relatives.
- **The Aged Parent** : Wemmick's kind, and very deaf, old father.
- **Pepper (or the Avenger)** : Pepper is a boy Pip employs as an odd-jobs sort of domestic helper at Barnard's Inn.
- **Clara** : Clara is Herbert's fiancé and later, his wife.
- **Trabb** : Trabb is the village tailor. Trabb also organizes Mrs. Joe's overdone funeral.
- **Miss Skiffens** : She is Wemmick's friend, and later, wife.
- **Clarriker** : Clarriker is the merchant who Pip pays to take Herbert on as a business partner. Pip later works with Clarriker, as well .