

Lecture 9

Great Expectations: Plot Summary

* Summary of Part I :

- Pip is an orphan living on the Kent marshes with his abusive sister and her husband, Joe Gargery, the village blacksmith.
- While exploring in the churchyard near the tombstones of his parents, Pip is accosted by an escaped convict.
- The convict scares Pip into stealing food for him, as well as a metal file to saw off the convict's leg iron.
- Returning with these the next morning, Pip discovers a second escaped convict, an enemy of the first one.
- Shortly afterward, both convicts are recaptured while fighting each other.
- Pip's pompous Uncle Pumblechook arranges for Pip to go to the house of a wealthy reclusive woman, Miss Havisham, to play with her adopted daughter, Estella.
- The house is a strange nightmare-world. Miss Havisham's fiancé jilted her on her wedding day and she still wears her old wedding gown, although she's now elderly and wheel-chair-bound.
- The house has been left as it was on her wedding day and even the old wedding cake is still on the table. Estella is beautiful but haughty and tells Pip that he is coarse and common.
- Pip is immediately attracted to Estella in spite of how she and Miss Havisham treat him.
- Although the visits are emotionally painful and demeaning, Pip continues to go there for several months to play with Estella and to wheel Miss Havisham around.
- He also meets her toady relatives who want her money and hate Pip. Pip does earn an affection from Estella when he beats one of the relatives, the Pale Young Gentleman, in a fistfight.
- Pip tries to better himself to win Estella's admiration by working harder with his friend, Biddy, at night school. Biddy's grandmother runs the night school.

- After a number of months, Miss Havisham pays for Pip's blacksmithing apprenticeship with Joe. Pip had looked forward to that for years, but now that he has seen "genteel" life, he views the forge as a death sentence.
- However, he hides his feelings from Joe and performs his duties. During this time, he encounters a strange man at the Jolly Bargemen, a local pub.
- The man has the file that Pip stole for the convict years before. The man gives Pip two one-pound notes.
- Pip continues to visit Miss Havisham on his birthday and on one of these occasions, his leaving work early instigates a fistfight between Joe and Joe's assistant, Dolge Orlick.
- Orlick resents Pip and hates Pip's abusive sister. On his way home from that visit, Pip finds out his sister was almost murdered and is now mentally crippled.
- Biddy comes to live with them to help out. Pip is attracted to her even though she is not educated and polished like Estella.
- One evening, a powerful London lawyer, Mr. Jaggers, visits Pip and Joe and informs them that Pip has "great expectations."
- Pip is overjoyed and assumes the windfall is from Miss Havisham, who wants to prepare him for Estella.
- He gets a new suit of clothes and is amazed at how differently he is treated by Mr. Trabb, the tailor, and by Uncle Pumblechook.
- When Pip gets Trabb's shop boy in trouble for not treating Pip with respect, he realizes how money changes things.
- He has a conversation with Biddy and asks her to work on "improving" Joe. Pip accuses her of being jealous of him when she suggests Joe does not need improving. By the end of the week, Pip is on his way to London to become a gentleman.

***Summary of Part II :**

- In London, Pip meets with Jaggers and his clerk, Mr. Wemmick. Wemmick brings Pip to the apartment of Herbert Pocket, who, Pip discovers, is the Pale Young Gentleman he fought at Miss Havisham's.
- Pip is to study with Herbert's father, Mr. Matthew Pocket, to learn how to be a gentleman. Pip and Herbert become good friends and Herbert nicknames Pip, Handel.
- Pip spends part of his time with Herbert and part of his time with the Pocket family. Also living at the Pocket's family home are two other "gentlemen students," Startop and Bentley Drummle.

- Drummle and Pip do not get along, especially later, when Drummle becomes involved with Estella.
- Pip is embarrassed when Joe visits him in London with a message from Miss Havisham and cannot wait for Joe to leave.
- When Pip returns home to see Miss Havisham, he avoids Joe's forge. Miss Havisham informs Pip he is to accompany Estella to London where she will live with a wealthy society woman.
- Pip is convinced Miss Havisham intends Estella for him. In London, he spends his time visiting with Estella, spending too much money with Herbert, and joining a group of useless rich men called the Finches.
- He also makes friends with Jaggers' clerk, Wemmick, and realizes that the stiff legal clerk has a different, kinder personality at home.
- Pip also realizes that he is harming Herbert financially with their debts, and with Wemmick's help, secretly arranges to set Herbert up in business with a merchant named Clarriker.
- During this time, Pip's sister dies. He returns for her funeral and is remorseful over his abandonment of Joe and Biddy. He promises he will visit more often and is angry when Biddy implies that she does not believe him.
- On a stormy evening back in London, Pip's world changes dramatically with the arrival of a ragged stranger whom Pip realizes is the convict from the marshes years ago.
- The convict, whose name is Magwitch, had been sent to Australia and was to never return to England under penalty of death.
- The convict made a fortune in Australia and has risked death to return and tell Pip that he is the source of Pip's expectations.
- Pip is disgusted and devastated, something Magwitch, in his happiness to see his "gentleman," does not notice.
- Pip now knows that Miss Havisham has not been preparing him for Estella, and that with his money coming from a convict he can never have Estella.
- He also realizes he deserted Joe for a convict's money.

***Summary of Part III :**

- Magwitch explains to Pip that he has come to give him his full inheritance as thanks for his help on the marshes years before.
- He tells Pip about the other convict, a man named Compeyson. Pip later learns from Herbert that Compeyson was the same man who broke Miss Havisham's heart.
- Pip decides he will take no more of Magwitch's money. However, he feels responsible for the danger the man is in and will find a way to get him safely out of the country.
- Pip is crushed to hear that Bentley Drummle is to marry Estella.
- Pip visits with her and Miss Havisham and pleads with her not to do this. He professes his deep love, which she cannot fathom, and tells her that he would be happy if she married another as long as it was not Drummle.
- During this conversation, Estella and Miss Havisham have an argument that shows she cannot love Miss Havisham, either. Miss Havisham realizes the depth of the damage she has done and is heartbroken.
- Returning to London, Pip learns from Wemmick that Compeyson is watching Magwitch. Herbert and Pip hide Magwitch and devise an escape plan.
- Pip also gets an anonymous note to come to the marshes where someone has information about Magwitch. He returns home and visits Miss Havisham before going to the marshes. She begs his forgiveness and agrees to Pip's request to help fund Herbert Pocket's new business.
- Pip starts to leave then returns to see Miss Havisham's dress on fire. He saves her but she is very ill afterward.
- He goes to the marshes, where he is captured by Orlick, who intends to kill him.
- Rescue comes from Herbert and Startop who had followed him from London. Trabb's shop boy led them to the marshes.
- They return to London and carry out their escape plan with Magwitch, but Compeyson has informed the authorities and they are caught.
- Compeyson and Magwitch struggle and fall into the river.
- Compeyson drowns and Magwitch is hurt, then imprisoned and sentenced to die.

- Pip by now has figured out Magwitch is Estella's father. He visits and cares for Magwitch until the man dies in prison.
- Afterward, Pip attends Wemmick's wedding.
- Pip also gets very sick and is himself arrested for not paying his debts.

- Joe comes and nurses Pip back to health and tells him Miss Havisham has died, leaving a large amount of money to Mr. Matthew Pocket.
- Before returning to his forge, Joe also pays off Pip's debt.
- Pip goes home, intending to make amends with Joe and marry Biddy. He arrives just in time to celebrate Joe and Biddy's wedding.

- Pip leaves shortly afterward for eleven years in Cairo, working with Herbert in his business.
- When he returns, he visits with Joe and Biddy and meets their son, little Pip.
- He also meets with Estella. She is a widow now after years in an abusive marriage to Drummle.
- She and Pip part, but the implication is that this time they will be together.

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 .

