

A STUDY OF THE NOVEL GREAT EXPECTATIONS BY CHARLES DICKENS

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Abstract:

Great Expectations is novel by Charles Dickens. It was first published in serial form in the publication. All the year around from December 1860 to August 1861. It has been adopted for stage and screen over 250 times. *Great Expectations* is written in the first person from the point of view of orphan Pip. The novel, like much of Dickens work draws on experience of life and people. The theme of *Great Expectations* is quite simple, affection, loyalty, and conscience are more important than social advancement, wealth and class. 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. Ambition and self-improvement take three forms in *Great Expectations*- moral, social, and educational; these motivate pip's best and his worst behavior throughout the novel. *Great Expectation* is a graphic book, full of extreme imagery, poverty, prison ships and fight to death. It therefore combines intrigue and unexpected twists of autobiographical details in different tones.

Keywords- orphan, life, people, affection, loyalty, moral, social, ambition.

Introduction:

On Christmas eve around 1812, Pip a boy around the age of six, encounters an escaped convict in the village churchyard while visiting his mother and father's younger brother's grave. The convict scares Pip into stealing food for him and a file to grind away his leg shackles. He warns pip not to tell anyone and to do as he says or his friends will cut out Pip heart and liver. Pip returns home where he lives with Mr. Joe (whose name is later revealed to be Georgiana Maria), his old sister, and her husband Joe Gargery. His sister is very cruel and beats him as well as her husband with various objects regularly; however Joe is much kinder to Pip. Pip's sister called Mr. Joe throughout the novel, often reminds Pip that she was the one who "brought him up by hand". Early the next morning, Pip steals food and drink from Gregary pantry (including a pie for their Christmas feast) and sneaks out to the graveyard. It's the first time in Pip's life he felt truly guilty.

During Christmas dinner with the minister Mr. Wopsle, Mr and Mrs hubbell and Uncle Pumblechook, Pip and Mrs. Joe's moderately wealthy uncle, no one notices the

missing food and brandy until Uncle Pumblechook drinks some Brandy and spits out. Pip realises that he filled the brandy jug not with water, but with tar water, (a foul tasting tonic made of pine tar and water often used for medicinal purposes), instead. He had brought some of the brandy to the convict and had to replace it somehow. Pip sits at the table being told how lucky he is by all the relatives all the while in fear that someone will notice the missing pie. However, the moment his sister goes to pantry to retrieve the pie and discovers it is missing, soldiers approach the house and ask Joe to repair their handcuffs and invites Joe, pip and Mr Wopsle to come with them to hunt for some escaped prisoners from the local jail. As they hunt through the marshes outside the village, they accost to convicts while engaged in a fight. One of them is the convict helped by Pip; the convict freely confess to the theft of the file and some food in order to shield pip. The police take the two to the Hulk, a giant prison ship, and Pip is carried home by Joe, where they finish Christmas dinner. A while after Pip's encounter with the convict, Pip's life returns to normal. He continues to attend the local school which is run by Mr Wopsle's great aunt and becomes friend with Biddy an orphan who was adopted by the Wopsles; even though no more was said about the incident with the convict and has been absolved of any wrong doing, he still feels guilty for the theft. A wealthy old woman named Miss Havisham ask Pip's Uncle Pumblechook to find a boy of certain age and bring him to her home to play. Pumblechook immediately selects Pip and brings him to miss Havisham's, who lives in in the village in Satis house. Miss Havisham is a spinster who wears an old wedding dress with one shoe on and has all the house clocks stopped at 20 minutes to nine. She has not seen sunlight in years and claims that she just wants to see Pip play cards with Estella, a young girl she had adopted.

Pip's first encounter with Miss Havisham and Estella is strange one. He discovers Miss Havisham is a shut-in who is boarded up the windows around the entire house not to allow any light in. She remains seated in a tattered chair from where she instructs pip to play cards with Estella. Estella is cruel to Pip and calls him by names and laugh at him. Miss Havisham seems to delight in this ill treatment of Pip and ask him repeatedly what he thinks of Estella and in turn by whispering it in her ear. Miss Havisham continuously praises Estella for her pride and her beauty. Hurt and angry, Pip leave Satis house to walk the ground and cries. Estella brings him food however she begins to make fun of him again as she sees that he has been crying and teases him for doing so. After this meeting, Pip frequently visits Ms Havisham and Estella, with whom he soon realises he's in love. He begins to tenaciously learn everything that he can from Biddy in school, with the hopes of becoming more educated and refined, in an effort to win Estella's affections, who had called him a common

'labouring boy'. One day, when Pip goes to town pub to pick up Joe, they are approached by a messenger sent by Pip's convicts who gives Pip two one pound notes before leaving however, upon returning home with the notes, Mrs. Joe takes the money from Pip and places it in a jar with the intention of sending word to the pub next day, as she believed that the messenger made a mistake and didn't mean to give such a large amount of money to Pip. Soon after the encounter with the messenger, Pip returns to Satis house to visit Miss Havisham on her birthday where she shows him her wedding cake, which is being eaten by mice and the place where she will be laid out when she is dead, a death she looks forward to. He also meets the pockets who who give him a chilly welcome. Outside, Pip is accosted by a young man of about the same age who tries to engage him in a fight. He calls Pip out but Pip refuses to fight with him at first, however, after this has gone on for a time, Pip swings and strikes the young man, knocking him to the ground. The young man repeatedly encourages Pip to hit him even though he is clearly losing and becoming increasingly battered and bloody. After the fight is over, the two part ways, Estella having seen the fight, lets Pip kiss her, excited that two young men are fighting for her, and he returns to the forge.

Ms Havisham requests an interview with Joe in which she enquires whether he still wishes Pip to be apprenticed to him as a blacksmith, Joe confirms this and she gives Joe 25 pounds, money pip has earned keeping her company and, releases him from her services. Pip works with Joe for few years in the forge, doing the work that he once looked forward to however now despises as he begins to see it as "common" and 'low'. After making an agreement with Joe, Pip receives a half holiday and visits Miss Havisham one final time on her birthday. This causes Joe's only other employee, a journeyman called Orlick, to become angry and demand a half-holiday as well. Joe grants this and declares a "half holiday for all". Upon hearing this, Mrs Joe goes into a violent fit angry that Joe is losing money by giving Pip and Orlick time off and closing the business early. Orlick and Mrs Joe entered into an argument during which they threaten each other and Orlick calls her a "shrew". She demands her husband punish Orlick for his for his actions and Joe' and Orlick get into a short altercation after which Orlick is subsequently let go from his Job. When Pip returns home, he discovers that Mrs. Joe had been attacked. The attack left her seriously injured and as she was struck in the head with-a blunt object several times, the brain damage left her an invalid. Pip feels guilty again-when the police believe escaped criminals attacked Mrs. Joe. The detectives from London however do not discover anything more about the suspected attacker and thus no one is ever apprehended.

After her attack, Mrs. Joe spends her days calling for Orlick and drawing a capital "T" on a slate. Biddy believes that the 'T' represents a hammer and that Orlick is the attacker. When Orlick arrives however, Mrs. Joe is very pleased to see him and soon after Orlick regularly comes to keep company and entertain Mrs. Joe. Meanwhile, Biddy being given the task of nursing Mrs. Joe, moves in with the Gargery's leading Pip to confide in her his true feelings for Estella. When Pip and Joe are listening to Mr. Wopsle read a murder trial from a newspaper, a London lawyer, Mr. Jaggers, approaches Pip, revealing very startling news: Pip has inherited a large sum of money from an anonymous benefactor. The conditions of the receipt of said money require him to leave for London immediately, buy new clothes, and become a gentleman.

Pip behaves badly in society (mostly over jealousy of Estella) and squanders his allowance running into debt. He is rescued on his 21st birthday, when he is notified by Jaggers that he is awarded 500 pounds (equal to £36,000 today) and an increased steady allowance, until such a time as his benefactor will appear and make himself known to Pip.

Pip originally believes Miss Havisham is his benefactress (and so the reader is led to believe, as well) for several years as he begins to learn to be a gentleman, helped by the now grown Herbert Pocket, (whom he discovers is the young man he fought at Satis house as a boy.), who is assigned as his companion. Pip returns to the village often however, rarely visiting his family and instead visiting Miss Havisham. For several years Estella had been studying abroad in Europe (a fashionable tradition of women's education for the wealthy at the time). Upon her return, Pip finds Estella much changed and her attitude refined. She apologizes for her earlier cruelty however, seeing Pip's affections warn him that he should not fall in love with her. Pip ignores these repeated warnings as he long harboured the belief that Miss Havisham (as his benefactress) intended them for each other. Estella continues to warn him that her heart is cold and cannot love him and entreats him to take her seriously, but he refuses, still believing they will be married and that her heart is not as cold as she claims.

During this time, Mrs. Joe dies. Pip returns home to the funeral where Biddy confides in him that Orlick has made several unwanted advances toward her. Pip is infuriated and warns Orlick to stay away from Biddy however Orlick continues to harass Biddy after Pip is gone.

Pip returns to London, heavily in debt which increases by the day. Having led Herbert into debt as well, Pip feels a deep sense of remorse for his irresponsible actions. In one of Dickens' famous plot twists Pip's benefactor turns out to be instead Abel Magwitch, the

convict whom Pip helped, who had been transported to New South Wales, where he had eventually prospered and become extremely wealthy.

Magwitch left all his money to Pip in gratitude for that kindness and also because Pip reminded him of his own child, whom he believes to have been killed by her mother over two decades prior. The revelation of his true benefactor crushes Pip. He is ashamed of Magwitch's criminal past and deeply saddened by the realization that Miss Havisham merely allowed him to believe she was the source of his expectations and never intended for Pip to marry Estella. However, Magwitch now expects to spend the rest of his life living with Pip in England. Pip, very reluctantly, lets Magwitch stay with him. Pip is unhappy in his new found knowledge and the danger and uncertainty it brings. Pip at one time entertained the idea of running off and joining the military to avoid Magwitch and his expectations. There's a warrant out for Magwitch's arrest in England and he will be hanged if he is caught in the country. Pip becomes increasingly suspicious of being watched and tells his landlord and all other close acquaintances (save for Herbert) that Magwitch is an uncle by the name of Provis. Eventually, it is understood that Magwitch cannot afford to stay in England much longer as the probability of Magwitch's arrest increases with each day he remains in the country. A plan is hatched by Herbert and Pip which involves fleeing the country by boat.

During these events, it is revealed to Pip that Estella is the daughter of Mr. Jaggers' housemaid, Molly, whom he defended in a murder charge and who gave up her daughter to be adopted by another of his clients, Miss Havisham, in return for his service in allowing her to be acquitted of the charge. Pip later realizes Magwitch is Estella's father. When Pip lays the claim before him, Mr. Jaggers does not outright confess to anything, however gives Pip a hypothetical situation in which the events transpired. He also hints that Molly, Estella's mother used to be jealous and wild and that in order to keep her wildness in check he beat her regularly and severely. These hints are proven true by Molly and Mr Jaggers interactions. Molly appears to be very much afraid of her master. Shortly before Pip and Magwitch are scheduled to flee, Pip receives an unsigned note at his home telling him to appear at the marches near his old home that at night at 9pm. Pip is timid at first, but the letter mentions his "Uncle Provis" and threatens his safety. Pip is lured by the note to his benefactor and leaves for the village by carriage immediately. On the marshes, Pip is struck on the head by a blunt object, rendering him unconscious for a period of time. When he awakens, he finds himself bound in a small shack far away from any other residences. It is revealed that both the author of the anonymous note and his attacker is Orlick, who admits that he was in fact the one who attacked Mrs. Joe. Orlick confides that he intends to kill Pip as he was always jealous of

young Pip when he worked with Joe and for Pip's intervention with his advances on Biddy. Pip is sure he is going to die though he refuses to cry out or beg for mercy.

Nevertheless, before Orlick can exact his revenge Pip is rescued by Herbert, a village shop boy and their old friend Startop. Herbert discloses that Pip accidentally let the cryptic note at their home which is how he knew where to find Pip. Orlick flees but it is decided not to alert the police as their situation with Magwitch is too precarious.

Meanwhile, out of spite for Miss Havisham Estella has married Bentley Drummie, a boastful rival of Pip's whom he very much dislikes. Mr Jaggers hints that he believes Drummie will beat Estella into submission so as to prove who is the stronger in the marriage. Pip is incensed and dejected although he refuses to believe that Drummie would do such a thing.

Before Pip flees with Magwitch, he makes one final visit to Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham realizes that she created a monster out of Estella by encouraging her vanity and her coldness towards others but especially Pip. Miss Havisham claims that she adopted Estella for the sole purpose of saving someone else from the heartbreak she herself suffered as a young woman. She instead taught Estella to be cruel, prideful and vain. It is revealed that Miss Havisham was convinced into buying her half-brother out of his share of the brewery at Satis House by a young man who claimed to love her. The young man proposed Miss Havisham and arrangements were made however on her wedding day, shortly before the ceremony the young shows -she rant been jilted. After this heartbreak Miss Havisham shut herself in her darkened house where she sits in her bridal gown amongst the rotting wedding cake for several years. Miss Havisham avowed never to be heartbroken again and use Estella as a tool with which to exact her revenge on, al men by encouraging her vanity and her meanness and her constant misleading of men.

However, seeing how much these teachings have corrupted Estella and broken Pip' heart she asks him for forgiveness. Pip confronts Miss Havisham with Estella's nistory and present circumstance in an unhappy marriage ,blaming Miss Havisham for teaching Estella to be cold and unloving. After the confrontation, Pip comes into the house once more to discover Miss Havisham standing too close to the fire and it ignites her dress. In an effort to save her, he removes his overcoat and throws it around Miss Havisham. The fire is put out however he and Miss Havisham are both badly injured, Miss Havisham infinitely more-so as she eventually succumbs to her injures.

Pip, Herbert and another friend, Startop, make a gallant attempt to help Magwitch escape, but instead he is captured and sent to jail. Pip is devoted to Magwitch by now and

recognizes in him a good and noble man and is ashamed that he had formerly looked down on Magwitch as his inferior. Pip tries to have Magwitch released but Magwitch dies shortly before his execution. Under English law Magwitch's wealth forfeits to the crown thus extinguishing Pip's "Great Expectations" .

During an extended period of sickness, Pip is nearly arrested for his numerous unpaid debts to several creditors however, due to his condition, which includes fever, he is not arrested at that time. During this illness, he is looked after by Joe and he eventually returns to good health. Joe leaves early one morning leaving Pip with only a note of well-wishes, believing that as Pip had not visited him in years since, he would not visit him then and that he likely would never see Pip again. Pip is greatly saddened by this turn of events and realises how thankless and ungrateful he had been over the years .His guilt is compounded by the discovery that the police didn't leave to allow Pip time to recover, but because Joe had paid all of his debts in full. Pip returns home to ask Biddy and Joe for forgiveness and to thank Joe for his unprovoked kindness and unfailing love for which Pip felt unworthy. When he arrives in the village, he finds that it is Biddy and Joe's wedding day. He congratulates the couple, but tells them that his visit is temporary fo he intended to pay Joe back every penny of money the money he paid the creditors. Afterwards, Pip goes into business overseas with Herbert. After eleven relatively successful years abroad, Pip goes back to visit Joe and the rest of his family out in the marshes.

Conclusion:

Pip meets Estella on the streets. Her abusive husband Drummle has died. Estella and Pip exchange brief pleasantries and Pip states that while he couldn't have her in the end, he was atleast glad to know that she was a different person now, changed from the coldhearted girl Miss Havisham had reared her to be. The novel ends with Pip saying he could see that "suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be".

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