

# **Studying *Great Expectations***

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# Studying *Great Expectations*

## Introduction

This study-guide is written to help you study *Great Expectations*. It is suitable for students taking exam courses in English and English literature at Advanced (AS and A2) level in the UK, and may be helpful to able students taking GCSE courses.

1. To succeed on such courses, you need to understand the novel and, one hopes, enjoy it. You are not required to memorize the narrative, but you should know it well. Parents and teachers often encourage you to read “classic” texts, on the ground that they are “good for you”. This is not likely to tear you away from your television. You may also notice that your parents and teachers do not themselves spend hours in the company of Dickens or Shakespeare. (“If it's so good, why don't you read it, dad?”) So what are “classics” and why are they worth studying?

## Telling stories

In all ages and countries, some kind of story telling seems to have been popular. What varies is the form of the stories. In ancient Greece or mediaeval England, long poems were written to tell stories; in Athens in the 5th century B.C. and in 16th century England the popular form was plays. No one wrote novels before the last years of the 17th century, and the novel only became the most popular form in the 19th century, as more people learned to read; in our own time the feature film and television drama have become popular forms for narratives. One reason why certain of these stories are called “classics” is their popularity. In his time, Shakespeare's plays packed the theatres, in a way no other playwright could match. More surprisingly, they have continued to attract large audiences to this day. Dickens, in the 19th century, published his novels, and those of other writers, as episodes in magazines; this meant lots of people could afford to buy them. It also meant that those who liked the story, and could afford to, would buy the complete book when this was published later. For those who could not read, or could not read well, there were public readings; Dickens “performed” extracts from his works to large and enthusiastic audiences.

## But is it still any good?

Make up your own mind. Some things are thought to be good because they are fashionable. Some of the most popular books of the past are never touched today (mercifully). Where books remain popular over long periods of time, there is probably a good reason for this. Dickens is still widely read, although not all his stories and novels are popular. *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol* are far better known today than *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Barnaby Rudge*. *Great Expectations* is unusual because it is considered by leading scholars to be a work of genius, but is also very widely-read by ordinary people.

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### Dickens is boring

Studying any work at school or for an exam can make it seem boring. In the future when *Coronation Street* is studied for exams, some students will complain. Dickens uses language we find off-putting: his **vocabulary** often seems unfamiliar to modern readers, and his sentences often long and complex.

Dickens is a great lover of verbal **irony**: he uses words in such a way that he seems to be saying the opposite of what he really means; he expects the reader to understand this from the tone or the details of what he is saying.

Dickens also loves **caricature**: the peculiarities of his characters are often amplified for comic purposes; if we do not understand this, we will miss much of his humour. At a deep level, Dickens is very serious about his subjects, but on the surface, he is often ironical, sarcastic or whimsical. What is good about Dickens is his all-round strength: there is a huge range of characters, all well-drawn; places and other details are described vividly where necessary to the story and omitted where irrelevant; dialogue is lively and varied (though prone to comic exaggeration); mood and atmosphere are convincingly conveyed, while the plotting of the novels is faultless.

### Ways into *Great Expectations*

Once you have read through the novel (you may need published notes to help you, but these may slow you down, and you should read as quickly as you can), you should identify subjects for study. We can arrange these in categories.

One would be **characters and their relationships**. In this novel many of the characters are best considered in pairs, as they resemble or are mirror images of others. Try and arrange them into pairs or small groups.

Another category is **themes**. Themes are important ideas, which recur through the novel; often they are connected with particular characters. What, in your view, are the important ideas in this novel?

The third category is perhaps the hardest of the three to consider: this is the author's **technique**, **how** the story is told. Technique includes:

- the plot and structure;
- the style of narrative and dialogue;
- the viewpoint of the narrative;
- symbolism and imagery, and
- other decorative or “poetic” features.

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You will see from this, that there are special words used for writing about literature. The best critical writing is simple and natural; in your work, you should not try to write complex or long-winded commentaries. But certain key words (like *plot* or *symbolism*) cannot be avoided, as they are the only standard names for the ideas they express. You should always ask your teacher to explain any such words that you do not understand. You can't learn maths, science or music by guessing what words stand for what ideas, and the same is true of the study of literature!

What examiners hate most is anything that looks like retelling of the story, without comment. On the other hand selected details from the story may be written about, so long as they are used to support your **comment**. In fact, interpretation of the text must be supported by evidence. Where possible, you should give the chapter number from which the evidence is taken. Do not write at great length about the first few chapters of any novel, and then leave out reference to the later parts of the novel. You must show that you know your way around the **whole** of any novel.

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### A plan of the novel

Here is a plan of the novel. The numbers are those of the chapters. The plan shows events and lists details. If you have not read the novel, it will make no sense. If you have read it, or as you are reading it, the plan will help you form a sense of the whole narrative structure.

### Part 1

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 *Great Expectations* and secrecy of benefactor; Joe refuses payment for Pip's release
19. Pip argues with Biddy; Pumblechook smug; Mr. Trabb; Miss Havisham knows all; Pip leaves home

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### Part 2

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; "I love her..."
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

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### Part 3

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”

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### Themes and motifs

There is great unity in this novel: it is principally about **guilt** and **shame**, and these ideas are reinforced in many ways. Pip is made to feel guilty for being a child, yet has genuine cause for guilt in his dealings with Magwitch. Pip feels shame at his lowly origin and pride in his sudden rise in fortunes; he continually contrasts the elegant lady, Estella, with the disgusting felon, Magwitch, while chance occurrences (the two convicts on the coach, say) reinforce such thoughts. It is central to his understanding of Magwitch's essential goodness, and his reconciliation with him, that he sees the common humanity of Estella and her convict father. To idealize Estella and demonize Magwitch is recognized as an error of which Pip must repent. His acceptance of Magwitch marks his redemption in the reader's eyes. Pip's shame at his origins fuels his desire to be a "gentleman", and the novel is very much about what makes a gentleman. Other motifs (recurring images) arise out of the novel's setting: the river as a metaphor for human experience, and the mists which descend or are rising at various points in Pip's story.

### Pip's guilt

Dickens convincingly depicts the oppressive sense with which guilt can lie on the young mind. Pip is repeatedly told by his elders that he lacks gratitude (for them that "brought him up by hand") and that the young are "naterally wicious". The child senses the injustice of such views but is denied opportunity to dispute it, as is Joe, who correctly sees (Ch. 57) that defending Pip leads to his harsher treatment. When Magwitch forces Pip to steal from the forge, Pip believes he is guilty of a serious crime, but is unable to confide in Joe, as he fears (wrongly) that he will lose his love. Magwitch's "confession" to the theft and Pumblechook's ridiculous "explanation" of it further compound Pip's dilemma. In the novel's third chapter Pip, in the mist, sees accusers in the phantom finger-post and the clerical ox, while in the next chapter he sees how remarks about the general wickedness of youth are directed at him; while keenly aware that, as yet, his sister and Pumblechook have no reason to accuse him of vice, he has committed a crime which must at any moment be discovered.

At this stage in the novel, the reader's disapproval of the smug diners is balanced against sympathy for the "poor wretches" on the marshes articulated by Pip's "pitying young fancy" no less than by Joe's kindness to a "poor miserable fellow-creatur". On a frosty night (Ch. 7) Pip thinks how awful it would be for a man "lying out on the marshes" and seeing "no help or pity" in the stars. When Mrs. Joe prepares Pip for his visit to town, he likens himself to a "penitent in sackcloth", "trussed up" and "delivered over" to Pumblechook, who is compared to a sheriff.

Pip's visit to Satis House leads to his awareness of himself as coarse and common; he is ashamed of the limitations imposed upon him by his social class; the great opportunity of his associating with Miss Havisham has led only to dissatisfaction. The stranger with the file in the Three Jolly Bargemen and the fight with the "pale young gentleman" (Herbert) have only added to Pip's feelings of guilt. In Chapter 14, Pip explains at some length his shame and ingratitude: ironically he is guilty (as regards Joe) of the very sin of which hitherto Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe have falsely accused him. Pip's half-holiday visit to Miss Havisham gives Orlick the motive and opportunity for his attack on Mrs. Joe; while Pip's earlier meeting with Magwitch provides the weapon.



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Pip, his “head full of George Barnwell” at first thinks himself to be guilty; later he correctly guesses that Orlick is the assailant, but is still troubled by having provided the weapon, “however undesignedly”, and contemplates confessing all to Joe, but never does so.

Pip becomes wrongly ashamed of his home and occupation and desperate to rise socially, but knows this to be impossible. Bidley wisely questions his motives but Pip, while aware of his inconsistency, cannot take her good advice, retreating into a fantasy of Miss Havisham's making his fortune. The discovery of his “great expectations” and the unusual secrecy of his patron lead Pip into an error of which neither Miss Havisham nor Mr. Jaggers cares at first to undeceive him. He becomes proud, patronizes Bidley and considers ways to make Joe a suitable companion. He is anxious to hide Joe from his London companions, though he knows them to be worthless. He is uncomfortable in behaving in this way, but not enough to alter his conduct. In narrating all this, of course, the older, better Pip is filled with shame for his betrayal of Joe.

Pip is proud to take the inherited money (as he thinks) of his adoptive fairy godmother but has a horror of his real benefactor. And yet Magwitch has, by hard work in an honest occupation, earned the wealth to make a gentleman of his “boy”. Pip has, in fact, got exactly what he has wished for. When Pip meets Magwitch his snobbish distaste for the convict (for which Magwitch does not at all blame him) is only slightly restrained by recognition of what the man has risked for him. He does, to his credit, feel it his duty to help Magwitch escape and resigns himself to being his companion.

But it is only as Magwitch lies dying in the prison infirmary that Pip comes to know him and love him. The earlier shame of association with a criminal gives way to a tolerant and sympathetic view not unlike that expressed by Joe, years before, on the marshes. Pip writes critically of the sentencing of “two-and-thirty men and women” but sympathetically of the prisoners who work as nurses in the infirmary: “malefactors, but not incapable of kindness, GOD be thanked”. The understanding of the common humanity of the beloved Estella and the convict has helped Pip to this view, but his addressing him as “Dear Magwitch” is sincere: he petitions the Home Secretary for mercy, he brings him comfort as he dies, and he prays for him as a penitent sinner.

Pip is now fully cured of his snobbery. He resists depending on others, but his illness makes him accept Joe's help and he is not too proud to take the job Herbert offers him. Joe's tact makes him withdraw when Pip is well, but Pip returns to the forge and is happily reconciled to Joe and Bidley. Pip has already suffered for his folly, but years of honest work and contentment with his lot in life are needed to complete his redemption. It is because he has accepted that he may never marry, that he has lost Estella, and that happiness is to be found in the friendship of Herbert and Clara, of Joe and Bidley, that his unexpected reuniting with the also older and humbler Estella is not implausible.

Pip as a child has an exaggerated sense of guilt but enough awareness to doubt Mrs. Joe's, Hubble's and Pumblechook's view of the young. He trusts Joe's judgement, but too soon mistakes Joe's lack of learning for lack of wisdom. His association with Magwitch wrongly troubles him, and his horror of the man is, even more wrongly, exaggerated by his love of Estella. Chance occurrences, always linked in the narrative with Estella, reinforce this sense of guilt (the man with the file, his reappearance later, Orlick's use of the leg-iron, a visit to Newgate and even Wopsle's recitation of the murder of George Barnwell, to say nothing of Jaggers' business and Wemmick's mementoes of crime).

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But when Pip goes to London any guilt at his own crime is lost in a snobbish sense of shame at the degraded social status of the convict and the thought of how such association would strike Estella. The Estella of the last chapter might view her paternity without disgust, but there is no hint in the narrative of Pip's telling her of it (as he tells Jaggers and Wemmick). Pip has weak feelings of guilt for his treatment of Joe, but these are sacrificed to his need not to lose face with the "Finches". With the death of Magwitch and Joe's reappearance in the novel the snobbery gives way to an open confident expression of love and gratitude. The ingratitude of which Pumblechook accuses Pip is a fault he is guilty of to Joe. The narrative voice of the thirty-something Pip conceals nothing but shows all of the failings of the younger self.

### Being a gentleman

In the novel we are introduced to two different ideas of what makes a gentleman.

One idea is that a gentleman is made what he is by his social status or class: this is measured in terms of his understanding of rules of social etiquette (table manners and so on), habits of dress and speech and the standing of his family; of course, wealth is important, too. Even a "poor" gentleman, such as Mr. Pocket employs a number of servants. Early in the novel Pip forms this idea: meeting Estella makes him desperate to be her social equal; at the same time he becomes ashamed of his honest master, and disgusted by the recollection of his dealings with Magwitch.

A quite different standard is apparent to the reader from early in the novel, and eventually to Pip: that being a true gentleman is a matter of virtue and honesty, of having a station in life which one can fill with dignity, as Biddy says of Joe.

Dickens, in the novel, exploits the ambiguity (having more than one meaning) of the term *gentleman*. Then, as now, it would mean someone who behaved in a certain way (truthful, honest, considerate etc.). But it also carried a sense of belonging to a separate class. Gentlemen and women (or gentry) derived their wealth from owning land. This wealth had been kept in families for generations by marrying within their own class. Ordinary people would work as farm-labourers or domestic servants. Trades people formed the middle class and could, by marriage, move into the upper class. Elder sons usually inherited whole estates (to prevent their being broken up); younger sons would go into the army or navy or the church. Daughters would receive a dowry but would only inherit where there was no male child (and not always then; an estate might be "entailed" to the nearest male relation).

By Dickens' time, a new factor had entered this situation, which had hardly changed for centuries: the industrial revolution and foreign trade had enabled men of very humble backgrounds to achieve immense wealth. They might eventually retire, move to a part of the country where they were not known, buy a title, and thus gain entry to the higher social circles. These were the *nouveaux riches* and might be disapproved by the more "established" families. In *Great Expectations* we meet no one from the highest social ranks (no aristocrats, for example). Bentley Drummle is from a landed family but is **Mr.** Drummle (he has no title, though he is "next heir but one to a baronetcy"). We are told in Chapter 25 that Drummle's family is from Somerset, but in Chapter 43 Pip speaks to him of "your Shropshire", and Drummle does not correct him.

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It is possible that Pip is deliberately inaccurate (to annoy his rival) but Dickens would certainly be aware of the distance between the two counties. Miss Havisham's fortune comes from the brewery (now disused) at Satis. Herbert notes astutely (Ch. 22) that brewers, unlike trades people generally, are admitted to the circles of gentility: "I don't know why it should be a crack thing to be a brewer; but...while you cannot possibly be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew. You see it every day". And while a gentleman "may not keep a public house" yet "a public house may keep a gentleman." This explanation both accounts for Miss Havisham's (and thus Estella's) social standing and provides comment on the illogicality of Victorian notions of gentility. Magwitch's crude idea of buying the position of gentleman would seem initially absurd to Dickens' contemporary readers; and yet money has bought status for Estella (acceptable because her criminal parents are not known).

There is a paradox here: Miss Havisham with money for which she has not worked can do what is impossible for Magwitch's honestly gained wealth. The only other genteel characters we meet in the novel are the Pockets, who are related to Miss Havisham, Startop and Jaggers, who has worked his way up in society by his skill in the law. Jaggers keeps a fairly modest establishment; he is an attorney (solicitor) and cannot plead in the higher courts (see Ch. 48). He is unlike most gentlemen in working (hard) to keep up his position in society.

**Dress** and **speech** are two things that mark a person's social class. Among the first things Estella says in the novel is her reproach of Pip for speaking of "Jacks" rather than "knaves". Pip is conscious of his own dress in Satis; he repeatedly remarks that Joe looks well in his working-clothes, but in his "best" resembles a scarecrow. When Pip begins his elevation in fortune both Bidley and Joe take to calling him "sir". Pip dislikes this, but they would feel uneasy not to use formal terms to one of Pip's new station. When Magwitch returns, Pip finds it impossible to disguise him effectively: whatever he wears, he retains the bearing and actions of a convict.

Against this we can set Pip and Estella who do manage the transition from one class to another successfully. Though Estella's status as Miss Havisham's ward is known, her adoption in infancy seems to silence guesses about her origins. Even as a child she seems a perfect lady, as she has the speech and bearing to complement her dress and beauty. Her success is a challenge to those who believe "good breeding" to be essential to a lady or gentleman. The opposite of this is Drummle who is favoured by background but stupid and brutal. Pip is early aware of his uncouth manners, but needs a patient friend such as Herbert to show him how to behave. We see Herbert's excellent blend of gentle humour and patience as he teaches Pip table manners while giving him (Ch. 22) an account of Miss Havisham's deception and jilting.

Compeyson has had some advantages ("been to a public boarding-school") but, for reasons we do not know, has resorted to crime as a means to wealth. As a young man (and already married) he deceives Miss Havisham; he is later convicted for circulating counterfeit notes. It is interesting that, according to Herbert, his father claims that Compeyson is not a gentleman, because "no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was...a true gentleman in manner". Quite clearly, Compeyson is not a gentleman "at heart"; but he **does** have the outward manners of a gentleman. If Mr. Pocket is referring to such things as table-manners and delicacy of speech, he is wrong, but if he means Compeyson's whole conduct towards others he may be right, and this leads us to considering the second sense in which we come to understand the term "gentleman".

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It was obvious even to the most conservative reader in Dickens' own day that social class and virtue did not regularly overlap. This leads to the notion of a gentleman or lady as someone who acts with integrity, who occupies with dignity his or her own proper place in society. Dickens quite clearly approves of social mobility for those, like Pip, who have the means to achieve it. But he recognizes that this is more the exception than the rule. Joe does not want to be a gentleman; he has a craft and a position in the village's society, which "he fills well and with respect". If we consider this second sense of the term, we will see that Dickens arranges characters (this is plausible, because Pip, as narrator, sees them in these terms) according to their integrity or lack of it.

Thus we contrast Joe with the hypocrite Pumblechook; Matthew Pocket with his toady relations; Drummle with Startop or Herbert; Magwitch with Compeyson; the young Bidley with the young Estella, and so on. Dickens does not make the sentimental error of supposing all village people to be simple but good, while those in the town are bad. There is a range of types in both places, from Bidley to Orlick, from Herbert or Wemmick to Compeyson.

Pip wants to be a gentleman so he can win Estella. His thinking of his expectations in romantic terms, with Miss Havisham as fairy godmother, suggests that this is an immature and foolish notion. The ridiculing of Pip by Trabb's boy is just, in a way: although Pip has not snubbed the boy, he has treated Joe and Bidley badly, by staying at the Blue Boar, rather than his old home. At the end of the novel, we believe, Pip **has** become a true gentleman: he no longer cares for outward pretence, he is reconciled to Joe and Bidley, he has abandoned his romantic delusions and he has worked for his (modest) wealth. His new position he owes to the one virtuous use he made of Magwitch's money (setting up Herbert in business).

The Estella of the final chapter is also a lady in a truer sense than the young snob or the callous heartbreaker of earlier times. Herbert and Bidley are exemplary in their industry, patience, tolerance and good sense (although Herbert is led into extravagance by Pip); while the most virtuous character in the novel, Joe, is the subject of frequent comment by Pip, in regard to his ignorance or rejection of conventions of genteel conduct.

Although Dickens examines issues of social class with seriousness, there is also much humour in the treatment. The convict's quaint notion of "buying" a gentleman as good as any other one is laughable, all the more so because Magwitch almost succeeds (he seems pleased to find Pip rather snobbish; Ch. 39). The reactions of such as Pumblechook and Trabb to Pip's changing prospects are comic in their extravagance (Pumblechook's continually asking to shake Pip's hand, Trabb's abuse of the boy "morally laid upon his back" by "the stupendous power of money").

The folly of those for whom being a gentleman is a matter of show and outward forms of conduct is perfectly exemplified by the "Finches of the Grove". A ridiculous example of how common sense is defeated by such superficial judgments comes in Chapter 23. Sophia, the Pockets' housemaid, has reported the cook for being drunk and having stolen the butter, to sell it. Although her husband sees this for himself, Mrs. Pocket complains of Sophia as a mischief-maker and defends the cook for having always been "a nice respectful woman" and for having supported Mrs. Pocket's deluded idea of her own value by claiming she "was born to be a Duchess".

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### Crime and punishment

Just as obviously as Dickens examines issues of social class in *Great Expectations*, so he reveals an interest in crime.

### Pip's benefactors – real and supposed

As Magwitch appears in the novel's first pages, the reader understands what Pip only observes: the man is an escaped convict who has suffered great hardship. Pip sees Magwitch only twice more, before his wholly unexpected return (Ch. 39), some sixteen years later, and yet Magwitch has been the unseen influence in Pip's life, which he has mistaken for Miss Havisham.

She and Magwitch are connected in more ways than in their being Pip's supposed and real benefactors. They are linked through Compeyson, her suitor and Magwitch's mentor; Estella, his natural and her adoptive daughter, and through Jaggers, who acts for both. Though Magwitch is absent for much of the novel (he boards the Hulk in Ch. 5, and reappears in Ch. 39) there are constant hints of his unseen hand. When his messenger brings Pip a small present, he shows Pip a file; and later this same convict is overheard by Pip recounting this incident to another. Here Pip cannot help remembering Magwitch, but at other times he does so without such clues, and often thinks of him at times when he is concerned for Estella: this is made plausible as being Pip's own worst fear of why he is unfit for her. It is thus thematically perfect that she should be the child of Magwitch.

When Orlick (as we learn later in Chapter 53) picks up the leg-iron, he has no idea Pip has helped in its removal. So when it is found beside Mrs. Joe, Pip feels guilty for the attack on her, knowing whose it was.

It is natural enough that Magwitch in New South Wales should appoint a lawyer to be Pip's guardian. It is not necessary for Pip to lodge in Little Britain, however. But by doing so, he is close to Jaggers' practice and sees him at work; he listens to Wemmick's gruesome criminal anecdotes, and is able to visit Newgate. When Magwitch returns, Pip becomes familiar with the penal system at first hand, even petitioning the Home Secretary. Reminders of crime abound for Pip in London, but even in the village, as well as the nearby Hulks and the mystery of the assault on Mrs. Joe, there are such seemingly trivial details as (on the very day of the attack) Mr. Wopsle's performance of *George Barnwell*. The same Mr. Wopsle, two chapters later, is reading from a newspaper the account of a "highly popular murder", when Jaggers enters the pub, and cross-examines him.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### “Dolge” Orlick and Compeyson

Orlick is a simple but evil character, abetted in his crimes by low cunning. He assaults Mrs. Joe who has earlier forced Joe to fight him, even though Joe has allowed him the half-holiday which caused the quarrel, he attempts to murder Pip, being thwarted by Trabb's boy and Herbert, he is in league with Compeyson, and he completes the catalogue of his crimes by his raid on Pumblechook's premises, for which he is imprisoned. Orlick is punished somewhat lightly, as his worst crimes are not widely known, and Pip has no interest in pursuing him for them. Dickens soothes our possible objection to this by reducing Orlick – terrifying as he prepares to kill Pip with a stone-hammer – to a rather comic status but also making him the means of punishment for Pumblechook, who, appropriately, has his mouth stuffed with flowering annuals to prevent his crying out. Unlike Orlick, Compeyson rarely appears in the novel in person, but, like Magwitch, is an unseen influence. We see him (twice) on the marshes and once more when he is drowned. Mr. Wopsle also sees him in a theatre audience; he has been behind Pip, who has not observed him.

Where Orlick is a very tangible flesh-and-blood presence with a characteristic bluntness of speech (he calls Pip “wolf” and says to Mrs. Joe: “You're a foul shrew, Mother Gargery”), Compeyson is shadowy and elusive. He lurks in darkness, he can copy any handwriting (illiterate Orlick admires this) and speaks little in the novel, although he has been a very persuasive speaker in his earlier deceptions.

Orlick is brutal, but harms only Mrs. Joe (indirectly bringing Joe and Biddy together). Compeyson, though he seems to dislike physical violence, is far more effective in his villainy: he blights the lives of Miss Havisham and her weak half-brother, and of Magwitch, to say nothing of the many victims of his crimes of whom we do not know, and he harms, indirectly, Estella and Pip, whom Miss Havisham and Magwitch use to get even with him, and with the world which (they wrongly think) he represents.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Magwitch and Compeyson

Though Compeyson has harmed Magwitch, his treachery in their trial and Magwitch's harsher sentence have been his undoing: Magwitch will stop at nothing to destroy Compeyson. Magwitch loses the chance of freedom at the start of the novel to return his enemy to prison. Though Magwitch is a generous man by nature his sense of the great injustice done him, which the world cannot see, prompts him both to expose Compeyson for what he is, as well as to punish him. Compeyson does not ultimately profit from his crime. He is in constant fear of Magwitch's vengeance, and in the very moment of supposed relief from this, as Magwitch is captured again, he receives the punishment he has long feared. As he goes over the side of the boat, Pip sees on his face "a white terror" which he "shall never forget".

Death by drowning is a horrible end, which Dickens reserves for some of his worst villains (Daniel Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Bradley Headstone and Roger Riderhood in *Our Mutual Friend*). Compeyson's treachery appears to the last: Wemmick's mistake in advising the attempted flight arises from a belief that Compeyson is absent. "I can only suppose now," says Wemmick (Ch. 55), "that it was a part of his policy... habitually to deceive his own instruments".

If Compeyson is a mystery of evil, Magwitch is an open book. Of those deceived by Compeyson Magwitch is the one ripest for exploitation. He has had no advantages in life, and has had his trust abused by everyone. It is no doubt Pip's keeping of his trust which inclines him to "adopt" the boy. He is capable of violence, but is a naturally affectionate and generous man. His dealings with Molly show him to behave honourably according to the customs of his class: he "marries" her "over the broomstick" and stands by her until he agrees to the separation which Jaggers uses to save mother and child.

As Pip comes to know Magwitch, so his ideas about criminals in general are modified. He distinguishes between the criminal by choice (Compeyson) and those driven to crime by desperation (like Magwitch). Pip notes the decency of the prisoners who serve in the hospital, and works to save Magwitch from the gallows. His punishment has been made tolerable by the notion of working for his "gentleman", but eventually it becomes intolerable not to see Pip enjoying the fruits of his labour. Having seen this (and not knowing his property is forfeit) he has no fear of death. In a fine episode Dickens attacks the barbarity of the system which sentences thirty-two people at a time, then mocks the pompous judge who singles out Magwitch for especial censure. When the judge speaks at length, Magwitch is a model of brevity and humour: "My Lord, I have received my sentence of death from the Almighty, but I bow to yours."

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### The narrative voice

#### Pip as narrator

Pip is a character in the story whom we can study, as any other character; but his is the novel's narrative voice. Dickens, in *Great Expectations*, shows enormous skill in his control of the narrative.

- First, we should note how, without any great variation in Pip's own narrative style, a vast range of characters is introduced. This is largely achieved by allowing these characters to speak for themselves.
- Second, Pip is able to convey the viewpoint both of his younger self (from the simple child of the novel's opening to the young prig of the middle chapters) and of the mature narrator: he is merciless in exposing his faults, allowing them to appear by the honesty of his narration rather than passing judgement.

He does pass judgement on others for good (Joe, Biddy) or ill (Pumblechook, Orlick), but these judgements do not seem to the reader to be simple personal likes or dislikes; they are convincing, because they are borne out by the words and deeds of these characters. Thus Pip tells us of Herbert (Ch. 22), that he has seen no one else who expresses more strongly “in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean”. In Chapter 27, Dickens illustrates perfectly the gulf between the embarrassment of the young prig at Joe's provincial speech and outlandish dress, and the adult Pip's understanding of the moral stature of the man:

“I had not been mistaken in my fancy that there was a simple dignity in him. The fashion of his dress could no more come in its way, when he spoke these words, than it could come in its way in Heaven”.

Earlier (Ch. 19) Pip gives an account of a conversation with Biddy: he wishes her to educate Joe so as to make him a more suitable companion to the gentleman, who plans to “remove” him “into a higher sphere”. When Biddy retorts that Joe “may be too proud to let anyone take him out of a place that he is competent to fill, and fills well and with respect” she is accused by Pip of envy. Pip (as narrator) has so presented the conversation as to ensure the reader's disapproval of his own conduct and approval of Biddy as a person, and in her view of Joe.

Joe and Magwitch are not “gentlemen”, but they work for their living; each finds dignity in honest toil (though Magwitch, as if to hit back at those who have injured him, mistakenly uses his wealth to set Pip up as a gentleman). Contrast this with the indolence of those who style themselves “the Finches of the Grove”. If Joe is out of place in London, so much the worse for London, and his remark of Barnard's Inn, that it “may be a werry good inn” by London standards, but that he “wouldn't keep a pig in it” is all the more damning of Barnard because we know Joe is **not** trying to give offence (his subsequent comment about fattening the pig and eating him “with a meller flavour on him” shows that Joe is not speaking figuratively here!).



## Studying *Great Expectations*

Dickens allows Pip to speak with a distinctive voice: the story telling is vivid, the sentences fluent and varied and the honesty of the narrator is shown in his self-condemnation. The opening chapter is remarkable for the switching from the child's state of mind to the explosive appearance of Magwitch. Dickens is prepared to allow Pip to depart from normal grammar in the paragraph beginning: "A fearful man". Note the precision with which details of Magwitch's appearance are listed, his quirks of speech ("Pint", "wittles") and his treatment of Pip, as when he turns Pip upside down and Pip sees the church steeple "under my feet"

On the other hand the narrator perfectly conveys the child's ignorance: Pip notes that the man eats the bread but does not understand why he should be so ravenous; later he asks Joe what a convict is: here he seems not to know that Magwitch is a convict. Some comments are strikingly acute: when Mrs. Joe says: "You may well say churchyard, you two", Pip notes that: "One of us, by-the-bye, had not said it" and when the sergeant says he has mentioned the nature of his errand to "this smart young shaver", Pip notes, in parenthesis, that "he hadn't". As well as presenting the child's view of things, the adult narrator allows adult observations about the young Pip's situation and those around him, as when we read that he and Joe going to church "must have been a moving spectacle for compassionate minds". These observations are often marked by humour and irony; indeed Pip is allowed to share Dickens' eye for the comic in human behaviour, and the novel abounds in memorable comic phrases, as in the description of Bidley's grandmother:

"Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt kept an evening school in the village; that is to say, she was a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity, who used to go to sleep from six to seven every evening, in the society of youth who paid twopence per week each, for the improving opportunity of seeing her do it."

The most sustained comedy in the novel is in Chapter 31, which is barely necessary to the plot (save for its preparation for the later episode where Wopsle sees Compeyson in the theatre). Pip is merciless in his account of the deficiencies of the performance of *Hamlet* that he attends.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Other voices

Pip may have a distinctive voice, but allows others to speak with their own voices in a way which establishes character: Joe is uneducated but often most articulate, as when he observes of his blacksmith father: “he hammered at me with a wigour only to be equalled by the wigour with which he didn't hammer at his anvil”, or as in the comment on Barnard's Inn quoted above. The hypocritical Pumblechook, the cold Mrs. Joe, polite but plain-speaking Bidley, the snarling Orlick, the rough but kindly Magwitch and the “twin” versions of Wemmick - all these (and many more) have their characteristic voices.

Of course, Dickens exploits the conventions of first-person narrative with skill: we can believe that the story is all Pip's but the voice is not unlike Dickens' own in third-person novels. More tellingly, Pip is able to recall verbatim complete conversations which take place when he is seven, even though he is at least in his mid-thirties when he is supposed to be telling the story. Good examples come in Ch. 7, where Joe speaks at length, and in Ch. 11. On the other hand we can suppose that Pip would recall the substance of the conversation, Joe's actions with the poker and Joe's general turn of speech; for this reason the convention of presenting the conversation and Joe's gestures as if exactly recalled is perfectly plausible. Indeed, it only strikes one as odd if it is pointed out, as here.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Characters

In the novel we meet a great range of characters. It is not possible to comment at length on all of them, but you should be able to answer questions on the principal characters, and their relationships. Remember to write about a character's depiction in the whole novel (use the plan above; pp. 3 and 4). Do not write about the early chapters only.

### Pip

So much has been said about Pip in the sections on themes and the narrative voice, that little more is needed here. Pip is shown both through his own portrayal of his younger self, and in his relationship with others. In outline, he is, at the start of the novel, a kind and intelligent child, who lacks formal learning but is aware of the humbug of Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe. He sees Joe's goodness, but mistakes his simplicity for lack of wisdom. His ambition at this time is to avoid "Tickler" and in due course to become Joe's apprentice. His introduction to Satis House gives him a glimpse of another world, to which he is anxious to gain access socially. Its unattainability is embodied in Estella. He becomes unhappy with his lot and only remains at the forge because Joe is so good to him.

The discovery of his "expectations" seems to give Pip reason for his shame at his origins, and he is swift to place some distance between himself and his home village. He retains his fondness for Joe, but cannot admit it openly, and is embarrassed by Joe in London. Pip confirms his snobbery by keeping a servant and joining the "Finches of the Grove". He exceeds his income and leads the impoverished Herbert into extravagance. His smugness is shattered by the discovery that Magwitch is his patron; he has supposed himself to be part of a grand design, leading to marriage with Estella.

His treatment of Magwitch is at first unpleasant, but he softens as he realizes what the man has risked to see him. He still dislikes him, however. Magwitch's account of his hard life brings more sympathy, and Pip begins to like his "uncle" by degrees. When the man falls ill, this turns to genuine affection, which issues in practical comfort. Pip has become a much better man. He recognizes how ungrateful he has been to Joe and is reconciled to him, first when Joe cares for him in London, and later when he returns to the forge on Joe's wedding-day. Pip atones for his past errors by hard work abroad, but is resigned to a life of bachelorhood: his earlier notion of marrying Bidley would have been a mistake, and he is thankful he did not make the proposal, as Joe would have doubtless given way to Pip. He can only ever marry one person, Estella: without her, he is better single. When she is softened and humbled by her own harsh lessons in life, she may be able to accept him.

The novel's revised and ambiguous ending suggests that she and Pip will stay together. This outline does little justice to a subtle and complex portrait; we know Pip as fully as we might know many a real person. We also discover how the adult Pip judges his earlier conduct for good or ill. He is an attractive character, but foolish in youth. His honesty as narrator is such that he leaves no stone unturned in presenting the case against himself.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Joe Gargery

While it suits the plot for Pip's protector to be a blacksmith (he has the means to remove the convict's leg-iron) it also seems a fitting occupation for the man Dickens wishes to depict. The job is hard and requires skill, yet no formal learning, so Joe seems a fool to those around him. We forgive the child, Pip, but Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook by turns patronize Joe and ignore him. Miss Havisham, a shrewder judge, seems to see what Joe is really like, in spite of his awkwardness, when she signs Pip's indentures. Joe becomes self-conscious and tongue-tied in unfamiliar surroundings, yet is not without eloquence. This does not appear in his intended epitaph for his father ("Whatsume'er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his hart"), but in his earlier comment about his hammering and his remark about keeping a pig in Barnard's inn (both quoted above).

Joe appears to be a poor scholar, but Bidley's patience succeeds where Pip has failed, and he learns to read and write. The physical strength of blacksmiths is proverbial (so much so that Pip's rowing tutor almost loses his pupil by saying Pip has the arm of a blacksmith) and Joe conforms perfectly to this idea. Orlick, himself a big man, is knocked down by Joe "as if he had been of no more account than the pale young gentleman", and Pip knows of no-one who could stand up long against Joe, although Joe is not at all aggressive. In defending (as he thinks) Pip's interests before Jaggers, he becomes menacing but Jaggers swiftly placates him. But Joe is typically a gentle giant. He does what he can to protect Pip from "Tickler", but sees that too much interference will lead to more trouble later. The reader is amused by the picture of Mrs. Joe's constant assaults upon this great man, who never retaliates, for fear of becoming like his bullying father.

Joe's great size is a metaphor for his moral stature. He knows what he can do well in life and does it. He sees what is wrong with Pip's fantasy existence in London long before Pip does. He is always faithful to Pip, but for long allows Pumblechook to take credit due to him. (Pumblechook is, in the composition of the novel, the character most clearly contrasted with Joe, or depicted as his opposite; we note similar structural pairings in Estella and Bidley, Magwitch and Miss Havisham and so on.)

Though Joe (in Chapter 27) tells Pip he will never see him again out of his forge and his working-clothes, he is man enough to go once more to London when Pip is ill and in danger of prison. His money, earned by honest toil, pays off the immediate debt. Joe wants no thanks and is embarrassed when Pip alludes to it: he does not give the matter a second thought, just as there is no question whether he will take time off from his business (and so lose income) to look after his friend. Both the older Pip who tells the story and Bidley, at the time of the events narrated, point the reader to Joe's virtues. There are touches of sentimentality in the depiction of this honest, simple but deep character; but they are only touches, and Pip, remember, aware of his earlier ingratitude to Joe, can be excused for indulging them. The portrayal of Joe is convincing and very moving.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Magwitch and Miss Havisham

These two are as far apart socially as can be imagined, and never meet in the course of the novel. From the start they, their worlds, and how he thinks of them are contrasted in his narrative by Pip, yet he often thinks of them together. They are linked in that both are the dupes of Compeyson, and each responds to his cruelty in the same way, adopting a child and trying to influence the child's upbringing.

Of the two, Magwitch would seem much the better as benefactor. Miss Havisham's disappointment in love is great, but her attempt to lay waste all around her is a terrible mistake: she suffers from it more than anyone else, and her power to destroy does not go beyond Satis; more to the point, Compeyson does not deserve such a magnificent gesture, and the desire to be revenged on an entire sex is immoral: Compeyson may not be unique in his treachery, but he is far from typical of all men. Moreover, Estella may cause some suffering but those who love her have not necessarily deserved it. Drummle, the chosen victim, is, as Pip sees, not capable of suffering the pains of true love, while Jaggers fears he may have more strength for a contest of wills than Estella. Finally, the corruption of a child to be the agent of this revenge is immoral.

Miss Havisham's injury is great, but her reaction insane and disproportionate. Yet apart from this she seems a clever and civilized woman. She sees through her flatterers, becomes as fond of Pip as she is capable of liking any boy, treats Joe with courtesy, shuts out Pumblechook and helps Herbert financially, while offering help to Pip, which he declines. She realizes early on that Pip thinks her to be his benefactor, and knows enough from Jaggers to let him continue in the delusion. It is his error, but she as an older person might easily put him right; yet it suits her not to do so.

When she is confronted by Pip with the enormity of her actions she explains but does not seek to excuse her conduct, before asking for his forgiveness. The fire (from which she never fully recovers, as Joe tells Pip; Ch. 57) symbolizes her moral cleansing: it drives out the beetles and spiders and destroys the faded bridal dress which represents (for her as much as for the reader) her imprisonment in the past; now she can ask for the forgiveness, which Pip is more than ready to give her, as his parting gesture shows.

She and Magwitch strike the young Pip as beings from another world. In both cases the characters' strangeness is suggested by bizarre details of dress and appearance, and by their surroundings, Magwitch in the churchyard, Miss Havisham amid her faded wedding finery. Unlike her, Magwitch rapidly vanishes from Pip's life, though he haunts his memory. Magwitch is a simple man, but having at length understood how Compeyson has used him has a simple desire for vengeance. His desire for revenge seems not so much selfish as motivated by an urge to punish the evildoer. Magwitch looks like a brute, as the young Pip notes, and Compeyson's lawyer exploits this when they are tried. He is strong and capable of violence, as Compeyson's scar shows, but he is not habitually violent. Given his background, he is as decent as could be expected; his conduct towards Molly and their child is exemplary. He is too simple to see that he might harm Pip by giving him his "great expectations". Though he wants to hit back at those who have harmed him, he genuinely wants to promote the interests of the child who helped him on the marshes, and reminded him of his lost daughter. Magwitch is happy to see his "gentleman", fearless of his sentence, and finally comforted to know Estella lives.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Estella and Biddy

Apart from Clara, whom Pip does not meet until late in the novel, Biddy and Estella are the only young women Pip seems to know. He considers both as possible partners, but for very different motives. At first, it seems that, in her circumstances and background, Biddy is much the more suitable, but it becomes clear eventually that Estella's experience almost exactly matches Pip's own. Biddy, like Joe, is somewhat idealized. She is also used rather schematically for purposes of contrast with Estella. For much of the novel she almost serves as the voice of Pip's conscience, and certainly she expresses the reader's view against Pip's false judgements.

Biddy is a village girl, slightly older than Pip, like him an orphan and "brought up by hand". While she lives with her grandmother, she is industrious but unkempt. When she comes to the forge, she quickly becomes clean and tidy. She is presented to the reader as a pretty and obliging girl. For this Pip likes her, but she cannot exercise the power over him of the haughty and distant Estella. "She was not beautiful - she was common and could not be like Estella - but she was pleasant and wholesome." Pip adds that her eyes "were very pretty and very good". As Biddy is literally near to Pip in the house, so she is metaphorically. She begins as his teacher and becomes his confidante. "I shall always tell you everything," says Pip (Ch. 17). He asks her advice concerning Estella and being a gentleman, and considers how he "might even have grown up to keep company" with her. It does not occur to him that Biddy might love him, nor that he is patronizing her.

Though she is "not over-particular" for herself, she does stand up for Joe, when Pip suggests a scheme for his education and "improvement" (Chapter 19). Biddy is remarkable for her ability to learn everything - a virtue arising from her disadvantaged start in life. As well as acquiring housekeeping skills and basic literacy, she is "theoretically as good a blacksmith" as Pip in his apprenticeship. When she comes to the forge, she quickly alters its domestic character. She is a tender nurse for Mrs. Joe, whose death, though it at first takes her from the forge (a single woman could not live alone with a man to whom she is not married), ultimately enables her to marry Joe.

Biddy makes good use of every opportunity to better herself, and achieves a typical and respectable progress, rising from the ragged orphan we first meet, to an educated woman, village schoolmistress, model housewife and mother, married to a respectable craftsman of reasonable means. This would be as much as any woman of the village could reasonably hope for, and Biddy is more than happy with her lot. Her ambitions are modest, but she achieves them; they are contrasted with the impossible longings of Pip.

Biddy is warm as the forge she makes her home, but Estella is as cold as her adoptive home at Satis. Dickens' educated readers would know the meaning of her name though the young Pip, who knows no Latin, makes the comparison for himself, as her light comes "along the dark passage like a star". Like a star, she is cold and distant; like a star she is a point by which Pip steers the course of his life. She signals her haughtiness in her addressing Pip repeatedly as "boy" and ridiculing his speech and "thick boots". The one show of affection, when she allows Pip to kiss her, is a reward for his knocking down Herbert.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

Even Miss Havisham, having brought her up to be proud and insulting, is alarmed by her own creation as she reproaches Estella for being cold to her (Ch. 38). When Estella goes to Richmond, she makes Pip her friend and confidant; she likes him and wishes to spare him the torment she intends for others.

She does not think it possible that she will ever love, and so does not ever entertain the idea of Pip's courtship; as a friend she repeatedly warns him off. We regard a woman without feeling, who torments others, with disapproval, but Estella is not a selfish *femme fatale*. Her defective emotions are the result of Miss Havisham's cruel experiment. Estella has obeyed her adoptive mother perfectly. And Estella is always honest about herself with Pip. The Estella of the final chapter, chastened by her experience of marriage to Drummle, seems at last prepared to admit Pip to a closer relationship, the course of which is left open to the reader's guesses.

Estella, like the convict, is present to Pip, even when absent (which is much of the time). She is forever in his thoughts, the source of his obsessive desire to be a gentleman. Bidley suggests that she does not deserve Pip's love. In fact, given that she is outwardly cold and haughty, Dickens makes her surprisingly sympathetic; we do not feel that Pip is simply wrong to love her. This is partly due to the fact that she, like Pip, is the victim of another person's grand scheme. It is also partly due to her true origins, which Pip discovers and divulges only to Jaggers and Wemmick: her parents are the lowest of the low, socially, and yet she has risen to the pinnacle of elegant society. The warmth with which Pip tells Magwitch of his lost daughter is surely shared by the reader.

### **Herbert Pocket**

Herbert, like Bidley, is somewhat idealized in Dickens' portrayal. He is, like Bidley, deferential and considerate. When we meet him, he is seeking employment, and "looking about him" for an opening. In this he seems rather ineffectual (perhaps he is not pushy enough) but given the opening in Clarriker's House (note that here Pip becomes the anonymous benefactor) Herbert works with great industry, and fulfils the Victorian dream: a little capital creates a business, trading in the east, which eventually brings moderate wealth to Herbert and to Pip. Herbert's courtship of Clara is a conveniently ideal relationship against which to judge Pip's problems with Estella, and Clara is somewhat of a cliché, with her mild manners and her tyrannical father, who dies at just the right time. Herbert is important to the plot, as a link with Miss Havisham and Pip's past, in his loyally helping Pip with Magwitch, and in his rescuing Pip from Orlick. In London he becomes Pip's intimate confidant, as Bidley has been hitherto.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Other characters

Though you are unlikely to have to write about any other characters on their own, you may need to comment on them in terms of their relationships with Pip, or with others. You may also have to answer a question about a group of characters, such as the women in the novel, or the people from Pip's village.

### Mrs. Joe

Mrs. Joe is somewhat of a caricature: even Joe, her husband, admits that she is rather bony and red-faced. She is a busy housewife, but her exertions are made it seems mainly to satisfy her own inflated notions of her status, to make Pip and Joe suffer, and to seek credit for bringing Pip up “by hand”. Her presence makes the forge a less welcome place.

Her sharp tongue provokes an apt comment from Orlick, and indirectly leads to her injury at his hand, and early death. In terms of the plot, she brings Joe together with both Pip and Biddy, before obligingly dying. She is not much missed.

### Mr. Pumblechook

Mrs Joe’s great ally is Pumblechook. He is a perfect specimen of humbug: when Pip is a child he speaks of the wickedness of the young, ignoring Pip and Joe; when Pip becomes a local celebrity, he promotes his own reputation by claiming to have been Pip's earliest benefactor and “founder of his fortunes” (the unspoken reason being his introduction of Pip to Miss Havisham). In bringing Pip to Satis, he is pursuing his own gain, and exercising his nosiness. He spends (with Mrs. Joe) a large part of Pip's premium on a dinner (as earlier he gives the sergeant the wine meant to be Mrs. Joe's present). When, perhaps unwisely, Pip snubs him, Pumblechook takes offence at this proof of his “ingratitude”. It is surprising how many people this “windy donkey” takes in, but Miss Havisham is not one of them: Estella is not to admit him to Satis.

Pumblechook prefers his own invention to the truth: he explains how Magwitch robbed the forge and endorses Pip's fantastic description of Satis House. Pip, as narrator, generally resists the temptation to judge others than himself, but Pumblechook is almost always introduced with some such term as “cheat” or “hypocrite”. He also irritates Pip by such actions as ruffling his hair (as a child), shaking his hand repeatedly and even adjusting his mourning headdress at Mrs. Joe's funeral.

Other characters from the village that deserve comment are Trabb's boy and Dolge Orlick.



## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Trabb's boy

Trabb abuses the boy for his slowness in serving Pip. When Pip returns to the village, he is publicly humiliated by a bizarre performance in which the boy suggests that Pip thinks himself too superior to recognize ordinary people. Pip writes to Mr. Trabb about this, but we have no idea what action Trabb takes. The same boy later helps Herbert rescue Pip from Orlick. He is happy to be rewarded by Pip, but Pip's apology for having previously "an ill opinion" of him makes no impression.

### "Dolge" Orlick

Pip tells us early on that Orlick claims to be called Dolge, but suggests that this is not possible. Orlick is simply villainous, and goes from bad to worse. He is evidently a competent enough labourer for Joe to employ him. He knows that Pip dislikes him for his attentions to Biddy, and he is dismissed from Miss Havisham's service on Pip's advice. It is natural that Compeyson should use him; in return for which services, he writes out the note with which Orlick lures Pip to the lime-kiln. Orlick's final crime is the robbery of Pumblechook's premises, for which he is jailed (tying up a loose end in the plot). Pip suspects that he may be guilty of the attack on his sister, but the reader is maybe misled by the reappearance of the leg-iron at the scene of the attack. Perhaps the only action of Orlick's that Pip approves is his stuffing Pumblechook's mouth with flowering annuals.

### Other village characters

Other characters in the village are:

- Mr. Wopsle, who is vain but harmless: as the church is not "open" to him (he is of the wrong class and has not been to university), he becomes Mr. Waldengarver, an actor, who begins as Hamlet, and descends to minor rôles;
- Mr. Hubble, notable for his long legs and remark about the young ("Naterally wicious"), and his wife;
- Mr. Wopsle's great aunt (Biddy's grandmother; introduced briefly in Ch. 7, and at more length in Ch. 10), and
- Mr. Trabb, another pompous type, but less so than Pumblechook.

To the village come the sergeant and the troop of soldiers (Chapters. 4 and 5) and Magwitch's envoy with the file (Ch. 10).

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### The flatterers

At Satis House, Pip sees Miss Havisham's flatterers: Sarah Pocket, Georgiana, Camilla and Cousin Raymond ("Mr. Camilla"). Though they have individual peculiarities, they are branded together by Pip as "toadies and humbugs", each pretending not to know the others are "toadies and humbugs". Pip's detailed account of their conversation is at odds with his confusion as to who is who: they are not memorable, but typify the greedy relatives hoping for a legacy. They are contrasted with Herbert's father, who asks for nothing but is rewarded because of Pip's account of him, with a "cool four thousand". Joe tells Pip also (Ch. 57) of Miss Havisham's humorous treatment of the "toadies" in her will: twenty pounds to Georgiana, twenty-five to Sarah to buy pills for her wind, and five pounds for "Mrs. Camels" to buy rushlights to keep her spirits up in the night.

### Mr. Jaggers

Mr. Jaggers appears at Satis House and again in the village inn, before Pip goes to London, but it is there that he comes to know him properly. Jaggers is self-possessed and seems to have no feelings. He is severe on his clients, and has a reputation so fearful that he boasts of never locking his valuables away: no one will dare rob him. Jaggers lives alone with his housekeeper, Molly, but is sociable on occasion. He is fascinated by Drummle (he does not really "like" him, of course) and enjoys ridiculing Wopsle for his assumption that a murder suspect is guilty. He tries to give the impression that he knows everything but admits nothing, a professional tactic he has carried over into his personal life. Once only does Pip surprise him, as he pieces together the whole of Estella's story (Chapter 51).

Though he rarely allows himself to indulge his feelings, Jaggers does not lack humanity: his provision for Estella, and his dealings with Molly and Magwitch show him in a good light. Like many Dickens characters, he is identified by habitual actions: he is fastidious in washing his hands (as if metaphorically washing off the dirt of crime) but is chiefly marked out by his habit of biting his finger as he speaks.

### Mr. Wemmick

His clerk, Wemmick, is as severe as his master at work: his face is expressionless, though he speaks freely enough to Pip. At home, at Walworth, he is a wholly different person, kind and caring, delighting his "aged parent" with the drawbridge, the cannon and the ornamental lake. Jaggers respects his privacy and knows nothing of Walworth. Pip remarks on how Wemmick's mouth, which he likens to a letterbox, gradually relaxes as he walks home; having seen Wemmick several times at home, he writes as if he were twins: a kind twin at Walworth, a severe twin at Little Britain. Wemmick is aware of this, and makes a rule of it: when Pip asks for his help in Herbert's behalf, Wemmick (in the office) appears to refuse, but suggests that Pip ask him again at home; when Pip does this, the help is given at once. Wemmick, like Herbert, has a sweetheart whom he eventually marries, though Pip (as best man) and Wemmick's father are the only guests. His bride, Miss Skiffins, barely exists as a character in the novel, other than to show Wemmick's human side, but her brother, an accountant, finds the merchant, Clarriker, who becomes Herbert's partner.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### **The Pockets**

Matthew Pocket and his family live in Hammersmith. Mr. Pocket is an impractical man of integrity and patience; he is burdened by a foolish wife and many children. Mrs. Pocket believes herself to be a great lady who has married beneath her. She is “highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless”. Pip notes that the servants are more in charge than the Pockets; unfortunately, the servants are lazy and irresponsible: the cook, for example, drinks and steals butter to sell. A “toady neighbour” (Mrs. Coiler) supports Mrs. Pocket in her vain belief that she requires “so much luxury and elegance”.

### **Startop and Drummle**

At Hammersmith, Pip first meets Startop and Bentley Drummle. Startop is a rather mild character, from whom Drummle borrows money. He is loyal and honourable and helps Pip and Herbert in their attempt to smuggle Magwitch out of the country. Drummle is far more important: he is a conventional snob, proud of himself and his origins and wholly contemptuous of Pip. He is “next heir but one to a baronetcy”, heavily built, sulky, idle and stupid. Pip at once takes a dislike to him, which is returned in full. Jagger's remarks on Drummle's stubbornness and persistence, which duly enable him to be Estella's chosen husband and victim. Though Pip dislikes Drummle, he has a horror of his seeing Joe and ridiculing him. Pip and Drummle quarrel spectacularly about Estella at the “Grove”. Drummle typifies perfectly the world that Pip is so anxious to enter. Drummle's death, as well as being convenient for the novel's plot is a kind of poetic justice: he dies in an accident “consequent on his ill-treatment of a horse”.

### **Bill Barley and Clara**

At Chinks's Basin, Pip meets Clara. Her motherly landlady, Mrs. Whimple, looks after her. Both make the briefest of appearances, but are eclipsed by the comic figure of Bill Barley, Clara's father. He is never seen by Pip, but is heard walking in the room overhead, and singing aloud. The chief joke about Barley is his consumption of vast quantities of food and drink. He keeps all the provisions in his room and measures out tiny portions for Clara (including a tot of rum, which Herbert drinks for her!) and vast meals for himself, which Clara must cook. Part of Clara's attraction to Herbert is that she has only one living relation (and he will not live long): unlike Herbert, she has no family to worry about.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Time in the novel

We are fortunate in having Dickens' own calculations of his characters' ages in the latter part of the novel. These clarify the information (much of it, but incomplete) in the text.

Pip is about seven at the beginning of the story. He would be apprenticed at fourteen and goes to London at about eighteen. He comes of age in Chapter 36 (we learn that Herbert is eight months older and that Pip's birthday is in November), and is twenty-three in the final part of the novel, save for the last chapter which is eleven years later. In each of the novel's three parts, except Chapter 59, time passes more slowly, or, to state this another way, the narrative is more detailed.

Estella is of Pip's age but in her early teens seems much older; Magwitch is initially attracted to Pip because he supposes him to be of his lost child's age. When Pip is twenty-three, Magwitch is sixty; Compeyson, fifty-two or fifty-three; Miss Havisham, fifty-six; Biddy, twenty-four or twenty-five; Joe, forty-five; Jaggers, fifty-five, and Wemmick near fifty. Miss Havisham's engagement to Compeyson takes place thirty-years before this time (Herbert tells the eighteen year-old Pip, in Chapter 22, that this took place "five-and-twenty years ago").

The novel begins some time around 1810 (*Great Expectations* was published in 1861). We cannot date the action precisely, but such things as the mode of transport indicate a fairly early time (there is no reference to railways, for example).

Three exact dates can be given, however. In Chapter 40, Pip refers to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and in Chapter 46 he learns how to "shoot" the Old London Bridge. Shelley's novel was published in 1818, while the bridge was demolished in 1831. In both chapters, Pip is twenty-three; the novel begins fourteen years earlier.

And in Chapter 36 (Pip's coming of age) Wemmick refers to Waterloo Bridge (built 1817). Thus the earliest date for the first meeting with Magwitch is 1805, and the latest date 1817.

The paddle steamers in Chapter 54 (propellers were introduced in the late 1830s) again suggest the late 1820s for this part of the novel. One inconsistency is Magwitch's sentence of death: the last returned transport to hang did so in 1810, though the offence remained a capital one in theory until 1835.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

### Places in the novel

The novel opens in the low-lying peninsula of “marsh country” between the Thames and Medway estuaries in Kent, east of London. Dickens seems to have combined the features of several of the small villages here. In the churchyard of Cooling were the graves of twelve small brothers and sisters buried together, like Pip's family. The nearby town - in which are Satis House, the Blue Boar and Mr. Pumblechook's business - is not named in the novel but is almost certainly based on Rochester (it has a cathedral; see Ch. 49). The “old Battery” was at Cliffe, overlooking the Thames. The Hulk (Chapter. 5) appears to lie on the Thames (although two hours walking might enable the party to cross to the Medway shore); in reality the Hulks were kept on the Medway at Upnor.

The places in London can mostly be found on a good map.

- Little Britain runs past St. Bart's Hospital, between Smithfield Market and the Barbican; from here Jaggers would ride (or walk) less than two miles home to Gerrard St., Soho (between Wardour St. and Cambridge Circus).
- Barnard's Inn, an ancient Inn of Chancery once attached to Gray's Inn, had ceased to have any legal character by the time of the novel; in 1892 it became a school. It is a short walk from Little Britain, as we read in Ch. 20.
- Later (between Chapters. 38 and 39) Pip and Herbert move to Garden Court, in the Temple, by the Thames.
- The Pockets live in Hammersmith, several miles west of London; their house also overlooks the river.
- Walworth is south of the river, about two miles from the City.
- Mill Pond Bank appears to be in what is now Docklands, perhaps on the Isle of Dogs. Richmond (Mrs. Brandley's) is in Surrey, several miles upstream and south-west of Hammersmith (through which Estella's coach passes in Ch. 33).
- The Hummums was in Covent Garden, on the corner of Russell St.; it stood on the site of a Turkish-bath-house, from which it took its name.

Many of the London locations are in the area of the law courts, close to Newgate prison: this is plausible, given the occupation of Pip's guardian, who has been chosen because he is the only lawyer Magwitch knows in England; but it enables Dickens to confront Pip with frequent reminders of his convict and of the process of law. Similarly, there are many river locations: partly this is made necessary by the plot; that Pip, a good waterman, should try to smuggle Magwitch aboard a steamer is most likely. But again it allows the river as a symbol or metaphor for experience to figure prominently. The same river links Estella at Richmond, the Pockets at Hammersmith, Pip at the Temple and the village in the marsh country.

Satis House is a perfect reflection of Miss Havisham's living death: the once-luxurious house has been allowed to decay around her. The brewery is disused and the wind seems to blow colder there; the barrels are rotting and Pip thinks he sees Miss Havisham hanging from a beam. Inside, all daylight is excluded (Pip imagines it would “have struck” Miss Havisham “to dust”) and candles are lit. It is a place of darkness, of decay, of fungus and of spiders. Pip likens Miss Havisham's wedding-dress to grave-clothes and her veil to a shroud. This decay continues throughout her last years; on her death, the house is pulled down. The site, for years, is not built on again, because Estella has resisted this; she revisits it in the final chapter because she has at last allowed the site to be developed.

## Studying *Great Expectations*

Joe's forge and little cottage contrast strongly with the faded grandeur of Satis; we do not have a very detailed description, but know the cottage is made of wood (usual in this area at the time) and adjoins the forge; we know of the chimney-corner, where Pip has his stool; of the "little state parlour across the passage", and that the kitchen can accommodate a file of soldiers. We are told that Mrs. Joe is a very clean housekeeper, but that her cleanliness is more uncomfortable than dirt. There seem to be rooms enough for Joe and Mrs. Joe, for Pip and for Biddy, later; we know the house has stairs and a pantry, even that the kitchen table is made of deal, and twice we are told of a dog. Despite Mrs. Joe, the cottage is naturally homely; when Biddy moves in, it becomes much more so: the idyllic picture of the simple country cottage is completed by Biddy's and Joe's child in the chimney corner.

Barnard's Inn, despite its historic standing, is an unwholesome place. It is described as a collection of dingy buildings, in one of which Pip and Herbert lodge: it is repeatedly described as "dismal", and likened to "a club for Tom-cats". The air is stale, wet rot and dry rot abound, and Pip is almost decapitated by a sash window, from which the lines have rotted away. The reality of Barnard's Inn is a shock to Pip, who expects a grander hotel than the Blue Boar; it helps put his expectations in perspective, and is memorably described by Joe, when he first comes to London. The Pockets' house and Jaggers' establishment are very sketchily described, but Wemmick's wooden Gothic "castle" is depicted in great detail: we know of the drawbridge, the fountain, the cannon, the mechanism for giving messages, the flagpole and flag, and so on. This place typifies the charm and ingenuity of the human Wemmick of Walworth.

Other places Pip visits are the humble village pub, the Three Jolly Bargemen, with its common room, settle and kitchen fire, and the Blue Boar, an elegant hotel, in the coffee room of which Pip contests with Drummle the warmth of the fire. But the most memorable and atmospheric place in the novel appears in the first chapters, and we return there much later: the marsh country.

This is a harsh, bleak place for Magwitch to lie at night; and in the early chapters the contrast is obvious between the hunted convict, shivering on the marshes and the smug party at Joe's cottage, eating their Christmas fare. From the bleak churchyard, to the old battery and beyond, to the landing stage for the Hulks, this place becomes another character in the novel. The Hulk Pip sees he imagines as a "wicked Noah's ark" - an image that might occur as much to the child, as to the adult narrator. If Pip's experiences here are full of terror, his later visit to the marshes, at Orlick's invitation, holds more fear for the reader and real danger for Pip. As before, the place makes Pip uneasy even before his danger appears: the wind is "melancholy", the marshes "dismal"; "insupportable" to a stranger, they are "oppressive" even to Pip, who has come there and gone on against his "inclination". The marshes form a fitting backdrop for acts of terror and violence.

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