

Timeless Fiction Great Expectations

HEMANTA BORA

M.A. in English
Guwahati, Assam

Great Expectations is the novel by Charles Dickens which depicts the education of an orphan named Pip. The novel is the story of the childhood and young adult years of Pip in a country village. Great Expectations is a critique of the Victorian society. Pip realizes that his great expectations- social status and wealth are less important than loyalty and compassion. The novel is a mixture of humour, mystery and tragedy.

Pip and Estella aren't reunited at the end in the original work. But Dickens was convinced to write a happy conclusion as well. Great Expectations comes under the genre of bildungsroman or coming-of-age novel. The novel addressed the issues of social justice and inequality. Great Expectations appeared in All the Year Round, a weekly periodical. Pip dreams of becoming a gentleman. His family struggled with finances. Pip is raised by his sister and her husband. Pip faces rises and falls in life and he learns the meaning of love and friendship. Pip tries to find happiness during tough situations of life as well. He tries to become a better person. The central theme of the novel is the theme of ambition and self-improvement in life. Social class is another theme based on the post-industrial revolution model of class system in England.

The poor, country boy Pip turns into a high society, London gentleman by a mysterious benefactor. When Pip loses everything, he understands the truly noble qualities of life- honesty, hard work, selflessness and a good heart. Estella to Pip, "Suffering has been stronger than all other teaching." Great Expectations is the thirteenth novel by Charles Dickens. We see an eventual triumph of good over evil in the story.

The novel is successful and popular among the readers universally and is highly critically acclaimed. The novel is written in first person. Pip is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. The novel showed how some of people's expectations in life are unrealistic. Great Expectations was Dicken's final finished novel before his death and critics have called it his best romance. Although the novel as it exists today, contains a happy ending, in the original Pip remains single and Estella remarries. The novel is a social satire exposing society's problems.

In the beginning, Pip describes his situation- "I used to stand about the churchyard on Sunday evenings when night was falling, comparing my own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were, and how on both there came in an unknown way a dark mist and then the sea. (p.135).....Suddenly the knees of Trabb's boy smote together, his hair uprose, his cap fell off, he trembled violently in every limb, staggered out into the road, and crying to the populace, 'Hold me I am so frightened!' feigned to be in a paroxysm of terror and contrition, occasioned by the dignity of my appearanceI had not gone much further down the street as the post office, when I again beheld Trabb's boy shooting round by a back way. This time he was entirely changed. He wore his blue bag in the manner of my greatcoat, and was strutting along the pavement towards me in the opposite side of the street, attended by a company of delighted young friends to whom he from time to time exclaimed, with a wave of his hand, 'Don't know yah!' Words cannot state the amount of aggravation and injury wreaked upon me by Trabb's boy, when, passing abreast of me, he pulled up his shirt collar, twined up his side hair, stuck an arm akimbo, and smirked extravagantly by wriggling his elbows and his body, and saying to his attendants 'Don't know yah, don't know yah, upon my soul don't know yah!' (p.267)

Pip aspires for the gentlemanly world- "Whenever I watched the vessels standing out to the sea with their white sails spread, I somehow thought of Miss Havisham and Estella; and whenever the light struck aslant, far off, upon a cloud or sail or green hillside or water line it was just the same- Miss Havisham, Estella and the strange house and the strange life appeared to have something to do with everything that was picturesque.(p.137)

Pip believes in romantic vision- "You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have read, since. I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen- on the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets. You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with."(p.378)

Book 3 of the novel expresses the central reality of Pip's present existence- "Even when I thought of Estella, and how we parted that day for ever, and when I recalled all the circumstances of our parting, and all her looks and tones, and the action of her fingers while

she knitted- even then I was pursuing here, there and everywhere the caution 'Don't go home.' When at last I dozed, in sheer exhaustion of mind and body, it became a vast shadowy verb which I had to conjugate. Imperative mood present tense: Do not thou go home,- potentially; I may not, cannot go home, and I might not, could not, would not and should not go home ; while I fell . I was going distracted, and rolled over on the pillow. (p.381).....Whether I was really down in Garden-Court in the dead of night, groping about for the boat that was supposed to be there, whether I had two or three times come to myself on the staircase with great terror, not knowing how I had got out of bed; whether I had found myself lighting the lamp, possessed by the idea that he was coming up the stairs, and the lights were blown out, whether I had been inexpressibly harassed by the distracted talking, laughing and groaning, of someone.....Whether there had been a closed iron furnace in a dark corner of the room, and a voice had called out over and over again that Miss Havisham was consuming within it; these things I tried to settle with myself and get into some order, as I lay that morning in bed. But the vapour of time kills would come between me and them, disordering them all.....”(pp. 470-71)

The criminal Magwitch said to Pip: “I was took up, took up, took up, to that extent I regularly growed up took up. This was the way it was when I was a ragged little creetur as much to be pitied as I ever see.....I got the name of being hardened. Tramping, begging, thieving, working sometimes, when I would- though that wasn't as often as you might think, till you put the question would you ha'been overready to give me work yourselves- a bit of a poacher, a bit of a labourer, a bit of a waggoner, a bit of a haymaker, a bit of a hawker, a bit of most things that don't pay and lead to trouble, I got to be a man.”(p.361)

Wemmick's situation was- “While he was putting up the other cast and coming down from the chair, the thought crossed my mind that all his personal jewellery was derived from like sources. As he had shown no diffidence on the subject , I ventured on the liberty of asking him the question when he stood before me, dusting his hands. 'Oh yes', he returned, 'these are all gifts of that kind. One brings another, you see, that's the way of it. I always take 'em. They're curiosities. And they are property. They mayn't be worth much, but, after all, they're property and portable- my guiding star always is, 'Get hold of portable property'.....The interval between that time and supper. Wemmick devoted to showing me his collection of curiosities. They were mostly of a felonious character; comprising the pen with which a celebrated forgery had been committed , a distinguished razor or two- and several manuscript confessions- They were agreeably dispersed among small specimens of China and glass, various neat trifles made by the proprietor of the museum, and some tobacco-stoppers carved by the aged.” (pp.231-32)

Great Expectations makes the process of self-improvement different unlike David Copperfield. The fairytale mode in Great Expectations helps us to see the world of the elite from a new point of view. Crime in society exists as a powerful psychological force in the novel.

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