

How does dickens  
manipulate sympathy  
for his characters in  
great expectations  
and...



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Great Expectations is a novel that was written by Charles Dickens and published in the late 19th century. It was firstly published in serial form in 'All The Year Round', which was Dickens weekly literary magazine. It was founded and owned by him and published between 1859 and 1895 throughout the UK. It is a coming of age novel as it follows the story of a boy into their break of maturity.

Great Expectations follows the story of young orphan Pip, proclaiming his early childhood life, to his adulthood which along the way, shows his desperate attempt to become a gentleman. The novel has been greatly considered to be a semi- autobiography of Dickens' life, like most of his other work. This makes the genre fictional biography as it is a life story of a fictional character also Bildungsroman as it is the story of a character growing up and developing in society.

The novel mainly features social criticism as Dickens projects his own criticisms to society in the book; he does this through setting and characterisation. In this essay I am going to explain how Charles Dickens manipulates sympathy for his characters in Great Expectations. Dickens uses language techniques to create sympathy for some of his characters throughout the novel, however starts with the protagonist Pip, in chapter I. In chapter I you are introduced to Pip; he is an orphan and all of his family are dead except for his elder sister who is his guardian.

From the first page the reader immediately sympathises with Pip as he is a young, uneducated vulnerable boy alone in an exposed environment, with 'dykes and mounds', where 'the wind was rushing' and he was 'growing

afraid' which ultimately left him 'beginning to cry'. Dickens uses first person narration which is effective the story being told from Pip's perspective rather than a bystander overlooking his life, this enables us to read his true feelings and thoughts Pip tells his story through his own knowledge which is more trustworthy.

A good example of this is when Pip clarifies that he never saw his father or mother and 'drew a childish conclusion' of what they looked like due to the appearance of their tombstones. He guessed that his father 'was a square, stout, dark man with curly hair'. Also, his mother who he assumed was 'freckled and sickly'. All these observations made by Pip are effective as they are first person narration and are truthful. They create sympathy as they show Pip's low level of education. The use of first person narration is effective throughout the whole book as it stays the same and allows readers to form a judgement.

The structure of this the first chapter helps create sympathy as the reader is told a description of Pip's life and background which is quite emotional, then has a scene which disturbs the atmosphere with convict Magwitch frightening and intimidating Pip. Bringing Magwitch into the scene brings a sense of empathy as anyone would be terrified if you were surrounded by an escaped convict. As Magwitch begins to terrorise Pip, readers' feelings of sympathy change as you are anxious of what Magwitch is going to do with Pip. Dickens has used different techniques to present each character.

With Pip he uses first person narration and metaphors for readers to empathise with him. Magwitch is an antagonist but Dickens keeps us not to

hate him with the use of literary devices and techniques. When Magwitch is first introduced in chapter I, Dickens uses passive verbs. This is shown as Magwitch has been 'soaked', 'smothered', 'lamed', 'cut', 'stung' and 'torn'. These are passive verbs because he received those actions. These passive verbs help to create sympathy for Magwitch as they show he has been hurt in the past.

Also Magwitch can be seen as ironic in chapter I where he threatens to eat Pip's cheeks and that he is with someone. Readers know he is not serious as he would have hurt Pip already if he was, but Magwitch knows he needs to be dependent on Pip for his own survival. In chapter XXXIX the reader is seeing everything in a different point of view as it coming to the end of the second stage of Pip's life. The longing sympathy you feel for Pip in chapter I has all absconded as he is past his days as a 'labouring boy'. He has just turned twenty three years old and has become the gentleman he always wanted to be.

He is living in a flat in 'The Temple', which is a building near the Thames that is mostly occupied by lawyers and law students. From this we can see Pip has transformed from a boy to a man. In chapter XXXIX, the first thing we notice is that there is a storm. Dickens uses one of the most common techniques emerged in the novel; pathetic fallacies.

The use of this technique makes readers anxious as it creates a vivid atmosphere using the weather. The 'violent blasts of rain' and 'vast heavy veil' show that something bad will undergo which is what happens later on in this chapter when Magwitch arrives. Readers feel sympathy for Pip in that part

of the chapter as he is lonely and in an atmosphere with dull weather conditions, just as in chapter I. In chapter XXXIX, Dickens starts to manipulate our sympathy as the reader no longer has the need to sympathise with Pip as he is no longer a 'labouring boy', he is now a mature man with a stronger sense of knowledge and wealth. Dickens then shifts the reader's sympathy to Magwitch. Dickens sets the scene out well as 'lamps were blown out', which gives a sense of dark and anxiety.

Readers lose sympathy for Pip as it seems he is being snobbish and looking down on Magwitch. These feelings lost move over to Magwitch as he was 'holding out both his hands' to Pip, and Pip saw this as a 'stupid kind of amazement'. Dickens builds up sympathy for Magwitch as he is respectful and refers to Pip as 'Master'. Readers almost lose all correspondence for Pip when he asks Magwitch to come in but 'inhospitably enough'. He also resented Magwitch's 'gratified recognition'. Dickens is showing readers how wealth can completely change a person's life as Pip is a completely different character to who he was in chapter I.

He now has a complete opposite way of life to when he was a boy. He has a different attitude to life, when he was a boy he had to work for a living now he just receives money from an unknown benefactor. When Magwitch reveals himself to Pip by showing him the file and handkerchief, readers remember the cruelly ironic, scruffy escaped convict he was in chapter I. When Magwitch reveals he is Pip's secret benefactor and gave him all his savings he worked for, readers feel sorry for Pip and empathise with him and feel the same way they felt for him when he was a boy as his plan to marry Estella has failed.

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Dickens manipulates the reader's sympathy as he plays with your feelings towards characters. There is clear evidence of this with the characters of Pip and Magwitch. In chapter I readers see Pip as a young, defenceless boy and when he is approached by Magwitch you feel as if you want to protect him. In most of his work, Dickens uses his characters in the novels to express his own opinions. I think poverty is the main theme throughout the novel as well as different classes. I know this because Pip was very poor, his main family were all dead apart from his elder sister, he was an orphan and was in working class conditions.

Whereas newly introduced character Miss Havisham in chapter VIII who he is invited by to come to her mansion Satis House, to play with her adopted daughter Estella, is in the complete opposite position. She has plenty of money, has a different attitude towards things and lives in upper class conditions. This creates sympathy as well as empathy because if it were us to be in his position we would hate it and probably could not cope without family and friends who support us. In Great Expectations Dickens is trying to portray that the Victorian judiciary as unfair and unjust.

He uses Magwitch as an example of this which is seen mainly at the end of the novel. The way Dickens shows the upper and lower classes in the novel is why Dickens creates sympathy. His life was quite similar to the character of Pip he was a 'labouring boy' and had to work to become a 'gentlemen' and he got far. Most writers in his time were writing novels portraying only upper class people. Dickens writing about the lower class e. g Pip as a young boy makes readers sympathise and judge society in perhaps a more wider view.

With Magwitch he shows both sides as he can be seen as a criminal or victim of society. The criminal is what most people would see, but Dickens goes much deeper and shows how Magwitch is treated unfairly by the judicial system. The constant change of characterisation, setting, narrative voice, pathetic fallacy and other language techniques for Pip and Magwitch and other characters is how Dickens manipulates sympathy. The use of these techniques is what makes Charles Dickens work great and one of the most popular English novelists of all time.