

# Great expectations

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



“ Miss Havisham is one of Dickens’ most memorable characters.” Write about Dickens’ presentation of Miss Havisham, referring closely to any two passages in “ Great Expectations” In “ Great Expectations”, Miss Havisham is one of Dickens’ most memorable characters. Her repulsiveness makes her fascinating, and Dickens’ presentation of her is very effective in making her an interesting individual. Her personality changes throughout the novel.

Miss Havisham is an elderly woman who wears an old bridal dress that was formerly white, but has now faded to pale yellow.

She was abandoned by her fiancē½ at the altar a long time ago. Miss Havisham was heartbroken and turned into a bitter, resentful woman. She stayed indoors, stopping the clocks and leaving everything the way it was on the day she was to be married. She stays in the darkness, never seeing the light of day, and never even ventures outside her mansion, which has been plunged into mourning. Satis House is a perfect reflection of Miss Havisham’s living death: the once-luxurious house has been allowed to decay around her.

“ Great Expectations” was written at a time when marriage was an extremely important institution. Unless a woman had money, she needed a husband. Miss Havisham is very fortunate in that she is very rich, and is able to support herself. She has called her mansion Satis House (“ Satis” meaning “ enough”), as if to imply that all who reside in the house will not need anything else. This is ironic, as it is quite obvious that Miss Havisham yearns for her sweetheart, so the house is definitely not enough for her.

In chapter 8, Pip meets Miss Havisham for the first time. As we regard the house through Pips eyes, it is evident that although the building is incredibly large and impressive, it has no warmth. The same seems to be true of the owner, as Miss Havisham's name is actually a play on words, consisting of the "having" and "sham". This indicates both her physical and psychological state of mind. In terms of wealth she has everything, but this has not brought her any joy or contentment. Perhaps Dickens chose this name for her as a moral, to show that money cannot buy you happiness. Pips initial description of Miss Havisham raises many questions about her.

It gives a sense of mystery when he describes her in her wedding dress, as he says, "she was dressed in rich materials- satins, and lace and silks- all of white", but then realises that everything "had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow". The reader reflects on why this woman is always in the dark, and dressed in a bridal gown, which makes Miss Havisham more compelling. She does not explain her predicament, but only says that her heart is broken. Afterwards, she ordered Pip to play. She regards him as a toy for her pleasure, and does not think of his opinions, but commands him to do her bidding.

The reader is again made to wonder whether Miss Havisham really is a danger to others or a threat to herself. "I sometimes have sick fancies," she says. "And I have a sick fancy that I want to see some play," she continues making the reader wonder whether her requests are kosher. This type of constant doubt hanging over her devises a more complex characterisation, which is achieved by these ambiguous descriptions. When he does, she asks

him if he is “ sullen and obstinate”, to which he replies with a terrified excuse. This shows that she is quite a frightening person to a little child. In addition, Pip says that he would have “ cried out if he could”, earlier in the chapter, and he sometimes stammers when speaking to her, for instance, when he says, “ I don’t like to say”. It seems to the reader that Miss Havisham is used to getting her own way, as she decides to call her daughter, Estella, to play with him.

Pip describes Miss Havisham as a walking corpse. He describes the silk stocking on her foot as “ ragged”, and says that “ without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, nor even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like grave-clothes, or the long vale so like a shroud”. He also contrasts her “ frillings and trimmings on her bridal dress” to “ looking like earthly paper”, and compares her figure to that of a “ ghastly waxwork at the fair”. This comparison of Miss Havisham to a waxwork and skeleton foreshadows her fate. He also mentions associated images of darkness and decay, such as “ withered” and “ sunken eyes”.

He realises that Miss Havisham has frozen time after the emotional trauma of her inexistent wedding day. She has refused to move on and instead has devoted her life solely to something to disregard time. Miss Havisham has taken out her unhappiness and anger on the male race as a whole, even raising her adopted daughter Estella to break the hearts of men in the future. She is so wrapped up in her revenge, that she tells Estella that she can “ break his heart”. This also shows that she can be quite manipulative

and clever, as she is using Estella's ultimate goal, to break all men's hearts, to make her play with Pip, just for her amusement.

Miss Havisham notices that Pip says nothing of Estella, whilst she insults him. She asks him why, saying, " You say nothing of her, she says many hard things of you, but you say nothing of her. What do you think of her?" Pip replies by answering, " I don't really like to say", but he does tell her in her ear that he thinks Estella is " very proud", " very pretty", and " very insulting". He adds that he " should like to go home". The fact that Miss Havisham has asked him to speak in her ear shows that she is quite intelligent, and knows exactly what to say to Pip in order to make him trust her.

Moreover, Miss Havisham seems to think that her adopted daughter is very attractive, and jumps to conclusions, as she adds " and never see her again, though she is so pretty?" Pip responds to this with " I am not sure that I shouldn't like to see her again, but I should like to go home now". Miss Havisham, however, answers him by saying, " You shall go soon. Play the game out." This demonstrates that she is in control, and has no consideration for his feelings. When she orders Pip to come again, she says "" There, there! I know nothing of days of the week; I know nothing of weeks of the year. Come again after six days. You hear?" This is successful in escalating the atmosphere of mystery around Miss Havisham, as the reader speculates on why she does not know the date or the day.