

Prose [Fiction] Model Analysis

Question:

Write an essay in which you perform a close reading of the following extract from Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Please do not refer to the novel in general. Your analysis must focus on the given text.

In your analysis, you should address the following aspects of creative writing:

- **Narrative Structure and Point of View**
- **The Introduction and Development of Theme**
- **The Creation of Character and the Elaboration of Theme through the Manipulation of Tone and Diction**
- **The Use of Poetic Techniques and Language to Create Meaning.**

It is essential that you refer to the techniques covered in both the literary and language sections of the course in order to examine how the writer creates meaning in the extract.

My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make of both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister,—Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "Also Georgiana Wife of the Above," I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine,—who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle,—I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence.

[Chapter 1, *Great Expectations*]

Answer:

The purpose of this essay serves to provide you with a model analysis for how you might approach a question such as the above when analysing a prose/fiction extract. If you have any questions about or comments on this analysis, please post such under the 'Prose [Fiction] Model Analysis Discussion' topic in the Study Unit 2 forum [***Note:** I am briefly introducing the

model analysis here, but—as I am writing this analysis in an ‘explanation’ style—this is not an example of how you should write your essay introduction. Please refer to the ‘Writing/Structuring a Proper Academic Essay’ topic in the Study Unit 1 forum for full guidance on and examples of how your essay introduction should read].

Before we can comment on the creation of thematic effect, we need to consider the introduction of theme in the passage. What theme/s can we identify? I would say that the overarching themes in the passage are loss and death. These are arguably not the predominant themes in the novel as a whole, but it does not matter, as we need to analyse the extract in and for itself [***Note: Please do not refer to the theme/s or symbolism in the novel as a whole. As you are required to perform a close analysis of the given passage only, you should not refer to the novel from whence it is extracted at all—no matter how relevant you think such a contextual reference may be].**

As we have, at first glance, identified the overarching themes in the passage, we can now elaborate on the literary and linguistic devices that enable the writer to create thematic effect in the passage [***Note: You might not be able to identify the theme/s in a given passage at first glance and may need to perform a close reading of the extract before being able to do so. I would recommend you explore and determine the theme/s in a passage in the planning stages of your analysis and nonetheless state what the theme in the passage is at the outset of your essay. You can then, in the body of your essay, explain how you determined the theme/s of the passage. Such an explanation, in essence, would be a commentary on the creation of thematic effect. In general, if you are unable to concisely comment on the creation of thematic effect in a given passage, your identification of the theme/s in the passage is probably not entirely correct. If you have successfully identified the overarching theme/s in a passage, you should naturally be able to explain the thematic development in the passage].**

To the above point, how does Dickens create thematic effect in the extract? What literary and linguistic devices has he employed? [***Note: A line by line analysis is almost always recommended, but in the **planning** stages in your essay. A line by line analysis format should never be followed for your final essay, as such is not an appropriate academic structure. I performed a line by line analysis of the passage in order to identify the literary and linguistic devices present in the text in the planning stages of this essay, and I am now discussing the devices and features of the text in a properly structured essay, paragraphed by ‘idea’ and not by line or stanza].** The first mention of death is not explicit; instead the word “tombstone” is employed, which as a symbol and consequence of death, immediately tells the reader that Pip’s father is no longer living. In considering symbolic effect, how does the mention of Pip’s father’s tombstone in such a cavalier fashion impact the tone of the passage? The passage opens in a somewhat conversational and neutral manner, with Pip introducing himself to the reader, but the mention of a tombstone—a symbol of death—sets a somewhat sombre tone. This is intensified in the next line when Pip mentions that he “never saw [his] father or [his] mother”, which tells us (again not explicitly) that Pip is an orphan. This is reiterated when

Pip's mother's tombstone is also mentioned and we receive confirmation that she too is deceased. Through the imagery of Pip's father and mother's tombstones and the insinuation that they died when Pip was quite young (that is, too young to remember either of them) the themes of loss and death are created.

The themes of loss and death are developed and intensified at the mention of "five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside [Pip's parents'] grave[s]". Note the chilling significance of the choice of diction in "little" and "about a foot and a half long" used to describe the tombstones arranged next to Pip's father and mother's graves. Before we are plainly told that the five little tombstones belong to Pip's five deceased little brothers, the sombre tone of the passage is intensified by the image of five tiny graves. The thematic effect of loss is particularly unsettling here, not only in that we can hazard a guess that, with the exception of his sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, Pip does not have much family left, but also in the childlike, almost hopeful way in which he imagines his deceased siblings. Consider the image of Pip's brothers being "born on their backs with their hands in their trouser-pockets". Does this not create an image in your mind of someone who is relaxed, perhaps leisurely dozing in a field? If we consider that Pip's infant siblings in all likelihood did not succumb to death in such a tranquil manner and take into account the writer's choice of diction in Pip stating that he is grateful ["indebted"] for this childlike belief of his little brothers' appearance in death, the profound effect of the loss of his family is emphasised. Note also the contrast that is created through the image of "trousers". Trousers are an article of clothing usually worn by older children; presumably Pip's infant brothers would not have been old enough to wear proper trousers yet. The tragedy of how little his brothers were when they died is thus highlighted by the mention of trousers, an article of clothing they would never come to wear.

Having explored the creation of thematic and symbolic effect in the passage, we can consider how the literary and linguistic devices utilised encourage a particular understanding of the characters to whom we are introduced. Pip's narrative style, innocent determination of the appearance of his deceased family and the fact that he refers to his conclusions about his mother as "childish" emphasises his youth and naivety at the time in which the passage is set. Contrasted with the themes of loss and death found in the passage, the emphasis of Pip's young age (as touched on above) creates a chilling effect.

At this point, we need to make mention of Pip's role as narrator. As is always the case with first-person narration, we need to be aware of the fact that the information that we are receiving will inevitably be coloured by the subjectivity of the narrator. This is not only important to keep in mind as it pertains to how other characters in a given passage are described, but also to how it may inform our understanding of the narrator him or herself. In considering the given extract, you may firstly note the peculiarity of the narrator's voice. While the passage comprises a certain period in Pip's childhood, he is not in actual fact telling the story as a child. The passage rather reads as an adult reflecting on his childhood and what he thought and believed as a child with a

certain degree of adult wryness. The employment of past tense as well as Pip referring to his imaginings as “childish” serve as indicators of this.

What does the passage reveal about the character of Pip? There are a number of observations you could make about Pip. So long as you can support your assertions with reference to the given extract, there are no right or wrong answers in this regard. Personally, I feel it is significant to note his imagination’s ordering control over his experiences, a point which I will explore in further detail below.

You might note that Pip mentions his sister, who is presumably alive (at least at the time in which the passage is set), only briefly whilst his deceased family, whom he has never met, are described in significantly more detail. What meaning can we derive from this? How do you think Pip feels about his deceased family?

Of key importance is the fact that Pip derives imaginings of the appearance of his mother and father directly from their tombstones. The symbolic effect he derives (that is, the appearance and character traits that he is able to attribute to his parents based on their tombstones) is noteworthy. Pip states that, from the inscription on his father’s tombstone, he images his father to be “a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair”. Does this not give you, the reader, an almost clear image of the style of the inscription on Pip’s father’s tombstone? Due to the style of the inscription on Pip’s mother’s tombstone, and the fact that she is described as nothing more than “Wife of the Above”, Pip deems her to have been “freckled and sickly”. Based on what we are told, could you agree with Pip’s imagined description of his mother? Note how, even though the characters of the father and mother do not actually appear in the passage and their actual appearances are not made known, the reader cannot help but form an image of their appearances due to the imaginative terms in which Pip describes them. Pip’s subjectivity as narrator is particularly apparent here. Pip bases his parents’ imagined appearances purely on how he perceives their tombstones. Another person who had never seen a likeness of Pip’s mother and father may look at their tombstones and, if pressed to picture them based on the inscriptions on the tombstones, might form a completely different image of Pip’s parents in his or her mind.

To relate Pip’s imaginings of his parents back to the themes of loss and death, note the significance of the fact that the only source from which Pip can deduce the appearances of his father and mother is their tombstones, the concrete symbols of their death. Referring back to my point about Pip’s ability to have his imagination control his circumstances and experiences, we may note that, perhaps converse to expectation, he seems to take some level of comfort in the physicality of his deceased family’s tombstones. What do you think this says about Pip’s character? Do you deem him to be resilient? Or perhaps simply that desperate for some semblance of contact with his deceased family?

To conclude your analysis of a given passage, you would need to succinctly summarise your findings. Based on the above, I would conclude by saying that Dickens has created a strong image of loss and tragedy through the diction and tone in the given passage. He has also, however, offered the reader the beginnings of resilience in the protagonist, Pip, who somehow is

able to comfort himself despite the loss of almost his entire family at a young age.

While the above analysis is not exhaustive or conclusive (you might have taken a slightly different approach or have noted certain additional elements or devices), I hope that this model analysis has informed your approach to analysing a prose/fiction text somewhat.

Again, if you have any questions about or comments on this analysis please feel free to post such in the Study Unit 2 discussion forum.