

Literary Monsters – Literature is full of monstrous characters. Here are just a few from the rogue’s gallery of the world of fiction.

Miss Havisham from *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (1861)

Miss Havisham is a character in the Charles Dickens novel *Great Expectations* (1861). She is a wealthy spinster, once jilted at the altar, who insists on wearing her wedding dress for the rest of her life. She lives in a ruined mansion called Satis House with her adopted daughter, Estella. Dickens describes her as looking like "the witch of the place".

Although she has often been portrayed in film versions as very elderly, Dickens's own notes indicate that she is only in her mid-thirties at the start of the novel. However, it is indicated in the novel that her long life without sunlight has aged her.

While Miss Havisham's original goal was to prevent Estella from suffering as she had at the hands of a man, it changed as Estella grew older:

"Believe this: when she first came, I meant to save her from misery like my own. At first I meant no more. But as she grew, and promised to be very beautiful, I gradually did worse, and with my praises, and with my jewels, and with my teachings, and with this figure of myself always before her a warning to back and point my lessons, I stole her heart away and put ice in its place."

While Estella was still a child, Miss Havisham began casting about for boys who could be a testing ground for Estella's education in breaking the hearts of men as vicarious revenge for Miss Havisham's pain. Pip, the narrator, is the eventual victim; and Miss Havisham readily dresses Estella in jewels to enhance her beauty and to exemplify all the more the vast social gulf between her and Pip. When, as a young adult, Estella leaves for France to receive education, Miss Havisham eagerly asks him, "Do you feel you have lost her?"



Victor Frankenstein from *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818)

From childhood, Victor Frankenstein had a thirst for knowledge and a particular interest in unlocking the secrets of nature and the natural world.

He is a Scientist who discovers the secret of creating life and builds a man from human body parts.

He then awakens this 'monster' and recoils in horror. He is appalled by the ugliness of his creation and feels almost instant guilt over having brought it to life. He quickly abandons the 'monster', leaving it alone and helpless to fend for itself.

He attempts to keep his creation a secret, however he is ultimately powerless to prevent it from ruining his life and the lives of others.

"You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been."

THE MONSTER

The nameless hideous creature that Victor Frankenstein creates and then abandons, the 'Monster' is initially presented as kind with a longing for human interaction and acceptance. He ponders over his own existence and ultimately struggles with a deep feeling of isolation.

He eventually becomes embittered and enraged at its treatment, having been abandoned by his 'father' and demonised by society.

He demands that Frankenstein create him a female mate so that he may have a companion.

Eventually, the monster becomes a killer. This is caused by its desire for revenge against its creator.

"When I looked around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, a monster, a blot upon the earth from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?"



Henry Higgins from *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw (1913)

Professor Henry Higgins, forty years old, is a bundle of paradoxes. In spite of his brilliant intellectual achievements, his manners are usually those of the worst sort of petulant, whining child. He is a combination of lovable eccentricities, brilliant achievements, and devoted dedication to improving the human race. Yet he is completely socially inept; his manners are so bad that his own mother does not want him in her house when she has company, and his manners are so offensive that she will not attend the same church at the same time.

To accomplish his aims, he will trample on anyone's feelings — whether that person be a Cockney flower girl in Covent Garden (Eliza Doolittle) or a real duchess or a lady in his mother's elaborate drawing room. Thus, one of Higgins' claims to equality is not that he doesn't have manners (it is a foregone conclusion that he has none), but that he treats all people alike. However, he only thinks that he does; he is not as egalitarian and democratic as he likes to think that he is.

"A woman who utters such depressing and disgusting sounds has no right to be anywhere — no right to live. Remember that you are a human being with a soul and the divine gift of articulate speech . . . don't sit there crooning like a bilious pigeon."

Anyone who can deliver such splendid invective is to be admired for his or her brilliant, spontaneous use of the English language, and especially when it is directed against so lowly a person as this flower girl from the slums. But in a play dealing with manners, no proper gentleman would utter such condemnations.

But if Higgins is charming, he is also a tyrannical bully; if he is devastatingly intelligent, he is also ignorantly insensitive to the feelings of others; if he is god-like in his achievements, he is childishly petulant in his wanting his own way; if he believes in his scientific methodology, he is also something of the intuitive poet; and if he is a man so confident of his aim in life, he is also a man so ignorant of his own personality that he really thinks himself timid, modest, and diffident.



Some key words for you to learn (spelling and meaning):

- Character** – the mental and moral qualities of an individual
- Explicit** – fully and clearly expressed; obvious
- Implicit** – implied or inferred; suggested by something
- Moral** – concerned with principles of right and wrong or conforming to standards of behaviour and character based on those principles
- Ethical** – conforming to expected standards of social or professional behaviour
- Tragic** – extremely mournful, melancholic or pathetic; dreadful, calamitous, disastrous, or fatal
- Trait** – a distinguishing characteristic or quality, especially or one's personal nature

A reminder about capital letters:

- You should use a capital letter:
 - To start a sentence
- There are no exceptions to this rule!
- In titles (unless minor words like "and" or "of")

Great Expectations, Pygmalion, Frankenstein

- For proper nouns and place names
- Miss Havisham; Victor Frankenstein, Professor Henry Higgins, Eliza Doolittle, London, the Arctic (North Pole)
- Acronyms
- BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), UFO (Unidentified Flying Object), USA (United States of America), WoW (World of Warcraft)
- Contractions
- When it is the first-person pronoun
- I, I'm (I am), I'll (I will), I'd (I would), I've (I have)

Hi-Fi (High Fidelity, Sci-Fi (Science Fiction)