

# Review of two screen adaptations of "great expectations" essay sample

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## **Review Of Two Screen Adaptations Of “ Great Expectations” Essay Sample**

David Lean’s production of Great Expectations was created in 1946 and was originally written by Charles Dickens in 1860. Later, in 1999, Julian Jarrold directed Tony Merchant’s dramatisation of Great Expectations. The openings of both films would appear to be similar, however in their own individual ways each opening is portraying its own powerful images to represent the novel. Camera work, lighting, setting, dialogue and sound effects are all applied to create the startlingly different effects in both adaptations of the novels.

David Lean’s 1946 adaptation would appear to be more of a horror-based narrative whereas Julian Jarrold’s utilises realism. In the period around 1946 horror entertainment was frequently used in films. Examples such as ‘ House of Dracula’ and ‘ House of Horrors’ may have reflected David Lean’s approach to his production of the novel. However later he was known for his epic films and ground- breaking cinematography.

The openings in both adaptations are very different due to the techniques each director has used. Both of the films openings are set in a churchyard yet travel there in very different ways. David Lean’s famous opening of the pan shot of Pip running across the marshes projects a powerful image. The contrast between the black and white colours is bleak yet striking. The gibbets tell us that this is a period drama, as we no longer use capital punishment.

Julian Jarrold has improvised a scene, which wasn't written by Charles Dickens to make the opening more exciting and heated. He has changed the meeting between Pip and Magwitch in the churchyard. Instead he fabricates a whole new scene of Magwitch chasing Pip through a cornfield. Jarrold uses slow motion effects on the camera and quick sharp shots to create suspense, tension and confusion. This would captivate the audience, as it is exciting and more dramatic than just a brisk meeting in a churchyard.

David Lean's pan shot of Pip running swiftly edits to a medium shot of Pip at the gravestone. The background of the church is larger than life which brings focus to Pip as he is juxtaposed against the overwhelmingly large church. Lean uses the technique of back projection, which emphasises Pip's vulnerability in this situation.

The sky is clouded and grey, which sets the mood of uneasiness and trouble. If it were to be blue skies and birds chirping the dramatic effect would not fit into the convention of the horror/thriller genre. The trees are black with no leaves, which makes them seem malevolent and as if they are threatening Pip. Their branches look like claw hands, which hint at sinister human connotations of capture and perhaps imprisonment, which also could be linked to Magwitch- ex convict.

The gravestones are jagged and look neglected which adds to the effect that is being accumulated. The sound effects are whistling of the wind, a strong creaking of the claw trees, which are fiercely being windswept across the frame.

Pip is by his mother's grave kneeling down when Magwitch closes in on him and Pip screams mercilessly. This has a mild insight into Pips character being caring and in a vulnerable state of mind as he is at his mother's grave.

The camera has a high angle shot of Magwitch to promote his power and authority whereas Pip is filmed from a low angle showing how defenceless he is compared to Magwitch. A dim lighting is projected across Magwitchs face, which creates a negative and dirty aura. In comparison, a white light being shone on to Pip's face to show his innocence as Magwitch interrogates him.

Magwitch has a deep, husky voice with a rough accent perhaps suggesting that he is working class and low in society. It could also suggest that he is evil and perhaps a convict. Pip has a high polite voice with received pronunciation, which adds to the strong stereotypical contrast of the innocence of Pip and the corrupt nature of Magwitch.

Pip is dressed well in a scarf and jacket and looks clean. His hair is blonde and tidy so he doesn't look homeless or unkempt. When Magwitch speaks to him Pip doesn't freeze, this shows Pip's naïve nature. He answers him politely and talks clearly, answering him fully with no nervousness coming through in his voice.

Magwitch however is dressed in dark clothes and many of the camera shots are focused on his chains as he tips Pip upside down. The emphasis on the chains indicates to the audience that he may be dangerous and could be a danger to young Pip. In addition he may have escaped from somewhere as if he were animal to be locked up. After Pip and Magwitch depart, Pip runs

home and the same shot is repeated as in the opening of Pip running across the marshes past the gallows, which is a good effect.

Jarrold's approach is quite different. The first shot shows Pip's head ducking up from a cornfield with a terrified expression and hawk like eyes. Then edits to a panning shot as Pip runs through the cornfields. The camera is chasing Pip from the view of Magwitch as he sees Pip running from him, which is very effective. Jarrold uses different views of shots to create maximum effect.

Quick camera angle changes, sharp movements and slow motion are all important to keep the audience attentive and in suspense. Pip is still running fast and the audience does not get a glimpse of Magwitch, which is more effective because it creates tension and mystery as to whom or what is chasing Pip. The only focus the audience sees is the chains around Magwitches ankles, which increases the tension profoundly as chains signify danger, criminals and slavery. Pip falls down and backs up against a gravestone, which shows his terror and apprehension of Magwitches approach on him.

In Jarrold's interpretation, Pip is scruffy and messy. As Pip is on the ground the audience sees a big close up of Magwitch who looks dirty and greasy as his eyes bore into Pip. Magwitch is filmed at a higher shot than Pip this shows his superiority over him and his control of the situation. He has a shaved head as if he was a prisoner and he breathes heavily and looks aggressive. His body language is threatening and angry as he stands tall and the camera pans from his feet to his head. Again suspense is being

accumulated as we wait to see what his face looks like. The darkness of this face is striking in contrast of his white eyes

The background of the church is huge and much more welcoming than the 1946 version. The sky is grey, dull and lifeless as he runs away from Magwitch. As he draws closer to his safe home the sky becomes orange like a sunset, which shows he is out of danger and drawing towards safety. The orange and yellow colours of the scene are more positive and welcoming and suggest that Pip is out of danger.

The colours are used to portray safety and sanctuary for Pip providing more warmth and calmness that make the opening less horror based and more realistic than the gothic horror of David Lean's production. However the hitchcockian birds are still flying fiercely and squawking against the sky to warn the audience that Pip may still be in danger.

Julian Jarrold may have chosen to make the opening more realistic as

his other productions have been crime series such as Cracker, which are very realistic. Also influencing him to include the hand held camera effect of Magwitch chasing Pip through the graveyard was the success of the Blair Witch Project.

Both films I think are family orientated, something to be viewed around Christmas in the late afternoon. However in both films there are elements of terror, which may frighten younger viewers, such as the chasing and grabbing round the throat especially in the 1946 adaptation. For both of the

productions I think the films are suitable for children of eight years and upwards with a PG rating as its violence could disturb children without their parents.

In both adaptations the overall message relies upon many stereotypes. One clear example is that a convict would be a bad person not a kind loving man. The strong contrasts made between Magwitch and Pip are created in so many different ways by the use of clothing, lighting, camera shots and dialogue. However all these strong differences between the two characters makes it a little too clichéd to be realistic.

Both openings are very effective in creating an atmosphere of fear and mystery. In both films each opening would make a viewer want to watch more, particularly in the 1999 film when you cannot see the face of Magwitch just his chained ankles, which fits the convention of horror and mystery.

The 1946 film brings the novel to life magically. The repetitive shots work really well and the contrasted lighting on Pip and Magwitch create a great atmosphere. The 1999 film improvises the book and creates a different storyline, which has the same functions.

Both film adaptations whether they are 53 years apart or not, both illustrate similar messages of stereotypes, significant roles and emotions of the two characters.