

Great expectations motif

Literature



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Throughout time society as a whole has greatly changed and developed to what it is now. One major part of the society is the social class structure. In Charles Dickens' novel, *Great Expectations*, Dickens expresses his beliefs on that structure in many ways. Since Dickens wrote the novel during the Victorian Era it reflects and evaluates the beliefs and values of the time. For the most part one's place in the social order was based on wealth and the reputation of one's relations.

In general, the members of the higher class were unhappy and those in the lower class were joyful. He does this to show that wealth isn't everything. He continues to display that idea throughout the book and he displays its effects on various aspects of life. Dickens uses the motif of hands, which defines certain characteristics of people, to represent the effects of social class on the lives of many throughout the book because he holds a negative view on the social class system.

The hands motif is used as a symbol to portray the relationships between the members of different classes. For starters, upon Pip and Estella's first meeting Estella comments on Pip's hands and Pip reads deeply into it, "And what coarse hands he has! '...I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before, but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair" (Dickens 59). From Pip's low class viewpoint he had never seen hands as an important aspect of himself, however, because of Estella's high class upbringing she has grown to notice every sign of peasantry.

Next, after Pip's departure to London, Joe came to visit him and since Pip was now of a higher class Joe and Pip formally shook hands (Dickens 219).

Hence Pip and Joe's once strong and loving relationship has now changed because Pip is now a gentleman and since Joe is a mere commoner, they have less in common and they don't understand each other as they had in the past. Additionally, upon learning that Drummle is on friendly terms with Estella he goes to confront her and she states that she is marrying him because of his wealth and social status (Dickens 363).

During the occurrence Dickens uses the hands motif several times to signify that since Drummle has a higher class than Pip, Estella has chosen him and Pip and Estella's relationship is to come to an end. Thus, the hands motif is a clear representation of the effects of the class system of society on not only relationships but on other aspects regarding the treatment of members in different social groups. The motif of hands also illustrates the respect or lack of respect among characters that are distinctly separate in society.

First, after Pip informs Miss Havisham of his future wealth, " She stretched out her hand, and I went down on my knee and put it to my lips" (Dickens 158). Although Pip's rank in society has now increased he is still below Miss Havisham and acts accordingly by showing her respect. Secondly, when word gets out of Pip's newfound riches Pumblechook suddenly begins to act extremely kindly towards Pip and continues to ask permission of Pip to shake his hand (Dickens 156).

This displays how much money and social rank have an effect on the amount of respect someone gives a person because Pumblechook now treats Pip better than before, when he was poor and had nothing to offer him. Thirdly, when Pip has lost his fortunes he returns home but first sees Pumblechook

who now acts in a completely different way than upon their aforementioned meeting and now he smugly shakes hands with Pip as if he knew that the day would come (Dickens 479).

Now that Pip no longer has money and isn't in a higher class than Pumblechook, he treats Pip poorly and without any respect and he even acts as though he is Pip's superior. Overall, respect is depicted in the book by the hands motif which shows how one's social class affects life and consequently the customs involved in one's lifestyle. Significant custom differences amid different classes are additionally represented by the hands motif.

For example, upon Wemmick and Pip's first meeting, "I extended my hand and Mr. Wemmick at first looked as if he thought I wanted something" (Dickens 171) Since Pip is still unaccustomed to his new lifestyle he doesn't realize that people of Wemmick's standing don't do everything the way people did at his old village. Also, when Herbert and Pip are first conversing over dinner, Herbert corrects many of Pip's poor table manners so that he knows the proper forms of fine dining in their society (Page 177). The differences between lower and higher classes include very small aspects of dining and Pip is just beginning to learn all the new rules as he is thrust into a new world which he soon regrets joining.

In addition, when Mr. Jaggers invites Pip and his friends to dinner Pip learns that he washes his hands very frequently (Page 210). Mr. Jaggers continuously washes his hands to cleanse himself of the dirt of the world around him as he believes that many of the people around him, which are in lower classes, aren't clean. In conclusion, social class, symbolized by the

motif of hands, influences the customs of a person and people close to that person.

Overall, it is clear that the hands motif is a portrayal of the impact of the social class system, of the time, on the lives of not only Pip, but many other important characters and Dickens did this because he disagreed with the ideas and values behind the social class system. Dickens expressed that impact through hands because hands show people for whom they are and social classes can easily be shown by ones hands. Nearly the entire plot of the novel is the journey that Pip takes from his home and his eventual realization that being rich isn't all that it seems to be.

At the beginning he dreamed of being a wealthy gentleman that was happy beyond belief, however, he ultimately recognizes the fact that becoming a gentleman won't make him happy but rather the opposite, miserable. Dickens clearly saw the system as corrupt as he gave numerous other examples throughout the book of wealthy people being miserable and peasants finding happiness in the simplest of things. The book incorporates many life lessons but perhaps one of the most important is that life is what one makes it to be, no matter what your social status may be.