

Charles Dickens's "great expectations" and the monsters

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We would always look in the darkest places for monsters: under the bed, in the closet, out in the woods where light could never penetrate the trees. We would always let our imagination wander to depict creatures that replicated hairy beasts with angry fangs and cat-like eyes whose pupils never enlarged to show their good in every evil. We would always imagine monsters to be dark, scary, manipulative, and dangerous, but what if the very monsters we pictured were only replicas of us? What if the same monsters we imagined were so familiar to us because we knew that maybe in a different world, they might just be us? One of the revolving yet underlying themes in the novel *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens explores the ideas of how essentially, humans make monsters; they don't just form on their own. The evil potential in almost every circumstance that can take away from the moral goodness of a character is what can cause the monster-like ideas that people often associates beasts with, such as large, dark, angry, ambitious, and determined. Many of these qualities are also human-like, just not associated negatively when used in a good way. One of the "monstrous" themes that the novel discusses is the idea of wealth-driven ambition, which can be seen through the Pip's character. As readers experience how Pip grows up and learns the mistakes he made in his early life, Dickens relates to the readers that while ambition is inherently good, it has the potential to be bad depending on the extent someone will go to achieve their goals, and what goals drive certain ambitions.

People's ambitions differ based on different goals that they have. Success to one person can mean something different to another. In *Great Expectations*, there's a clear difference between the goals and meanings of Joe's life and

Pip's life, as highlighted at the end of Chapter 9. After Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook arrange for Pip to play at Mrs. Havisham's house in hopes of Pip's rise in social status, Pip returns home and is overwhelmed by the difference in his life and Mrs. Havisham's life. When he tells Joe his feelings about his experience, Joe advises Pip to stay within his own social class and tells him that honesty will pave a successful path. Pip however, overwhelmed with the extravagance of the other life, falls "asleep recalling what [he] "used to do" when [he] was at Mrs. Havisham's; as though [he] had been there for weeks or months, instead of hours; and as though it were quite an old subject of remembrance, instead of one that had only arisen that day" (131). It is seen within the first few chapters that although the idea of Pip going to Mrs. Havisham's wasn't originally Pip's idea, but instead Mrs. Joe's and Pumblechook's idea, Pip showed signs of showing the same desire as his sister and Pumblechook had, which was a different class and essentially, a different way of life. Dickens shows us that a decision between a morally good yet intangible goal against a goal worth monetary value and stature is a hard one to make, and Pip is presented with this option from Joe in this chapter. Although that it is a choice to make, Pip clearly doesn't know it yet, as something monetary and tangible at first glance seems to outweigh anything intangible. While Pip's ambition drove him to become better, his choice of becoming better in terms of wealth versus his choice of becoming a better character had caused his ambition to make a monster out of his desire: the rise to a higher status and wealth.

By narrating the story of his own life, Pip shows us that by choosing what his goals were and his desire to achieve them, he sacrificed moral goodness and generosity in hopes of gaining wealth. Pip spends long hours at the Satis house playing with Mrs. Havisham and Estella to the point where Pip begins to fall in love with Estella and her rude, selfish personality. While Pip seems infatuated with the girl and longs to spend his time with her, readers can't help but question whether or not Pip's "love" for Estella was real and the cause of his desire to stay at Satis house, or if it was simply him loving her status and his goals to reach it. Pip's "great expectation" was rising in class to marry Estella, caused by his assumption that Mrs. Havisham was the benefactor of a large amount of money he received. However, once Pip finds out that his benefactor was not Mrs. Havisham but instead a convict that he had rescued years ago named Magwitch who had showed up at Pip's place while he was in London, it is questioned if Pip actually helps him out of his own goodness or if he helped him because he felt indebted to him and the fortune he received. When he was young, Pip had helped Magwitch out of his own moral goodness, expecting nothing in return. After his time in London, at the Satis House, and away from family, however, Pip's moral drive that was not associated with wealth seemed to slowly go away, as he stopped visiting family to the point where his family stopped expecting him. Pip's rise in social class had changed him so much to the point that he even began to feel awkward around Joe, who was always there for him. During one meeting, Joe tells Pip, "Life is made of ever so many partings welded together, as I may say, and one man's a blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith, and one's a goldsmith, and one's a coppersmith. Divisions among such must come, and

must be met as they come" (746). As Joe hinted, Pip's ambition had driven him so far that even his love for Joe couldn't hide the awkwardness and differences he felt between them. If one's ambition is so strong that it takes away from other characteristics, it may as well be deemed "monstrous," as monsters are known to take away and be greedy. Monstrous yet humane characteristics are also greedy and it's our choices to act upon the greed of our desire. In the novel, Pip's ambition won.

Through Pip's life, Dickens had showed us that monsters are in every one of us, and it's our choices that bring them out. It's always a battle between one thing and another every single day that we live, and these choices not only shape us but the monsters we breed, whether it may be jealousy, love, ambition, and even self-consciousness. It's a perfect balance between the monstrous forces and their "good" counterparts that keep the monsters down and keep us happy at the same time, because one can only win at another's loss. Readers learn that while jealousy is powerful, so is acceptance, and jealousy is the monster that can overrule. The same thing goes for hate, ambition, and every other characteristic that we host. It's a matter of choosing carefully and thinking before we speak and act that allows us to beat the monsters that reside in our own being.