

Great expectations – analyse how dickens maintains suspense in chapter 39 essay S...

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'Great Expectations' is a novel written by Charles Dickens. First published in weekly instalments for a magazine that was losing readers, called 'All Year Round', it was soon fully released in 1851 after the magazine gained more notability. The novel also seems to be semi auto-biographical, as Dickens own personal experiences of the world are portrayed in the character 'Pip'. The character Magwitch, an escaped convict was also influenced by Dickens' own family, as his father was sent to prison for debt. From 1776 – 1857, 'Hulks' were prison ships used to transport prisoners to Australia. Magwitch was on a Hulk, but Dickens father was not. Dickens own county, Kent, inspired the Marshes and location for the beginning of the novel. The Victorian Times was period where London was unhealthy, people were poor, depressed and social classes was strict.

'Great Expectations' featured these type of people, such as Miss Havisham who lived in a dirty mansion and who was depressed. Child exploitation and abuse was also prominent in this period and characters such as Pip, were abused by his own older sister. 'Great Expectations' is a novel filled with suspense, tension and a slight of horror, which audiences in the Victorian period enjoyed. So far, in Chapter 39, Pip has become a gentleman. His sister, Mrs Joe, raised him in a child abuse like-way. Even her husband, Joe, is scared of her. She later gets attacked, and as soon as Pip is told by Mr Jaggers that he is to be a gentleman, his self-importance raises.

Throughout Chapter 39, Dickens has used various techniques to establish full suspense. Dickens uses mainly complex sentences to add as much description as possible. It helps release lots of detail all in one go, which

maintains the tension within the reader. An example of his sentence is, “ The sound was curiously flawed by the wind; and I was listening, and thinking how the wind assailed and tore it, when I heard a footstep on the stair”. Clearly after each comma, more detail is added to maintain a tensed atmosphere.

Dickens uses the weather to create an atmosphere, which also reflects Pip’s feelings. An example is, “ rage of wind and rush of rain”. This creates the moody atmosphere, as well as revealing what is going on in his mind. The weather atmosphere suggests that he is scared, confused and those feelings are rushing around in his mind. Dickens uses weather to keep us in the spooky and confused chapter. Another example is, “ stormy and wet, stormy and wet”. This, once again sets the scene and reveals that Pip is feeling sad, anxious and moody.

Alliteration is also used to build suspense, as Dickens uses “ wretched weather” to describe the atmosphere. Repetition is another writing technique used to create the spooky feeling around the setting. Dickens describes the street as “ mud, mud, mud”, the repetition helps create the suspense. The heavy use of adjectives is what keeps the scary atmosphere and reader in suspense. Dickens describes a lighthouse as “ storm beaten”, the rain as “ red-hot” and the streetlamps as “ shudder-ing”. Dickens also uses metaphors, which help add suspense and enforce the sentence structure. An example used in Chapter 39 include, “ A vast heavy veil had been driving over London”. Personification is another powerful technique used in Chapter 39, for example, Dickens uses, “ So furious had been the gusts”, which is

describing the gusts as 'furious'. The effect of this is to add more emotion to the atmosphere. Another word technique Dickens uses is Similies, an example is, " Like discharges of cannon", which helps the reader understand further what Dickens is writing about.

Visual images play a big role in making Chapter 39 stand out and seem more scary. Dickens uses sea imagery, such as, " Breakings of a sea", " Storm-beaten light-house" and " Voyager by the sea". These are all references to the sea, that remind us of Magwitch, who escaped from a Hulk. The mention of " shipwreck and death", creates a horror feeling, In which Victorian readers loved. They could all be clues to tell the reader that Magwitch is on his way to Pip's home. It all creates suspense and mystery, and readers would be engaged in to the chapter. As well as visual images, colour adjectives help create colour imagery. Dickens uses, " Black windows" and " Red-hot splashes in the rain". Readers can visualise these images in their mind, and this creates suspense. Dickens also makes little references to other parts of the novel and characters, which readers can visualise. The word " veil" is used as a metaphor, but it could also be to describe Miss Havisham, who wears a veil. Dickens then gives Magwitch the action of, " Holding out both his hands to me", which could be a reference to the first chapter, where Magwitch holds out his hands to beg for food.

In addition to imagery, Dickens uses the words that are related to light and dark, to help add more effect and tension. Examples of light and dark used are, " The staircase lamps were blown out" and " Shaded my face". Dickens goes on to use, " I stood with my lamp... he came alowly within its light".

Even these little techniques used by Dickens has an effect to the reader. Similarly with imagery, readers can visualise these light and dark effects in their mind.

Chapter 39 has been set in Pip's home, on a stormy and wet London night. He also feels, " dispirited and anxious". Therefore, this gloomy atmosphere makes Pip's home feel haunted and eerire. The reader could predict that danger is heading towards his home. Dickens probably chose to use Pip's home as the location because crime and danger can escalate, with no one knowing you're in trouble. A home location is also private, and people don't necessary know what happens there. This is why Magwitch enters in his home.

The reader can sense the tension between Pip, who is a gentleman and Magwitch, a lower class person. Pip sees Magwitch's " rough outer coat" and " iron-grey hair". Pip knows that this lower class man looks dangerous and Pip also doesn't like lower class people interfering with him. Pip acts as if he is snobbish, when he says, " I hope you have shown your gratitude by mending your way of life". Pip looks at Magwitch " tentively", as he is scared that he might steal something. The ways they talk are also different, with Pip talking in a gentleman like-way and Magwitch talking in a low class way. An example of Magwitch's dialogue is, " Might a mere warmint ask whose property?" As two different social classes mix, the richer people tend to show arrogance, and this is is the case with Pip and Magwitch.

Dickens has carefully constructed the chapter to make sure readers would read on. To do this, at the beginning, Dickens sets the scene with, “ It was wretched weather; stormy and wet, stormy and wet”. As the scene unravels slowly with, “ Violent blasts of rain” and “ Smoke came rolling down the chimney”, the audience can feel the tension. As the churches struck eleven o’clock, Pip, “ heard a footstep on the stair”. An unknown footstep creates the beginning of a tense moment of the chapter. As soon as Pip starts talking to the unknown man, who is Magwitch, the dialogue between them is quick and short. This creates tension for the reader, as well as the two characters. Chapter 39 has also been positioned near the center of the novel, because this is the important part of Pip’s life, where he finds out that Magwitch is his benefactor.

It can be concluded that Dickens has effectively built up suspense throughout the chapter with his own style and skill of writing. His word techniques have been carefully crafted into his complex sentences. The chapter slowly releases more and more detail out to help keep the reader engaged, which maintains the suspense. My favourite and tense part of the chapter is when Pip hears the unknown footstep, because Dickens has built up the atmosphere in the previous paragraph, and a unknown footstep keeps me in a tense mood. To conclude, ‘ Great Expectations’ is a powerful, and yet, unique novel which has been carefully thought-out to attract readers.