

Motif of sexuality in angela's ashes essay



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In the two notable novels, *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, motif of sexuality play a significant role in successfully illustrating the protagonists' affectionate desire towards characters of the opposite sex - also acting as an indicator of the protagonists' maturation to adulthood. Furthermore, as the novels progress, through the voyeuristic experiences, the characters gain a deeper sense of sexual consciousness, either covertly or overtly, showing development in both physical and mental growth in characters, which eventually start to act as a galvanizing force that changes their lives.

This motif shifts rapidly throughout the novels; briefly mentioned at the beginning as the characters themselves start to mature and develop, until the very end of the novel, which to Frank, sexuality becomes a force that eventually allows him to understand the deaths of immortal souls and learn to confess and relieve his sins and guilt, whereas to Pip, sexuality acts as a force that advances his social status. Nevertheless, the highlight and pinnacle points in these two novels are the engagement of the characters' sexual desires.

In search for this engagement, both McCourt and Dickens convey voyeurism to depict the mental growth and maturation of the protagonists, Frank and Pip from *Angela's Ashes* and *Great Expectations* respectively. In *Angela's Ashes*, voyeurism or 'excitement' as Frank calls it, plays a significant role in portraying his mental growth and maturation from adolescence to adulthood.

"[...] when I see them in my mind I'm tempted and I climb to the very top of the castle where once there was a tower and there in full view of Ireland I

interfere with myself and spurt all over Carrigo-gunnel and fields beyond.

This quote which describes Frank's experience of masturbation on top of the hills was a form of escapism for Frank, illustrating his voyeuristic whims and fancies. The act of masturbation is notable here, because it is in the days of Frank's childhood that priests sermonized about the sins of masturbation and sex. His maturation is also marked by how he somewhat embraces his natural sexual impulses, instead of feeling burdened by it.

Another quote from this novel illustrating Frank's voyeuristic thoughts is when Frank reads a sex manual written by Lin Yutang. "[...] I wake up in a state of excitement with something hot and sticky pumping out of me oh God my male organ of copulation sticking out a mile people in the park giving me curious looks. " It is then he realizes his father has lied to him for years about the " Angel on the Seventh Step". This quote also frames the ' excitement' Frank had while sleeping in the park, signifying his first experience of a nocturnal emission.

These exaggerated descriptions such as, ' pumping out' and ' sticking out a mile' suggest a humorous tone in this passage, creating a jovial mood throughout.

Frank's first experience of nocturnal emission and his dreams of virgin martyrs signify the physical maturation that he is going through at this stage of the novel, especially after having discovered the truths his father hid from him. Later on in the book, from these voyeuristic experiences, Frank eventually learns about sex and his desires - and more importantly, he no longer feels guilty about them.

By the use of direct, exaggerated and colloquial diction, Frank McCourt overtly expresses the significance of lustful thoughts. However, in a stark contrast to Angela's Ashes, the motif of sexuality is addressed in a more subtle and covert manner in the Great Expectations. "[...] directed my attention to Estella's beauty, and made me notice it the more by trying her jewels on Estella's breast and hair. " This quote expresses sexuality in disguise, but only weakly, for the sexual undertone is still discernible.

Quite obviously this act of Miss Havinsham was a pretentious showcase of Estella's beauty and valuable assets, a plausible part of her plan to raise Estella as a weapon against men and to " break their hearts". Pip becomes a victim of this male torment, and wishes to marry Estella. Sexuality is often in the form of aestheticism and physical attraction in the novel, like the above quote has shown. Frigid, cynical and manipulative, Estella is a sexual object of Miss Havinsham's creation, designed both to appeal and to taunt men.

The following quote also effectively portrays the sexual desires of characters.

" That I got them off, closed with her, threw her down, and got them over her; that I dragged the great cloth from the table for the same purpose, and with it dragged down the heap of rottenness in the midst, and all the ugly things that sheltered there; that we were on the ground struggling like desperate enemies, and that the closer I covered her, the more wildly she shrieked and tried to free herself; that this occurred I knew through the result, but not through anything I felt, or thought, or knew I did. This scene vividly describes Miss Havisham's wedding dress striking ablaze, and how Pip removed his clothes and enclosed her body with his in a frantic attempt to put out the fire. There are allusions to sexuality, with their tumble on the

ground and the closeness of their bodies. More significantly, a link between sexuality and death manifests here, as Miss Havisham dies after this incident, and the fact that it was her wedding dress that was on fire symbolizes her non-existent marriage going down in flames.

In a scene that speaks volumes of symbolism, the author conveys another aspect pivotal to the theme: the role of sexuality in the maturation of the main character, and the use of sexuality linked to death, to explore the perils of adulthood. Throughout both novels, sexuality acts as a galvanizing force that affects the maturity of the characters' perspectives and understandings, redirecting the characters' ambition and their objectives.