

**Dept. of English**

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**3<sup>rd</sup> Year Novel**

## **The prevailing attitudes that characterized the Victorian age**

The Victorian Era, in which Brontë composed *Wuthering Heights*, receives its name from the reign of Queen Victoria of England. The era was a great age of the English novel, which was the ideal form to describe contemporary life and to entertain the middle class. Emily, born in 1818, lived in a household in the countryside in Yorkshire, locates her fiction in the worlds she knows personally. In addition, she makes the novel even more personal by reflecting her own life and experiences in both characters and action of *Wuthering Heights*. In fact, many characters in the novel grow up motherless, reflecting Emily's own childhood, as her mother died when Emily was three years old .

And wheedle my father out of all he has; only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan. And take that! I hope he'll kick out your brains!" (Brontë 39). Hindley mistreats Heathcliff as he is aware of having power over the Mr. Earnshaw's non natural-born son. As the punishment for not obeying the Hindley's will, both Catherine and Heathcliff are being taken into the custody. Hindley "refuses him the familial spaces of *Wuthering Heights*, and asserts his power to render the younger boy homeless" (Steinitz). According to Catherine ,

"Hindley calls him a vagabond, and won't let him sit with us, nor eat with us anymore, and, he and I must not play together, and threatens, to turn him out of the house if we break his orders" (Brontë 21.)

As the result of this treatment, Heathcliff grows up to be the most selfish person in the family. He was hateful, spiteful and very vengeful. As Hindley torments Heathcliff, Heathcliff later torments Hareton. He forces him to work in the house as a common servant, belittles him, and psychologically abuses by constantly badgering him. Heathcliff becomes an uncaring parent enacting a part of his revenge. He takes revenge on Hareton by ensuring that the boy is raised in ignorance, with loutish

manners, so that he will never escape his situation. Heathcliff tries to make Heraton's childhood at least as miserable as his own, wishing that Heraton would become someone alike him; "And we'll see if one tree

Dickens' *Great Expectations* is one of several reflective books of Victorian age. It is a very successful representative of its own time. Written in 1860 and following the story of Pip from childhood to adulthood, the book represents the common Victorian elements like social class difference, industrialization, Victorian houses, Victorian values and women.

At the very beginning of the book, we encounter with a typical low-class family. They live in a village among marshes. Mr. Joe is a blacksmith and his wife (the sister of Pip) is a typical Victorian low-class housewife. She sinks under the household duties and always complains about not being able to take off her apron (chapter 1-2). Because of her harsh duties, she is always frustrated and often beats Pip. Then, we encounter with high-class, well-dressed, well-dancing women like Miss Havisham and Estella through the onwards of the book.

These two different families are also the first signals of the existence of social classes in the society. On the one hand, Gargery family is a poor, uneducated, living in a village. On the other hand, Miss Havisham lives in a mansion called Satis House. The Pockets' house is full of servants. Estella is a young lady who dances well and educated abroad. Also the other women in Pip's snobbish life in London represent the typical high-class Victorian women. Having seen the two different lives in early years of his life, Pip wants to shift to the upper class. He expects to become a 'gentleman' who has all the values appreciated by the society in order to have Estella and an upper class lifestyle.

Pip's early impressions about London remind us the effects of Industrial Revolution and immigration. When he comes to London, he is amazed and displeased with the unbelievable crowd (resulting from immigration for job) and awful smell (coming from sewage due to the factories): 'I was scared by the intensity of London. I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty.'(pg. 138) The gloomy streets of Smithfield disturb him.

It is easy to see Victorian architecture and Victorian houses in the book. Satis House, Wemmick's house (like a castle), and other ornamented houses tell us the taste of architecture of those days.

It is very sad not to see some of important themes of Victorian era like child labor, prostitution, colonialism etc. in *Great Expectations*. But, Dickens uses colonialism in *Great Expectations* as a narrative device. 'A transported convict exactly meets the need for a benefactor who can make a substantial fortune yet who has to remain anonymous, and of whom Pip will eventually be ashamed. The capital law against returning from transportation sharpens the impact of the later chapters, when Pip sheds his pretensions as well as his wealth.' Thus Dickens, like so many Victorian authors who used the colonies as places to transfer burned-out characters or from which to retrieve characters, uses this aspect of colonialism as the dramatic cornerstone for his novel.' (Jonah Raskin in *The Mythology of Imperialism* (New York:Random House,1971)((

In other words, colonialism is used not as a theme but a narrative device in *Great Expectations*. Also, Dickens used the other themes mentioned above in his other works. For example, *Oliver Twist* – child labor, destitution etc.