

The Impact of School and Social Environment on the Characters in the Novel “Great Expectations” by Charles Dickens

Niyazova Mokhichehra Xayatovna

PhD, associate professor of English Literary and Translation Studies, BSU

Kushaeva Faridabonu Afzal kizi

Master Student of Bukhara State University

Abstract: This article dealt with Charles Dickens's "Great Expectations" is a profound exploration of the indelible impact that educational institutions and social environments exert on the lives and psyches of individuals. Through the novel's richly drawn characters, Dickens illuminates the intricate interplay between the forces of socialization and personal growth, shedding light on the enduring themes of identity formation, social mobility, and the quest for self-actualization.

Keywords: central protagonist, social environment, power dynamics, emotional manipulation, emotional paralysis, personal growth.



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Pip, the novel's central protagonist, serves as a poignant example of the profound influence that educational institutions and social environments can wield on an individual's trajectory. His journey from a guileless young man deeply rooted in his working-class origins to a disillusioned gentleman grappling with the consequences of his aspirations is a testament to the transformative power of societal forces.

In his formative years, Pip's primary educational environment is the humble forge of his brother-in-law, Joe Gargery. Here, he is nurtured in an atmosphere of authenticity, hard work, and practical skill development, shielded from the corrupting influences of wealth and privilege [1]. However, his encounter with the eccentric Miss Havisham and her adopted daughter, Estella, ignites within him a burning desire to transcend his modest circumstances and attain the refinement and status associated with the upper echelons of society.

Pip's subsequent enrollment at the illustrious tutelage of Matthew Pocket and his immersion in the rarefied circles of the gentry mark a pivotal shift in his educational and social environment. Surrounded by the trappings of wealth and the superficial pursuits of the aristocracy, Pip's moral compass begins to erode, and his once-empathetic nature is gradually supplanted by a fixation on material success and societal acceptance.

Dickens masterfully depicts the corrupting influence of Pip's new social milieu, as he rejects the genuine affection of those closest to him, such as Joe and Biddy, in favor of the hollow accolades and social graces of the upper classes. The novel suggests that the institutions and environments in which individuals are immersed can profoundly shape their values, priorities, and sense of self, often at the expense of authenticity and personal fulfillment [2].

Estella's character serves as a poignant illustration of the devastating impact that toxic social environments and distorted forms of socialization can have on an individual's emotional development and capacity for genuine human connection. Raised by the embittered Miss Havisham, Estella's upbringing is marked by emotional manipulation, calculated cruelty, and a profound disconnection from her authentic self.

From a young age, Estella's educational and social environment is shaped by Miss Havisham's obsession with exacting revenge on the male gender. Her training and socialization prioritize the cultivation of superficial accomplishments and the suppression of authentic emotional expression, effectively denying her the opportunity for true self-discovery and personal growth.

Estella's interactions with Pip, characterized by deliberate cruelty and the exploitation of his affections, reflect the distorted power dynamics and emotional detachment fostered by her warped upbringing. The novel suggests that the environments and social influences to which individuals are exposed can profoundly impact their ability to form healthy relationships, empathize with others, and embrace their innate humanity.

Moreover, Dickens's portrayal of Estella's ultimate unhappiness within the confines of her marriage to the brutish Bentley Drummle serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring consequences of sacrificing authentic connection for the sake of societal conformity. The toxic social environment cultivated by Miss Havisham effectively stunted Estella's emotional growth and denied her the opportunity to break free from the cycle of bitterness and emotional exploitation.

Miss Havisham's character stands as a haunting embodiment of the profound impact that emotional trauma and social isolation can exert on an individual's psyche. Frozen in time and trapped within the dilapidated grandeur of Satis House, Miss Havisham's emotional paralysis and inability to move beyond her fateful jilting on her wedding day reflect the devastating consequences of unresolved grief and a lack of meaningful human connection. Dickens's portrayal of Miss Havisham's arrested development and emotional stagnation serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of succumbing to bitterness and the importance of resilience and personal growth in the face of adversity. The novel suggests that without a supportive social environment and the nurturing influence of genuine human connection, individuals can become trapped in their own emotional prisons, unable to heal and embrace the fullness of their humanity [3].

In essence, "Great Expectations" stands as a literary masterpiece that not only reflects the societal ills and educational failings of its time but also offers a profound commentary on the universal human condition. Dickens's insights into the impact of educational institutions and social environments on individuals and societies have left an indelible mark on literary discourse and continue to inspire critical examination of systemic inequalities, the relentless pursuit of personal growth, and the enduring quest for self-actualization in the face of formidable societal forces.

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