

# THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES AS REVEALED IN DICKENS' *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

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## Abstract

A work of literature cannot be separated from its time and place, in which it is made. Therefore, to get a vivid understanding of a literary work, some certain techniques are needed. One of them is by breaking down the social and cultural layers of the work. It can also be applied in Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*. By breaking down and analyzing its social and cultural layers, it can be found that the novel reflects the portrait of Industrial Revolution era and its consequences such as dissolution of family units, illness, poverty, mutual exploitation, human passions, expectations, and selfishness as well.

**Keyword:** Industrial Revolution, society, culture, *zeitgeist*, social and cultural layers

## INTRODUCTION

For obtaining further understanding, a work of literature must be read in broader context. It means that poetry; prose or novel could be satisfactorily appreciated and analyzed if they are put into a place where society and culture are involved. As stated by Greibstein in Damono (1984: 4) that every work of literature forms a result of complicated mutual effects of social and cultural factors, and the work of literature itself contains a complicated cultural object.

Time has a spiritual unity, a *zeitgeist*. That is why literary works are produced in various forms of writing styles, themes, settings, and etc, based on the social and cultural background of the prevailing era. The works of Jane Austen, for example, which highlights feeling and spontaneity, presents the characteristics of romanticism period. Stephen (1986: 165) says "Jane Austen admires love, generosity and compassion. She also admires common sense. Thus, she does not object to people marrying for love-provided there is enough money in the marriage to help love along the way". It is quite

different from Victorian time that centralizes morality, critique and seriousness, as we can see from Victorian Dickens's *Great Expectations*. Those characteristics come out as the social and cultural life effects of the prevailing era experienced by each author. *Great Expectations* is regarded as Dickens' masterpiece which profoundly serious in its psychological and sociological aspects. Referring to the title, the writer limits the scope into the latter aspect only, which also includes the cultural aspect in it.

## INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AT GLANCE

During the long reign of Queen Victoria, England reached her highest point of development as a world power. All the foundations of the great industrial revolution that turned England from a rural to industrial nation had already been laid although many were not yet evident. Great Britain began quite rapidly to reap the reward of its Industrial Revolution: wealth and modernization. At the same time, it began to pay the price. A huge explosion in population, the move from the land to cities, and

a society that at times seems turned upside down, all served to produce appalling overcrowding, dissolution of family units, illness, poverty and confusion. Phrases that are rather tired in the present age-pollution, safety at work, slum dwelling, sewage, were newly born and screaming for assistance in Dickens' day. The Victorian rose to occasion. They made very many mistakes, but they tackled the new age head-on and with great gusto. They failed to abolish poverty, hardship and inequality (Stephen: 173-174).

In line with this, Easton (1996: 568) also says that "there are only two possibilities are open when population increase. Either the food supply must be increased to feed the extra mouths, or the population must decrease through famine, war or other causes until the existing resources are sufficient to feed it". Besides, the surplus population leaves the rural sector of the economy and tries to make a living in the city, the problem of unemployment and underemployment is transferred to the city, unless there is a great increase in manufacture. If there is a marked improvement in agricultural methods, then it is possible that the problem of feeding the surplus population will be solved. But scientific agriculture uses fewer, not more laborers on the land. Industrialization therefore remains a necessity if there is not to be widespread urban unemployment.

Industrial Revolution also effects on creating a new market. The urban workers in British industry, though still extremely poor and ill paid, nevertheless earned a money wage higher than under the previous domestic system. Indeed, it was for the sake of improved income that they agreed to work in the factories. From the beginning they were able to buy some of the textiles they now made in the factories. As their wages rose during the century, they were

increasingly able to purchase some of the general products of the new industry. Thus industrialization tended to create its own new markets. Many of the entrepreneurs had acquired some wealth, but they knew better than anyone else how inefficiently their capital was employed. The large landowners grew wealthy from their ownership of rent, and many earned money also from the exploitation of the mineral deposits under their land, especially coal. Their money was available for profitable enterprises other than improving the yield from agriculture and increasing their holdings of land. British lords, though it was socially disreputable for them to enter directly into trading and industrial operations, could lend their money in such a way that it would yield a financial profit (Easton, 1996: 571-572).

### **Philosophical Thought in Industrial Revolution Era**

In recent historical research, including the history of art and literature, the transition from 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century is seen as an important threshold between the eras of modern age and modernism. Philosophy which considered man as material took a great part in this era. Ludwig Feuerbach, posted man as a concrete creature that was merely a mechanic process of material, while soul leapt from body. He did not deny that there was an experience of men's thinking spiritually, but it was considered only a subjective matter of daily life. In this case, material took control. Feuerbach materialism was passive and ignoring human's relationship. The limitation then caused Karl Marx presented his historic materialism. The problem was not only how to interpret the world, but how to change the world. Men's consciousness changed in accordance of their behavior as well as their individual ability in a certain society (Delius, 2000: 86-87)

## The Industrial Revolution and Its Consequences As Revealed in Dickens' *Great Expectations*

*Great Expectations* was written in 1861, where Queen Victoria reigned and there was a change that transforms people with peasant occupations and local markets into industrial society with worldwide connections. Therefore, it is not quite surprising if this novel has its own time spirit that represents social and cultural life of the Industrial Revolution era and its consequences. There are some cultural layers could be drawn from Dickens' *Great Expectations* as follows:

Firstly, the characters chosen by Dickens are orphans or those who do not remember their parents, and have no idea where they were born. They are Pip and Estella. Pip and Estella are children who lack of affection. They are not raised in an appropriate way. Pip is a boy who cannot even visualize the picture of his father and mother since he never met them. He is raised by his married sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, and lives in poverty.

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister- Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. And I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like were unreasonably derived from their tombstone. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "Also *Georgiana Wife of the Above*," I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was

freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine-who gave up trying to get a living exceedingly early in that universal struggle- I am indebted for a belief I religiously entertained that they had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence (Dickens, 2003: 17).

Meanwhile, Estella is adopted by Miss Havisham and lives in moderate circumstances, but she feels depressed since the way Miss Havisham treats her is weird. Miss Havisham adopted her not for the sake of love or mercy, but she uses her as a tool to take revenge. It is implied in the following quotation:

"Why should I call you mad," returned Estella, "I of all people? Does anyone live, who knows what a steady memory you have, half as well as I do? Who have sat on this same hearth on the little stool that is even now beside you there, learning your lessons and looking up into your face, when your face was strange and frightened me!" (Dickens, 2003: 332).

Industrialization makes people move from village to town and work as labors for better life. The inadequate housing and financial condition forced them to live together in the same place without any privacy at all. The condition caused free circumstances, which then developed into free sex among them. The children they produced had no either father or mother, or even both. The figure of Pip and Estella as orphans here is used to reveal Dickens' view on society.

Corruption, sin and decay as the result of industrial revolution have given bad effects to children. Their parents neglect them and it is a threat to a fabric of society as symbolized by the family unit.

Secondly, *Great Expectations* is essentially a novel about money. Money has become a sin and an evil. It is recognized in the right hands it can do good, but its power to corrupt is conveyed, if anything more strongly. The concept of money as a disease and an illness is developed strongly in almost appeared characters such as Miss Havisham, Abel Magwitch, Compeyson, and Pip's sister. Miss Havisham uses her wealth to cure the pain she suffered from for a long period. She manipulates Estella to reach her goal. She does not care whether it will hurt Estella's heart. Her miserable past of being betrayed and deceived by Compeyson makes her willing to sacrifice her adopted daughter. It can be seen through the following quotation:

Never had I seen such passionate eagerness as was joined to her utterance of these words. I could feel the muscles of the thin arm round my neck swell with the vehemence that possessed her.

"Hear me, Pip! I adopted her to be loved. I bred her and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!"

She said the word often enough, and there could be no doubt that she meant to say it; but if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love-despair-revenge-dire death-it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse.

"I'll tell you," said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, "what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world,

giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter-as I did!" (Dickens, 2003:264-265).

She raised Estella for bad a purpose. She makes Estella beautiful and well-educated, but at the same time she also creates Estella as a woman with no respect and desire to her opposite sex (Dickens, 2003: 330). Her beauty and intelligence are intentionally created to make gentlemen interested and fall in love with her. It will then become a ticket for Miss Havisham to break those guys' heart.

Abel Magwitch is a convict, but he is actually a nice man of good character. He is also uneducated. As a convict, he is not considered as a human and never respected by society. That is why he then bequeaths a large amount of money to Pip (Dickens, 2003: 348). He wants Pip to fulfill his wish. He uses Pip to make his dream come true. Compeyson, who breaks Miss Havisham's Heart, is also a gentleman of money oriented. He conspires with Arthur, Miss Havisham's half brother. He comes into Miss Havisham's life; wins her heart by pretending that he is truly in love with her, and takes her money out. Pip's sister is also a character who is manipulated by money. She asks her brother to accompany Miss Havisham's niece, Estella, and gets the payment as a result. She is forced to do it because she needs the money to support her family life.

It is clearly understood that Industrial Revolution means the succession of changes, which transformed England from a predominantly rural and agricultural country into a predominantly urban and manufacturing one. There were so many people leaved the rural sector of the economy and tried to make a living in city. It then made a great change in the way people behave. They used to put their orientation on power derived from heredity property such as

land. But now they put it on money. Money, as a result of modern concept (materialism) had changed the standard value of behavior and thought, which then caused a new culture on society. Feudalism has made people passive. They have no fighting spirit since they depend themselves on nature. Different from feudalism, capitalism produces tough and energetic people. The industrial atmosphere put them in a competitive situation. They fight each other to get the best income and to reach the most comfortable position in society. The characters discussed above show that the Industrial Revolution has made people culturally change. People need money to show their existence as well as their social status.

When money becomes one of the characters' expectations, the title of the novel also refers some "expectations" that are important not only for Pip (becoming a gentleman and well-educated person), but also in other senses for other characters. Estella expects to become a rich lady dominating humiliated admirers, but then she becomes enslaved to a brutal husband. Pip's friend, Herbert, dreams of becoming a powerful industrialist, but he has no capital until Pip provides it as implied in the quotations as follows:

"Then, Herbert, estimate; estimate it in round numbers, and put it down."

"What a fellow of resource you are!" my friend would reply, with admiration. "Really your business powers are very remarkable." I thought so too. I established with myself on these occasions the reputation of a first-rate man of business—prompt, deceive, energetic, clear, cool-headed. When I had got all my responsibilities down upon my list, I compared each with the bill, and ticked it off. My self-approval when I ticked an entry was quite a luxurious sensation. When I had no

more ticks to make, I folded all my bills up uniformly, docketed each on the back, and tied the whole into a symmetrical bundle. Then I did the same for Herbert (who modestly said he had not my administrative genius), and felt that I had brought his affairs into a focus for him (Dickens, 2003: 302-303)

Mis Havisham herself, and Magwitch also, live for expectations (in Estella and Pip), which are frustrated. In its largest implication, *Great Expectations* is concerned with the futility of a society in which individuals live by desires powered by illusion. Culture as ideas can be seen from the "expectations" performed by the characters of the novel. They create expectations to better their life in society. They reflect those positive motivation in one hand, industrialization may bring good effects for nation as England was successful of defeating France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and made it dominant. But on the other hand, it also brings some serious social effects to society.

Thirdly, *Great Expectations* starts off as a mystery story based round an inheritance. It is a fact that in Victorian time huge piles of rubbish could be sold at vast profit, sometimes for the valuables they contained, but sometimes also for building and other industrial work. This provides the novel with a marvelous symbol for wealth and money in corrupt society.

People have lost their faith and benevolence and the power of the charitable individual as the sole requirement if wrongs were to be righted; as the awareness grew that social pressures could and did outweigh the power of individual. Wealth and its effect on the individual are presented as a central theme of the novel. It shows how wealth corrupts individuals and is a totally false base on which to judge people. The characterization in the novel is notable. Miss Havisham for example,

who has sought to freeze time at the moment when her fiancé jilted her, is a classic and famous portrait, a symbol of decay. Compeyson is also another symbol of corruption. He runs a dirty business. He persuades people to invest their money to him and he uses stolen banknotes and writes false cheques. He is clever, but wicked and tricky (Dickens, 2003: 314-315). Industrialization and materialism have made people put their orientation on money. Instead of using their intelligence to gain profit in a positive way, they turn to be tricky regardless moral values which exist in society.

The symbol of prison in Dickens' *Great Expectations* can be analyzed as a cultural symptom that comes up as the result of Industrial Revolution. A tough competition has made people work harder. They are forced to extend their working hour to get the best and satisfying results, which then put them into boring daily routine. Prison is a symbol of routines that shackles people from a life which actually nicer and worth living. It is also a symbol of the waste of human potential. The tendency of people to imprison themselves, locking up their inner soul behind walls of hypocrisy and deceit, springs naturally from the physical image of the prison.

Lastly, it deals savagely with the new industrial philosophy that sought to treat people as mere numbers and machines, puts in a heartfelt plea for fantasy and the life of the imagination, and shows the crushing burden of mental and physical imprisonment inflicted on society by the Industrial Revolution. It is true that this novel marks a brave and determined attempt to come to terms with, and to make a decent human statement, on some of the worst atrocities inflicted on human beings by the new industrial society.

## CONCLUSION

From the analysis, the conclusion can be drawn as follows:

Since literary work is reflection of a real life in society, it is not surprising therefore if, we find novel, drama, or poetry represents its *zeitgeist* (a spiritual unity). It consists of so many cultural layers, which of course helpful for us, the readers, to have a good understanding of one's literary work. Industrial Revolution that culturally and sociology caused many changes in England has influenced Dickens' *Great Expectations*. The changes or the consequences of Industrial Revolutions can be revealed through Pip, Estella, Pip's sister, Miss Havisham, Herbert, Compeyson, and Magwitch as the characters of the novel.

The life of Pip and Estella who have no parents and lack of love and affection as well represent the dissolution of family units. The concept of money as disease and illness can be seen through the attitude of each character toward his/ her problem. All characters represent such deed, but Compeyson shows the most characteristics in terms of possessing wealth. Meanwhile, Miss Havisham can be categorized into a character who reveals selfishness as she uses Estella to take revenge to her past. Mutual exploitation as one of the Industrial Revolution consequences can be also identified from the way Magwitch and Pip create their relationship, as well as Pip and Herbert. Such relationship is also made by Pip's sister and Miss Havisham. As someone who is responsible to Pip, she has to afford much money; and it is impossible since she lives in poverty. That is why she then agrees on sending Pip to accompany Estella. Finally, the cultural layer can be broken down from the title of the novel. *Great Expectations* shows the "Expectations" of all characters which represent human passion and ambition through the hard life caused by capitalism in industrial life.

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