Great Expectations The Character Of Mrs Joe Essay, Research Paper

Great Expectations – Mrs. Joe

The importance of Mrs. Joe in Great Expectations has two major

parts: the significance of the character, and the symbolism of the

character. The signifance of Mrs. Joe is to complete the figure of Joe

The symbolism of Mrs. Joe is actually the physical manifestation of

Joe’s fears in combination with his desire for a commanding

father-figure. First, Mrs. Joe’s reign of terror is obviously

necessary for Joe’s existence. In the beginning of Great Expectations,

Joe requires identification as a major character. Without the weakness

that Mrs. Joe instills in Joe via her reign of terror, Joe never

develops to a major character. Joe is identified as a compassionate,

sensitive character, and the most direct way to display this feature

is to have the character appear vulnerable. Mrs. Joe serves as the

tyrant for which Joe is made helpless. Joe, unless he is a scared

character, does not recognize the friend he has in Pip. Without Joe as

a major role in Pip’s life, Pip also seems very incomplete. Second,

Mrs. Joe also serves as the comical interlude of an otherwise sombre

story.

“When she had exhausted a torrent of such inquiries, she threw a

candlestick at Joe, burst into a loud sobbing, got out the dustpan —

which was always a very bad sign — put on her coarse apron, and began

cleaning up to a terrible extent. Not satisfied with a dry cleaning,

she took to a pail and scrubbing-brush, and cleaned us out of house

and home,…” Truly, a frightening creature is that that may destroy a

household by cleaning when anger besets her. Third, the comedy also

has a serious side, though, as we remember our mothers exerting their

great frustrations upon the household tasks of cleanliness. So,

Mrs. Joe serves very well as a mother to Pip. Besides the age

difference and the motherly duties of housekeeping for Pip and

Joe, the attitude of a scornful mother is also apparent. This, of

course, draws Joe even closer to Pip, by relation. Mrs. Joe serves as

link to make it so that Joe appears very much to be the father of Pip.

In addition, Joe, although terrified of Mrs. Joe, is a very honorable

man and would never consider divorcing his wife. Through this

condition, however, Joe appears to be even a more honorable man to

choose to preserve the sacred marriage rather than seek his comfort.

It is ironic that Mrs. Joe be referred to as Mrs. Joe constantly when

there doesn’t seem to much a part of Joe in her. The main purpose it

serves is probably to characterize Mrs. Joe as a more masculine, and,

therefore, typically more commanding, character. In the tradition

of marriage, the wife usually gives up her last name to show that she

is “property” of the man, therefore it is especially ironic that

she be called Mrs. Joe when it is clear that Joe, rather, belongs more

to her than vice-versa. It is also ironic that Joe be the one that

seems to be stuck in tough situation in his marraige. Often, in this

time, women suffered from the abuse of their husbands and expected to

keep the marriage together regardless. However, Joe is clearly the one

being abused in this story and he also is the only one decent enough

to care enough about the marraige to try and keep it together by

enduring the abuse of Mrs. Joe. Fifth, through love, Joe shows the

audience that truly he is not just a very timid man but a

whole-hearted man. Truly, it takes a loving man to stay in love with

such a woman as Mrs. Joe. No kissing ever took place between Joe and

Mrs. Joe (much less child birth), and it becomes clear to the reader

that the relationship between Joe and Mrs. Joe is a very “one-way”

relationship. It would seem that Joe cares enough for Mrs. Joe, though

Mrs. Joe never once seems to show a bit of compassion for Joe.

Illustration of this can be seen in Mrs. Joe’s numerous dorogatory

references to being married to “a lowly blacksmith.” Surely, after

Mrs. Joe dies, Joe reflects upon how he was treated and what he will

do differently in the future. With Mrs. Joe gone, a piece of Joe’s

life is again freed up and can slowly be reclaimed, making him into a

stronger person. Eventually marrying Biddy makes it apparent that Joe

is changed, as Biddy seems more the feminine, quiet, traditional girl,

compared to Mrs. Joe. Sixth, Mrs. Joe represents the semi-aristocracy

that oppresses Joe and Pip. She continually threatens Joe and Pip with

bodily harm, pushing Joe and Pip together under a common oppression,

just as the aristocracy ridicules Pip through Estella and Joe through

Pip, eventually. Although Mrs. Joe isn’t exactly wealthy, she has the

aristocratic connections that define her as part of the elite class.

The home life is supposedly filled by a pair of nurturing parents,

however, in this book, the home serves as sort of a microcosm. The

social structure and events that take place within the house echo all

the rest of the events in the book: from the theft of the file and

food and Pips first feelings of guilt, to Mrs. Joe’s oppresion of her

husband and little brother. Finally, Joe first sought this

relationship with such an overbearing character because he has always

needed someone to make his decisions for him. He did not used to

suffer under such abuse, I assume, although he has always been clumsy

physically as well as mentally. Examples of this are his general

timidity to confrontation and his occasional stumbling over items,

especially when trying to act in the presence of Pip when he is a

gentleman. Joe’s speech and use of words illustrate his plainess and

accent Pip’s aristocracy. Decisions never came easily for Joe and he’d

much rather someone else make them for him rather than have to choose

on his own. Being uneducated, Joe never felt sure of himself that he

could make an appropriate decision, anyway. When asking for Mrs. Joe’s

hand in marraige, it can be assumed that Mrs. Joe did everything short

of buying the wedding ring herself to make the marriage a reality. So,

Mrs. Joe essentially created Joe to be the character that he allowed

himself to be. With the slow death of Mrs. Joe, Joe reclaimed his life

from his earlier insecurity. Mrs. Joe’s importance in tying Joe to Pip

made the relationship between the two significantly more beliveable,

and without her, the great expectation of this book would never have

been met.

Great Expectations – Charles Dickens