



SOCIAL JUSTICE AND MORALITY IN THE NOVEL GREAT EXPECTATIONS BY CHARLES DICKENS

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Abstract : In Charles Dickens' novel Great Expectations, Social Justice and morality are central themes that explore the disparities and ethics of Victorian society. Through the experiences of Pip, the protagonist, Dickens critiques the class system and emphasizes the moral consequences of personal ambition and Social mobility. The concept of Social Justice in the novel is intricately tied to the rigid class structure of 19th – century England. Pip's journey from a poor orphan to a gentleman exposes the injustices faced by the lower classes. Characters like Joe Gargery and Magwitch represent the oppressed working class who exhibit more integrity and kindness than the upper-class characters, highlighting Dickens' critique of the social hierarchy. Magwitch, a convict, embodies the theme of redemption and challenges the notion that social status equates to moral worth. His transformation and benevolence towards Pip contrast sharply with the cruel and self-serving behaviors of characters like Compassion and Drummle.

Morality in Great Expectations is depicted as a complex and often contradictory force. Pip's internal moral struggle is a central narrative arc. Initially, Pip equates social advancement with personal worth, leading him to abandon his roots and feel ashamed of Joe and Biddy. Pip realizes that true gentility is a matter of character rather than wealth or status. The moral lesson here is that genuine compassion and loyalty define a person's true worth. The novel suggests that morality is grounded in empathy, humility and the ability to rectify one's mistakes.

Key words: Aspiration, Ambition ,Growth, Expectations and Identity.

Dickens portrays the stark contrast between the wealthy and the poor in Victorian England. The novel highlights the struggles of the working class, represented by characters like Joe Gargery and Magwitch , who face poverty, exploitation, and harsh treatment. In contrast, the wealthy characters, like Miss Havisham and the aristocratic patrons of the pocket family, enjoy luxuries and privileges.

Dickens raises questions about morality and ethics through characters like Magwitch , a convict who seeks redemption and Miss Havisham, who embodies bitterness and revenge. Pip's journey forces him to confront his own moral shortcomings and take responsibility for his actions. The novel encourages readers to consider what is right and wrong in the face of societal expectations and personal relationships.

The novel explores the themes of redemption through characters like Magwitch and Miss Havisham. Magwitch's desire for redemption highlights the possibility of personal transformation and forgiveness. Miss Havisham's story, on the other hand, serves as a cautionary tale about the destructive nature of unresolved emotions and the importance of forgiveness.

Trace Pip's moral journey from innocence to self-awareness. Discuss how his relationships with other characters shape his understanding of right and wrong. Consider the influence of wealth and status on his moral choices.

Discuss Dickens's critique of Victorian society, moral standards. Explore how characters like Estella and Miss Havisham represent the consequences of a morally corrupt society.

Dickens' critique of social norms and values. Commentary on education, crime and punishment. Importance of social justice and reform.

Analyze how characters like Biddy and Joe serve as moral anchors in the story, embodying the virtues of kindness and humility that Pip comes to appreciate.

Examine how Dickens critiques the rigid social hierarchies of Victorian England, particularly through the lens of Pip's disillusionment with the upper class. Discuss the novel's portrayal of the legal system, particularly through the characters of Jaggers, and how it reflects the moral ambiguities and injustices of the time.

The novel was very widely praised. Although Dickens's contemporary Thomas Carlyle referred to it disparagingly as "that Pip nonsense", he nevertheless reacted to each fresh instalment with "roars of laughter". Later, George Bernard Shaw praised the novel, describing it as "all of one piece and consistently truthful". When the plot first formed in his mind, he called it "a very fine, new and grotesque idea".

In the 21st century, the novel retains good standing among literary critics and in 2003 it was ranked 17th on the BBC's The Big Read poll.

Some of the narrative devices that Dickens uses are caricature, comic speech intrigue, Gothic atmosphere and a central character who gradually changes. Davis sees the symbolism attached to "great expectations" as reinforcing the novel's impact. This is mirrored in the imagery of the black waters tormented waves and eddies.

Dickens highlights the stark contrast between the wealthy and the poor, emphasizing the struggles of the working class and the excesses of the wealthy. He explores complex moral issues through characters like Magwitch, Miss Havisham and Pip, encouraging readers to consider empathy, compassion and personal responsibility. The novel emphasizes the importance of empathy and compassion in breaking down social barriers and promoting understanding. Pip's journey highlights the need for individuals to take responsibility for their actions and their place in society.

The novel advocates for Social Justice, encouraging readers to consider the impact of their actions on others and to work towards a more equitable society. The themes and ideas are central Dickens' exploration of social justice and morality in Great Expectations. Dickens critiques the limited access to education for the working class, highlighting the importance of education in social mobility.

Pip's journey emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions and their impact on others. The novel encourages readers to consider the perspectives and experiences of others, promoting empathy and compassion. The novel explores the possibility of redemption and forgiveness, highlighting the importance of second chances.

Dickens critiques social norms and values, encouraging readers to consider the moral implications of their actions.

The novel raises questions about justice and punishment, encouraging readers to consider the morality of the Victorian justice system. The points provide a starting point for exploring the complex themes of social justice and morality in *Great Expectations*. Magwitch represents the consequences of crime and the possibility of redemption. Miss Havisham symbolizes the destructive nature of unresolved emotions and the importance of forgiveness. Joe Gargery embodies the values of empathy, compassion and hard work.

Dickens encourages readers to consider the need for social change and reform. The novel explores the importance of moral growth and development. The possibility of redemption and forgiveness is a central theme. Dickens highlights the importance of social justice and equality. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex themes of social justice and morality in *Great Expectations*.

Dickens advocates for social justice, emphasizing the need for equality and fairness. It explores the moral development of his characters, particularly the protagonist, Pip. Pip's journey from a poor blacksmith's apprentice to a gentleman highlights the societal obsession with class and the superficial nature of such distinctions. Characters like Joe Gargery, who is kind and morally upright but of a lower class, are contrasted with upper-class characters who are often depicted as morally corrupt, such as Bentley Drummle. Dickens criticizes a system where wealth and social status are valued over character and kindness.

The novel also critiques the legal system, which is portrayed as biased and unjust. Characters like Magwitch, who is harshly treated despite his reformation and Compeyson, who manipulates the system to his advantage, illustrate the inequities of the justice system. Dickens suggests that the law is more concerned with punishing the poor and vulnerable than with true justice. Dickens sheds light on the harsh realities of poverty and the exploitation of the poor.

Characters like Magwitch and Joe are emblematic of the working class, who, despite their hard work and good intentions, are often marginalized and mistreated. Dickens criticizes a society that allows such exploitation and fails to provide opportunities for the poor to improve their circumstances.

Pip's development is central to the novel's exploration of morality. Initially, Pip is ashamed of his origins and aspires to rise above his social class, believing that wealth and status will bring him happiness. However, as he gains wealth, he becomes increasingly unhappy and morally compromised, neglecting those who genuinely care for him, like Joe and Biddy. It is only through suffering and the realization of his misguided ambitions that Pip comes to understand that true worth lies in love, loyalty and kindness, not in social status. The theme of redemption is prominent in the novel, particularly through the character of Magwitch. Despite his criminal past, Magwitch redeems himself through his love and dedication to Pip. Pip's eventual forgiveness and acceptance of Magwitch highlight the novel's moral message that people should be judged by their actions and character, not their social standing or past mistakes. Dickens also presents characters who embody moral ambiguity, such as Miss Havisham. While she is a victim of betrayal, she becomes consumed by revenge, raising Estella to be cold and unfeeling. However, by the end of the novel, she seeks Pip's forgiveness, illustrating the complexity of human morality and the possibility of redemption. Dickens exposes the harsh realities faced by the working class and criticizes a society that allows such exploitation to persist.

Redemption is another key aspect of morality in the novel. *Great Expectations* explores the interplay between social justice and morality, using the character of Pip and the world around him to critique the social hierarchies and injustices of Victorian society. Dickens illustrates that true moral worth is not determined by social class or wealth, but by one's actions and character. The novel ultimately advocates for a more just and compassionate society, where individuals are valued for their humanity rather than their social status.

Pip acquires wealth and moves to London, where he attempts to transform himself into a gentleman, believing that higher social status equates to greater worth and happiness. His moral journey involves recognizing the emptiness of social status and understanding that true worth is found in character and relationships, not wealth or class. The novel also explores the relationship between wealth and justice. The legal system, represented by characters like Jaggers and Wemmick, is shown to be impartial and often disconnected from moral justice. Jaggers, as a lawyer, is a figure who embodies the law's impartiality but also its moral ambiguity, highlighting the tension between legal justice and moral righteousness. Morality in "Great Expectations" is deeply tied to the themes of guilt, redemption and forgiveness. Pip's journey is one of moral awakening, where he learns to recognize his own flaws and seeks redemption. His treatment of Joe and Biddy, and his later realization of the wrongs he has committed, mark critical points in his moral development. Dickens uses Magwitch to challenge the idea that morality is tied to social class, showing that goodness can exist in the most unlikely places. The education system, for instance, is depicted as inadequate, with Pip's schooling providing him with little real knowledge or moral guidance. Similarly, the church, represented by the cold and hypocritical Pumblecook, fails to provide genuine moral leadership. Joe Gargery, his sister's husband and Pip's father figure. Magwitch's fate is a stark example of the legal system's injustice. Dickens' exploration of these themes remains relevant, offering insights into the ways in which society can better uphold principles of justice and morality. How Miss Havisham and Estella never sat in a kitchen, but were far above the level of such common doings. I fell asleep recalling what I "used to do" when I was at Miss Havisham's; as though I had been there weeks or months, instead of hours; and as though it were quite an old subject of remembrance, instead of one that had arisen only that day. That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. It being Saturday night, I found the landlord looking rather grimly at these records; but as my business was with Joe and not with him, I merely wished him good evening and passed into the common room at the end of the passage.

References:

1. "My father's family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip. The Bible, Exodus 2:10
2. "I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason and nature. William Shakespeare's "Hamlet", Act 1, Scene 1
3. The injustices of the criminal justice system.

