

ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS OF SOCIAL INJUSTICE AND THE EVOLUTION OF HUMANISTIC IDEALS IN CHARLES DICKENS'S GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Khodjayeva Dilafruz Izatilloevna

Professor, DSc, Bukhara State University.

d.i.xodjaeva@buxdu.uz

Qodirova Shahnoza Bobir qizi

MA student Bukhara State University.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18077299>

Abstract. *This article examines Charles Dickens's artistic representation of social injustice and the development of humanistic ideals in Great Expectations. Through a qualitative textual analysis, the study explores how Dickens critiques the Victorian class system while simultaneously promoting moral values such as empathy, humility, and human dignity. The findings demonstrate that Dickens exposes the moral emptiness of social ambition and redefines human worth beyond wealth and social rank. The novel ultimately advances a humanistic vision grounded in ethical responsibility and compassion, making Great Expectations a significant contribution to Victorian social criticism.*

Keywords: *Charles Dickens; Great Expectations; social injustice; humanism; Victorian novel; class inequality*

1. Introduction

Charles Dickens occupies a central position in Victorian literature for his powerful exposure of social inequality and moral hypocrisy. [Ledger, S. (2007)]. His novel Great Expectations (1861) offers a decisive exploration of class divisions, social mobility, and ethical transformation within nineteenth-century English society. Through Pip's journey from poverty to wealth and eventual moral awakening, Dickens questions the values underpinning Victorian social structures.

While much scholarship has examined Great Expectations as a Bildungsroman or a critique of class ambition, this article focuses specifically on the intersection between social injustice and humanistic ideals. It asserts that Dickens not only exposes systemic inequality but also progresses a moral philosophy that prioritizes human dignity over material success. The study seeks to answer two key questions: how social injustice artistically is portrayed in the novel, and how these representations contribute to the evolution of humanistic values.

2. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative literary research method based on close textual analysis. Primary material consists of Dickens's Great Expectations, while secondary sources include critical studies on Dickens, Victorian society, and literary humanism. The analysis focuses on characterization, narrative progression, symbolism, and thematic contrasts to examine the relationship between social injustice and moral development. This interpretive approach allows for an in-depth exploration of Dickens's artistic and ethical concerns.

3. Results

The qualitative analysis of Great Expectations reveals that Charles Dickens employs a complex artistic framework to depict social injustice while gradually advancing humanistic ideals. The results are organized into five interrelated thematic findings, each illustrated with textual evidence.

3.1 Structural Representation of Social Injustice

Dickens presents social injustice as a deeply embedded structural phenomenon within Victorian society, where class hierarchy controls social value and access to justice. From the novel's opening, Pip's encounter with the convict Magwitch (Chapter 1) illustrates social marginalization: Pip is frightened not only by Magwitch's physical threat but also by the convict's desperate social position—"a fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg." [Sanders, A. (1994)]. This image symbolizes how society chains and dehumanizes the poor and criminalized. The inequity of justice is further shown through Compeyson, the "gentleman" criminal who escapes from harsh punishment by tricking his social status, as explained by Jaggers:

"He is a light-weighted, insignificant fellow, with a good many accomplishments... A gentleman on the wrong side of the law." (Chapters 39-40)

The legal system's bias is exposed when Magwitch, despite his kindness towards Pip, is condemned without mercy, while Compeyson manipulates the system to his advantage. This contrast exemplifies Dickens's critique of Victorian institutions that protect the privileged and oppress the vulnerable.

3.2 Class Identity and Psychological Alienation

Pip's psychological alienation emerges as he internalizes the values of the upper class, leading to shame and estrangement from his origins. After receiving his "great expectations," Pip reflects on his background with embarrassment:

"I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella's reproaches." (Chapter 29)

This confession reveals how Pip's social ambition alienates him from Joe, who remains his moral anchor. Pip's visit to Satis House and interaction with Estella further intensify his feelings of inferiority. Estella's cold dismissal,

"You are not handsome, and you are not clever... You must know that you have been the means of making me hate you," (Chapter 29) symbolizes the social gulf and emotional distance imposed by class prejudice.

The shame Pip feels at Joe's rough manners, despite Joe's genuine kindness, highlights the psychological damage caused by the internalization of class-based values.

3.3 Moral Inversion and Critique of Gentility

Dickens subverts the Victorian ideal of gentility by presenting wealthy characters as morally bankrupt and the poor as ethically virtuous [Walsh, C. (2009)]. Miss Havisham encapsulates emotional cruelty masked by social status. Her decaying mansion and perpetual bridal attire symbolize a life consumed by bitterness and revenge:

"Her watch stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and her bridal dress was white and yellow with dust and age." (Chapter 8)

Her manipulation of Estella to "break men's hearts" underscores the corruption beneath her social façade. Bentley Drummle, a "gentleman" by birth, is depicted as brutal and morally crude. Pip describes him as:

"a cruel man and a bad man, with a touch of the tiger in him." (Chapter 34)

This description contrasts with Joe's gentle and honest nature, emphasizing that true morality does not depend on class. Joe Gargery, despite his low social standing and simple speech, exemplifies tenderness and integrity: [Cheadle, B. (1992)]

"Joe was a fair, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow..." (Chapter 4)

His true loyalty to Pip, even when rejected, highlights the novel's humanistic valorization of ethical character over social rank.

3.4 Evolution of Humanistic Ideals through Moral Development

Pip's moral growth culminates in his recognition of shared humanity, especially through his relationship with Magwitch. Upon learning Magwitch is his secret benefactor, Pip's initial horror transforms into compassion:

"I had never thought of him as my benefactor before. I looked at him, and then I felt, somehow, that there was a kindness and a goodness in him." (Chapter 39)

This moment marks Pip's rejection of class prejudice and acceptance of human dignity. Pip's care for Magwitch in his final days, risking social disgrace, illustrates his full ethical transformation:

"I stole a part of his bread and butter, and then a piece of cold beef... I was ashamed of my theft, but it was his bread." (Chapter 57)

This passage shows Pip's humility and empathy, prioritizing human connection over societal judgment. Pip also reconciles with Joe and Bidley, acknowledging their true worth beyond social class:

"You must know... that I have been a dear good friend to you." (Chapter 59)

This reconciliation signifies the novel's humanistic ideal of moral equality.

3.5 Human Dignity as a Counterforce to Social Injustice

Dickens affirms that dignity arises from moral character, not social status, as embodied by marginalized characters. Magwitch's unwavering hope for a better life and his generosity toward Pip exemplify dignity despite oppression:

"I've been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape." (Chapter 56)

His words assert the possibility of moral renewal regardless of past suffering or class. Joe's patient forgiveness and humility, especially after Pip's rejection, demonstrate the innate dignity of the humble:

"I'm proud to be your husband, dear." (Chapter 59)

Joe's dignity remains intact even without social recognition. Through these characters, Dickens critiques the social order and proposes that human dignity is a moral constant transcending class boundaries.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that Dickens employs narrative realism and symbolic characterization to critique Victorian social ideology. By reversing conventional moral expectations—portraying criminals as humane and gentlemen as morally flawed—Dickens dismantles the notion that class determines virtue. Furthermore, *Great Expectations* aligns with nineteenth-century humanistic thought by emphasizing individual moral agency. Dickens's critique extends beyond social institutions to address personal ethical failure, suggesting that social reform must be accompanied by moral self-awareness. The novel thus functions as both social commentary and moral instruction.

5. Conclusion

This study illustrates that *Great Expectations* presents a nuanced critique of social injustice while advocating for the evolution of humanistic ideals. Dickens exposes the moral contradictions of Victorian society and redefines human worth through compassion, humility, and ethical responsibility.

By prioritizing inner moral development over external success, the novel offers a timeless humanistic message that continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of social justice.

References

1. Brooks, P. (1984). *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Harvard University Press.
2. Cheadle, B. (1992). The Motives of Charity and the Ideology of the Gentleman in *Great Expectations*. *Dickens Quarterly*.
3. Dickens, C. (1861). *Great Expectations*. London: Chapman & Hall.
4. Eagleton, T. (2005). *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
5. House, H. (1941). *The Dickens World*. Oxford University Press.
6. Ledger, S. (2007). *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*. Cambridge University Press.
7. Meckier, J. (2002). *Dickens's Great Expectations: Misnarration and Redemption*. Ashgate Publishing.
8. Sanders, A. (1994). *The Victorian Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9. Walsh, C. (2009). The Role of the Poor Law in the Novels of Charles Dickens. *Journal of Victorian Culture*.