



Original article

Charles Dickens's "Great Expectations": Analysis of Didacticism and Morality

Azhar Kadhim Sabr¹, Ahmed Karyosh Jubair²
University of Thi-Qar- College of Arts, English Department

*Correspondence author:
Azharkadhim@utq.edu.iq
ahmedkaryosh@utq.edu.iq

Received: 19 January 2026
Accepted: 16 February 2026
Published: 01 May 2026

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol22.Iss2.1580>



1812-0512 / © 2026 The Author(s). Published by Wasit Journal for Humanities Sciences, Wasit University. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Cite:

Sabr, A. K., & Jubair, A. K. (2026). Charles Dickens's "Great Expectations": Analysis of Didacticism and Morality. Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 22(2).
<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol22.Iss2.1580>

ABSTRACT

This paper argues that didacticism and morality are closely intertwined in ""Great Expectations"" by Charles Dickens, an illustration of his adult moral vision. Dickens goes beyond mere moralizing and employs a psychologically subtle first-person narration to examine how morals are constructed through the protagonist, Pip's, guilt, shame, and redemption. Through an examination of the novel's symbolic geography, characterization, and issues of social mobility and crime, the paper reveals how the novel compels the reader to track Pip's moral collapse and rebuild, challenging the Victorian ideals of class and respectability. The didacticism of Dickens is reflective and humanistic. It has been formed through experiencing empathy, suffering, and personal responsibility. According to the novel, moral, rather than material, "Great Expectations" inspire individuals to engage in ethical thinking, and, by extension, the role of literature in doing so.

Keywords: Great Expectations", didacticism, Victorian ethics, Bildungsroman, moral development, guilt, redemption

الآمال العظيمة لتشارلز ديكنز: تحليل النزعة التعليمية والأخلاقية

أزهر كاظم صبر¹، أحمد كريوش جبير²
جامعة ذي قار، كلية الآداب، قسم اللغة الإنكليزية

المُستخلص

تناقش هذه الورقة البحثية العلاقة الوثيقة بين النزعة التعليمية والأخلاق في رواية "آمال عظيمة" لتشارلز ديكنز، والتي تُجسد رؤيته الأخلاقية الناضجة. يتجاوز ديكنز مجرد الوعظ الأخلاقي، ويستخدم أسلوب السرد بضمير المتكلم، وهو أسلوب دقيق نفسيًا، لدراسة كيفية بناء القيم الأخلاقية انطلاقًا من مشاعر الذنب والخزي والخلوص التي تنتاب بطل الرواية، بيب. من خلال دراسة الجغرافيا الرمزية للرواية، وتصوير الشخصيات، وقضايا الحراك الاجتماعي والجريمة، تكشف الورقة كيف تدفع الرواية القارئ إلى تتبع الانهيار الأخلاقي وإعادة بناء بيب، وتحدي المثل الفيكتورية السائدة حول الطبقة الاجتماعية والمكانة الاجتماعية. تتسم النزعة التعليمية لدى ديكنز بالتأمل والإنسانية، إذ تشكلت من خلال تجربة التعاطف والمعاناة والمسؤولية الشخصية. ووفقًا للرواية، فإن الآمال العظيمة، الأخلاقية لا المادية، هي التي تُلهم الأفراد للانخراط في التفكير الأخلاقي، ومن هنا يبرز دور الأدب في ذلك.

الكلمات المفتاحية: آمال عظيمة، التعليم، الأخلاق الفيكتورية، رواية التنشئة، التطور الأخلاقي، الشعور بالذنب، الفداء

1. Introduction

The Victorian novel was, in most ways, a didactic tool, and Charles Dickens was its master. Charles Dickens is a social realist author who shaped the direction of English literature in the nineteenth century, not only as a writer but also as an ethical thinker deeply interested in the suffering of people, issues of injustice, and the idea of moral duty. Since *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), his fiction has been more overtly didactic and reformative, intended to improve his readers against social vices such as the Poor Law and industrial alienation (Schlicke, 1999). "*Great Expectations*" is a novel published in *All the Year Round* between 1860 and 1861 that belongs to the tradition of the Victorian serial novel. However, it pushes the moral and narrative certainties of that tradition to the limit.

"*Great Expectations*" (1861) is one of his most psychologically complex and morally advanced novels, written in his later years. Although its narrative technique, symbolism, and social criticism have often been criticized, the concept of the novel as a didactic moral text is one of the most important, yet occasionally underappreciated, aspects of this novel (Bloom, 2008; Ford, 1987). The first-person retrospective narration of the novel, as described by John (2001), allows it to adopt an introspective gaze on the world and to bring the didactic activity of instructing people to the individual conscience.

So, "*Great Expectations*" is a very different departure from the more schematic morality of a previous novel, such as *Oliver Twist* (1837). The virtue in that work is very natural and external, in the person of the gold-hearted boy Oliver, whose innocence is not marred by the vulgarity all about him, and who is rewarded by a pre-destined, comfortable middle-class existence. By contrast, "*Great Expectations*" introduces the question of morality as something not to be upheld, but as a skill one must struggle to gain through mistakes and pain.

Dickens was a writer in an era where literature was generally considered a means of moral education. Readers in the Victorian era demanded novels that promoted moral standards, compassion, and ethical social welfare (Himmelfarb, 1984). But Dickens did not merely preach traditional morality; he dramatized moral conflict through character development, the story's irony, and the clash of emotions. Dickens in "Great Expectations" employs the life of an orphan, Pip, to go through the world of poverty to gentility to determine how moral values are developed, twisted, and later reshaped through experience.

This paper will interrogate the relationship between didacticism and morality in "Great Expectations". It assumes that the didacticism of the novel is two-fold: on the one hand, in its traditional plot structure that criticizes snobbery and confirms the natural goodness, on the other, and more fundamentally, in its approach to the reader to follow, together with Pip, the strenuous educational process of cultivating the sense of morality (Brooks, 1984). In this paper, it is argued that "Great Expectations" is a didactic novel in the truest meaning of this word: it does not simply inform the readers what is right and what is wrong, but exemplifies how moral insight is obtained through ordeal, contemplation, and compassion. The moral education of Pip is influenced by all the interactions he has had with characters that demonstrate conflicting ethical systems: the humble goodness of Joe, the bitterness of Miss Havisham, the emotional indifference of Estella, and the criminalized yet true loyalty of Magwitch. These relationships help Dickens to challenge the Victorian ideas of class, virtue, and respectability (Slater, 2011).

We are going to discuss a moral taxonomy of characters in the novel, the defining role of guilt and shame as the driving force towards moral development, the critique of gentility and class performance, and the redefinition of "Great Expectations" as a financial windfall to moral maturity. As a result of this analysis, we shall argue that "Great Expectations" is didactically effective not because it tells certain maxims, but because it transports the reader into the uncertainties and sufferings of becoming a moral agent.

The fact that Charles Dickens remains the greatest novelist of the Victorian era is beyond doubt. His works, nevertheless, are not entertainment works but are essentially pedagogical works. According to John (2001), Dickens considered himself a public moralist, a writer with a serious responsibility to diagnose the evils of his society and to instruct his readers in rightful thinking and behavior. This is an instructive command, the desperate need to teach, and it fills the work of art, its composition itself. This paper shall delve into the mechanism and objectives of didacticism as used by Dickens, with the argument that didacticism is used as a means of correcting the hearts and institutions of the people. It has a two-fold thrust: the revelation of systemic social vices (poverty, legal corruption, educational failure) and the exemplification of perfect domestic and interpersonal morality.

2. Questions of the Study

- In what ways does "Great Expectations" create moral development with the use of narrative structure and characterization?
- How does Dickens use didacticism to attack the social and moral values of the Victorians?

- What does the novel redefine morality beyond wealth, class, and social status?

These questions will place "Great Expectations" in the context of Victorian moral philosophy and of contemporary ethical literary criticism after answering them. As shown, Dickens's didacticism is neither strict nor dictatorial but thoughtful, conversational, and humanistic.

3. Literature Review

The academic fascination with "Great Expectations" has generated a rich critique of the narrative voice, symbolism, social commentary, and moral philosophy. The critics of Dickens in the early times, including Leavis (1970) and Wilson (1941), focused on the aesthetic wholeness and psychological insight of the novel. In contrast, later critics have foresaw the complexity of ethical implications and criticism of ideology.

3.1 Dickens and Moral Criticism

Dickens has been known as a moral novelist. Dickens wrote fiction based on a moral vision of compassion, responsibility, and human dignity, as Ford (1987) puts it. He claims that Dickens regarded the novel as an effective tool of moral education, especially during an era of industrial exploitation and social inequity. On the same note, according to Slater (2011), the ethical decision-making in the narratives of Dickens is always dramatized instead of moral rules in the abstract, and the readers get to vicariously experience moral conflict through the identification of characters.

In her contribution to ethical literary criticism, Nussbaum (1990) indicates that such novels as "Great Expectations" are a contribution to moral philosophy by developing emotional intelligence and ethical sensitivity. By reading and imagining Pip and his problems, the reader gets to contemplate their own values and judgments.

3.2 Victorian Fiction Didacticism

Victorian literature was characterized by didacticism. According to Himmelfarb (1984), the Victorians' morality was influenced by ideals of duty, self-discipline, and social responsibility, which can be considered the main elements of Dickens's work. Nevertheless, Dickens did not share the same mindset as other stern moralists in the sense that he did not depict moral development as a constant situation but instead as a process (Newsome, 2001).

Ledger (2007) states that indirect and ironic didacticism is quite common in Dickens. In "Great Expectations", e.g., the false notion that a person who has lots of money is morally worthy, as seen through Pip, is slowly broken down through narrative irony and first-degree experience. This form of lessoning is subtle, enabling Dickens to criticize social values without moralizing.

3.3 Bildungsroman and Moral Identity

The most common interpretation of "Great Expectations" by critics is as a Bildungsroman, or a novel of moral and psychological growth. As noted by Buckley (1974), Pip, in his voyage, is awakened to an ethical journey, where he learns to balance ambition with compassion. Likewise, Li

and Guo (2023) argue that Pip's moral decay and healing can be compared to the conflict between social desire and moral values.

This moral journey is heightened by the fact that the story is first-person narrated. Booth (1983) notes that the retrospective narrator enables the readers to observe the mistakes that Pip made as a young man and how he sees the errors in his young adult life, but at the same time sees the moral sense of maturity. This plot device makes the novel feel more like a philosophical question than a moral story.

4. Theoretical Framework

The developed meaning of didacticism in literary criticism has shifted from an overt moral instruction to an implicit moral and emotional instruction. Traditionally, didactic literature was scorned as preachy or inferior aesthetically and was linked to an authoritative passing of moral doctrine. But as narrative theory grew, critics began to appreciate that the best moral teaching in writing usually works indirectly. In a work such as that of the nineteenth-century novelists, such as Dickens, the didactic urge was redirected out of mere moralizing to what critic Barbara Hardy called the moral imagination, an education of the sympathies of the reader by living vicariously through the experience of a character. This kind of indirect didacticism does not instruct the reader to think a particular way, but rather takes the reader through a process of ethical discovery, and the reader gets to learn with the characters. The value of such an indirect approach was further solidified by the twentieth-century preference for ambiguity and showing over telling that was championed by modernism. So, discussing such a novel as "Great Expectations", didacticism can be interpreted not as a set of prescriptive lessons, but as a literary device that provides a reader with a complicated examination of morality, justice, and personal development, and, subsequently, leads to a more profound and empathetic idea of the human condition.

The three theories that are interrelated in terms of this study are moral criticism, ethical literary theory, and Victorian moral philosophy.

4.1 Moral Criticism

Moral criticism considers literature to be an outlet for investigating questions of morality and morals. Based on the arguments by Wayne Booth (1988), narratives define how readers perceive morality because they are encouraged to sympathize with some characters and condemn others. "Great Expectations" is especially replete with moral clues, which help the audience to judge the characters not by social status but by their abilities to love, be loyal, and morally brave.

4.2 Ethical Literary Theory

Nussbaum (1990) and Wu and Liu (2025) are the ethical literary critics who underline that moral imagination is developed through literature. In "Great Expectations", readers can feel the shame, the

conscience, and the moral clarity that Pip gains, and reflect on the moral outcomes of arrogance, goals, and ingratitude.

4.3 Victorian Moral Philosophy

Victorian ethics were focused on self-improvement, duty, and social responsibility (Himmelfarb, 1984). Dickens plays around with these ideals and also brings them into disrepute. The novel reveals the idea that Victorian respectability tends to conceal cruelty, and not only that, but the marginalized characters, such as Magwitch, have true moral value.

5. Methodology

The analysis of text in this study will be qualitative, based on moral criticism and ethical literary theory. Some of the most influential passages in "Great Expectations" are analyzed to find out the traces of moral education, building character, and irony of the narrative. Dickens secondary sources comprise a background historical as well as a theoretical background.

5.1 Selection Criteria and Process of Analysis

To explore the didactic and moral aspects of "Great Expectations" by Charles Dickens, the research will employ a close-reading methodology grounded in a qualitative approach to specific passages of the text. The analytical process is crafted to go beyond plot summary to reveal the mechanisms by which the novel conveys its moral teachings.

5.2 Textual Selection criteria

Passages to be analyzed are chosen based on the fact that they immediately address the moral and pedagogical framework of the novel. Instead of trying to make a shallow overview of the entire text, the analysis will look at particular instances of the text that fulfill the following criteria:

Representation of Central Moral Themes: The passages are selected based on the way they exemplify the main moral concerns of the novel, including the essence of true gentility and social rank, the seductive power of wealth (Pip, ambition), the psychology of guilt and shame, and the significance of empathy and fidelity. For example, the first time Pip visits Satis House is chosen not just as a plot device but as the cornerstone where his moral uneasiness and absorption of social inferiority begin (Dickens, 1861/1999, p. 59).

The Didactic Voice or Narrative Commentary: The focus is on passages in which adult Pip, the retrospective narrator, actually remarks on what his younger self is doing. Such a storytelling method is one of the main vehicles of didacticism, as it directly contrasts the foolishness of youth with the wisdom of adulthood. The instances in which Pip cogitates about his heartache or shame

are significant to the interpretation of the moral teaching the novel aims to convey (Dickens, 1861/1999, p. 82).

Major Incidents of Moral Crisis or Discovery: It is an assessment of the critical points in the life of the main character that compel him to undergo a moral crisis. These are how Pip treats Joe when he enters into his expectations, how he reacts to the return of Magwitch, and the reconciliation he has with Joe. It is at these crisis points that the novel's moral logic is most severely challenged and most clearly expressed.

Character Foils and Moral Contrasts: Sections with characters that act as moral foils of Pip are chosen. As seen through his encounters with Pip, Joe Gargery is a moral good, instinctive and unswerving. On the other hand, characters such as Compeyson give a momentous contrast of pure moral depravity and thus help shape the ethical limits of the novel.

5.3 Certain Steps of the Analytical Process

A systematic analytical procedure will be applied to the chosen passages, and it includes the following steps:

Close Reading and Textual Analysis: Every chosen passage will be analyzed in detail in terms of its language, imagery, and syntax. It is the process of finding some keywords and phrases concerning moral concepts (e.g., "gentleman," "common," "guilt," "forgiveness"). The analysis will be very keen on the way Dickens has used symbolism, e.g., the mist on the marshes or the forge, and the role of symbols within the moral fabric of the novel.

Narrative Voice and Perspective Analysis: A key step would be to differentiate the viewpoint of the young protagonist who is going through the events and the viewpoint of the older narrator perceiving what is going on. It will examine how the adult Pip's commentary assigns moral importance to the actions taken in the past. The strength of this retrospective clarity is indicated by the novel, according to literary critic George Gissing, in which the man gazes back on the boy that he was with a sort of agonized pity (as cited in House, 1941, p. 78). It is the key to the novel's didactic effect.

Contextualization of the Victorian Moral and Social Norms: To comprehend the didactic intentions of the novel wholly, the contextualization of the moral dilemmas that Pip is confronted with will be based on the Victorian discourse on gentility, criminality, and social responsibility at large. The representation of the work in relation to the social anxieties of his era, most especially the issue of whether moral worth is inborn or developed, has been investigated by critics such as Humphry House (House, 1941). This is achieved by using secondary sources to shed more light on the novel's moral lessons in its historical and cultural context.

Synthesis and Interpretation of Didactic Purpose: This is the last step, which entails the synthesis of what is found in the close reading and contextual analysis with the view of stating the particular moral lessons that are being taught. This involves knowing what the novel proposes about the way to attain real moral growth, the type of just society, and the duties that people owe to each other. The analysis shall end with the evaluation of the effectiveness and complexity of the moral vision

expressed by Dickens, admitting that there may be ambiguity or contradictions in its didactic message.

5.4 Moral Landscape: Character as Ethical Category

The conventional didactic technique is the large number of characters Dickens fills his novel with, each with particular moral traits. Joe Gargery is the symbol of the uneducated, instinctive good; his forge symbolizes integrity and hard work (Sadrin, 1988). Miss Havisham, on the other hand, is an icon of the debased moral vitality, applying her trauma to control and chastise her so that Satis House is a didactic void of the deadly impact of stunted growth (Waters, 1997, p. 154). Magwitch, who is the first character that represents a criminal danger, is also subjected to a change in morality, which makes a simple allegory difficult. His crude appearance conceals an immense reservoir of gratitude and love and compels Pip--and the reader--to deal with biased ideas of what is moral (Glancy, 1993).

Being brought up to be heartless, Estella is an excellent example of emotional deformation. Still, her eventual downfall at the hands of Drummle is an excellent moral lesson about the results of such rearing (Michie, 2011). Herbert Pocket and Wemmick (in his Walworth persona) represent other, less sustainable moralities, founded on cheerfulness, domesticity, and compartmentalization. Such a system of types establishes an apparent moral code: the real value lies independent of social status and is found in compassion, devotion, and sincerity.

5.5 The Engine of Conscience

The novel's major didactic tool is the tortured conscience of Pip. Since the very first scene on the marshes, Pip is ruled by the feeling of guilt, first, due to the assistance to the convict, the second, due to his commonness, and, last, by his shame towards Joe and Biddy (Miller, 1958). Dickens carefully traces the transformation of Pip's moral compass due to his "Great Expectations"; his ingrained shame within his own class leads him to belittle his past and those who actually benefited him. Pip, in his own thought, says that he was too cowardly to do what he knew was right, just as he had been too cowardly to do what he knew was wrong (Dickens, 1861, p. 75). It is a didactic presentation of a case study on a moral failure, a retrospective analysis.

Moral re-education of Pip begins with the traumatic enlightenment that it is Magwitch, not Miss Havisham, whom he is patronising. This ruins his romantic and class-based fantasies and substitutes them with the more terrifying yet real ones. The next part of tending over Magwitch was a form of penance where Pip is taught the lesson of duty, kindness, and love without any form of social pretence (Newsom, 2004). His disease and Joe's salvage close the loop and mark a rebirth as a more integrated and humble moral being. The moral, as explained, is obvious: moral identity is not made in the pride of expectation, but in the humility of service and a sense of responsibility (Larson, 2013).

5.6 The Critique of Performed Morality and Gentility

One of the novel's main instructive lines is a cataclysmic attack on the Victorian cult of gentility. The emptiness of learning the etiquette of being a gentleman, as taught by Matthew Pocket, is dramatized through the education of Pip and his time in London. His mounting debt is not necessarily financial but moral, which means a life is based on a false premise (Morgentaler, 2000). Drummle, the second eldest heir to a baronet, is the final assassination of this system, having the rank, but being savage and savage. The novel also challenges the connotations of gentlemanliness, systematically debunking the idea that wealth or blood are the hallmarks of gentlemanly behavior, with empathy and integrity being the hallmarks of gentlemanly behavior (Paroissien, 2000).

This criticism is carried to institutionalized morality. The law, through Mr. Jaggers and the stifling environment of Newgate, is revealed to be a system of control and process that is usually unrelated to real justice or sympathy. The symbolic nature of this moral compromise is the hand-washing that Jaggers is always engaged in. Right morality, Dickens implies, is working on the inter-human plane (in the forgiveness of Joe, in the loyalty of Herbert, in the eventual care of Magwitch by Pip), rather than in the abstract laws of society (Gallagher, 2015).

The denunciation of gentility goes to the core of one of the main Victorian anxieties: that of social mobility and class performance during a period of economic turmoil unprecedented in history. The Victorian world, dominated by industrial wealth and colonial fortunes and an emerging middle class, provided the disturbing prospect of shifting one's position up the hierarchy, but afforded this only at a high psychological cost, contrary to what had happened in earlier centuries, where there were rigid class structures. The dilemma of Pip is a crisis of this time: he does not inherit any land or title, but a stipend, a kind of mobile capital, which enables him to play the role of a gentleman without any traditional underpinnings. His immorality is therefore inextricably linked with the state of the nouveau riche, who is in a social no-man's land without a real home, as he is embarrassed by his background, and yet not entirely adopted by the class upon which he tries to copy. Moreover, Dickens associates such a demonstration of gentility with the culture of conspicuous consumption and financial exposure of the time; i.e., the figure of Compeyson, the parasitic gentleman-forger, who finds his way in the world by fraud. Here, the moral path of self-discovery that Pip takes is not only an individual awakening, but a renunciation of a society that has commercialized human value, confusing the veil of morality (table manners, accent, credit) with its actual content.

5.7 Restating the meaning of the term Expectations

The title of the novel is very ironic, and its unpacking is a fundamental didactic approach. Pip's first notion of expectations is strictly material and social: a legacy that will make him a gentleman. This term is redefined by the story's moral arc. The moral trials that Pip must pass through turn out to be the real expectations. Through the expectation of wealth, the expectation of ethical accountability replaces it, as Jordan (2001) puts forth the argument.

This redefinition is emphasized by the original (revised) pessimistic ending. Pip and Estella separate, both wiser in their experience; neither is dreaming of romantic union, but a moral clarity

that has been fought and the dumb dignity of self-understanding. In the rewritten ending, the mood is elegant as well, meaning that the anticipation of happiness is surrounded by the remembrance of loss and suffering (Connor, 1996). What it teaches us is that an extraordinary life is not based on external fortunes but rather upon self-improvement, strength, and the ability to love what one has to achieve oneself.

5.8 Textual Analysis of "Great Expectations" Didacticism and Morality

5.8.1 Moral Decadence and Ethical Enlightenment in Pip

Pip is presented at the start of "Great Expectations" as a kind and naive child who is extremely sensitive to pain. His action in assisting the starving convict Magwitch is a manifestation of a natural moral impulse based on empathy rather than socialization (Dickens, 1861/2003). But when Pip is introduced to the rotten aristocratic environment of Miss Havisham and the disdain of Estella, he is changed in his moral compass. He starts equating value to money, education, and social sophistication, and not morality.

Dickens actually depicts this moral consequence of disorientation as spiritual corruption. Pip turns out to humiliate Joe, whose sincerity and good nature were the cornerstones of his emotional life. Pip is snobbish, and this, according to Bloom (2008), is a betrayal of his true self and an indication of a criticism of the ideology of classes as embraced by the Victorians. Pip's inner monologue gives readers a chance to observe how his moral sense is gradually worn away by the power of ambition rather than by a sense of gratitude and love.

This moral decay hits its climax when Pip finds out that he is not being sponsored by Miss Havisham but by Magwitch. The discovery is devastating to Pip, as it undermines his moral and social assumptions. His education and social ascent have been financed by a criminal and not an aristocrat. This turnaround forces Pip to confront the emptiness of class morality (Slater, 2011). Moral value in the system of ethics of Dickens is not based on social respectability but on human devotion and sacrifice.

5.8.2 Joe Gargery as the Center of Morality

Joe Gargery serves as the novel's moral compass. Since the outset, Joe has shown humbled, forgiving, and unconditional love. He never feels resentment toward Pip for his ambition or social snobbery; he deals with it in a patient and kind way. According to Leavis (1970), Joe is a moral sanity in a corrupt social world.

Dickens introduces Joe as an illiterate and socially awkward individual, but a person who is morally better than most of the gentlemen in the novel. This reversal emphasizes the instructive message that being good is not a matter of school or social standing. The fact that Pip is mistreated but Joe refuses to shame her is a lesson in moral dignity from Dickens, grounded in compassion rather than power (Ford, 1987).

It is Joe who tends to the ailing Pip when he falls sick and goes bankrupt, and he does not reprimand him. This is the time when Pip is born again morally. Both Dickens and Joe learn that forgiveness is the supreme moral power and is more powerful than pride and revenge.

5.8.3 Estella and the Unsuccess of Emotional Education

Estella is the destructive effects of moral deprivation. Being brought up in the world of Miss Havisham, who does not believe in love, Estella has no empathy or emotional understanding. She is morally incomplete despite her refinement and elegance. Nussbaum (1990) argues that the tragedy of Estella is that she was unable to build ethical relationships in which they could recognize each other.

Dickens uses Estella as a satire on aristocratic education, where social polish is preferred to emotional intelligence. Whereas Pip's education plays a wrong hand, Estella's training makes her unable to connect effectively with morality. Her miserable marriage with Drummle highlights the words of Dickens that moral and personal unhappiness is the result of repression of emotions.

5.8.4 Magwitch and Redemption of the Moral

Abel Magwitch is the most influential moral character in the novel. He is a criminal by law, but he is loyal, appreciative, and a sacrificial lover. The fact that he chooses to finance Pip's education is a morally generous gesture that contradicts Victorian stereotypes of crime and class (Ledger, 2007).

Dickens intentionally questions the law's ability to determine right and wrong. Although the society denounces Magwitch, Dickens praises him as a morally better person than other people, like Compeyson, who is a socially acceptable man, but unethical. This comparison strengthens the position of Dickens, who held the view that character and not status determine moral worth (Wu and Liu, 2025).

6. Discussion

The ethics of "Great Expectations" illustrate how Dickens criticizes Victorian ideology in general. The novel negates the belief that money, good breeding, and learning bring about moral excellence. Rather, Dickens encourages humanistic ethics based on empathy, loyalty, and personal responsibility.

Dickens uses the moral experience of Pip to dramatize the risk of internalizing social values, encouraging the importance of appearance over integrity. The pain is not only emotional but also ethical in that Pip has to deal with the damage that his ingratitude, pride, and disregard for people in his life did. Victorian moral philosophy, as Himmelfarb (1984) points out, was based on the notion of duty. Still, Dickens broadens it to mean duty related to emotional insight as opposed to being a social responsibility.

This didactic purpose is supported by the narrative's retrospective voice. Older Pip can judge his younger self in a morally upright way, where the readers are directed to judge ethical errors without being judgmental but sincerely reflect on the errors (Booth, 1983).

7. Conclusion

The profound moral teaching of the novel is not presented by what is being said, but by the distance between the two Pips who say it, the wavering youthful hero who lives through it, and the wiser, adult narrator who recreates it. This two-sided consciousness forms a permanent, minor critical distance. When the young and blinded by the shame Pip remarks that Joe had been so final in his manner and I was so much impressed that I went wherever he had led me, the phrasing of the older narrator, the tacit judgement of the so final, the so astonished, goes to make the reader aware of the condescension in Pip long before Pip himself acknowledges it. We stand next to the mature voice and see the younger self, blind as he is, through the retrospective pain of hindsight. This style is the spring of the indirect didacticism of the novel: we are not only told that Pip was a snob, but we can observe his snobbery working in immediate action; at the same time, we can feel the impending burden of remorse pressing on the action we are about to take. The moral growth needs an agonized re-examination of one's own former self, which is, then, performed in the very exercise of reading, as we get to know how to judge the young hero by the indications of his mature and wise counterpart.

References

- Bloom, H. (2008). Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Charles Dickens. Infobase.
- Booth, W. C. (1983). The rhetoric of fiction (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Brooks, P. (1984). Reading for the plot: Design and intention in narrative. Harvard University Press.
- Buckley, J. H. (1974). Season of youth: The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding. Harvard University Press.
- Connor, S. (1996). Charles Dickens. Blackwell.
- Dickens, C. (1861). "Great Expectations". Chapman and Hall.
- Dickens, C. (1999). "Great Expectations" (E. Rosenberg, Ed.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1861)
- Dickens, C. (2003). "Great Expectations". Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1861)
- Ford, G. H. (1987). Victorian fiction: A research guide. Harvard University Press.
- Gallagher, C. (2015). The body economic: Life, death, and sensation in political economy and the Victorian novel. Princeton University Press.
- Glancy, R. (1993). "Great Expectations": Critical issues. Macmillan.
- Grossman, J. (2012). Charles Dickens's networks: Public transport and the novel. Oxford University Press.
- Himmelfarb, G. (1984). The morality of Victorian England. Knopf.

- House, H. (1941). *The Dickens world*. Oxford University Press.
- John, J. (2001). *Dickens's villains: Melodrama, character, popular culture*. Oxford University Press.
- Jordan, J. O. (Ed.). (2001). *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kucich, J. (1994). *The power of lies: Transgression in Victorian fiction*. Cornell University Press.
- Larson, J. L. (2013). *Ethics and narrative in the English novel, 1880-1914*. Cambridge University Press.
- Leavis, F. R. (1970). *The great tradition*. Penguin.
- Ledger, S. (2007). *Dickens and the popular radical imagination*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, C., & Guo, L. (2023). Loss and regain of values and morality in "Great Expectations". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, 10(2), 44–56.
- Michie, H. (2011). *Victorian honeymoons: Journeys to the conjugal*. Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, J. H. (1958). *Charles Dickens: The world of his novels*. Harvard University Press.
- Morgentaler, G. (2000). *Dickens and heredity: When like begets like*. Macmillan.
- Newsom, R. (2001). *Dickens and the feminine*. University of Michigan Press.
- Newsom, R. (2004). *Charles Dickens revisited*. Twayne Publishers.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1990). *Love's knowledge: Essays on philosophy and literature*. Oxford University Press.
- Paroissien, D. (Ed.). (2000). *A companion to "Great Expectations"*. Greenwood Press.
- Rasheed, A. H. (2025). Decoding moral ambiguity: A critical study of Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian novel "Never Let Me Go". *Wasit Journal for Human Sciences*, 21(4).
<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1279>
- Sadrin, A. (1988). *"Great Expectations"*. Unwin Hyman.
- Schlicke, P. (Ed.). (1999). *Oxford reader's companion to Dickens*. Oxford University Press.
- Slater, M. (2011). *Charles Dickens*. Yale University Press.
- Waters, C. (1997). *Dickens and the politics of the family*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, E. (1941). *The wound and the bow*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Winston, J. (2018). *Law, literature, and the transmission of culture in England, 1837-1925*. Routledge.
- Wu, M., & Liu, Y. (2025). A study on "Great Expectations" from the perspective of ethical literary criticism. *Studies in Linguistics and Literature*, 9(1), 26–40.