Capitalism in Charles Dickens's Great Expectations: A Critique

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Editor’s Note

Dear Readers and Contributors,

Congratulations to all of us for sustaining this academic enterprise for five years. With this issue we are entering into the sixth year which we believe will be intensely academic for all the teachers, scholars, supervisors and teachers.

The most interesting article of this issue is ‘Dialogue Journaling’, as a tool for teaching English in classrooms. It was extremely thought provoking and innovative. So are many more articles in the literature section. Share it with your peers and colleagues.

Happy Reading and Sharing!

Dr. Mrudula Lakkaraju
Chief & Founding Editor
## CONTENTS

**Editorial Board** ........................................................................................................................................... 02  
**Editor’s Note** .................................................................................................................................................. 03  
**Contents** ......................................................................................................................................................... 04

## ENGLISH CREATIVE SECTION

- **Into The World**  
  C. Chandhini.................................................................................................................................................. 05  
- **The Triad**  
  Saroj Bala....................................................................................................................................................... 06  
- **Blended Learning**  
  Srimadhavi P.................................................................................................................................................... 07

## ENGLISH LITERATURE

- **The Cloistered Race and Their Clogged Lives: A Study of Alice Walker’s *Meridian***  
  E. Anita............................................................................................................................................................... 09

- **Women-across Boundaries**  
  Ansulika Paul.................................................................................................................................................... 14

- **Psychoanalytic Approach to Manjari’s Character in *Moving On***  
  Bhavana Pandey.................................................................................................................................................. 19

- **Writer and Society: A Subaltern Perspective of Bama’s *Karukku***  
  C. Channappa.................................................................................................................................................. 23

- **Split between Two Identities: an Analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Namesake***  
  Gagandeep Bhullar............................................................................................................................................ 30

- **Literature and Life – The Two Sides of a Coin**  
  P. Hiltrud Dave Eve.......................................................................................................................................... 37

- **Capitalism in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*: A critique**  
  Isam Shihada..................................................................................................................................................... 42

- **The Use of Myth and History in Karnad’s play *Nagamandala***  
  Kanchana Gupta................................................................................................................................................ 43

- **A Study of Wordsworth’s “Ode on Intimation of Immortality” in the Light of Śabdālaṅkāras (verbal figures) of AlāṅkāraSiddhānta**  
  Mukesh K Gupta............................................................................................................................................... 56

- **Retelling the Ramayana and its Impact on the Readers**  
  K. Murali & R. Tirumala.................................................................................................................................. 62

- **Transcending Dalit Aesthetics in the Field of Contemporary Indian Literature**  
  Pradeep Bellubbi.............................................................................................................................................. 65

- **Beyond Self behind the Bars: Mary Tyler’s Autobiography *My Years in an Indian Prison***  
  Satyanarayan Nemalipuri...................................................................................................................................... 69

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

- **Dialogue Journaling with Malaysian English Teachers**  
  Jimalee Sowell.................................................................................................................................................. 77

- **Task-Based Approach to Teaching English Speaking Skills at the Tertiary Level: A Study**  
  S. Belgiliya Lincy.............................................................................................................................................. 89

## Author Profiles

- ........................................................................................................................................................................ 95

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Capitalism in Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*: A Critique

*Isam Shihada*

**Introduction:**

In England, the years spanning 1780–1840 witnessed rapid economic changes, which propelled English society decisively towards industrialization. (Lloyd-Jones & Lewis, 2014) The Industrial Revolution (1) transformed England from an agricultural to an industrial society where the machine had replaced manual labor. This may have led to the rise of mass unemployment and the exodus of workers from villages to cities in search of economic opportunities to survive. This also accounts for the increasing number of slums along the Thames River and the exploitation of women and children at the factories for extremely low wages. (Calmon, 1994)

The Industrial Revolution not only changed the means of production but also the lives of people and structure of English society as a whole. This revolution enabled man to access means of living and production and escape from the unpredictability of nature by bringing an end to the agricultural dominance. (Mokyer, 1985) Though the Industrial Revolution provided solutions for the longstanding problems faced by English people in terms of industry, higher income, steady employment, and railway transportation, it also created new issues such as poverty, urban overpopulation, lack of sanitation, diseases, and child labor—thus marking one of the darkest periods of England’s history. (McNeese, 2000)

Charles Dickens witnessed the consequence of the Industrial Revolution on England’s social fabric and how it particularly affected the lives of the poor and downtrodden. For Victor Lippit, “the core dynamic of the capitalist system (2) is the accumulation process, a process in which a portion of the profits reaped through the sale of goods and services is reinvested, swelling the capital stock, incorporating new technologies in the process, and permitting larger sales and profits in the future.” (2007, p.150) However, Dickens was primarily concerned with the utilitarianism that represented the basis of a solid capitalist economy; if it is abused and misjudged, it turns the rich and privileged of the society into monsters, devouring the poor. Following from this, one of the grim repercussions of the capitalist system is the significant rise in the average living standards of the rich which has created an insurmountable difference between the rich and the poor Dickens regarded the capitalist system to be destructive, pernicious to humanity, and representing a mere return to the law of the jungle. In his novels such as; Great Expectations, he criticizes this system by revealing its negative facets such as child labor and workers’ exploitation. (Hollington, 2013; Hammond, 2015) The poor were exploited and dragged to work for long hours in miserable conditions for low wages. For example, children were hired in textile factories for their small hands because they could reach into the small places where fabric tended to get stuck, exposing themselves to danger. (Fitzgerald, 2000) The contents of the Second Report of the British Government’s Investigation into the Employment of Children in Factories and Mines shocked Dickens when he received a copy in 1843. The report graphically detailed horrific images of naked children chained to and pulling coal carts twice their size and, in some cases, buried so deep in mine shafts that they were unable to stand up straight. (Welch, 2001)
Therefore, we find Dickens championing the problems of the poor and marginalized classes in his novels. Andrea Warren remarks, “Charles Dickens was a more powerful catalyst for change than any queen, prime minister, or politician. He is known as one of history’s greatest reformers.” (2011, p.3) During his daily walks, Dickens saw the drastic effects of capitalism on English society and noted how the royal family and rich classes lived a luxurious life in several palaces attended by servants in London, whereas the poor lived in filthy and overcrowded areas. The poor were also the victims of starvation, violence, and disease and succumbed in great numbers to illnesses such as smallpox, diarrhea, and fever. (Carpenter, 2010; Pike, 2006) Yet, in spite, of the despicable conditions of the poor, they kept pouring into the city, looking for job opportunities in factories and shipyards to survive. They labored for extended hours for low wages in dangerous working conditions. They were provided no assistance. They were confined in overcrowded places where many people shared a single room lit by a candle, deprived of clean water. (Warren, 2011)

Dickens’s *Great Expectations*: A critique of the capitalist system.

For Karl Marx, Charles Dickens represented an example of revolutionary English novelists whose graphic and eloquent pages issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists, and moralists put together (Stearns & Burns, 2011), while for George Orwell, “in every page of Dickens’s work, one can see a consciousness that society is wrong somewhere at the root in Dickens’s novels.” (1940, p.5) For both of them, Dickens believed that literature is an expansive and effective medium of creating and spreading class consciousness and social awareness among people. As a novelist and social reformer, Dickens’s main concern was to prevent power from being abused. He deconstructed the capitalist system by arguing against a free market for labor and fighting against personal greed, callousness, and misanthropy. He was, in fact, outraged by the English legal system and its indifference to the poor and how it saw them only as the responsibility of the Church and not the state. Thus, we find that the poor don’t enjoy economic rights or political representation in Victorian England. They were, in fact, subject to miserable, slave-like working and living conditions. (Pakditawan, 2002)

During these tumultuous times of drastic changes in the second half of the nineteenth century in England, Charles Dickens started writing his novel, *Great Expectations*, described by Bernard Shaw as “his most compactly perfect book . . . all of one piece and consistently truthful as none of his other books are.” (1937, p.xii) That period witnessed the growth of capitalism accompanied by cycles of booms and drawbacks. Dickens’ *Great Expectations* refers to the manipulation of the bourgeois employers, assisted by the government, against the working class. They were not only used as machines by their employers, but were also victimized by them. The working class’s exploitation stemmed solely from materialistic purposes, which resulted in a series of destructions such as the transformation of innocent characters into evil ones. Within this context, Peter Childs and Nicolas Tredell argue that Dickens’s *Great Expectations* renders a world in which “the individual human freedom and fulfillment is frustrated by what are usually promulgated as society’s ‘great expectations,’ and those values usually associated with progress, civilization and modernity.” (2006, p.167) Charles Dickens harshly reviles the capitalist system that would create and transform human beings into greedy creatures. (Houston, 1992) He sheds light on the impact of the Industrial Revolution and its capitalist system in transforming characters into pitiless, selfish people devoid of emotions and on how it destroys all ties of affection and love and nourishes feelings of snobbishness, selfishness, and superiority.
among people. They simply become the object of market relations, learning only to devour or be devoured. For example, Magwitch explains to Pip that he turned to crime because he was starving and no one ever “measured my stomach,” for “I must put something into my stomach, mustn’t I?” (Dickens, 1881, p.284)(3)

In Victorian society, crime is arguably related to monopoly capitalism, negligence, and selfish economic policies. The impact of this socioeconomic transformation on the moral aspects of society has a powerful influence next to education. Crimes increased because transactions connected with property had increased and this new mode of wealth required the protection of the law from theft. Therefore, the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a rapid extension of laws on theft. (Jones, 2015; Mclynn, 2013) Within this context, Charles Dickens sees strong connections between capitalism and delinquency where families were torn apart by ferocious and unrestricted competition. This creates a situation where the greedy capitalist elite confront an increasingly angry and restless proletarian force in the towns and countryside. Therefore, conflict, delinquency, and depravity are the inevitable results. (Jones, 2015)

In Great Expectations, Charles Dickens warns that wealth and status are corrupt and corrupting, inducing social emptiness, inertia, snobbery, and vengefulness. The novel elucidates the disastrous impacts of materialism and class difference on human relationships. For instance, we find that characters such as Pip, Miss Havisham, and Magwitch are transformed into corrupt, arrogant, manipulative, greedy, and machine-like entities blinded by their insatiable desire for ownership, property, and revenge. (Bouziane, 2015) Their greed turns them evil, exploiting poor people to reach their own cherished. As an example from the novel, we find that society’s great injustice to Magwitch has prompted him to turn Pip, a blacksmith’s apprentice, into a “gentleman,” seeking fame and gratitude in return. In addition, Magwitch's thirst for vengeance against his manipulating former partner, Compeyson, urges him to capture Compeyson for the pursuing police at the cost of Magwitch’s own brief freedom. (Newlin, 2000) Miss Havishamuses, Estella as an instrument to vent her anger, frustration, and revenge against society, being jilted by Compeyson on her wedding day, in a form that “her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride, found vengeance in.” (p.148)Her infatuation with Compeyson dated back to the times when he falsely made her believe that he was devoted to her: “There is no doubt that she perfectly idolized him. He practiced on her affection in that systematic way, that he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery at an immense price.” (p.148) Miss Havisham even becomes “too haughty and too much in love to be advised by anyone” (p.148), when she refuses to heed the advice of her poor cousin, Mathew Pocket, thinking that he is simply an opportunist seeking only to possess her fortune. Pocket warned Miss Havisham that “she was doing too much for this man (Compeyson) and was placing herself unreservedly in his power.” (p. 148) Miss Havisham does not accept Mathew's advice not only because she is passionately in love with Compeyson but also because she is arrogant and despises and sees herself as superior to her cousin, Mathew, since he belongs to a lower class. Later, Miss Havisham is jilted by Compeyson, leaving her deceived, devastated, and unhappy. Therefore, she decides to lead a life of seclusion in Satis House. Actually, she is transformed from a loving character into a sadistic and devilish one who enjoys inflicting pain on men. For George Newlin, “Miss Havisham’s determination to avenge herself on the traitorous male leads her to a pathetic extreme—destroying herself and sabotaging Estella” (2000, p.9). Thus, she becomes a destructive character who is capable of destroying love and instilling hatred among people,
especially between Pip and Estella, the girl whom she adopted. She also tries to manipulate Pip to enslave him emotionally like she molds her adopted daughter, Estella. (Houston, 1992)

Miss Havisham uses Estella as an instrument of revenge against Pip, “with my praises, and with my jewels and with my teachings, and with this figure of myself always before her a warning and point my lessons, I stole her heart away and put ice in its place.” (p.434) Being heartless and cruel, Estella will draw men as a candle attracts moths, and she will treat them as Compeyson treated Miss Havisham. For Joseph Miller, Miss Havisham “had deluded herself into thinking she is only letting her state of abandonment be a punishment. Through Estella, she will take an indirect, guiltless revenge and break a hundred hearts for her own heart that was broken.” (1958, p.258) She is willing to enjoy the power of the oppressor without feeling guilty that she is the direct cause behind Estella’s cruel behavior to her suitors, where she feels that men are her natural enemies. For instance, Miss Havisham wants Estella to love her only in the dark and airless confines of Satis House where she may dwell safe from all and, at the same time, where she can destroy any possibility of love between Estella and Pip.

Therefore, we find Miss Havisham teaching Estella the ways of snobbery and arrogance and even pushing her to despise Pip. She convinces Estella that Pip is pursuing her for money and not because he loves her, destroying the chances of friendship and love growing between them. This is depicted in Miss Havisham’s disrespect towards Pip’s feelings of love for Estella. Miss Havisham constantly despises Pip, saying that Estella is “abroad, [. . .] educating for a lady; far out of reach, prettier than ever, admired by all who see her.’…” There was such a malignant enjoyment in her utterance of the last words, and she broke into such a disagreeable laugh, that I was at a loss what to say. She spared me the trouble of considering by dismissing me.” (p.140) Miss Havisham continues to remind Pip of the class differences between him and Estella: that he is a poor boy, while Estella is a rich and educated lady and asserting that their union is impossible. After being humiliated by Miss Havisham and Estella, Pip too is transformed into a corrupt and snobbish person. Pip’s virtues are also corrupted by the temptation of wealth. Being aware of the widening class gap between him and Estella, Pip, in fact, becomes ashamed and unsatisfied with his lot, home, and family, “It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home [. . .] Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister’s temper [. . .] Now, it was all coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on my account.” (p.147)

Though Pip feels ashamed of his humble origins, he finally comes to find out that “crossing class boundaries merely gives him access to a world that is morally and spiritually worse that the poor one he has left.” (Roberts, 2009, p.53) Pip finally gets disillusioned and discovers the emptiness of being part of the high society when he realizes that Miss Havisham does not want him to court Estella. For instance, when Pip confesses his love to Estella, she replies, “When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don’t care for what you say at all.” (p.395) Estella turns out to be a very cold person, disregarding the emotions of everyone coming close to her. Moreover, she is rude and does not hesitate to taunt Pip though she hardly knows him. “He calls the knaves Jacks, this boy?” said Estella, with disdain, before our first game was out. ‘And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!’” (p.81) Estella’s rudeness and arrogance enhance Pip’s feelings of shame and class inferiority and highlights how love and marriage are strongly intertwined with social status.
Dickens’ *Great Expectations* also emphasizes the importance of social participation and acceptance, related to how the individual locates himself within his community. (Choudhury, 2009) One of the problematic issues for Pip is the question not only of the high society he wishes to inhabit but also of the one he wants to quit, considering he is an orphan deprived of any status in the changing English Victorian society fostered by industrial capitalism. Pip feels that it would have been better if he had not been born and that his birth was simply against the odds. Within this context, Pip says of himself, “I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition in the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends.” (p.42) Pip is alive by mere chance, his poor health as an infant recalled by Joe, “if you could have been aware how small and flabby and mean you was, dear me, you’d have formed the most contemptible opinions of yourself!” (p.62). Being an orphan without any status in the society enhances Pip’s growing sense of being lost. Pip feels himself as either a burden that is ignored, left to starve, and die by society or be taken care of by foster parents who, in return, rob him of his identity. For Pip, to accept being taken care of means to be transformed into an object in the capitalist system that dominates the lives of people in England, where social status is associated with wealth and money.

In Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, characters often make huge social transitions, both from wealth to poverty as well as the other way round in the age of financial and social instability. (Bowen, 2015) The impact of the capitalist system on the life of Pip is evident since he suddenly shifted from the class of the poor and downtrodden to that of the rich through the endowment of an unknown benefactor. He suddenly attains the status of a gentleman in society. This may explain Pip’s arrogance towards Joe and his submissiveness towards Miss Havisham and Estella, symbols of the upper class, in his pursuit of love and the luxurious life of high society in London. For Joseph Miller, Pip is ready to “barter all the spontaneity and charity of his relations to Joe for the coldness, formality, and decay of Miss Havisham’s house, and for the life as a gentleman he thinks she has given him.” (1958:p.268)

Dickens feels fascinated by the particulars of each class. Hence, he portrays in detail the small differences of behaviors, clothing, and accents through which people display their aspirations and class identities. Dickens is constantly drawn to the marginalized, peripheral people, rather than who are at the center of social classes. In other words, he is more interested in those who cling to the edges of respectability and who feel vulnerable in the unstable world of the Victorian economy. When it comes to class identity, many of Dickens’ characters are performers who are unwilling to simply accept their given place in society, but are determined to better their positions and lives. However, their aspirations could result in snobbishness, greed, and self-deception. (Bowen, 2015)

For instance, Pip arguably loses his innocence and becomes unfaithful to his social class once he earns a premium for his apprenticeship in London. This may reflect the extent to which capitalism and the resultant materialistic system are the driving cause of the destruction of affection and human relationships among people. For example, we find that Pip feels ashamed even of his brother-in-law, Joe, who had brought him up. This is clearly voiced by Pip: “I am afraid I was ashamed of the dear fellow. I know I was ashamed of him when I saw Estella stood at the back of Miss Havisham, and her eyes laughed mischievously.” (p.124)
Pip’s social snobbery and arrogance heightens when he becomes a rich gentleman. When Pip becomes a wealthy man, he has to learn to speak, eat, and dress, performing a whole new identity to be recognized by others as genteel. He believes that real “gentleman-ness” and good manners are associated with money. Pip thinks that if money can prevent Joe from visiting him, he will pay him. Within this context, Pip says: “If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money. [...] I had little objection to his being seen by Herbert or his father, for both of whom I had a respect.” (p.246) Furthermore, Pip becomes concerned about his own reputation and social status since he does not want to be seen with Joe because he is not refined. The feeling that his degrading and impoverished childhood will stain his whole life is one that he never loses. This is one reason why Pip behaves so badly, particularly towards Joe; although he feels profoundly guilty, Pip is still unable to be fair or generous to him.

Pip is unfortunately blinded to the real gentleman in Joe who is good at heart and keen to visit Pip in London. Supporting this, after Miss Havisham’s party finishes, Pip decides to return back to London without paying a visit to Joe. Instead, he sends a barrel of oysters to Joe as a compensation for not having visited him. Pip substitutes his love for Joe with material things since he thinks that sending Joe a present will compensate for not seeing him in person. Pip’s snobbishness also forces him to keep his relationship with Joe a secret since he thinks that the “civilized” world he inhabits is far more important than the emotional life he shares with Joe. Therefore, Pip’s concern with wealth and status leads to the deterioration of his relationship with his family.

Pip’s snobbery gets intensified during his trip to Satis House to attend Miss Havisham’s birthday. Pip feels disgusted to share the coach with two convicts during his travel, and says: “There were two convicts going down with me [...] their coarse mangy ungainly outer surface, as if they were lower animals, [...] a most disagreeable and degraded spectacle [...] It is impossible to express with what acuteness I felt the convict’s breathing, not only on the back of my head, but all along my spine.” (p.255) Pip feels a sense of superiority before the two criminals, is disgusted by their bad breath, and sees them degradingly as lower animals. Pip’s criticism of the two is ironical since he is unaware that he is indirectly linked with the world of criminals throughout his life. For example, Pip’s benefactor is actually the convict, Magwitch, and his beloved, Estella, is only the daughter of two criminals, Molly and Magwitch.

Furthermore, Pip also discovers futility of his great expectations when he finds out that his real sponsor is not Miss Havisham, a symbol of high society but the criminal convict, Magwitch, a discovery that symbolizes the self-deception of the high society he joins, which leaves him disillusioned. He is almost destroyed by the discovery, and his whole sense of self is simultaneously tainted and emptied.

Magwitch thinks of Pip as “his” gentleman, “If I ain’t a gentleman, nor yet ain’t got no learning, I’m the owner of such. All on you owns stock and land; which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman?” (p.111) Magwitch’s investment of his wealth into Pip is almost like a money laundering plan. By doing this, Magwitch would clean up his money and leave a gentleman as a decent legacy. But for Pip, Magwitch is merely a convict, and he never imagines that his fortune would have come from a criminal. Suddenly, Pip finds himself back to his humble roots remembering when he used to steal food from his home to feed the escaped convict, Magwitch. “You bring me, tomorrow morning early, the file and them wittles. You bring a lot to me, at that old Battery over yonder. You do it and you never dare to say a word or dare to make a sign concerning our having seen such a person as me, or any person sum ever, and you shall be let to live.” (p.5) To add salt to injury, Pip also
discovers that Estella, a symbol of gentility and high class, is only the daughter of the convict, Magwitch.

By raising this issue of the dark side of capitalism, Dickens is keen to provoke a new kind of social consciousness among the upper classes since it is also important for him that the upper classes know about the suffering of the poor. Dickens also points out that capitalism has created a huge gap between the upper and lower classes, which needs urgently to be bridged. For example, Pip’s suffering and humiliation at his sister’s hands symbolizes the lower class’s subjection to the upper class, where his sister and relatives always remind Pip of his humble origins as an orphan who would have died long time ago if not for the paltry food and shelter reluctantly provided by his sister. “‘Church-yard!’ repeated my sister. ‘If it warn’t for me you’d have been to the church-yard long ago, and stayed there. Who brought you up by hand?’” (p.14) Mrs. Joe keeps reminding Pip that she saved him from starving to death and that without her help, he would not be alive, but lying dead in the churchyard along with his parents.

Moreover, Dickens uses every opportunity to compare the life of Pip on the marshes (representing the world of the oppressed) with the genteel Satis House and changing world of London (representing the oppressors). (Stearns & Burns, 2011) Accordingly, Pip becomes conscious of his poor class when Miss Havisham instructs Estella to play a card game with him, Estella answers with disdain, “With this boy! Why, he is a common laboring-boy!” (p.125) In another incident, when Estella puts food on the ground for Pip to eat without even looking at him, he feels lesser than an animal: “She came back, with some bread and meat and a little mug of beer. She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry . . . the tears started to my eyes” (p.86) Leaving Satis House humiliated, Pip feels ashamed of his low class origins: set off on the four-mile walk to our forge; pondering, as I went along, on all I had seen, and deeply revolving that I was a common laboring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way. (p.89)

Capitalism not only produces inequality, but also leaves its grave psychological impact on characters like Pip, who is humiliated, degraded, and offended by Miss Havisham and Estella for belonging to a lower class. He is an object of ridicule and scorn. (Makati, 2008)

A philanthropic Perspective

However, despite his revolutionary ideas and harsh critique of the capitalist system, Dickens never calls for an overthrow of capitalism and does not see the struggle, like Karl Marx, as a struggle between the rich and poor where a classless society will eventually emerge. Within this context, George Orwell asserts that there is no clear sign that Dickens “wants the existing order to be overthrown or that he believes it would make very much difference if it WERE overthrown. For in reality his target is not so much society as ‘human nature’. ” (1940, p. 5) Dickens’ target is, in fact, altering human nature since he wants the upper class people to be aware of their blind selfishness and the gruesome realities of the poor, for which the rich are responsible. He appeals to their humanity to look beyond the curtain that prevents them from seeing the displaced person, the child laborer, and the
hungry factory worker, who keep the wheels of capitalism turning and turning.(Stearns & Burns, 2011)

For Dickens, capitalism can, therefore, be reformed internally by encouraging philanthropy (4) where people cooperate and help each other. Philanthropy “can be defined as a social duty and prompt action on behalf of any victims of economic competition.” (Cazamian, 2013, p.81) When it comes to the question of philanthropy, the terrible poverty, misery, and human suffering of the poor did haunt many of England’s rich. Anti-slavery agitation, growing poverty, and the ongoing demands for workers’ welfare were the reasons behind the growth of philanthropy and gave an impetus for the philanthropists to improve the structure of Victorian society. Philanthropists also felt that the British government failed miserably to help the country’s most vulnerable people. Therefore, they decided to devote their lives to raising money and setting up schools, hostels, soup kitchens to help the poor and less fortunate. In this context, John Stuart Mill argues that “the aim of philanthropy was to extinguish not only poverty but also the forms of vice, destitution, and physical wretchedness.” (5) (Cazamian, 2013, p.107) For Charles Dickens, the upper classes were responsible for the problems of Victorian society and public, private assistance and charity for the needy were necessary. In other words, any person in any position of authority was responsible for the well-being of his subordinates.

Instances of individual and genuine benevolence were Dickens’ favorite way of assisting and rescuing his characters from despair and need. It is sufficient to say that benefactors would be ready to contribute, and their aid was put in good use. (Bremner, 1996) Dickens employs philanthropy as a potential solution to the challenge of social stratifications in the age of high capitalism. Dickens saw “a close connection between good order in the state, philanthropy, and the national interest. He was quite willing to turn his fire on false charity, as well as moral and religious hypocrisy. (Cazamian, 2013, p.144) He condemned the policies that caused suffering of the poor and wondered why poor people were left to die of neglect when the rest had enormous wealth at their disposal. Personally, Dickens was generous toward people in need, contributed to a variety of charitable organizations, helped them raise funds, and served on the boards of many charitable agencies. (Bremner, 1996)

Philanthropy, in Dickens's Great Expectations, acts both as a sign of new forms of social relation and representation, which is commensurate with a realist literary paradigm.” (Christianson, 2007, p.63) Dickens wanted rich and philanthropists to feel and contribute to alleviating the sufferings of their brethren. This may symbolize the long tradition of Christian charity as a practice that contributes to the salvation of the deprived. In Great Expectations, Pip describes Joe as “a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow,—a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness.” (p.26) Joe sets an example of what philanthropy should be when he asks Mrs. Joe to bring the orphan Pip to live with them, “I said to her, ‘And bring the poor little child. God bless the poor little child,’ I said to your sister, ‘there’s room for him at the forge!’” (p.68). He later pays off all of Pip’s debts and then sneaks away in the middle of the night, so Pip will not be ashamed of him. Moreover, Joe readily destroys Pip’s apprenticeship papers, uncomplainingly relinquishing control over the boy while rejecting the worldly Jagger’s offer of compensation.

Joe’s act is an authentically philanthropic one, asking nothing for himself. Instead, he helps genuinely rather than manipulate the recipient, Pip. Therefore, by the end of the
novel, Pip becomes the true son of this spiritual father, Mr. Joe, when he keeps silent about the money he has given to Herbert Pocket.

Finally, Charles Dickens asserts that philanthropy should be genuine and a sincere effort to help the poor and warns against using it as a means to credit and fame. For instance, Miss Havisham seeks credit for reconstituting Estella into an instrument of vengeance and breaking hearts, while Magwitch performs philanthropy with a desire for gaining gratitude. Magwitch’s philanthropy is devouring since it falls unavoidably into the pitfalls of corrupt charity. First, it is manipulative since Magwitch tries to shape and mold Pip to his own perverse image of a gentleman and control even his choice of a name. Second, it is self-serving when Magwitch returns to England so that he may himself watch the fruits of his philanthropy and enjoy gratitude and power. Thus, philanthropy should not be a name for selfishness and vanity, but for self-abnegation.

Conclusion:

To conclude, in Great Expectations, Dickens criticizes the capitalist system, which is destructive and pernicious, by showing its negative facets such as the class system, child labor, workers’ exploitation, and transformation of the moral and psychological structure of Victorian society. Charles Dickens criticizes the vice of greed and misanthropy fostered by capitalism and emphasizes the idea that wealth based on the exploitation of the poor cannot achieve happiness and satisfaction. On the contrary, it fosters snobbery, greed, feelings of hatred, and revenge. It traps, humiliates, and degrades the humanity of people. By citing examples such as Miss Havisham and Magwitch, he warns against using philanthropy as a means to seek gratitude and fame. Dickens advocates genuine philanthropy and an equal distribution of wealth, rather than overthrowing capitalism as a remedy to the dark side of capitalism, which may redeem humanity and preserve its dignity.

Notes


3-All references will henceforth be taken from Dickens, C. (1881). Great Expectations. Boston: Estes and Lauriat

References:
• Retrieved from http://find.galegroup.com/gic/infomark.do?&source=gale&idigest=fb72ofd3d9036c1ed2df3a0500fc2&prodId=GIC&userGroupName=itsbtrial&tabID=T001&docId=CX3408502115&type=retrieve&contentSet=EBKS&version=1.0
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