



Lost and Regain of Values and Morality in Great Expectations

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Abstract: As a humanist, Charles Dickens was concerned with people in a morality-collapsing society; he was always using his works to popularize a kind of values existing in the people of the lower class. This paper intends to reveal Dickens' morality in *Great Expectations* through the protagonist Pip. During the three stages of transformations, Pip embraced different values towards life and people around him. At the very beginning he has a contented mind and sense of love; at the second stage, being conquered by the glamour of high social status and the power of money, he becomes a snobbish "gentleman"; and at the last stage, he realizes the true meaning of life and the relations between love and happiness, and eventually he acquires the true values. Through analyzing the causes of Pip's transformations in values, we can gain a valuable instruction in cultivating values and morality.

Key words: *Great Expectations*; values transformations; morality

I. Introduction

Charles Dickens, the greatest representative of English critical realism, was born in Victorian age. It was an age of controversy: industrial revolution brought out rapid development, but at the same time, great contrast between the rich and poor emerged; capitalists laid so much emphasis on morality while many things that betrayed morality appeared. Dickens gained full understanding of life and society from the extreme miseries of the poor he experienced. Sub-consciously, Dickens had a desire to purify the world. As a writer, he resorted to his works, instilling his thoughts into them to serve as a beacon to the contemporary people.

There is no exception to *Great Expectations*, which was written in Dickens's latter life after he had cultivated penetrating sight into life and society. It is an acute examination of Victorian society and the development of one's morality. The novel centers on the story of Pip, an orphan who has good luck and is bestowed a great fortune. But later he loses

both his luck and his expectations. Through the ups and downs, he changes from a contented and kind child to a snobbish "gentleman", and at last he realizes the true values and the importance of the values in one's life if he wants to live a happy life. This paper attempts to analyze the causes of Pip's transformations at different stages so as to reveal Dickens' thoughts and morality characterized by humanistic concerns and sympathy towards the common poor.

II. The Critic and Humanist Dickens

In the history of England, the age ruled by Queen Victoria has generally been regarded as one of the most remarkable periods. The country grew from an agricultural country into an industrialized one and became a financial and political center.

The implementation of the first reform bill made it possible for the industrial capitalists to gain their power in parliament. For up to 1832, the industrial capitalists, though playing an increasingly important role in the economic life of the country, were barred from the political organ of the country. Prior to 1832, the landed class and aristocrats, including the commercial capitalists, controlled the system of voting and representation. But the Reform Bill of 1832 extended the right to vote to all men owning property worth ten pounds or more, enabling the industrial capitalists to come to the political arena. During this period, Britain was transformed from a predominantly rural economy to a major industrial power. Transportation, mass communication, education, legal and parliamentary structures, the treatment of the insane and criminals, and the position of women, were all radically altered.

However fast England was developing into a rich, advanced industrialized country in Victorian age, it was an age that saw the sharpest contrast between the rich and poor. The whole process of the development in capitalism witnessed the sufferings and miseries of the mass working class. With the introduction of the steam engine, it was possible for



the capitalists to hire unskilled workers. It was not unusual that children of five years of age were dragging heavy loads of coal in the mine passage for sixteen hours a day. Many skilled workers were unemployed, and the capitalists did not feel they were responsible for the poverty of the working people, because it is a policy based on the Utilitarian philosophy, which asserted that the function of the government was to preserve order and protect ownership of private property and not to interfere with the economic operation of the country. In order to demand their own rights, the working people launched large-scale demonstrations.

Under this situation, the English critical realism appeared. It realistically exposed the darker side of the seemingly prosperous society, condemned the ugly modern capitalist civilization, and revealed the cash corruption and its influence upon human nature. Charles Dickens was one of the greatest critical realist writers. He was fully convinced that “the world is not a dream, but a reality, of which we are the chief part, and in which we must be up and doing something and our business is to use life well. If we do that we may leave Death alone.” (Peters, 108) He played an active role in charitable enterprises and welfare schemes; he made numerous speeches at charity activities and undertook private benefactions. So it can be said that he is not only a great writer, but also a humanist. His attack was no longer aimed at specific social abuses, but at a climate of opinion that saw everything in terms of monetary value. To him, the greatest literature was literature for the people, and literature “can not be too faithful to the people—can not too ardently advocate the cause of their advancements, happiness and prosperity” (Liu, 363). All these factors play an indispensable role in the formation of Dickens’ thoughts. Dickens cared about the society, and cared about the people in the society. This care made him a person with great morality and the values transformations of Pip in *Great Expectations* embody this clearly.

III. The Primary Values

During the first period, Pip, the orphan boy, lives with his brother-in-law Joe. In his young eyes, Joe is his harbor, and he can only receive protections and love from Joe both in and out of the family. His sister is such a tyrannical and abusive figure that she always punishes him even when he commits no mistakes; people in the village regard him as a talking subject. Thus, Joe is quite an important figure in Pip’s heart, and the influence from Joe will be decisive in the life of Pip.

Firstly, Joe is responsible. Even though the

family seems to be in the control of Mrs. Joe, yet the breadwinner is Joe. Joe draws inspirations from his own mother that he would never do wrong in a woman, because his mother is a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest heart and never getting peace in her mortal days. Joe is deadly afraid of doing wrong in a woman; he must stand as a man to bear all the responsibility in the family.

Secondly, Joe is honest. It can be proved through the following quotation from the novel:

that lies is lies, however that come, they didn’t ought to come, and they come from that farther of lies, and work around to the same. Don’t tell no more of’em, Pip, that ain’t the way to get out of being common, old chap. And sa to being common, I don’t make it out at all clear. You are uncommon in some things, you are uncommon small. Likewise you’re a uncommon scholar. (Dickens, 69)

This not only reflects honesty in Joe, but other virtues. Joe is able to see uncommonness from commonness, and this ability makes Joe proud of his profession. And this also shows Joe’s latter disapproval of Pip’s leaving for his great expectations, since he believes that a person must be a common one before he can be an uncommon one, and That everything achieved in life requires great endeavor is an absolute truth forever in Joe’s eye.

In fact, it can be said that the values Dickens tried to popularize in *Great Expectations* is embodied through Joe. Joe is the man of virtues, even though it is Pip whom the writer pictured, because the ultimate values Pip gets are actually the values of Joe. During this period, Joe is a role model to Pip and a factor of his life. So Pip is a very kind and sensitive child. His kindness lies in his help of a starving convict, and his sensitiveness lies in his fear of doing something wrong. This is shown when his guilty conscience along with his imagination haunts him with images of his being caught after he stole food for the convict. The way his conscience has to wrestle with the idea that he has done a good deed shows insecurity as well as his fear of doing something wrong. He is afraid of losing Joe’s confidence, and he determines to be apprenticed to Joe and believes the forge as “the glowing road to manhood and independence” (Dickens, 104)

IV. Values Lost

Marxism considers human beings as social ones; their attitudes and values are formed and influenced by interpersonal relations. At the first stage, Joe is the center in Pip’s life, and he has no opportunity to encounter other people and life to him is a much simpler one. If Pip never met Estella and lived simply with Joe the whole life, his former



values would be remained without any doubt. Nevertheless, he is offered series of opportunities that contribute to his transformations.

4.1 The Power of Money

The first opportunity is meeting Estella, the beautiful but arrogant lady. She makes Pip aware his commonness. Before, he has never thought that he had thick boots and coarse hands, let alone the fact that it was a bad thing; he has never thought that he was ignorant and that it was wrong to call knaves Jacks, let alone to doubt Joe's ability. Pip becomes upset by the fact that he is ignorant and inadequate. He is ashamed of being a common laboring boy, and now he thinks everything to be coarse and common.

Estella is such an attractive lady and much more beautiful than anybody ever was that Pip falls in love with her at the first sight, and he is determined to become a gentleman on her account. Estella brings about changes in him and everything built in Pip collapses now. He is no longer content at being at the forge, and he does not consider Joe's companionship as anything very important and most of all he is completely dissatisfied with his place in life and his future. He begins to despise the things that keep him at the forge and he would never like Joe and the trade and everything. Now, two objectives have been formulated in Pip's life: to upgrade his social status and to learn indispensable knowledge. He will not be a real gentleman until he achieves the two objectives; he will not be able to equal Estella without the fulfillment of his objectives. However, the poor family in which he lives could not afford him the opportunity to fulfill his dream. He feels very aggrieved, dissatisfied and uncomfortable. Just at this critical moment comes the second opportunity in his life.

It is assured that without the great fortune bestowed, Pip is unlikely to disassociate himself with his former class, and his former values, either. It is just the fortune that makes him a gentleman. It is also the fortune that makes him admire the power of money. Without money, he would not receive the education for gentleman, and therefore would not become a gentleman. Money changes his fate. Money enables him to get rid of his former class, and eliminates all the secret agony he suffered when he thought he was unable to become a gentleman. Besides, the fortune brings about dramatic changes in other people living in the village. Before he gets the fortune, he was criticized and under their thumbs, taking Uncle Pumblechook as an example, he spited Pip and called him "Sixpennorth of halfpence"(Dickens,24)before, but after Pip gets the fortune, he considers that it is him that helps Pip.

After Pip gets the fortune, he is called "Sir" by the shop-owner of Trabb, and the servant in the shop is nothing in the eyes of the shopkeeper when Pip is present.

In fact, the respect people pay is not to Pip but to money. Money possesses such a dynamic power that makes people kneel at the foot of it. This has become the climate of the society. The worship of money causes lots of tragedies. Miss. Harvisham can be said so as a victim for she is betrayed due to her fortune; Conpayson's disgusting deeds are also lured by his desire for money; and most of Miss. Harvisham's relatives visit the tomb like Satis with an intention to obtain heritage of Miss. Harvisham. Money becomes the motives of people's actions and the criterion of people's judgments. Living in such a climate, Pip, a very simple child, is hard to be immune from the air filthy with money.

4.2 The Standard of Being a Gentleman

British Prime Minister Disraeli, Benjamin (governed in 1868) draw a conclusion during that period that Britain could be divided into two types of peoples: the rich and the poor, and between the two existed a huge gap. This proves true in Pip. Pip believes that there must be a great gap between being uncommon and being common, and also that the gap is as great as the time when he dreamed of being a gentleman but lived in a common blacksmith's family. Now, he has crossed the great gap and been a real gentleman, there must be a gap between him and people like Joe and Bidly. His values judgment towards Joe changes tremendously because of the fortune he receives. He thinks he is much better than Joe for he is now wealthier and higher in class. To fit his new status, he must make new friends, and enjoys his new life. The new friends are actually like the Serpent in the Eden whom will only lead him to degeneration. He becomes frivols, using his money carelessly, and not realizing the consequences. Pip begins to feel increasingly superior to Joe, and becomes easily influenced by others around him. While Pip is in debt, one of his new friends advises him to spend even more money to join a club called the Finches, which would swallow up even more money. The amounting debt does not make him nervous, but insensitive.

Sometimes he still thinks of his former friends and knows their honesty, but now he becomes a gentleman, it is quite unfit for him to continue their relations. When he knows Joe would come to London to see him, he feels unpleasant, regarding his visit as considerable disturbance and some mortification, "if I could have kept him away



by paying money, I certainly would have paid money”(Dickens,215).

By now, Pip has been corrupted by money; in his mind, money could be effective in everything. He totally forgets the time when he was to leave the forge. At that time, Joe was offered money as compensation for the loss of Pip’s services in the forge, but Joe declined that offer, saying that “Lord forbid that I would want anything for not standing in Pip’s way.” (Dickens,134) and that “It were understood, And it are understand, And ever will be similar according.” (Dickens,138)At that time Pip should have known that Joe lists love over money forever. “But of you think as money can make compensation to me for the loss of the little child—what come to the forge—and ever the best of friends!” (Dickens,138)Pip’s words show how he has been corrupted by money as well as how snobbish he is! Even when he comes back to his hometown, he invents all kinds reasons and excuses not to go home. He thinks if he came home, he will become an inconvenience because he is not expected to come home and bring unnecessary troubles to Joe and Biddy.

V. Values Regained

Human life is full of mistakes, for it is inevitable for people to make mistakes, but after making mistakes, there appear two kinds of people, the first are those who never admit they have done something wrong, while the other are those who come to realize their mistakes and feel regret and correct their mistakes. No matter how long the process of correcting mistakes lasts, this kind of person is basically kind and honest. Pip undergoes this hard but quite worthy process because after this process he becomes mature.

5.1 The Learning of Responsibility

In the process of Pip’s transformations in values, Magwitch plays an important part. Magwitch’s experience is very painful, and it can be said that he is the victim of the society in which the minor ones are totally ignored, but they still have to live, and “put something into his stomach”.Without means of going out, they commit crimes. If the society provides minimum necessity for them when they got trapped, and the rich who have the capacity are willing to show them their sympathy, and stretch a helping hand out, they might lead another kind of life. This point is the aim of Dickens’ critics in this novel.

British writer Oliver Goldsmith said that Laws grind the poor, and rich man rule the law. A society is nothing but the Hell if it is deprived of

justice. Magwitch is a crime, a crime deserving punishment, but is Compeyson not a crime? Did he commit less severe crimes than Magwitch? The court would not like to think it further. In the court, they judge like this:

My lord and gentlemen, here you has afore you, side by side, two persons as your eyes can separate wide, one the younger, well brought up, who will be spoke to as such, one the elder, ill brought up, who will be spoken to as such, one, the younger, seldom if ever seen in these here transactions, and only suspected t’other, the elder, always seen in’em and always wi’his guilt brought home. Can you doubt, if there is but one in it, which is the one, and if there is two in it, which is much the worst one? (Dickens,346-347)

The judges sentence Magwitch fourteen years in prison due to his harsh manners and wretched appearance, but Compeyson seven years because of his education and appearance. Compeyson is a gentleman according to the standard of being a gentleman in the society, judging by his appearance and his knowledge; but his deeds are far from honorable. His business is swindling, handwriting forging, and stolen bank note passing. Compeyson has pity on nothing and nobody, “he had no more heart than a iron file, he was as cold as death, and he had the head of the devil.” (Dickens,344)And he sets all sorts of traps he is able to think of, and keep his own legs out of and get the profits and let another man trapped. Caught in the same crimes, he does not care about his fellow at all, only tries to push all the troubles onto others.

Magwitch tells Pip that he was trapped by Compeyson and always under his thumb; he was always working and always got into danger. When Pip listens to this, in his heart, he may make a comparison between Compeyson and Joe. Joe always tries his best to protect him even like to bear all the punishment on account of him. Till now, Pip may turn his attention to the inside of people. He seems to realize that what is on the inside counts and the exterior is not important. From the unfair justice regarding poor and illiterate people but advantageous towards the rich and educated middle-class, Pip sees that the law has wronged Magwitch and Pip becomes more concerned about Magwitch, which shows that Pip is becoming a more caring person. Attractive appearance and intensive knowledge cannot guarantee an honest heart. Once he focuses his attention on heart, he will find his standard of being a gentleman is not right.

Joe is honest and kind, so is Magwitch, the criminal. Living in Australia, he can live without any



worries and spend his remaining years with doing nothing considering the great fortune he possesses. But that is not his choice. He never forgets the boy who rendered him food and fire to help him survive in the churchyard. He harbors eternal gratitude to Pip, and is determined to make Pip a gentleman. This is the reason why Pip gets the great fortune. Gratitude is the point that Dickens intended to depict. At the very beginning of the novel, Pip is told that “to be grateful to them who brought you up by hand” (Dickens, 25), but he abandons his gratitude to those who brought him by hand. Considering the unjust treatment Magwitch gets and the gratitude and the purpose of his coming back, Pip changes his attitude towards Magwitch, the abhorrence and repugnance disappearing. He resists his impulse to flee from the convict and realizes that he could not extricate himself. A kind of responsibility rises in his heart and he must try all means to help the man escape from punishment. After Magwitch has been captured, Pip becomes increasingly attentive and all his contempt has gone. He becomes a man who shamelessly loves a convict when he says that: “I will be as true to you, as you have been to me.” (Dickens, 441) Pip does everything in his power to change the situation. Pip is able to see the good in someone who is openly supposed to be bad, just like what Joe tells Pip about his own father that “whatsoever the failings on his part, remember reader he were that good in his heart” (Dickens, 46).

5.2 The Introspection on Happiness

What is the concept of happiness and how can one be happy in life. That is a question, and to that question, different people hold different views. Happiness may be equal to comfortable life, high social status, or a kind of attitude. Happiness to Pip is to be a gentleman and win the love of Estella, and his understanding is quite different from that of Joe and Biddy's. The final understanding of the concept of happiness may also lead to his recognition of the true values.

To Joe, happiness is reward of hard work; independence gained through hard work and to bear and fulfill one's duty with an honest heart. “live well and die happy” (Dickens, 70) is his perpetual principle. With regards to Pip's great expectations, though agrees with him going for London, he does not in his heart. “if you can't get to be uncommon through going straight, you'll never get to do it through going crooked.” (Dickens, 70) In Joe's eyes, without earnest working, Pip's great expectations is just a castle built in the air, without sound foundation. It is confirmed in the end when Magwitch is caught because the fortune he is bestowed would be confiscated.

Biddy is a common but kind girl living in the countryside, to her, happiness is not something quite beyond one's grasp. She is able to enjoy happiness through loving and being loved. When Pip reveals the truth to her, she feels happy because Pip regards her as a true friend or he would not tell his secret to her at all, but at the same time, she feels grieved because she thinks Pip desires too much from life. Keeping one's nature is the first important thing. Biddy, like Joe, belonging to the lower class, remains their nature through the novel, even when Pip feels ashamed of them and betrays them; they treat him all the same. Biddy's kindness can be seen much more clearly in comparison with Estella. The former is so kind that she would only derive pain and no pleasure from rendering others pains and she would rather have wounded her own breast than others'. But Estella is quite the contrary, in her heart she intends to gain satisfactions from breaking the hearts of men.

It has been mentioned above that Pip's great expectations collapses when Magwitch tells him the truth and loses all the fortune he could inherit after Magwitch has been captured. And what about the love he shows to Estella? Does he gain happiness from the love? The answer is a definite no because Estella is out of reach forever, and Harvisham's motive is only to “break their hearts and have no mercy!” Pip falls the victim of Miss Harvisham's trap. Miss. Harvisham, with a broken heart from a failed love, hates all men in the world; the adopted daughter is nothing but a tool with which she revenges herself. Love in the heart of Miss Harvisham is not the healthy one: “what real love is, it is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter—as I did!” (Dickens, 237) It is no doubt she educated Estella like this, loving Estella, Pip is doomed to be grieved. Herbert once told Pip that “that girl's hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree”, and Estella herself admits that her heart is vital to her since if it ceases to beat she would cease to be, but she also tells Pip that “I have no softness there, no—softness there, no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense.” (Dickens, 235) The time he spends with her is not happy at all:

“There were picnics, fete days, plays, operas, concerts, parties, all sorts of pleasures, through which I persuade her—and they were all miseries to me. I never had one hour's happiness in her society.” (Dickens, 296)

Loving in such condition is not enjoying, but suffering. When he comes home after bankruptcy,



he meets Biddy, both of them crying, but he cries because she looks so fresh and pleasant, she because he looks so wore and white. So it can be said that Pip derives no happiness from his great expectations, yet Biddy and Joe are living happily in the countryside. When Pip knows the two will get married, he says to Biddy that she has the best husband in the whole world, and to Joe that he has the best wife in the whole world.

5.3 The Functions of Conscience

Undoubtedly, conscience always functions in Pip, and that little spark of celestial fire never extinguishes, or he will not feel grieved at all. And only this conscience together with the influence of Joe and Magwitch and other innocent people, can he changes to the better. Pip's conscience lies in his attitude towards his home and the good deeds he later does.

To Pip, home has never been a very pleasant place because of his sister's temper, but his Joe sanctifies the home, so he also believes in home, and "believe in the front door as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls." (Dickens, 104) But after the visit of Satis, he begins to hate the place. He is in such a hurry to flee from home that he wildly packs up things that he knows he would need the next morning, in a fiction that there is not a moment to be lost. However, the disaffection in his heart makes Pip feel that "it is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home." (Dickens, 104) He bursts into cry secretly, and the tears like rain upon the blinding dust of earth, making him feel more sorrowful, and more aware of his ingratitude. In fact, only a person with a loving heart can shed tears for his mistakes. When Pip is living in London, in a decidedly overrated city, when he wakes up in the night, he still thinks of Joe "in the honest old forge" and "there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home" (Dickens, 268) when he sits alone, looking at the fire in London. Actually, even Pip becomes degenerated in the city, life at home always vividly returns in his conscience, and the edge of Tickler seems softened when he receives the news of his sister's death.

An ideal home is main values of Dickens, for his own family could not be said as an ideal one. He was plagued by his father's financial problems, and his brothers were also making financial demands on him. His own children were unable to become the persons he had expected. His own marriage was a great headache to him. Therefore, Dickens was eager for an ideal home from which he can derive love and warmth and care among family members. He often

depicted moving pictures of family life in his works. An ideal home is Paradise that serves as a harbor far from the friendless business world. In the end, when Pip goes bankrupt, it is from his home, his suffer-follower Joe and friend Biddy that he gets sympathy and acceptance and avoids being sent into prison for his large amount of debts.

Conscience makes him introspect on what he has done and realizes finally the mistakes he has made following his great expectations. "I live in a state of chronic uneasiness respecting my behavior to Joe, my conscience—was not by any means comfortable about Biddy" (Dickens, 268) But Pip is far beyond remorse, his repent lies in the good deeds he later does. After realizing that Herbert, his faithful friend, might have done much better without him and his great expectations, Pip thinks that he should help Herbert with his resources. So when Herbert talks to him the whole evening in a flush of pleasure and success, Pip considers it as a "great event in his life" and "the turning point of his life" (Dickens, 295), because his expectations have done some good to somebody. Pip's conscience also affects the decision of Miss. Harvisham in her will and left four thousand to Mr. Mathew Pocket "because of Pip's account of him the said Mathew" (Dickens, 459), till now, Pip recognizes the significance of honesty and Mathew is an honest man.

Conscience is the interior factor and Marxist philosophy considers the interior factor as decisive one in its influence upon people. This interior factor inspires Pip to change to the better actively. Therefore, it can be said that Pip is not bad essentially due to his conscience. The exterior factors are brought out by the society in which the worship of cash becomes popular and traditional values are discarded. In the novel, virtues of Joe represent the traditional values, he is industrious, responsible, honest and warm-hearted, but such a man is incompatible with the current society, even is disgusted by his suffer-follower Pip, to whom he renders too much care and love, in Pip's ingratitude words and deeds. Conscience is an instinct to judge ourselves in the light of moral laws, it is not a mere faculty; it is an instinct. After a long tedious journey, Pip finds the true values and starts a new life.

VI. Conclusion

Great Expectations is one of Dickens' latter works that contains his profound thoughts gained in life. Dickens' intention is not just to narrate the story of Pip's expectations and his failure of achieving expectations. The analyzing of the causes of Pip's transformations makes it clear that Pip is actually



influenced by outside factors. But after a long tedious journey, Pip acquires the true values in the end. In this sense, Pip achieves another “great expectations”—a kind of attitude towards life and better understanding of himself, only with this newly gained great expectations can he leads his new life and knows the very kind of life he is meant to lead.

Taking all the factors that affect Pip’s transformations into consideration, it can be seen that Dickens is upholding and trying to popularize a kind of values existing in people like Joe. And the values of Joe represent the universal values, but it was threatened in an industrialized society where people were driven by the pursuing of money regardless of their own conscience. The greatness of Dickens lies in the fact that he was not only able to notice the goodness exists in the minor ones, but also gave it an affirmative emphasis. In *Great Expectations*, this goodness is amplified through contrast with meanness and avarice and all other wickedness exhibited in people like Compeyson, Harvisham, Estella, Uncle Pumblichook and others. And it is much more amplified through the course of Pip’s transformations in which he discards and then regains the goodness. The whole process of Pip’s transformations is in fact his discovery and trace of true values and his final acquiring the true values reflects his moral growth. This shows Dickens’ sincere sympathy towards the common poor and the morality of his own as a humanistic writer in Victorian age.

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