

# Portrait of the injustice

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In the first part of Dicken's *Great Expectations*, Pip confesses to his readers that " I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me" (63). During Pip's first visit to Satis House in Chapter Eight, he finds himself crying from brutal humiliation and explains to his readers that his sister's bringing him up by hand made him sensitive (63). He continues by explaining that " in the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely felt, as injustice" (63). His cry of injustice, however, does not leave him even when he grows. Though Pip is looking back on all these events and placing them in his narrative as an adult, his tone and language indicate a sense of bitterness. Although he has overcome his disappointments and failures by the end of the novel and is now looking back and retelling his story, he is still blaming his sister's bringing him up " by hand" as the cause for his vulnerabilities. This feeling of " injustice" has never left him " within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with injustice" (63).

From the very first lines of the novel the readers are given a depressing view of Pip's childhood. The only thing that represents his parents is their tombstones. His five dead brothers, " who gave up trying to get a living; exceedingly early in that universal struggle" (3), illustrates the harshness of the world in which Pip grew up. Not knowing anything more about his family, Pip fantasizes about them; he imagines his father was a " square, stout, dark man, with curly hair" and his mother was " freckled and sickly" (3). As a deprived child he is forced to fantasize and imagine the world in various ways, and according to Hochman and Wachs, " his discourse throughout [the

novel] is shot through with imagery that powerfully refracts fantasy material characteristic of [his] early life” (168). For instance, the sharp needles and pins jammed into the buttered bread Mrs. Joe fed both himself and Joe (10) in the first part of the novel were paralleled later on by the sharp handles of the nutcracker that might have poked out baby Pocket’s eyes (194). The file Pip had stolen from the forge reappears again in chapter ten as the stranger in the Jolly Bargemen stirred his rum-and-water with it (77). The Pocket’s children’s tumbling upside-down in Chapter Twenty Two echoes Pip’s being tilted upside-down by Magwitch in the very first chapter. Even Tickler the “wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my [Pip’s] tickled frame” (9), never leaves Pip’s mind; by the time of his sister’s funeral in chapter thirty five Pip still remembers the Tickler (278).

Guilt also never leaves Pip. According to Pip, his sister had always believed that he “was a young offender whom an Accoucheur Policemen had taken up...and delivered to her, to be dealt with according to the outraged majesty of the law. “ I [Pip] was always treated as if I had insisted on being born, in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality... ” (23). Mr. Wopsle and Mr. Pumblechook must also see Pip in this light as they discuss Mr. Wopsle’s pork sermon “the gluttony of Swine is put before us, as an example to the young...what is detestable in a pig, is more detestable in a boy” (27). For these reasons, it seems natural for Pip to feel so much guilt throughout the course of the novel.

At the very start of the novel he is forced to steal food from the dreadful Mrs. Joe and steal the file from Joe. Because of this, he feels guilty in two different

ways. First, his guilt for stealing from his sister takes the form of fear and, second, his stealing from Joe causes him to feel ashamed. The readers are given a vivid description of his internal struggles as Mr. Pumblechook takes a sip of tar water from the glass of what Mr. Pumblechook assumes to be brandy “ O heavens, it had come at last! ...I held tight to the leg of the table under the cloth, with both hands, and awaited my fate...I didn't know how I had done it, but I had murdered him somehow” (28). Fortunately Pip was not caught by Mrs. Joe and Mr. Pumblechook recovered. However, just as Pip began to calm down and release the leg of the table, his nerves unraveled again as Mrs. Joe remembers to offer her guests the pork pie Pip had stolen (29). Later on in chapter 13 when Pip enters the Town Hall to be bounded as Joe's apprentice, the crowd of people he encounters assumes he has committed some sort of crime. Even in London, Pip cannot escape Jaggers's pocket-handkerchief and waving finger, or the anxiety of housing a convict.

In many situations Pip's guilt occurs from his feeling contaminated by crime, tainted by his having helped a convict. While Pip, as a child, quivers at the sight of the prison ship by the marshland and describes it as a “ wicked Noah's ark” (40), he also quivers at the sight of Newgate. For Pip, Newgate is a reminder of his childhood, and after visiting the prison with Wemmick in Chapter Thirty Two, he thinks to himself “ how strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint of prison and crime; that, in my childhood out on our lonely marshes on a winter evening I should have first encountered it” (264). Dickens himself also feels the same way about Newgate, and in his diary he explains that he has never lost his original feelings upon viewing the

prison, “ to this hour I never pass the building without something like a shudder and have never outgrown the rugged walls” (75).

With respect to Hochman and Wachs, Pip’s present preservation of his “ infantile sense of the interpretation of... his endless vulnerable self and the relentless invasive others” and the vividness of his narrative shows that he has not triumphantly outgrown his “ orphan condition” (170). Kincaid, on the other hand, believes that through the process of retelling his story Pip outgrows his victimized state by examining a passage from the novel:

It was fine summer weather again, and as I walked along, the times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned. But they returned with a gentle tone upon them, that softened even the edge of Tickler. For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory of others walking in the sun shine should be softened as they thought of me.

Kincaid points out that the passage starts off with a memory that defines Pip as a victim, but then it moves away from that quickly and moves towards forgiveness (41). Whether or not Kincaid or Hochman and Wachs are correct, it seemed necessary for Dickens to offer the narrative through Pip’s voice. Only through Pip’s voice can readers sympathize with the helpless, battered, abandoned child and it seems that Dickens is asking his readers to treat children with compassion – for the quote written in Dickens’s diary:

“ In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice,” (Great Expectations, 63; My Early Times, 77) is borrowed by Pip in the novel from Dickens himself.

## **Works Cited**

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