Developing new approaches to Dickens' Great Expectations

Trish Milhan

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DEVELOPING NEW APPROACHES TO
DICKENS' GREAT EXPECTATIONS

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Secondary Education: English Option

by
Trish Milhan
June 1993
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Approved by:

Dr. Russell Okinaka, First Reader 5/19/93

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ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem
The purpose of this project was to ascertain several new approaches to teaching a standard ninth grade text, Great Expectations. As a secondary teacher, I felt that this particular literary classic has often been relegated to a two-week unit during which the majority of time is spent watching the film version of it. Since Charles Dickens is considered by many to be comparable only to Shakespeare in his character and plot development, I thought that introducing him as an author to 14-year-olds for the first time should be a pleasure, not a pain for the teacher, and that the students should be invited to enter into the novel in such a way that it becomes an unforgettable encounter with a superb work of literature rather than a task to be endured.

Procedure
In reviewing the literature from recent English journals, I discovered a wealth of information about various approaches to Great Expectations—articles which incorporated the moral, social, psychological, deconstructionist, and archetypal approaches. Of these many varied approaches, I selected three approaches represented in three articles: the archetypal, psychological, and deconstructionist. My
reasons for choosing these three were because they were either the most engaging of all the articles read and/or they were the most unique and, therefore, more stimulating to me because I was unfamiliar with their content.

In the following pages, each view was defined, each article was summarized and critiqued, and certain aspects of each approach were scrutinized closely for their relevance to the students as an audience. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the project, I proposed practical ways in which to present each of the three methods and I gave suggestions on developing a curriculum for teaching Great Expectations using these various approaches.

Results

Based on my analysis of the three approaches, I discovered that either the archetypal or deconstructionist views would be of most value to the students. The psychological approach was too complex for ninth graders, and its terminology did not seem appealing to budding adolescents; the archetypal view would best be used in conjunction with the moral approach since the two seemed to overlap in many places; the deconstructionist view was, in my opinion, the most intriguing and most insightful for students as it provided room for reader-response, forcing students to deal with issues previously overlooked in a more traditional setting.
Conclusions and Implications

Having completed a preliminary draft of this project, I incorporated many of the curriculum ideas presented in teaching Great Expectations this year and found, to my delight, that a much higher percentage of students than ever before (76% of 60 students, to be exact) found themselves meaningfully engaged with the story, despite their initial fears and misgivings about reading it. Furthermore, I myself have been refreshed by taking a new look at this well-worn classic. This project has stimulated my interest in reviewing other such standard literary works that are part of my curriculum so as to determine how to best present certain classics— an undertaking not without merit for anyone who has taught the same material for five or more years. It is my desire that this project will not only enlighten but perhaps stimulate meaningful dialogue among English teachers about how they can provide learning experiences more tailored to the student population rather than the teacher’s convenience.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Ed. White who encouraged me to undertake this project in the first place and gave me an appreciation for the varied approaches to literary analysis.

I also want to thank my beloved husband, Alan, who patiently endured through six years of my taking classes, changing programs, and finally seeing the fruit of my labor—"great is your reward in Heaven."
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Introduction

Having taught Charles Dickens' novel, Great Expectations, to both junior and senior high English students for many years, I have become increasingly aware of the variety of approaches and interpretations for studying this tightly woven story. In my classroom, the character of Phillip Pirrip has often been used to caution students about evil influences, to encourage them to take responsibility for their own lives, and to enable them to make wise decisions for themselves rather than allowing circumstances or well-meaning friends to do it for them. This moral approach, along with the formal approach, has been used successfully across the nation to teach college preparatory students the essentials of one of Charles Dickens' most famous novel.

In this project, however, I hope to enlarge my perspectives on Great Expectations and, in doing so, to develop new ones so that in my future teaching experiences I will have much more to offer the students in the way of stimulating their thinking and creating alternative worlds of discourse so that they might be more fully engaged in their study of this classic.

Specifically, the three approaches I hope to compare/contrast with the moral approach include the archetypal, the psychological, and the deconstructionist. These seem to appear again and again in recent journal
publications, leading me to believe that I have much to learn about them. The problem I hope to resolve is how to incorporate the latter three types of criticism without confusing ninth graders and to discover in what ways these add to a deeper understanding of the novel. From a psychological approach, I hope to analyze the relationship between the characters in detail and draw new conclusions about them. From the deconstructionist point of view I hope to gain insight into other stories the author may not have realized he was telling. I have no desire to cast aside moral and formal criticism of the novel, but I would like to have my horizons enlarged, and I trust that this paper will provide new insight to other colleagues as well.

Archetypal Approach

The first of these approaches, the archetypal, looks for hidden significance. In this approach the story becomes a symbol for a larger, more profound myth or universal pattern that may not be initially apparent; the myth, in other words, becomes essential for understanding the story. An article by Susan Thurin entitled "The Seven Deadly Sins in Great Expectations" views the character of Pip as a symbol of a greatly loved medieval story. Based on her understanding of the morality plays of the Middle Ages, Thurin believes Great Expectations embodies the allegory of "Everyman" and seven deadly sins. Pip
represents "Everyman" (according to Thurin), and the seven major sins presumed to lead to eternal damnation are typified by seven grotesque and/or comic characters in the story. According to Thurin, the concept of seven deadly sins can be traced back to the fourth century where it was used by monastic orders and Irish priests. Since then, the motif has appeared in all forms of medieval literature, religion, and art. These seven deadly sins are anger, sloth, avarice, envy, lust, gluttony, and pride. In Great Expectations not only does Pip encounter these sins in the form of characters in the story, but he also must learn useful moral lessons from each of them before they disappear (or die), similar to the cyclical morality plays of medieval times. In Thurin's words, "Great Expectations constitutes an artistic last will and testament in which Dickens arranges for posterity the values which form the basis of his work" (203). More than a moral fable or fairy tale, then, Great Expectations is a vehicle to express an all-encompassing mythology which is easily recognizable to most of mankind, and that, according to Thurin, is the novel's most important contribution to modern literature.

To briefly summarize the seven characters and to demonstrate how they are matched by Thurin with the seven deadly sins, let us take a look at the story. Mrs. Joe, Pip's sister and surrogate mother, is introduced early on as the epitome of anger. Pip's response to her at first is
veiled hostility. Later, his inability to return Biddy’s affection, his nursing of an infatuation that can never be reciprocated, and his hostility towards his old home all point to the effects of his earlier angry environment. Not until Mrs. Joe dies is Pip finally able to express familial affection for Joe and Biddy—only then is he freed from his childhood bitterness, according to Thurin.

In the case of Mrs. Joe, anger does seem to define her character, but whether Pip is that affected by her hostility is another question. All through the novel Pip seems the epitome of the peacemaker—he tries to keep Joe from getting into trouble with Mrs. Joe, he tries to soothe and calm Mrs. Joe when she is hurt, and he leaves home not rally hating his sister but instead feeling sorry for her, a remarkable attitude for an abused child. Pip does not have to deal with anger so much as he is forced to out-grow his old home. Yes, Pip is hostile towards his old home in the marshes, but I believe it is more out of a desire to put his poverty-stricken past behind him rather than a desire to put his angry past behind him.

Second in the list of deadly sins is sloth, characterized by Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt who is Pip’s first (and poorest) teacher. Fortunately for Pip, both Joe and Biddy refuse to allow Pip to suffer from this vice and engender within him a love of learning despite his initial reluctance. Upon this comical lady’s demise, Biddy takes
over his education in earnest and enables Pip to realize his potential as a "scholar."

I see no problem with Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt representing sloth—however, her part in the story is minimal and it seems a bit contrived to think she carries that much importance when she barely appears before she dies. Furthermore, Pip doesn’t seem particularly tempted by this sin as he does by some of the others.

The third character, Compeyson, represents avarice. He is not personally acquainted with Pip, but certainly he is the source of much of Pip’s grief throughout the story. And avarice goes beyond simple greed, encompassing the rich stealing from the poor (Compeyson duping Miss Havisham), Pip going into debt at Herbert’s expense, and a self-deception on the part of Pip where Pip considers himself a "self-swindler" (Thurin 208). Only when Compeyson is killed in combat with Magwitch is Pip freed to become content with his life and to stop coveting things never intended for him (Estella being an exception).

Thurin seems to imply that Compeyson’s avarice becomes Pip’s. Is this a valid interpretation? I think not. Just as Pip demonstrates the opposite qualities of his sister with her anger and Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt with her sloth, so he shows a remarkably generous spirit when he finds out the source of his true benefactor. Not only does he set up Herbert in a business, but he also decides to travel out of
the country with his convict so as not to endanger Magwitch's life, giving up his lifestyle and wealth in London. The time when he demonstrates avarice is rather short-lived and does not seem related to his encountering Compeyson, which does not take place until the end of the story. If anyone is to blame for his avaricious tendencies, either Mrs. Joe or Miss Havisham would be more appropriate choices since they encouraged a poor boy to want to rise above his class by allowing him to play at a rich lady's house when he was at an impressionable age.

The fourth deadly sin, envy, is exemplified by Magwitch. In the words of Thurin, "Magwitch's character is formed by early deprivation . . . Orphanhood, poverty and ignorance lead to his life of crime and victimization" (209). As one of two father figures for Pip (the other one being Joe), Magwitch early in the story imbues in Pip a sense of what he is missing in life. Pip must make choices between virtue (represented by Joe) and vice (represented by Magwitch), and when he does make unwise decisions, Magwitch is a first blamed by Pip and then, upon Magwitch's death, he is praised for his deportment with Pip. Why this change in attitude? Pip finally learns that he alone is fully responsible for his problems and so stops trying to justify his behavior by blaming it on those, such as Magwitch, who helped shape his circumstances.

Is Thurin saying that Magwitch's criminal way of life
was something to be envied by Pip? If so, I find this idea rather ludicrous. All through the novel Magwitch is depicted as a very sad, deprived, uneducated, and unfulfilled man. True, Magwitch is envious of others' money and position, and he does seem to try and live his life vicariously through Pip at the end, but I cannot agree that Pip had to choose between Magwitch and Joe when his encounter with the convict was so brief and his friendship with Joe so enduring and of such a positive nature. A father figure for Pip? I doubt it since Pip did not know Magwitch personally until the story was almost through. Pip does deal with envy from the time he visits Satis House, but I do not see a connection with Magwitch—if anything, Pip becomes a better person at the end of the story because of his dealings with Magwitch.

The fifth character, Miss Havisham, typifies in Thurin's schemata the deadly sin of lust. Miss Havisham's appearance, her demeanor towards Pip, her encouragement of an unwise attachment to Estella (who has been reared with the soul object of arousing desire in men), all evoke erotic love in Pip. As Thurin reflects, "Miss Havisham's ultimate sin . . . is against home and family, for she distorts familial relations in order to satisfy her consuming need to avenge her wronged love" (211). Only after Miss Havisham is badly burned in a fire (leading ultimately to her death) does she repent of the enticing
arts she has used on Pip, and it is at this point that Pip can begin to reevaluate romantic love as a means of personal fulfillment.

In my opinion, Miss Havisham is only indirectly responsible for Pip's problem with lust. Throughout the novel, Miss Havisham epitomizes revenge first and foremost, and the only reason she uses Estella to tantalize Pip is to wreak revenge on the male sex. Does Pip actually find Miss Havisham attractive? Hardly. The main attraction is the person of her ward, Estella, who is used as a pawn to set up the scenario for Miss Havisham to get her revenge at any cost. Pip does have a problem with lust, but it is the person of Estella who provokes it in him, not Miss Havisham.

Sixth in Thurin's catalogue of deadly sins is gluttony, represented by Captain Barley, the storekeeper and future father-in-law of Pip's best friend Herbert Pocket. In this instance, Pip simply observes the storekeeper as he pathetically drinks himself to death and learns his lesson without entering into Barley's vice—but it is only upon the burial of the Captain that Herbert can find nuptial bliss, yet another necessary separation of vice and virtue.

Gluttony, according to the dictionary definition, is first of all an excess in eating and secondly an insatiable desire for anything (The American College Dictionary, 516).
In my opinion, Uncle Pumblechook would be a much better representative of this vice because of his gargantuan appetite for both food and wine. Also, Pumblechook is a much more central figure to the story since he first introduces Pip to Satis House and since he takes credit for all of Pip's good fortune—showing his insatiable desire to be in the limelight. Captain Barley, on the other hand, is a very minor character whom we are never introduced to directly and who appears and then dies rather quickly. Thurin feels that this is one sin Pip does not deal with directly. I disagree. Not only is Pip introduced to a world of exotic food and wine in London, but he himself goes into debt to throw dinner parties a gormandizer would enjoy. Furthermore, Pip definitely develops insatiable appetites for this luxurious lifestyle and is only curbed in his pursuits by the appearance of Magwitch.

Seventh is the sin of pride as personified by the character of Bentley Drummle. Drummle represents the officious, snobbish, clannish upper class that Pip decries yet at the same time wants so desperately to belong to. As defined by Thurin, "Pride is an evil when it inordinately exalts the self, when it values other people according to how they can magnify or bring honor to the self, and when it assumes an undue superiority in some respect, often at the expense of others" (213). Throughout the story Pip must fight against both his inordinate pride in self and an
acquired class pride in which he despises his humble beginnings. This pride makes him compete with Drummle, the "born gentleman", for Estella’s affections, and this pride wounds him sorely when he not only loses his love but his domestic values as well. Pip realizes too late what happiness his pride has kept him from and, appropriately, is never totally free of this curse until the very end of the story when Estella informs him of Bentley’s untimely death, although even then Pip does not seem at peace with himself.

The idea of Drummle representing pride seems a sound one. In contrast to Pip, however, Bentley Drummle is a static, superficial character who appears as Pip’s nemesis on a very shallow plane. Whereas Pip’s pride wounds him deeply, Drummle’s pride provides the reader comic relief. Pip’s pride leads him to betray those he loves most dearly—namely, Joe, Biddy, and everyone from his home town. Drummle’s pride is class-conscious as well, but it is never as insidious as Pip’s because we do not become involved with Drummle’s life and do not see him grow or change. Certainly the demise of Drummle has little to do with Pip losing his pride. The real catalyst for change is Magwitch’s death, in my opinion, for here we see a truly humble man who cannot help but stand in stark contrast to the falsely proud Pip.

Instead of having Pip overcome these seven temptations
in order to achieve an eternal reward, Dickens temporalized the allegory somewhat to present moral lessons with an application to the present, according to Thurin. Pip, therefore, cannot be assured of great joy in the hereafter, but he can and must live out his life to make reparations for mistakes he made earlier. The only characters who are allowed to experience true happiness, says Thurin, are those who never entered into the seven deadly sins at all—Joe, Biddy, Herbert, and Clara. Thus, the allegory is complete, and Pip is unable to escape the effects of the sins which, as he is the representative of Everyman, are common to human experience.

Although many of the characters seem to be stretched a bit to fit the description of the deadly sins, I nevertheless enjoyed Thurin's correlations and could see validity in using this approach with high schoolers. I would have to change the characters of all but two (Mrs. Joe as anger and Drummle as pride) in order to make students accepting of the archetypes, but I would enjoy the challenge and I think the students would profit from this approach since it overlaps with the moral approach. Many lessons can be learned by looking at the seven deadly sins Pip is tantalized by. Teenagers relate well to people having problems with lust, anger, envy and so forth, so they could easily be drawn into the story through this approach. The main weakness of Thurin's article was her
choice of characters and the degree she thought Pip entered into the various sins. The allegory did not hold up very well the way it was presented. Other archetypes, such as the Cinderella story, could be just as effective and, if nothing else, Thurin’s article has made me think of several new ways to handle the story on a larger-than-life scale. Generally speaking, I would find greater use for the archetypal approach if it were presented in a more credible manner.

**Psychological Approach**

A second approach that has interested me for many years but that has remained largely unexplored is the psychological. In this approach, the most important assumptions have to do with how the subconscious plays a crucial role in Pip’s fortunes. As an example of this type of criticism, Michal Peled Ginsburg’s article entitled “Dickens and the Uncanny: Repression and Displacement in Great Expectations” attempts to explain the underlying reasons why Pip is so ignorant of the true source of his expectations and how this ignorance dictates his actions in the first two-thirds of the story. In this essay, the early appearance of Magwitch is represented as a "primal event, contemporaneous with the formation of personal identity and its definition in relation to the world outside: the moment in which Pip takes cognizance of the
'identity of things'" (Ginsburg, 117). This identification early in life with a convicted criminal (who tells Pip he is a second father to him) both creates guilt on Pip's part and confirms guilt Pip already felt in his relationship with his sister and since birth. Mrs. Joe has already convinced Pip of his utter worthlessness before the outset of the novel, so Pip's guilt at associating with a convict only emphasizes the fact that he must be guilty of crimes himself and thus deserves to associate with convicted criminals. This analysis of Pip's early self image seems quite accurate and would account for Pip's strong identification with and compassion for his "criminal", Magwitch, at the outset of the story. Pip realizes his mother died in childbirth and has been continuously reminded of how put-out his sister is about having to "bring him up by hand", so he is already immersed in feelings of despair when he meets a fellow creature who is just as worthless as he feels himself to be, a fellow creature who calls himself Pip's second father.

But that is not all Ginsburg would conjecture about Pip's guilt. According to Ginsburg, Mrs. Joe represents more of a father figure than a mother figure to Pip, so now Pip has two "fathers" (Magwitch and Mrs. Joe) who inspire fear and guilt in him besides his own real father who died before he was born. To compound his guilt, Pip's "father" Magwitch gets re-arrested, and Mrs. Joe is mysteriously
injured and dies as a result of her injuries—causing Pip to feel guilty about his part in these sad outcomes. The sense of "original sin" engendered in Pip by his own father's demise adds to the guilt Mrs. Joe has practiced on Pip since he was old enough to understand her sarcastic jabs, and now this guilt is enlarged upon by Magwitch's appearance as yet another "revolting" father figure. It is natural that Pip desires the death of Magwitch, but in so doing, he psychologically repeats the death of his father and his sister, and this creates new waves of guilt that he finds insurmountable. "It is because the death of the father is constantly repeated that the appearance of Magwitch is both the origin and the confirmation of Pip's guilt, its cause, projections, and dramatization" (Ginsburg, 119).

The idea of original sin, that we are all born with sin natures that create guilt within us, is easily comprehensible. The idea that Pip hates his sister so much at times that he wishes she were dead and then feels guilty about when it actually happens makes sense as well. The idea of Pip identifying strongly with Magwitch's helplessness at the outset of the story and than later turning his back on him because he would like to rid himself of his "second father" after he himself has become stronger also seems logical to me. What I do not understand is how Pip could possible feel guilty about his
real father's demise—there seems no justification for that sort of guilt unless Pip's father somehow knew that his son would grow to hate him and so decided to end his life before Pip's began, and that does not make sense to me at all. Does Pip actually need three father figures to project guilt on? I think not. This part of Ginsburg's article confused and perplexed me, probably because I have a lack of training in Freudian theory but also because, in my opinion, Ginsburg did not explain key terminology very well (terminology such as "original sin", "projection", and so forth). I would be hard pressed to use this part of Ginsburg's argument in presenting the psychological approach to my class.

Ginsburg goes on to explain that the guilt Pip suffers due to Magwitch's appearance is as old as life and consciousness itself (Freud called it "nachtraglich", p.119), and the compilation of that guilt with the guilt he has lived with since a child cries out for substitution and displacement onto a more positive object—in this case, the residents of Satis House. In Pip's meeting with Miss Havisham and Estella for the first time, he is introduced to the idea of a new self concept, he feels new deficiencies, and he experiences the pangs of new desires. And, because these new feelings all stem from Satis House, Pip immediately assumes a connection between the two that seems quite logical to him when these desires are realized
by his receiving his great expectations soon after becoming involved with Miss Havisham and Estella. Whereas meeting Magwitch on the marshes reinforced original guilt for Pip, meeting Miss Havisham and Estella has made a deep and lasting impression on him which leads him to believe he can become free of this old guilt.

The idea of substitution and displacement of Pip's guilt onto something positive is certainly a reasonable one, but I would question whether Satis House and its residents are actually the positive object of this displacement. In many ways, Pip's association with Satis House brings delight, but it also brings fresh guilt over how much he hates his old home and everything it represents, guilt over how he deceives Mrs. Joe about his visits, guilt over his lustful feelings for Estella, and guilt over how he "kow-tows" to Miss Havisham only so he can see Estella again and again. Satis House certainly brings new thoughts to Pip's mind, but its contrasting opulence and wealth with his humble home does not seem, in my opinion, to make it a very positive object for his displacement of guilt. Furthermore, as the story progresses, Satis House becomes the object of Pip's greatest pain as he discovers Estella's spurning of his affection and Miss Havisham's eccentric and bizarre outlook on life. Better yet, why not consider Pip's new life in London as a more positive substitution for his feeling of
original guilt? I would think his training to become a gentleman, his friendship with Matthew and Herbert Pocket, and his courting of the adult Estella in London (rather than at Satis House) would all prove to be a much more positive substitution for him than Satis House itself. Desire (for Pip) might have begun at Satis House, but it is certainly closer to being fulfilled in London when he immerses himself in a totally different world from his original one on the marshes.

Unfortunately, Pip constantly associates the old world of the convict with his new world of desire and is never able to free himself from pairing these two ideas, no matter how hard he tries, according to Ginsburg. "...every encounter with the world by a return of the world of the convict, of crime, and of guilt" (120). Eventually, this constant association of the new feelings with the old guilt results in Pip stumbling on the truth about his relationship to the residents of Satis House—and this is despite his efforts to repress and displace these feelings. This idea of his old feelings being paired with his new desires can certainly be substantiated by the story. All through the novel Pip seems prepared to put the past behind him when someone or something shows up to remind him of it (the man at the bar with the file, Joe coming to London, the convicts talking about Magwitch on the back of the coach, Compeyson following him to the theater, and finally,
Magwitch's reappearance are just a few examples of how Pip's past haunts him).

"Pip's misinterpretation [of his expectations] can now be phrased as the wish to see desire as totally independent of guilt, and the lesson Pip learns is that such a separation is impossible" (Ginsburg, 121). In other words, Pip's new-found life turns out to be the flip side of his old one, and his new feelings are so strongly intertwined with his old ones that they are almost one and the same. In Freudian psychology, not only is there no desire without guilt, but, more importantly, repressed guilt manifests itself as desire because it has to come to the surface somewhere, even if it appears seemingly by accident. In this case the "accident" is that Pip's benefactor is actually the originator of his guilt, Pip's idealized love is actually the daughter of his benefactor/ criminal, and Pip's supposed benefactor, Miss Havisham, was swindled by his true benefactor many years ago. Furthermore, this revealing and hiding Pip experiences has no point of origin--there is no way to tell the true source of guilt and why it is so important to repress it. Therefore, it is inevitable that Pip discovers his true benefactor and that this benefactor is closely tied in to his early sense of guilt. Through substitution and displacement, Pip had been kept mystified regarding the source of his great expectations for much of the novel, but the story line
would be incomplete unless the full cycle of guilt, repression, substitution, displacement, and then guilt once again is finally played out.

Ginsburg's idea of a cycle of guilt, repression, substitution, and displacement being played out in Pip's life appears to adequately account for Pip's attitudes and actions throughout the story from a psychological point of view. Personally, I find this approach very limiting. Pip's "psyche" seemed to be analyzed in a cut and dried manner, almost stereotypical. Who really wants Mrs. Joe and Magwitch both representing Pip's father? And how is it possible for anyone to know what the character of Pip felt about the death of a father he had never known? The idea of original sin is certainly a valid one, but we have no evidence in the novel to suggest that Pip felt guilt-ridden over things outside of his control once he left his sister's domain. Furthermore, the concept of Satis House being the object of his positive desires seems, as discussed earlier, slightly ridiculous when its inhabitants caused so much guilt for Pip. There is much evidence to suggest a conflict between Pip's true guilt and his feelings of desire, however, and from that perspective I appreciate Ginsburg's approach because it enables me to sympathize with the unhappy Pip rather than sit in judgment on him for being so insensitive and self-centered when he first discovers the true source of his expectations.
I would be hesitant to use this approach unless the group I was working with was well acquainted with Freudian terms, could grasp abstract concepts about the idea of original guilt, and was considering this approach in conjunction with another one such as the moral or archetypal. The psychological approach as expressed in Ginsberg's article would, in my opinion, not be concrete enough for most teenagers who do not have the maturity (or the desire) to deal with such abstractions at their age. Therefore, I would find this approach less attractive for me as a teacher than some of the others previously mentioned.

**Deconstructionist Approach**

A final approach to *Great Expectations* I would like to consider is that of deconstruction. A deconstructionist reading look for places in the text where a writer's language may lose control of his intention, where another message may be hidden in the text that the writer did not "mean" to say. This approach is based on the idea of the supremacy of language over the consciousness of the mind, the Signified being elevated over the signifier" (Crowley, 5). In this approach, larger systematic motifs may be teased out of gaps or inconsistencies in the text to create a unique perspective on a great work of literature (Crowley, 7). This approach is unlike any others I have
considered in so far as it is not trying to fix one particular meaning of the text but instead plays with the words of the text in order to develop new patterns and/or themes that may have been overlooked by traditional analysis.

Eiici Hara addressed the problem of the novel's authorship in "Stories Present and Absent in Great Expectations" and gives new insights about the story Dickens could not in good conscience tell his Victorian audience.

According to Hara, Pip fails to tell his own story because the novel is structured around the central story as "written" by Magwitch, the convict, and other less significant "writers" such as Pumblechook, Wopsle, and Orlick. Hara differentiates between story and plot, explaining that the story of Great Expectations is "in its most neutral, objective, chronological form—the story as it might have been enacted in real time and space" (594), whereas plot is the "actual text in which this story is imitated" (594). In other words, the story at Great Expectations had already been completed before the plot even began, and this same story actually traps Pip into a set of circumstances he has no control over.

The implications of this differentiation between story and plot are tremendous. If plot is simply the written text of a pre-existent story, then the plot could be
manipulated by its author/s to reflect a totally different narrative than what was originally intended. Impressions of what the story is really about could differ greatly from what we think it is about when we examine the original story more closely.

Hara believes Magwitch is the central "writer", or plot manipulator, of the story because he is a father substitution (sound familiar?) who helps Pip become involved with his second father's world of crime and guilt. Unlike Ginsburg, however, Hara does not believe Pip suffers from the guilt of original sin but rather from guilt imposed upon him by outside authority figures. The first sub-story, in Hara's opinion, is told by Mr. Pumblechook and could be entitled, "Pip, the Prodigal Son," similar to the Biblical story of the errant son who repents and returns to his father after being greatly humiliated. Mr. Pumblechook introduces Pip to the idea of the prodigal when elaborating on his pork dinner which reminds him of swine. This parable is to remind Pip of his place and to cause him to be grateful for all his relatives are doing for him (particularly Mrs. Joe). Later on, in a chance meeting on the street, Mr. Wopsle relates the story of a servant who killed his master, raped his mistress, and robbed them both of their fortune. This story becomes "Pip the Criminal". Both stories lead Pip to believe he is already guilty of some heinous crime when, in fact, he has done nothing wrong.
except give food to a poor starved convict under the threat of his life. The third sub-story is presented by Orlick, Joe's apprentice, who believes Pip is going to usurp his place as the successor to Joe in the blacksmith business. Orlick writes the story of "Pip, the Good Apprentice", picturing himself as the "bad one." This story is reminiscent of the Cinderella story in which the wicked step-sisters (Orlick) treat Cinderella badly but live to regret it when Cinderella becomes their new princess (Pip receiving his expectations). The story then continues in the hands of Estella who writes "Pip, the Apprentice" in quite different tones. In Estella's story, Pip is a common, low class boy with no future. This story alienates Pip from himself and changes his entire attitude about his career as a blacksmith.

Regarding Hara's list of "writers", several comments can be made. I tend to agree with Hara regarding Magwitch as the central "writer". He certainly provides a catalysis for all major events in the story, from his forcing Pip to befriend him at the outset of the story to his being Pip's true benefactor with all that it implies. I also agree that Pip suffers more from guilt imposed by the outside world rather than by original guilt. He is easily swayed by anyone in a position of authority at the beginning of the novel and does not have the wisdom to dichotomize between wise and foolish counsel at this point. Playing on
Pip's susceptibility, Pumblechook tells the "Prodigal Son" story to make Pip feel guilty about Mrs. Joe having to raise him. Later, when Pumblechook senses Pip's lack of "gratitude" for Pumblechook providing him with an introduction to Satis House, he would seem to have even more reason than ever to try and provoke guilt in Pip. "Pip, the Criminal" as told by Mr. Wopsle seems a bit far-fetched since Wopsle has no basis for making a personal application to the boy and since Orlick would be much more likely to rob his master, rape his mistress, and take off with a fortune. If Pip indeed takes this story to heart there is no indication of that in the novel. The only reason Pip would feel criminally guilt is because of his relationship with the convict which, at this point, is very short-lived. "Pip, the Good Apprentice" seems like an appropriate story for Orlick to tell since Orlick is the only one in a position to suffer because of Pip's diligence in the forge. Furthermore, Orlick has no self-confidence whatsoever and would love to see misfortune happen to his "competition"--even to the point of making it happen himself. Finally, Estella not only wields her influence to write "Pip the Apprentice" in derogatory terms, but she also exerts her power over the story later on when she continues to lead Pip on, knowing he is being set up for ultimate rejection (we might call this story "Pip, the Wounded Lover").
At this point in the story, Hara believes that Pip constructs for himself a fairy tale where he is the recipient of great expectations. In this story of "Poor Boy Makes Good", Pip is much more comfortable because it offers him salvation from the ones previously mentioned which are so alien to him and promises to fill the void engendered by Satis House. Circumstances appear to be favorable to Pip's false construction, and he continues to enjoy his "autonomy" until he finally realizes he has been deluded into thinking that he has power to create his own life story. This happens, of course, when Magwitch reappears on the scene as his second father and true benefactor. At this crisis point, the story Magwitch has created is incompatible with Pip's inner needs and desires, and this is where the central story breaks down, according to Hara.

Similar to Ginsberg's psychological approach in which Pip is displacing his guilt through money, pleasure, and sexual desire, Hara believes that Pip "writes" or creates a false world of happiness and ideals after receiving his expectations. This fantasy continues until Pip is no longer allowed to "write" his own story because of the return of his second father, Magwitch, who once again becomes the central "writer". At this point, according to Hara, the story breaks down or stops making sense. It becomes illogical in the way characters are dealt with from
then on—there are too many loose ends that are neatly tied together in a rather superficial manner. I wholeheartedly concur with Hara at this point—the marriage of Estella and Drummle, the marriage of Herbert and Clara, the marriage of Mr. Wemmick and Miss Skiffins, the marriage of Joe and Biddy, the sudden danger from Orlick, the reappearance of Compeyson simultaneously with the reappearance of Magwitch are all examples of how contrived the story becomes (even if it is still enjoyable reading). The obvious counterpoint Pip plays to everyone else's lives at this point makes the story appear rather forced and artificial when viewed from the deconstructionist perspective.

Hara suggests that this breakdown reveals a lack of an in-depth moral in Great Expectations. He thinks that if the story were truly moral in purpose, Pip would return to the forge and marry Biddy and become the hero of his own story—but this is not the case, indicating to Hara that Dickens was not trying to write a moral fable for his time. Rather, Hara alleges that Pip would feel uncomfortable in the role of hero because, after all, that is a story someone else has written for him—a story that is not his own and much better suited to a truly heroic figure, such as Joe. According to Hara, "the final moral meaning that the novel offers suggests its own hollowness and falsity by being too neat and logical a construction . . . it is quite likely to be destroyed by its own artificiality" (606).
disagree that the story is not moral—it may not have originally been intended to be a moral story, but even given the view of a deconstructionist, much can be learned about human nature from the growth Pip goes through. He may be less than heroic, but he certainly offers living proof that people can change for the better and that good can come out of any life malleable to suffering.

So what is *Great Expectations* really about, according to Hara? He believes the reason Pip allows others to tell his own story and the reason he does not act in a predictable fashion is because of a driving force, a demonic impulse named Estella (607). Rather than Magwitch or Miss Havisham, Estella is the one who keeps Pip from logical, rational behavior. Despite scanty character development, Estella is the one who alienates Pip from his dream of apprenticeship, and out of his passion for her his better judgment is constantly thrust aside. Aware of Estella's hostility from the beginning, Pip nevertheless rejects all sound advice and his "unquenchable passion remains impermeable to that disassociating force at work in the novel" (609). Thus, Pip is incapable of writing his own story of passion for Estella because everyone else is too busy writing stories for him, including the nineteenth century society of Dickens. Hara feels that Dickens had to curb his wild imagination for the sake of his audience and that the "subversive force" at work in *Great Expectations*,
the carnivalistic philosophy where rules are made to be broken, had to be repressed so as not to tamper with the traditional pattern of closure of the novel.

Thus, the revised ending (in Hara's opinion), is Dickens' attempt to provide a beginning of Pip's story—the one he would have written if he had the chance—the one about passion and irrationality. If this is true, then the revised ending is a brave effort on the part of Dickens to break out of Victorian conventions, and we must admire his efforts to allow writing to be a "dangerous activity" in an era which craved security and stability in the arts.

I believe that Hara makes a good argument for Dickens' inability to write the story of unbridled passion he would have written had the nineteenth century world been able to receive it. Thus, the stories absent (Pip's passion for Estella and its results) would probably make much more entertaining reading for a twentieth century audience than the stories present (such as "Pip, the Prodigal Son", "Pip, the Good Apprentice", and so forth). Furthermore, Estella as the catalyst behind everything good and bad in Pip's life is, to my way of thinking, much more satisfying than Magwitch who, although he maintains his position as central "writer", never purposes to destroy Pip as his passion for Estella almost invariable does. In contrast with Ginsburg's emphasis on original guilt and Thurin's emphasis on minor characters who represent various vices, I enjoy
Hara's interpretation of Estella being delineated as the driving force behind Pip.

Hara's essay I found to be extremely entertaining and challenging to my way of thinking about literature, particularly about the genre of the "novel." I found it easy to enter into Hara's reasoning once I understood the idea of story versus plot and stories absent versus stories present. Adolescents might find this approach difficult as it requires close attention to the text, some in-depth experience with different readings, and a certain degree of playfulness that usually comes through abstract analysis of concepts beyond their grasp. I would, however, enjoy trying to explicate the idea of Great Expectations being "written" by everyone but Pip as it seems to fit the novel quite well.

Review and Critique of Approaches

So--how do these three approaches help me to understand and appreciate the novel? In what ways do they stimulate my thinking about Great Expectations? First of all, I have much greater sympathy for Pip as a complex character who is powerless over his life. He seems much more three-dimensional after considering the various father figures in his life, the guilt he experienced, and the terrible self image he had at the beginning of the story. I also could admire Pip's strengths when he resisted
temptation again and again in the form of various "role models" who played a part in his life. Instead of seeing Pip’s story as cyclical (the psychological approach), I see it as just beginning in the revised ending—a story of deep passion that would take place between a wiser Pip and a more mature Estella. Instead of being satisfied with a caricature of Pip, I now feel he has become fleshed out as a full human being with all the pathos, desires, and unfulfilled yearnings still in tact at the end of the story. Pip’s story is not over as I had believed before—it is just beginning to be lived on an adult plane, which entices me to wonder what would happen after he and Estella left Satis House behind them.

Not only do I now have greater appreciation for Pip, but I also am able to grasp more fully some of the stereotypical characters who people the novel. The importance of Pumblechook who creates new guilt in Pip, the significance of Orlick who provides a scenario of "Pip as Apprentice" that he ultimately rejects, the anger of Mrs. Joe and how it forces Pip into the antithetic role of peacemaker, and the humility of Magwitch and how it makes Pip aware of his false sense of pride—all these characters share responsibility in making Pip change and come to grips with certain aspects (or faults) he might not have dealt with otherwise. Other examples not mentioned in the articles but ones which have come to mind would include
Wemmick, Jaggers' clerk, who enables Pip to see the normality of family ties and proves his loyalty as a friend: another minor character, Trabb's boy, who shows Pip's false sense of pride for what it truly is when he guffaws him out of the tailor shop yet later rescues him from danger; Jaggers' implacability which provides Pip an opportunity to show what he is really made of when he goes into debt and Jaggers says nothing about it. Many other examples abound, but suffice it to say that I see new avenues to explore with my students and new ways of viewing Great Expectations for my own pleasure.

Finally, my admiration for Dickens increased significantly after researching the various approaches. For an author to have written Great Expectations in serial form over a year's time and still keep up the momentum in making us believe in his characters and enter into the story line wholeheartedly is remarkable. For Dickens to be able to weave such a tightly controlled plot while at the same time actually desiring to tell a different story altogether (as the deconstructionist would have us believe) is short of miraculous.

In analyzing Pip's character, I found myself analyzing Charles Dickens, the man, wondering just how much of himself he put into his protagonist. Was Dickens at a point of great personal change and growth when he wrote this novel? Had he done much soul-searching before coming
up with the idea of a story about a boy who is powerless over his life? Yes, the story begins similarly to many others he wrote, but the maturing of Pip through suffering and circumstances out of his control seems to be more on an emotional and psychological level rather than on just a circumstantial and social level—in other words, Pip's growth comes not just from his change of fortune or outside circumstances but more importantly from his change of heart toward those closest to him, a change that is not so readily apparent. It is interesting to speculate what moral Dickens would have derived from the novel, if any. Not surprisingly, Great Expectations is now filled with exciting possibilities since I have had exposure to some unusual and varied approaches that were formerly non-existent for me.

Sample Lesson Plans

From a practical standpoint, how would I present the various approaches to my ninth graders?

The archetypal approach, if I were to use it, would be introduced before we delved into reading the novel. I would explain the idea of the myth, larger-than-life symbols which would be represented (in this case) by various vices from earlier morality plays. I would have the class read excerpts from "The Hound of Everyman" and choose one particular vice they consider a problem area to
write about in their journal. Then I would introduce the characters with their corresponding vice (having changed them from Thurin's article as mentioned previously) and have each student be responsible for keeping track of his/her particular vice, noting each time it pops up and how Pip deals with it—successfully or not. After their particular character dies, I would have the student continue to keep track of the vice in the person of Pip himself. At the end of the novel, I would then encourage the students to break into small cooperative learning groups made up of other students who chose their same vice (ninth graders love this), and they would decide whether the character really did represent that particular vice, how well did Pip deal with it, and what, if anything, could they learn about staying away from this particular temptation. At the end of the unit I would then have them write an essay on the vice/character and explain in full just how it influenced their reading of the story and what it did to make them appreciate Pip's complexity as a character.

From a psychological perspective, I would have to explain Freud's concept of original sin and guilt (I teach at a Christian school so this would not be a problem in some ways) before I could begin to delve into the novel. Then I would have the students watch for the appearance of any potential father figures who could possible cause guilt
for Pip—including Mrs. Joe, Magwitch, and anyone else they might care to choose. After reading the first third of the novel, I would have the students begin to keep a chart made up of several circles. In these circles would be the words "guilt", "repression", "substitution", and "displacement" with blanks next to each of them. As the story progressed, students would be responsible to fill in the appropriate examples from the story of Pip's various feelings, actions, and attitudes. At the end of the story I would have them review their charts and decide the following: 1. Who was Pip's most prominent father figure and why?; 2. How many cycles did Pip actually go through before the story ended?; 3. How do the objects of Pip's displacement affect him adversely in the long run?; 4. What is the significance of Pip's desire for Estella which seems to underlie all his choices? These questions might be difficult for some students, so I would break them into small groups so they would be able to come to a consensus as a team, receiving a team grade for their efforts. At this point I would assign an essay in which they would be asked to discuss the nature of Pip's guilt feelings, the identity of his most important father figure, and the relationship between the plot and their cycles.

From a deconstructionist point of view, I would have to define what deconstruction is first of all. Then I would explain that as we read the novel they would be
keeping a dialectical journal, recounting the names and actions of any and all characters who seem to have some sort of direct influence on Pip. When the novel was completed, they would have to review the varied interactions Pip has had with a particular character that they enjoyed the most. After gathering all the data and deciding on one character, the students would be asked to have that character re-tell Pip's story from their point of view, as if they were the most significant character in the story. (The students would use first person to help them enter into the spirit of the assignment.) Since some of their characters only appeared briefly, they would be allowed some license to be creative and change the story to fit their character's personality. But they would still have to keep the main details of Pip's story accurate. When this assignment was completed, the essays would be read in small groups and voted on so as to determine the top five in the class. These top five would then be read by myself to the class and the students would discuss how differently the story appears when told from the varied characters' points of view. I would then introduce the idea that Pip never really had a chance to write his own story because so many others were writing it for him and then ask the students to write an essay about how they think Pip would have really wanted the story to go if he had had the chance to write it himself.
Conclusion

Of the three approaches, the one I enjoyed the most was deconstruction. I felt amused, enlightened, and stimulated by Hara’s treatment of *Great Expectations* and would not hesitate to read other articles using the same perspective if they were as clear and well thought out as this one. The viewpoint I enjoyed the least was the psychological approach. I found it narrow, repressive, and rather gloomy. I would not be able to sell my class on it very well since I myself am still skeptical of it and feel I would need more training in Freudian psychology before undertaking such an approach with my class. The archetypal approach would easily be presentable to my class. I would enjoy this approach because of its emphasis on moral-ethical issues and how it overlaps with the moral approach, one I am already familiar with and have used for many years.

Other approaches besides those mentioned above could easily be applied to the study of *Great Expectations*, and it is a testimony to the novel’s greatness that so many different approaches work so well. In writing *Great Expectations*, Dickens created a universe where fresh discourse and new ideas abound—and that is why I continue to find great enjoyment in the teaching of this remarkable novel.


Annotated Bibliography


