



University of Tehran press

Research in Contemporary World Literature

<http://jor.ut.ac.ir>, Email: pajuhesh@ut.ac.ir

p-ISSN : 2588-4131 e-ISSN: 2588 -7092

A New Historicist Reading of Dickens' *Great Expectations*: Dickens' Pip Studied Through Victorian Ideals

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Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received: 16 November 2022

Received in revised form: 17
January 2023

Accepted: 21 January 2023

Published online: Autumn 2024

Keywords:

Victorian Ideals, New
Historicism, Children, *Great
Expectations*, Reality.

Extended ABSTRACT

Queen Victoria, after whom the period covering most of the nineteenth century is named, came to the throne in 1837. She went on to rule for more than sixty years, longer than any English ruler before her. During her reign, Britain was at the height of its power, both politically and economically. Abroad, Britain dominated world politics. In the domestic sphere, the Industrial Revolution was at its height. For those with wealth and influence, Victoria's reign was a time of prosperity. Yet, the majority of the population, especially the children suffered greatly during this period, because the Victorian age was the period of change in almost everything that the previous centuries held as indispensable truth. Almost every social institution was shaken by unpredictable change. The nineteenth century was a time of great social and political upheaval influenced by the French Revolution as well. There were some movements and changes such as the Oxford Movement, Reform Bills, and Chartism. The impact of science and especially industrialism were very important in transforming Britain into a modern industrial state. However, Victorian society was paradoxical as far as the idea of childhood is concerned, because although it perceived childhood as an essential period in a person's life, most of its juveniles were not given the chance to experience growth and a safe transition into adulthood. Charles Dickens' novels in general and *Great Expectations* (1861) in particular provide great insight into Victorian society. Dickens is actually the voice of the voiceless people, especially orphans. Dickens' child characters are either orphaned or of unknown parentage. His novels are full of neglected, exploited, or abused children. Dickens paints an extremely vivid picture of childhood. The reader is able to enter the mind of the child hero and see the world through his eyes. This might have been partly influenced by Dickens' own horrible childhood experience. Dickens in a way rewrites his own painful, unforgettable memories of childhood in the novel. In fact, by choosing a child as the protagonist of the novel, Dickens could make a contrast between the real ideals of his character and those of the Victorian society as he shatters those ideals. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine the ideals of children in the Victorian age and to compare them with the reality by adopting the new historicist approach. Since new historicism is based on the premise that a literary text should be considered a product of the time, place, and circumstances of its composition, the historical and social conditions of this era will be analyzed.

Cite this article: Sadeghi Garmaroodi, Mostafa; Beyad, Maryam Soltan & Ramin Zohre. "A New Historicist Reading of Dickens' *Great Expectations*: Dickens' Pip Studied Through Victorian Ideals" *Research in Contemporary World Literature*, 2024, 29 (2), 289-314. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jor.2023.351153.2360>.

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Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.22059/jor.2023.351153.2360>.

