

## Cultural Encounter in Literature

### A Note on Four Modern Novels

By

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The concept of culture is notoriously obtuse in its protean meanings. That it could refer to a "whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual" seems to raise more questions than answering them (1). When anthropologists discuss "culture", they primarily associate it with modes of economic production, patterns of behavior, authority, religious practices, hierarchy of social, marital, tribal power, etc. (2) When the same concept is discussed by students of literature, they tend to discuss it in terms of those aspects which alienate a character from others and from himself such as color, dust, heat, or sex. In other words, the concept of culture assumes in literature significances and frames of reference not ordinarily discussed by anthropologists.

One of the most striking instances of "culture" in literature is the traumatic experience a character undergoes as he faces a foreign culture.

When a character finds himself imposed on an alien land, his reaction tends to range from absolute antagonism (such as the case with conquerors throughout history) to complete assimilation. But when a character opts for another culture in lieu of his native one for a variety of reasons (economic, religious, intellectual, etc.), then the new culture which he tries to get assimilated into poses a host of problems which the character frequently fails to surmount. When the new culture is marred by historical contention, disagreement, and bellicosity as that which obtains between East and West, then the problems are compounded. Travelers, politicians, historians, military leaders, men of letters and adventurers have tried to conquer, assimilate, compromise, or understand the East for such diverse reasons as colonialism, imperialism, tourism, or commercial exploitations (3).

"East and West" is only a narrow facet of a larger area of cultural confrontation, and cultures are impervious to others, and those who intrude realize that understanding a different culture entails understanding oneself first. Although cultures differ, some sort of understanding

20. Norman Page, *Charles Dickens: Hard Times, Great Expectations, our Mutual Friends*. (London, 1988), p. 109.
21. Jean-Claude Amalric, 184.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
23. Monroe Engel, *The Maturity of Dickens*, (Cambridge, 1967), p. 1610.

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13. Strachey, James, trans. *Sigmund Freud, Two Short Accounts of Psycho-Analysis*. London: Penguin Books, 1968.
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allegory is set in a novel which has other riches as well, a traditional novel with a plot and characters, full of tenderness, humour and life. So that in fact the allegory is sometimes confused and indistinct, that is to say *Great Expectations* is a novel with allegorical elements. *Great Expectations* corresponds to the personality of Dickens: a man full of vitality, of emotional power and at the same time a man capable of conveying to us a kind of personal meditation on human destiny through the medium of allegorical fiction.

#### NOTES

1. Susan Horton, *Style and Response*, (London: 1988).
2. Barbara Hardy, *The Moral Art of Dickens' Moral Issues*, (London, 1971).
3. Joseph T. Shipley, ed., *Dictionary of World Literary Terms* (London 197), p. 10.
4. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (Princeton, 1957), p. 90.
5. Patrick Murry, *Literary Criticism: A Glossary of Major Terms*, (London, 1978), p.5.
6. Ibid., p.5.
7. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, (New York, 1965), p. 120.
8. Northrop Frye, p.
9. For more details about the distinctions between symbols and allegories see: Angus Fletcher, pp. 13-19.
10. Jean-Claude Amalric, *Studies in the Later Dickens*, (Montpellier, 1973 p. 127.
11. A.O.J. Cockshut, *The Imagination of Dickens*, (London, 1965), p. 184.
12. Harry Allen Ebeling, "The Allegorical Tales of Samuel Johnson", Unpublished ph.D. Dissertation; University of Kansas, 1965, p. 3299.
13. For more details see: Ebeling, p p. 3299-3300.
14. All the quotations from the novel are taken from: H.M. Burton, introd. *Great Expectations*, by Charles Dickens: (Hong Kong, 1977).
15. Patrick Murry, p. 4.
16. Jean-Claude Amalric, p. 128.
17. Jane Vogel, *Allegory in Dickens*, (U.S.A., 1977), p. 322.
18. Jean-Claude Amalric, p. 129.
19. James Strachey, Sigmund Freud, *Two Short Accounts of Psycho-Analysis*, (London, 1968), p. 113.

tion of the first stage; Pip moves to the city and his moral values deteriorate. The third stage is good and triumphant. In this final stage, Pip returns to his birth place and achieves partial synthesis of the virtues of his innocent youth and the melancholy insight of his later experience. This complex fabric is sometimes explained by a moral comment from the older Pip when he reflects on adventures of his former attitude and errors. At the end, he always draws or infers a moral lesson, an allegorical example from his trials and errors. (For more details about the moral lessons (See pp. 3-4).

On reading the novel profoundly, we conclude that the characteristic allegory is a prevailing aspect. Therefore, it is appropriate to mention some of the limitations of allegory in the novel. Thematically, and as it is stated earlier, allegory can not be fully coherent and clear-cut, because of the ambiguity of the moral lessons and values. This is due to some contradictory statements in the novel. The nearest example is in the attitude expressed towards money. Money which is attacked as a corrupting power, sometimes appears, nevertheless, as a form of reward. What Dickens emphasizes then is that money is "harmless only when it is allowed to false area of gentility or pretense... when it is useful" (23). Dickens also condemns false gentility in the behaviour of Pip. But sometimes he tries to set a positive image of a gentlemen through his portrayal of Joe Gargery. In Joe, the novelist implies that true virtues of decency and true gentility are to be found. Another element which blurs the outline of allegory is the presence of grotesque and comic elements. In other words, humour and comedy destroy the allegory and a comic atmosphere may sometimes prevent readers from taking things seriously or may divert their attention from the inner meaning of a passage or a character. Finally, realism and the concern for realism in the novel limits the effect of allegory. *Great Expectations* is a novel, a "real story", which may be read as such. We find careful descriptions of a given village and town, based on autobiographical data and with authentic details. This realism stands out in contrast to the general background of allegory.

To sum up, I would say there is, obviously, an allegorical pattern, an allegory, in Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, not a classical allegory but rather modern one in its themes and illustrations and fully developed in convincing terms. This allegorical pattern is of ten strengthened by multiplicity of symbols, but the book is not a symbolist novel proper. The

up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all glittering multitude.

(Ch. 7, 0. 54)

Estella and her light are described as coming down the dark passage of Satis House 'like a star', and when she has become a woman, she is constantly surrounded by the bright glitter of jewelry. Joe Gargery, on the other hand, is associated with the warm fire of the hearth or forge.

The symbolism of the crumbling wedding feast is also obvious:

The most prominent object was a long table with a tablecloth spread on it, as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clock all stopped together. An epergne... was in the the middle with cobwebs that its form was quite undistinguishable; and as I looked along... I saw speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it... I heard the mice too rattling behind the panels ..

(Ch. 11, p. 92)

We notice that Miss Havisham makes a symbolic correlation between the mouldering wedding-breakfast and her own life. She has been gnawed by pain as food has been gnawed by rodents, she has worn away with the meal and when she is dead, she too will be laid out that table.

Finally, the images of intimacy and closeness are associated with the idea of protection and safety. Wemmick's small house gives the impression of happiness, pleasure and cosiness. It is mirrored in a miniature lake, and isolated from the hostile world by a drawbridge. On the whole, without belonging to an organizing symbolical pattern that would integrate and unify them, all images strengthen the impression that the novel is allegorical.

There are other allegorical elements, for instance the ironical structure of *Great Expectations*. The significance which characters and events have, the ironical contradictions between life and expectations, are carefully arranged and used to pedagogical purpose for Pip. The very division of the novel into three stages corresponds to various aspects of allegory. (22) First, innocence and friendship as opposed to money and ambition. In this stage, we find Pip act in the country instinctively and therefore virtuously. Secondly, snobbery and evil, which involve a nega-

who for a time, humiliated him and thwarted in Pip's ambition to become a man of great importance. All these authoritarian figures are punished secretly and indirectly through punitive instruments. Mrs. Joe, for example, is punished by Orlik; and Estella receives her chastisement at the hands of her cruel husband, Bentley Drummle.

In *Great Expectations*, the drive for more mother love is represented in the early stage of Pip's career. His living experience and evolution suggest the pattern of a fairy-tale. (20) Circumstances magically conspire to rescue Pip from the spartan rigours of Mrs. Joe. In taking him up, Miss Havisham plays the role of fairy-godmother, and later permits him to continue in his belief that she is the sponsor of his luxury in London—until he was brought up by the rough figure of Magewitch, who plays the role of godfather. Likewise, he is passive in his longing for Estella, who, in her metaphoric association with precious jewels and lofty stars, come to symbolize to him the Final goal of his dreams of love, luxury, high position and social promotion. In stead of trying to capture her through an aggressive courtship, he simply pines, assuming on very little evidence that one day she will be bestowed upon him by Miss Havisham's everything else has been. Later, upon the return of Magwrich, Pip is forced to wake up and realize that life is not, after all, a fairy-tale. In the same way, the theme of Pygmalion, that is the creation of a new person by the sheer force of a man or his art, or his money is also present, and pip appears in the convict's eyes as his own creation. These patterns are contrasted with the moral patterns, which is the traditional pattern of the Prodigal Son, implying corruption by money, by the town, followed by suffering and a sense of guilt, then ending in forgiveness of the father and understanding of true love. All these themes create, and convey the idea of, a fable, an apologue, that is moral allegory.

Another allegorical element which could be traced in the novel is its language which is characterized by the use of imagery. Taken separately, these images appear as symbols, but they serve the purpose of allgory (21)

The most obvious images are: the images of fire, and of darkness. light/fire opposition does seem to be present by implication. Estella is by name a star and through the novel, stars are conceived pitiless. :

And then I looked at the stars, and considered  
how awful it would be for a man to turn his face

Orlick and Compeyson, the villains of the novel, have no redeeming features. Herbert is the embodiment of friendship. Bentley Drummle is the very image of the gentleman-villain and represents false values. The double life of Wemmick gives ugly image of the inhumanity of the big town. We often find in these characters that oversimplification that makes them appear good or evil as the case may be, merely through two or three characteristics. The very names, for instance, are allegorical: Abel Magwitch is not only an embodiment of innocence and virtue, as his Christian name, Abel, shows, but a magician and witch, a master of dark mysteries and occult(18). Miss Havisham is a sham and a shame. Estella is the cold and inaccessible star that shines before young Pip on his way to manhood.

Another element which plays an important role in the development of allegory in *Great Expectations* is fantasy and fairy-tale pattern. Fantasy, as it is defined by psychologists is "a well-nigh imaginative flight of childhood."(19) By creating for himself a fiction wherein the world is made to conform to his desire and will, the child succeeds in compensating himself for the fact that his real position is without power and that the quantity of love he enjoys is inadequate. Out of this unbalanced state between an unbounded demand and a limited supply of love and power proceed the fairy-godmothers, vicious step-parents and bad giants in which world legena abounds. The fantasy element *Great Expectations* shares with such stories as "Jack and the Beanstalk" and "Cinderella" contains two implicit motives; the drive for power and the drive for more mother love. In power motive, child tries through aggressive wish to push beyond the authoritarian figures who hold the child powerless and stand against his wishes and will. So it is more productive of guilt and is expressed in certain amount of concealment. In other words, it is the driving force in the child's behaviour. Thus Jack in the folk tale kills the wicked gaint in order to live in affluence with his widowed mother enjoying her undivided love and admiration. We might add that the type of love sought in this fantasy is a childish version of love which is largely passive. Similarly power motive in *Great Expectations* is best expressed through Pip's behaviour. From the beginning of the novel, power, wealth and rise in society haunt the imagination of the child. Like Jack in "Jack and the Beanstalk", Pip tries to revenge himself upon the authority figures

Another essential allegorical feature which is found in *Great Expectations* is pedagogical function. Generally speaking, one of many purposes of an allegory is that it teaches moral and religious lessons (12). Dickens' *Great Expectations*, as Harry Allen Ebeling says, is thronged with heterogeneous moral lessons which he conveys to the reader in a similar way to that presented by the classical and oriental allegorists. (13) However, one of purposeful moral lessons Dickens intends to teach his reader is: the influences of money on human behaviour. Money on the surface is a means of happiness; beneath the surface we recognize a moral implication: the deceptive lure of money, a theme which pervades the entire novel. This moral lesson is carefully conveyed to the reader through Pip's character. Pip, as the case with the heroes of the classical and oriental allegories, first tends to believe that accumulation of money will surely make him a happy and respectable gentleman. On the contrary, the love of money corrupts his behaviour and makes him snobbish and arrogant. Then, he realizes that the sudden fall of his morals and fortune is a result of his misbehaving:

I began to think that I began fully to know how wrecked I was, and how the ship I sailed was gone to pieces.

(Ch. 39, p. 364) 14.

Finally, Pip learns a moral lesson: the falseness and futility of money. Another moral lesson stressed on in the novel is the fascination of gentility. Dickens, namely through Pip's behaviour tries to warn his readers how misleading it is to be taken by superficial appearances. In other words, Dickens aims at stating that appearances are always deceptive.

The allegory is conveyed to the reader by various means, and mainly through the characters. In the works where the total scheme is not allegorical, characters may function allegorically. (15) It would not be right to say that the characters of *Great Expectations* are mere incarnation of abstract ideas. But it is obvious, as Jean Claude states, that "some of the characters represent an aspect of the theme or stand for something more than what they appear" (16). Joe, who represents virtue, kindness, goodness and simple life with its true, unsophisticated values, seems to personify a sort of "Hercules in strength" (17), and he is associated with fire, sun, sky and cloud. Miss Havisham, for a time plays the part of the fairy godmother. (See p. 6).



Some readers tend to believe that every allegory is a parable and every allegory is a symbol. But their usage suggests that these terms, viz symbol and parable differ from allegory. A 'parable' is more appropriate name for a short illustrative story designed to answer a single question or to point one definite moral (5). Whereas 'allegory' is preferred when it is of "greater length not necessarily restricted to one single idea (6). Another difference between 'allegory' and 'parable' is that the latter is written to persuade or to teach, whereas not all allegories have this function. Some allegories are written primarily to entertain or hold enemies up to ridicule, and some are used for didactic and moral suasion (7). In the case of 'parable', the didactic function is paramount and direct. A further distinction made by Murray concerns characters and events in parables which are not always manifestations of individuals and episodes, i.e. they do not stand for anybody or anything. Whereas, in allegory they do. (8) Northrop Frye draws a distinction between the symbol proper and the symbol which is 'allegory'. He says that a symbol is a figure in which a 'concrete' object is used to stand for an abstract idea, while in 'allegory' abstract ideas represent concrete objects (9).

We may now trace the important allegorical elements in *Great Expectations*. The first one is the presence of the second meaning. The title of the novel is not a name of a character, but a theme, or it is an abstract idea which represents a concrete object, i.e. the story of Pip is intended to mean something or at least to imply a deeper meaning at various levels. Hence this trait helps to offer several kinds of allegory. On the social level, there is a social allegory which can be envisaged in display of questioning of human justice and plea for education. On the moral level, there is moral allegory on the use of riches, on ambition, snobbery love and money, human relationships, on condemnation of parasitism and the recognition of true values which go more or less with Christian principles. (10) This leads us to the religious allegory, to the theme of the Prodigal Son, with the idea of guilt, retribution, and redemption through love, possibly on the pattern of a progress in three stages suggesting a moral pilgrimage of rise, fall and final restoration. Finally, there is a mythical allegory in the quest of a new parents. Unquestionably, all these themes are there, and they may be considered as "the second" meaning in the definition of the allegory. For it is Dickens' trait to penetrate deeper and deeper into the treasure of meanings and he ponders into their multiple implication (11).

## ALLEGORICAL ELEMENTS IN GREAT EXPECTATIONS

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*Great Expectations* has received much critical attention which centers around two aspects: First, the qualities of its structure and technique; and second, the depth of its moral penetration. Susan Horton, provides a very helpful approach to the range and variety of style in Dickens' writings with enlightening implications for the style of *Great Expectations*. (1) In *The Moral Art of Dickens*, Barbara Hardy focuses on Dickens' moral issues (2). There has been some doubt about whether *Great Expectations* is, in one way or another, an allegory or not. However, it can be stated that the novel is not a fully developed allegory, but it contains some allegorical elements. It is not too difficult to find sufficient evidence. This will be the task of the paper. Reliance will be made on several devices, some of which concern a definition of allegory, various shades of meanings, pedagogical function, allegorical characters, narrative pattern, allegorical structure, the use of imagery and limitations of allegory.

Allegory is a poetical device, omnipresent in Western literature from the earliest times to modern era. Ever since its appearance there has been a continuous controversy over the differences among meanings of allegory, parables and symbol. Because of such controversy it seems indispensable to have a quick glance at the definition of allegory. Not only this but a contrast among these three terms will be needed.

Allegory in its simplest term is described as: "a trope in which a second meaning is to be read beneath and concurrent with the surface meaning" (3). In other words, a writer of any literary work is allegorical whenever it is clear that he is saying "by this I also (allos) mean that(4)" If this is done continuously, his work is an allegory. So allegory demands a contrapuntal technique, a structure images suggesting ideas.

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### المصادر العربية

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## Conclusion

The present paper is an attempt to study aspects of semantic change in both Arabic and English. This semantic change and the non-equivalence resulting from it cause difficulties in translation from one of these languages into the other.

Arabic has several literary sources behind it, which have affected its development and the stylistic value of its vocabulary. This is perhaps attributed to Arabic having a long uninterrupted literary history enabling certain words and phrases to retain their poetic or literary contexts. Pre-Islamic poetry, the Qur'an, as well as the poetry and prose of their later periods are widely read, even memorized.

It has been concluded that in some areas of meaning, Arabic has several words denoting an action or an entity as we have seen in the example "eye" which has four Arabic synonyms with the nuances between them that the English equivalent "eye" does not convey completely. The same can be said about "سريع" and its English equivalents.

It has also been clear from the foregoing discussion that the translation difficulties involved here result in a difference in the attitude of translators towards the conceptual and emotional dimensions of certain culture-bound metaphors. Moreover, difficulties arise in the translation of metaphorical extensions:

The example I have cited: كبت الطائرة cannot be translated into English in a way as to give the same emotive meaning. On the other hand, certain words can have almost the opposite denotation among different societies or information as in the example 'terrorists' 'freedom fighters'.