

JIHOČESKÁ UNIVERZITA V ČESKÝCH BUDĚJOVICÍCH

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

ÚSTAV ANGLISTIKY

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

THE DECLINE OF VICTORIAN MORALITY IN CHARLES DICKENS'

*GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

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Studijní obor: Anglický jazyk a literatura

Ročník: 3

2024

I confirm that this thesis is my own work written using solely the sources and literature properly quoted and acknowledged as works cited.

České Budějovice 23.04.2024

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## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to doc. PhDr. Ladislav Nagy, Ph.D., for his invaluable advice, patience, and comments that significantly helped me throughout the process of writing this thesis.

## **Anotace**

Tato práce se zaměřuje na demonstraci úpadku viktoriánské morálky v díle Charlese Dickense *Great Expectations*. Cílem výzkumu je ukázat, jak toto pojetí ovlivnilo životy jedinců z různých společenských vrstev britské společnosti a jaké důvody k tomuto procesu přispěly. První kapitola práce se zaměřuje na detailní rozbor viktoriánského období a zahrnuje analýzy různých sfér společenského života. Druhá část se věnuje samotnému románu a poskytuje řadu důkazů o tom, že 19. století bylo pro viktoriánskou morálku přelomové, o čemž svědčí amorální činy hlavních postav a jejich zkreslené hodnoty.

**Klíčová slova:** *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens, viktoriánská morálka, viktoriánská Anglie, britská společnost

## **Annotation**

This thesis focuses on demonstrating the decline of Victorian morality in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*. The research aims to illustrate how this concept has influenced the lives of individuals from different social classes in British society and what reasons have contributed to this process. The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the Victorian period and includes analyses of different spheres of social life. The second part deals with examining the novel. It provides ample evidence that the nineteenth century was a turning point for Victorian morality, as evidenced by the distorted values and amoral actions of the main characters.

**Keywords:** *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens, Victorian morality, Victorian England, British society

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## **Introduction**

The Victorian period in Britain is mainly known for its high morals and exemplary people who lived according to the prevailing principles and standards of Victorian morality. However, through analysis of documented details in the history of England, one can reveal that the practical reality of people's lives often contradicted the typical ideal portrayal of this period. It was exactly this reason that stimulated some writers' desire to convey the real situation in the country through their writings. Prominent among them was undoubtedly Charles Dickens, who brilliantly illuminated the realities of the nineteenth century. Thanks to his talent for narration, irony, and satire, *Great Expectations* became the literary space for the writer's encoded ideas, judgements, and views on aspects of this era.

This novel contains a vast representation of symbols and details depicting society's life, refuting the argument that the period of Queen Victoria's reign was flawless regarding its attitudes towards ordinary people. The evidence of this is primarily the versatility of the main characters, who originate from different social classes and display the vices of individuals in various spheres of life, which include household organisation, professional background, religious and moral values, and criminal and judicial systems.

The example of the social life experience of the main protagonist Pip and his surroundings demonstrates the loss of significance and distorted idea of the tenets of Victorian morality, which were seen in society's perception of gender roles, industriousness, the educational process, and spiritual values. In addition to the main aim of this thesis, which lies in the demonstration of the scepticism of the above-mentioned aspects, an equally important objective is to provide evidence of the close relationship between Victorian principles, which were constantly intertwined in Britons' lives.

In analysing any piece of literature, strong emphasis is always placed on the period in which it was written, regardless of whether the text has some reference to the historical details. However, in the case of *Great Expectations*, the content of this novel is closely related to the realities of Victorian England amid the prosperity of which the book was written. Therefore, it is essential to focus on the historical aspect of the country, insofar as only after a thorough analysis of this period will it be possible to observe and grasp aspects of Dickens' criticism of society, its roots, and consequences. Thus, the first part of the research focuses on a detailed investigation of the Victorian period, which is primarily theoretical in order to confirm or refute the reality portrayed in *Great Expectations*. The second part, in turn, demonstrates how this time is portrayed in the story of Pip's thorny life path and how the inconsistency of accepted, widespread, and publicised norms in Victorian England affected and reflected on society throughout the entire novel. Simultaneously with this process, this chapter will examine how Victorian morality marginalised certain representatives of the lower class.

The paramount objective of this thesis lies in dispelling the myths and demonstrating the truth about unvarnished life in nineteenth-century England by means of a thorough examination of history and the novel *Great Expectations*, which provides a great opportunity for further discussions. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that, like any other concept, Victorian morality has had a tendency to change alongside the values of society. However, emphasis should be placed on the fact that it has had a negative impact on individuals, thereby laying the foundation for forming negative qualities and distorted values, among which we should highlight class snobbery, androcentrism, and obsession with wealth. Unfortunately, these aspects can be observed in representatives of contemporary society. Therefore, this thesis can be considered as an instructive illustration that despite one's great expectations, which come at a price and

may not always be justified, under any circumstances, one must remain human to not allow one's moral principles to be distorted.

# **1 Victorian England**

## **1.1 General overview of the period**

A distinctive and vivid interval in the history of England occurred during the reign of Queen Victoria, who ascended the throne in 1837 and emerged as one of the most prominent figures who left a huge imprint on the history of the great empire. Insofar as English society, throughout its existence, has been unequivocally dependent on its rulers, the tradition of naming historical periods after the reigning monarchs has continued, thus leading to the fact that the span from 1837 to 1901 is called the Victorian Era.

This period in the history of England was a time of enormous changes and reforms, which subsequently influenced the economic growth of the Empire, the expansion of industry, and its strengthening in the rank of the world's leading countries. The government's actions were directed at all societal levels and all significant areas of social spheres, which unconditionally affected all citizens of England (Altick 15). However, such undertakings have caused much controversy and questioning due to the numerous documented fluctuations in the government systems, economy, and standard of living of the lower class at that time. This truly remarkable era is exceptional and recognisable for the decisions and regulations that affected and changed Britons' lives.

When it comes to the spiritual and social sphere of society, one of the most prominent examples can be confidently called the adoption of such a concept as Victorian morality, which affected every level of the social strata. Its rules impacted on the elementary principles of child-rearing, the perception of domestic life, social behaviour, etc.

As for the general country-leading, in terms of its internal and foreign policy, England applied a clever and favourable strategy, thus remaining one of the leading empires in the world, as mentioned earlier. All foreign affairs were conducted in a

predominantly strategical manner with the aim of enriching and expanding the frontiers (Paterson 300). Therefore, it can be assumed that the system of politics and power of England during the reign of Victoria did not undergo global changes.

The question of Victorian success in a particular sphere is rather controversial and subject to many studies, as economic achievements cost people's health and lives, the adoption of reforms and laws for education still did not provide children with full access to schools, due to their social status or obligation to work, and the creation of an ideal model of a family was still ruled by disrespect and inequality between its members.

## **1.2 The basis of the Victorian era**

The basis of the entire Victorian era was, for the most part, focused on the country's domestic politics. It was during these times that England experienced a dramatic economic upsurge owing to the adoption of numerous reforms and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Therefore, Young claims that "Industrialism had been coming over England like a climatic change" (22).

As one may infer, such innovations were concentrated in the big cities, which caused a sharp decline in population of smaller settlements and a deterioration in life conditions there. On the other hand, this occurrence was followed by a very low unemployment rate and the deployment of all labour forces, regardless of gender and age (Young 21). Moreover, with regard to the latter aspect, the significant subject was child exploitation for various work purposes. Since child labour was priced quite cheaply, they could be found in various occupations with incredibly long hours that were spent working to exhaustion, which seemed impossible for the average adult to perform.

Thus, it is not hard to realise that one of the most important bases of Victorian England was the obligation to work. However, unfortunately, it could be often seen that

this principle cost people bad attitudes at work, ill health, or even fatalities, examples of which were often not a difficult occurrence to come across.

However, it is worth mentioning the so-called “self-help” or “self-reliance” principle, which was introduced by Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) with the publication of his book *Self-help* in 1876. The primary objective of this work was to convey and inspire mostly the lower class of society, providing them with the importance of self-survival and constant dedication to work in order to become the best version of oneself and present the great society of England. According to Smiles, “this spirit of self-help, as exhibited in the energetic action of individuals, has in all times been a marked feature in the English character, and furnishes the true measure of our power as a nation” (5).

Samuel Smiles also implies great figures from history who gained enormous fame owing to their intelligence applied in labour industries of all kinds, consequently showing amazing abilities of their mind and intellect. Examples include notable personalities, such as Josiah Wedgwood, known for his talent for ceramic arts and crafts (Smiles 88), Thomas Arnold, a prominent reformer of the educational system of England in the nineteenth century (Smiles 375), William Smith, “the father of English geology” (Smiles 144), and many other figures who have made tremendous contributions to the development of different spheres of life, at the cost of their perseverance and sincere dedication to work.

In addition, it would be appropriate to mention the writings of William Lovett (1800-1877), the famous English radical and leader of the labour movement, for whom education was an integral part of his life. In his autobiography, he pointed out that all his achievements in different branches of education, such as political and economic, were obtained by himself through self-dependent labour and perseverance (Lovett 36). Since he did not grow up in an upper-class family, throughout his life Lovett was charitable and tried to help ordinary people gain some experience and knowledge by creating different

textbooks and manuals, attending meetings, and supporting different movements of the working class (Lovett 52).

Drawing parallels between William Lovett's autobiography and Samuel Smiles' *Self-help*, one can conclude that in England at that time the main principle was to rely solely on yourself, and the best way to achieve and advance was at the cost of one's own labour.

Since most of the country's achievements came at the cost of the hard labour of the lower class, no benefits were given to them or their families. Thus, in the industrial centres, which were concentrated in the largest cities, there was an increased demand for labour, therefore, the mass people's movement in the direction of those cities caused a population boom and a global housing shortage. The working class and their families were forced to share small rooms with other families, and their lifestyles were often accompanied by unsanitary conditions, lacking the necessities of everyday life, such as beds, kitchens, and bathrooms (Altick 41-44).

In terms of the educational aspect, the first half of the nineteenth century was a difficult time for English children who originated from the lower class insofar as in order to help their poor families, they were forced to work and did not have the opportunity to attend school, as it was mentioned earlier. It was not until the advent of the Factory Act introduced in 1844 that children could attend educational institutions and continue to work in parallel (Altick 47).

When analysing the level of development of England and the prioritisation of certain principles in society, it is not difficult to notice that dependence on one's social status has been important throughout history and even today, but it was never as significant and progressive as in the Victorian era. The concept of tolerance and equality did not exist and all areas of social life were based on what class an individual was from.

The same applies to the main principles of Victorian morality, one of the most important foundations of this era: its main rules were mostly aimed at the middle and upper classes, whereas the lower class was not subject to various changes and simply could not obey these rules.

### **1.3 Social classes**

An integral part of Victorian history, through which the inequalities in society, division of responsibilities, and defined role of individuals within particular spheres were clearly expressed, was the distinct classification of people into certain classes, which in those times was the absolute norm and fair practice. The hierarchy of society in nineteenth-century England consisted of the upper, middle, and lower classes.

When talking about the Victorian era, one might immediately think of lavish balls, where gorgeous ladies in bouffant dresses dance around a huge hall with beautiful crystal chandeliers, high ceilings, and various banquets. At lunchtime, a typical English tea party is held, and, in the evening, literary readings are organised. All of this truly existed in Victorian times, however, it was available for the middle (partly) and upper classes of society.

Apart from members of the royal family, the higher class of the community was classically led by the aristocracy, which had occupied this place since the time of the Tudors (Altick 20). The rest of the individuals belonging to this class were the members of parliament who possessed the most power and authority, the heirs of great dynasties, and famous authorities who brought the country their achievements in the fields of medicine, science, art, etc. These pious citizens did their best to follow the rules of etiquette, show the purity of their words and actions, and demonstrate all positive aspects according to Victorian morality.

Undoubtedly, money for this branch of the community played an undeniable role in the fulfilment of their desires and the realisation of their needs. In addition to spending money on entertainment, the country's budget was also supplemented by corrupt contributions, which were common in the mid-nineteenth century (Altick 25). These illegal transactions occurred in almost every area of life, regardless of one's status. However, taking as an example the upper class, it was corruption in politics that was popular among them, which was quite widespread and could effectively help in the upcoming elections or defend one's interests (Altick 25). Therefore, the upper class was almost inviolate and the most influential of all, insofar as its members had the most means and opportunities to display a beautiful picture of the Great Empire.

The class standing below the upper one in the hierarchy, according to Altick, can be roughly divided into two parts: the gentry and the middle class (27). As for the former, theoretically, it refers to individuals who were related to the aristocracy, but for certain reasons, such as the absence of direct kinship roots, non-fulfilment of the requirements of primogeniture, obtaining status through marriage, ranked lower than their influential predecessors from the upper class. However, practically speaking, this branch of the community shared common privileges and interests with the aristocracy (Altick 25). At this point, this class does not end, but spreads to so-called gentlemen. Such people were owners of lands, or also governors in small settlements, to whom ordinary inhabitants obeyed and fulfilled their requirements. This system was widespread and was more characterised by the "tone of rural and small-town society" (Altick 26).

As for the conventional middle class, the classification of people to this part is not definite, insofar as in addition to the traditional division, great attention was given to the sphere of labour, income, and social achievements, which unveiled a wide range of subclasses. However, what can be said for certain is that the influence of the middle class

reached a massive scale and boosted the economy of England towards high levels. The most common areas of employment for these people were related to financial affairs, management systems, manufacture, and trades. In Altick's study, some widespread professions included merchants, brokers, foreign traders, etc. (27).

The members of the middle class described themselves as "the moral heart of Victorian society" (Altick 29), and they certainly were. Some of the central aspects of their lives included industriousness, representation of the best version of themselves in society, and passion for self-education. It was the latter element that was strongly influenced by literature and consequently had its impact on every realm of life. Reading served this part of society as a key to enlightening. Nevertheless, Victorian readers were quite scrupulous in their choice of literature and fiction was one of the most favoured genres, insofar as the public was encouraged to identify with the protagonists of novels in which the characters were predominantly from the middle class. Fictional and real-life stories contained realities of the time, thereby allowing readers to put the knowledge, which they gained in books, into practice in real life, thus expanding their worldview and literacy level (Altick 63-64).

Since the spheres of their work compelled the utilisation of all abilities and talents, they possessed great intelligence, logic, and wiles, which enabled them to promote their ideas, desires, and demands with great success and efficiency. Moreover, it was members of the middle class who were enthusiastic reformers. In the example of electoral reforms introduced in 1832 by the Reform Act, the middle class managed to achieve the expansion of the electorate by over 50 per cent in their favour ("1832 Reform Act"). Suffice it to say, the state cared about their satisfaction and productivity, which was significant for strengthening the country's economy and its level of development.

Concluding the exploration of Victorian society, the lowest social tier was the working class, representing approximately 70% of the total population of England. The industrialisation and demographic boom in the largest English cities, which were mentioned earlier, for the most part, included members of this class and was vividly evident in both their living conditions and working environment (Sherwell 6).

The mass migration to central cities was accompanied by a shortage of places to live in, making the working class and their families share living space with others (Sherwell 16). In addition, Mike Paterson mentions a passage from a report on living conditions in London written by Dr. Lerthaby: “The too frequent occurrence of necessitous overcrowding, where the husband, the wife, and young family of four or five children are cramped into a miserably small and ill-conditioned room” (qtd. in Paterson 33). People were also unable to afford furniture, leading to sleeping on the floor. They had no basic access to cooking equipment and water in the house. Therefore, such extremely uncomfortable and unsanitary conditions caused the spread of many infectious diseases, alongside the lack of constant hygiene and maintenance of the human way of life at a rudimentary level (Sherwell 10). In addition, the following table shows the percentage of infectious diseases arising from living conditions in certain areas of London in 1894:

Table 1<sup>1</sup>

Sanitary Area.	Proportion of Over-crowding (Percentage of Total Population).	Death-Rate per 1000 from Principal Zymotic Diseases, 1894.
Hampstead ... ..	15	1.38
St. George's, Hanover Square	19	1.40
Strand (including St. Anne, Soho) ... ..	42	2.68
St. George's-in-the-East ... ..	55	4.95

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<sup>1</sup> Sherwell, Arthur. *Life in West London : A Study and a Contrast*. third ed., Methuen & Co, 1901, p. 51.

Considering this situation from another perspective, the working class spent most of their lives at work, so there was hardly any time left for their households and families. Moreover, the working class simply did not have time, resources, or opportunity to improve the conditions of their lives and surroundings. Extremely hard physical work exhausted people in their attempts to earn money:

The higher wages could only be earned by great pressure: the outworker himself frequently working all night (on some occasions having but two hours sleep in thirty-six hours), and on Sundays also, while his wife often worked from 6 a.m. to 12 p.m. (Sherwell 110)

The spheres of work were mainly based on the level of one's professionalism, and wages also depended on this (Sherwell 83). The most common were the occupations within manufactures, agriculture, services, and trades. Some of the representatives of the latter can be seen in the following table, which shows the percentage of the population of certain professions in certain London boroughs:

Table 2<sup>2</sup>

Trades.	St. George's-in-the-East and Whitechapel.	St. Saviour, Southwark.	St. Olave, Southwark.	Strand, Soho, and St. Giles.
	Perc. of Population.	Perc. of Population.	Perc. of Population.	Perc. of Population.
Tailors ... ..	14 $\frac{3}{4}$	1 $\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	8
Bootmakers ... ..	6 $\frac{1}{8}$	2 $\frac{1}{2}$	1 $\frac{1}{5}$	2 $\frac{3}{4}$
Dressmakers and milliners ... ..	$\frac{3}{4}$	1	$\frac{2}{5}$	$\frac{3}{4}$
Shirtmakers ... ..	—	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{2}{5}$	—
Trimmings, artificial flowers, etc.	1	—	—	$\frac{3}{4}$

Concerning the first occupation in the column above, namely tailoring, Arthur Sherwell identifies it as one of the most complicated for workers, insofar as congestion

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<sup>2</sup> Sherwell, Arthur. *Life in West London : A Study and a Contrast*. third ed., Methuen & Co, 1901, p. 63.

and workload had to be completed by a large number of people, and their workplaces often served them as 'home' (88).

The level of education of the lower class was a controversial and difficult topic for representation, insofar as the lack of free time and constant presence at work provided little or no opportunity to enhance the level of education. Additionally, the general level of literacy was raised by the middle and upper classes while most of the lower one was not capable of reading and writing. Many children, coming from poor families, could not afford to attend school, therefore, they spent their childhood working (Altick 46). With the passage of time and the adoption of educational reforms, the conditions of children changed for the better, reducing the hours of work allowed and widening the school accessibility (Altick 47).

In conclusion, the social hierarchy of Victorian society was indeed complex and vivid. The overall picture of the time appeared to be quite promising, as each representative had their job to carry out. Nevertheless, all of them demonstrated the weaknesses and strengths of the empire, with respect to the general standard of living, education, and economic development of the society.

#### **1.4 Industrial Revolution**

During Queen Victoria's reign, England was considered one of the most progressive states due to its industrial development, the adoption of new technologies, and the construction of numerous factories and small businesses, which helped to promote the country on the global market. At the same time, some laws were being improved at the political level in order to create a more suitable working environment. Despite the significant successes and global changes in the British industrial system, the majority of the working class was dissatisfied with certain aspects of their employment, conditions,

and assessment. Unfortunately, this dissatisfaction led to the gradual decline of England in world industrial production.

At the outset, it is important to consider the tasks that were being prioritised for the improvement and advancement of labour in nineteenth-century England. The Industrial Revolution is commonly associated with this topic, as it brought significant changes to almost every aspect of life for the people of Britain at the time. The main purpose of the event was to shift the country's production from agricultural to industrial one (Musson 254). Therefore, this period in history is often related to global innovations that facilitated and accelerated various industrial processes. These innovations included factory equipment and faster transportation between major cities via railways (Musson 254). For this reason, it is significant to note that everything hinged upon the sphere of manufactures, inasmuch as

In most industries there was no technical revolution in the century before 1850, that traditional handicrafts still predominated in the mid-nineteenth century and that outside textiles (particularly cotton), the primary processes of iron production, and a few other manufactures, there had been no widespread introduction of steam-powered mechanization and the factory system. (Musson 252-253)

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, metal industries and other complex branches of production became progressive thanks to simplified transportation rather than specialised devices in factories: “The development of railways and steamships was directly related to the revolution in coal, iron and steam technology and so is regarded as part of the Industrial Revolution—indeed, we may well talk of a transport ‘industry’” (qtd. in Musson 254). As previously discussed, consistently, with the development of industrial

sectors, England's largest cities underwent a population growth that had a dramatic impact on the social sphere and urbanisation.

With the arrival of the Industrial Revolution, “over half the population lived in urban areas by 1851 and by the later nineteenth century the proportion had risen to 80 per cent” (Musson 255). This statistic clearly demonstrates the successful transition from the old industrial production facilities. Furthermore, it shows the significant increase in the number of people living in cities, which has made rural and suburban areas obsolete, resulting in a significant decline in the number of people living in these areas and a huge shortage of urban housing: “This rapid urbanization went together with and was a result of the Industrial Revolution that was taking place, providing increasing employment not only in growing industries but also in the related transport and commercial sectors” (Musson 255). Therefore, it is essential to emphasise that “the ‘agricultural revolution’, the population explosion, and rapid urbanization are also often subsumed in the general concept of an ‘industrial revolution’” (Musson 253).

The hugely popular cult of labour undoubtedly contributed to the strengthening of the state's economy and the absence of unemployment amongst the population. However, simultaneously, it brought another wave of challenges faced by the working class. As discussed earlier, despite the proliferation and introduction of new appliances, manual labour remained prevalent. The rapid growth in demand for production led to the fact that working shifts often exceeded the norm and people were forced to spend all their time there, often arranging sleeping places by machinery (Sherwell 88). Using the example of London, the following chart shows the percentage of married people of 35 years in the industrial areas of the city, which, in turn, will help to connect previously discussed labour and family affairs:

Table 3<sup>3</sup>

Registration District.	Single.	Married.
Soho (St. James and St. Anne) ... ..	20 $\frac{1}{8}$ %	79 $\frac{3}{8}$ %
St. Saviour, Southwark ... ..	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ %	88 $\frac{1}{2}$ %
St. George's-in-the-East ... ..	9 $\frac{2}{3}$ %	90 $\frac{1}{3}$ %
Average for all London ... ..	14 %	86 %

It can be concluded that a significant proportion of the working class aged 35 and above were married. The negative impact on their families was primarily due to frequent and prolonged overtime at work. Despite the fact that the Victorian moral code expected women to focus on household and childcare duties, a considerable number of them were also compelled to work (Sherwell 68). This was either due to a lack of financial resources or the death of a key member of the family (the latter unfortunate circumstance was often fuelled by unsanitary conditions or arduous work shifts) (Sherwell 12). According to Arthur Sherwell, the female workforce could be categorised as “skilled and unskilled”, where “the former includes the workers in the various branches of the dress trades (e.g., tailoresses, mantle-makers, dressmakers, etc.); while the latter includes the more casual and nondescript forms of labour (e.g., charring, laundry-work, \* and general factory work)” (79). Similarly, women suffered from numerous problems related to hard shifts, lack of housing, and low wages.

The Industrial Revolution had a significant impact on children, with many households being forced to rely on their labour. When families could afford not to send their children to work, it was considered a luxury and a sign of success (Humphries 407). The following lines illustrate the thorny life that young workers often faced:

Frank Galton was sent to work at a relatively young age on account of his father's falling wages, as competition from workshop production using a detailed division

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<sup>3</sup> Sherwell, Arthur. *Life in West London : A Study and a Contrast*. third ed., Methuen & Co, 1901, p. 72.

of labour and child workers drove down prices. Galton junior was not himself employed in making saddles but the sons of other men were and we do not have to look far to find unambiguous examples of competitive dependence, where a son's own cheap labour undercut his father's skilled work. (Humphries 411)

Parents often sent their children to work in the same place they were, which on average happened when the child reached the age of 10 (Humphries 406). The most difficult aspect of this was that the spheres of labour were the same as for adults, accordingly, no indulgences in working hours or working conditions were available for them. In this table compiled by Jane Humphries, one can see a list of the most popular occupations among the child population:

Table 4<sup>4</sup>

<i>Most frequently recorded first jobs</i>	<i>Top twenty jobs</i>
1. Agriculture <sup>a</sup>	1. Agricultural labourer (out-door)
2. Messenger, porter	2. Farmer's, grazier's, son, grandson, etc.
3. Cotton manufacture <sup>b</sup>	3. Messenger, porter (not government)
4. Coal-miner	4. Farm servant (in-door)
5. Woollen/worsted manufacture <sup>b</sup>	5. Cotton manufacture
6. Shop boy/retail	6. Coal-miner
7. Monitor schoolteacher	7. Labourer (branch undefined)
8. Sailor	8. Woollen cloth manufacture
9. = Shoemaker	9. Worsted manufacture
9. = Office boy	10. Shoemaker
11. Domestic servant	11. Silk manufacture
12. Hawker/street-trader	12. Iron manufacture
13. Printer/compositor	13. Domestic servant (General)
14. Rope/paper manufacture	14. Earthenware manufacture
15. Carpenter/joiner	15. Tailor
16. Earthenware manufacture	16. Hose, stocking, manufacture
17. Silk manufacture	17. Blacksmith
18. Iron manufacture	18. Carpenter, joiner
19. Blacksmith	19. Mason, paviour
20. Tailor	20. Brickmaker

*Notes: a* includes all agricultural occupations; *b* includes factory work and domestic manufacturing.  
*Source:* Census data taken from Kirby, 'Brief statistical sketch', p. 242.

The reality is that child labour was important not only for their own earning purposes but also for the country's economy as a whole, as many factories could have twice as many child labourers as adults. Additionally, "there were no institutions holding the economy at a good equilibrium without child labour" (Humphries 411). Therefore, despite multiple changes in laws concerning the reduction of permitted working hours for

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<sup>4</sup> Humphries, Jane. "Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution." *The Economic History Review*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2013, pp. 404. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42921562>.

children, the prohibition of night work, changes in the permissible age for admission to certain factories, and amendments to improve their quality of life, child labour remained relevant until the year 1903 (The Employment of Children Act), which provided for strict restrictions and regulation of child labour (Dearle 487). However, Arthur Sherwell argues that new laws are not always the solution to social problems such as poor living conditions; instead, it is crucial for public opinion to be enlightened and for local authorities to be aware of it (157). Therefore, social issues often required a shift in public awareness and support from local authorities, rather than new legislations.

In conclusion, the nineteenth century was a period of significant economic and social transformation in British history, insofar as “industry and its related transport and commercial networks now predominated and Britain had been transformed from a mainly agricultural/rural country to an industrial/urban one” (Musson 254). Nevertheless, industrialisation also led to several social problems, including labour exploitation, low wages, poor working conditions, and child labour. Despite some negative aspects of this period, it had a huge impact on the economic and social development of the country, forming the foundations of modern industry and significantly changing the social structure and cultural life.

### **1.5 The concept of Victorian morality**

The adherence to the rules and values established by the Victorian moral system was an integral part of every Englishman’s life, in many cases, even regardless of their social status. As it was mentioned earlier, the boundaries of this system were wide, as they considerably varied according to occupation, gender, and social class.

First and foremost, it is necessary to mention that the concept of morality itself was initially established with a huge religious impact, namely influenced by evangelicalism, which included a general picture of moral ideology. One of the

fundamentals of this aspect was the exaltation and inculcation of the importance of labour as a key to satisfaction and characterisation as a proper citizen (Altick 168-169). Thus, the government itself greatly benefited from this pattern, as unemployment rates were low and the economic level increased, although, from a religious point of view, Evangelicalism was more focused on the social aspect rather than the political one. Nevertheless, it was the lower and middle classes that contributed substantially to this process, simultaneously uniting their dedication to labour and creating so-called “common morality” between their representatives (Altick 174).

The moral ideology of Britons, who belonged to the higher social statuses, was mostly based on displaying a pleasing and proper picture of society, impressing others with their etiquette and manners, which demonstrated the purity of English words and actions. In addition, this class served as role models for the rising middle class, who followed the aristocracy’s examples of “how to dress, what to eat, where to be seen and – crucially – how to entertain” (Paterson 196). Therefore, books on manners, which served as guides regarding proper social behaviour, became very popular in the time in question. Furthermore, respectable women were among the main representatives of intelligence and kindness, who despite the huge social gulf between “the ‘two nations’ of rich and poor” endeavoured to reinforce the core British family values and the significance of education (Marsden 125).

Suffice to say, the attitude of the lower class towards the moral system is rather complicated, considering that the only aspects in which they could follow the traditions of this concept were matters of labour and family organisation. This class could not be proper representatives of the moral system insofar as given their status and financial situation, they could not afford to attend events where they could demonstrate their etiquette and fashion. The only things that remained were their ‘commercial spirit’ in

attempts to feed their family and distribution of roles in its organisation, which people had already established at a genetic level and had become mundane rather than due to sincere adherence to the rules of the concept.

Nevertheless, the decline of the principles of Victorian morality was seen not only in the lower but also in the middle and high social classes. Their actions were often greed-based, which predominantly violated the rules of the system. Representatives of the highest class often showed double standards, which was paradoxical for the moral code (hypocrisy). As an instance that testifies to this process, one can observe documentations that provide information about a huge number of brothels and the demand for prostitution which existed in the largest cities of England in the second half of the nineteenth century (Sherwell 144). Since the extent of prostitution reached an enormous scale, the government was aware of this and confirmed the existence of such relations between the two sexes. The paradoxical explanation of this occurrence, provided on an official level, was as follows: “With the one sex the offence is committed as a matter of gain; with the other it is an irregular indulgence of a natural impulse” (qtd. in Thomas 198). Admittedly, statistics cannot show what percentage of the men involved in this process were either single or married, but regarding the latter category, divorce trials clearly privileged the male sex. A woman’s infidelity to her partner was a valid reason for divorce initiated by a man, while an identical situation in which a woman was subjected to infidelity by her husband most often did not reach a successful court decision in the realisation of divorce (Thomas 199). Therefore, it can be inferred that British double standards were more often in relation to gender.

This concept is extremely unique in the sense that, in parallel with the enormous impact on people’s lives and the stigmatisation of certain groups in society, Victorian morality itself began to undergo a process of loss of relevance and value. As time passed,

the inequality, injustice, and impurity of people's actions began to affect the system, leading to its gradual transformation. The late nineteenth century is memorable as a period of criticism, anti-intellectualism, dogmatism, and rigidity, which subsequently led to dramatic departures from widely accepted norms amongst society (Houghton 110-180).

### **1.5.1 Social life: leisure and entertainment**

The public life of the British and the choice of their leisure activities are some of the most striking examples of the display of moral norms and values of society. However, given that there were vast differences between social groups, it is significant to highlight the fact that norms of behaviour and activities varied considerably between them. Nevertheless, it is exactly what gives a deeper insight into the extent to which they differed or whether the morals of the English were still the same regardless of social level or financial wealth.

The aristocracy or upper class is a romanticised literary reference from the days of Victorian England. This pattern was most often formulated by the fact that customary activities were usually depicted in historical movies or paintings that accurately portrayed the qualities of restraint, diligence, and purity of the people. However, as history reveals, in many cases their leisure activities were not in accordance with Victorian moral values. At this point, however, it would be worthwhile to imply the character of the amusements of the class in question. Besides the characteristic gambling, racing, and hunting, women served men of the upper class for entertainment purposes (Altick 22). Therefore, despite all the purity of Victorian morality concerning family values and social behaviour, this type of entertainment, namely philandering, was considered acceptable and tolerated within the norm when it came to the superior individuals.

As regards sporting activities, golf gained enormous popularity in nineteenth-century England. This sport was a great option for those who were not in the best shape

but still wanted to participate in such activities, which also had a beneficial influence on communication and provided an opportunity to encounter people of a similar class. What was characteristic of golf was that it was not intended for the working class, which is why it was hugely popular amongst the upper classes, even including females (Paterson 272).

Owing to the Industrial Revolution and the advent of new means of transport, notably the railway, travelling became extremely popular in the nineteenth century. Britons were now able to actively explore European countries, which had a positive impact on their education and intelligence, which by the standards of Victorian morality was one of the most important qualities of an individual. However, as time passed, Europe was criticised by British travellers, due to the fact that many things simply did not appeal to them (Paterson 260). Therefore, in the 1860s, Britain discovered a new destination, which was Egypt, and as Paterson describes what particularly attracted them was that “young people of both sexes were able to behave with greater freedom than could be found within the tight strictures that governed them at home” (261).

Those people who did choose to stay in the country began to establish places that served people as good spots to relax. For instance, Victorian England had a reputation for having a high rate of alcoholism. The British took this as an opportunity to create special places to read and socialise, which civilised the usual pubs and allowed the working class to share their leisure time in friendly companies (Paterson 47). It was precisely such co-operations concerning social aspects between the lower and middle classes that could be found quite frequently.

Additionally, members of the latter class were most commonly found in educational or charitable organisations. The Ragged School movement, for instance, enabled poor children to receive a minimal education, where “lessons were taught to them by volunteers, using whatever premises could be cheaply rented, and classes were held in

the evenings to enable them to continue earning their livings during the daytime” (Paterson 47). Based on this example, it can be inferred that the middle class did follow the norms of Victorian morality, which was about helping the needy and promoting the importance of intelligence and knowledge.

When it comes to members of the working class, the most significant factors to consider are undoubtedly the amount of free time, financial situation, and resources available to them. Nevertheless, with the development of technology and mass printing facilities, it was newspapers and magazines that became very common sources of entertainment, which could include news, short stories, and even scandalous satirical publications about the monarchy (Paterson 286). On the other hand, one should take into account the fact that the majority of people were inerudite but year by year the number of them decreased, and even senior citizens tried to self-educate themselves.

Suffice to say, British society often prioritised self-improvement, including reading and self-study. Certain people did this to a greater extent, some to a lesser one, depending on their occupations and classes. It was one of the biggest achievements that united English society and followed the moral laws at the same time. Although the upper class was often exemplified as ‘proper’ representatives of society, based on some of their activities, paradoxically they were the ones who least conformed to the codes of Victorian morality. With time and the development of new trends and technologies, Britons’ leisure activities and values changed, but many things that were at the pinnacle of popularity in the nineteenth century remain so to this day.

### **1.5.2 Religion and its branches**

Throughout the example of many countries in the nineteenth century when religion played a huge role in a wide range of spheres of life, England was no exception amongst them. Moreover, it was religion that significantly influenced the foundation of

Victorian morality and maintained it throughout its existence. For this reason, in Mike Paterson's words, "the Anglican Church – was an unflinching upholder of the social order and a sort of moral police force for the nation" (156). Therefore, it is essential to examine how widespread faith was amongst citizens and how specifically it shaped the moral code, insofar as it is necessary to understand where the roots of Victorian morality lie and the extent to which the nation sympathised with them.

The first point to start with is that Britons were considered to be a truly religious nation. However, Walter Arnstein argues that

The discovery that in an England and Wales of almost 18 million people, only 11 million church or chapel visits occurred on the particular Sunday surveyed. Inasmuch as tabulators believed that a good many of these people had attended more than once, they came up with an estimate of 7,261,000 individuals who had attended religious services one or more times that day. (151)

Nevertheless, it is crucial to mention the fact that despite the above-mentioned statistic, religious practices were quite widespread among people, because even with Sabbath day as an example, many sources claim that whether it was a city or a rural area, the majority of public places were closed and the day was traditionally dedicated to relaxation (Altick 168).

Since people were so close to religion, it should not have been difficult for them to adhere to moral norms. Therefore, during the establishment of Victorian morality, Christianity was evident in its shared values of family, labour, and social responsibility, which included selfless help for those in need. Mike Paterson highlights this point as follows:

The ethos of hard work, frugality, unselfishness in serving others – be they the poor, the community or the nation – drew on roots that went back to the Puritans

of two hundred years earlier (and, like the Puritans, many Victorians believed that prosperity was a reward from God for their virtue). (164)

It was in the nineteenth century when the so-called Sunday schools within churches, where children were provided with the opportunity to study in their free time, gained prominence. Thus, as has been discussed in previous sections on the Britons' leisure time, especially the middle and lower classes figured prominently in this process. More often than not, it was middle-class women, who were politically limited and had plenty of free time, who devoted their free time to Victorian religious work, which consisted of the teaching process (Paterson 167). The linkage between moral and religious rules for the two classes in attention accurately fulfils the following statement from Mike Paterson: "The earnest desire for self-improvement, again a characteristic left over from the Puritans, but one that the Victorians continued to revere, stressed the need to put work before pleasure, obligations before self-indulgence" (164-165).

However, despite the prevalence of religious and moral standards in English society, many issues in British daily life were contradictory to religion. Some of these included prostitution and alcoholism, which have been discussed in previous sections. In addition, as for other negative customs, it is impossible not to mention smoking, which was extremely common not only among adults but even among children. In his article Matthew Hilton mentions: "An 1876 article in *Tobacco Trade Review* (hereafter T.T.R.) describes an eccentric middle-class family in which the father and his three sons, aged nine, twelve and fourteen, all smoke cigars together" (qtd. in Hilton 588). Unfortunately, this could be observed very frequently, but laws restricting smoking for children began to be introduced as early as the beginning of the twentieth century.

In nineteenth-century England, movements promoting the cultural and spiritual value of religion were a common practice. For instance, it occurred in the 1830s when

members of the religious community were dissatisfied with the intrusion of the government into the affairs of the church, which consequently led to the formation of The Oxford Movement. Suffice to say, its main objective was to fight for the preservation of traditional religious rituals, support believers, and spread the doctrines of the church. Owing to this movement, there was also a huge contribution to the cultural and architectural heritage of England, which consisted in the building of new churches with elements of Gothic architecture (Altick 209-216).

Given that a large number of tenets were identical or similar in both religion and Victorian morality, it can be concluded that faith played a tremendous role in the everyday life of any citizen. It fostered in British citizens the potential for actions, self-reliance, and responsibility, hence, “the Victorians believed that individuals, rather than the state, should look after society’s needs” (Paterson 156). It is religion that figures prominently in social, cultural, and political history inasmuch as regardless of social status, it was available to everyone.

### **1.5.3 Legislative system: laws and punishments**

In broader terms, the study of the legislative system in the context of any country is valuable and effective for two reasons: firstly, it gives an insight into how intensively the state has taken measures in order to improve the quality of life and the overall situation in the country; and secondly, it demonstrates what weaknesses and problems were present in a certain period of history. In the case of Victorian era, the above-mentioned examples were quite numerous, but the main focus of this part is to examine the rate of criminal cases, such as public order offences, thefts, and homicides, and what punishments were applied at that time. Not least of all, this section investigates how Victorian morality influenced the laws themselves and how disobedience to codes and norms figured in the system of infractions and punishments itself.

In order to examine specific laws and their effectiveness, it is necessary to determine what the situation in the country was concerning security and the frequency of particular infringements. As the Industrial Revolution unfolded, the number of people in the cities grew significantly, and so did the number of problems which could be found on the city streets. The settlers who instigated the spread of slums, filth, and violations caused increased city patrolling on a scale that had not been seen before: “Established initially chiefly out of fear for the safety of property in an era of social dislocation, these forces came to press down on disorderly and violent activity as well as thefts” (Wiener 19). However, as for other legal actions, in order to remedy the situation and control the activity of the lower class, in 1834 the Poor Law Amendment was introduced, which sought to reduce the number of homeless people and give them employment which was provided in workhouses (Chesney 24). Unfortunately, this page in the history of the legislative system in England is considered to be controversial, insofar as conditions in such institutions were extremely harsh and the rules and routines of the camps were destructive both mentally and physically to those who lived there.

However, returning to the city, namely London, there was a close bond between the local tradesmen and the street trespassers and thieves. What united them was a shared hatred of the authorities and the police, which most frequently went beyond verbal altercations. As to the consequences, Kellow Chesney points out: “There were costers who had been jailed a dozen times or more for assaults on policemen. However one may suppose that the police, who returned the costers’ feelings, sometimes found means to settle accounts” (48).

Given that many cases included impunity for damaged property or bodily injury prior to the nineteenth century, during Queen Victoria’s reign the situation significantly improved (Wiener 15). Furthermore, it is also worth highlighting that the increasing

accessibility of news, which brought incidents to the public, had a positive impact on reducing crime rates. Most often, these were examples of serious crimes such as murder, that were subject to the death penalty. However, the nineteenth century made enormous changes to this process: finally, one could witness the end of the “bloody code”, in which previously even petty theft could be punished with execution; additionally, public execution was abolished and the minimum age of a person who could receive such a verdict was set (Wiener 27).

The Victorian gender ideology, which is closely related to the concept of Victorian morality, became an integral part of the judicial process. This is evidenced by the following statistic: “By 1900, more than 85% of inmates of local prisons (for short sentences) and about 96% of convict (longer sentence) prisoners were male” (qtd. in Wiener 37). Although women’s rights were rather limited, the positive aspects were still visible. One of the great achievements of the connection between the legislative system and Victorian morality, as Marvin J. Wiener emphasises, was that “the protection of women from violence” positively contributed to the results of the judicial processes regarding sexual assaults (100). Furthermore, given that society perceived them as the weaker sex, destined for domestic labour, it is for this reason that many indulgences in the judicial process for them referred to health problems or total absence of guilt, therefore “violence against or even serious mistreatment of women was being regarded more gravely and argued about more intensely” (Wiener 38).

A document that was one of the foremost examples of the authorities’ concern about declining Victorian morality in society appeared under the initiative of Lord Campbell in 1857 and bore the name The Obscene Publications Act. This legislation prohibited the distribution of immoral material that was deemed harmful to public decency (Roberts 609-610). Since prostitution was a frequent practice on the streets of

cities, it was also common to encounter sellers of newspapers that contained pornographic material in similar places. It was such publications that were extremely vehemently criticised by moralists, as a consequence of which offenders could receive a fine or even imprisonment, justifying it as follows: “not so much to punish vice as to prevent crime” (qtd. in Roberts 613), where crime meant sexual assaults.

During the Victorian period, a considerable number of laws and amendments were passed, which demonstrates that the authorities and the courts were taking action to improve the situation in England while at the same time trying to maintain and expand the moral values. The most prominent achievements were the expansion and protection of women’s rights, the commutation of death penalty sentences, and the prevention of homelessness. Undoubtedly, according to modern standards, some of them seem absurd and ineffective, but compared to previous periods, in the nineteenth century, England’s legal system made significant progress and laid the foundations for the formation of the most significant laws of the next centuries.

#### **1.5.4 Education and intelligence**

Victorian society has always valued two core human qualities: industriousness and a passion for learning. Paradoxically, not all individuals were able to combine the two, so it was necessary to set priorities when it came to working class children. Nevertheless, there were also deficiencies in the educational system for the middle classes, which the state tried to eliminate by means of reforms and laws. This was an urgent objective considering the fact that education played a pioneering role not only in the formation of moral values in each class but also in the formation of the entire society.

To begin with, it is important to examine the structure and organisation of education during the early years of Queen Victoria’s reign. As previously mentioned, individuals of the lower class had the option of attending church schools, workhouses, or

private rural schools. These institutions primarily focused on teaching basic skills, such as reading and writing. However, in 1844 the establishment of The Ragged School Union took place, which aimed at providing education for very poor working children, where they had access to coarser study of the sciences. In addition, it was funded by influential and wealthy individuals (Hepplewhite 8-9). Contrastingly, parents of middle-class backgrounds could afford to send their children to public schools, where a wider range of subjects were taught. Moreover, they were assisted in becoming “Christian gentlemen” – religious, well-mannered, and proud of their country. Alongside such institutions, grammar schools were also popular among young men, as they could receive education in areas that would be useful for their future careers (Hepplewhite 7).

The concept of “civilising through education” was a common practice in the nineteenth century, which was applied by the state to the adult members of the working class in order to suppress radicalism amongst its representatives. Thus, the state wanted “to control the thoughts and fashion even the minds of its subjects” (qtd. in Scott 203). However, it also raised concerns that with the acquisition of new knowledge and the enlightenment of society, people would become even more anti-authoritarian. For instance, the statement by British socialist writer Thomas Hodgskin explains the following: “Men had better be without education, than be educated by their rulers; for their education is but the mere breaking in of the steer of the yoke” (qtd. in Scott 203). Indeed, politicians’ concerns were not in vain in some respects, as later England was able to witness the establishment of a radical education that was not controlled by the state and included discussions on “political knowledge, socialist principles, and labour economics” (Scott 203).

Therefore, it was much easier to initially educate people from an early age in a way that would be the most beneficial for the state, insofar as “education is a premiere

form of social management” (Scott 99). In practice, it was common to see different methods of regulations and punishments that were used as a result of students’ misbehaviour or disobedience to the rules. Through educational reforms, Victorian Britain moved further away from physical punishment, which, for example, was an extremely common practice in Georgian times (Scott 100). Now, the British mindset was rather directed at avoiding and preventing offences, thereby instructing children through literature that contained religious motifs and moral standards: “Early moralistic children’s fiction sought to make inherently wicked children obey the structures of religion and thus become good citizens” (Scott 103).

The educational system is a brilliant example of the emphasis that the state places on the intellectual and moral development of its citizens. Given the challenges of population growth, a large number of poor people, and the problems in departing from old practices, the time of Queen Victoria’s reign saw a tremendous change that sought to ensure that regardless of class, everyone could be educated. It was a positive aspect of the change in society that gave working-class people the opportunity to progress and improve. Undoubtedly, such hardships encouraged the child to show a craving for learning, which had a positive effect on the level of general literacy of the nation and the cultural and moral heritage of Victorian England.

### **1.5.5 Patriarchy and the role of women**

The patriarchal system of political, economic, and social governance in England has been prevailing for a long time, and this was no exception during the reign of Queen Victoria. This system involved an unequal distribution of rights and roles, which was often criticised by women whose rights were specifically restricted and defined by the Victorian moral code. On the other hand, the nineteenth century had a significant impact on the empowerment of women’s rights, allowing them to participate actively in different

spheres of social life and, most importantly, to be perceived as independent and powerful individuals.

The establishment of patriarchal values in Victorian society always started with the family aspect. For instance, every British family expected a son to be born, which was primarily in the interest of the father, the head of the family: “One source of man’s fear of woman derives from her part in the reproductive process – a woman must produce the sons who will become the patriarchs of the next generation” (Langland 383). This occurred for two reasons: firstly, in upper-class families, it was a biological and social factor for the continuation of the bloodline; secondly, in families of any class, the male sex was privileged in the field of education and work. Taking into account that the nineteenth century was the period of great progress for England in the economic sphere, which occurred due to the Industrial Revolution, it was during these times that men’s labour was highly valued and had a major role to play in this, which also influenced the formation of values: “Working men proud of their hard-earned skill, their ‘independence,’ their domestic habits, and their self-improvement” (Tosh 332).

First and foremost, this significance of the male gender affected attitudes within the family: the man was perceived as the main provider for his children and wife, who, in turn, were obliged to respect and fulfil their domestic duties as prescribed in the moral code. In addition, Tosh highlights that “this exclusive male responsibility for the family income led to the characteristically Victorian valorization of work as both moral duty and personal fulfillment” (332). As can be evident, social expectations for men and their responsibilities were also clearly established and prescribed, leading to the emergence of a new concept of masculinity or “manliness”, which was based primarily on financial and social independence (Tosh 335). In the first place, clear separation of the sexes played an important role in the realisation of men’s ambitions, which played to their advantage

because “it denied men’s emotional vulnerability and reinforced their monopoly on courage and stoicism” (Tosh 337).

The physical and intellectual superiority of men also had a positive impact on their personal lives and relationships with women. In the example of the middle class, one could often observe a huge difference in age and social class between a man and his chosen female partner. This was primarily impacted by his influential status, which would have a positive impact on the social and financial situation of a working-class girl, insofar as the only available path out of a difficult situation for her would be marriage. At the same time, it is worth highlighting that it was almost impossible to find a similar relationship between an older woman and a young man in Victorian society, which would logically contradict the norms of traditional household life (Davidoff 93).

As one can infer, in all spheres of life, women have had little or no choice concerning their own desires and opinions: “Property, liberty, earnings, even a wife’s conscience, all belonged to her husband, as did the children she might bear” (Crow 147). It lasted until the end of the nineteenth century when England was first able to witness a change in the social perception of women. This was primarily influenced by the feminist movement, which succeeded in the adoption of reforms that changed the role of women and significantly reduced patriarchal domination in society. Some of the first demands of women were “control of their own property and earnings, access to easier divorce, child custody rights, higher education, and entry to the male professions” (Perkin 213). However, it is also worth mentioning women’s extreme resentment of their exclusion from political issues, namely suffrage. A petition created by Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon in 1865 that sought to allow women to vote was rejected on the grounds that “the vote was the least of women’s problems” (Perkin 213). Despite this, there have been still achievements in other areas. For instance, in 1878, the Matrimonial Causes Act was

passed, which provided protection for women who had suffered physical abuse from men and at the same time gave the right to separation and custody of children; also in 1873, The Infant Custody Act was introduced, which unlike the 1839 act (in which the age of children was under seven), now allowed custody of children up to sixteen years old (“Custody Rights”).

In conclusion, it must be stated that men did take a leading role in all spheres of Victorian society, starting from the household and ending with the highest political structures. Many moral principles of that time clearly prescribed that due to their physical and intellectual abilities, which were colossally different from those of women, men had a more positive and fruitful influence on the development and advancement of England and its improvement in economic, political, and cultural structures. However, as can be observed, the nineteenth century also played a key role in the development of feminism, which was able to show the value of women beyond domestic life. Although the ruler of the state was a woman, it was not beneficial in the process of improving and changing the role of females, therefore, all achievements were obtained through a long and fruitful struggle for women’s rights and the departure from the classical patriarchal system.

#### **1.5.6 The ideal woman model and manners**

Once the responsibilities and roles of the males in Victorian society were clearly defined, the question was: what should the ideal woman model look like? This is a genuinely broad topic and one of the central themes in the context of the discussion of moral norms, given that, in all respects, any woman had to follow them. Now, the central objective is to identify the characteristics of a woman who fulfilled the description of a proper or ideal female, how she was supposed to behave in public, that is, in general, what the expectations of society for her were. It is also important to mention that, as in any other context, the issue of class division figured prominently in this topic, as social

expectations and responsibilities differed considerably between working-class and aristocratic women.

In order to demonstrate what a woman had to represent, it is necessary to address the subject of the organisation of family responsibilities. In many marriages among upper-class couples, it has been observed that the financial condition of the family depended entirely on the husband, and the organisation of the household and the care of the children was the full responsibility of the wife. However, since financial status allowed them to hire nursemaids, housekeepers, and other domestic helpers, women could afford to spend time on their own, travelling and educating themselves (Perkin 78). Moreover, educated women were highly valued in society, since men always wished to see an aesthetically pleasing and intelligent lady who could maintain a conversation on any topic. In middle-class families, husbands often preferred a wife who was “a decoratively idle, sexually passive woman, pure of heart, religious and self-sacrificing” (Perkin 86). Practically, the income range of middle-class families could vary considerably, therefore, not all women were able to hire helpers and be truly “decoratively idle”; instead, they raised their children and took care of the house themselves (Perkin 87).

An important aspect of the true ideal woman was her appearance, specifically her clothing, which played an enormous role in her presentation in the public: “As well as the demands of etiquette, women were constrained for much of the era by fussy and impractical clothing” (Paterson 215). According to Joan Perkin, “fashionable dress came more and more to emphasise the ideal of women’s dependence and weakness” (95), because dresses were so opulent and complicated, even the very process of dressing forced one to be helped by others. However, in addition to this, clothing was an effective instrument for demonstrating one’s status when attending various events, such as balls, dinners, and travelling. This was certainly the case for upper-class women, but in the

example of working-class females, they wore standard, discreet, and often second-hand clothes in order to save money so that the head of the family could afford to buy better pieces and look presentable (Perkin 97).

For women's awareness, throughout the Victorian era, manuals and books were often published on what habits and rules of behaviour should be present in society. Thus, one such book was *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook of Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen* written in 1859. The rules of etiquette for women in society were, for the most part, to remain as discreet and decorous as possible in any situation, especially when it came to relationships with the male sex: "If a young married woman wishes to be respected, and therefore happy in life, there should be a quiet propriety of manner, a dignity towards the male sex, which cannot be mistaken in her for prudery, since it is consistent with her position and her ties" ("The Habits" 270). Before that, of course, her manners and proper body language had to be observed, as ladies were always the ones to greet first, but only those people whom they knew: "You must not, however short-sighted, raise your glasses and stare at him through them before you bow; but as it is very awkward for a lady to bow by mistake to a gentleman she does not know, you should look at him well before you come up to him" ("The Habits" 275). In general, for both sexes, manners meant respect for oneself as well as for others ("The Habits" 242). However, there is no doubt that proper social behaviour of women was highly necessary to not discredit her husband and his dignity, or in the case of an unmarried girl, to present herself as a polite, intelligent, and dignified individual.

As one can observe, women did not have many rights, but the number of their obligations was surprisingly broad. For every woman, it was first and foremost important to be a caring mother and a dutiful wife, who maintained a well-distributed arrangement of everyday life and leading roles. It would be wrong to say that by limited rights or high

social expectations, a woman was disadvantaged in society; on the contrary, those who fit the framework of a proper Victorian woman were valued and respected in their circles. For this reason, the examples of such females helped maintain stability, order, and moral purity in Victorian society.

### **1.5.7 The Victorian family**

The significance of the family in the cultural context of states has always been enormous, inasmuch as it represents the connection of moral concepts between generations. In Victorian England, it was possible to observe both the adherence to old traditions and the introduction of new values, which were rapidly changing with the development of industry and principles of morality. Consequently, the family laid the foundation for the child's development and accurate perception of the world, which prepared them for a future independent life. This is why every Victorian strived to create the right family structure in which all roles were properly distributed among its members and all core values were honoured. Therefore, it is essential to consider which factors and moral principles influenced the organisation of family life and its effective functioning.

In Victorian society, the family was perceived as one of the most significant aspects of everyone's life because it contained almost all the spiritual values that every human being was supposed to have. For this reason, home was perceived as a place of comfort and spiritual solitude: "In its sanctities and privacy a man might escape from the trials of the outer world and be safe from its prying eyes" (BBC 344). This was primarily influenced by the huge changes in society as a result of the Industrial Revolution, during which men worked diligently to supply their families. Under such conditions, the role of women was equally crucial: "The mid-Victorian husband depended on his wife to perform the ideological work of managing the class question and displaying the signs of the family's status – duties to which he contributed a disposable income" (Langland 291).

In this case, proper cooperation between family members benefited everyone, creating a comfortable and fair environment for all.

However, undoubtedly, for all those who desired to create a family, marriage was an indispensable condition for the fulfilment of this task, the perception of which was shaped by religious motives and values among the Britons: “They were able to picture marriage as justified not only by its roles in rearing children and as a focus for emotions but also as a means of absolution and redemption, a school for heaven” (Mintz 199). Any hardships the couples may have faced were viewed as vital life lessons for “self-discipline and self-restraint” (Mintz 128), thanks to which people realised their vocation and honourably fulfilled their life’s duty. Such skills were also advantageous in the upbringing of children, during which the parent was obliged to teach “how to regulate and control their behavior, to suppress their aggressive impulses, and to learn to do things for themselves without being dependent upon their parents” (Mintz 31). For the effectiveness of all of the above matters, children were also influenced by how they perceived their parents and what methods were applied to their upbringing. For their discipline, it was extremely important that the child did not depend on the parents emotionally, so that their advice or wishes (not orders) would not be taken to extremes and their reaction would be much more balanced and adequate, hence, the effectiveness would increase dramatically (Mintz 32).

The role of children and the period of their rearing differed considerably between lower and upper-class families: “The higher the status to which a child’s family aspires for the child, the longer the economic dependency of the child on the family” (Ruether 112). Consequently, child labour in the working classes did not provide an opportunity to stay at home and receive an education, while children in the middle classes could remain in the care of their parents until the moment they found a job (Ruether 112). Nevertheless,

it was important for every child to show respect and gratitude to their parents for the skills they had learnt and the values instilled in them during their childhood, which were the cornerstones of shaping their future lives.

The Victorian family is one of the most important aspects of the study of the realities of the time, insofar as it allows one to examine the impact of social, moral, political, and cultural changes that immediately affected the relationships and formations of families. Although their values and roles may have varied significantly according to one's social class, the family was considered a place of comfort and spiritual solitude where each member felt protected from the teeming problems of the world. For children, not only did it play a key role in preparing them for their future independent lives, but it was also a major factor in shaping the personality and values of each individual, influenced by restraint, respect, discipline, and inculcation of labour, which had a profound impact on the development of society and culture over the years.

## **2 *Great Expectations***

### **2.1 Characteristics and the motif of the novel**

Charles Dickens once said: “I must make the most I can out of the book” (qtd. in Johnson 488). By this, he meant the novel *Great Expectations* that was published in 1861 and became one of the brightest concluding pages of writer’s oeuvre. As well as his other works, not only is this novel considered to be a masterpiece of those times, but it also remains relevant today. This is primarily influenced by the enormous talent and skill of the author in depicting the realities of that time, a wide range of themes, and the versatility of the characters.

The story unfolds in the first half of the nineteenth century amid global changes in Victorian England. Throughout the three volumes of the novel, whereas each shows the stages of personal expectations, the reader is to witness the life journey of the protagonist Pip, who, alongside his surrounding society, changes himself and his values in life. His main goal was to become a true gentleman. Additionally, due to the fact that the story has a first-person narrative, one can observe the detailed process of how Pip was able to experience the condition and treatment of each class of society. Additionally, being influenced not only by his own but also by society’s expectations, he gradually changes his mindset. Pip is the central figure of the whole story, and as Nigel Messenger claims, his entire instructive journey from the lowest to the higher class of society shows personal development and improvement, which was of utmost importance in Victorian society (75).

This leads to the fact that Dickens’ main objective and motive for writing this novel was to demonstrate that many people during that time were striving hard to change their social and financial status, resorting to a variety of actions and finding themselves in unexpected circumstances. On the other hand, an obstacle along this way could be

one's past. Taking the example of the main character, moving to London became invaluable experience for Pip, which revealed plenty of new opportunities and useful acquaintances. However, having experienced everything first-hand, the imposed picture of a decent society and a developed industrial centre gradually ceased to be ideal in Pip's eyes, which was unconventional because "Britons had at that time particularly settled that it was treasonable to doubt our having and our being the best of everything" (Dickens 163). Gradually adjusting and changing his mind, Pip was still held by his former life, especially by the unsolved mystery of who helped him on his path to becoming a gentleman. It is in London that he meets Abel Magwitch, who was his secret benefactor. However, this news does not make Pip thrilled insofar as now he had a sense of indebtedness to him and all previous hopes that the sponsor of his luxurious life was Mrs. Havisham evaporated. Now, Pip doubted himself and his abilities, despised his attitude towards Joe, and, most importantly, he realised that his relationship with Estella and his presence at Satis House was just an amusement for Mrs. Havisham (Dickens 323).

Given the fact that the story is narrated chronologically, the plot lines and details are revealed gradually as Pip's mindset progresses, and from a psychological point of view, this vividly demonstrates the changes in his perception of the world. The first volume of the novel delves into Pip's childhood as a member of the working class, in which he first begins to encounter the inequalities of social classes, but at the same time, his journey towards improvement begins here. Furthermore, this part also includes a description of the household, the educational system, and religion. All these events take place in the rural areas of the county of Kent, which provides an opportunity to see the difference in the quality of life compared to London, which in turn appears in the next part.

The second volume is the fulfilment of Pip's dream, which, in turn, gradually dispels his high expectations of an upper-class life. His life in London primarily affected the formation of his moral values that were prescribed by society. This included the industrial sphere, such as the operation of business and the management of finances, the relationships between people, especially the upper classes, and their manners and principles. However, simultaneously, he was able to witness the flaws in society and the system as a whole, which led to his disillusionment, hence it is not surprising that "the prevailing tone of Pip's narration is one of resigned melancholy" (Messenger 90).

The third and final volume focuses mainly on Pip's process of re-realising his entire life and the people who have been involved in shaping his personality. In this part, he finally discovers the details of his benefactor's life and his disdain for him disappears. Now, Pip is willing to help him escape the problems that were related to Magwitch's criminal background. Unfortunately, the escape was unsuccessful, which soon led to the benefactor's death, and Pip completely lost his expectations (Messenger 55). At the very end, specifically in the 59<sup>th</sup> chapter, Pip returns home, the place he had longed to leave, and finally a stage of realisation and acceptance of life's circumstances dawns on him.

Dickens aimed to illustrate that the influence of society was extremely strong, and through the example of Pip's life path, the entire journey from low to upper class had a huge price to pay. With the inculcation of new manners and principles, he gradually acquired negative qualities while being amongst respectable and wealthy individuals. He underestimated and despised low-class individuals, including those closest to him, such as Joe, Biddy, and Abel Magwitch, although Pip himself was once the same as these people. Therefore, not only did the class difference entail a desire to improve one's living conditions, but more often than not it led to a loss of real values in pursuit of high expectations that were never fulfilled.

## 2.2 The impact of the author's personal life on the creation of the novel

The path to great success of Charles Dickens cannot be considered simple; the writer's life was quite intense and throughout the years he faced successes and failures, including those in career and personal life. However, such a huge life experience strongly influenced his oeuvre, since his novels contain a huge number of themes, in most of which the central problem is the vices of society, hence "the later Dickens becomes a social critic and a social prophet whose amazing imaginative comprehension of his environment illuminates the problems of our contemporary world" (Johnson 12). *Great Expectations* was no exception in this, and many aspects of his personal life can be traced throughout the course of the novel.

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in the family of John and Elizabeth Dickens. The writer recalled his childhood as a carefree time when he received his first education at home, in the circle of parents and servants (Johnson 17). His early years were relatively happy time until the moment when Dickens turned eleven years old and his family faced severe financial difficulties; when he reached the age of twelve, he was sent to work (Johnson 31). This drastic change in living conditions imprinted on the fellow's psyche insofar as working conditions were harsh and people around him were completely different from those he was used to: "There was a difference of manners between him and the boys that resulted in his being called, perhaps not quite reverentially, 'the young gentleman'" (Johnson 32). Therefore, it demonstrates that both, Pip and Dickens, are similar in their life circumstances when they had to step out of their comfort zones in order to improve their social status.

The writer's mindset and perception of life were significantly impacted by these events, which lasted until his death. Due to his living conditions and the dramatic changes he experienced, Dickens was forced to become disciplined and responsible in order to

work hard and ensure financial stability: “As a child he had also felt the need to work skilfully and hard, saving as much money as he could in the process” (Ackroyd 1083). His ambition and perseverance were strong enough to lead him to his first success in his writing career. The publication of *Sketches by Boz* (1836) gained Dickens fame, after which he began to receive job offers and became increasingly recognisable (Johnson 85). However, approaching the end of his writing career, as Sean Grass states,

Though Dickens had made extraordinary sums of money by the time he wrote *Great Expectations*, then, he never ceased to be the anxious and unhappy child: too aware of poverty, too fearful of his secret vulgarity, too worried about the possibility of some irremediable slide into economic and social degradation. (625)

The same fears and memories are constantly traced in Pip’s thoughts, which leads to the conclusion that both he and Dickens are strongly affected by their impoverished childhood experience, which could not allow them to lead peaceful and careless lives.

Additionally, Charles Dickens’ personal life had another aspect, namely his attitudes towards women, the vices of whose can be observed in the female characters of *Great Expectations*. According to the writer, a woman had to devote all of herself to domestic duties, family, and especially children. In the example of Dickens’ childhood, his mother did function this way. However, he also harboured resentment and judgement towards her attitude, insofar as

Not only had she once sacrificed him, as he saw it, for the few shillings a week he could earn as a child but she had aided and abetted her improvident husband in constant assaults on his purse, or in complaints about his provision for them, during his years of fame and prosperity. (Slater 15)

Certainly, it cannot be claimed that the prototype for Mrs. Gargery was Dickens’ mother Elizabeth, inasmuch as the difference in the personalities of these two individuals was

enormous. Nevertheless, it is still possible to draw a parallel between them in the fact that they both made a mistake in child-rearing: Pip suffered from physical abuse and a strict upbringing, while Charles Dickens endured his mother's indifference towards his personal life and feelings in light of the fact that she sent him to work despite his enormous desire to study.

In conclusion, it is important to note that *Great Expectations* is not a reflection of Charles Dickens' personality or his life journey. It is rather a depiction of the societal experiences and observations that he encountered throughout his life. However, there are certainly similarities between the challenges faced by the characters in the novel and those experienced by the author in his personal life, and as Andrews points out, "his sensitivity to the plight of poor and working people can be attributed in part to the fragility of his childhood social and economic status" (298). Furthermore, the characters in *Great Expectations* represent the societal issues that plagued the esteemed author in various ways.

### **2.3 The analysis of the main protagonists and their function**

The versatility of the characters in *Great Expectations* demonstrates Victorian society from completely different aspects, including their spheres of life, social class, and, most importantly, the process of how Victorian morality and its values declined at different social levels.

It would be worth starting with the main character, namely **Pip**, who is also known as Philip Pirrip. He grew up as an orphan, having been raised by his sister and her husband. His personality and mindset demonstrate an uneasy transition from working to upper class, during which he is constantly changing and becoming the hostage to his own and society's expectations, according to the surroundings in which he finds himself. Equally worth noting is his high aspiration to improve and fulfil his dream of becoming

a gentleman and linking his life with Estella. As a child, he had observed a difficult relationship in his family, due to which throughout his life Pip will feel guilty and ungrateful.

**Joe Gargery and Mrs. Joe Gargery** raised Pip after his parents had passed away. However, the example of this couple demonstrates rather a lack of respect and the application of physical violence in their family circle, where the main figure was a woman. Mrs. Joe Gargery was extremely dissatisfied with her living conditions and always believed that everything in their family was her merit, which obliged all family members to respect and pity the poor wife of a simple blacksmith. Joe, in his turn, was a hard-working individual, but his lack of aspiration for self-education and improvement of the quality of his life gradually alienated him in Pip's eyes, despite his kindness and sincere love for him. Therefore, according to Elizabeth Campbell, the most significant aspect of this character is that

Joe's gentle nature, humility, poverty, and innocence temper his masculinity and render his massive strength of character and body unmanly; and this most unsettling inversion of gender and value relations is the tragic reality underlying the topsy-turvy comedy of *Great Expectations*. (162)

The subsequent major figures in Pip's life were **Miss Havisham and Estella**, due to the fact that they were the ones who laid the foundation for the formation of his gentlemanly personality. Miss Havisham lived with old grudges and memories and tried to replicate her failed personal life on her daughter, teaching her to be cold-blooded and mean to men. As Houston also highlights, "she is the nightmare version of the Victorian female bred to have no desires, no appetites, trained to be desired and to be the object of appetite" (15). First and foremost, Miss Havisham demonstrates the fact that despite her high social status, manners, and principles, internally she was extremely cruel and callous.

Estella, on the other hand, having been very attached to her mother, was unable to arrange her personal life and as a result remained lonely and miserable.

**Abel Magwitch**, one of the central figures in Pip's life, was his secret benefactor, which is revealed only at the end of the second volume. His personality and soul did not match his horrific appearance and way of life, since he sought to earn money for Pip in every possible way, including criminal affairs. Therefore, this character depicts the criminal part of society, while describing in detail the offences and punishments received by them, which in turn shows the real price of the posh life of a gentleman, for whom Abel had to engage himself in danger and injustice.

**Compeyson**, who betrayed Magwitch, was also related to criminal affairs in this novel. When he managed to make himself a gentleman and be accepted as such by society in order to avoid punishment, he resorted to various unscrupulous and cruel practices, including the deception of Miss Havisham, as he was the one who left her before the wedding. The figure of Compeyson tarnishes manners and, in general, the concept of 'gentleman' because of the selfish and cruel nature of his actions.

The novel also includes a figure who was the epitome of all good human qualities, whom was **Biddy**. She was Pip's childhood friend who assisted him in his studies and helped his family when Mrs. Joe Gargery was seriously ill. Nevertheless, Biddy's kindness and simplicity repelled Pip, inasmuch as in his pursuit of the upper class, in his eyes she seemed to be an unworthy partner for him, despite her remarkable intelligence.

However, there was a fellow who showed intrusive and disrespectful attention to Biddy, the one being **Orlick**. He was a member of the low class whose moral values were completely absent, judging from the nature of his actions. This character represents envy, a fierce desire for revenge, and cruelty towards society. He first attacked Mrs. Gargery, but then also tried to kill Pip himself.

The next character in the protagonist's adult life before and after moving to London was **Mr. Jaggers**. Everything about this individual revolves around his work as a lawyer, and apart from that, he does not reveal himself to the readers from the aspect of his personal life. Despite his mysterious image, he approached all his duties with intelligence and complete commitment despite the nature of his clients' crimes, which made him immensely successful in his field of work. This character illuminates the dark aspect of the criminal system of Victorian England, demonstrating examples of injustice in the court system and the pitfalls of his profession in those times.

Alongside Jaggers worked his clerk, **Wemmick**. Unlike his boss, this character could be seen not only from a work perspective but also from a personal one, the boundaries between which were clearly defined in Wemmick's view. It is this character that demonstrates what the morals of Victorians were in relation to personal and work life: only at home could his identity be recognised.

The storylines of these characters are closely intertwined throughout the novel. Therefore, the characterisation of individual characters will help better guide the demonstration of specific examples of the decline of Victorian morality, which will be discussed in the next section.

## **2.4 The decline of rules in Victorian England and its morality**

### **2.4.1 The significance of Dickens' critique in *Great Expectations***

Charles Dickens is rightly regarded as "a voice of that age" (Marsden 55), and according to the writer's biographer Edgar Johnson, "the unifying thread of his entire career was a critical analysis of nineteenth-century society unsurpassed by any novelist in grasp or scope" (7). Precisely for this reason, one means of demonstrating a critique of Victorian society in the novel *Great Expectations* was to highlight specific examples of

the decline of its morals and principles, which are vividly illustrated in every class of society.

According to Andrews, “although Dickens’s biases of privilege came through his works, he persistently sought to reveal the abuse of power across the rigid social class system” (Andrews 300). It was the class division that played a central role in the critique of Victorian society, insofar as it marginalised members of the lower class, emphasising their inequality and limitations in social rights. Furthermore, simultaneously, this process was closely linked to the decline of the principles and foundations of Victorian morality itself. Therefore, it is important to examine how this process occurred through the storylines of this novel.

In *Great Expectations*, the gradual loss of importance of Victorian values can be brilliantly depicted through the example of the main character Pip, who aimed at becoming a gentleman but was often hampered by what he had heard and been taught, i.e., by the generally accepted norms. Thus, the relationships between people and their principles, ostensibly built on the foundations of Victorian morality, transpired to be quite different when the hero was able to observe the real picture and experience it himself: “Dickens’s analysis of the emptiness and falseness that the acceptance of that ideal imposed on Pip is measure of the corruption he now found in the society it dominates” (Johnson 489). Concisely, in the high society, a common problem was the misuse of their class for selfish purposes. This could involve criminal cases, where corruption and status were used to avoid punishment, or in ordinary life circumstances, where one had to assert power over a less fortunate person.

Additionally, one of the major vices of society was their attitude towards money and, in general, their status as a hostage to the financial situation. It is a well-known fact that diligence was one of the most important criteria of Victorian morality, but it was also

one of the most influential factors for financial status. This moral principle was controversial because, given that all the foundations of morality were closely intertwined, in case of failure in one area, it had a negative impact on another. The novel vividly illustrates the example of Pip's family, where the relationship between a married couple deteriorated due to their social and financial status. Firstly, not only does it demonstrate the absence of family values, but it also questions the role of the woman. Mrs. Joe Gargery was an example of a head of household who humiliated and manipulated her family members, which was categorically against the classical structure of the family organisation. Secondly, the example of only one Gargery family supports Johnson's claim regarding the fact that "Dickens had nevertheless a sharp intelligence which pierced through the complexities of the social scene to a comprehension of its shocking realities" (564).

If one considers the basis of the main character's storyline, specifically Pip's sudden fortune in wealth acquisition, the writer exemplifies the devaluation of labour for the purpose of enhancing one's quality of life: "Pip's rise to gentility through such means can only be depicted as a monstrous parody, as well as a parable about the dangers of Victorian middle-class affluence not properly grounded in an ethic that holds work as a religious value" (qtd. in Campbell 158). In addition to the aforementioned statement, this sharp 'rise to gentility' included the unawareness and uncertainty of the protagonist, insofar as such shifting morals in society made it difficult for individuals to understand how he or she was supposed to act in order to integrate with others, often leading to deteriorating relationships between people.

Inasmuch as "in England, Dickens said, people were hypocritically pretended that social evils and vices did not exist" (Johnson 438), it was important for him to depict all the realities of the time, including its negative aspects. Dickens demonstrated that

Victorian morality, which was initially perceived as innocent and pure, developed into something more than the distribution of gender roles, proper manners, and spiritual values. In reality, and as demonstrated in *Great Expectations*, this moral code caused a massive division of social strata, leading to the marginalisation of the members of society and the decline of their traditional values.

#### **2.4.2 The decline of the proper family model**

Through examples of two families in *Great Expectations*, this section will examine instances of the violation and distortion of family principles and patterns. Due to the fact that “Dickens’s fictional representations of the family have traditionally been examined as an index to social realities” (Jordan 121), it is worth starting with this particular issue, given the fact that for Victorians, the family was the basis for all moral principles of each individual, in which relationships and upbringing of children had a colossal impact on their subsequent lives.

The most striking example of the degradation of the traditional Victorian family model is Pip’s household relationships. It is worth noting the role of Mrs. Joe Gargery, who was the head of the family because of her firm character and insensitive nature. In addition to her constant reproaches to Pip for bringing him up “by hand”, she often applied physical violence, not only to the child but also to the husband, which was completely against the rules of morality:

Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand. (Dickens 7-8)

Furthermore, Mrs. Joe Gargery failed in the duty to instil her with ‘self-discipline and self-restraint’ in the upbringing of her brother. In the scene when Pip first returns

from the mysterious Satis House, his sister displays great curiosity about every detail that her brother had noticed about Mrs. Havisham, but in the aftermath of their failed conversion, the following conflict could be observed:

And I soon found myself getting heavily bumped from behind in the nape of the neck and the small of the back, and having my face ignominiously shoved against the kitchen wall, because I did not answer those questions at sufficient length.

(Dickens 65)

All these unjust events in Pip's childhood significantly affected his psyche, which made him sensitive and led to his distorted family values in his mature life. The confirmation of this can be seen in the fact that in Victorian society, the home was considered a truly sacred place, whereas in Pip's perception "home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper" (Dickens 106).

The consequences of such upbringing can be seen in one of the first conflicts of the novel, which illustrates Pip's theft and his reluctance to tell Joe about it, thereby demonstrating his insecurity and fear of losing the one person who has treated him kindly: "The fear of losing Joe's confidence, and of thenceforth sitting in the chimney corner at night staring drearily at my for ever lost companion and friend, tied up my tongue" (Dickens 41). Therefore, this also refers to mistrustful relationships, lies, and distorted ideas of proper kinship, which over time and with Pip's changing social status have evolved into complete condescension and denial of his past.

The fall of the traditional family model and its values can also be demonstrated through the example of Mrs. Havisham and her adopted daughter Estella. This process is vividly expressed in the very upbringing of the child, which contradicted the spiritual and moral values of society: "That girl's hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree, and has been brought up by Miss Havisham to wreak revenge on all the male sex"

(Dickens 177). As Miss Havisham herself claimed, her daughter must be loved, but love in her interpretation meant “blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world” (Dickens 240). The inculcation of these values was indeed deleterious on her child’s psyche and affected her attitude towards the male sex, which carried only one purpose: revenge for her mother’s unhappy fate. Unfortunately, Estella herself was aware of everything that was happening to her, but she blindly continued in the fulfilment of her duty to her mother, to whom she should have been grateful, despite the nature of her upbringing and the self-serving goals which were behind it.

Thus, the parallel in ineffective and morally repugnant child-rearing and family relationships can be clearly seen in the examples of these two families. Both cases caused a distorted view of the world that affected the future lives of Pip and Estella.

#### **2.4.3 The degradation of the ideal woman model**

In the case of women’s failure to perform their duties as prescribed by society’s moral codes, Victorian stereotypical beliefs about them allowed this to be immediately recognised. Similarly, through the female characters in *Great Expectations*, one can observe several instances of women who did not conform to the norms of the society of the time.

Mrs. Joe Gargery is a fairly obvious example of the above-mentioned process; however, it is essential to look at the reasons that lie behind it. First of all, this character acts as a hostage to her social status, which entails many problems, including the decline of her proper female identity. Her poor financial condition made her a cruel and domineering figure in their family circle, who instead of maintaining a cosy and comfortable atmosphere (as was customary for women of the time), provoked constant quarrels and humiliated others. It cannot be said that she did not fulfil her household

duties, she certainly did. Nevertheless, more often than not, this process took place in an extremely negative atmosphere, in which she blamed her husband and brother, considering herself to be their slave (Dickens 22). As Pip himself mentioned: “Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself” (Dickens 23). It can thus be summarised that her harsh living conditions and depraved character influenced her failure to properly perform her feminine duties, thereby neglecting the principles of Victorian morality.

The subsequent female character who displays her failure to adhere to moral norms is Mrs. Havisham. In the previous section, the methods of her upbringing have been dealt with, but now it is important to highlight that they were influenced by Mrs. Havisham’s personal life, in which the loss of proper feminine qualities is pronounced. Just like the previous character, the figure of this woman is presented as a victim of her own social class, but unlike Mrs. Gargery, of a higher one. The reason for her unhappy fate was the deception of a man who wanted to profit from her:

He practised on her affection in that systematic way, that he got great sums of money from her, and he induced her to buy her brother out of a share in the brewery (which had been weakly left him by his father) at an immense price, on the plea that when he was her husband he must hold and manage it all. (Dickens 181)

This eventually led to Mrs. Havisham being abandoned at the altar and her life has been at a standstill ever since. Her actions and intimidating appearance clearly present her as a symbol of alienation and an example of how the absence of a husband could lead to social isolation. In addition to the cold-blooded upbringing of her daughter, the decline of Mrs. Havisham’s womanhood is evident in her unkempt household, whose aristocratic but intimidating atmosphere creates despondency: “It was spacious, and I dare say had once

been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces” (Dickens 84). Therefore, in Elizabeth Campbell’s opinion, her character is a grotesque representation of “stagnation and decay” (159).

The novel featured a secondary character who also displayed the vices of female representatives of high society, whom Mrs Pocket was. In addition to her controversial, artificially created aristocratic background, this woman “was to be guarded from the acquisition of plebeian domestic knowledge” (Dickens 189), which consequently led to the fact “that she had grown up highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless” (Dickens 189). As described in the previous sections, in the case of a woman of good financial wealth and status, she could afford to employ assistants when organising her household. Nevertheless, she was always expected to be able to do it herself, which was definitely not Mrs. Pocket’s case. Thus, her figure predominantly shows the weaknesses of the female part of high society in terms of their domestic affairs.

The last character who shows the degradation of the proper Victorian woman model is Estella’s biological mother and wife of Abel Magwitch – Molly. At the time Pip discovered information about her, she was working as a maid for Mr. Jaggers, where she had come after her successful defence in court when having been accused of murder for jealousy (Dickens 393). Although both the murderer and the murdered “led tramping lives” (Dickens 393), this crime not only demonstrates a disregard for all moral and social rules but also a terrible sin in Christianity. Molly’s way of life and her relationship with her husband led to her being forced to give their child to a stranger, thereby condemning both herself and Estella to a miserable life in which both never found true happiness.

Despite the strict moral standards and social expectations that were aimed at the female representatives of Victorian society, examples of the failures to fulfil the ideal woman model could often be found, which was primarily influenced by their social class

and financial conditions. All of this entailed a distortion of spiritual, social, and family values, which over time continued to lose its relevance.

#### **2.4.4 The controversy of the importance of education**

According to the principles of Victorian morality, the key to successful self-improvement was a quality education, which also played a major role in enhancing one's social status. It was this aspect that constituted one of the central themes in *Great Expectations*. Nevertheless, the main characters in this novel also demonstrate the devaluation of education, which in most cases was prevalent in the working class of society. Consequently, one can observe a non-serious approach and unwillingness of both teachers and students to devote sufficient time and effort to the educational process.

To demonstrate this point, Charles Dickens used the example of an evening school for the working class, held by Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt (Dickens 43). Since institutions of this type were quite common during the Victorian period, it may be suggested that the scenes depicted in the novel were likely similar to real-life practices of the educational process for the working class. The description of Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt herself illustrates an ironic image of a teacher who was not interested in her profession, despite the fact that she herself was the organiser of the school in question:

She was a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity, who used to go to sleep from six to seven every evening, in the society of youth who paid twopence per week each, for the improving opportunity of seeing her do it. (Dickens 43)

Therefore, it can be inferred that the sole motivation for operating this school was financial gain, which contradicts the moral and religious values of women, inasmuch as their primary objective should have been to assist underprivileged children in obtaining knowledge selflessly and sincerely. Furthermore, in order to maintain discipline and gain

attention, the school resorted to physical punishment. However, this practice was already strongly discouraged by the conventional standards of Victorian morality. Pip, in turn, demonstrates this as follows: “The pupils ate apples and put straws up one another’s backs, until Mr. Wopsle’s great-aunt collected her energies, and made an indiscriminate totter at them with a birch-rod” (Dickens 73). It is evident that the students did not take their studies seriously. However, it is also important to consider the role of the teacher in this matter. The limited amount of teaching material provided by her may have contributed to the lack of engagement from the students:

Three defaced Bibles (shaped as if they had been unskilfully cut off the chump-end of something), more illegibly printed at the best than any curiosities of literature I have since met with, speckled all over with ironmould, and having various specimens of the insect world smashed between their leaves. (Dickens 73)

Moreover, this quote draws a parallel between education and religion through the example of the Bible, as it was religious movements that sought “to bring the influences of religious education to bear on ‘the children of the poor’” (BBC 306). However, it is evident from the appearance and condition of the book that it was not used frequently by the students.

The following example is centred on Joe, an older member of the working class who also did not succeed in his education due to the financial obstacles in his family. The reader learns details of his childhood after Pip begins to enquire about the problems that hindered Joe, and one piece of evidence from his words is the following: “Poetry costs money, cut it how you will, small or large, and it were not done. Not to mention bearers, all the money that could be spared were wanted for my mother. She were in poor elth, and quite broke” (Dickens 47). For Joe’s uneducated nature, Dickens repeatedly uses elementary grammatical errors in his speech and inability to read and write, which was

for him “a miracle of erudition” (Dickens 45). It further marginalised his working figure in society and discredited him in the eyes of Pip himself, as his manners and illiteracy evoked disapproval and disrespect from the fellow, despite his attempts to teach him certain things: “I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society” (Dickens 109). However, in most cases, these attempts were unsuccessful. This leads to the conclusion that lost time and limited opportunities for intellectual development further fuelled class snobbery among individuals of higher social status.

Despite the state’s attempts to modernise the education system by adopting various reforms that would have improved the situation of the working class in relation to education, these efforts ultimately proved to be insufficient and ineffective. The novel vividly demonstrates the teacher’s unwillingness to instil in children a desire to learn and, in turn, the apathetic attitude of students towards self-development. As one can observe, some people who were used to the old practices and resigned to their social position were clearly not keen to change, which demonstrates the decline of the importance of education in Victorian society.

#### **2.4.5 Questioning the relevance of religion**

Throughout the lines of *Great Expectations*, the readership will rarely find concrete references to religion, insofar as this theme is not central given the backdrop of class divisions, wealth, and love. Nevertheless, the novel includes several elements, by means of which the writer emphasises the point that the church did not play a major role in the life of society, although religious aspects were a major part of Victorian morality. It is also worth emphasising that Dickens himself was not among the novelists who sought to promote his religious opinions and ideas through his works (Nixon 58). However, it can be assumed that by means of the realities and his own experience, the author tried to encode the religious vices of society and the devaluation of spiritual aspects. Furthermore,

Dickens, like the protagonist Pip, was taught to attend church from childhood, yet without any explanation as to why to do so. Therefore, in his adult conscious life, “Dickens wants a faith that is practical, functional, and useful, not one that is spectral, and draped in ceremony” (Nixon 76).

The opening scene of Pip’s story is an evening visit to his parents’ grave in the churchyard. According to Jennifer Gribble, “nothing could be more evocative of the waning power of the Church of England than the desolate churchyard in which a child attempts to construe meaning from the liturgical language engraved on the tombstones” (234). This scene describes Pip’s struggle to comprehend the text on his parents’ graves, which may indicate that he was quite distant and unaware of the religious practices of the time. Nevertheless, it is crucial to highlight that the influence of religion on the protagonist’s life was quite strong, but there was “the gap between its official message and the message received”, which the writer presents as “the subject of genial comedy, parody, and trenchant satire” (Gribble 234). Additionally, as the confirmation of this, in the notes to *Great Expectations*, Charlotte Mitchell interprets Catechism as the religious knowledge that “was commonly taught to children, to instruct them in morals and Church of England doctrine”, in which they commit themselves “to ‘keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life’” (Dickens 488). However, the latter part of these engagements Pip comprehended as “an obligation always to go through the village from our house in one particular direction, and never to vary it by turning down by the wheelwright’s or up by the mill” (Dickens 43).

Thereafter, it is worth considering the purpose of Dickens’ use of the Bible, which, apart from its neglected state in the educational process, also figures by its canonical texts, examples of which often appeared in characters’ speech. In particular, the instance of Mr.

Wopsle is quite controversial amongst them. Thereby, in the following extract, he draws a parallel between animals and humans:

'Swine were the companions of the prodigal. The gluttony of Swine is put before us, as an example to the young.' (I thought this pretty well in him who had been praising up the pork for being so plump and juicy.) 'What is detestable in a pig, is more detestable in a boy'. (Dickens 27)

Referring to the insatiability of swine from "Christ's parable of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11–32", in which "the wastrel becomes a swineherd" (Dickens 487), Mr. Wopsle tries to discredit young people by focusing on their moral vices, thus distorting the original message of the parable, which in turn emphasises the need for mercy and understanding between people, rather than insulting and humiliating them. Therefore, according to Larson, "Bible becomes a paradoxical book: it is at once a source of stability, with its familiar conventions of order, and a locus of hermeneutic instability reflecting the times of religious anxiety in which Dickens wrote" (14).

Undoubtedly, *Great Expectations* does not contain a wide number of examples that would clearly indicate the decline of the church in society. However, with the help of the religious trappings, writing, and places used in the novel, the reader is able to understand society's view on faith. For the protagonist Pip, the churchyard served as the starting point for his journey towards becoming a gentleman. However, it was also the site of his first sin, stealing food for Magwitch, about what he subsequently lied and kept in secret. From that very moment on, this character was constantly tormented by his conscience for what he had done, and the church was unable to help him (Dickens 23). Additionally, this spiritual place demonstrated a childish ignorance of the basic knowledge of the Catechism, which was considered fundamental for a person's moral and spiritual development. On the other hand, it was a logical scenario, insofar as the

Victorian period was rapidly bringing changes in the morals of society: material values were foregrounded with the rapid growth of industrialisation, which influenced the fading role of the church in English society.

#### **2.4.6 Distorted industriousness**

As the Industrial Revolution progressed, Victorian society underwent tremendous changes in the status of those people who were most dedicated to work. This zealous pursuit of wealth and social status affected the priorities of English society, which now focused primarily on achieving these goals at any cost, often neglecting moral values. Insofar as Dickens “sees all the evils and dangers of the industrial explosion, the horror of the cities, the worst aspects of the new middle class who rule England” (Gold 206), he brilliantly managed to depict the vices of society in relation to work through several characters in *Great Expectations*, which will be discussed further below.

Mr. Pumblechook, who was Joe’s uncle and owner of the grain trading business, introduced Pip to Mrs. Havisham with the intention of expanding his circle of influential contacts for potential business investments and benefits. This act could rightly be considered a display of self-interest in the conduct of his business and selfishness towards Pip, inasmuch as, based solely on his own interests, he earned a reputation with him by taking advantage of his low social status and desire to become a part of high society. Therefore, Mr. Pumblechook used him as an instrument for achieving his objectives. In addition, before the acquaintance with Mrs. Havisham was planned, his duplicity towards Pip was evident in the fact that he had been “not allowed to call him uncle, under the severest penalties” (Dickens 24), but after discovering that the fellow had received financial benefits and was on his way to becoming a gentleman, Mr. Pumblechook’s behaviour changed dramatically and he even began to involve him in his work affairs. For instance, Pumblechook informed him about “a great amalgamation and monopoly of

the corn and seed trade”, in which he tried to engage Pip by asking him to invest some of his capital and become “a sleeping partner”, who will not have to do anything but “walk in, by self or deputy, whenever he pleased, and examine the books – and walk in twice a year and take his profits away in his pocket” (Dickens 155). This offer primarily indicates Pumblechook’s selfish capitalist nature, whereas by means of deception and lies he attempted to promote his business without disclosing the potential financial risks to Pip.

The second, more successful businessman, Mr. Jagger, distinguished himself by being completely absorbed in his work that he literally “washed his clients off, as if he were a surgeon or a dentist” (Dickens 210). His field of specialisation, namely criminal law, has had a huge impact on Jagger’s personal life. Given that “Dickens was also interested in the nature of work and its effects on people’s lives” (Messenger 78), the novel includes a large number of examples that suggest that this character was unable to organise his personal life properly due to his extensive immersion in work. Pip’s description of Jagger’s house clearly demonstrates this fact by its being filled with various documents, books, and materials for his job, and gives the impression that he preferred “to bring the office home” (Dickens 211), which was not a traditional approach for a Victorian.

Furthermore, his profession reveals various society’s vices that Jagger had to defend in court. I would point this out as a paradoxical case of the Victorian being so dedicated to his work that he accepted even the most immoral cases, for example, the murder committed by his maid Molly at the beginning of his career (Dickens 393). It was this case that had earned him fame, insofar as his strong arguments made him one of the most successful lawyers in London. The nature and brutality of this crime can be seen not only as defiance of the moral aspects but also as controversy of his career that was built on the success of such a cruel crime.

His field of work also made him a sharp and callous person who had no desire to have any personal ties with his clients, thereby rejecting their interference in their own affairs. It predominantly demonstrates his full confidence in his abilities and authority, which would not allow his clients to reject him. At the same time, it is worth noting that in a profession such as advocacy, it is extremely important for the defendant to have contact with their clients not only in order to find out the details of a case, but also for the psychological support of their defence counsels. However, in the case of Jaggers, who kept as much distance as possible from his clients, the only thing he was interested in was the information as to whether they paid for his services or not. In addition to his lack of moral support and information on the progress of the case, he threatened his clients in a way that unless they stopped asking questions, he would return their money and drop the case (Dickens 168).

The rapidly expanding urban economy and industrialisation led to the devaluation of rural labour, as seen in the case of Joe Gargery, who, being surrounded by members of the upper class, was rejected by them and even his family. For example, his wife “blames the descent and her current poverty on Pip, who internalizes the blame and the association of worthlessness with Joe’s class of manual labor” (Weissman 109). In this context, it is worth emphasising that despite Joe’s own satisfaction and complete enjoyment of his work, the figure of this character and his attitude towards work represent “an image of nostalgic appeal that looks increasingly remote from the harsher realities of the new urban life of the nineteenth century” (Messenger 78). Thus, it provoked not only the devaluation of industriousness but also marginalised the working class itself, who did not succeed in reaching the upper class and high profits.

In conclusion, this novel gives the readership an example of different approaches to business management, perceptions of industrialisation, and, most importantly, the

impact of the change in leading spheres of labour on individuals from different social backgrounds. Moreover, it is important to note that the main character can be perceived as a collective image of the new generation, capturing all the changes in Victorian England, and for this reason “*Great Expectations* dramatizes Pip’s crisis of identity as a direct consequence of his migration from the rural economy of his boyhood to the remorseless capitalist exchange of the city” (Pettitt 245). This ‘crisis of identity’ occurred primarily due to false expectations of new changes in personalities, influenced by the pursuit of quick money, in which real moral principles were distorted. People had to resort to practices of deceit, lies, carelessness, self-interest, and hypocrisy, which gradually declined human labour. For this particular reason, this novel served Dickens as a tool to demonstrate “a disillusioned analysis of the endlessly interlinked evils piled up in an economic system dominated by industrialism and material greed” (Johnson 12).

#### **2.4.7 The controversy of laws and punishments**

The first chapter of this thesis, specifically a subchapter on laws and punishments, discusses the regulation of the number of poor people in cities and the abolition of the death penalty for minor offences as improvements to Victorian legislation. However, the illustrations in the novel suggest the opposite: the situation did not seem to have improved, and court authorities increasingly displayed class prejudice in their judgements. Furthermore, while living in London, Pip had the opportunity to witness the treatment of convicts and the severe and unfair punishments that were inflicted upon them.

In a particular scene, Dickens employs an ironic depiction of a drunken minister of justice who, in exchange for money, offers Pip to attend a trial with “a full view of the Lord Chief Justice in his wig and robes – mentioning that awful personage like waxwork” (Dickens 165). First and foremost, this episode can be perceived as a representation of

the frivolous and comical nature of the judicial process, which was somewhat of a theatre that one had to pay to visit. After refusing such a performance, Pip did agree to go on a 'tour' of the courtyard where the public executions were being held. Notable amongst this was the Debtors' Door, where the accused were later condemned to be hanged, despite the fact that only criminals who had committed serious offences, such as murder, were to be subjected to such verdict. All these visuals displayed in Pip's mind "a sickening idea of London" (Dickens 166), by means of which "Dickens is at the same time vividly impressing upon us his fundamental idea of two worlds: the world of 'respectability' and the world of ignominy; of oppressors and of oppressed; of the living and of the dead" (Hagan 177). Moreover, beyond this location there continued to be a high risk of danger: "You may get cheated, robbed and murdered in London" (Dickens 172). Therefore, it vividly demonstrates the ineffectiveness of England's criminal system, which endangered its citizens.

The following example of the unfairness of the judicial system, which is exemplified by the Magwitch and Compeyson case, illustrates the fact that English law was not the same for everyone. Social status played a huge role in judgement and sentencing, which consequently influenced the fact that "the whole judicial system may tend to perpetuate class antagonism and hostility" (Hagan 170). Compeyson, who took advantage of Magwitch's poor financial situation and low social rank, made him "his black slave" (Dickens 350) and involved him in his illegal money machinations. Despite his being the initiator of all the offences, Compeyson received a much lighter sentence than his accused subordinate, owing to his gentlemanly demeanour and manner of speech, which discredited Magwitch in the eyes of the judges (Dickens 351). This injustice in the judicial process, based on class prejudice, contributed to the fact that people like Magwitch sought revenge (Axton 288) and after release, or even escape from prison,

continued their criminal activities, which consequently worsened the overall situation in the country. This primarily demonstrates the decline of the main judicial codes, which should have aimed at reducing the number of crimes through fair and effective punishment, rather than encouraging a worse course of events on the part of the accused by privileging the upper social classes in the decision-making process. Therefore, it can be suggested that the example of these two characters illustrates the essence of the judicial system in England, in which “the operation of the criminal code is depicted as a process by means of which respectable society seeks vengeance on wrongdoers who are largely products of that society’s neglect or exploitation” (Axton 278).

Therefore, it can be concluded that *Great Expectations* places significant emphasis on the criminal aspect of Victorian society and its corresponding judicial system. The novel provides examples of scenes that depict the use of capital punishment, highlighting the fact that despite changes in the law, such practices were still applied to individuals who had not committed serious crimes. Unfortunately, individuals who were wrongly accused of theft and had committed no offences whatsoever were also sentenced (Dickens 259). The clear divisions between social classes contributed to the increase in crime rates and disorders, which negatively impacted the security of citizens. To say the least, Dickens’ use of comic characters from the judiciary highlights the absurdity of the situation; and despite attempts to improve the laws, they remained consistently unjust, especially towards the lower class of society.

## **Conclusion**

This bachelor thesis aimed to identify examples of the declining aspects of Victorian morality through the plot lines of the novel *Great Expectations*. Charles Dickens was one of the most prominent writers of the Victorian era, which is why it is possible to observe the realities of the time via his works, which provides an excellent opportunity to navigate and grasp the situation from within. Moreover, he was one of those who upheld the traditional values and norms of the time, which is why the destabilisation of society and the scepticism of its values is vividly portrayed by the writer in his novels, which was a huge advantage in studying this aspect of social history.

The first chapter of this thesis focused on a thorough analysis of the history of Victorian England, which helped to clarify the overall political, economic, and social background of the country. The spheres of society's life discussed in this part were linked to the principles of Victorian morality, which was an integral part of everyone's life. This was reflected primarily in Britons' attitudes towards labour, education, and family structure. Consequently, an in-depth analysis of these aspects helped to draw a logical conclusion about the causes of the decline, which was an issue discussed in the second chapter of this paper. However, it is also crucial to highlight that one of the major and most striking changes in society was due to the rapid growth of the industrialisation process, which contributed to an even greater focus on one's social class and wealth.

Class divisions were one of the most important aspects of Victorian society. Therefore, it was decided to demonstrate the opportunities and contributions from each class to the social, professional, and cultural spheres, which helped to focus on specific examples and difficulties caused by Victorian morality at different levels of society. The most profound disappointment, which was also a paradoxical factor, was how Britons appreciated industriousness and education, but, unfortunately, it was devalued by certain

individuals. For instance, by investigating the aspects of the working class, it was demonstrated that due to physical and financial inability, people could not be educated, and their work was often undervalued. This simultaneously marginalised both members of the class and the values of Victorian morality. On the other hand, having more financial and legal opportunities, people from the upper classes were more successful in portraying a proper Victorian society where moral and spiritual values were maintained. This could be seen in the distribution of family responsibilities, more educational opportunities, and their ability to devote free time to family, charity, and leisure pursuits. In these aspects, the concluding factor was selflessness, sincerity, and the desire to improve and assist others in this endeavour.

While the first chapter of the thesis focused on the depiction of historical factors and the conventional picture of society's traditions and lifestyles, the second part of the paper aimed at a practical study of the realities of the time, using the novel *Great Expectations* as an example, which contradicted conventional facts. Victorian morality is a broad concept, so it was important to highlight the most important spheres of society's life where its tenets figured the most. The advantage of this decision was that it was possible to observe people's attitudes towards the concept and its principles in practice, drawing an analogy between what was written in the first chapter. The example of this was primarily the family and the relationships within it, insofar as its structure accommodated gender roles, child-rearing principles, and the inculcation of proper Victorian values. It was the degradation of these aspects that Dickens portrayed in the example of Pip and Estella's families. Despite their enormous difference in social statuses, both characters, having received distorted values, experienced a difficult childhood, which later became an obstacle to organising a happy adult life.

Furthermore, this chapter focused on equally relevant topics, such as education, labour, and the criminal system. With presented examples from the lives of the protagonists, it became evident that all these aspects were closely intertwined. The main aim of this paper was not only to demonstrate the above-mentioned fact, but also to summarise how the distorted principles of Victorian morality figured in these issues. The results of this study have shown that selfish desire, ineffective legislation, and materialism were the main reasons leading to the decline of this concept. Some of the most notable examples of characters displaying this included Compeyson, who, by means of his status and manners, avoided just punishment for offences that involved huge ill-gotten gains. His partner Magwitch, in turn, demonstrated how the legal system marginalised the underclass by showing injustice and cruelty towards them.

Although the second part of this thesis included descriptions of the feelings and psyche of the protagonists, this work provides an opportunity for further research that could delve more deeply into the psychoanalytical processes of the impact of these changes on society. With the historical background of the time and specific examples of plot lines from the novel, further research could develop and explain this process on individual levels.

A fairly large number of works focus on specific issues, such as class differences, the role of women, or professional ethics and manners. However, this thesis contributed to the investigation of Victorian morality, specifically its distorted aspects, by giving the most important spheres of human life as examples in the novel *Great Expectations*. It gives the contemporary reader the opportunity to observe that alongside the great achievements, society also experienced a huge transition in spiritual and moral values, which led to a loss of relevance of the concept among the citizens of nineteenth-century England.

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