

# Intertextuality and the context of reception: *Great Expectations* - chapter 56 by Charles Dickens

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### Lesson plan

#### Resources

- ❖ Copies of *Great Expectations* texts
- ❖ Highlighters
- ❖ **Resource A** – Extract from *Great Expectations* Chapter 56
- ❖ **Resource B** – Film Clip of *Great Expectations* Chapter 56

#### Learning objectives

- ❖ To consider the character of Magwitch and his significance
- ❖ To analyse closely the death of Magwitch
- ❖ To apply a biblical interpretation to Magwitch's death.

#### Starter activity – considering Magwitch

- ❖ Students create acrostic poems on Magwitch, considering his character presentation. Hear some examples.

#### Main activity 1 – character tracking

- ❖ Allocate the following chapters to students: 1, 3, 5, 39, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 50, 54, 55, 56. Students skim read the chapter and make a note of key facts about Magwitch:
  - Where he is
  - What he is doing
  - What new information is revealed about him
- Feedback to create a flow diagram on the board – students copy down
- Then, colour-code the flow diagram according to:
  - Which chapters/pieces of information are designed to alienate or mislead the reader about Magwitch
  - Which chapters/pieces of information are designed to create sympathy for Magwitch
- Establish that it is at the end of his life that Magwitch appears

at his most sympathetic/righteous/noble – as with Miss Havisham, his death ennobles him.

#### Main activity 2 – analysing the extract

- ❖ Read the extract [**Resource A**] and students highlight and annotate the following aspects which help to ennoble Magwitch on his death bed:
  - Use of silence
  - Weakness/vulnerability
  - Affection
  - Use of touch
  - Images of peace
  - Religious references
- ❖ Watch the film clip [**Resource B**] and discuss the significance of the Bible passage quoted.
  - What point is Dickens making about the character of Magwitch by referring to this parable? (he recognizes his guilt and is therefore forgiven and shall be “exalted” ie he will go to heaven)
- ❖ Consider why justice and death for Magwitch is imbued with such significance (i.e. he has led a life beyond the law and has finally succumbed, his redemption is therefore dramatic; he has given up on the idea of revenge; his inner nobility and love for Pip is shown; he willingly accepts his punishment and tells the judge that he believes God has decreed his death as an act of forgiveness; he is happy to hear news of his daughter; after the dramatic events of his life he dies at peace and goes to heaven, etc.).

#### Plenary – reflections

- ❖ What are Dickens' messages and purposes through the character of Magwitch?
  - How does he achieve this?
    - Class discussion and contributions.
    - Establish key ideas/sections of the novel and set essay for homework.

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### **Resources**

#### **Resource A - Extract from chapter 56**

[Magwitch] had spoken his last words. He smiled, and I understood his touch to mean that he wished to lift my hand, and lay it on his breast. I laid it there, and he smiled again, and put both his hands upon it.

The allotted time ran out, while we were thus; but, looking round, I found the governor of the prison standing near me, and he whispered, 'You needn't go yet.' ...

With a last faint effort, which would have been powerless but for my yielding to it and assisting it, he raised my hand to his lips. Then, he gently let it sink upon his breast again, with his own hands lying on it. The placid look at the white ceiling came back, and passed away, and his head dropped quietly on his breast.

Mindful, then, of what we had read together, I thought of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray, and I knew there were no better words that I could say beside his bed, than 'O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!'

#### **Luke 18:9-14**

<sup>9</sup>And [Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: <sup>10</sup>Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

<sup>11</sup>The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.'

<sup>13</sup>And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'

<sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

**Resource B** – <http://www.crossref-it.info/articles/488/Great-Expectations-~-ch-56>