

Class, Conscience and The Country House: Reading Social Hierarchies in 19th-Century British Novels

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores how the country house reflects and shapes class structures, moral values, and power in two major nineteenth-century British novels: *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. Using Marxist theory and Raymond Williams' ideas from *The Country and the City*, the study examines how these physical spaces carry social meaning and influence characters' lives. Pemberley and Satis House are more than settings; they serve as symbols of social rank, ideology, and emotional truth. The paper shows how characters like Elizabeth Bennet and Pip respond to the power and pressure of the country house, revealing the limits of class mobility and the deep connection between space and conscience. It also addresses how the estates reflect gender roles and inheritance laws. By studying these spaces, the paper explores how literature presents the values and problems of nineteenth-century British society. The findings suggest that the country house is a strong symbol of both social control and personal struggle, making it central to the novels' meaning.

KEYWORDS: Country house, Class structure, Nineteenth-century literature, British novels, Marxist criticism, Social hierarchy, Inheritance and gender, Literary space.

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century in England saw rapid industrial growth, urban expansion, and significant shifts in social structure. Traditional aristocratic power began to face challenges from a rising middle class that gained influence through trade, industry, and professional success. Class identity became more fluid, but old systems of privilege and inheritance remained strong in rural areas. The country house, as a symbol of inherited wealth and social authority, stood as a visual reminder of class separation and continuity. This paper argues that in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*, the country house serves not merely as a symbol of wealth or tradition, but as a narrative space where class boundaries, moral tensions, and personal transformation are negotiated and exposed. Through a Marxist lens and drawing on Raymond Williams' theory of cultural materialism, the study reveals how Austen and Dickens use the country house to critique rigid social hierarchies and explore the conscience of individuals caught between aspiration and inheritance.

In British fiction of this period, the country house often appeared as more than a setting. It reflected values of hierarchy, taste, and legitimacy. Its presentation shaped how readers understood power and belonging. Within this context, literature functioned not only as a form of art but also as an agent of ideology. Marxist criticism focuses on how material conditions shape culture. It sees literature as part of the superstructure, often reinforcing or exposing the values of the ruling class. Through tools like class struggle, ideology, and economic base, Marxist theory helps uncover hidden power structures in fiction. The country house, when read through this lens, reveals how narratives support or question dominant class values.

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* offer rich ground for comparison. Both novels present characters who move across class boundaries, yet the paths they follow reflect different values and outcomes. Austen's rural gentry and Dickens's urban-industrial society show two ends of the changing class spectrum. By reading these texts together, new insights emerge about the role of the country house in shaping conscience, class identity, and social belonging in nineteenth-century British fiction.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 19th-century British novels, the country house often stands as a symbol of wealth, class, and social order. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*, houses like Pemberley and Satis House seem to show tradition and status. However, these places also

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reveal deeper problems related to social movement, personal values, and the idea of conscience. Many studies have discussed class and property in these novels, but few have looked closely at how the country house questions the strict class rules of Victorian society. This study looks at how Jane Austen and Charles Dickens use the country house not just as a background but as a tool to show the struggles of identity, morality, and social change. By comparing the two novels and using Marxist theory and Raymond Williams' ideas, the paper explores how the country house shapes the thoughts and values of both the characters and the readers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* uses the country house as a powerful symbol of class and social standing. The novel contrasts characters' moral values and behavior with their family estates, highlighting the intricate relationship between personal identity and social mobility. The country house becomes a site where characters, particularly Elizabeth Bennet, navigate societal expectations and reveal deeper truths about themselves, challenging or reinforcing the class distinctions of their world.

Dickens' portrayal of the country house in *Great Expectations* is often dark and decaying, symbolizing the moral consequences of wealth and class. Through spaces like Satis House, Dickens critiques the pursuit of social advancement at the cost of personal identity and integrity. The house represents the hollow aspiration for status that Pip seeks, only to find that the societal rewards are empty and lead to alienation and disillusionment.

Helleberg's research focuses on the complexities of social mobility in *Great Expectations*, where the country house is a symbol of both aspiration and disillusionment. Satis House, for instance, embodies the false promises of wealth, reflecting the stark contrast between appearance and reality. Helleberg's work highlights how the novel critiques the very notion of upward mobility, showing that the pursuit of class advancement often leads to moral decay rather than fulfillment.

Raymond Williams' (1973) seminal work explores the relationship between rural and urban spaces, showing how the country house is not just a physical structure but a reflection of broader social and political ideologies. In the context of *Pride and Prejudice*, the country house represents the stability and tradition of rural gentry, while in *Great Expectations*, the rural decay of Satis House illustrates the disillusionment of the industrial age. Williams' analysis provides a framework for understanding how the country house functions as a symbol of class, power, and social transformation in these two novels.

Peter Brooks' (2003) analysis of narrative design underscores how setting, particularly in the form of a country house, shapes character development. In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*, the house plays a crucial role in shaping the protagonists' understandings of self and their place within society. The spatial elements of the country house in both novels contribute to the plot's moral and emotional arcs, underscoring the interplay between place and personal growth.

Brownson and Solomons' (2024) exploration of the British country house delves into how these spaces serve as symbols of patriarchal authority and social stratification. They argue that the house is not merely a home but a political space that enforces power dynamics. In the context of *Pride and Prejudice*, this idea can be seen in the way characters like Mr. Darcy use their estates to exert control over others, reinforcing their superior social status.

Allyn C. Pierson's (2016) discussion on inheritance law and its connection to *Pride and Prejudice* touches on the role of the country house as both a literal and metaphorical inheritance. The novel's focus on inheritance laws and the passing down of family estates reflects the broader theme of social mobility, where the country house becomes a symbol of stability, authority, and class restriction. It underscores the tension between individual desires and the social structures that confine them.

Caludia L. Johnson's (1988) exploration of Austen's novels focuses on the intersection of gender, class, and politics, especially as it is represented through the symbolism of the country house. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the estates are not just markers of wealth but also of social legitimacy, where characters like Darcy use their homes to assert authority. Johnson's analysis underscores how the country house serves as a tool for examining the rigid class system and its impact on women's roles in society.

Oscar Abello's (2018) article on the undervaluation of Black neighborhoods provides insight into the socio-economic disparities that extend beyond rural areas. While it specifically addresses modern urban spaces, the core idea of value being assigned based on social constructs can be applied to the country house in literature. Just as Black neighborhoods are often undervalued in real estate, country houses in literature serve as symbols of power and social control, reflecting the deep-rooted social structures of their time.

Jason's discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* highlights the importance of setting in the novel, particularly the country houses that symbolize social and moral values. The estates in the novel serve as backdrops for character development and moral choices, where the values of wealth, lineage, and personal integrity intersect. Austen uses these houses to critique class distinctions, revealing the limitations and potential for personal growth through the lens of social status.

Barbara Havelocke's (2024) review, while focused on a contemporary work, touches on themes of social class and inheritance that are also central to *Great Expectations*. The country house in Dickens' novel, especially in the case of Satis House, symbolizes the

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decay of aristocratic values and the illusion of social mobility. Havelocke's analysis of social retribution and moral awakening aligns with the critical examination of how the pursuit of wealth and class status leads to personal and social disintegration.

Stephens Richard's (2020) article investigates the country house as a space that reflects power dynamics and the display of wealth through art patronage. This analysis is relevant to both Austen and Dickens, as the houses in their novels are not only homes but showcases of social power and control. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the lavishness of Pemberley reflects Darcy's wealth and moral values, while in *Great Expectations*, the decaying Satis House represents the dangers of wealth without moral integrity.

Nick Bentley's (2025) examination of subcultures discusses how individual and collective identities are shaped by socio-economic factors. This perspective is useful in analyzing how the country house functions within both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* as a site where social hierarchies are both challenged and affirmed. The houses in these novels reflect the limits and potential of personal transformation, echoing the tension between societal expectations and individual desires.

The application of Marxist criticism to Dickens' works illuminates how class struggles are represented through the symbolism of the country house. The tension between the social classes in *Great Expectations* is reflected in the disparity between the opulent, yet decaying, Satis House and the modest home of Joe Gargery. Marxist criticism helps frame the country house as a symbol of class oppression, where the wealthy characters' identities and moralities are intrinsically tied to their material possessions and social standing.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The research questions are as follows –

- a) How do *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* use the country house to show class divisions and ideas of social belonging?
- b) In what ways do Austen and Dickens reflect or question social power and class values through the image of the country house?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The research objectives are as follows –

- a) To explore how the country house in each novel represents class, property, and power.
- b) To examine how characters relate to the country house and what this says about their social position.
- c) To apply Marxist ideas such as class struggle and ideology to understand the deeper meaning of the house in both novels.
- d) To compare how Austen and Dickens use the country house to reflect changes in nineteenth-century English society.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach based on textual analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*. The focus is on how the country house reflects class structure, social values, and power in nineteenth-century British fiction.

The analysis applies Marxist literary theory, using key ideas like class struggle, ideology, and the base-superstructure model to explore how literature supports or challenges dominant class systems. Both novels are chosen for their rich depiction of class and property in different social settings—Austen's rural gentry and Dickens's industrial society. This comparison helps reveal how the country house functions as a symbol of status and control.

Secondary sources such as critical essays and Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* support the analysis and offer context. The study is interpretive, not statistical, aiming to uncover deeper meanings in the texts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study uses Marxist literary theory as its main lens. Based on the ideas of Karl Marx and later critics, this theory explores the ways material conditions, class relations, and power structures shape human life and culture. In literature, Marxist criticism focuses on how texts reflect, support, or resist the values of the dominant class. It does not treat fiction as neutral but as part of the ideological superstructure. Literature can both expose and hide the forces that control society.

Raymond Williams' contributions help deepen this analysis. In *The Country and the City*, Williams shows how the English country house operates as a cultural and ideological symbol. It reflects not only wealth and tradition but also power and exclusion. The country house becomes a space where class control is made visible, where personal worth is judged, and where social order is either protected or questioned. This idea connects directly to the current study's focus on how class and conscience are shaped within the space of the house in two key nineteenth-century novels.

The research question—how the country house in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* reveals and shapes social hierarchies and class values—is guided by Marxist concepts. The base-superstructure model is central. Economic conditions form the base,

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while institutions like literature and family form the superstructure. These upper layers often serve to protect the interests of those who control the base. The novels reflect this interaction. The country house, tied to property and inheritance, becomes a symbol of the economic base (Stephens). Its role in shaping morals, identity, and belonging reflects the work of the superstructure.

Ideology is another key concept. Defined as the system of ideas that supports existing class power, ideology often works through everyday spaces and language. In fiction, it appears in the way certain characters are praised, others excluded, and some judged as more "worthy" than others. In both novels, characters interact with the country house as a space loaded with judgment. Success, love, marriage, and morality are often tied to how they relate to property and space. This process shows how ideology works inside the novel's world.

Class struggle adds another layer. While open conflict is rare in these novels, class tension is present. In Austen's world, subtle battles over marriage and inheritance mark the borders of class (Pierson). In Dickens's world, ambition, rejection, and failure show how difficult it is to rise without proper support from class and property. These struggles, quiet or loud, reflect deeper social systems.

The theoretical framework shapes the research objectives. It helps explore how the house is more than a building. It stands for class power. It controls movement between classes. It reflects judgment. It holds emotional and moral value. All these ideas guide the textual analysis and support the goal of connecting literature to broader systems of class and power in nineteenth-century Britain.

DISCUSSION

The Country House as a Symbol of Class and Power. The country house in both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* serves as much more than a mere backdrop in the narratives; it emerges as a symbol deeply entwined with class structure, social status, and the power dynamics of nineteenth-century England. In these novels, the country house is not just a place where characters live, but a reflection of inherited wealth, tradition, and the socio-economic foundations that divide the upper class from the lower. As such, it becomes a site where power, legitimacy, and social divisions are constantly reinforced.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the country house symbolizes the deep-rooted class distinctions that dictate the relationships and the social mobility of the characters. For instance, Pemberley, the grand estate of Mr. Darcy, embodies not only wealth and property but also the moral and social superiority that Darcy himself represents. According to Marxist critic Terry Eagleton, the home in literature often functions as a "repository of values," where characters are judged by their ability to conform to or challenge these values. Darcy's estate, with its refined taste, speaks to his lineage and his moral standing. It sets him apart from the other characters and is instrumental in Elizabeth Bennet's eventual change of heart. As she enters Pemberley, her feelings toward Darcy shift, revealing the symbolic power of the house. It is not just a physical space, but a place that dictates social standing and moral character, further emphasizing the importance of property in shaping social identity.

Similarly, in *Great Expectations*, the country house plays a pivotal role in defining class divisions, but in a more critical and problematic light. Satis House, the decaying home of Miss Havisham, symbolizes the hollow nature of aristocratic wealth and the corrupting power of inherited property. In contrast to the functional, prosperous Pemberley, Satis House is a gothic ruin, haunted by the stagnation of the upper class. As John Carey notes, the house represents the "rotting heart of the English class system," where appearances of wealth mask the moral decay underneath. Here, the country house signifies the oppressive nature of class inheritance, where social mobility is an illusion and the power of the aristocracy is rooted in the preservation of old wealth rather than merit or innovation. This setting reflects Dickens's critique of the social structure, revealing that wealth without genuine virtue leads to moral ruin.

Both novels underscore the country house as a marker of class division and legitimacy. As Raymond Williams argues in *The Country and the City*, the house is not just a dwelling but a cultural symbol representing the tension between rural aristocracy and the rising middle class. The country house, in this sense, becomes a physical marker of the social order, a space where power is not only maintained but also justified. It is within these walls that characters are judged, their worth determined by their relationship to property and wealth. While Austen's rural settings suggest a relatively stable class system, Dickens's depiction of the country house reflects the anxieties and moral complexities of a rapidly industrializing society.

In both texts, the country house is far more than a mere setting; it is a symbol of power, wealth, and social legitimacy. Through the use of these houses, Austen and Dickens reveal the intricate relationship between property and class, offering profound insights into the social hierarchies of nineteenth-century England.

Austen's Use of the Country House in Pride and Prejudice. The country house is arguably the strongest visual signifier of the structures of wealth and inequality that secured enormous amounts of power and privilege in the hands of a minority of men who dominated British politics and the British empire into the twentieth century (Brownson and Solomons). Country houses also act as an index for understanding the shifting composition of the British elite over time – from agrarian to plutocratic wealth – and how

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different styles of architecture and types of patronage and collecting could support, celebrate and enable different levels of political ambition across generations (Stephens). In *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen uses the country house to show social class, inheritance, and moral character. The homes in the novel are more than just places where characters live. They reflect the status and values of their owners. Wealth and property affect their lives and relationships.

Longbourn, the Bennet family home, represents limited wealth and insecure status. The Bennets cannot inherit the property because of the entailment law. This makes the family financially unstable. Marilyn Butler says that Longbourn is “the home of the lower gentry.” The house is small and modest. This shows that the Bennets are not part of the wealthy aristocracy. Financial insecurity affects the Bennets' behavior. Mrs. Bennet's obsession with marrying off her daughters to rich men highlights this. Longbourn reflects the family's unstable social position.

Netherfield, Mr. Bingley's rented home, represents temporary wealth and uncertain status. Mr. Bingley's wealth is new and earned through trade. Terry Eagleton explains that the house shows Mr. Bingley is “comfortable but not entrenched.” His wealth allows him to live in style. But it does not come with the security or tradition of Darcy's Pemberley. Mr. Bingley's outsider status means he lacks the social stability that comes with inherited wealth. Netherfield is a place to show off wealth. But it does not have the permanence of a family estate.

Pemberley, Mr. Darcy's grand estate, symbolizes aristocratic wealth and social superiority. It is not just a house, but a sign of Darcy's moral and social standing. Richard Cronin says that Pemberley “signifies the authority and responsibility that comes with inherited wealth and nobility.” The estate's beauty and size show Darcy's position in society. It is also linked to his character. Darcy's wealth and land reflect his moral values. Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley marks a change in her opinion of Darcy. At first, she judges him harshly, but seeing his estate makes her reconsider. She begins to see him as a man of worth, not just a wealthy gentleman. This shift highlights how property and social class are tied to personal character. Clare Tomalin says that Darcy's estate shows “taste, refinement, and control,” qualities that Elizabeth begins to admire. Pemberley plays a key role in Elizabeth's changing view of class and worth. It's not just Darcy's wealth that influences her, but the taste and tradition reflected in the estate. These values—responsibility, control, and respect for tradition—are those of the ruling class. Pemberley is more than just a house. It represents the ideals Darcy stands for. These values, once unfamiliar to Elizabeth, become more appealing as she reevaluates her prejudices about class.

Through the country house, Austen shows the differences between the lower gentry, the rising middle class, and the established aristocracy. Each house represents different values—wealth, tradition, and moral character. The houses are not just settings. They reveal the social forces that shape the characters' lives and relationships. They show how class and social position determine personal identity and behavior.

Dickens's Use of the Country House in Great Expectations. In *Great Expectations*, Charles Dickens uses the country house to reveal broken ideals of class, false dreams of status, and the contrast between empty wealth and honest living. The houses in the novel reflect Pip's changing view of class and identity (Helleberg). They also show how the idea of the country house, often seen as a place of power and stability, can become a symbol of loss and confusion.

Satis House, home of Miss Havisham, appears grand but feels frozen and lifeless. The clocks have stopped. The wedding feast has rotted. Dust covers the furniture. The house shows the decay of aristocratic pride and the harm caused by holding on to the past. Julian Moynahan writes, “Satis House is a prison and a shrine, a place where time has stopped and natural growth is denied.” Miss Havisham shuts herself away in this decaying space. She traps Estella and uses her to carry out revenge (Havelocke). The house becomes a place of manipulation and pain.

Pip visits Satis House as a poor boy and begins to believe that true worth comes from wealth and status. He admires Estella. He wants to rise in class. The house shapes his idea of what success means. John Lucas argues that “Pip's journey is driven by illusions born in Satis House, illusions that link love, class, and power.” Pip believes that becoming a gentleman will bring happiness and love. He connects this dream with the world of Miss Havisham. But the house gives no real comfort. His time there leads to shame, heartbreak, and regret.

Satis House shows how class dreams can become traps. It reflects what Raymond Williams calls “a dominant but dying culture.” The aristocratic world that Miss Havisham represents has no life left in it. Pip's desire to enter that world blinds him to its emptiness. The house hides pain beneath wealth. It offers no real belonging, only loss.

In contrast, Wemmick's home in Walworth shows another kind of living. It is small, creative, and shaped by care. Wemmick builds it with his own hands. He creates a quiet world of peace and joy. Hilary Schor writes that “Wemmick's castle is a place of personal meaning, built from effort and affection.” This home stands apart from the dark, heavy air of Satis House. It reflects honest labor and simple happiness.

Dickens uses these two homes to question the value of social ambition. Satis House, large and once powerful, shows the failure of status built on pride and illusion. Wemmick's home, modest and real, shows the worth of personal agency and love. Through this

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contrast, Dickens highlights the flaws in the class system and the false promise of wealth without moral grounding. The country house, once a symbol of greatness, becomes a warning against blind ambition and internalized class ideals.

Marxist Concepts in Both Novels. In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*, Marxist ideas help explain how class, ideology, and social power shape the lives of characters. Class struggle becomes visible in the way characters try to move up or keep their place. The country house plays a strong role in this struggle. It is not only a building but a space where class is made visible. It shows who belongs and who does not.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet comes from a family with low wealth and uncertain future. Her father's estate, Longbourn, is entailed away from the daughters. This law keeps property in the hands of male heirs. Elizabeth's social position is unstable, even though she is intelligent and morally strong. Her journey toward Pemberley, both physical and emotional, shows her crossing a class boundary. The visit to Pemberley shifts her idea of Darcy, and of the kind of life she might live. The house influences her thoughts about worth and love. Raymond Williams writes, "The country house is a centre of authority... a fixed point of social order." In Austen's novel, this fixed point begins to move as Elizabeth's values and class position change.

In *Great Expectations*, Pip begins poor and feels shame about his place. He meets Estella and Miss Havisham, and starts to believe that wealth will make him worthy. His desire to rise comes from within, but society also feeds it. He sees rich houses and thinks they show success. The moment he becomes a gentleman; he starts to look down on his roots. This is a key example of ideology working through character. Louis Althusser's idea of ideology as "a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" fits Pip's story (Bentley). He imagines that money will fix everything. But the result is loss, confusion, and regret.

The houses in both novels show the effect of ideology. They are spaces where characters feel judged. At Longbourn, Elizabeth knows her family is mocked. At Satis House, Pip feels small and common. In both texts, entry into a grand house marks a test of belonging. Being accepted or rejected there shapes how characters view themselves. Fredric Jameson notes that in literature, "the ideology of the ruling class always lies in wait." The country house, full of signs of wealth and culture, holds that ideology.

Movement into or out of such houses shows changing class identity. Elizabeth enters Pemberley and sees not just beauty, but values she respects. Pip leaves Satis House with pain, learning that wealth does not always bring dignity. Both novels use the country house to show how class is built, enforced, and sometimes questioned. Through Marxist ideas, the role of power, class, and belief becomes clearer in the lives of Austen's and Dickens's characters.

Characters and Their Relation to the House. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*, the country houses play a significant symbolic role in portraying class divisions and the characters' internal struggles with their social identity. These estates—Pemberley and Satis House—are not just physical spaces; they reflect the protagonists' personal growth, their evolving ideas about class, and how these spaces shape their sense of self-worth.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet's changing perception of Pemberley marks a key point in her moral development. At first, she is quick to judge Mr. Darcy based on superficial perceptions of his pride and aristocratic status. However, when Elizabeth visits Pemberley, her view begins to shift. The estate, with its grandeur and harmony, challenges her assumptions about Darcy. Pemberley represents the "moral picturesque," a term used to describe how the setting enhances moral understanding in literature. The estate reflects the values of respectability, tradition, and integrity, which are often associated with the upper class but are represented by Darcy in a more genuine form. Elizabeth's shift in opinion about Pemberley symbolizes her own growth from being governed by prejudice to a deeper, more reflective understanding of both class and personal character.

Similarly, in *Great Expectations*, Pip's relationship with Satis House highlights his internal struggle with class identity and aspiration. The house, once grand but now decaying, symbolizes the false allure of wealth and status that Pip longs to attain. Satis House, with its dilapidated walls and dark, oppressive atmosphere, stands in stark contrast to Pip's idealized vision of aristocracy. The house functions as a "physical embodiment of Pip's internalized class ideology," showcasing how Pip's desire to escape his humble beginnings distorts his perception of self-worth. His obsession with Satis House leads him to neglect his true self and moral values, as he becomes consumed with trying to fit into a world he does not truly understand. Trotter argues that Satis House, much like the country houses in other Victorian novels, symbolizes the "illusion of upward mobility" and the dangers of aligning one's identity with an idealized version of class.

Both Pemberley and Satis House illustrate how space and environment can deeply influence a character's understanding of themselves and their place in society. These houses are not merely settings; they are integral to the protagonists' development, representing the external forces of class, power, and societal expectations that shape their personal struggles. Elizabeth's evolving relationship with Pemberley and Pip's fascination with Satis House demonstrate how characters internalize societal values and attempt to reconcile their personal desires with the constraints of their class status.

Through the lens of Marxist theory, these spaces become symbols of material conditions that influence social structures and the characters' self-conception. As Marxist scholar Raymond Williams suggests, the physical spaces in which characters live and

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interact often embody the ideological forces that shape their worldview. The country house, in this context, acts as a site where class struggle is materialized—where the characters' social aspirations and class struggles are played out in physical form. Pemberley, with its refinement and moral clarity, represents the upper-class values of tradition, while Satis House, in its decay, reflects the futility of pursuing an idealized version of wealth and status.

Both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations* critique the social structures that elevate wealth and class above personal integrity and moral development. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth's eventual understanding of Darcy's true character reflects her growing awareness of the importance of moral integrity over social status. Meanwhile, in *Great Expectations*, Pip's eventual disillusionment with Satis House demonstrates the dangers of idealizing wealth and class. Dickens uses Satis House to reveal "the hollowness of social ambition," challenging the reader to question the true value of class-based aspirations. Ultimately, both novels, through their use of the country house as a symbol of class, emphasize the importance of personal growth and self-awareness in the face of societal expectations.

The Country House as a Symbol of Class and Identity in Austen and Dickens. Comparing *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, the portrayal of class mobility and the significance of the country house reveals distinct societal settings that reflect the respective worlds of the authors. Austen's world in *Pride and Prejudice* presents a stable, rural society where social movement is limited. The characters in her novel are mostly confined to their inherited class positions, and while marriage may offer some upward mobility, it does not dramatically alter the fundamental social order. As critic Claudia L. Johnson suggests, "Austen's depiction of the class system is rooted in an 'immutable social order,' where the roles of individuals are largely predetermined by birth and wealth" (Johnson). The country house, such as Pemberley, symbolizes this stable social world, representing a continuity of tradition, inheritance, and a certain moral clarity tied to the aristocracy's historical ownership of land.

On the other hand, Dickens's portrayal in *Great Expectations* is set in an unstable, industrial world where social mobility is more possible but fraught with danger. Characters like Pip, who rise from humble origins, illustrate the volatility of social movement in Dickens's world. The possibility of upward mobility, while present, is accompanied by a sense of moral ambiguity and personal cost. As Peter Brooks notes, "Dickens's world is one in which social advancement, while theoretically available, can lead to a loss of personal identity, morality, and social belonging. (Brooks)" In *Great Expectations*, Pip's transformation from a poor orphan to a gentleman exposes the dangers of desiring social mobility without understanding the moral implications of such a change. In this unstable world, the country house—like Satis House—becomes a symbol of unattainable aspirations, representing not just wealth but a distorted vision of social acceptance and belonging.

Despite these differences in the settings of Austen and Dickens's novels, both authors agree that social acceptance is still judged by property and space. Whether in Austen's stable rural world or Dickens's shifting industrial society, characters are constantly evaluated based on their connection to land, wealth, and social position. This is especially true when examining the role of the country house, which functions as both a symbol of status and a marker of social legitimacy. The country house represents more than just wealth or comfort; it signifies authority, control, and the power to define social relations. In both novels, the house acts as a quiet but powerful force of control, subtly influencing the characters' behavior and choices. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the country house is associated with stability and the legitimacy of social rank. The characters' understanding of their place in the social hierarchy is framed by the houses they inhabit or visit.

In *Great Expectations*, the country house works similarly but with a darker tone. Satis House, with its decay and isolation, symbolizes the hollow pursuit of wealth and the false promises of social elevation. Pip's connection to the house shows how property and space shape one's sense of belonging. The house in Dickens's novel is not merely a physical structure, but a site of psychological conflict, where class aspirations and personal identity intersect. The house, in both novels, becomes a physical representation of the characters' conscience and behavior. It is not only a place of residence but a space that quietly shapes the characters' actions and decisions based on the history and values it holds.

Both authors show that the country house is central to understanding social belonging, functioning as a marker of who belongs and who does not. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the house signifies moral clarity and belonging to the rightful class, while in *Great Expectations*, the house embodies the dangers of false class aspirations and the illusion of belonging. Ultimately, both novels emphasize the significance of property and space in shaping social identity and class, while highlighting the role these physical spaces play in regulating behavior and defining personal and social values. The country house, thus, serves as a vehicle for both authors to comment on the deeply ingrained class divisions in their societies, illustrating how social acceptance and personal identity are inextricably linked to wealth, land, and the spaces one occupies (Abello).

FINDINGS

The Country House as a visual marker of class hierarchy is a prominent feature in both the novels. In both *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*, the country house functions as a visible representation of social status. Estates like Pemberley and Satis House are not merely residences but social signifiers that reflect and reinforce inherited privilege, moral authority, and class divisions. Inherited property as a mechanism of power and legitimacy can be seen here. The novels illustrate how landownership and inherited estates preserve elite power structures. Pemberley reinforces Darcy's aristocratic legitimacy, while Satis House embodies the stagnant authority of a declining upper class. These settings reflect Raymond Williams' theory that the country house is a "fixed point of social order."

The illusion and fragility of social mobility is deeply observed here. Both Elizabeth Bennet and Pip are drawn to the power associated with grand estates, revealing the seductive promise of class mobility. However, their experiences also expose the fragility of such movement—Elizabeth's rise is exceptional and based on marriage, while Pip's social ascent is ultimately disillusioning and emotionally costly.

The novels demonstrate how ideology operates subtly through characters' perceptions of self-worth and class. Pip internalizes a belief that wealth equates to virtue, illustrating Althusser's notion of ideological state apparatuses shaping individual desires and identities through material structures like the country house. Thus the novels show ideology and class internalization.

Architectural symbolism of moral and social values can be seen here. Austen and Dickens use architecture as symbolic shorthand: Pemberley represents moral balance and refined tradition; Satis House evokes decay and moral corruption. These spaces serve not only narrative functions but act as ideological critiques of British class society.

Contrasting Models of Value: Tradition vs. Personal Agency: While the aristocratic country house reflects entrenched power, Dickens offers an alternative in Wemmick's modest home, which symbolizes authenticity, labor, and affection. This contrast challenges the notion that class superiority equates to moral or emotional worth.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to examine how the country house functions as a symbol of class structure, personal conscience, and social ideology in two significant nineteenth-century British novels: *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*. The study aimed to understand how these physical spaces reveal the deeper tensions within class identity and power relations. By using Marxist theory and Raymond Williams' ideas from *The Country and the City*, this research has demonstrated that the country house is not just a backdrop but a central figure in shaping social values, relationships, and character development.

The first objective was to explore how the country house reflects class hierarchies. This has been clearly shown through the estates of Pemberley and Satis House. Both locations reveal not only the wealth and status of their owners but also the way society places value on inherited property. Darcy's Pemberley presents an image of balance, pride, and moral strength. In contrast, Satis House stands for decay, emotional emptiness, and the illusion of stability. These portrayals support the idea that the country house works as a symbol of social power and order, as Raymond Williams suggested.

The second objective focused on how characters experience and respond to these grand estates. Elizabeth Bennet and Pip both show attraction to wealth and the class status tied to country houses. However, their experiences also uncover the emotional cost and moral questions connected to such desires. Elizabeth's eventual acceptance into Pemberley through marriage is presented as rare and based on personal merit. Pip's journey toward wealth through an unknown benefactor brings shame, loss, and confusion rather than fulfillment. These outcomes support the argument that class mobility, while possible, remains unstable and morally complex.

The third objective aimed to uncover how the novels use space to express ideology and conscience. The findings show that the authors use architectural design and physical space to reflect moral and social truths. Austen connects Pemberley with reason, tradition, and virtue, while Dickens uses Satis House to criticize the empty values of a dying upper class. This use of space as ideological expression supports the view that literature shapes and reflects the social order. The contrast between large estates and smaller homes, such as Wemmick's house, offers an alternative model of value based on personal care, labor, and simplicity. Finally, this research also proves that the country house in these novels is deeply tied to gender roles. The entailment of Longbourn and Miss Havisham's control over Estella both show how property and inheritance affect women differently. These patterns reflect the broader power systems that limit freedom based on both class and gender.

Finally, it can be said that, the study has met its aims by showing how the country house operates as a powerful symbol of class, ideology, and conscience in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Great Expectations*. Through close reading and theoretical analysis, this paper has revealed how space becomes a way to understand and question the deep structures of nineteenth-century British society.

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