



Dickens's Great Expectations as a Tale of Moral Regeneration

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Abstract

Characters' expectations in Dickens's *Great Expectations* are shaped by their social classes and the societal developments of the Victorian era. Though many things contributed to the societal shifts that occurred during the Victorian Era, industrialization was a major one since it forced many people from the countryside to leave their agricultural employment and settle in the cities. At the same time, the wealthy were oppressing the poor, and class strife was rife. There was a profound societal transformation in early Victorian England, where *Great Expectations* occurred, primarily due to the Industrial Revolution that swept the country in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Pip, an orphan youngster, embodies the novel's central issue of social outcasts, while characters like Miss Havisham and Estella represent the novel's upper-class society. Charles Dickens delved deeply into the Victorian era's stratification of society in *Great Expectations*, spanning from the lowest of the low to the highest of the rich. Social reforms aimed to alleviate the plight of women and children and put an end to slavery. Factory conditions were so bad that they inspired the working class to rise in rebellion. Because of industrialization, the middle class rose dramatically during this time. This paper examines the novel's depiction of social class, paying particular attention to Pip, the protagonist, who represents personal development and progress. Focusing on Pip's battle with fate, ethics, and riches, this study also sheds light on Dickens's portrayal of Victorian society and its social strata in *Great Expectations*.

Keywords:

Victorian, Social Changes, Class, Bildungsroman, Growth, Moral regeneration.

The Victorian era was a time of change when society was marked by its stratification. In that era, there were three distinct social classes: the working, middle, and upper. The political landscape and the economy underwent radical shifts due to the Industrial Revolution. The poorest men, women, and children had no choice but to join the labor force in search of better economic opportunities, even though they were already living in poverty. Various characters in Dickens's *Great Expectations* are depicted according to their socioeconomic strata in Victorian society. The novel's protagonist, Pip, embodies Dickens's depiction of the working class with lofty aspirations of achieving the same level of wealth as the upper-class characters, particularly Miss Havisham and Estella. The narrative follows protagonist Pip as he goes through a series of changing expectations and ultimately aspires to become a gentleman. In Pip, the expectation of becoming the Victorian ideal of a "gentleman" can be seen.

From his early years until Pip becomes an adult, *Great Expectations* covers his life. *Great Expectations* is a bildungsroman that follows one character's life — Philip Pirrip, or Pip, as he grows up.



As the protagonist and narrator whose actions drive the novel's central plot, Pip is the most crucial character in *Great Expectations*. In Victorian society, social class is established by how an individual gets treated and their level of education; nevertheless, it is not a measure of character. *Great Expectations* depicts the prejudice of the time when the wealthy harassed the poor through unequal treatment. Dickens wrote the novel primarily to draw attention to Victorian England's oppression of the lower classes. In this society, it was difficult for those with lower incomes to live peacefully, and moving up the social ladder was difficult for those who tried to work their way up. Society, justice, humanity, pride, and vengeance are just a few themes explored in the book. Pip, the protagonist, allows Dickens to delve into these subjects.

Class Structure in the Victorian Era

Dickens uses Pip to illustrate several forms of Victorian-era social stratification. The social shifts that Pip experiences make it hard for him to classify himself. He strives to dictate his destiny to discover who he is and where he fits in with society. A new model of social classification based on self-determination and the ability to attain status by doing actions rather than by birth was adopted, and this novel raises questions about the problems already present in society, such as dissimilarity, exactitude, and social classification. Even though the boy's parents and siblings are buried in the marsh cemetery, he is orphaned and treated like a male Cinderella by his spiteful older sister. Magwitch, Orlick, Miss Havisham, Jaggers. He cannot discern which ones pose a threat to him and which help him. Because of the allure of wealth, his purity is eroded. Estella, a Belle Dame sans Merci, entices him, and he ignores the helpful spirits that watch out for him, such as Joe, the blacksmith, and Biddy, the plain schoolteacher (Tomalin, 2011).

The narrative follows a young orphan's quest to discover a better life in late-nineteenth-century England. Meeting Miss Havisham and her adopted daughter Estella on his first visit to Satis House is a watershed moment in Pip's life. Both of these people were pivotal in the story because of the ways they affected Pip. Miss Havisham and Estella's wealth and charisma captivate Pip once he visits them. Estella, whom Pip loves, does not value his adoration as Miss Havisham taught her to hurt people with her beauty. Pip wants to become a gentleman to win Estella over after she rejects him because he feels ashamed of his social background. Pip tries to meet new individuals from all walks of life as he explores these different socioeconomic classes. The fact that Pip is unsure of how to classify himself allows his narrative to revolve around coming to terms with who he is. Being a complete mystery makes him curious about who he is inside. Based on his observations of people around him, Pip deduces that he, too, should be able to establish his identity, just as other members of society are linked to their occupations or social ranks. Only by learning about the many identities in society and deciding which one he wants to embody can he construct his unique sense of himself. (Upham 2012). Despite his best efforts, Pip encounters numerous challenges from the lower to the higher class. At last, with the lawyer's aid, Mr. Jaggers offers Pip a substantial sum to further his studies if he relocates to London.

The protagonist, Pip, is enchanted by the wealth and beauty of the wealthy, particularly Miss Havisham and Estella. He aspired to become a gentleman like the wealthy and escape his humble origins. One is reminded of the Industrial Revolution and its ramifications by Pip's early impressions of London.



Pip is taken aback by the overwhelming number of people in London, which he attributes to immigration, and by the foul stench of industrial effluence.

“I was scared by the immensity of London. I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow, and dirty” (Dickens,2002).

Moving to London exposes Pip to the glitz and glamour of city life. He starts spending much money on personal stuff, designer clothes, etc. The end consequence is that he ends up in debt.

Like Pip, Estella grew up as an orphan; her adoptive mother, Miss Havisham, encouraged her to use her beauty to attract people and exposed her to false ideals. However, she understands the significance of caring for another person due to her experience. As a component of socioeconomic class, family is also an essential factor in *Great Expectations*. Joe helps Pip grow, but unlike Estella, she does not know how much love means to him. However, in the end, he makes peace with Joe after realizing his earlier; a lawyer called Mr. Jaggers shows in and tells Pip that he can travel to London for school because an anonymous donor has paid for it. Pip thinks Miss Havisham is behind it, and she does not try to discourage him. When Pip arrives in London, he meets Matthew Pocket and his son Herbert, whom he had met at Satis House years before. Herbert teaches Pip how to be a gentleman.

A vital component of *Great Expectations* is the significance of socioeconomic class in the emergence of new social and urban organizations in nineteenth-century Britain. During this period, Britain's economy and industry experienced massive growth due to the Industrial Revolution, which forced many people from the countryside to leave their jobs in agriculture and settle in the city. A middle-class family residing in a village is introduced at the tale's beginning. A blacksmith by trade, Mr. Joe's wife is a working-class homemaker. Back when she was a housewife, she frequently griped about her apron. The narrative also introduces us to another family: that of the well-to-do ladies, such as Miss Havisham and Estella. These two types of households serve as indicators of the presence of social stratification.

Alternatively, Miss Havisham resides in a stately home known as Satis House. There are many servants at the Pockets' house. The young woman known as Estella has a gift for dance and has studied overseas. The other ladies in Pip's London snobby circle are stand-ins for the archetypal Victorian socialite. After witnessing the two lifestyles in his formative years, Pip aspires to join the upper class. In pursuing Estella and affluence, he plans to become a "gentleman" with all the societally valued qualities.

Learning is essential to Pip and Estella's development as they grow up. "Suffering has been stronger than all other teachings and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be," Estella notes towards the end of the story (Dickens, 2002). Unlike those in the middle and lower classes, Pip swiftly ascends to the upper class because of his education and transformation into a gentleman.

Search for Identity

Everyone in *Great Expectations* is on a quest to find who they are. As he opens up about his life, Pip reveals how he tries to find his place in society. As the story progresses, Pip is seen to be perpetually



bewildered by life and eager to discover who he is. Because his parents passed away when he was a little boy and his sister and brother-in-law, Joe Gargery, took him in, he cannot help but wonder about his origins and his future. The narrative spans Pip's youth and his mature life. From his early years, he recounts his life's adventures. Pip becomes so infuriated by the actions of Victorian society that he considers himself a powerful man. He considered transforming into an upper-class person because he planned to marry Estella, a wealthy girl.

Pip struggles with feelings of humiliation and anxiety as he attempts to discover his place in society. He feels terrible for the other characters because he is a naive little boy. Pip owes much of his contemporary self to Estella, who plays a pivotal part in his life. Pip tries to improve himself so Estella will love him, as he is ashamed of himself. In addition to using Estella to symbolize his moral growth and establish his identity, Pip utilizes her for self-identification. Like the novel's Miss Havisham, Pip has to overcome several obstacles to self-identity. Miss Havisham uses Estella to test Pip's morality and reveal his donor, but Pip wants to modify his appearance and clothing style, oblivious to all but winning Estella's affection. He felt embarrassed to admit his social class. The realization that a person's social status is unimportant and that Pip's behavior as a gentleman injured those who cared for him comes to him when he begins to respect Magwitch as he loses Estella to Drummle. Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* mirrored the Victorian era's moral inclination. Strength, virtue, cleanliness, purity, and honesty were hallmarks of the Victorian age, and the people of that era often placed a premium on these values. Pip is full of life and changes and grapples with various moral dilemmas in this state. Miss Havisham and Estella have corrupted Pip with their lavish lifestyle, and he occasionally loses sight of the principles he was brought up with. Despite this setback, Pip is still full of hope for the future. His quest for self-discovery directly results from his incessant efforts to transform himself.

Pip's Journey and Moral Regeneration:

Following *A Tale of Two Cities*, in *Great Expectations*, Dickens has a final vision for life and a new perspective on the world. While it avoids overtly political themes, the story follows an orphan youngster as he finds his place in the world and discovers his true identity—a theme in many of his earlier works. In contrast to his other works, which focused on happiness, this is about disappointment from expecting too much from "fairy-godmother" partnerships. Against Dickens's former formula of unexpected fulfillment, there is an irony here. The irony here is unclear; after all, Pip finds true happiness and authenticity when his "great expectations" fall. The wit and buoyancy of Dickens's earlier style were back in *Great Expectations*, which was well-received by his contemporaries. On the other hand, most contemporary readers perceive a darker, more disillusioned, and even sad tone throughout the novel. The work is highly esteemed because of its profound moral penetration, excellent skill, and well-crafted prose.

A life of terrible suffering sets the stage for the boy's life. The little boy's sister is married to Mr. Joe Gargery, a modest and amiable blacksmith from the hamlet, and the two of them take care of the orphan. When Pip visits his sister and brother-in-law at their home, his sister will sometimes slap him with a cane—a term she uses to describe it—and administer a dose of tar water. Even her friends mistreat him. Pip does not come from an illustrious family or have any heritage to be proud of. Mr. and Mrs. Hubble, Wopsole, Pumblechook, and Trabb's child are some of the unsavory characters in his social



circle. Their names imply how humble they once were. The person who brings him solace is Joe Gargery, who personifies the kind and innocent nature of the country.

The idea of being a "gentleman" is quite appealing to him. The mysterious source, the escaped prisoner who pays for his schooling in London, gives him tremendous hope. He emerges from his stifling environment and joins the cultured world of London after hearing the lawyer, Mr. Jaggers, speak of his lofty ambitions. Dickens has portrayed a few genuine gentlemen who have escaped the false ideals of industrial society as he follows Pip from his humble beginnings as a blacksmith's lad to his naiveté and eventual disappointment as a pompous and varnished gentleman. In Dickens, a gentleman should be selfless, kind, and virtuous. Being a true gentleman requires more than fitting in with the crowd. Three characters in *Great Expectations* exemplify the traits of an ideal gentleman: Pip's London acquaintance Herbert Pocket, the clerk to the lawyer Wemmick, and the straightforward and generous blacksmith Joe Gargery. From his father, Herbert Pocket learned that no amount of varnish could cover over an unsightly intent. His demeanor is one of kindness, tolerance, and good nature. He thinks going to the counting house will bring him a lot of money. First, he plans to use his connections at the counting house to guarantee shipping and engaging in international trade. Because he is so kind, he decides to marry a lady from a low-income family instead of joining the shallow, trendy society. He lets Pip's wasteful spending habits get the best of him and ends himself in debt as an actual buddy. Once again, he finds Pip a job at his firm since he is a genuine friend. Pip is ultimately impressed by his preparedness and diligence.

Dickens used his novels also to speak out against the maltreatment of children. The most endearing depictions of youngsters in Dickens's works are Pip and David. *Great Expectations* has the most tragic depiction of the youngster Pip's suffering at the hands of adults. The novel also satirizes the progressive parenting style of Mrs. Matthew Pocket, who entrusts her children to the care of unscrupulous housekeepers. Pip was kind, mild-mannered, and ethically resolute as a little boy. Like Joe and Biddy, he adores everyone in his immediate vicinity. They are his compass, he says. He feels dreadful and guilty whenever he makes a mistake or does something horrible. For example, while he is compelled to assist the convicted Magwitch in stealing food and documents, he is constantly agitated, commits crimes, and betrays his sister and Joe, the people he loves the most: "The guilty knowledge that I was going to rob Mrs. Joe- I never thought I was going to rob Joe, for I never thought any of the housekeeping property as his-united to the necessity of always keeping one hand on my bread-and-butter." (*Great Expectations* 16).

Pip begins training in London with Herbert's father, Mr. Matthew Pocket. Mr. Herbert Pocket, a young gentleman, will also impart some vital gentlemanly wisdom. They grow close buddies later on. Herbert occasionally gives Pip lessons on practical table manners for London. In response to Pip's request for guidance on London etiquette, Herbert explains, "I further mentioned that as I had been brought up a blacksmith in a country place, and knew very little of the ways of politeness" (*Great Expectations* 140). Pip takes Herbert's word since he understands he is trying to help him. So, Pip never gets the impression that Herbert is trying to belittle him; whenever Herbert fixes an error, he always expresses gratitude.

Pip has changed his look over the years. He used to be another guy Estella picked apart, but now he thinks he is much more refined and polite. When Pip encounters the wealth and lifestyle of the upper class, he develops into a fake man. Pip's expectations of marrying Estella, being a better person, and being



a gentleman all contribute to the birth of a second Pip. Furthermore, he is now well aware of the horrible man he has become. Everyone who loves and cares for him has seen him flee and betray them. Discovering the trustworthy source of his riches is Pip's biggest letdown. He rescued the prisoner Magwitch from the marsh as a little boy. Miss Havisham is not his benefactor, as he had long believed. His hopes and goals are dashed as he comes to terms with the fact that he and Estella are growing apart.

Dickens exposes the realities of the Victorian era's socioeconomic order through Pip's quest for self-improvement, touching on everyone from the vile Magwitch to the downtrodden marsh villagers Joe and Biddy, the middle-class Pumblechook, the upper-class Mr. Jaggers, and the wealthy Miss Havisham. Using the incarcerated and criminal Magwitch and the well-educated and wealthy woman Miss Havisham as examples, Dickens contrasts the lower and upper classes.

Pip's migration to London in pursuit of gentlemanhood exemplifies the prioritization of wealth above family name in the era after the Industrial Revolution. There is no actual family name for Pip that is known to us. Philip Pirrip combines his given name and his family's surname—the novel attempts to strike a balance between morality and social status. The novel devotes a lot of page space to the social system. The importance of affection, loyalty, and morality outweighs monetary wealth and social status, as Dickens teaches us via Pip's epiphany.

Pip, the story's hero, possesses both immature and idealistic tendencies and an intense yearning to better himself and achieve social, moral, or intellectual success. All the events are recounted by Pip, who narrates them with wisdom and maturity. Dickens gives Pip dual personalities; in the first, we hear an older person narrating the story in plain English about what happened to Pip as a kid. Later on, Pip reflects on the day from his current vantage point, which refers to his past and shows that he has grown up and is no longer naive, simplistic, and limited in his outlook on life:

“That was a memorable day, for it significantly changed me. However, it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day” (*Great Expectations* 60).

Dickens used the novel's themes of class and wealth to help Pip grow as a person through *Great Expectations*. After the book, Pip learns true love, devotion, and morality are more valuable than material success, social status, and class. While delving into his lofty goals, he unearths realities that outstrip his wildest dreams.

As a Bildungsroman and a study of human psychology, *Great Expectations* has many interpretations. The moral rebirth of Pip is the subject of this massive, expansive, and lengthy book. Even as a little lad, Pip was kind, mild-mannered, and morally resolute. Throughout his youth, he demonstrates zero signs of villainy and stardom. With Joe and Biddy's help, he stays awake because his conscience will not let him. A solid moral compass and admirable principles form in him. However, he has a breakdown if he has to lie or do anything wicked because he feels compelled to. As a result of his terror at



Magwitch's abuse, he steals a file and some food from his sister's house in the marsh scene. He makes a solemn vow to comply with Magwitch's demand. However, he starts to feel antsy and nervous when he steals some food and a file. He feels guilty all the time. The idea of betraying Joe and his sister haunts him. However, he does not lose his basic humanity; he gives the file, food, and drink to an outcast out of compassion. Despite being coerced by Magwitch into giving the inmate what he wants, Pip still feels profound sympathy for him.

Pip and his best friend Joe live a simple existence in the countryside. Joe, the blacksmith, is his apprentice. Even though he hates living with his nasty sister, he finds solace in the love and care he receives from Joe Gargery. Pip's interaction with Miss Havisham, Estella, and their group is a watershed moment in his character development. The fact that he was a member of the "commoner's class" had no bearing on him until this point; he had been oblivious to the class difference. While living his carefree, innocent existence, he experiences his inferiority complex when he visits the Satis House. He felt utterly unsettled and unsettled by Stella's disdain for his unrefined manners and rough hands and their infrequent excursions to the Satis House and their card games. He was agitated and anxious.

While he cannot help but be enchanted by Estella's good looks, he cannot help but be wounded by her contempt and relentless bullying because of his lower social station. It appears as though one is faced with a predicament. He realizes that in order to win over his disdainful beloved, he needs to act like a gentleman after enduring a long time of mental anguish and frustration. So, Pip's patron, the ex-convict Magwitch, has sent him to London to be modeled after the ideal London gentleman. When Pip learns that Estella is marrying Drummle, he loses all hope of ever getting her. His expectations of Estella are now unrealistically high. He caused another Pip by fooling himself about the guy and hoping to get Estella. Now that he has abandoned everyone who cares about him, he is starting to see what a terrible man he has become. His statement, "I wish I had never left the forge," demonstrates his moral rebirth.

At this point, he begins the process of moral regeneration. When the fog that obscured his inherent goodness lifts, he can see people for what they are: human beings deserving of respect and dignity. No matter how badly he treats them, Pip makes an effort to make amends with everyone he has loved. Until he grows up and learns these lessons, Pip has been too polite, which has wounded the ones who care most about him.

Conclusion

Great Expectations revolves around the theme of social class and its darkest aspects from where Pip has his moral regeneration. Dickens examined the Victorian era's social stratification using a cast that included low-class farmers, criminals, middle-class citizens, and wealthy aristocrats. Pip learns that love, devotion, and worth are more important than money and social status. When Pip realizes that no one's socioeconomic status is tied to one's fundamental nature in any way—even in his desperation to marry Estella—he acquires this concept of humility. To fully grasp the novel's depiction of socioeconomic class, one must remember that it is rooted in England's Victorian era. Dickens typically gives more time to people whose wealth has been amassed through trade than to nobility or the hereditary aristocracy members. By the conclusion, Pip has learned that money is not everything and has grown ashamed of his



actions toward Joe and Bidy, among others. As Pip discovers, a person's social status is unrelated to their inherent personality.

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