

The Influence of Society on Personality of PIP in the Novel “Great Expectations” By Ch.Dickens

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Abstract. *This article explores the profound influence of society on the protagonist, Pip, in Charles Dickens’ “Great Expectations”. As an orphan growing up in 19th-century England, Pip’s life is shaped by rigid class structures, societal expectations, and relationships with individuals who embody various societal values. The discussion examines key moments and remarks from the novel where societal pressures and aspirations for upward mobility shape Pip’s identity and decisions. This article highlights how Dickens critiques Victorian society’s obsession with class and wealth while portraying Pip’s eventual moral redemption.*

Key words: *Great Expectations, Charles Dickens, Pip, Victorian society, class structure, societal influence, identity, moral redemption.*

Introduction

Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations* explores the intersection between individual aspiration and societal expectation in Victorian England. The novel portrays the journey of its protagonist, Pip, as he navigates the complexities of a society deeply entrenched in class hierarchies and materialism. Scholars have long debated the influence of societal forces on Pip’s character development. For example, Elina Helleberg in the work “The Portrayal of Class and Social Mobility in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*” mentions that Pip’s changed behavior can display how the upper-middle class maintains its domination in Victorian society by showing him the greatness of living wealthier.¹ Similarly, Mr. Amar Tulshiram Balki in his article states how the novel “*Great Expectations*” deals with the burning issue of that time, for example, social injustice in a social class-based society in the Victorian Era, and the way the protagonist of the novel Pip seeks to break the obstacles and elude his social class, with his wishes to be a “gentleman”, despite his poor background, and education.² Also, co-authors Amada and Ahmad Naem describe social growth of Pip in the following words: “*By then Pip has climbed the social ladder to a position where he is partially accepted in the bourgeoisie class.*”³ This sentence means that Pip, the protagonist of the novel, has moved up in social class due to external factors like education, financial aid, and changes in his lifestyle. Initially a poor orphan in the working class, Pip’s “expectations” allow him to gain wealth, polish his manners, and adopt a more refined way of living.

¹ Elina Helleberg. “The portrayal of class and social mobility in Charles Dickens’ “*Great Expectations*”. 2021. – P.12.

² Amar Tulshiram Balki. “*Great Expectations: A Reflection of Victorian Social Class*”. JETIR May 2022, Volume 9, Issue 5 Available online: www.jetir.org (ISSN-2349-5162)

³ Amada, Dr. Ahmad Naem. “THE INFLUENCE OF ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION ON INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY: A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF CHARLES DICKENS’ *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*.” PJAEE, 20 (2) (2023) – P. 11.

However, his acceptance into the bourgeoisie (middle or upper class) is only partial. This indicates that while Pip may appear to belong to this higher class due to his money and outward behavior, he still struggles with fully being accepted or feeling like he truly belongs because of his humble origins and inner insecurities. This reflects a critique of social mobility in Victorian society, where class distinctions were rigid and difficult to overcome.

Methodology. This research paper adopts a qualitative methodology, which facilitates a detailed examination of the novel's themes, characters, and social dynamics. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of societal norms and influences on individual identity.

Discussion

Society profoundly influences Pip from the beginning of *Great Expectations*, shaping his ambitions, relationships, and moral outlook. As a child, Pip internalizes the values of the society around him, particularly its fixation on class and material wealth, which ultimately drives many of his decisions and aspirations. Pip's early experiences highlight the rigid class structure of Victorian England. Raised as an orphan by his sister and her husband, Joe Gargery, Pip lives a modest life in a rural village. Society's disdain for the lower class becomes apparent when Pip first visits Satis House, where he meets Miss Havisham and Estella. Estella's mocking of Pip for his coarse hands and boots reveals their deep social divide. This moment ignites Pip's desire for self-improvement and upward mobility: "*I was humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry—I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart—God knows what its name was, that had no name*" (Chapter 8).⁴

From this point onward, Pip equates social advancement with personal worth, demonstrating how societal values begin to shape his identity. His longing to become a gentleman stems not from a genuine desire to improve himself but from the societal belief that wealth and status confer respect and happiness. Pip's humiliation by Estella at Satis House is described in the following sentence:

"He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy! And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!" (Chapter 8).⁵

This scene at Satis House is pivotal in shaping Pip's desire to escape his humble beginnings. Estella's humiliating words toward Pip for his "*coarse hands*" and "*thick boots*" reveal her disdain for his working-class status. It is the first time Pip becomes acutely aware of the social hierarchy, and it sparks his shame and insecurity about his origins. Estella's words serve as a catalyst for Pip's ambition to become a gentleman, not because he genuinely desires self-improvement, but because he equates social elevation with gaining Estella's approval and self-worth. This illustrates how societal expectations influence Pip's sense of identity and self-esteem, driving his obsession with wealth and class. Pip's growing shame of his humble background is also featured in Chapter 14:

*"It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home."*⁶

Here, Dickens highlights the internal conflict that arises when societal expectations clash with personal values. Pip's encounter with London's elite convinces him that to achieve success and win Estella's love, he must disassociate from his origins. This shame leads him to distance himself from Joe and Biddy, who embody honesty and integrity. This rejection illustrates how society's materialistic ideals alienate individuals from their roots and values. Once in London, Pip adopts behaviors and ambitions that align with the values of the aristocratic class. His mentor, Mr. Jaggers, symbolizes the cold pragmatism and moral ambiguity of this world. Pip begins to emulate these traits, believing that financial success and social refinement are the paths to happiness and respectability.

For instance, he starts spending lavishly and accruing debts, which reflects the societal emphasis on appearances over substance. His financial irresponsibility mirrors the shallow values of the London elite, who prioritize wealth and external validation over genuine connections.

⁴ Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*. Free eBooks at Planet eBook.com

⁵ Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*. Free eBooks at Planet eBook.com

⁶ Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*. Free eBooks at Planet eBook.com

That is why, when Pip is informed of the news of his “great expectations”, he reacts in a way that shows how a poor boy wants to be rich and get out of his miserable condition:

“O, what a distinguished and gentlemanly figure he looked as he sat with his hand upon the table!... and how much more genteel even my capricious patron could have looked!” (Chapter 18).⁷

When Pip learns about his newfound fortune, he immediately envisions a life of gentility and respectability. He assumes that becoming a gentleman will bring him happiness and social acceptance. This moment highlights how societal values equate wealth with personal worth and success. Pip’s excitement is not about the opportunities for personal growth but about escaping the shame of his humble background. His reaction underscores how deeply societal ideals have influenced his desires and priorities.

As the novel progresses, Miss Havisham’s manipulation of Pip and Estella becomes evident:

“Love her, love her, love her! If she favors you, love her. If she wounds you, love her. If she tears your heart to pieces—and as it gets older and stronger, it will tear deeper—love her, love her, love her!” (Chapter 29).⁸

Miss Havisham’s words reveal her distorted view of love, shaped by her heartbreak and desire for revenge against men. She raises Estella to be a tool for this revenge, ensuring that she remains emotionally detached and cruel. Pip, caught in Miss Havisham’s manipulative scheme, becomes a victim of societal values that prioritize wealth and status over genuine human connections. This manipulation further entrenches Pip’s misguided beliefs about love and class. Pip’s initial reaction to Magwitch’s identity as his benefactor:

“The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast.” (Chapter 39).⁹

When Pip learns that Magwitch, a convict, is his benefactor, he feels disgust and disappointment. This reaction reveals how deeply ingrained societal prejudices against the lower classes and criminals are in Pip’s mind. He had built his identity around the belief that wealth and status would elevate him above his origins, only to discover that his fortune comes from someone society deems unworthy. This harsh truth morally affects Pip. However, the difficulties and hardships that Pip undergoes lead to his eventual compassion for Magwitch:

“For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor.” (Chapter 54).¹⁰

Over time, Pip learns to see Magwitch as a human being rather than a symbol of societal shame. This transformation reflects Pip’s rejection of societal values and his recognition of the humanity in those marginalized by society. By caring for Magwitch in his final days, Pip redeems himself and finds a deeper sense of moral integrity, untainted by societal expectations.

Conclusion

The novel *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens offers a profound exploration of the ways societal forces shape an individual’s identity and ambitions. Through Pip’s interactions with characters such as Miss Havisham, Estella, Joe, and Magwitch, Dickens critiques the class prejudices, materialism, and rigid societal norms of Victorian England. These societal influences not only alienate Pip from his roots but also drive his moral and emotional struggles, illustrating the impact of external pressures on personal growth.

However, Dickens also portrays a journey of self-awareness and redemption, as Pip ultimately rejects superficial values and reconnects with the authenticity and kindness embodied by Joe and Magwitch. This transformation underscores the novel’s broader message: while society can distort an

⁷ Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*. Free eBooks at Planet eBook.com

⁸ The same source

⁹ Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*. Free eBooks at Planet eBook.com

¹⁰ Charles Dickens. *Great Expectations*. Free eBooks at Planet eBook.com

individual's identity, personal reflection, and genuine relationships have the power to restore balance and moral clarity.

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