
The Great Expectations: Class And Mobility In Victorian Britain

What do you think Great Expectations is attempting to suggest about class and mobility in Victorian Britain?

Abstract:

Charles Dickens Great Expectations is a novel written in episodes to make readers feel empathy and to know what they really want from it. In this paper, I am going to describe how Dickens suggested class and mobility from the perspective of the main character, Pip, analysing his personality and his evolution along the story taking into account the main issues and characteristics of Victorian Society. At the end of the paper, we can assert that Pip hates the person in what he became and, finally, tries to solve every mistake he did.

KEYWORDS: Dickens, Great Expectations, class, mobility, values, status.

Great Expectation is a novel by Charles Dickens in which the criticism of an industrial and Victorian society after feudalism, and its class division, is one of the main theme. A part from this, another theme is the story of the main character, Pip, who is an orphan boy that wants to achieve his goals scaling the social status from the very bottom of it. As I said, Pip is an orphan boy that comes from a working class broken family because he and his sister are the only survivors of that family, as he says in his first appearance in the novel "As I never saw my father nor my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them... my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tomb stones" (3). Also, he is alone because his sister does not take good care of him. As it is written during the Victorian period, Dickens made a point talking about social status or class, which was supposed to be kind of abolished after feudalism, and the possible movements people could made. However, as Karl Marx said in The Communist Manifesto:

"the modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonism... but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of old ones" (62)

Meaning that, after feudalism, social classes were supposed to be abolished, but with the new system and the growth of industrialisation, people created new classes and to be part of them it was required a high economic or personal sacrifice.

Having said that, and taking into account that the highest class you had, the more benefits you earn, let's talk about Pip and his evolution along the story. After introducing himself and let us know he is an orphan, while he is in a graveyard, he met a chained man, called Magwitch, who was asking Pip for food. The day after, Pip brought him food and some drink and he realised he was a prisoner who escaped from law, because he would be sent to Australia to work. After this, we could see Pip's humanity despite he is putting in danger his relation with his sister by giving Magwitch food. Finally, Magwitch is caught by soldiers and to protect Pip from them and his

sister, he said he stole the food from Pip's house, "So', said the convict, turning his eyes on Joe in a moody manner, and without the least glance at me, 'so you're the blacksmith, are you? Then I'm sorry to say, I've eat tour pie'" (45) returning in this way the favour to Pip in spite of he was sent to Australia. This act changed Pip's perspective in live.

Furthermore, Pip had his first deeper touch with social classes when he met Miss Havisham who payed Pip's sister in order to Pip play with her niece Stella. When he was at Satis House, Pip suffered a lot of mistreats for not being part of the elite of the society, from part of Miss Havisham and Stella, who acted as well as her aunt, treating Pip as if he was inferior being distant. These mistreats are a clear example of class differences because they treat Pip badly just because he comes from a different class backround.

And then I told Joe that I felt very miserable, and that I hadn't been able to explain myself to Mrs Joe and Pumblechook who were so rude to me, and that there had been a beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's who was dreadfully proud, and that she had said I was common, and that I knew I was common, and that I wished I was not common, and that the lies had come of it somehow, though I didn't know how. (81)

In this passage, Pip is telling us that he finally felt miserable after all the disdain he suffered because they told him, he was common just for not belonging a rich family. After this moment, Pip realised he did not want to be poor anymore, he wanted to scale in society and obtain Stella's love and approval.

Moreover, Pip talked to Joe in order to scale in society and Joe told him he had to start from the bottom, with hard work and a lot of sacrifice, he could scale a little bit. Time after, Pip received a visit from a lawyer which told him that an anonymous person gave him a large amount of money. Pip spent this money going to London to become a gentleman and, therefore, reach his social class goal. As he thought it was a cup of luck and a gift from a rich family, Pip, surrounded by all the luxuries he hadn't had during his infancy, became not only gentleman, but also a selfish and unmoral person thinking that money can buy and solve anything. Due to this, Joe went to London to visit him.

I received this letter by the post on Monday morning, and therefore its appointment was for next day. Let me confess exactly with what feelings I looked forward to Joe's coming.

Not with pleasure, though I was bound to him by so many ties; no; with considerable disturbance, some mortification, and a keen sense of incongruity. If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money. (251)

This passage shows us the nature Pip gained while becoming a gentleman, reaching to the point of do not want to see Joe and not to be seen with him because it could embrace him in front of the other people. So, he also wished he could pay no to be seen with him nor visited by him.

Finally, after believing he was gifted by some rich family, he realises and discovers the truth. The money he spent in becoming a gentleman was sent from Magwitch from Australia because he saved money while working as a farmer. This fact destroyed Pip's moral and he realised he was not behaving well, money and luxury had turned in him kind of a monster, losing his entire identity and personality. Due to this, Pip, aware of what he did, started a journey to Egypt as a

mid-class man in order to purge himself as a penitence.

To sum up, as in history, money and power made people lose their identity in order to achieve their ambitions. Dickens, in this novel, undresses the truth of becoming a selfish and arrogant gentleman and so, according to Think Thought Taught's author, challenges the notion of social mobility between classes depending on the individual, but with troubles and limitations for gender or upbringing. Therefore, the aim of the author is to tell that no matter what race or social status we belong to, people are humans, and as humans, we are all equal and it is a big mistake to consider one more than the other. Newel explains this in his article: "Only through his move between classes and back again is Pip capable of awakening to the reality of life: class is merely a divisive social construct."

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