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## Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* as a Story of Pip's Education and Moral Regeneration

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### **Abstract:**

*Great Expectations* is Pip's journey for seeking self-identity, self-improvement and seek to be a gentleman. In other words, it is a novel about the desire for education, wealth and social refinement. The reader of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* was educated in the values of the Victorian society; the importance of moral and manners. The reader follows the protagonist's growth from childhood into adulthood on his quest for a better life and by the protagonist's encounters with other characters, values and behaviour, the reader learns to distinguish good moral from failing even in the non-fictional world. This is what makes the genre of the Bildungsroman so interesting; it serves as an intermediary between the moral values of society and the maturation of a fictive character.

**Keywords:** Pip, Self-Identity, Self-Improvement, Social Refinement, Education, Moral Regeneration, Victorian Society.

### **Introduction:**

Four expectations that Pip wishes to achieve throughout his journey. The first one, because he lacks real family, so he seeks for both identity and security. The second one, to hide his roughness and commonness he endeavors for education both in respect of knowledge and styles. The third expectation is his concentration with all his power to be a gentleman. His identification

for a gentleman is based on social class, prestige, and money. If he succeeds to grasp all these targets, he will win Estella, as he thinks, and this is his fourth expectation. Pip starts to think about these expectations when he understands the meaning of poverty, ignorance, and immorality. Thus his dream is not to be poor, ignorant, and immoral. So Pip, the narrator criticizes his past behaviors as an extremely roughly and seldom giving himself confidence for good deeds, on the contrary, he angrily rebuke himself as bad ones. He says: "as I went along, on all I had seen, and deeply revolving that I was a common laboring boy; that my hands were coarse, that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way" (*Great Expectations* 55).

### **Journey of Pip's Education and Moral Regeneration:**

In *Great Expectations* which follows *A Tale of Two Cities* Dickens comes to see the world in a new way, and his final vision of life seems to emerge. The novel does not explicitly deal with social issues, but like some of his earlier novels shows an orphan boy's progress towards security, peace and happiness, towards authentic individuality. It is not like his earlier novels, a story of fulfilment, but rather a story of collapse of expectations generated by 'fairy-godmother' type of romances. There is irony here - partly directed against Dickens's own earlier formula of sudden fulfilment. This irony is ambiguous, for, in a sense, it is because of the collapse of his 'great expectations' that Pip finally achieves fulfilment, an authentic self. The young boy Pip in whom the bildungsroman in the novel centres, faces the same predicament and has almost the same development as Julien Sorel of Stendhal's masterpiece, *The Red and the Black*. *Great Expectations* was welcomed by Dickens's contemporaries as returning to the humour and cheerfulness of his earlier manner. But to most modern readers the book is less sunny and optimistic, more disillusioned and even melancholy. The book is now held in high esteem for the qualities of its construction and technique, and the depth of its moral penetration.

The background of the boy's life is one of wretched misery. The orphan child lives with his sister who is married to Mr. Joe Gargery, a simple and good-natured village black-smith. In the house of his sister and brother-in-law, Pip is occasionally thrashed by his sister with a cane, euphemistically called 'Tickler' and is given dosings with tar-water. He is also ill-treated by her friends. Pip has neither any noble lineage to be proud of, nor any patrimony. His social milieu is

composed of such uncouth persons as Wopsole, Pumblechook, and Mr. and Mrs. Hubble and Trabb's boy. The very names suggest their ignoble origin. His only comfort is Joe Gargery who embodies rustic innocence and warm-heartedness.

He entertains great expectations to become a 'gentleman'. His great expectations are fed by the unknown source - the escaped convict, who provides money for his education in London. He is informed by the lawyer, Mr. Jaggers of his great expectations, he comes out of the stultifying situation, and enters into the civilized society of London.

While depicting Pip's transformation from a simple blacksmith's boy into a gentleman, vain and varnished, and his ultimate disillusionment, Dickens has drawn the portraits of a few true gentleman who have not been corrupted by the false values of the industrial society. To Dickens, a true gentleman should be noble, considerate and unselfish. Mere imitation of the sophisticated ways of living, and polish and style do not produce a true gentleman. In *Great Expectation* Herbert Pocket, Pip's friend of London, Wemmick, the lawyer's clerk, and Joe Gargery, the simple and kind hearted blacksmith, are shown to possess the qualities of true gentleman. Herbert Pocket has learnt from his father that varnishing cannot hide an ugly motive. He is good-natured, tolerant and kind-hearted. He expects to make good fortune by attending the Counting-house. He thinks that his connection with the Counting-house will enable him to insure ship at first and traffick with foreign lands. His gentleness prompts him to reject the hollow fashionable society and enter into matrimonial relation with a poor girl of humble origin. As a true friend he tolerates Pip's lavish habits and falls into debt. Again as a true friend, he finds employment for Pip in his firm. In the end Pip is impressed by his industry and readiness.

Children were a passionate concern with Dickens. In his novels Dickens protested against the injustice done to the children. Of the large number of children presented in Dickens's novels, the most convincing portraits are those of David and Pip. There is, in *Great Expectations*, the most pathetic account of the harshness and helplessness which the boy Pip has to suffer. There is also, in the novel, a satire on Mrs. Matthew Pocket's enlightened upbringing of children who are left under the care of dishonest servants.

As a child, Pip has good nature, gentle and morally strong. He loves all people around him like Joe and Biddy. He considers them his guidance. Whenever he commit mistake or does a bad thing, he suffers and considers himself guilty. For instance when he is forced to help the convict Magwitch to steal food and file, all the time he feels restless and commit crime and betraying his

sister and Joe who he loves 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).

In London, Pip starts his lessons with Mr. Matthew Pocket, Herbert's father. In addition, some important instructions as a gentleman will be taught with Mr. Herbert Pocket (a young gentleman). Later, they become close friends. From time to time, Herbert instructs Pip on convenient London table styles. Pip himself asks Herbert to help him to the manners and manners of London, he tells him: "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 follows any advice or instruction by Herbert, he knows that Herbert wants to help him, thus, he never feels that Herbert tries to insult him, on the contrary, all the time, Pip thanks him when the later corrects any mistake.

By time, Pip has undergone a lot of changes in his appearance; in the past, he was an ordinary person and the goal of criticism and scorns by Estella, now he believes that he has improved a gentlemanly behavior and etiquette.

Pip begins to grow into a false man when he becomes in contact with money and the life of upper class. Moreover, his search for self-improvement and to be a gentleman, in addition to his dream to marry Estella, all these expectations lead to create another Pip. And just now he knows what an unpleasant man he has become. He has avoided and betrayed all people who care for and love him:

As I had grown accustomed to my expectations, I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me. Their influence on my own character, I disguised from my recognition as much as possible, but I knew very well that it was not all good. I lived in a state of chronic uneasiness respecting my behavior to Joe. My conscience was not by any means comfortable about Biddy (*Great Expectations* 207).

Pip's great disappointment is when he knows the real benefactor behind his fortune. It is Magwitch, the convict whom he helped when he was a child in the marsh. His knowing the truth that it is not Miss Havisham is his benefactor as he thought for a long time. Now he entirely realizes

that the distance between him and Estella becomes bigger and bigger and immediately all his dreams are shattered.

Throughout Pip's journey for self-improvement, Dickens reveals the truth of social system of Victorian period starting from the criminal Magwitch to the simple and poor villagers of the marshes Joe and Biddy, passing by the middle class Pumblechook and upper class as Mr. Jaggers to the rich one as Miss Havisham. Dickens presents the contrast between lower class and upper class; between Magwitch, the convict, the criminal and Miss Havisham an educated and rich woman.

Actually the moving of Pip from the small and isolated village to London seeking to be a gentleman represents the outflow of middle class, after the industrial Revolution to show the emphasis of material over ancestral name. As we know that Pip has no real ancestral name. His name is mixture of his given name Philip with his family name Pirrip. The novel tries to make balance between social class and morality. We can notice that social system takes a large space in this novel. Dickens tells us through pip's realization that both; money and class have no importance while affection, loyalty, and morality are more important for human being.

We should put in our mind that Pip is both; Pip, the protagonist of the novel, immature, romantic ideals with deep desire to improve himself and attain any advancement whether educational, moral or social, and Pip, the narrator for all the events with perspective and maturity. Dickens presents Pip as two characters, as we hear the story, we hear a mature person telling us the events about Pip as a child with his simple language and simple expression. For instance when Pip depicts his feeling of inefficiency and weakness about himself and his family when he spends the day at Satis House for the first time: "I thought how Joe and my sister were then sitting in the kitchen, and how I had come up to bed from the kitchen, and how Miss Havisham and Estella never sat in a kitchen, but were far above the level of such common doings" (Great Expectations 60). Later Pip comments on the day from his present perspective, now he is mature and referring to his past, he is no longer young with innocent, simple and narrow view of life:

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But, 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).

In *Great Expectations*, Dickens succeeded to establish themes of money and social class to make Pip learn a great lesson from his experience. Pip discovers at the end of the novel that affection, loyalty, and conscience are more important than social advancement, money and class. By exploring his great expectations he discovers new things more important and more valuable than what he has sought.

*Great Expectations* can be said as a study of human psychological development and a Bildungsroman novel. In one sense, this grand and huge novel, voluminous can be called a work dealing with the moral regeneration of Pip.

From his early boyhood Pip was good, gentle, and morally strong. He does not show any sign of villainy and notoriety at his boyhood. His conscience always keeps awake under the proper guidance of Joe and Biddy. He develops a strong moral sense and good values. However whenever he is forced to commit an evil deed or to tell a lie; he suffers a mental disturbance. In the marsh scene, he is terrified at Magwitch's ill treatment and he is forced to commit crimes: to steal a file and some food from his sister's house. Under Magwitch's threat he promises that he must do so. But after stealing food and a file, he becomes restless and uneasy. He can not get rid of his guilt feelings. He thinks that he has betrayed Joe and his sister. However, he retains his basic humanity and shows pity for an outcast by giving the file and some food and drink to him. Though Pip provided the demanded things to the convict under Magwitch's force, Pip shows deep compassion for him. This is quite obvious when in the course of their conversation while Magwitch takes the food to the marsh, Pip confesses:

"Pitying his desolation, and watching him as he gradually settled down upon the pie, I made bold to say, 'I am glad you enjoy it.'

'Did you speak?'

'I said I was glad you enjoyed it.'" (*Great Expectations* 21)

Such a humble life Pip leads in the village with his great friend Joe. He is apprenticed to Joe, the blacksmith. Though he is unhappy to live with his cruel sister, he certainly had consolation as he got love and affection from Joe Gargery.

In fact, Pip's confrontation with Miss Havisham and Estella and their circle is the turning point in the development of his personality. So, far he had been unconscious about class distinction

– he was indifferent that he belonged to a “commoner’s class“. Going to the Satis House he feels for the first time in his life his inferiority complex which was absent in his simple innocent life style. The occasional visits to the Satis House, playing cards with Stella, her scorn of his coarse hands and unpolished manners made him utterly uneasy and disturbed. He lost mental peace and calm. In one hand, he becomes fascinated with Estella’s physical charm and beauty; on the other hand, he is hurt by her scorn and continual torture concerning his belonging lower social class. One seems to be at his horns of dilemma. After a long period of mental torture and frustration, he comes to the point that he must be a gentleman to win his scornful beloved.

Thus, Pip has been taken to London to be brought up as a perfect London gentleman according to the wish of the convict Magwitch, his benefactor. Pip holds on to the dream of having Estella until he finds out that she is marrying Drummle. At this moment all of his hopes for Estella are rushed. His self-deception about gentleman and his hope of getting Estella lead to another Pip. He now begins to realize what a horrible man he has become, and that he has shunned all who really care for him. His utterance: “I wish I had never left the forge” shows his moral regeneration.

His moral regeneration starts in this stage. The clouds which covered his original goodness pass away and once again he enables to see man as man recognizing the proper worth of basic humanity. Pip tries to repair all his relationships with people he mistreated and loved. Pip’s behavior as a gentleman has caused him to hurt the people who care about him most. Once he has learned these lessons and matures into the man.

### **Conclusion:**

How is Great Expectations a novel of education and regeneration: A novel that follows the main character as he/she matures throughout the plot Great Expectations because it follows the life of Pip from childhood to adulthood. Pip matures throughout the story. He becomes academically educated. He is quoted as loving Estella more and more. He understands what suffering and ambition come to mean. Dickens also demonstrates to Pip how one’s actions can affect the life of another person (either for the worse or better). While Pip learns to distinguish good moral from failing in the fictive world of Dickens’s London, the real reader is supposed to be able to do the same in the non-fictional world. The values of society and the importance of manners and



education are conveyed through *Great Expectations* and the novel itself can be seen as a sort of handbook of correct manners according to the Victorian society.

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