

What role does social class play in the novel Great Expectations? What lesson does Pip learn from his experience?

Great expectations reveal Dickens's dark attitudes towards Victorian society such as its inherent class structure, flaw of judicial system, contrast between rural and urban England and immorality of high class. The novel tells how wealth inspires great expectations, how those influences and creates class consciousness, and all the monsters vanities that have been curses in the world.

Great expectations tells the story of Philip Pirrip, known as 'pip', an orphan brought up by his bad tempered sister and her warm hearted husband, Joe Gargery, the village blacksmith. The hero raised in humble circumstances, comes into a fortune, and then quickly disavows family and friends. When he loses in fortune he is forced to recognize his past conduct and ingratitude.

"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 character I disguised from my recognition as much as possible. But I know very well that it was not all good"

Throughout Great Expectations, Dickens talks about the class system of Victorian society, ranging from the most wretched criminal (Magwitch) to the poor peasants of the marsh country (Joe and Biddy) to the middle class (Pumblechook) to the very rich (Miss Havisham). It is not only there were several classes but there were also class distinction or class consciousness. The people of the upper class did not mix with the people of the lower class. It is seen through the pip's uneasiness on the arrival of Joe at London. The theme of social class is central to the novel's plot and to the ultimate moral theme of the book—Pip's realization that wealth and class are less important than affection, loyalty, and inner worth. Pip achieves this realization when he is finally able to understand that, despite the esteem in which he holds Estella, one's social status is in no way connected to one's real character. Drummle, for instance, is an upper-class lout, while Magwitch, a persecuted convict, has a deep inner worth.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember Great Expectations' treatment of social class is that the class system it portrays is based on the post-Industrial Revolution model of Victorian England. Dickens generally ignores the nobility in favour of characters whose fortunes have been earned through commerce. In this way he connects the theme of social class to the idea of work and self-advancement.

I had heard of Miss Havisham up town – everybody for miles round, had heard of Miss Havisham up town – as an immensely rich and grim lady who lived in a large and dismal house barricaded against robbers, and who led a life of seclusion. (1.7.80)

Pip takes all his cues from Joe. He learns how to interact with the world through his brother-in-law. Here, we see Pip focused on what he lacks rather than what he has. His introduction to "society" makes him fully aware of the absence of things. Pip wants to belong to Miss Havisham's world, but he does not have the key to unlock it.

I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too. (1.8.92)

Pip feels like gentlemanly behavior is something that can be caught, like a cold. He is so caught up in the appearance of things. Pip values the knowledge that Miss Havisham and Estella have over the knowledge that Joe has, even though he has rarely had a thoughtful conversation with Estella. His relationship to Estella seems completely dependent upon externalities.

Whatever I acquired, I tried to impart to Joe. This statement sounds so well, that I cannot in my conscience let it pass unexplained. I wanted to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella's reproach. (1.15.2)

The marked difference existed between the rural and urban England. The real picture of the rural England is given through the Joe's family the lives of the rural people were still very simple. They were honest and caring but the people of the city like London became complicated as well as complex. For example pip arrived in the metropolis and has taken a look around. He is not much impressed by the locality in which Mr. Jaggers has his office. He finds this locality called "Little Britain", to be full of filth. Mr. Jaggers office is itself a most dismal place.

The people of the upper class are immoral. A number of characters in the novel are dominated by greed for money. When pip goes on Miss Havisham's house for the second time he finds a number of Miss Havisham's relative there, Camilla is an aging, talkative relative of Miss Havisham who does not care much for Miss Havisham but only wants her money, Cousin Raymond is another relative of Miss Havisham who is interested in her money and is married to Camilla, Gorgiana is another aging relative of Miss Havisham who is also only interested in her money, Sarah Pocket is also one of her relative only greedy of her money. He calls relatives "toadies and humbugs"

Due to the shocking difference that people of the higher class or the gentlemen also got different treatment from the judicial system. They were highly punished. While the people of the lower class comparatively got the harsh punishment. Magwitch fell a victim to injustice of law enforcing agency. They passed a harsher punishment (14 years punishment) for Magwitch then the original criminal Compeyson (7 years imprisonment) simple because Magwitch had previous records of criminal activities while Compeyson seemed a gentleman with good and upper social lineage.

Effect on Pip's Life after being gentleman:

Social class played a major role in the society depicted in Charles Dickens's Great Expectations. Social class determined the manner in which a person was treated and their access to education. Yet, social class did not define the character of the individual.

Many characters were treated differently because of their social class in Great Expectations. Seeing the contrast between how the poor and the rich were treated will give a clearer understanding of how much social class mattered.

Pip learnt many lessons throughout the novel from childhood till adolescent. He learnt that wealth is not enough for a man's happiness. A man has to do something in his life for a better future or he should rely on his own. Pip did many things good as well as bad. He was born with

a destiny to be poor but it is not his mistake. We see in the novel that Pip did things to change his destiny and to be rich like his upper class but the way he struggles like when Mr. Jagger tells him that he is ready to make Pip a gentleman and expectations of great wealth for him. He offers him a great deal of money and money comes from unknown benefactor. Pip did not try once to find out who is his benefactor and without any investigation, he keeps money. This act of Pip clearly shows the lack of confidence in Pip's character. Instead of confidence of earning such money and achieve something, he relies on somebody's money even without investigating the source.

When he meets Biddy, Estella and Miss Havisham at Satis house, he recognizes his low status as he came to know there and Pip falls in love with Estella but she immediately rebuffs him. *He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!' said Estella with disdain, before our first game was out. 'And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!'*

At the age of fourteen, Miss Havisham pays for him to be apprenticed to Joe Gorgery, the village Blacksmith and his visit of Satis house and to Estella come to an end. After four years of apprenticeship, Pip receives a visit from an old lawyer Mr. Jaggers whom he had met at Satis House some years previously.

With that money he goes to London to learn to be a gentleman. Here he becomes proud and snobbish like the upper class and neglects his old friends but particularly the loving blacksmith.

Finally, I remember that when I got into my little bedroom, I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but once was not now.

In London, he gradually gets himself further and further into debt and is continually snubbed by Estella, who is now also living in London. Even in this moment, he does not realize that how his friends get hurt of his behavior in the same way as he is getting hurt of the Estella's behavior.

Pip is divided here between what is familiar and what is sexy. He knows Biddy well, they talks and interact daily. All Pip knows of Estella is her beauty, her household, and her attitude towards him.

And now, because my mind was not confused enough before, I complicated its confusion fifty thousand-fold, by having states and seasons when I was clear that Biddy was immeasurably better than Estella, and that the plain honest working life to which I was born, had nothing in it to be ashamed of, but offered me sufficient means of self-respect and happiness. (1.17.74)

Further on when at a point, Pip's real benefactor is revealed, this turns out to be Abel Magwitch, the convict he helped on the marshes when he was a child and who has in the meantime made a fortune as a transported convict in Australia. Pip at first rejects the lowly Magwitch, and is ashamed that the source of his present wealth comes from a criminal. Even at this stage, Pip is not understanding that if at this moment, Magwitch is low of a lower class then Pip too belongs to a lower class.

He gradually becomes very change and his attitude towards the lower class makes him remind of the attitude of the upper class with him.

He does not recognize himself with Joe because he thinks that Joe is not educated and does not know the manners of a gentleman. This is Dicken's sharp criticism that a fake Victorian gentleman Pip becomes ashamed of his childhood friend Joe's presence at his lodging in London. When Biddy, by writing a letter, informs Pip that Joe is coming at London, after hearing that news, Pip cannot remain happy rather a growing discomfort seizes him. Inwardly he does not hope Joe's coming to meet him at London where Pip lives with a sophisticated society. Pip in order to improve his status, gets loan for himself. But this was Joe who payed back his loan. Now he finally realized that he has lost his loved ones.

In Great Expectations, a person's social class determined the amount of education they had. It is important to perceive this relationship between education and social class to clearly understand the importance of social class. A person like Joe who was a common blacksmith had no education at all. Pip, in the early days when he was low class, had a poor education at a small school. The school was not the best of schools, but it's all that the lower class had. The teacher spent more time sleeping than teaching and Pip had learned more from Biddy than from the actual teacher. Even though he had an education when he was low class, his education as a gentleman with Mr. Pocket was much greater. Another example of how social class affects education is the difference of education between the two convicts. Magwitch, born poor and low class had no education at all while Compeyson, born rich was high class and a gentleman with an education. Education is a factor in showing how social class greatly determined people's lives.

Even though social class determined many things, it did not establish a person's true inner character. Realizing this will play a part in proving that social class did matter in most but not all cases. For example, the lowest class people were Joe, Biddy, Magwitch, and Orlick. Joe and Biddy were very poor but had very good hearts. Joe was always there for Pip and Biddy had moved in to help Mrs. Joe. Magwitch was a dirty convict of the lowest class, but he turned out to be a very caring and generous man. Orlick was low class and his character also turned out to be very low because he was a murderer. The fact that there are both good and cold hearted people in the lower class shows that class has no connection with how people really are. Another example is the richer class. This includes Ms. Havisham, Estella, Herbert, Jaggers, and Wemmick. Ms. Havisham and Estella were both very wealthy but they had no heart and their intentions were to bring hell to all men. While Herbert was the opposite, he was a true friend to Pip and always stayed by his side. Jaggers and Wemmick also in the higher class had supported Pip through his gentleman years. Being aware that not all of the high class were necessarily good people states the fact that class does not determine character. Even though class mattered in most things, this is an example it did not take part in.

After exploring how class was associated with the way people were treated, how much education they had, but not with their true character, these facts have become easy to discern. With these points proved, the fact that social class mattered in most but not all things had no doubt become clear in the mind. It is strange how different social class had been back in Pip's days and now.

Dickens gives readers more than a dramatic moral tale. He offers the readers a lesson in self value and perseverance. In his Britain, a man is not trapped in a world of poverty unless he chooses to be trapped. And, that poverty can be based on lack of money, education or genuine kindness toward others.

Charles Dickens is a master storyteller and his body of work speaks for his talent. It is in one of his best novels, *Great Expectations*, that he expands upon his literary tales about social classes in Britain and the consequences of ideal wealth and unscrupulous living.
