

**SOCIAL MOBILITY AND PERSONAL IDENTITY IN
GREAT EXPECTATIONS**

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Abstract: This article analyzes the theme of social mobility and its influence on personal identity in *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. The novel presents the psychological transformation of Pip, whose desire for higher social status reshapes his moral values and relationships. Through qualitative literary analysis, this study examines how Dickens critiques Victorian class structure and demonstrates that true maturity is achieved through ethical awareness rather than material success. The findings show that social ambition leads to internal conflict, but moral self-realization ultimately defines authentic growth.

Keywords: social mobility, identity formation, Victorian society, moral development, class structure, Dickens, ambition, character transformation

Introduction

Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* remains one of the most significant novels of Victorian literature. Published in 1861, the novel reflects the rigid social hierarchy of nineteenth-century England and explores the consequences of ambition within that system. The protagonist, Pip, experiences a dramatic transformation from a humble orphan to a gentleman with "great expectations."

However, Dickens does not portray this transformation as purely positive. Instead, he uses Pip's journey to question the belief that wealth and social advancement automatically bring happiness and moral superiority. The novel addresses important questions about identity, self-worth, and the meaning of true success. This article aims to analyze how social mobility influences Pip's personal identity and how Dickens ultimately redefines the concept of personal achievement.

Literature Review

Scholars have long recognized *Great Expectations* as a novel of moral education. Early critics such as John Forster emphasized autobiographical elements and Dickens's concern with humility and gratitude. Later, F. R. Leavis described the novel as a study of ethical growth, arguing that Pip's mistakes form the foundation of his moral awakening.

Modern literary criticism highlights the socio-economic context of Victorian

England. According to contemporary scholars, Dickens critiques a society that equates gentility with wealth rather than character. Some critics focus on the psychological dimension of Pip's shame, suggesting that his alienation reflects internalized social prejudice.

While previous studies emphasize class conflict and moral themes, this article specifically examines the interaction between social mobility and identity formation, showing how ambition reshapes self-perception and interpersonal relationships.

Research Methodology

This research applies qualitative literary analysis. The primary source is Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861). Secondary sources include academic articles and critical studies related to Victorian literature and class theory.

The study uses close reading as the main analytical method. Key passages are selected to analyze Pip's changing attitudes toward his social background, especially in his interactions with Joe, Estella, and Magwitch. The thematic method is applied to identify patterns related to ambition, identity, and moral growth.

This methodology allows for an in-depth examination of character development within its historical and social context.

Analysis and Results

At the beginning of the novel, Pip is portrayed as a kind and innocent child. His relationship with Joe represents moral stability and emotional sincerity. However, after meeting Estella and visiting Satis House, Pip begins to feel ashamed of his social position. He confesses that he wished Joe had been "rather more genteelly brought up," which reveals the beginning of his internal transformation.

This moment marks the influence of social comparison on identity formation. Pip starts measuring his worth through the lens of class hierarchy. When he later receives his mysterious fortune, he assumes that becoming a gentleman will resolve his insecurities. However, Dickens gradually exposes the illusion of this belief.

The revelation that Magwitch, a convict, is Pip's benefactor becomes a turning point. Pip initially reacts with horror, demonstrating how deeply he has internalized social prejudice. Yet, over time, he develops compassion and loyalty toward Magwitch. This shift reflects moral growth and self-awareness.

The results of this analysis demonstrate that social mobility in the novel leads not to fulfillment but to alienation. Pip's ultimate maturity emerges only after he recognizes the emptiness of superficial status. Dickens suggests that personal identity must be grounded in ethical values rather than social approval.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, *Great Expectations* presents a critical examination of social mobility and its impact on personal identity. Dickens illustrates that ambition without moral awareness leads to emotional isolation and dissatisfaction. Through Pip's

transformation, the novel argues that genuine success is defined by compassion, humility, and integrity.

This study recommends further research comparing Dickens's portrayal of class mobility with other Victorian novels addressing similar themes. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining literary analysis with sociological theory could deepen understanding of identity construction in nineteenth-century literature.

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