

Good example of the concept of being a gentleman in the novel, 'great expectation...

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



There are a number of themes in Dickens' 'Great Expectations,' but the theme of the age-old problem of being a gentleman in any society surfaces through the character of Pip. In the past, the gentleman was any wealthy male whose status as a gentleman was determined by his clothes, wealth, and his family history. But, the gentleman is truly more than his physical appearance. A true gentleman should possess qualities that go beyond one's physical appearance or heritage and should include the personal qualities and traits of the individuals. The novel centres around Dickens' ideal vision of a gentleman as one who is of humble beginnings, but remains a well-mannered male who has a firm belief in maintaining the values and attitudes of the society. Dickens gives the ideal presentation of the main character, Pip as a gentleman based on his acts of generosity, humility, and kindness. Dickens uses his pen to write about his motivation by the social and economic class structure in the society and how it helped to shape the ideals of the gentleman, (Blackshadow, 1). The novel gives an insight into the actions of Pip and his views of the ideal gentleman. Pip is the narrator of the story and he deals with issues that help the readers to see the qualities of the gentleman in a different way. Pip is not the ideal wealthy gentleman in the story, but his actions make him even more desirable than those who the society expects to be gentlemen. Based on Pip's perception, the gentleman is one who has money, culture and grace and these qualities make him refined. But, the image was only that of a man who could meet the expectations of the Victorian age and prove Marxist views that "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness," Nation Master, June 2004, as

cited by Blackshadow, 2). Clearly, the Victorian gentleman had to maintain a particular image, but through Pip, the readers realize that it was a challenge to become a gentleman in the setting if one was not rich.

However, Pip is given the opportunity to change his standing in the society and as a result, he shows that his good natured spirit and his character and grace could allow him to become gentlemen. Pip finds that he has always been a true gentleman because of his personality humility. Pip brings to life the problem of his upbringing as country boy who believes that the only way to win Estella's heart is to become a sophisticated gentleman. In Chapter 14, Pip suggests that he dreaded Estella looking through the window and seeing that his face and hands are black because he was doing the coarsest part of his job, (GE, 14: 190). This job, according to Pip, is not the job of the Victorian gentleman and therefore Estella would not want to be with him at all. He continues in Chapter 17 to express his desires to become a gentleman because of: ' The beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's, and she's more beautiful than anybody ever was, and I admire her dreadfully, and I want to be a gentleman on her account,' (GE, 17: 228).

Anne Wollenberg suggests that individuals enjoy the Victorian setting of the novel and the way in which Dickens maintains the common element of being a gentleman, (Wollenberg, 6). This vision of the gentleman is quite common in modern day society as the Victorian gentleman can be likened to the affluent business people and the movie and music stars. The fact that a poor common man opens a door for a female goes unnoticed in many parts of the society today, yet the impact of an affluent individual carrying out the same act will not go unnoticed.

In Pip's mind, 'gentleman' reflects the sophisticated man who could win the respect of others and while improving one's social standing. In contrast, the modern gentleman is one who treats a lady with respect that is judged by the old-fashioned standard. Additionally, a gentleman does not have to be wealthy or of a high social standing, but Pip wrongly assumes that a gentleman is one who is fashionable dressed and wealthy. Clearly, Pip's misconception of a true gentleman does not include the moral chivalry or selfless or modest male who is considerate of his peers. Pip's misguided views of being a gentleman reflect the dreams of a poor young man who believes that wealth determines the character of an individual.

Nonetheless, Pip changes as a result of his need to become a gentleman. The readers see that Pip gets an education and instead of remaining as modest young man, he becomes unbearable. The changes in Pip's character lead him to lose his ignorance and become more of an arrogant young man who believes that he is better than Biddy. Dickens shows that Pip's concept of being a gentleman is not accurate as the moral and ethical principles of being a gentleman is lost in Pip's belief that a gentleman is one who dresses appropriately, spends money, have influential friends and hires servants. The message that Dickens sends to the readers through Estella in Chapter 44 is that the role of a gentleman goes beneath the physical appearance and reflects inner qualities that allows the gentleman to be morally good. Pip learns this valuable lesson after he nearly loses everything that he has worked to achieve. Clearly, Pip's lesson comes through the self-respect that he gains later in the novel and the readers see that the idea of what makes a true gentleman changes as the novel progresses.

Arguably, the ideal gentleman is one who is able to exert, self-control, shows compassion and grace, and forgiveness. As Pip reflects on his past, the readers become aware that Pip has changed as he forgives Estella when she marries Drummle. This act of forgiveness shows that Pip is now realizing that being a gentleman means that he must be able to forgive those who have hurt his feelings in the past. Still, the readers realize that Pip goes through the various changes in his life and becomes a true gentleman. At the end of Chapter 27, the readers recognize that Pip has changed dramatically. Joe visits Pip and sees that Pip has become a gentleman, but these changes in Pip's character makes him cold and unkind, but the contrast in Joe's and Pip's character in this chapter suggests that Joe is more of a gentleman as he forgives Pip actions towards him. Arguably, Pip is not the true gentleman as he does not treat Joe with the kindness that one would associate with being a true gentleman. Instead, he tells Pip that such actions serve as a part of nature and the natural social divisions in the society, (GE, 224).

Through his need to impress Estella, Pip lost his ability to be kind and cheerful and instead builds a sense of jealousy, (GE, 144) that is not becoming of a gentleman. Pip's shallow behaviour and his devotion to impressing the love of his leads to Pip's delusion of what makes a man a gentleman. But, Pip's obsession with becoming a gentleman leads to his torment as there was an " air of inaccessibility which her beauty and her manner gave her, (GE, 239) and leads to the distance that comes with the division in the social status of individuals in the society. At the same time, the readers see the changes in Pip's actions as his desires to be a gentleman lies in his obsession with Estella. His expectations are high and he works

hard to meet these expectations. These expectations may appear foolish, but they are in fact the reflection of the need to fit into the society and gain acceptance. Despite these actions, the readers realize that Pip becomes the ideal gentleman and is no longer concerned with the external pretence of being gentleman.

In conclusion, the novel shows two distinct types of a gentleman. On the one hand, the gentleman is one who surfaces because of his social standing and the rules of social etiquette based on the expectations of the society and physical appearances. On the other hand, the gentleman is one, who is poor but has the self-sacrificing nature that allows for a poor person to maintain his honesty, dignity, and virtue. One could say that Pip early childlike views of what makes a true gentleman changes as he matures as maturity adds wisdom to the perception of life. There is no doubt that Dickens does not give one meaning to the term gentleman but explores the behaviour and the characteristics of what makes a true gentleman. In the end, Dickens shows that material possessions do not make a man wealthy, but it is the inner moral and ethical values that make a true man.

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