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The portrayal of class and social mobility in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*

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Abstract

Pip's transformation to become a gentleman in manners and behaviour in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* illustrates the difference and importance of class in the Victorian society. Through an unknown benefactor, Pip makes a journey from working-class blacksmith apprenticeship in the countryside to gentleman life in the upper-middle class London, with access to economic, cultural and social capital. By applying Marxist theory, the study has found that 1) Pip's awareness and self-perception of his class background becomes increasingly apparent after meeting Miss Havisham and Estella; 2) that he is conflicted as regards with moral behaviour, social relationships and class belonging and 3) a story like Pip's was rare in Victorian society. Previous research has found that the concept of the Bildungsroman is presented in *Great Expectations* through the male protagonist Pip and his transformation to the upper-middle class, which this thesis corroborates as well.

Table of contents

Introduction

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) wrote many novels depicting the social issues of Victorian society, illustrated it in his literary work and developed the public opinion among his readers. His novels and short stories reflect the Victorian period which gives modern readers an insight in the society in which he lived in and its positive and negative aspects (Asci 31). He had at times a difficult childhood and drew on his own life when writing stories with both positive and negative recollection, which fuelled his imagination in future writings (Slater 4-6). His popularity could be explained by readers' reaction to the representation of the shared struggle of the English population (Rodensky 584). Charles Dickens, who saw the inequalities and troublesome issues in the Victorian society, illustrated the reality in several novels during the 19th century (Asci 31). Dickens own life experiences influenced him to write about unpleasant effects of industrialism and disturbances between the classes (Asci 32).

Zweierlein explains the term Bildung as 'aimed at a practical concept which was more narrowly focused on the individual biography and personal achievement' (337). Dickens' Bildungsroman describes the early life of protagonists in poor positions where the work focuses on the severity of hunger as an all-present comrade (Zweierlein 343). Dickens started a new serial named *All the Year Round* (Slater 469-470) with the plan that the first part of *Great Expectations* would be published on 1 December (Slater 486). *All the Year Round* had a significantly larger readership than his previous journal *Household Words.* The prominent status that the serial received was due to its distribution of sensational texts speaking of areas such as insanity, family values and middle-class crime (Wynne 45-46). The novel would be different from his previous works about young children coming to London and searching a fortune. The title would not, as in some of his previous novels, be the protagonist's name but instead be called *Great Expectations* because it 'reaches for more', 'suggesting the fantasies not just of an individual but of a whole society, or at least a generation' (Slater 487). The novel has certain similarities with Charles Dickens' early childhood and biography, for example the thirteen siblings dying as infants which was restricted to five in the novel (Slater 486, 488).

Great Expectations published as a three-volume novel format in 1861 follows the young protagonist Pip's journey from a child to an adult and also his journey to become a gentleman, made possible through an unknown benefactor. The social mobility from the working class to the upper- middle class displays the importance of class in the Victorian society of the novel as

well as how economic capital can be implemented to transform the journey. Pip acquires not only economic, social and cultural capital, but also the behaviour and manners of a gentleman. This is a significant aspect in the transformation for Pip since economic capital is not the only area which decides if a man is truly a 'gentleman'. Behaviours and manners will be studied together with the concept of Bildungsroman to view how the distinction of class is displayed in the Victorian society and how it is reflected in *Great Expectations*. Focusing on this theme, this study will discuss how different classes in Victorian society and culture are described in *Great Expectations* as well as how Pip's social journey reflects Victorian society.

The essay begins by introducing class in *Great Expectations* and the British Bildungsroman as well as describing Marxist theory and class in the Victorian society. It will then go on to study the illustration of the working class in the Victorian society focusing on Joe and Pip and the social mobility. Lastly, education, behaviours and manners and the British Bildungsroman will be explored together with the depiction of class in *Great Expectations* and Pip's social journey, ending with a conclusion. I aim to show how Pip's social mobility reflects the Victorian society and how class differences establish differences among individuals, such as Estella and Pip. I have an interest in the characters Joe and Estella and their function in the novel since they are closely connected to Pip and represent two different classes. Joe belongs the working class and Pip's previous life, which the protagonist is embarrassed of when Joe comes to visit in London. Estella, on the other hand, represents the upper-middle class, looks down on Pip, views herself as having a higher social status and creates a desire for Pip of a specific woman that he could attain. Joe and Estella are both individuals between Pip's previous working-class background and his transformation to become a gentleman.

The connection between class in *Great Expectations* and the British Bildungsroman

Great Expectations shows the division and importance of class in the Victorian society. The class system existed but it was people themselves who made the division between classes. However, times were changing. The daily life for individuals in Victorian England was based on the foundation of social class structured by the traditional way of life in city, town and country. Class did not rely upon the amount of capital but rested on birth, family connections and source of income. The majority of individuals comprehended and accepted their class position. Class was disclosed in education, speech, manners, clothing and values (Mitchell 17).

The working class consisted of people doing manual labour such as domestic servants, agricultural labours, and factory hands. The class consisted of unskilled, semiskilled and skilled labourers like Joe in *Great Expectations*. The manual labour was physically demanding, and the majority of the working class acquired enough to live and if layoffs, an unexpected misfortune or illness occurred, they could be hurled into poverty (Mitchell 18). The middle class increased during the Victorian era, making up 15 percent in the first half of the 19th century. It was a rising class and had become substantial when *Great Expectations* was written in 1860. A quantity of this group were large-scale bankers, merchants and manufacturers who made their fortune through the Industrial Revolution (Mitchell 19-20). This class consisted of occupations that required good education such as local government workers, accountants, insurance agents and police inspectors. The value of education was significant for this class (Mitchell 20). The upper class consisted of the aristocrats and the gentry (a landowning class) whose earnings came from their land. The landowner's property was rented to working-class tenants on long-terms leases. The upper-class resided in a convenient hall or manor with servants. Aristocrats with titles let the land be taken over by the eldest son (Mitchell 21).

Pip's ability to transcend from his working-class position to the upper-middle class is solely thanks to his benefactor, a fact which sheds a light on the few real working-class individuals transcending to a new class in the Victorian society. It is through gaining access to economic, social and cultural capital as well as learning how to be a gentleman, that he is able to improve his social status in society and live a life in greater comfort, compared to if he had remained a skilled working-class blacksmith labourer like Joe.

The 19th century Bildungsroman focuses on the protagonist's transformation of growing up and gravitating towards the larger cultural and social discourses of the middle class instead of the state and its authoritarian construction (Zweierlein 336). The genre of male plots have historically put ambition as the main force moving the plots forward and sending the protagonists on their path to assimilation (Zarour Zarzar 352). Within the Bildungsroman, it is likely to aim the attention on the male bourgeois protagonist, where a 'free' improvement is the authentic opportunity and that these stories of transformation are particular conditions of social class (Zweierlein 339).

Applying Marxist theory

Marxist literary criticism involves studying literary works 'through the lens of ideology critique' (Foley 126). The mixed signals given in texts display the role of ideological conflict. The aim of attention on ideology critique is an area that Marxist critics underline how literary works provide an apologetic function that maintains the domination of the ruling-class (Foley 130).

Foley writes:

> 'The Marxist critic consists primarily in their use of theory to penetrate through the surface to depth, examining those moments when the patient's guard is down and the text's formal stability is disrupted, revealing the roots of repression in history' (Foley 133).

Marxist criticism is to disclose the ultimate grounding of essential facts in class-based profiteering (Foley 133).

Karl Marx argues that a capitalist society is maintained through "the superstructure" with literature, arts, religion and philosophy (Lynn 156). The structure and its cultural and political institutions forms the workers' ideas, the ideology of the culture and provides the unfair treatment of capitalism to make it seem natural and right. However, Marx states that the superstructure is a misconception and that the workers will in the course of time realize their exploitation and revolt (Lynn 156). Applying Marxist analysis includes to comprehend "how a culture's ideology creates the individual's self-perception" (Lynn 156-157). 'Marxist criticism strives to see literature in terms of its relationship to society, and a work is assumed to reinforce the current social structure, or undermine it, or some combination of the two' (Lynn 160).

Class in Victorian society

Victorians' obsession with class was displayed by pointing individuals to certain social categories. During the Victorian period, the new middle class began to grow and prosper and made wealth in new ways: manufacture, production, trading articles and money or by becoming engineers or stockbrokers. There was also a great urbanization towards greater cities such as London. The middle class believed in the individual's own success in the world and that if one worked harder than the next individual, they would 'make it in the world'

(British Library 2). Many novels published in the middle of the 19th century illustrated that economic and social success was accessible for any individual and demanded only dedication (Hasegawa 312). The view on economy was a free movement in services, goods and free trade and that the old-fashioned monopolies would vanish. It went as far with the attitude that if an individual had not succeeded, something was wrong (laissez-faire) (British Library 2). The Victorian literature illustrating social mobility shows how the middle class wanted to maintain their high position above average individuals, preserved by their exploitation of the masses (Hasegawa 310).

The use of money was transformed from being a predominantly local instrument of exchange to a symbol of national strength at the end of the century (Alborn 209). Capital had different meanings for individuals in the Victorian society, depending on the social class (Alborn 214). The increase of investments appeared during the Victorian period as well, with bonds and stocks that sustained the surge for railways and other similar associations which began in 1820 (Alborn 215). Timothy Alborn refers to Karl Marx who argued that money is 'the only appearance of matters' and who anticipated that the nation state would decline with the achievement of capital. When more Victorians came to understand the grasp of money, they comprehended the meanings by instrument of financial institutions, credit and a align of cultural productions. However, these individuals were less persuaded to Marx's view of the real value: the commodity of their labour (Alborn 217).

In the 19th century England, ladies and gentlemen who belonged to "society" were obsessed with sustaining and bettering their positions in the changing ranking (Morgan 91). The development in the beginning of the 19th century created possibilities for political, economic and social developments which made the aristocratic elite to be more limited and opposing. The recently wealthy professional and financial men made important advancement in civil service. This threatened the aristocracy by expanding the gentility, advancing 'a fleet of rising country men' as well as many professionals (Morgan 92). These men became a power and disputed within the field of government which differs from the group of men who came from only acres of land. The new world of industrial capitalism made it possible for individuals to contest at the place for status and profits, allocated by public favour. The industrial society was viewed more as a restricted "court", a place where participants took assumed social mobility. The individuals viewed a compulsive eagerness for social and economic improvement (Morgan 93). Political economists viewed that the achievement of industrial capitalism relied on the ambitious quest

of personal economic acquisition by individuals in all classes in the Victorian society. 'In these three-volatile social milieux, people tended to be less concerned with who they were, than with who they were becoming'. Etiquette was a significant part of re-defining one's social identity and could display important signs of a status that could without difficulty be obtained. Further, etiquette was used to restrict and ease social upgrading (Morgan 94).

Not all men who could act as a gentleman did automatically belong to the upper class. The term gentleman refers to a specific way of behaving and acting.

The working class in the Victorian society through Joe and Pip

Pip is born into a working-class family and raised by his sister Mrs Joe and her husband Joe. His parents are deceased and he has several siblings who died as infants. It is expected that Pip will inherit Joe's trade as a skilled labourer (a blacksmith) by being an apprentice to Joe. This establishes his working-class status through his work (physical labour), economic status (working for his living instead of living a life of leisure as a gentleman) and limited social and cultural capital (living in a smaller village, defining behaviour and manners, becoming an apprentice to Joe instead of studying at university or receiving a good education as an upper-middle class or upper-class gentleman). Pip describes his class position through the assignment he is handed to do:

> When I was old enough, I was to be apprenticed to Joe, and until I could assume that dignity I was not to be what Mrs Joe called 'Popmpeyed', or (as I render it) pampered. Therefore, I was not only odd-boy about the forge, but if any neighbour happened to want an extra boy to frighten birds, or pick up stones, or do any such job, I was favoured with the employment. (50)

The tasks are typically delegated to a working-class boy like Pip and the paragraph demonstrates his acceptance to the task given to him. He does not question his work position to be 'an extra boy' but accepts the assignment. It is emphasized that Mrs Joe does not want Pip to become 'pampered', described as if he was a gentleman in a higher social class, which could indicate that she wants him to become aware of his class background and to be accessible for smaller job assignments which an upper-middle class boy would not do. Hasegawa describes that the advantage of the working-class is connected to William Morris' description of 'class robbery' (1884). The stealing of the labouring class is implanted in the Victorian society, separated into two classes where the first one 'is privileged to be kept by

the labour of the other' (Hasegawa 309). Pip will be an apprentice and have more freedom compared to an unskilled labourer. However, Pip must still work for his survival and does not hold the privilege as the upper class do to rely on income and investments. He remains therefore in the working class until the unknown benefactor appears.

Miss Havisham, a wealthy lady belonging to a higher social class, lives in a house that is stuck in time and decorated as it was on her wedding day. She was left by her fiancé on that day and has ever since lived in in the shadow of that event. Miss Havisham is known around town for how she lives. Pip, on the other hand, has restrains due to his class background and the expectations of him being an apprentice to Joe, which further prevents him from achieving greater possibilities in his life. The difference of class is visible to Pip and Miss Havisham. Mr Pumblechook takes Pip to see Miss Havisham for the first time and therefore views himself as helping Pip to his fortune. He is a corn-chandler, a seedsman and owns a shop. Joe, Mrs Joe and Mr Pumblechook discuss Miss Havisham:

> (Pip speaking) 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 (59).

Miss Havisham is a flawed character due to her past and described as a gruesome and rich lady living in a house stuck in time. The lack of possibilities is displayed in Taft who writes that Pip's home village can be seen as a limited system of social relations where the village is the restraints of the world (Taft 1971). The limitations are displayed by how Miss Havisham has requested that Pip comes and plays at her house which Mrs Joe is adamant that he shall do, otherwise she will 'work him'. The invitation is important for Pip's sister since it may offer an opportunity of some kind for him due to Miss Havisham belonging to a higher social class as well as holding economic capital. It was often the case that people stayed in the same village they grew up in and the limited social relations Taft argues about is in general true for most individuals. Pip receives a rare opportunity to see another aspect of society which conforms with Taft's argument that the village itself is a restriction of the world. However, even though the village is limited to some extent, it is possible for Pip to visit Miss Havisham who can open doors for him.

Estella, being raised by Miss Havisham and used to a certain amount of wealth, aspires to achieve more in her own life through financial means, where living in a similar sized house as

she grew up in, is not enough. Miss Havisham has also raised Estella to despise men due to her own past. Therefore, Estella is harsh against other men, including Pip. The class difference becomes apparent for Pip when he realizes the division between Estella and himself and he begins to desire for more in his own life. He is aware that his working-class background is not enough to attain Estella.

Estella speaks with Pip about Miss Havisham's house:

> (Estella) It meant that it was given, that whoever had this house, could want nothing else, to which she adds her own perspective. They must have been easily satisfied in those days (chapter 8, page 65).

Miss Havisham's house is a reflection of what it once was – a stately house, which has turned into a Gothic spectre of her wedding day with time and by lack of maintenance. Estella is a product of her upbringing, looking down on individuals who do not aim for a certain social status and financial situation. This paragraph in *Great Expectations* demonstrates the gap between Estella, aspiring for more and being condescending towards Pip whereas he is becoming aware of his current limitations in his background. 'Estella's derision at the presumption that mere property could guarantee a satisfying life points to a new form of desire that inflects Pip's narrative trajectory, namely, a ceaseless desire to acquire more' (Taft 1974). Taft's argument displays Estella's requirements and goals, but Pip who does not come from a wealthy background must first digest his meeting with Estella before he can begin to battle his expectations to become an apprentice to Joe as a blacksmith. I argue that Pip does not yet in this part of the novel desire to acquire more since he is disoriented in the setting between his working-class background and the new experience at Miss Havisham's house. By applying Marxist theory, it is clear that Estella's class background has made it possible for her to live wealthy and that the financial assets most likely comes from benefiting from poor labourers. Estella, who is proud of her background, can be seen as maintaining the superstructure in society through her actions and has no further desire to improve the conditions for the less well-off. Taft writes that the understanding of class is showed when Pip realises his lack of economic capital, visible through Estella's remarks of the visual signs of taste and the identification of labour. Pip's longing for Estella shows his attempts to become a gentleman and make him attractive to her, which requires an alteration with the magic of money (Taft 1975). Pip becomes more aware of his class background which Taft writes and Estella is specific to point out areas on Pip that characterize him as a labourer. She comments on Pip's visible signs of belonging to the working class, which is far from her own

upbringing, with the aim to make Pip feel less compared to her. Pip finds himself in a new situation, realizing his class background and the difference between Estella and himself.

Pip meets Miss Havisham for the first time in her house. He is astonished by the grandeur of the house, its dated interior (from the wedding day), the appearance of her as well as the clothes dispersed around her. The meeting between the two shows the difference of class, which Pip realises in the beginning of his visit when he describes what he sees:

> She was dressed in rich materials – satins, and lace and silks – all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair and had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about (66).

The description of Miss Havisham being dressed in 'rich materials' as lace, silk and satin, which were expensive materials and wearing 'bright sparkled jewels' meant that she has access to economical capital. This shows her belonging to a higher social class (upper-middle class) compared to Pip's working-class background. Miss Havisham's wealth comes from her family, more specifically her father who owned a brewery, was most likely has been engaged in and profited from the industrialisation in England, where according to Marx, the working-class people are viewed as laborers without an identity, used by the bourgeoise. Pip, unfamiliar to the surroundings of Miss Havisham, experiences a different world which has so far been unreachable to him. The amounts of material items indicate further the economic assets Miss Havisham possesses compared to the weaker economic capital of Pip's. Hasegawa writes that Pip's desire to social progress makes him to view everything in the circle of the working-class to be low and negative (311). Pip has not experienced class difference before due to the lack of interaction between classes. It displays how the difference of class becomes increasingly apparent for Pip during and after his visit, since the clothing and jewels on and around Miss Havisham is the sort of wealth that he has not witnessed before. Hasegawa's argument fits with how Pip begins to question his class background and compare it to the upper-middle class. He begins to process his experiences after the visit and feels that his class is no longer good enough for him as it was before.

Pip's working-class background

Pip has comprehended his working-class background and differences between classes. He was prior to the visit satisfied to become an apprentice to Joe and to live and work with him. However, after his visit to Miss Havisham and encountering Estella, he views himself more critically than before. Pip's previous ambition to become a blacksmith is therefore no longer enough for his new ambitions:

> 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. (123, chapter 13)

His previous desire to follow the tradition of taking the same trade as Joe is no longer suitable to Pip's new ambition to be something that can give him a higher social status in life. He views his destiny to be the same: to be an apprentice to Joe, as he was to his own father (Taft 1971). The skilled blacksmith trade is inherited from generation to generation but Pip sees other possibilities after visiting a higher social class setting.

Taft describes Pip's expected path as 'no longer suitable' but it is rather disappointing for Pip to realize what he is destined to be in contrast to the idea of becoming something that will give him 'a higher social status'. This is displayed further with Zweierlein who argues that the working-class dependability to work for survival is in direct contrast to the status of upper-middle class (gentle)men who have a freer leisure at their hands, whereas the labourers lack the possibility and freedom to devote themselves to activities such as education, sport and cultural activities.

According to Marxist theory, the culture's ideology, capitalism, creates the individual's self-perception which is clearly shown in this paragraph from the novel when Pip is 'wretched' and feels strongly that he would never like to be a blacksmith. After the visit to Miss Havisham, he makes it clear for himself that he will not take it on as an occupation which displays how the Victorian society is maintained through the superstructure and Pip is adamant to become something else. Pip is expected to follow Joe's footsteps as a labourer due to his working-class background and it conforms with the Marxist theory that an individual's birth in a specific class determines the prospects and perspectives. Zweierlein refers to William James who states that a membership of a social class is decided at birth and becomes more speaking during the upbringing. An 'accomplished gentleman' has been provided with

job positions during his early period in life and has advanced his capability and talents. This differs from the working-class child which is 'starved in body and mind (Zweierlein 349). Pip has not received an upbringing as an 'accomplished gentleman' and his social class has not led him to improve talents and capability as a young boy from the upper-middle class would have. He can to some extent be described as 'starved in body and mind' as Zweierlein 2012 argues, however, Pip will be an apprentice and learn a skilled trade which means that he will not be entirely withheld from development and will receive a trade that he can support himself with. Morgan highlights that class mobility in the 19th century England focused not on 'who they were, than with who they were becoming' (94). This is exemplified in *Great Expectations* when Pip realizes the difference of class when Estella is given instructions to play with him. She calls him 'a common labouring-boy' and when he goes home afterward, he becomes more conscious of his 'low class surroundings' (Stearns and Burns 5-6). After the visit to Miss Havisham, Pip has seen a different way of life which was unknown to him before and he aspires to reach success outside his village. He begins on a mobility that agrees with what Morgan writes – 'with who they were becoming' – in that Pip is focused to become something else than a blacksmith apprentice.

After some thinking, Pip comes up with the idea to become a gentleman and tells Biddy (who is a childhood friend of his in the beginning of the novel and later on marries Joe after Pip's sister, Mrs Joe, is murdered) about it. He describes his unhappiness with his calling in life in a conversation with her and expresses how it makes him feel wretched. Biddy views that perhaps Pip should settle for the current position in life:

> 'Biddy', I said, with some severity, 'I have particular reasons for wanting to be a gentleman'. You know best, Pip; but you don't think you are happier as you are? 'Biddy', I exclaimed, impatiently. 'I am not happy as I am. I am disgusted with my calling and with my life. I have never taken to either, since I was bound. Don't be absurd. Well then, understand once for all that I never shall or can be comfortable – or anything but miserable – there, Biddy! – unless I can lead a very different sort of life from the life I lead now. (149)

Biddy's main message to Pip is that he is happy as he is, which Pip rejects. She views that he is better off staying where he is without having 'a worldly experience' (Zhang 516). Pip has seen other outcomes where being a gentleman lies in his new interest. His repulsion with his 'calling' alters his previous goals where he must now find a way to change his life. This

conforms with Zhang's argument of the difference between how Pip and Biddy view the situation. Pip's changed behaviour can display how the upper-middle class maintains its domination in the Victorian society by showing him the greatness of living wealthier. He aspires now to be a gentleman which can be seen as the result of successfully 'winning over' a working-class blacksmith apprentice and therefore strengthening their position even more. William Morris, referred to by Hasegawa, wrote that the powerful class forces the labourers to work and then takes what it can take to further maintain the privileged position, where the higher social status makes these individuals to be more beautiful, live longer and be purer (Hasegawa 309). Morris' argument can be applied to *Great Expectations* when Pip does not want to perform labour to survive, describing it as being 'disgusted with my calling and with my life'. Instead, he wants to attain a position as a gentleman to reach for more in his own life and develop beyond being a blacksmith apprentice. He agrees with the description of being in a privileged position according to William Morris and how they are not required to perform labour due to being in a higher social class than Pip himself. The Victorian literature on social mobility led to a yearning among working-class people to access a higher social class which was usually impossible for them (Hasegawa 313). Hasegawa emphasizes an important aspect in Victorian literature on this particular theme: doing a social mobility from the labouring class to a higher social class was very rare and describes the 'great expectations' that Pip will experience. He admires the higher social classes and their privileged position in society and aims to be there himself one day.

Pip's social mobility and entrance to the upper middle class

Pip has an anonymous benefactor who requests that he becomes a gentleman in London. He pursues the opportunity, travels to London and gains access to economic, social and cultural capital. Pip learns how to dress, behave and act as a gentleman and access social circles that would not have been possible for him without the anonymous benefactor. After some time, Joe visits Pip in London and is appalled at the differences between the two and at Joe's manners when they are eating at a fine restaurant and describes him as 'rather backward'. Pip, having been in London for quite some time, does not consider Joe and his class background where he has stayed, while Pip has evolved his social status. He explains the situation to Biddy:

> Well! Joe is a dear good fellow – in fact, I think he is the dearest fellow that have ever lived – but he is rather backward in some things. For instance, Biddy, in his learning and his manners. Although I was looking at Biddy as I spoke, and although she opened

> her eyes very wide when I had spoken, she did not look at me. Oh, his manners! Won't his manners do then? asked Biddy, plucking a black currant leaf. My Dear Biddy, they do very well here -. Oh! they do very well here? interposed Biddy, looking closely at the leaf in her hand. Hear me out – but if I were to remove Joe into a higher sphere, as I shall hope to remove him when fully come into my property, they would hardly do him justice. (173, chapter 19)

Campbell states that Pip's social mobility is possible through the unknown benefactor's help and it displays the pleasant base for the middle class, relying on the hard work of the labouring class (Hasegawa 308). Pip is determined to leave his position as an apprentice to live a dissimilar life as a comfortable gentleman and the anonymous benefactor creates possibilities for Pip that would not have been possible otherwise.

The rising middle class in the Victorian society could improve their position by taking job positions in banks, shops and offices which grew due to the development in many areas where new industries blossomed. The pleasant base that Hasegawa writes about may not be applicable to the whole middle class due to the wide field of occupations. The development in society required people who could take new positions that was not necessarily to do with the pleasant base. Some areas, such as railways and factory owners, relied more heavily on the hard work of the working class. Dickens many characters in his work were from a broadly ignored underclass where the society's deterioration from the feudal structure gave way to the industrial capitalism (Stearns and Burns 2). William James argues that to dress like a gentleman is a failure for the lower classes due to the lack of economic capital and success, viewed as significant in the Victorian society, since these men cannot purchase the correct items (Zweierlein 350). Pip's access to economic funds makes it possible for him to dress like a gentleman, attainable thanks to Magwitch, his anonymous benefactor, which agrees with William James' argument. Further, the new position as a gentleman illustrates clearly Pip's social mobility and place in London as well as the increased difference between himself and Joe.

The paragraph in the novel shows how the dominating ruling-class maintains their position by how Pip is influenced and has changed his view on life (manners, behaviour) from the upper-middle class. His conversation with Biddy shows the difference of class where she is rather upset at Pip's remarks of dear Joe, but Pip has difficulties considering Biddy's perspective.

Pip's development through the anonymous benefactor is rare, where Taft describes Dickens' novel as displaying the magic when the protagonist is changed from a blacksmith's apprentice to a pursuing metropolitan gentleman, as "a young fellow of great expectations" (Taft 1977). Hasegawa refers to Meckier who states that *Great Expectations* gives the unrealistic guarantee that any individual can have a magical Cinderella status (Hasegawa 309). Both Taft and Meckier in Hasegawa show how rare Pip's social mobility in the Victorian society was (Hasegawa 309). Pip's 'great expectations' becomes a Cinderella story more suitable for the fairy tale books than the reality of the working-class where some aspired to achieve more than to settle with class that they were born into and the expected future job positions.

Education, behaviours and manners: becoming a gentleman and the Bildungsroman

The idea of the self-made man was ever present in Victorian literature. The self-made man who had created his own wealth and social status and the idea of the gentleman are incorporated in the novel and assemble Pip's desire to social mobility after Estella's description of him as "a common labouring-boy"' (Hasegawa 304). According to Samuel Smiles' book 'Self-Help', a poor man can still be a real gentleman in the everyday life and spirit while a rich man does not have essential connections to be a proper gentleman. Therefore, the poor man can be greater than a rich man with his rich spirit than the rich man with a destitute spirit (Hasegawa 305-306).

Taft states that to become a gentleman, the individual cannot already "be" a gentleman. Pip does not reach the upper class since it is characterized by eliminating him. This shows according to Bakhtin the Bildungsroman as 'an image in the process of becoming' (Taft 1979). Taft writes that Pip's arrival in London makes him to pursue an education that will make him compete with other young men with the same comfortable situation. Through his clothing, he can learn the language to become a "member of society" by wearing a neckcloth, hat, head, trousers, boots and a waistcoat (Taft 1978).

Pip becomes accustomed to his new life as a gentleman in the upper-middle class and begins to reflect on his development and social mobility. He starts to question himself, his treatment of Joe and how life would have been if he had not met Miss Havisham. Pip plays with the idea of how his life would be if he had stayed as an apprentice to Joe, to be satisfied with those circumstances and remain 'in the honest old forge' (312):

> 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 behaviour to Joe. When I woke up in the night – like Camilla – I used to think, with weariness on my spirit, that I should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face, and risen to the manhood content to be partners with Joe in the honest old forge (volume 2, chapter 15, page 312).

Taft writes that Charles Dickens applies the Bildungsroman to show how the ambition to go beyond the world of labour disfigures the everyday life as money develops the quality of social ties with other individuals as well as with himself (the individual), which is shown through Pip's transformation (clothes, education, social relations, fortune) and his travel to London. Even though Pip has become accustomed to a certain way of living (being a gentleman with 'great expectations' as Taft (2020) argues, he remains critical and questions himself and his transformation.

From a Marxist point of view, Pip has abandoned his previous working-class background and gone through a social mobility to become a gentleman. He has used economic capital to pursue and live his dream on the expenses of other poor labourers, where his belonging to the upper-middle class reinforces the superstructure of society – he does not question it. Pip ascending a new social position in the upper-middle class and the accumulated fortune and its comforts creates confusion for Pip and he feels conflicted towards Joe and his new social positions.

The comforts Pip is enjoying are only material. His previous position as a blacksmith through honest labour but less material assets; has a higher emotional value to Pip than being a gentleman in London. Pip misses his old life when he was a partner with Joe and feels that his new life strains the relation to him. Although his development is admirable and the reader wishes that Pip will succeed, the reality of the Victorian society with a story like Pip's was not common. Taft argues that a young protagonist of a Bildungsroman cannot ascend to a different position with new social relations without some magic (Taft 1969-1970). According to Taft, Pip's access to finances becomes a shopping expedition with fashionable clothes, a furnished room, membership in a private club as well as a servant which shows his opening to

society. Taft's argument displays the fairy tale story that *Great Expectations* actually is and how economic capital can transform an individual's life beyond the limitations of a village or a class background. Pip's social mobility to become a gentleman is possible thanks to his unknown benefactor who later on turns out to be the convict Magwitch. Hasegawa argues that the literature on the theme of the self-made man was used to trick the working-class to be industrious and honest (307). Pip could therefore be pleased with his working-class position from the start, work honest and continue to learn a skill to become a blacksmith.

The literature printed during the Victorian period aimed for the working-class to be honest and work hard, where it could be argued that it was used as a course of action to prevent the large part of the working-class from improving their own position. The richer class could therefore protect their own position in society by emphasizing to the working-class to continue to work as they do now. Zhang refers to Q.D Lewis who states that Pip's mobility teaches him to cherish honest labour and work (514). Joe lectures Pip on goodness and his disappointment in desiring a gentleman lifestyle which further reinforces the recognition of Joe's life philosophy (Zhang 514). From a Marxist point of view, the richer classes enrich themselves through their profits while the workers are seen as a commodity. Pip's remorse makes him consider how life could have been if he had not embarked on the visit to Miss Havisham and instead continued with the apprenticeship with Joe. This paragraph in the novel shows the British Bildungsroman's relation between the individual and society through Pip's own reflection of his own transformation. The focus on the complete change from his working-class background to inclining into the middle class and the greater social and cultural discourses rather than the state and its authoritarian construction as Zweierlein argues, illustrates how Dickens has presented the importance of class in the Victorian society and the social separation between them.

Pip lives a life as a gentleman in London, and although his social mobility has taught him how to act and behave, as well as how to gain access to economic, social and cultural capital, he has not been taught how to take care of his finances. He has mismanaged them to the extent that debt collectors visit him to receive the debt and his life as a gentleman in London is slowly coming to an end:

> What do you want? I asked starting; I don't know you. Well, sir, returned one of them, bending down and touching me on the shoulder, this is a matter that you'll soon arrange, I dare say, but you're arrested. What is the debt? Hundred and twenty-three pound,

> fifteen, six. Jeweller's account, I think. What is to be done? You had better come to my house, said the man. I keep a very nice house. I made some attempt to get up and dress myself. When I next attended to them, they were standing a little off from the bed, looking at me. I still lay there. (Volume 3, chapter 18, page 528)

Wynne argues that the jeweller's account attests to the extravagance and inequality in the Victorian society between the labouring classes and the wealthier middle class, which Dickens wanted to highlight in his stories. Pip's illusion of social mobility aimed the view of Miss Havisham as a 'fairy godmother' which blinds him to the connection between Satis House and Newgate prison (Wynne 53). Wynne's argument can be put into the context in the beginning of the novel when Pip visits Miss Havisham for the first time and sees the extravagant materials scattered around. He was astonished by the extravagance where I argue earlier that the difference of class becomes increasingly apparent for him. The same applies to this section of *Great Expectations* where Pip's debt to the jeweller's account shows the contrasts in his life from his first visit to Miss Havisham as a labouring boy to now being an upper-middle class gentleman who has lived beyond his means in London. Pip's transformation to become a gentleman would not have been possible without his anonymous benefactor which displays the importance of how economic capital is vital to social mobility in the Victorian society. The accumulated fortune that he accesses comes not from a benefactor belonging to a higher social class but from a Magwitch, a criminal. From a Marxist perspective, the fortune was made (before the benefactor was known) to come very likely from exploited labourers which Pip enjoyed and spent, while working-class individuals were used and oppressed through the superstructure, reinforced as normal in a society. Zweierlein writes that *Great Expectations* focuses on Pip's transformation to become a gentleman and his development to social and cultural capital and the middle class rather than the state and its authoritarian construction. This argument can be put in the context of how the middle class wanted to place individuals in social classes to determine where they belonged (British Library 2), where I argue that the novel illustrates clearly the limitations and restrictions of the Victorian society and culture and where Pip's story is magical but far from the reality. Although Pip's social mobility is illustrated as a 'great expectation' with economic, social and cultural capital, it was a rare occurrence in Victorian society and culture as Zweierlein 2012 states. Dickens' story of Pip is magical, as Taft argues and where Hagawesa highlights the mid-Victorian literature on working-class men, the self-made man and climbing up the social ladder. I argue that *Great Expectations* portrays an almost 'too good to be true' story where

the working-class labouring boy Pip is chosen to be educated in London to become a gentleman, to give a glimpse to readers in the working-class how a social mobility to a higher social class could be – if an unknown benefactor appeared suddenly. Despite literature on class mobility in the 19th century which aimed at working-class men (Hasegawa 305), to succeed climbing the social ladder like Pip does; it was rather an illusion.

Depiction of class in *Great Expectations* and its reflection of the Victorian society

The difference of class is depicted by the clear contrasts between Pip belonging to the working-class in the beginning of the novel, when his goal is to become a blacksmith apprentice to Joe, and then being introduced to Miss Havisham and Estella, who belong to an upper-middle class. Pip has previously not experienced the division of class between people which becomes apparent when he visits Miss Havisham and sees her clothes, sparkling jewels and half-packed trunks. The realization of class is further reinforced by Estella's remarks of Pip being a common labouring boy with thick boots.

Pip's social journey

Pip decides later on that he does not want to become an apprentice to Joe anymore since it does not suit his new ambitions. The unknown benefactor appears with the intention that Pip shall become a gentleman in London. Pip's social mobility illustrates the belonging of class in *Great Expectations* and how the unknown benefactor creates the opportunity for him to attain a position among the upper-middle class and achieve access to economic, cultural and social capital as well as behaviour and manners. He believes that his benefactor belongs to a higher social class than himself, only to be disappointed when he finds out that it is Magwitch, a convicted criminal living abroad. Dickens demonstrates the difficulties for a working-class boy to transcend into a higher social class without economic capital and opportunities that comes along (education, contacts, cultural capital). The area of class is a major theme in *Great Expectations* but the novel also touches upon other themes such as relations, kindness and maturity.

Conclusion

This thesis has studied how class is illustrated in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and how it can show the limitations and restrictions of the Victorian society and culture through the protagonist Pip and a lesser focus on Joe and Estella, representing the working-class labourer and the upper-middle class lady. Marxist theory has been applied to study how class differences, social, economic and cultural capital and labourers are illustrated. The results show how economic capital can make a social mobility possible while the Victorian society imposed limitations and restrictions for individuals without a fortune and therefore the difficulties of improving one's class belonging. A second finding was Pip's self-perception as a blacksmith belonging to the working-class, which becomes increasingly apparent after meeting Estella. A third finding is how Pip struggles (by not taking care of his finances, missing close relationships and difficulties with his new identity) as a gentleman in his new upper-middle class position.

Suggestions for future research are more studies on how different characters in *Great Expectations* are represented from a class perspective, how Victorian writers displayed differences of class in literature and in which way social mobility can present difficulties for the individual (Pip's situation) when moving between two classes.

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