

The Great Expectations as a Bildungsroman

The main premise of a Bildungsroman is that it traces the development of the protagonist from childhood to adulthood or from naiveté to maturity. In the novel, Pip the protagonist experiences a variety of events which shape his aspirations and outlook towards life. As a child, he keeps himself alienated from his termagant and discursive sister, who treats him-‘as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion and morality’. But Pip has an affectionate eye for her husband, Mr Joe-‘perhaps for no better reason than because the dear fellow let me love him’. His life is dragged along the monotony and plainness of the country life and often is subdued by the domineering care of his sister.

Pip sooner stumbles upon a chance event when his uncle, on the bidding of a noble woman-Miss Havisham, takes him to Satis House. Pip encounters the first glimpses of wealthy living through this character and her adopted daughter Estella. A sudden yet unmistakable urge to become a gentleman is kindled in him as he is captivated by Estella’s stately disposition and understands to win her love its imperative for him to rise above his social class. This stage forms his first great expectation and the nuanced changes in his character are clearly discernible. He believes his first rendezvous with the nobility of Satis house has opened new avenues for his ambitions-“That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me.”

Quite ironically Pip accuses Joe, for his own rustic and unsophisticated upbringing-“I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up an then I should have been so too.” His desire to impress Estella makes him blind to the things that once were his dear possessions, a reminder of people who lessened his somewhat aggrieved life-“It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home.”

In the fourth year of his apprenticeship to Joe, another fortunate event occurs which triggers his ambition anew-it’s the appearance of a lawyer Jiggers with the news that an anonymous benefactor has decided to make a gentleman out of Pip. The moment he discloses-“The communication I have to make is that, he (Pip) has great expectations”, Pip’s ecstasy knows no bound. His pride soon takes center stage, as he inherits his expectations and the ensuing social status. He promises himself “to bestow...a gallon of condescension upon everybody in the village.” His overt patronizing and contempt of his low class people, marks a departure from his nature one beholds in the beginning of the novel.

Pip’s travails in London as a gentleman infuses in him such derision against his roots, his past and especially against Joe in whose company, he

feels intensely embarrassed. He endeavors to make—"Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella's reproach." He admonishes Joe to behave civilly in front of his rival Drummle lest his action is mortifying for his status and damaging for his reputation. Later he broods on his cold behavior against Joe, the person who was like a bosom friend for him, but whose goodwill and care has now been eclipsed by Pip's ostentatious pride—"So through our life worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise." He reproaches himself for his newfound ego at the behest of his gentlemanly training. Torn between his native grooming and gallant living, he's dumbfounded to see Joe who in spite of his austerity consoles him in a manner smacking of a wise gentleman—"Pip...I may say...one man's blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith and one's goldsmith, and one's a coppersmith. Divisions among such must come, and must be met as they come. You and me is not two figures to be together in London...I am awful dull..." Pip is thrown into a predicament and questions the very importance of becoming a gentleman. He realizes if someone has been injured by his ambition then it's he himself—"All other swindlers are nothing to self-swindlers."

Pip's materialistic venture in London speaks of his naiveté. He finds his life empty and without foundation when he's sunk in ever-burgeoning debts—"We spent as much money as we could...we were always more and less miserable... There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did." Later Pip comes to realize the true identity of his benefactor and it becomes known he's the father of Estella as well. In helping his patron-Magwitch to escape from the city police, Pip's generosity and strength of mind comes to light. This serves as turning point in his life as he finally figures out the road to happiness lies in helping others—"I did really cry in good earnest...to think that my expectations had done some good to somebody."

Pip's anguish worsens when he finds his childhood love Estella betrothed to his beta-noire-Drummele. Estella was a major stimulus for Pip to strive for becoming a gentleman and her betrayal is mortal to him. Yet he forswears the tragic path Miss Havisham undertook after the trauma she suffered due to her to-be husband's infidelity. He doesn't react to Estella's rejection unlike Miss Havisham who- "in shutting out the light of the day, she had shut out infinitely more; she had secluded herself from a thousand natural healing influences...her mind had grown diseased... as all minds... who reverse the appointed order of their maker."

Pip at this stage remains still compassionate to Miss Havisham, knowingly the grievous act she has committed—"in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection and wounded pride, found vengeance in..." He accuses the vanities of this world for compelling the miserable plight of Miss Havisham—"And could I look upon her without compassion seeing her punishment in the ruin...she was placed in the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, the vanity of penitence..." Its Pip sensibility that instead of

childishly rebuking the already distraught Miss. Havisham, he consoles her with gentle commiseration.

Pip finally returns to his village, with an earnest desire to make amends with Joe. His ambitions, remorse at his reproach of Joe, self doubt of his expectations, futile yearning for Estella and then his realization of true happiness in serving others,; all events chronicle his development from an age of naiveté to the high pedestal of sensibleness, hence this novel yields the Bildungsroman vein.