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Trabajo Fin de Grado

Female Empowerment and Transgression in
the Construction of Pip in *Great Expectations*

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Abstract

This Undergraduate Dissertation offers a feminist approach to the work *Great Expectations*. It aims to investigate the influence of women on Pip's environment and the valuable moral and social lessons that Pip receives at different stages of his life. This contributes to his development as a character, as Pip's construction is achieved through a critical analysis of the construction of the characters of Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella and Bidley. These female characters are classified as moderate or passionate, following Garnett's categorisation of Dickensian characters, and transgress social norms, since they belong to a patriarchal world where everything is immovable as far as gender and social class are concerned. It is precisely this transgressive environment and its consequences, as well as the presence or absence of passionate actions that has so much influence on Pip's development from childhood to maturity, influencing his way of acting, thinking and perceiving the world.

Resumen

Este Trabajo Fin de Grado ofrece un acercamiento feminista a la obra *Grandes Esperanzas*. Su principal objetivo es indagar en la influencia femenina del entorno del personaje de Pip y las valiosas lecciones morales y sociales que este recibe en sus diferentes etapas de la vida y que, por tanto, contribuyen al desarrollo de su personaje. La construcción del personaje de Pip se hace a través del análisis crítico de la construcción de los personajes de Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella y Bidley. Estos personajes femeninos son clasificados como moderados o pasionales, siguiendo la categorización de los personajes de Dickens propuesta por Garnett, y ofrecen transgresiones sociales, puesto que se encuentran en un mundo patriarcal en el que todo es inamovible en lo que al género y a la clase social refiere. Es precisamente este entorno transgresor y sus consecuencias, así como la presencia o ausencia de acciones pasionales de estos personajes femeninos lo que tanta influencia tiene en el desarrollo de Pip desde su infancia hasta su madurez, condicionando su forma de actuar, pensar y percibir el mundo.

1. Introduction

Great Expectations is a novel written by Charles Dickens and published in 1861. The book is about a young boy named Pip who was born at the bottom of the Victorian ladder and was raised by his sister Mrs. Joe and her husband. Pip is eager to change and become an educated gentleman. Then he receives a great amount of money anonymously and that helps him achieve his dream. However, during that process he meets several figures, such as Miss Havisham, Estella, Bidley or Magwitch among others, who bring about turning points both in his way of thinking and in his life decisions. He learns important lessons that help him become a better person and really value what he had previously rejected.

Victorian literature often portrayed social transgression and deviance as a threat to the established social order, and explored the consequences of such behaviour. In *Great Expectations*, not only does Dickens focus on the female characters, but also on their effect on the male characters to exemplify how these characters challenge the social order and the consequences of their transgressive behaviour. In this dissertation I will analyse how the construction of the female characters builds the main male character Pip, since they act either as a reflection of their social status, the ideas and the morality of the Victorian era, or as a deviance from them. Moreover, the main female characters represent a challenge to Pip and the readers due to the fact that the latter have expectations which do not meet what actually happens. The views of Pip on social class, personality and love vary throughout the novel.

Pip is a character whose background is mainly based on women, for which he can be interpreted as a female-centred character. As I will further explore, Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella and Bidley guide him unconsciously in his process of maturation and growing realisation of what truly matters in life. Pip is a character that has always been marked by women and the search for maternal love due to the affective deficiencies that he has always endured. Each woman he comes across is different from each other but at the same time similar, and they teach him different aspects not only of life itself or of the way of thinking, but also of himself, which helps him forge his personality and bring out his best version.

To present this idea, I will first explain the context of the book and its author, that is, Victorian literature and Charles Dickens. Afterwards, I will explain how the four

main female characters, Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella and Bidley, are constructed by means of the combination of their social class and the result of different life circumstances. At the same time, I will explain in which ways these characters and their interactions affect the construction of Pip. For this, I will use the book *Great Expectations* and secondary readings that will corroborate and support my analysis. In particular, I will mainly base my critical examination of the novel on the categorisation of Dickensian characters carried out by scholars such as Raphael, Simmons and Garnett.

2. Context: Dickens & Victorian Literature

Charles John Huffam Dickens (1812 - 1870) was an English writer of the Victorian era and author of many notable novels such as *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1853) and *Great Expectations* (1861). His parents sent him to work in a warehouse at the age of 12. Therefore, he experienced child exploitation in the factory and the poor labour conditions of the time. His mother was his greatest influence and reference (Şenel 3).

In Victorian times women struggled to fit in the patriarchal society in which they lived, since they were marginalised and despised. Women were economically and socially dependent on their husbands. Women did not have the same opportunities as men in education and labour, since they were supposed to remain in their homes to take care of their family. This implied that they should be serene, obedient, obliging and well behaved. A stereotype regarding women was that they were fragile and emotional. Women had to be committed to the home to show the right morals. Dickens agreed with the standards and ideologies regarding Victorian women. However, in his works he also attempted to expose the difficult and struggling situation that these women bore as well as their denial of power or authority as they were supposed to confine themselves to the domestic sphere. The portrayal of women that Dickens made in his works was influenced by his own personal experiences with women. According to Nikhat, Dickens was more fond of characters that represented the image of a woman who was devoted to the house and her husband. Nevertheless, he also included women who involved some kind of transgression to the established order and, thus, were treated harshly and sternly by men or even other women (542). By presenting both types of female characters, their treatment and their inner lives, Dickens subtly criticised the patriarchal society.

Although Dickens may agree with Victorian standards of correct moral values and devotion to the domestic sphere of women, I consider that with his work *Great Expectations* and the portrayal of both types of female characters he shows the Victorian patriarchal system. However, I believe that the female characters in this work represent a challenge to that system. In the following sections I will analyse the female characters Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella and Bidley and how their construction builds Pip's character to show how Dickens challenges this patriarchal system and its treatment towards women.

3. Pip as a Bildungsroman Character

Pip is the protagonist of *Great Expectations*, in which we see his evolution from a small and naive child to a mature and resolute man. In this sense, this novel is a clear example of Bildungsroman. Like all Bildungsroman novels, this work is also divided into three very distinguished parts through which Pip's moral progress can be seen: his childhood, adolescence and maturity (Ahmed 2).

This character begins as an orphan belonging to the lower social class. During his childhood, he remains in the care of his older sister Mrs. Joe and her husband Joe Gargery, who works as a blacksmith. From the beginning Pip is treated very harshly both by family members and by outsiders such as the convict Magwitch or Orlik among others. As Ahmed argues, at this stage of his life Pip has no problem with his social class or his appearance, in fact he has the humblest and sincerest values (3). However, the moment he sets foot in the house of Miss Havisham, Satis House, everything changes and from then on he aspires to change his whole persona, giving way to the next stage in his life: adolescence.

In this new stage the search for his identity is shown by means of his eagerness to become a gentleman and be with Estella. Pip is alienated from the people who supposedly loved him and were with him in his childhood. Instead he joins Herbert, Matthew Pocket, Jaggers and Wemmick. All these men show him how to become a gentleman, he learns their manners and their mind sets. However, it is when he discovers that his benefactor is Magwitch that he moves to the next stage in life: maturity.

This next and last stage illustrates the second turning point in the life of Pip, since the discovery of his benefactor is astonishing for him. Pip returns to his origins and becomes aware of all the wrongs he did to Joe and the people who loved him. He also realises that all he believed in was an illusion and that all he did was in vain. However, as Ahmed states, Pip learns the most valuable lesson, which is that being a gentleman has nothing to do with class but with personality and essence (5). By doing so, in *Great Expectations* Dickens exposes the three types of social class in the Victorian era —the poor, the middle-class and the upper-class— and shows that fortune and class have no relevance if there is no love, loyalty, and moral values, Ahmed claims (6).

Bearing in mind the ideas cited above, it is clear that *Great Expectations* constitutes an example of Bildungsroman. Pip's process of maturation has generally been analysed and discussed by approaching Pip as a male-centred character, as scholars such as Morris, Ying and Phelan have done. By contrast, in this dissertation, I will analyse Dickens's novel from a feminist point of view. I will focus on the most important women who play a significant role in Pip's life, and demonstrate how each of them leaves a mark on him. In this way, I will present Pip as a female-centred character and will offer an original and enjoying insight of this book.

4. Female Figures in *Great Expectations*

The female characters of *Great Expectations* that will be analysed in this essay are Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella and Bidley. Pip interacts with these four women and each one of them provides a new perspective not only on the narrative but also on the evolutionary process of Pip. First of all, I will talk about their characterisation as women: that is to say, how they are portrayed, what they represent both in society and in the novel, how they act and their motives behind their behaviours. Finally, I will explain their effects on both the reader and Pip.

According to Garnett, the characters in *Great Expectations* can be classified as moderate and passionate. The moderate characters are those who are perfect examples of the domestic and social virtues that Victorian society supported whereas the passionate ones are those he understood but who at the same time did not approve of due to their egocentric impulses (25). In what follows, I will also explain to which

category each of the female characters belong and whether they represent a transgression or not to the social norms that were established in the Victorian era.

4.1 Mrs. Joe: Harshness and Care

Mrs. Joe is Pip's sister and the first important woman that he encounters. Mrs. Joe belongs to the category of passionate characters. Although she is always in the domestic sphere, she deviates from the Victorian norm. Moreover, she is very harsh on Pip but that roughness and lack of love are precisely what make Pip learn and mature.

From the very first moment Mrs. Joe is portrayed from the male point of view, namely, from the perspective of Pip and Joe, her husband. Pip describes her as an ugly and brute woman "She was not a good-looking woman [...]. My sister had such a prevailing redness of skin [...] she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap" (Dickens 8). This negative description of her physical appearance is a reflection of her personality "full of pins and needles" (8). Mrs. Joe is surrounded by elements such as pins and needles which are sharp and have to be used carefully in order not to be harmed. In this sense, these objects are a metaphor of her personality, since she can be as harmful as these objects. Besides, pins and needles are related with sewing, which is one of the activities that Victorian women did to take care of their houses. Her mere description is very significant because it already shows the situation in which she finds herself: the domestic sphere and her character. She is a genuine Victorian woman, as she does not work and her main role is to take care of her home, her husband and her brother Pip, whom she treats as a son. From the first moment she is forced to adopt the position of a mother because their parents died and she has to take care of her brother. Moreover, her social class turns her into an even more determined character. Due to her gender and class, she will never be able to leave her position both as a house woman and as the working class to which she and her family belong. In fact, she is often addressed not only by others but also mainly by herself as "a blacksmith's wife" (22), which clearly illustrates her doubly dependent status.

Unlike the stereotypical image of a Victorian woman, Mrs. Joe challenges the Victorian gender conventions since she is not subordinated to men. That is, even though she does not leave that domestic realm, she is the one who commands and makes the decisions, who takes care of the money and who allows who can get close to her and her family. In other words, she is the one who controls everything and thus she is placed in a superior position by all the characters who fear and respect her. As an illustration, in

chapter 5 when Pip wants to see the soldiers looking for the escaped convicts, he states: “Joe said it was agreeable, and would take me, if Mrs. Joe approved” (33). In short, as this example shows, Mrs. Joe represents a figure of authority not only for Pip, but also for her husband and the rest of the family. This position of authority and her imposition as a mother figure allow her to forge a strong and predominant character throughout the novel. Moreover, she is a hostile and very strict woman and that is precisely what makes Pip a humble and educated child for what their social class is. For instance, in chapter 4 when the Gargery's are preparing dinner to celebrate Christmas, Pip argues: “Mrs. Joe was in a cross temper. That was so much her normal state that Joe and I [Pip] would often, for weeks together, be, as to our fingers, like monumental crusaders as to their legs.” (22).

According to Garnett, Mrs. Joe can be classified among the passionate characters, because even though she has been forced to take care of the house and her brother as if he were her son, Mrs. Joe is “violent and combustible” because her “erotic energies erupt in pyrotechnic violence” (26). She is guided by her impulses and desires, since she treats Pip and Joe very roughly, and even cruelly sometimes. According to Simmons, for Dickens Mrs. Joe is a “bad” woman, because she is neither a good mother nor a good wife. In fact, her hotheaded behaviour can be compared to Eve, since both of them follow their impulses and do not have moral rightness (124). Moreover, there is a similarity between Mrs. Joe and Miss Havisham that Pip himself makes. This is made clear when he is first hired by Miss Havisham, and he decides not to be as sincere about the appearance and attitude of Miss Havisham as his sister would have liked him to be. This is because Pip feels that the two of them have many aspects in common and that Mrs. Joe can comprehend the behaviour and mentality of Miss Havisham more than he would like to. Pip thinks that if she knew about Miss Havisham he would no longer be allowed to visit her (Raphael 409). Furthermore, Raphael also states that the fact that Mr. Joe can understand and relate to Miss Havisham in ways Pip cannot is because he does not comprehend the behaviour of his sister towards him (409). In a way, both women share the same tough essence.

Since he was a child, Pip had been raised in an uncommon and rare environment to most Victorian households. The subversion of the role of authority in his house and the brutality of his sister when dealing with him made Pip respect and obey her and not Joe. For instance, when Pip did something wrong, such as feeding the convict

Magwitch, he is afraid that his sister might find out and of how she would react: “the terrors that had assailed me whenever Mrs. Joe had gone near the pantry, or out of the room, were only to be equalled by the remorse with which my mind dwelt on what my hands had done,” Pip thinks (Dickens 23). That is, his fear resided in the female figure rather than in the male one. This implies a complete anomaly for that time, since according to Victorian social standards it was the male role that had the authority and who should be feared. In Pip’s case, Mrs. Joe has a brutal and hostile influence on Pip, because during his childhood he was exposed to an atypical world in which he did not receive the maternal or feminine love that he should have had. As Huston argues, the term “raised by hand” in the case of Pip means that he was not fed by the breast and that he lacked maternal love as a baby. This beginning in the life of Pip is totally ironic since Mrs. Joe, who brought him by hand, considers that Pip should not be spoiled (18). As a result, this creates in Pip strengths such as his humility and good manners despite belonging to a lower social class, as he demonstrates when in chapter 7 Mrs. Joe and Mr Pumblechook come from the market and Pip is glad to have a place to stay and family to share such a cold night. Mrs. Joe says: ““if this boy an’t grateful tonight he never will be” I [Pip] looked as grateful as any boy possibly could” (Dickens 51) Nevertheless, his upbringing also contributes to growing insecurities and weaknesses in him that mark his life. His search for love in Estella or even Bidley and for maternal love, as he does with Miss Havisham, imply the existence of a notable emptiness in Pip which makes him an insecure boy. Therefore, he is very naïve and does not know what that kind of love is. As a consequence, he only receives suffering and pain, as in chapter 8 in which Pip visits Satis House and, when he leaves, he thinks of his relationship with his sister and how she treats him:

Through all my punishments, disgraces, fasts and vigils, and other penitential performances [...] I got rid of my injured feelings for the time by kicking them into the brewery wall and twisting them out of my hair, and then I smoothed my face with my sleeve, and came from the gate. (Dickens 63)

4.2 Miss Havisham: Loneliness and Revenge

Miss Havisham is another of the most relevant women with whom Pip deals. She is a woman stuck in the past and she is guided by her desires and emotions. She can be considered to be a typical Victorian woman due to the situation she enjoyed in her

family before her failed marriage with Compeyson. However, at the same time she can be said to deviate from the norm because she is an empowered woman. She plays a crucial role in the life of Pip as she sows the seeds of all the illusions Pip entertains.

Miss Havisham is a middle-aged woman who lives anchored to the past. She is unable to progress morally and physically because she was abandoned on her wedding day very drastically and unexpectedly. This stagnation is shown not only in her physical appearance, but also in the appearance of her house: she always wears just one shoe and her wedding dress, which is no longer white but yellow and old. Her wedding cake is kept on the table despite being covered with mould, the walls of her house are yellow and aged, and not even a ray of light enters the room where Pip meets her. Everything suggests that Miss Havisham lives trapped on her wedding day along with everything around her. It is as if the house had been consumed by the lack of care. As Pip reflects on in chapter 8, when he plays cards with Estella and simultaneously analyses the room of Miss Havisham “it was then [he] began to understand that everything in the room had stopped, like the watch and the clock, a long time ago” (Dickens 60). To put it differently, the room can be said to mirror Miss Havisham’s state of depression after having been left at the altar. This reflection emphasises and hyperbolises the bad state in which she finds herself. In the view of Raphael, this depressing image is a reflection of the unsuccessful attempt of Miss Havisham to make her inner expectations of the wedding visible and public and build, therefore, her sign of identity (402). The yellow colour, the mould and the aged appearance simply represent the passage of time that she tries so hard to avoid. The trauma continues for her, but not for the others. Bearing all of these ideas in mind, Miss Havisham, like Mrs. Joe, can definitely be categorised within the passionate characters. She is moved not only by pain but also by her desire for revenge; her “love is warped into an excess of grief” (Garnett 30). As Garnett goes on to argue, Miss Havisham may be regarded as a “flamboyant actress,” as she “creates herself taking justifiable satisfaction in the staging of her own gothic melodrama.” According to Garnett, Miss Havisham burns her house to the ground as a way of sacrificing herself and her frustrated passion. However, that theatrical act is extended due to the previous decay of herself and her house (31). Besides, according to Garnett, the feelings of anger and hurt which Miss Havisham shows are commonly seen in passionate characters (33).

There are two turning points in the life of Miss Havisham which allow the reader to see the reasons why this character deviates from the Victorian norm. The first and most obvious turning point is when she was abandoned on her wedding day. That moment traumatised her, as the decoration of her house makes it clear, and marked her character. It turned her into a cold, demanding, condescending woman. It is precisely her authoritarian figure and her behaviour towards the others, especially towards the male gender, that shows her true persona. She has love deficiencies and, thus, she is in pain; she suffers this emotional emptiness until the day she dies. This hurt highlights her determinism as a solitary figure and her inability to escape from her lonely destiny, despite her plea for forgiveness to Pip and Estella (Dickens 398, 399). Moreover, the trauma of Miss Havisham comes from a misunderstanding, since the reason for her misfortune is not the absence of Compeyson but her inability to comprehend that there is a system against her, Raphael contends (409). Namely, it is the system run by men that she does not comprehend. In that system women only serve as decor, they do not have any important purpose other than taking care of the house, the children and their husbands, and if their husbands or the men that surround them do not think they can offer them anything else, they leave them. That is the world she cannot really escape, because such a patriarchal world still lives in her trauma, her decisions, her revengeful attitudes and her house. As Raphael argues, the fact that there are still elements of that failed wedding show the difference between chance and desire that many Victorian women had to bear (402). To put it in other words, the rests of the failed wedding display the difference between Miss Havisham's desire of getting married in order to live a happy life and her real opportunities based on her personal situation and society, since Miss Havisham no longer has a purpose in life and cannot fulfil her desire of getting married after Compeyson abandons her at the altar.

Miss Havisham can be regarded as a hybrid character in the sense that she is the typical Victorian woman, but at the same time she is not. On the one hand, she belongs to a patriarchal system to which many upper-class Victorian women also belonged, as they were subordinated to men. In keeping with this idea, Miss Havisham's life has always been defined by men: her father, step-brother and husband. Men were the trigger of the events she suffered and the reason for her following revengeful attitudes and decisions. According to Raphael, Miss Havisham behaves like an upper-class Victorian woman and restricts herself to the domestic sphere where she is supposed to embellish

the male life (404). On the other hand, although she is always seen within the domestic sphere, once she is betrayed she never plays any of the typical roles generally attached to Victorian women. Miss Havisham has servants but unlike other upper-class Victorian women she does not contribute to the care of the house. In fact, she demands that the house may not be cared for so that it looks the way it does. There is no male authoritarian role present. Taking this idea into account, it can be said that Miss Havisham does not belong to the category of a conventional Victorian woman because she is portrayed as an independent and powerful lady. As a matter of fact, Raphael considers that she is rather portrayed as a Victorian male figure (408): she is no longer a woman whose duty is to take care of the house, the children or to please a man. According to Simmons, Miss Havisham cannot even be considered a good woman since she is not able to fulfil her desire of getting married, which was the main goal Victorian women were expected to achieve. As a consequence, Miss Havisham uses Estella, her adopted daughter, to take vengeance on men (125).

Miss Havisham shows the world in which many Victorian women found themselves trapped, but still she deviates from that norm. Although she does not completely escape from it, she does not allow any man to harm her or Estella again by making Estella a cold and emotionless woman whose life, unlike the one of other Victorian women, is not centred on pleasing any man. Miss Havisham takes control over her house and the people that surround her because she is in charge and has the power to decide everything. She lives anchored to the past but in command and not dependent on any man. Thus, it may be argued that she deviates from the image of a typical Victorian woman.

The second turning point in her life is when Miss Havisham becomes aware of the pain she has caused mainly to Pip, and Estella and desires a reconciliation with them. The fact that Miss Havisham is hurt on her wedding day by being abandoned causes a series of emotional pain in other characters. She hurts Estella out of spite, who consequently hurts Pip, who ends up hurting Joe by blaming him for his lack of education. This is a clearly metonymic relationship of concatenated moral hurting, since it is produced by affective deficiencies that lead to the personal frustration of each of the characters, as they are not happy with themselves and take it out on others, creating a chain of destruction. However, although Compeyson is the one who started this chain, Miss Havisham is seen from the masculine point of view and is made responsible for all

this pain and hurt that Pip has suffered. Nevertheless, in the end Miss Havisham argues with Estella and Pip, and becomes aware of what she has done and all the pain she has caused them. She acknowledges her mistakes and tries to make amends. For example, in chapter 49 when Pip visits Miss Havisham to confront her after her dispute with Estella, Pip thinks “to see her [Miss Havisham] with her white hair and her worn face kneeling at [his] feet, [which gives him] a shock through all [his] frame.” As Pip continues narrating, at this moment, Miss Havisham “wrung her hands and crushed her white hair, and returned to her cry over and over again. ‘What have I done!’” (Dickens 398). Miss Havisham understands that Estella is a girl who has grown up in need of love, and as for Pip, she has allowed the boy to think for years that she is not only his benefactor but also that he has a future with Estella.

Taking this into account, Miss Havisham can be said to transgress Victorian social conventions because she allows Pip to think not only that someone from a lower social class can mingle with and marry someone from the upper class, but also that social classes are not fixed and that one can move from a lower social class to a higher one. As Raphael sees it (410), these transgressions that Miss Havisham presents allow Pip to be exposed to the world that surrounds him and become the powerful character that he is.

As Miss Havisham is the second significant woman Pip encounters, he establishes a kind of maternal bond with her, either because of her resemblance to his sister or because he thinks she is his benefactor. However, this bond is not reciprocal because Miss Havisham does not regard him as a son as she does with Estella. Pip tirelessly seeks her love and approval and yet he only receives coldness and false expectations from her. The role that Miss Havisham plays in the life of Pip is relevant since she is the bridge to the world he so dearly desires. She is the driving force behind his craving for change because of the ideas she instilled in him. She encourages him to think that she is his main supporter by making him believe that she is his benefactor and that he has a chance with Estella. However, Miss Havisham also fuels the insecurities and deficiencies that Pip already had because, like Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham is distant and apathetic. This makes his maternal affective deficiencies increase, especially after realising that everything he believed was a lie. But also Miss Havisham shows him how the world works in real life, she shows him the reality that many Victorian women like herself and Estella suffer. Besides, Miss Havisham also makes Pip see how naive and

manipulable he is, forging once and for all his character and making him stronger and more mature. In chapter 8 after playing cards with Estella at Satis House Miss Havisham asks Pip about his opinion on Estella, to which Pip replies: “I think she is very insulting” (Dickens 61). In response to this, Miss Havisham constantly asks Pip if he thinks anything else of Estella. Her insistent and impertinent questions show that she can do whatever she wants with him, even reveal his inner feelings. In a sense, this proves that he is easily influenced by her.

In brief, judging from the ideas discussed above, it becomes evident that the selfishness and narcissism that characterise Miss Havisham make Pip a man who eventually knows how the world works and gets to know his place in it, marking his insecurities but also increasing his knowledge and maturity

4.3 Estella: Disdain and Indifference

Estella is another significant woman that Pip encounters, practically at the same time as Miss Havisham. She is the object of his desires but also the reason for his distress. She cannot be classified and cannot really be analysed from her perspective, but from the perspective that Pip offers of her. As was discussed in the previous section, she is the victim of the traumatic experience underwent by Miss Havisham and her attitudes teach Pip that all he had thought was an illusion.

Estella is the adopted daughter of Miss Havisham, and the biological daughter of Magwitch and Molly, two convicted murderers. In this sense, Estella belongs originally to the lower social class but, as she lives with Miss Havisham, she belongs to the upper class of Victorian society and therefore represents the opposite of Pip. Estella is the product of all the fears and traumas which Miss Havisham has experienced; she is the personified revenge of Miss Havisham against men, making her a cold and heartless child. Estella was taught to be like that since she was little and as much as she is beautiful on the outside, she is rotten inside. She is a girl who has been conditioned in every way to the point of being a person who neither feels nor suffers. In reality, Estella is a reflection of what Miss Havisham would have liked to have been if she would not have been harmed. Although Miss Havisham is supposed to shape her with genuine motives, they are actually the most selfish ones. She uses Estella as a weapon to break the hearts of the boys in the same way they broke hers. Estella is very well aware of that

and reproaches it to Miss Havisham when they have a row because Estella is tired of the life she has led, which has been based on the desires and decisions of Miss Havisham instead of her own. Estella replies to Miss Havisham: “I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine, but the two together make me” (Dickens 306).

Simmons argues that Miss Havisham wants Estella to become a *femme fatale* (125) and, therefore, Estella is not the typical Victorian lady, but a distorted version of it: she does not obey any man, on the contrary, they obey her. As Huston states, Estella was educated according to the Victorian standards for women. However, she can be considered a “Dickensian heroine” since she becomes the total opposite of what was expected of a woman at that time. Estella is a woman who does not desire at all because she is the object of craving (15).

Bentley Drummle is a selfish, arrogant and very derogatory boy who belongs to the upper classes. Pip hates this character and how rude he treats everyone. However, Drummle courts Estella and she eventually marries him. She thinks that Drummle will make her happy and she considers that marrying him is the only decision she makes on her own without having to depend on what Miss Havisham wants or expects from her. Moreover, according to Gates, Estella has a cruel behaviour since she has grown in victimising circumstances and she decides to marry Drummle moved by her desires for revenge towards Miss Havisham (391). However, contrary to her expectation, her decision of getting married to Drummle turns out to make her even unhappier than she was as Drummle mistreats her.

According to Garnett, unlike Miss Havisham or Mrs. Joe, Estella is neither a passionate nor a moderate character, since she is emotionally ambiguous. In a sense, Estella, as well as her biological mother Molly, has a mysterious and lively essence. However, in the view of Garnett, Estella defends herself against her appeal and her own vulnerability to desire by means of adopting an emotionless and contemptuous attitude (36).

Estella is a very reserved girl, and her thoughts, opinions and feelings are rarely shown because she is mainly portrayed from the perspective of Pip. So to speak, Pip acts as lens or as focaliser of Estella. As Garnett argues, she is always perceived from this male point of view but always as his object of desire (35). Estella is described by

Pip as “beautiful and self-possessed; and [...] as scornful of [him] as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen” (Dickens 56). Her position in Satis House is of a daughter and she never contradicts Miss Havisham because Estella barely has any power over her guardian. However, when it comes to Pip, Estella is placed in a position of superiority, not only because of her beauty, but also because of her social class. She has the power of breaking his heart and doing whatever she wants. She knows that she is in that position with Pip and is cruel to him by making him feel miserable and insufficient for her from the very first moment. In fact, she even enjoys letting him know that, as she does for instance when they play cards and she beats him. In a way it is as if she reaffirmed her superiority over Pip “in wait for [him] to do wrong [...] as if she [Estella] despised them [the cards] for having been won of me” (61). She calls him the “Labouring boy” (61) to make it clear that there exists an unbridgeable gap between the two of them. Before meeting Estella, he had never felt that way, it was something he had never considered until he met Estella. In chapter 9 Pip goes for the first time to Satis House and when he leaves, Estella accompanies him and he thinks: “I was a common labouring-boy; that my hands were coarse [...] that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way” (65). Before meeting Estella, he was happy with his social and economic situation, his class was never a problem for him, but the beauty and toughness of Estella make him see that she is unattainable for him and, therefore, he feels motivated to change for her. His ultimate goal is Estella and he just wants her to be his, as in chapter 29, when Estella comes back from France and Pip from London and the two of them meet again, Pip states: “In a word, it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life” (236). Nevertheless, the effect that Estella has on him is very compelling since it does not matter how much time passes or how cruel she is to him, Estella will always remain in that superior position and Pip is very well aware of that. The situation between them does not change, for example in the same chapter as the previous quote, Pip states “The air of completeness and superiority with which she walked at my side and the air of youthfulness and submission with which I walked at hers, made a contrast I strongly felt” (237)

Furthermore, Estella can be regarded as the third important woman Pip encounters. She represents the ultimate goal of Pip throughout the novel. Although Miss Havisham is the one who inculcates in his head the obsession and desire for Estella, it is

Estella by means of mistreatment who makes Pip do his best to be with her. Estella gives life to the ideas and intentions of Miss Havisham, she shapes them by mistreating Pip. She makes him ashamed of his origins and even of his family. Estella is the real life trigger to the cravings for change of Pip and, therefore, to his maturity. Estella teaches Pip that he has never really owned the goals of his decisions and that he is as naive as he was as a child. In chapter 39 after he finds out that Miss Havisham is not his benefactor but Magwitch, Pip states “Miss Havisham’s intentions towards me [Pip], all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience” (323). Even though she was very arrogant and even cruel to him as a child, she strengthened him by opening his eyes. Estella makes Pip a more self-confident man because in a way she reveals to him the true intentions of Miss Havisham regarding his chances with her. For instance in chapter 44 once Pip finds out that Magwitch is his benefactor, he goes to Satis House and confronts Miss Havisham. Pip reacts to this truth towards Estella by saying: “You [Estella] are part of my existence, part of myself. [...] Estella, to the last hour of my life, you cannot choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil.” (364).

Pip shows his personal transition by going from Mrs. Joe to Miss Havisham and then to Estella and by paying attention to how each one manages to change his way of thinking, his attitude and even his decisions about his future. In chapter 39 after Pip finds out the truth of his future with Estella and the real intentions of Miss Havisham, Pip argues “I would not go back to Joe now, I would not have gone back to Biddy now [...] because my sense of worthless conduct to them was greater than every consideration. [...] I could never, never, never undo what I had done.” (323). Consequently, Pip is a female-based character and he is female-centred, since all his life is basically based on women, guided by women and determined by women. Even Pip himself is aware of their influences on him as he states in chapter 12 when he goes to Satis House to entertain Miss Havisham “What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them?” (Dickens 96)

4.4 Biddy: Kindness and Wisdom

Biddy is relevant to Pip because she is not only the person who helps him to be literate, but she is also the one who reminds him of the reality he so eagerly avoids confronting.

Biddy shows Pip the affection he so desires. Despite being the typical image of a Victorian woman, she also shows a transgressive behaviour which has an impact on Pip's character development.

Biddy is a girl of the same age and social class as Pip's. She is very altruistic, kind and charming and she is always willing to help everyone. She definitely helps Pip and his family with every inconvenience they have, either by taking care of the house when Mrs. Joe is attacked and becomes motionless or by taking care of Joe when Mrs. Joe dies, Pip leaves and he is left alone. Biddy plays a key role in the development of Pip as she is the one who supports him and helps him achieve his goals. When Pip goes to Satis House and becomes aware that he is an illiterate and an ordinary boy, it is Biddy who gives him lessons so that he does not feel that way. In other words, Biddy is the one who teaches Pip the basics so that he can grow intellectually and achieve his main goal of becoming a gentleman. Furthermore, Biddy is also the one who keeps Pip focused. Namely, Pip is a boy who throughout the novel can be observed to be full of wishes, dreams and aspirations not only for his social future but also with his future with Estella, as I have argued in the previous sections. By contrast, Biddy stays outside the bubble of illusion in which Pip finds himself. Thus, she is able to see everything clearly and can see that neither Miss Havisham nor Estella are treating Pip well, that his dreams are most unreal because he will never get what he so badly desires, and, above all, that those same unreal dreams make him treat those who truly love him such as Joe and herself with contempt and indifference. All of this can be observed, for instance, in chapter 17. In this chapter, Biddy tells Pip her thoughts about Estella and Miss Havisham. She says to Pip "And if it [being a gentleman] is to gain her [Estella] over, I should think [...] she was not worth gaining over" (Dickens 129). Biddy says that Estella is not worth gaining over because she considers that Estella is rude and cruel when she tells Pip that he is a common and labouring boy. In this sense, she is aware of the bad influence she is for Pip and the pain she will eventually cause him.

According to Garnett, the character of Biddy could be classified among the moderate ones because, unlike Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham or Estella, Biddy is not guided by any impulse or desires. On the contrary, Biddy leads a morally correct life according to the traditional values of the Victorian era. In chapter 17 Mrs. Joe is attacked and Biddy takes care of Joe and Pip, and Pip thinks that "She [Biddy] managed [their] whole domestic life, and wonderfully too" (Dickens 125). Biddy, as Pip explains, takes

good care of the house and of those she loves, especially Pip and Joe when she marries him. In fact, in contrast to the other female characters of *Great Expectations*, Simmons takes Bidley as an example of a good woman, and even compares her with the biblical figure of Mary since, as Simmons goes on to argue, both women represent the virtues of purity and moral rightness (124). In other words, for Simmons, Bidley undoubtedly represents the image of the typical Victorian woman. Nevertheless, I think that Bidley can also be said to transgress Victorian gender norms for two reasons. On the one hand, she is a woman who not only has intellect and knowledge —“Bidley was the wisest of girls,” Pip points out (Dickens 129)— but, as I argued earlier, she also teaches her knowledge to others by giving them classes, which, for the social class to which she belongs, is not a common gesture at all. Furthermore, this role as a teacher accentuates her distance from the stereotypical image of Victorian women even further, as this task contributes to situating Bidley not only in the domestic sphere, but also in the educational one, which has a more public character. Additionally, she also challenges the stereotyped image of the Victorian woman because she has enough strength and confidence to stand up to Pip and confront him. In this sense, she is a woman who has a voice and shows her opinions all the time, as it occurs in chapter 17. After the attack on Mrs. Joe, Pip and Bidley go for a walk and Pip tells her that he wants to become a gentleman and Bidley says to him ““Oh I wouldn’t, if I was you!” [...] You know best, Pip; but don’t you think you are happier as you are?” (127). In a way, although Bidley is never Pip’s first option, she is nonetheless an empowered character due to her personality and her great influence on him.

The development of the character of Bidley is portrayed from the male point of view, since she is depicted by the thoughts, opinions and reactions of Pip. First, Bidley is described physically, as it occurs in chapter 7 when they have their very first encounter and Pip thinks “her hair always want[s] brushing, her hands always want washing, and her shoes always want mending and pulling up the heel. [...] On Saturdays she [goes] to church elaborated” (44). Afterwards, in chapter 10, Bidley is described based on her intelligence and Pip’s admiration of it as a way out of his illiteracy. When Pip wants her to teach him her knowledge he thinks “the best step I could make was to get out of Bidley everything she knew” (Dickens 73). Before the attack, Bidley’s only role is to teach Pip for him to become literate. However, once their relationship is closer, Pip’s attitudes towards Bidley, as well as their relationship, change. In chapter 17, Pip does not

like the comments that Bidley makes when she tells him that it is not a good idea to become a gentleman. At this moment, Pip calls Bidley “with some severity” and “impatiently” (127). However, in a way he accepts her comments, and it is only at the end that Pip realises that everything Bidley has told him throughout the years was that Miss Havisham and Estella were not good influences on him and that his new lifestyle was driving him away from the people who loved him. In chapter 58, Pip returns home to visit Joe and Bidley once he is aware that his benefactor is Magwitch. He remembers Bidley and how good their relationship was, and thus he plans: “The purpose was that I would go to Bidley, that I would show her how humbled and repentant I came back, that I would tell her how I had lost all I once hoped for, that I would remind her of our old confidences in my first unhappy time” (Dickens 472). In this quotation, Pip demonstrates that he has matured because he wants to go back to Bidley and make things right by telling her how sorry he is. He notices that Bidley was right in the very first place about his future with Estella and his happiness at being a gentleman.

Summing up, Bidley is a figure who supports the decision of Pip to improve as a person and to nourish himself intellectually, and at the same time helps him discern reality from fiction. She is the one able to notice how the world in which Pip lives is corrupting him as a person.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, my feminist approach to *Great Expectations* has shown how Pip's evolution and life development are influenced by the female characters of Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham, Estella and Bidley.

Firstly, Mrs. Joe treats Pip harshly and insensitively. It is her impulses and emotions that make her a transgressive character, since she holds the power over her household. Consequently, this makes Pip see a world opposite to what was expected in the typical Victorian houses, making him an educated child who has respect and even fear towards women. Not only does Mrs. Joe teach Pip how to be humble and grateful, but she also raises many affective deficiencies in him. Secondly, Miss Havisham, on her part, also treats Pip harshly. She is the one who deprives Pip of his innocence due to her selfish and revengeful attitudes. She is also passionate and transgressive and holds the power in her household, just like Mrs. Joe. In this sense, Miss Havisham deepens the

love deficiencies with which Pip was born as well as reinforces Pip's respect towards women. Pip sees in Miss Havisham the reality regarding marriage that many Victorian women suffer. In addition, Estella is the reason why Pip wants to change and become a gentleman. Estella is the one who gives him a motivation to improve, but she is also the one who delves deeper into Pip's insecurities. She is the victim of the trauma of Miss Havisham and hence she becomes an emotionless weapon to hurt other men. As a consequence, she hurts Pip by treating him with disdain and indifference and by making him feel ashamed of his home and himself. Estella shows him that everything he believed in was nothing but an illusion and that he was a mere man to be hurt, just to please Miss Havisham. Finally, unlike these women, Biddy always tries to help and teach Pip. She is not driven by her impulses, but when she feels she has the freedom to talk, she gives her opinion and even contradicts Pip. Biddy becomes a transgressive character who exposes the reality to Pip, and this is her most valuable lesson to him. Pip is once again guided and surrounded by a feminine environment that brings him consciousness and reality.

The harsh and insensitive treatment of Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham and Estella, together with Biddy's patience, understanding and critical thinking leave Pip exposed to a transgressive world in which women decide, command and have a voice. As a result, Pip's visions, feelings and thoughts about the household and the image of women differ from what was common in the Victorian world in which the novel is set. Pip is influenced by these female figures that he meets throughout his life. In conclusion, this dissertation shows that Pip is a character built by women and therefore he can be defined as a female-centred character.

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