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## A RE-VISION OF MISS HAVISHAM: HER EXPECTATIONS AND OUR RESPONSES

LINDA RAPHAEL

Q. D. Leavis begins her essay “How We Must Read *Great Expectations*” by asserting that “it must have been very much easier to read *Great Expectations* adequately—that is, with a sympathetic and intelligent comprehension of the spirit in which it was written and of what it was actually about—in Dickens’s own day, or in any time up to the present, than it evidently is now [1970].” Leavis continues with a deprecation of her contemporary critics and general readers, who presumably “have no real knowledge of the constitution and actuality of Dickens’s society.”<sup>1</sup> The corrective Leavis provides for *Great Expectations* begins with a quotation from Lord Brain, who in a 1960 lecture to a medical association extolled what Leavis terms “Dickens’s intuitive apprehension of the relation between the inner and the outer life [and] . . . question[ing] as to the why of human conduct.” What seems curious is that Leavis later asserts the value of this novel over Dickens’s other works because of its “greater relevance outside its own age.”<sup>2</sup> Is not a part of that relevance determined by the response of late twentieth century readers, who understand the novel differently than Dickens’s contemporaries?

Since Leavis published her essay, a host of scholars—especially those whose work has been informed by Marxism, feminism, and psychoanalysis—have given us new insights into texts and the ways we as readers make sense of them. Much of this recent work challenges claims for the superiority of readings contemporary to a work by asserting the openness of the text to new interpretations. While Leavis’s reading of *Great Expectations* illuminates many of its fine qualities, particularly those which require psychological interpretation, her argument that later readers are impaired suggests a stagnant location of the text in a precise time and place and a privileging of its contemporary readership that similarly ignores the dynamic nature of texts. Moreover, Leavis’s thesis fails to take into account a central concern of novels, articulated succinctly by William Myers in his discussion of *Little Dorrit*: “as a work of art, [the novel must] be

against the reader in a certain sense; it must disconcert his aesthetic expectations; it must trap, surprise, and frustrate, as well as gratify, the literary appetites of the English bourgeoisie.”<sup>3</sup> The endurance of *Great Expectations* as a valuable work of art depends on its ability to continue to “trap, surprise, and frustrate” us—to ask us to go further into and beyond the text to fully appreciate its accomplishments.

Perhaps one of the most significant figures in *Great Expectations* in terms of affective power is Miss Havisham. Dickens’s contemporary readers probably understood, either consciously or subconsciously, that Miss Havisham’s ill-fated marriage and her consequent behavior made a peculiar sort of sense in their world. On the other hand, since stories like Miss Havisham’s have been re-told, from Dickens’s day to ours, in the continuing narrative of western experience and have been articulated in theoretical conceptions as well as in other fictional works, this frustrated spinster may seem very familiar to present-day readers. Like Dickens’s contemporaries, we respond to the codes that inform *Great Expectations* almost intuitively: the difference is that our intuitions are informed by a century of additional developments, both cultural and literary. The characterization of Miss Havisham provides a model of the power of repressive forces, especially in their dual roles as agents of society at large acting on the individual and as internalized matter directing one to govern the conduct of self and others according to unstated principles. For the late twentieth-century reader, the richness of this novel may be enhanced by an analysis that pays attention to the cultural dynamics at work during Dickens’s time with an emphasis on what more recent psycho-analytic, social, and literary narratives offer us for understanding.

Embodying the mythic horrors of countless cruel mothers, stepmothers, and witch-like figures, Miss Havisham has often been described by critics as one more instance of an irrational and vindictive female figure. For example, comparing her to other Dickensian women who are “perverted by passion,” Michael Slater asserts that “Miss Havisham is the most compelling and the most haunting.”<sup>4</sup> In *The Providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction* Thomas Vargish has named her “the most clearly culpable” when compared to Magwitch because “her twisting of Estella’s nature seems more consciously malevolent than his plan for Pip,”<sup>5</sup> and H. P. Sucksmith refers to “the extremely powerful effect and vision which the figure of Miss Havisham contributes to *Great Expectations*.”<sup>6</sup> Vargish’s claim, which depends on his assertion that Miss Havisham “was brought up as a lady, with a lady’s advantages,” raises the question of what it meant to be brought up as a lady, in general, or in Miss Havisham’s case, in particular. Dickens probably counted on his readers’ ability to answer the “in general,” since he provides only a brief summary of her life, offered to Pip by Herbert Pocket. However, her significance in the novel may be positively linked to the brevity of details about her background rather than in spite of it. In other words, readers may have always responded to Miss Havisham with an almost

automatic comprehension of her state of mind and her actions—and clearly this sort of reaction depends on the text’s evocation of shared cultural, and often literary, concepts.

Miss Havisham—bedecked in her withered bridal gown and half-arranged veil, resembling grave-clothes and a shroud, one shoe on, one off—creates a vivid and lasting image for the reader, one which is made more grotesque because of its convolution of the symbolic import of a wedding scene. Since at least biblical times, depictions of betrothal and marriage scenes have functioned as literary devices.<sup>7</sup> However, rather than signifying the celebration of a joyous social and personal event in which private lives are endorsed by public ceremony, the remains of the aborted wedding—the table still laid for a feast and the jilted bride in her yellowed gown—visibly enact a gap between opportunity and desire which frequently occurred in the lives of Victorian women. The dismal scene mirrors Miss Havisham’s failure to make her private dream a public reality and to create an identity outside her private sphere. In making the point that “there is nothing that is not social and historical—indeed, that everything is in the last analysis political,” Frederic Jameson defines the “structural, experiential, and conceptual gap between the public and private [as] maim[ing] our existence as individual subjects and paralyz[ing] our thinking about time and change.”<sup>8</sup> And surely Dickens depicts in Miss Havisham’s experience a social, historical, and “in the last analysis political” event. Few authors, with the notable exception of Faulkner, particularly in “A Rose for Emily” and *The Sound and the Fury*, create characters so paralyzed in thinking about time and change as Dickens does in the case of Miss Havisham.

Miss Havisham’s choice—if we can call it a choice finally—to live reclusively in the inner space of Satis House, enduring in a fetid atmosphere which threatens also to engulf young Estella, repeats the fate of many Victorian women. As Elaine Showalter concludes in her analysis of “The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman”:

the rise of the Victorian madwoman was one of history’s self-fulfilling prophecies. In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the asylums much of their population.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the macabre nature of Miss Havisham’s environment—one which has resisted all but the most negative effects of the passage of time—we may not immediately connect her existence to those of other nineteenth-century fictional females, such as Jane Eyre, whose confinement to closed spaces is a metaphor for entrapment in a society whose functioning depends in part on females’ complicity with their own imprisonment. Herbert Pocket’s report to Pip of Miss Havisham’s past—that she was a motherless young girl whose father, anxious

about his newly-achieved financial status, doted on her and neglected his son, who in turn resented the child so clearly favored over him—recounts, on one level, the history of a spoiled woman who, when her expectations are sorely disappointed by a jilting fiancé, will spend the rest of her life impotently raging at the forces that worked against her. Thus, readers have generally considered Miss Havisham's isolation as self-inflicted, but probing into the causes of her tortured manner of living reveals the workings of a complex system which has made her reclusiveness inevitable. While her financial independence has allowed her to escape confinement to an asylum, a fate we would imagine for a woman who behaved as she but did not have property or money, she lives as disconnected from the outside world as if she were institutionalized.

The “madwoman” who spends her life thus has many fictional counterparts, whose thrashings in a world deaf to their cries symbolize the same sort of unsatiated female passion and desire that smoulder in Miss Havisham. It is instructive, for example, to connect Faulkner's Emily with Miss Havisham because of their similar roles as daughters who held a special place in their fathers' imaginations. The world of *Great Expectations*, like that of “A Rose for Emily,” refracts complex and changing social values. Each work concerns itself particularly with those changes which challenge the privileged status of a family as a source of identity but simultaneously frustrate individual identity. Ironically, they seem to say, the same system which esteems individual enterprise limits the ability of those not powerful or lucky enough to find a secure niche within a competitive system that renders all things, including human relationships, subordinate to their profit and exchange value. Miss Havisham and Emily remain within the privacy of their homes, perhaps initially filling a role like the one Davidoff and Hall describe in their social history, *Family Fortunes*, as common to a young motherless woman: she might serve as an emotional focus for her father, protecting him from an “ill-considered” remarriage while gaining for herself “responsibility, respect and affection without a break from familiar surroundings and the necessity to cope with a new, sexual relationship.”<sup>10</sup>

Set later in the century, *Great Expectations* interprets this sort of intimate familial arrangement negatively, if we judge by the consequences in Miss Havisham's case, and presages fictional works which reflect even more stultifying emotional consequences for women.<sup>11</sup> By the time Dickens was writing, upper and middle class family structures, which had previously offered security against an increasingly unfamiliar outside world, were threatened by the divisive forces of industrialism and capitalism. One consequence of the movement of the workplace away from the home was that women's direct participation in the productive aspects of work—other than child-bearing, of course—diminished. Davidoff and Hall describe the effect of changes in the economic structure on women in the following way:

Women's identification with the domestic and moral sphere implied that they would only become active economic agents when forced by necessity. As the nineteenth century progressed, it was increasingly assumed that a woman engaged in business was a woman without either an income of her own or a man to support her.<sup>12</sup>

The protection a father offered his daughter from the world outside was sometimes an ironic gesture: the unfamiliar world outside the home might well have been the place where she could have established a sense of self-worth. Yet it was the place from which she was consistently shielded, a social reality Dickens reveals in the case of Bella Wilfer in *Our Mutual Friend*, who sees her father's place of work for the first time when she is a grown woman about to become married.<sup>13</sup> Since women's roles became more narrowly defined throughout the century, fictional depictions, increasingly sensitive to the inner lives of characters, plumb the depths of despair experienced by women whose growth is arrested at the stage of "daughter."

Although Miss Havisham has the privileges that Vargish associates with a "lady," the prerogatives she enjoys essentially limit her exchange value to the small marketplace she has created in Satis House. Again like Emily, who could not function in her post-Civil War American southern town which no longer appraised the social status of her family, Miss Havisham's worth to Compeyson and then to her relatives, and even to some extent to Pip (he imagines that she is a means to attaining the love of Estella as well as a source of material wealth), is measured by the monetary gains they believe they can realize from her. What a surprise for a woman who had no dealings with the public world in her years of growing up and who had received preferential treatment at the hands of her father, who himself had stature in his community.

Indeed, Mr. Havisham and his daughter are described by Herbert Pocket as "very rich and very proud."<sup>14</sup> However, in casting Mr. Havisham in the role of a brewer, Dickens suggests that his pride may have been a compensation for feelings of inferiority in comparison with upper-class rich men. Herbert explains that one may not be a baker and be a gentleman, nor, he and Pip agree, may one keep a public house and be a gentleman. It seems that a brewer enjoyed only a marginal status in the gentleman class, and Mr. Havisham risked this when, after Miss Havisham's mother's death, he privately married his cook.<sup>15</sup> For years he did not acknowledge the son born to him by this second wife, while he indulged his daughter, in keeping with both his class aspirations and her sex. She, in turn, learned to be proud and to expect to do little to earn her reward, and thus adopted the attitudes common to some upper-class Victorian women. She would be virtually useless—and unthreatening—in the marketplace, while she would support and embellish with her home-bound presence the role of the males in her life (first her father and then hopefully a husband) in the public sphere. The little that we learn of Miss Havisham's upbringing suggests at least that it intentionally

disempowered her. This would not, of course, make her an unseemly bride for the greedy Compeyson.

As H. P. Sucksmith points out, Compeyson is one of Dickens's characters who is "calculated to repel with a . . . plain variety of evil."<sup>16</sup> And it does not take much analysis on the reader's part for her to completely abhor him. Yet, as quick as our understanding may be of his actions, we are nevertheless responding to the complex machinery of a society in which individuals are dehumanized. By identifying Compeyson as a public-school educated gentleman, who has become a forger, Dickens asserts that treachery knows no class distinctions. Nor, considering Miss Havisham's original feelings for Compeyson, does the human condition of another deter the most cunning deceivers any more than it affects the less violent, but nonetheless crass, use of others depicted in the actions of Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, or Mrs. Coiler. When Herbert Pocket speaks of Miss Havisham's response to Compeyson, he judges, with a degree of sympathy, that she "passionately loved [Compeyson]" with "all the susceptibility she possessed." It is worth noting that she loved him not with a strength or energy of passion, but with a susceptibility. What she was susceptible to was her passion's potential to make her vulnerable to the plottings arranged by the members of what *was* strong and energetic: a homosocial alliance. As Eve Sedgewick has amply demonstrated in her study of British life and literature of the past few centuries, such alliances played significant and well-understood roles in social and economic intercourse.

In terms of Miss Havisham's marital plans, a brief history of traditional modes of arrangement helps to explain her special position vis-à-vis the male alliance between her step-brother and Compeyson. Until the eighteenth century, alliances between children of propertied families had been arranged by their families. Since the move toward arranging one's own courtship and marriage was in harmony with other social movements toward autonomy, Miss Havisham's choice to marry someone for whom she felt "all the passion of which she was susceptible" may be interpreted as a response to new social possibilities. However, the self-determined woman, often associated in popular culture with witch-like old maids, would have good cause to feel vulnerable to social criticism and to potential rejection from her object of desire. Herbert reports that when his father warned Miss Havisham that she was placing herself too much in Compeyson's power, she responded in an angry rage—a response that we might interpret as a sign of her fear that he was right as well as a sign that she behaved explosively as a young woman. Thus, Miss Havisham's half-brother, while hardly an upstanding member of the family, ostensibly protects her in two ways. He provides a socially acceptable context by introducing a friend to marry his sister, since the custom of a male family member arranging a marriage when parents were deceased follows the pattern which was still somewhat in place at the time; and his intermediary status deflects somewhat the passion with which Miss Havisham approaches this relationship. Thus, the homosocial alliance

finds its strength in norms which reflect women's subordination in legal, social, and emotional affairs.

Dickens has depicted the role of the patriarchy in making nuptial decisions, but at the same time, Miss Havisham emerges as a woman who attempted to take advantage of the new potential independence of a woman making a choice based on emotional intuition. Moreover, this reconstruction of the brief history of Miss Havisham's romance may explain why she would have desired to trust her half-brother and why she would have additional causes, besides the obvious one, for rage when this arrangement proves to have made her *more*, not less, vulnerable. Another insight Dickens has afforded with these quick strokes concerns the brother: collapsing the distinctions between psychological and social causes, Dickens has created a character who was treated so differently within his own nuclear family because of the lower status he shares with his mother that his development into a vengeful man is inextricable from both psychological and class-related factors.

No matter how tied to her spinster-status Miss Havisham's character may be, we would be mistaken to conclude that Dickens refracts social dynamics which affect only the single woman. The many female characters in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American fiction who fail to thrive within the confines of their privatized existences include not only single women living in frustration, but married women suffering as well the iniquities of a gender-biased society. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* recall the "madwoman" image of Bertha in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and anticipate the chilling story of repression in a midtwentieth-century British woman in Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen." Both Gilman and Chopin refract ironically the social status and potential bankruptcy of luxurious spaces—"a big airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways and air and sunshine galore" in "The Yellow Wallpaper" or "a large, double cottage, with a broad front veranda . . . scrupulously neat . . . rich and tasteful . . . the envy of many women" in *The Awakening*. These opulent spaces may confine and eventually suffocate, drown, or set aflame a woman as effectively as the attic room where Rochester's wife spent her tortured days and nights. While we can look back on Miss Havisham as a paradigm for the female characters of these and other similar stories, we can look forward with greater insight to Lessing's quiet, restrained Susan Rawlings, who moves subconsciously toward a suicidal resolution, because we are familiar with the unheard cries of her literary predecessors.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, when we realize that Miss Havisham's character is a comment on the entire system within which she and the other characters operate, we see more clearly the world of *Great Expectations*.

While the cultural directives which influence Miss Havisham's behavior make her a plausible character, the psychoanalytic concepts which underlie our understanding of her make the novel complex in suggestive ways. H. P.



Sucksmith examines several sources which indicate that Dickens had a particular interest in the behavior of recluses. In 1856 Dickens wrote to John Forster from Paris about an upper-class female recluse who has been murdered. What interested him were “the odd facts of human behaviour it revealed” in terms of the reclusive woman herself, rather than the facts of the murder. Both her habit of living in the dark and the image of “horses appearing to swim up to the haunces in the dead green sea of overgrown grass and weeds” fascinate him. Later that same spring, he wrote to Forster again about the horror of the death of an upper-class alcoholic woman who had purposely raised her daughter to be an alcoholic to spite her husband, a squire, from whom she was separated. And an article Dickens published in 1853 in *Household Words* describes the “White Woman,” who was dressed completely in white, in her wedding-dress, that is, and travelled frequently on Oxford Street. She went mad because a wealthy Quaker would not marry her. Sucksmith points out that Dickens stresses the facts rather than the effects in these cases, confirming his interest in the odd behavior itself.<sup>18</sup>

Another source for understanding Dickens’s attitude toward recluses may be found in the collection of *Christmas Stories*. The Traveller ridicules the behavior of Mr. Mopes, the Hermit, in “Tom Tiddler’s Ground.” He scolds him for his desire to arouse curiosity by over-awing his visitors with the novelty of his filth, and insists that the only worthwhile way of life is to be “up and doing.” “All is vanity,” the Traveller says of the hermit, arguing that the real proportions of Mopes are heightened because of “a mist of home-brewed marvel and romance” which surrounds him.<sup>19</sup> The story of Mopes, based on a hermit who lived near Dickens, suggests Dickens’s ability to perceive the psychological needs displayed in bizarre behavior. When one insists that the world pay him unremitting attention, if not for admirable qualities, then for *some* reason he can devise, he discloses what we now call a narcissistic personality. Others may be fooled by the narcissist’s behavior, as the Mopes story indicates, and tend to romanticize and exaggerate his peculiar habits. Dickens includes some of the dynamics of Mopes’s story in Miss Havisham’s personality and in others’ responses to her, but the irony and sympathy work together to make our responses to her complex.<sup>20</sup> Dickens included in his dramatizations of bizarre characters “a mist of home-brewed marvel and romance”—and never more compellingly that when he asks us to view Miss Havisham at the scene of her dashed hopes, the putrefied wedding table.<sup>21</sup> Since narcissism demands repression of one’s sense of lack and unmet desires, it is not surprising that the narcissist is not immediately recognized as such. In *Great Expectations* endless instances of repression counterbalance the dramatized neuroses, occurring in such clever narrative oppositions as Pip’s descriptions of himself as at once “ferocious and maudlin” or “flaccid with admiration.” While repression often signals Pip’s general feelings of guilt, repression and passion have worked together in the formation of Miss Havisham’s personality. According to the model which John

Kucich develops in *Repression in Victorian Fiction*, her inner life may have been unified by these forces. While Kucich generally understands repression and passion to be complementary qualities which lead to a positive inner development, he notes that the frightening passions of the villainous characters in Dickens's fiction are somehow related to the lack of passion in the heroes and heroines. Another common explanation of the consequences of repression concerns the loss of the necessary other which brings a shadow of despair. The strategy of the depressive—installing the lost loved one into the self in order to mitigate the loss—in fact incorporates the image of a partly hated one into the self. The process is further complicated by the other's rejection which now becomes self-rejection. Julia Kristeva amends this interpretation of the act of repression by suggesting that such a person considers himself as stricken by a fundamental lack, or congenital deficiency. In Miss Havisham's case, the sense of personal deficiency could have developed early. As the preferred child and center of her father's attention, she may have suspected her own inadequacy as the object of another's continual favors. Both Kristeva's definition of narcissism and the one she amends may describe Miss Havisham. Her incorporation of her wedding clothes into a permanent part of herself suggests that she has installed the loved one in herself, while all aspects of her behavior belie a violent self-hatred directed at the lost one who is now part of the self, as well as at the self, whose fundamental lack concerned the role in which society has placed her. When Estella accuses her of having a steady memory, we know her memory steadily creates her anguish and bitterness, and when Miss Havisham cries, "Who am I, for God's sake, that I should be kind?" we know that she perceives herself as one who has not been a repository for acts of human kindness.

At the same time, Kucich's claims about the ways in which repressed material forms identity help to explain how Miss Havisham has repressed her desire to punish Compeyson for his rejection of her and has used this energy to create her self-image. Thus, she may see herself as powerful, the owner of Satis House and an authority over Estella. In each of these powerful roles, she represents the Victorian male figure rather than the female: she owns property and she possesses a female—and her own female addition to this is that she also gains power over a male, Pip. Elizabeth Wright's contention that the response of a repressed individual suggests the character of the repressive institution is particularly suggestive for our greater understanding of the world of *Great Expectations*, not the least of which concerns the illusory quality of power relationships. For despite Estella's practical dependence on her adoptive mother, she is forced into an uncomfortably powerful position which places her in the role of master to the alternately vicious and pathetic woman who pleads for her approval and acceptance. The reversibility of the slave-master relationship reveals itself continually through the novel, so that in one of the turns of the screw, when Estella turns on Miss Havisham with controlled but significant

anger, we enjoy a release of our hostile feelings toward this manipulative witch-like figure through the expression of repressed rage of the female, Estella. And even though ultimately Estella represents the “angel in the house” image for which Dickens is famous, the reversal of her character remains unconvincing in contrast to the representation of her as an abused and abusing female.

Narcissistic rage, which includes converting a passive experience into an active one, identification with the aggressor, and seeking revenge for past humiliations, becomes the *modus operandi* of Miss Havisham. In acting out the ambivalent passion for Compeyson which she has repressed through Estella, and thus against Pip, Miss Havisham converts her pitifully passive role in the fate of her betrothal into an active one, while her identification with the aggressor allows her endless repetitions of the painful wound. Dressed as herself, the bride, and acting as Compeyson, the aggressor, she incorporates into one person the potential for continual re-enactment, but her repetition never leads to a satisfying mastery. It is no wonder that Pip describes her as corpse-like—no character could be more desirous of death than Miss Havisham, for when her repetitions lead to mastery in the sense that she wounds Pip through Estella’s marriage, she regrets her act, lights up in flames and moves steps closer to her death.

Not only does Miss Havisham function effectively in *Great Expectations*, but her character may serve to illuminate the causes for behavior in less fully developed females in Dickens’s novels.<sup>22</sup> An example from this novel, which addresses a question related to Miss Havisham’s influence on Pip, concerns Mrs. Joe. Pip suspects that his sister may misunderstand Miss Havisham, and he seeks to protect her by describing her as a large woman in black with a black coach. Not only does this description allude to more witch-like characteristics, but it in fact suggests that Pip may intuit that his sister, who at least is a raging woman, *will* understand Miss Havisham more than he cares for her to (lest he be deprived of future visits and favors from Miss Havisham):

If a dread of not being understood be hidden in the breast of other young people to anything like the extent to which it used to be hidden in mine—which I consider probable, as I have no particular reason to suspect myself of having been a monstrosity—it is the key to my reservations. I felt convinced that if I described Miss Havisham’s as my eyes had seen it, I should not be understood. Not only that, but I felt convinced that Miss Havisham too would not be understood; and although she was perfectly incomprehensible to me, I entertained an impression that there would be something coarse and treacherous in my dragging her as she really was to say nothing of Miss Estella before the contemplation of Mrs. Joe.<sup>23</sup>

The possibility that Mrs. Joe may identify with and comprehend Miss Havisham in ways that Pip does not are also tied to his inability to perceive the reasons for his sister’s acts against him (which we are left to explain only by conjecturing at various causes associated with female repression and class

immobility, based on her sycophantic ways with more well-established relatives). But even more importantly, Mrs. Joe shares with Miss Havisham and other females in Dickens's novels a particular place in history. The double messages Miss Havisham gives Estella—that nothing in the world is worth loving, but that Estella should love her—are unavoidable in terms of what we know about her world.

We have no reason to suspect that Miss Havisham understands her own misery as a consequence of more than having been jilted. The tragedy of her life is not that Compeyson failed to show up at the altar; it is not even that he and her step-brother had plotted against her—it is that she fails to understand the system that works against her. Rather than seeking whatever small, but personally significant, change she might effect, she seeks to revenge herself against society on its own terms. In other words, she acts on the belief that it is only through dehumanizing and often brutal deceit and abuse that desire can be satisfied. Miss Havisham thus fails to offer a hope for a different future for the next generation. This is Dickens at this most pessimistic—the Dickens who reveals the vicious circularity of individual and social misery. The illusion that Miss Havisham holds onto sustains the dream that the role she intended to assume was one that could offer satisfaction. Dickens unmasks this illusion in various ways throughout the novel, but the world he depicts offers no alternative.

Once we are aware of the repressions which operate in the institutions and characters of *Great Expectations*, and once we recognize how we respond as readers to those familiar signs of repression, the full workings of the novel become even more impressive. For example, critics have discussed the role of Wemmick as a character who dramatizes how one's public and private lives might be schizophrenically divided.<sup>24</sup> Wemmick provides an instructive example for Pip, who will need to bring into coherence his own drives, desires, and moral principles if he does not choose to live in a constant state of repression, but we could not fully comprehend Wemmick without the example of Miss Havisham. Because she is emblematic of those forces which account for Wemmick's divided-self, Jagger's hauntingly controlled behavior, Compeyson's valuation of others in terms of his own greed, and Joe's morality in living apart from the concerns of the capitalistic venturers of the novel, Miss Havisham has a pivotal role in *Great Expectations*. Not only does her existence bear a constant reminder of failed expectations, but it is a testimony to the necessity for and the effects of repression under a system which denies individuals full rights to self-development and undercuts principles of moral conduct with greedy self-interest. One critic has named this novel an instance of Dickens's very best writing because Pip is exposed along with the world around him.<sup>25</sup> Without the character of Miss Havisham, it seems doubtful that Dickens could have exposed the world around Pip and thus Pip as powerfully as he did.

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## NOTES

- 1 F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 277.
- 2 Leavis, pp. 281 and 289.
- 3 William Myers, "The Radicalism of *Little Dorrit*," *Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), p. 79.
- 4 Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1983), p. 291.
- 5 Thomas Vargish, *The Providential Aesthetic in Victorian Fiction* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1985), pp. 152-53.
- 6 Harvey Peter Sucksmith, *The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens: The Rhetoric of Sympathy and Irony in his Novels* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 186.
- 7 Robert Alter provides an illuminating narrative analysis of betrothal scenes in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
- 8 Frederic Jameson, *The Politic Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), p. 20.
- 9 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), p. 73.
- 10 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 347.
- 11 The peculiar relationship between Bella Wilfer and her "Pa" in *Our Mutual Friend* suggests an erotic tone to the father/daughter pairing which Davidoff and Hall indicate was sometimes the consequence of these sorts of arrangements. Although Bella's mother is living, she removes herself intellectually and emotionally from the doings of her husband and her daughter Bella. Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (New York: NAL Penguin, 1980).
- 12 Davidoff and Hall, p. 272.
- 13 Dickens subtly incorporates this aspect of the public/private split in Chapter 49. Since Bella plays the role of parent to her father, her desire to relieve him of his job and place him as her husband's secretary further expresses the conflicted attitude toward the public world and the work done therein.
- 14 All quotations have been taken from Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1965). The discussion of Miss Havisham's background occurs in Chapter 22.
- 15 Davidoff and Hall describe the lifestyle of Robert Bretnall of Witham in the mid 1840s: he listed himself variously as a miller or a landed gentleman proprietor since his income came in part from his trusteeship of a local brewery estate. He mixed with the elite of doctors, solicitors and large farmers in his town, attended the Anglican church, and dabbled in Whig politics. Yet his manners were crude, and he blended older forms of uncontrolled behavior and new seriousness. In the words of the authors, "Robert Bretnall was literate, wealthy and keen to adopt the outward trappings of gentility which meant some restraints on his conduct . . . His social power stemmed from his ownership of property, farming activities, local business and charitable activity as trustee, witness or governor. Middle class women had no such power" (p. 398). The social and psychological dynamics of Bretnall's life describe in detail the background we might logically supply for Mr. Havisham.

- 16 Sucksmith, p. 252.
- 17 Studies of Victorian women and of their fictional realizations have offered a wealth of information on feminist concerns about the nineteenth century. Following the work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), many other contributions have come from scholars with special interests in Victorian culture and fiction, including among others Steven Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1983); Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984); Nina Auerbach, *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985); Helena Michie, *The Flesh Made Word: Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987); Stephen Kerns, "Explosive Intimacy: Psychodynamics of the Victorian Family," *The History of Childhood Quarterly* (1974): 437-61.
- 18 Sucksmith, pp. 177-88.
- 19 Charles Dickens, *Christmas Stories* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1926), pp. 226-52.
- 20 For a discussion of the ways irony and sympathy interplay in Dickens, see Sucksmith, Chapter 5.
- 21 Michael Slater's interpretation of Pip's response to Miss Havisham is congruent with the idea that Dickens has surrounded her existence with some romance: "Pip sees Satis House as a fairy tale but misinterprets Miss Havisham, believing that she is aware of the evil of the enchantment she and her house lie under and that she is looking to him to release her from it" (p. 292).
- 22 Many Dickensian females' behavior is suggestive in terms of its repressed qualities, particularly that of Mrs. Wilfer in *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr. F's Aunt in *Little Dorrit*, or Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House*.
- 23 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin Viking, 1970), p. 95.
- 24 One of the early, and particularly insightful, discussions of Wemmick's role in dramatizing the split between the public and private worlds occurs in Angus Calder's Introduction to the Penguin Edition.
- 25 Jenni Calder, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p. 96.