

## Women and Violence in Dickens' *Great Expectations*

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'If I were Mr. Gaskell O Heaven how I would beat her'.<sup>1</sup> The year is 1855. The speaker is Charles Dickens, who in his role as editor of *Household Words* had quarrelled with one of his foremost contributors, Elizabeth Gaskell, over the best way to break up her latest story across several numbers of the journal. If Dickens never indulged in acts of violence against women in his personal life, he certainly carried them out in his fiction: most notably in *Great Expectations*, a novel that has remained consistently popular into the late twentieth century.

While Elizabeth Gaskell had to struggle to maintain authorial control over her own writing against this rapacious editor, she had no control at all over the earnings from that writing. Five years earlier, in 1850, she had earned her first twenty pounds for a short story. 'I stared', she wrote, 'and wondered if I was swindling them but I suppose I am not; and William [her husband William Gaskell] has composedly buttoned it up in his pocket'.<sup>2</sup> Her husband took the money she had earned with her own work, seeing it as rightfully and legally his.

In January 1856 the same Elizabeth Gaskell was asked to sign a petition to parliament asking that married women have the right to keep the money they earn themselves. Her comments on this petition and its possible efficacy make startling reading:

I don't think it is very definite and *pointed*; or that it will do much good – for the Turn Key's objection (vide Little Dorrit) 'but if they wish to come over her, how then can you legally tie it up' etc. will be a stronger difficulty than they can legislate for (;) a husband can coax, wheedle, beat or tyrannise his wife out of something and no law whatever will help this that I see. ... However our sex is badly enough used and

- 1 A. B. Hopkins, *Elizabeth Gaskell, Her Life and Work* (London: John Lehmann, 1952), p.152.
- 2 Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: Women's Press, 1978), pp.119-20.

legislated against, there's no doubt of *that* – so though I don't see the definite end proposed by these petitions I'll sign.<sup>3</sup>

Changes were slowly coming about and none more so than in this one major area, the area of women's rights. The great Reform Bill of 1832 over which so much furore and commotion had been created, for which such great hopes had been held, in fact reformed very little. The Bill indeed is distinguished, if that is the proper word, for being the first English legislation to specifically exclude women from legal privileges.<sup>4</sup>

The Married Women's Property Act was first introduced into Parliament in 1856 and included a long list of civil rights. This Bill however was not actually enacted for sixteen years, passing into law finally in 1870. The first divorce law in England to allow some reform was passed in 1858. This divorce law was, however, based on double-standard premises: it was more lenient towards men than women, and 'its provisions ensured that divorce remained very difficult and expensive to obtain.'<sup>5</sup>

The situation for married women was virtually this. Upon forsaking the single state a woman upon marriage forfeited every civil right. She had no control over her own earnings. She could not choose where to live. She was not permitted to manage property that was legally hers. She could not sign papers. She could not bear witness. The general philosophy of European law was based upon the married woman's status remaining that of a minor or chattel; her husband, as Kate Millett succinctly expresses it, 'something like a legal keeper'. Married women were indeed placed in the same class legally as lunatics and idiots who were also 'dead to the law.'<sup>6</sup>

A husband could take his wife's children from her; deprive them of the money she had earned to feed them; and could reclaim wife and children whenever he wished, even if he had deserted them for years. A wife could be held against her will

3 J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard eds., *The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), p.379.

4 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Granada, 1971), p.66.

5 Millett, pp.66-7.

6 Millett, p.67.

and in England, a wife who refused to return to the marital home, for no matter what reason, could be subject to imprisonment. Divorce from a cruel husband was a possibility, but legal cruelty was equated only with extreme violence and a woman had to prove to the court that she was liable to suffer danger to life, limb or health. In 1790 Sir William Scott set down an explanation of this law in direct relation to a specific case, that of *Evans v. Evans*. The precedent thus established in the English Law Reports became the basis for divorce judgments well into the twentieth century.

It was stated that there is a duty of self-preservation which must take place before the duties of marriage. That is, if you thought your husband was likely to kill you, and you could prove it, you might be permitted to leave the matrimonial home. But the law was cautious in this regard, stating:

What merely wounds the mental feelings is in few cases to be admitted where they are not accompanied by bodily injury, either actual or menaced. Mere austerity of temper, petulance of manners, rudeness of language, a want of civil attention and accommodations, even occasional sallies of passion, if they do not threaten bodily harm, do not amount to legal cruelty: they are high moral offences in the marriage state undoubtedly, not innocent surely in any state of life, but still they are not that cruelty against which the law can relieve. Under such misconduct of either parties, for it may exist on one side as well as the other, the suffering party must bear in some degree the consequences of an injudicious connection; must subdue by decent resistance or by prudent conciliation; and if this cannot be done, both must suffer in silence.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the Divorce Law reforms of 1858, the period between 1858 and 1863 saw a significant increase in applications for release from intolerable marriages. This provoked considerable public concern and was viewed as a floodgate which would lead to licentiousness.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century in England, 'there was no other country in the world in which so many and so great

7 A. James Hamerton, 'Victorian Marriage and the Law of Matrimonial Cruelty', *Victorian Studies* 33 (1990), 273.

a variety of human actions (were) punishable with loss of life'.<sup>8</sup> However, by 1861 the criminal law had been significantly amended, specifically by the Offences Against the Person Act. This Act allowed only four capital offences, that is offences punishable by hanging. These four offences were murder, treason, piracy and setting fire to dockyards and arsenals. 1852 saw the end of transportation too which had been an alternative to the death penalty. The last convict ship left England in 1867; the last of the hulks had closed in 1858. These amendments did not generally please the public, and especially in the 1860s there was a demand for harsher prison treatment and the Prison Act of 1865 re-established a severer regime.

These social changes spanned much of Charles Dickens' adult writing life and his involvement with them is not only reflected in his novels, but also in his writing as an editor and a journalist, and in his famous public readings. He wrote articles on detection and the police force, and on the administration of criminal law. And he became less enthusiastic about prison reform, more inclined to be punitive, as time went on. In 1863 Dickens prepared and rehearsed from *Oliver Twist* the brutal murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes for a public reading. In the novel Bill first pistol-whips her and then finishes her off with a heavy club. Dickens enacted Bill's roars and Nancy's screams with such fearsome reality he (or his advisers) decided the reading was too awful, although he eventually changed his mind, performing this acting out of violence in 1868 with bloodthirsty relish.<sup>9</sup>

The historical account of women's social, legal and economic conditions should not simplistically posit women as merely victimized and helpless, but should also allow the reader to challenge and question representations of women in Dickens' best known novel, the ironically named *Great Expectations*. Here the main female characters are portrayed in opposition to an ever present stereotyped domestic ideal, probably best iconized in *Great Expectations* by Becky's marginal role. The independent, uncontrolled women threaten the domestic ideal/idyll and it is for this reason that they have to be modified, altered, 'bent and

8 Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p.3.

9 Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Minerva, 1991), pp.974-5, 1095.

broken' into a better shape, to either restore them to a proper dependency and passivity, or eradicate them entirely.

It is during the period of intense public debate about the condition of women particularly, about marriage and about prison reform, that Charles Dickens wrote and published *Great Expectations*. The work was serialized in *All The Year Round* from December 1860 to June 1861, and expresses innate concerns about gender issues interestingly disguised as issues of class and social morality. The work reflects a very personal anxiety and concern over these matters.

I plan to focus upon the portrayal of uncontrolled women in the novel, allied to the concept of punishment, both literally and historically as it applies to the convict strand in the novel, and figuratively as it applies to characterizations of the women and of the novel's hero Pip. Both these aspects, the portrayal of women and the concept of punishment, are remarkable for the amount of violence, both physical and mental, that they inculcate.

The first uncontrolled female character to be introduced into the novel is Pip's sister, Mrs Joe Gargery. Mrs Joe's given name is never revealed in the text, significantly she takes the patronymic, Mrs Joe, rather than any female name, because Mrs Joe is a violent woman, possessing a violence more usually male than female. Pip, writing of her in retrospect, says:

My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery ... had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up 'by hand'. Having at that time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand.<sup>10</sup>

Mrs Joe's violence is not restricted to attacks on Pip, she attacks her husband Joe as well. Pip claims that he often served as a 'connubial missile' (p.41), and then describes one particularly violent scene notable for both its physical abuse and its aggressive language:

10 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1965), p.39. All subsequent references are to this edition.

she pounced on Joe, and, taking him by the two whiskers, knocked his head for a little while against the wall behind him: while I sat in the corner, looking guiltily on.

'Now, perhaps you'll mention what's the matter,' said my sister, out of breath, 'you staring great stuck pig'. (p.43)

Pip uses the word 'guiltily' to describe his witnessing of this domestic violence. Guilt is a word consistently used by the adult narrator Pip to describe his childhood feelings and what he sees as his state of inadvertent criminality, that is criminality both by proxy and by accident, but never by deliberate intent. This same adult narrator, the autobiographer, never palliates or excuses his sister's conduct. Mrs Joe's husband, Joe the Blacksmith, endures his wife's violence to the point where he appears to condone it. But he offers Pip an explanation of this behaviour, an explanation which stems from Pip's asking Joe why he never went to school:

'Well, Pip' said Joe ... 'I'll tell you. My father, Pip, he were given to drink, and when he were overtook with drink, he hammered away at my mother, most onmerciful. It were a'most the only hammering he did, indeed, 'xcepting at myself. And he hammered at me with a wigour only to be equalled by the wigour with which he didn't hammer at his anwil. – you're a listening and understanding, Pip? (p.76)

Joe's anxiety that Pip should comprehend what he is trying to tell him is made very clear with this interruption to his discourse at this specific point. He demands that Pip both 'listen' and 'understand'. Joe's father drank, did not work – didn't hammer at his anvil – but did hammer his wife and child. Not only must Pip listen and understand, so too must the reader. Joe also explains that although he and his mother ran away, his father would come with a crowd of people to wherever they had sought shelter and make such a row 'that they used to be obliged to have no more to do with us and to give us up to him. And then he took us home and hammered us' (p.77). And of course Joe's father had the law on his side. His mother had no legal right to choose where she would live, and his father had every legal right to reclaim his wife and child. Financially, of course, divorce was out of the question anyway.

Joe does not imitate or perpetuate his father's domestic violence, although he does continue the role of battered child. The direct consequence of Joe's restraint, however, is that his wife is violent instead. When Pip asks why he does not rise against Mrs Joe, the blacksmith explains:

This I want to say very serous to you, old chap – I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afraid of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself. I wish it was only me that got put out, Pip; I wish there weren't no Tickler for you, old chap; I wish I could take it all on myself. (p.80)

The adult narrator says he believes that he dated a new admiration of Joe from that night, but the consciousness is that while Joe is constructed as the truly gentle man, he is also truly ineffective. Admiration for Joe does not come to Pip until all his trials are over. The child remains a victim, although his sufferings are often humorously described, no more effectively than in the parenthetical aside that he is 'better acquainted than any living authority with the ridgy effect of a wedding-ring passing unsympathetically over the human countenance' (p.82). The humour encourages the reader to ignore the fact that as Joe has been, so too Pip is a victim of domestic violence. The key difference between the two is that while Joe and his mother were legally and financially prevented from resolving their domestic situation, Joe and Pip are morally prevented from doing so. Joe has placed an embargo on direct resistance and revenge, but retribution will come despite this, breaking into the text through a variety of indirect channels and agents.

The next two women to enter Pip's life are Miss Havisham and her adopted daughter Estella, at whose hands he experiences mental violence for the first time, Estella's contempt for his coarse hands and thick boots being, Pip recalls, 'so strong that it became infectious' (p.90). Before he leaves Satis House after his first visit, Estella brings Pip food and drink:

She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I

were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry – I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart – God knows what its name was – that tears started to my eyes. (p.92)

This moment produces the first and major conjunction of gender and class issues in the novel, linked by the word ‘infectious.’ The intensity of Pip’s feelings, the infection, is both sexual consciousness and class consciousness. The pain he feels here is the more interesting because he immediately associates it with his sister: ‘My sister’s bringing up had made me sensitive’, and the remainder of the paragraph focuses on the word ‘injustice’. Just as Pip smarts under Estella’s scorn, so too he smarts under the unjustness of his sister’s treatment of him, and he expresses himself in a sustained outburst dominated by the legal discourse of the courtroom and the prison:

Within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with *injustice*. I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent *coercion*, was *unjust* to me. I had cherished a profound *conviction* that her bringing me up by hand, gave her no *right* to bring me up by jerks. Through all my *punishments*, disgraces, fasts and vigils, and other *penitential* performances, I had nursed this assurance and to my communing so much with it, in a *solitary* and unprotected way, I in great part refer the fact that I was morally timid and very sensitive. (p.92: my emphasis)

So morally sensitive is Pip that revenge can be enacted only at one remove, and the chapter ends with a vision of violence when Pip sees Miss Havisham hanging by the neck from a beam in the disused brewery which is part of Miss Havisham’s estate. While Pip, through Joe’s precept, must resist personal retribution, in his ‘fancy’, and that is the word used in the text, he hangs Miss Havisham as the author of his woes.

Pip continues to make regular visits to Satis House, to suffer pain at the hands of Estella and to fall hopelessly in love with her, and all the while Mrs Joe and Uncle Pumblechook drive him to madness with their endless discussions on his future and the likely benefits to derive from his visits to Miss Havisham. At one point he says:

I used to want – quite painfully – to burst into spiteful tears, fly at Pumblechook, and pummel him all over. In these dialogues, my sister spoke to me as if she were morally wrenching one of my teeth out at every reference. (p.125)

Note the intense violence of the simile and the thwarted desire to take physical revenge on his tormentors. Eventually Miss Havisham's bounty is revealed when she pays for Pip to be indentured to Joe as an apprentice blacksmith.

Pip, of course, does not want the career that had seemed to him as a small child the most desirable one in the world. Now he likens the ceremony of being bound apprentice to being had up as a criminal, and goes on to describe the scene in the Town Hall when Pumblechook pushes him forward 'exactly as if I had that moment picked a pocket or fired a rick' (p.132). Again there is an implied criminality and in fact Pip hears people ask, 'What's he done?'. In the recounting of his life story Pip often makes such personal associations with criminality, as if for that first act of combined charity/theft when he stole food for the convict he remains convicted yet unpunished. As they leave the court after his indentures are signed, they have to get rid of a crowd of boys 'who had been put into great spirits by the expectation of seeing me publicly tortured, and who were much disappointed' (p.133). In contrast with this public, anticipated form of punishment Pip's private agonies are strong and powerful, and he analyses them:

How much of my ungracious condition of mind may have been my own fault, how much Miss Havisham's, how much my sister's, is now of no moment to me or to any one. The change was made in me; the thing was done. Well or ill done, excusably or inexcusably, it was done. (pp.134-5)

He has here named his two female enemies (loving Estella, he omits her) and the tone of bitter resignation suggests that Pip's changed state, his indentured condition, is a form of imprisonment, an exile from all he sees as desirable: that object of sexuality and upper class status, Estella.

When Dolge Orlick is introduced into the narrative Philip Pirrip, from an adult perspective, pronounces that the name 'Dolge' is 'a clear impossibility' (p.139) – just as the character

too is a clear impossibility. His presence in the novel defies the usual moralistic pattern of classic realist texts. Despite the disturbing crimes of violence Dolge commits, he remains, oddly and uncharacteristically in Dickensian fiction, unpunished. In 1960 Julian Moynahan suggested that Orlick in fact is Pip's dark side, that he is 'a monstrous caricature of the tender-minded hero',<sup>11</sup> a sort of Mr Hyde to Pip's Dr Jekyll, administering the revenge Pip yearns for and then dispensing the punishment Pip feels he deserves. And as recently as 1986 Jeremy Tambling in examining the relationship between Dickens' writing and Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, acknowledges his debt to Moynahan's article.<sup>12</sup>

Orlick is distinguished by the epithet 'slouching' and is described as 'broad-shouldered, loose-limbed and swarthy' (p.140). This description could also include Bentley Drummle – he and Orlick are intriguingly similar both in appearance and habits. And Drummle, like Orlick, is empowered by the novel to carry out revenge on yet another woman who has treated Pip with violence. As Moynahan points out, both characters are like instruments of vengeance enacting the aggression that Pip, as hero and putative gentleman, is prevented from carrying out himself.

Mrs Joe is the first of the violent women in *Great Expectations* to be punished, violently. She has created a terrible scene screaming abuse at Orlick in the smithy, and the narrator, recalling this scene, adds:

I must remark of my sister, what is equally true of all the violent women I have ever seen, that passion was no excuse for her, because it is undeniable that instead of lapsing into passion, she consciously and deliberately took extraordinary pains to force herself into it, and became blindly furious by regular stages. (p.142)

This comment is interesting on two counts. It suggests that Pip

11 Julian Moynahan, 'The Hero's Guilt: The Case of *Great Expectations*', *Essays in Criticism* 10 (1960), 67.

12 Jeremy Tambling, 'Prison-bound: Dickens and Foucault', *Essays in Criticism* 36 (1986), 11-31.

has had many encounters with violent women, but more sinisterly suggests that such violence is a performance, that rage is deliberately simulated to create effect and to cause confusion and upheaval. Placed together, Pip's two observations could suggest that he believes many women, in the quest for some power, of any form, take on the undeniably negative and unpleasant roles of termagant and harridan – as Joe has said earlier to Pip, 'I don't deny that your sister comes the Mo-gul over us' (p.79).

The outcome of Mrs Joe's eruption of rage is that Joe flattens Orlick; but nevertheless both Pip and Orlick obtain the half-holiday Joe had promised and to which Mrs Joe had so violently objected. Mrs Joe has committed an extraordinary and flagrant trespass. She has shifted from her own sphere, the house, into the forge, Joe's workplace where Joe is master, and her punishment follows quickly.

On his way home that same evening Pip agrees to turn aside with Mr Wopsle into Pumblechook's and to take part in a reading of George Lillo's tragedy *George Barnwell*. First produced in 1731, this popular and very violent play was still being staged in Dickens' time. What is strange here is that Pip takes on the role of the murderer, and says:

Even after I was happily hanged and Wopsle had closed the book, Pumblechook sat staring at me, and shaking his head, and saying, 'Take warning, boy, take warning!' as if it were a well-known fact that I contemplated murdering a near relation. (p.145)

On his return home Pip discovers that his sister has been brutally attacked:

lying without sense or movement on the bare boards where she had been knocked down by a tremendous blow on the back of the head, dealt by some unknown hand when her face was turned towards the fire – destined never to be on the Rampage again. (p.147)

The word 'Rampage' reminds the reader of this woman's character and effectively eliminates any sympathy for her condition. Moreover it is here, at this dramatic moment, when Pip has just played the part of a murderer of a near relation, that

Dickens ends the week's instalment of the serial – as only Dickens knew how – with his readers wondering if Pip could have possibly committed the crime – and thus ensuring sales for the next issue. In the next instalment Pip also makes a very incriminating statement: 'I was at first disposed to believe that I must have had some hand in the attack upon my sister' (p.147), and states he believes himself to be a 'more legitimate object of suspicion than any one else'. Pip too, as it turns out, has provided the weapon, the leg-iron sawn from Magwitch's leg so long ago with the file little Pip brought him from the forge. Nowhere in the text is Pip's propensity for guilt more strongly indicated than here, and although he soon accuses Orlick of the crime, that peculiar self-accusation remains intermixed with the other, confirming Moynahan's reading of Orlick as Pip's alter ego, as does the final encounter between Pip and Orlick.

So intriguing is this, the reader might well overlook the happy change in Mrs Joe. Violence has rendered her a passive human being, and although her mind and hearing are irretrievably impaired, her temper is greatly improved and Joe is able to appreciate the greater quiet of his life (p.150) which is now truly domestically ideal. The harridan and termagant has been effectively silenced. What is more Mrs Joe continually asks for Orlick, showing 'every possible desire to conciliate him, and there was an air of humble propitiation in all she did' (p.151). She seems here to be seeking the forgiveness of her attacker, a form of self-oppression in which she continually acknowledges the man who found the means to control and restrain her. She has 'the bearing of a child towards a hard master' (p.151) Pip tells us, perhaps recalling instinctively his own bearing towards his sister's 'hard and heavy' regime. Perhaps it is because Orlick has brought about this long-desired social improvement that he is never punished for the violent assault on Mrs Joe.

When Mrs Joe dies her final words are 'Joe', and 'Pardon', and 'Pip' (p.302). Thus the violent woman is made tractable through violence and brought to seek forgiveness from her victims. Mrs Joe has refused the domestic ideal: she is not the Angel in the house but a devil, a 'Mo-gul', a 'rampager', uncontrolled and apparently uncontrollable. Had this been the

only depiction of a violent woman dealt with violently in the text the circumstances would not have been remarkable. Mrs Joe would be seen as typical of her class and station, and therefore deserving of her brutal fate.

This reading of Mrs Joe's fate as a class issue seems to be confirmed by the case of Mr Jaggers' servant Molly, whom Wemmick describes as 'a wild beast tamed', adding 'It won't lower your opinion of Mr. Jaggers' powers. Keep your eyes on it' (p.224; my emphasis). The use of the impersonal 'it' reduces this woman to an inhuman level and thus excuses and condones her treatment. Molly's one prominent scene in the novel is one of the most distasteful, perturbing moments in fiction in which a man humiliates and punishes a woman. It is obvious this scene has been played out between them before and that Molly has been kept from the law to be Jaggers' victim and his slave. Ironically Molly's acquittal on a murder charge is the case which 'may almost be said to have made him' (p.405). Jaggers, Pip observes, brings 'the office home with him' (p.234). There is no delicate separation of Walworth sentiments from Little Britain ones as in Wemmick's case. And Jaggers' furniture too, while 'solid and good' has an 'official' look (p.234).

Pip, thus forewarned by Wemmick, watches Jaggers' housekeeper, with her face 'like the faces I had seen rise out of the Witches' cauldron' (p.235), a reference to *Macbeth* which incidentally helps to prejudice the reader against Molly, and notes

She kept her eyes attentively on my guardian, and ... would remove her hands from any dish she put before him, hesitatingly, as if she dreaded his calling her back, ... I fancied that I could detect in his manner a consciousness of this, and a purpose of always holding her in suspense. (p.235)

What ensues is the calculated humiliation of this woman in front of four educated, middle-class young men. Jaggers claps his hand on hers 'like a trap' and announces 'I'll show you a wrist. Molly, let them see your wrist'. She begs him 'Don't' in a 'low voice', entreating, murmuring, 'Master ... please!'. But relentlessly Jaggers displays both wrists 'coolly tracing out the sinews with his forefinger' (p.236). This personal violation, the assault on Molly's feelings and person is intensely sexual, and it

is not surprising when Jagers suddenly announces that his guests must leave at half past nine. Molly is from the lower, the criminal classes, has 'some gipsy blood' (p.405), and a curtain is drawn discreetly over the true nature of her relationship with the unmarried Jagers: 'he took her in, and ... he kept down the old wild violent nature whenever he saw an inkling of its breaking out, by asserting his power over her in the old way' (p.425). It is easy to imagine what that 'old way' is.

But if Molly is passionate and violent, so too are Miss Havisham and Estella, even though ostensibly from a better class. Miss Havisham is unmarried, a state of great bitterness to her, one of the many women said by W. R. Greg, quoted in Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments*, to have 'an independent and incomplete existence', and whose unmarried state constitutes 'the problem to be solved, the evil and anomaly to be cured'.<sup>13</sup> Miss Havisham, like Mrs Joe, threatens the domestic ideal and her education of Estella perpetuates that threat. Both must therefore be brought under control.

When Pip is elevated socially out of the smithy, due to his 'expectations', he believes Miss Havisham to be the author of his good fortune and that he is intended for Estella. Of Estella he says: 'I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be' (pp.253-4). Waiting at the coach-office for Estella on one occasion, Pip fills in the time by accompanying Wemmick to Newgate Prison, nevertheless he is back at the coach-office with still three hours to wait. He says: 'I consumed the whole time in thinking how strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint of prison and crime' (p.284). Pip is contaminated, with 'Newgate in my breath and on my clothes' and finds the contrast between the prison and Estella abhorrent. The contrast we are expected to make as readers is possibly a different one. Miss Havisham and Estella are the perpetrators of moral crimes and the taint of this is already upon both.

When Pip next sees the two together, Miss Havisham's

13 Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp.1-2.

punishment is begun. He notes that the older woman is 'more dreadfully fond' of Estella than ever, adding:

She hung upon Estella's beauty, hung upon her words, hung upon her gestures, and sat mumbling her own trembling fingers while she looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared. (p.320)

When Estella changes her place away from Miss Havisham, she is passionately accused of being an ingrate, tired of her benefactress. Estella shows a 'self-possessed indifference to the wild heat of the other, that was almost cruel'. That night Pip sees Miss Havisham roaming the house, 'going along in a ghostly manner, making a low cry' (p.325). This moralistic punishment of Miss Havisham is in contrast to both legal punishment and physical punishment. One form of physical punishment is the battering of Mrs Joe; legal punishment is detailed in the novel through the experiences of Magwitch. Magwitch returns to England illegally from Australia. To be caught means, he says dramatically, 'Death by the rope, in the open street' (p.348). Jagers confirms this in an official, legal summary:

I cautioned him that I must hear no more of that; that he was not at all likely to obtain a pardon; that he was expatriated for the term of his natural life; and that his presenting himself in this country would be an act of felony, rendering him liable to the extreme penalty of the law. (p.351)

Punishments, moral, physical or legal, continue to be meted out however. When Pip learns that Estella is to marry that 'mean, stupid brute' Bentley Drummle, the man Jagers has labelled 'The Spider', his agony and pain well up within him 'like blood from an inward wound' and he recalls 'the spectral figure of Miss Havisham ... all resolved into a ghastly stare of pity and remorse' (p.378). In Pip Miss Havisham sees reflected the pain she had suffered on being forsaken and later she seeks his forgiveness, kneeling at his feet.

Pip leaves Satis House but the childhood vision of Miss Havisham hanging by the neck recurs, and it is so intense that he returns to the house to see if she is all right. Just as he is about to leave again her dress catches fire and so old and dry is it that the flames leap up until they soar above her head. In extinguishing

the fire Pip and Miss Havisham struggle 'like desperate enemies' (p.414) as he strives to smother the flames. She is badly burned and later in her delirium she repeats the same three phrases over and over. The last words Pip ever hears her speak are 'Take the pencil and write under my name, I forgive her' (p.415), seeking forgiveness from him in her final moment as Pip's sister has done. Joseph Wiesenfarth says of these incidents that Pip has an unconscious desire to punish punishing women which manifests itself in a simile like 'desperate enemies'<sup>14</sup>.

Estella does not go unscathed in this orgy of punishment. It is Jaggers who originally arranged Estella's adoption by Miss Havisham and he justifies his actions, drawing together the two strands of crime in the novel:

Put the case that [a legal adviser] lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children, was, their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life, he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into the fish that were to come to his net – to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow ... Put the case, Pip, that here was one pretty little child out of the heap, who could be saved. (pp.424-5)

Jaggers saves Estella from this social fate, from legal punishment perhaps, but casts her into another type of prison, where her life is blighted by Miss Havisham's desire for revenge on all men. The one pretty little child out of the heap is saved – but for what? For a marriage to Bentley Drummle who, Jaggers has intimated cheerfully enough, will either beat her or cringe before her (p.402), having early identified Drummle as 'one of the true sort' (p.239). One assumes this is a reference to his latent criminality.

14 Joseph Wiesenfarth, *Gothic Manners and the Classic English Novel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), p.92. All subsequent references are to this edition.

When Pip meets Estella again eleven years have gone by and she is much changed. He had heard that she was most unhappy and 'separated from her husband, who had used her with great cruelty' (p.490). Estella's marital experience is of course a copy-book example of domestic violence. Drummle's death had released her two years earlier. Now Pip sees a saddened, softened light in the once-proud eyes and feels a friendly touch in the once insensible hand. She admits to Pip that 'suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but – I hope – into a better shape' (p.493).<sup>15</sup> Mrs Joe is battered into amenability, Miss Havisham fired into compassion and Estella bent and broken into kindness, all for the sake of the apprentice blacksmith and erstwhile gentleman, Pip.

Wiesenfarth suggests that this reshaping through adversity leads to salvation, but can we really label this extreme violence as no more than 'adversity'? And what kind of salvation do the three women find? Only a form of forgiveness. The narrative, in reshaping the violent women through violence, has empowered Pip who can forgive them *because* they have been brutally punished and reduced to subjection in begging his pardon.

Pip too is punished, but his punishments never take the forms of extreme violence that reforge the women. His punishments are modified forms of those dealt out to the women. He is battered by Orlick, more by words and fearful apprehension than in actual fact; he is burned putting out Miss Havisham's flames, and his right arm is 'disfigured'; and finally he falls desperately ill and his delirium is a confused loss of identity, akin to the loss of identity in Estella.

Illness in Victorian fiction is cathartic but Pip's hallucinations are more than that. His expectations, so linked to the schemes and plans of others, have sent him on a wild journey seeking an identity (which includes moving upwards in class), that will make him worthy of the proud young lady Estella (a Knight of romance marrying the Princess is the way he once hopefully described this role – p.253). At the journey's end Mrs Joe and

15 Wiesenfarth notes the aptness of the blacksmith's terms (p.92).

Miss Havisham are dead, Satis House has gone and all that is left is the cleared space where the house once stood, owned now by Estella. This cleared space is symbolic of the new story to come, and considering Estella's ownership, that new story should be hers, but the woman's narrative is never offered.

In both attempts at an ending Dickens cannot bring the empowered Pip and the tempered Estella together, despite her singularly lower class parentage: or perhaps because of it? Estella does reappear in Pip's life however in both the original and revised endings. In the first she is remote, distant: 'a *lady* in a carriage ... which the *lady* was driving; and the *lady* and I looked sadly enough on one another' (p.496; my emphasis). The class gap between Pip and Estella seems as wide here as it ever was, but the repetition of 'lady' reveals with what difficulty Pip keeps the knowledge of her parentage from her as she looks down on him from her carriage.

The second, revised ending harmoniously links with the novel's opening in its sombre, quiet evening setting but is deliberately ambiguous. It is ambiguous in Estella's saying 'And will continue friends apart' (p.453), contradicted by the next statement, 'I took her hand in mine'. It is ambiguous in the final words, 'I saw no shadow of another parting from her', which suggests there may be a parting after all and that there can be no happy ending for Estella.

The only tale then left to be told is a male one, that of a middle-aged clerk who sheds the childish appellation, the fantasy role of 'Pip', and begins his autobiography, a *bildungsroman* of violence, of crime and of punishment, by reaffirming the patriarchy with a statement that cites his family name as Pirrip, and his Christian name as Philip.