

Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*: The Failed Redeemers and Fate of the Orphan

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English

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15 April 2013

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Introduction

Great Expectations: Pip and the End of the Romantic Child

1860: Twenty-three years after the reign of Queen Victoria began, one year after Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and the year that Charles Dickens first began publishing *Great Expectations*. With the country reeling from the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution and theological crisis stemming from the theory of evolution, *Great Expectations* was born into a world of rapid social, political, and economic change. Dickens' own world was in flux as the serial publication began: in the two years preceding the novel, Dickens had divorced his wife, sold his home, and burned years' worth of correspondence with friends and family. In an environment of dizzying change, it should come as no surprise that *Great Expectations* deviates from Dickens' typical orphan tale. While other Dickensian orphans, David Copperfield and Oliver Twist, even Jo from *Bleak House*, are presented as icons of innocence, Pip's own first-person narrative makes clear that he is flawed, selfish, and culpable. While Oliver, David, and Jo¹ eventually find themselves rescued and redeemed in the arms of loving and affectionate adults, Pip's world is turned upside down when two frightening and self-serving adults manipulate the events of his life. Pip's story was indeed created at a time of dramatic change in both Victorian England and Dickens' own life, but there is more to be explored to account for this distortion of Dickens' traditional orphan tale: My aim is to explore *why* this great deviation takes place in *Great Expectations*.

¹ Though orphans are prevalent throughout Dickens' novels, I use will primarily use examples from *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Bleak House*. The reason for this is that these novels have the most similarities to *Great Expectations*, and thus serve as the best basis for comparison. The works focus on orphans in the literal sense (children who have lost both parents), and more specifically, male orphans, like Pip. Not only that, but they were written throughout Dickens' career, and reveal the progression of his thought and writing. My examples will in no way be exhaustive (to compare Pip to every abused child in Dickens' novels would require a much more expansive work), but are used to show Dickens' deviations in the orphan tale that he so often wrote.

The orphan tale itself was nothing unique to Dickens; expanding across the literature of Victorian England were tales filled with runaways and abandoned and fatherless children. From the Brontë sisters we have the stories of the orphaned governess Jane Eyre and the wild gypsy orphan Heathcliff, from George Eliot we meet Silas Marner and little adopted Eppie, and from Thackeray we encounter the orphaned but ambitious Becky Sharp. The sheer number of orphans in Victorian England at the time can explain their prevalence in literature. Hugh Cunningham points to the Industrial Revolution as a “cataclysmic force” that took children away from their parents and homes, placing them “from workhouses to isolated cotton mills” (8). The rupture in the family unit, coupled with the diseases spread by rapid urbanization and less than rapid sanitation measures, resulted in scores of children who were orphaned or abandoned. In Henry Mayhew’s work *London Labour and the London Poor*, published in 1851, the introduction to the chapter about thieves and swindlers actually begins with a description of the children on the streets:

There are thousands of neglected children loitering about the low neighborhoods of the metropolis, and prowling about the streets, begging and stealing for their daily bread... they are fluttering in rags and in the most motley attire. Some are orphans and have no one to care for them; others have left their homes and live in lodging houses in the most improvident manner... others are sent out by their unprincipled parents to beg and steal for a livelihood. (138)

The sheer number of poor and begging children was an inescapable reality in Dickens’ time and can account for their prevalence in the literature, but there were also a number of factual stories being published about orphans in the time. Ackroyd writes, “Dickens himself had often read autobiographies which emphasize the miseries and privations of childhood... There was also an

ancient but still healthy tradition of ‘rogue literature’, which in part chronicled the dramas of lost or abandoned children” (216-17). Though Dickens may have created some of the most memorable stories about children and orphans, his adoption of the theme was not uncommon.

While orphans and children began to figure more prominently in literature, the very conception of what defined a child was being challenged. Though the Puritan notion that children were inherently sinful had been widely accepted, a new perception of the child emerged in which the child was believed to be inherently innocent and pure. The Romantics introduced the idea that children ought to have some kind of “childhood,” a phase in life distinctly separate from that of adulthood. Malcolm Andrews comments that the male child was put in position where he was expected to be “the embodiment of innocence, spontaneity, romance and imagination; but he also had to be a respectable little citizen” (21). The Romantics continued to respond to both the doctrine of original sin and the Enlightenment view of the child as a “little citizen” (or Locke’s *tabula rasa*); Peter Coveney explains, “The Romantic reaction against moralizing, utilitarian literature for children was part of its whole reaction against the child of the associationist eighteenth century... The literary tide was full set towards the shores of Feeling, and bore with it the fragile craft of the Romantic child” (51). In tracing the emergence of this new figure of the child, Coveney points to Rousseau, Blake, and Wordsworth as the authors who created this image of the child that Dickens inherited.² Literature reflected these changing views of the child, and it is this Romantic child that we find in most of Dickens’ earlier novels, including *Oliver Twist*, *Dombey and Son*, and even *David Copperfield*.

² Coveney explains that Rousseau’s *Emile* and the belief that all children deserved a childhood was a direct challenge to John Locke’s idea that the child was to be “treated as a small adult... to be trained out of his childish ways” (40). After Rousseau, Coveney looks to both Blake and Wordsworth as the forerunners who introduced the child into their poetry as an embodiment of innocence.

Alongside the literary shifts that took place because of the changing perception of childhood, there were also important practical questions raised about the child's function in society. Cunningham explains in *The Children of the Poor* that until the nineteenth century, there had been little discussion of children simply enjoying the innocence and joy of their childhood:

Childhood in the seventeenth and for most of the eighteenth century was perceived as a time for the inurement into habits of labor. It might involve some schooling, but that schooling itself had an overriding function of preparing the child for its predestined future life. Moreover, it was assumed that the children of the poor should have economic value for their parents. (3)

Certainly this was the case for young Dickens at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When his father was put in debtor's prison and his mother's attempt to open a school for girls failed, Dickens, at the age of six, was sent to work at a blacking warehouse to earn some income for the family. Later in life, he described his time spent working at the blacking factory with a pain that seemed as raw as if the experience had taken place only recently: "it is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me..." (qtd. in Forster 21). Dickens was only one of many children who were forced to work to maintain their families, though he was one of the few who was later able to give voice to that experience and who had the sphere of influence to argue for change.

Dickens indeed was a child of the generation that believed children could and ought to be an economic asset to their parents, but he wrote in a generation that was increasingly questioning that notion and suggesting that there is something sacred about childhood. Though some believe that Dickens' writing was adversely affected by the events of his childhood and that his constant

fixation on childhood prevented him from embracing an adult life,³ Coveney instead believes that Dickens' childhood served as a catalyst for his most "mature" works: "His own experience as a child, and his awareness of children in the society about him, served to create a basis of feeling from which he launched the fundamental criticism of life for which his mature art is so remarkable" (111). Dickens, like many of his contemporaries, believed that children should be free to *act* as children, and that belief was part of the reason that the Romantic child appears over and over again in his works.

Part of the emergence of the Romantic view of childhood also had to do with the physical and sociological impacts of urbanization. Altick writes, "The city, like the railroad, had a profound impact upon sensibilities. It was at once the supreme triumph of civilization and civilization's most catastrophic mistake... if the spectacle enthralled, it also appalled. The city's density and expanse bred a sense of captivity, or helplessness, or claustrophobia. Its ugliness finally obscured its grandeur" (77). With the burgeoning change and increasingly fast pace of life, there was a desire to revert back to something simpler, something more innocent, and that "something," for many people, became childhood. Cunningham explains that "[t]he more adults and adult society seemed bleak, urbanized, and alienated, the more childhood came to be seen as properly a garden... which preserved the rude virtues of earlier period of the history of mankind" (3). Perhaps the fixation on childhood became a means of escaping the harsh realities of an overpopulated and unsanitary urbanized London, but for better or worse, the child had become an iconic figure of an unspoiled, untouched innocence.⁴

³ Malcolm Andrews makes a book-length, compelling argument against this belief in his work *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child*. His premise is that "Dickens the grown-up child was an identity deliberately assumed by Dickens as he diagnosed and dramatized that relationship in his writings" (181).

⁴ This figure of the child is what we see in Dickens' earliest works at the threshold of the Victorian era, though as Dickens grew as a man and an author, his own views of the child shifted, and the Romantic child began to fade from his writing (as will be discussed in the analysis of *Great Expectations*.)

Embracing the child as an icon of innocence, Dickens created stories in which the orphan not only maintains his or her innocence in the midst of tumultuous circumstances, but also redeems his or her world in some way. *Oliver Twist* is the first example of the orphan as redeemer in Dickens' novels: in his preface to the third edition of the work, Dickens explained, "I wished to show in little Oliver the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance and triumphing at last" (vi). Oliver does indeed survive and triumph, but as a passive figure of goodness, rather than a child actively working to change the world around him. Throughout the novel, various adults (adults who are both wealthy and thus in some position of power) see Oliver in all of his poverty and wretchedness, and not only redeem him but are inspired to bring some good into the world because of him (for instance, Rose extends her kindness to Nancy out of pity for her and gratitude for what she did for Oliver.)

In a similar way, *David Copperfield* is orphaned and then abused by his tyrannical step-father, and finds refuge when he appears at his Aunt Betsey's door, explaining, "I have been very unhappy since she [my mama] died. I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away to you. I was robbed at first setting out, and have walked all the way..." (198). David, just as pitiful and cruelly abused as Oliver, is promptly taken in to live with his aunt; he is redeemed, and he goes on to rescue others in the novel (including Agatha and her father from Uriah's plot to usurp their business). Throughout *Bleak House*, orphans are scattered and made pitiful in much the same way: Richard, Ada, and Esther are all orphaned and then taken in by Jarndyce; Charley's father dies and it is left to her to care for her two younger siblings, and little Jo from *Tom-all-Alone's* becomes the epitome of a helpless and innocent orphan. In the scene of Jo's death, Dickens' words are an indictment to those who fail to care for, to redeem children as vulnerable as Jo: "Dead, your Majesty. Dead,

my lords and gentlemen. Dead, right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day” (688). Over and over again, Dickens orphans his characters only to have them redeemed and rescued, or to die a martyr’s death to indict those who fail to care for the children.⁵ Dickens wrote about children and orphans not only to advocate for them, but to criticize the culture that neglected them.

Dickens’ use of children to make some sort of comment on society is not exclusive to his writing, though. Most novelists in his time wrote works that were thoroughly entrenched in the issues of their day. Ackroyd notes that “if there is any one enduring aesthetic concept of the period, it is the belief in the social dimensions of art... a novel was thought most important if it faced the reality of its period full on” (464). Dickens was active in the social concerns of his culture not only through his fiction, but in his own philanthropy and work as a reporter.⁶ In regards to his effect on his readers, G. K. Chesterton wrote, “Dickens did not write what the people wanted. He wanted what the people wanted... But Dickens never talked down to the people. He talked up to the people” (107). Dickens was certainly a product of his times, but he was a remarkable one.⁷

Since the Victorian era, children have continued to be used to criticize culture, often in the same ways that Dickens did. In Richard Locke’s work *Critical Children*, he examines the

⁵ These examples are certainly not exhaustive; many of Dickens’ novels have children who have lost only one parent, yet still act as the embodiment of innocence and are figures who are eventually redeemed and redeem those around them.

⁶ For instance, for *The Examiner*, he wrote several articles regarding the disaster at the Juvenile Pauper Asylum in Tooting, in which under nourishment and poor sanitation resulted in the deaths of 180 children. He also worked alongside Angela Burdett-Coutts to create a home for former prostitutes; Dickens’ hopes for change in his literature always came alongside his efforts for social work and reform in England.

⁷ Coveney makes an important observation about the deteriorating relationship between literature and social reality since Dickens’ time: “Dickens was the last English man of letters to have a really successful public voice... after him the moat between literature and the literate public widens; and the impact of literature upon the real flow of public affairs becomes sporadic and occasional” (31).

depiction of childhood in literature, beginning with three of Dickens' novels: *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*. While introducing the novels, he explains that each of the works uses "children caught in violent situations as vehicles of moral and cultural interrogation" (4). Dickens indeed uses childhood, specifically abuse that takes place during childhood, to call to account the various problems in Victorian life. Furthermore, Locke explains that each of the novels also has some sort of redemptive function:

In every one a child is used as a means of adult salvation or consolation – including the reader's. Even novels that appear to end in defeat are designed to provide the reader with moral or psychological insight that can comfort or redeem. In this sense, in every one a child is leading us into the kingdom of heaven or its secular equivalent (moral responsibility, psychological maturity, or their opposite: consoling regression.) (5)

It is this idea of a child as both potential redeemer and as a figure to be redeemed that I want to further investigate in Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

In Dickens' world where literature was often a means for social change and where children were the symbols of ultimate innocence, *Great Expectations* may seem curiously out of place: the overtly scathing criticisms of Victorian life that were characteristic of some of his earlier novels are missing (though certainly, Dickens made certain subtle jabs at various groups in society), and our narrator, though orphaned, is no pillar of innocence. Not only that, but there is no dramatic rescue of the orphan in this novel – those who intervene in his life hope to *gain through him*, not to redeem him. Suddenly Dickens has broken the mold. What has happened to Dickens' view of the child – has it changed, and is Pip's role as a guilty, culpable narrator evidence of that? Or has Dickens' view remained the same, but this time the story is deeper,

more complicated, perhaps darker and more honest? What about the absence of any kind of adult to rescue him, to act as a benefactor, a fairy godparent – in essence, a redeemer? The questions are indeed significant. In Harry Stone's *Dickens and the Invisible World*, Stone explores Dickens' fascination with and use of fairy tales throughout his works, though in his chapter analyzing *Great Expectations*, Stone calls the work Dickens' "inverted fairy tale" (299). An inverted fairy tale it certainly is, but the important question is, is there still redemption for Pip, the orphan of that tale?

My contention in this discussion is that there is still redemption for the orphan, but redemption that comes in a very different way than it did in Dickens's earlier novels. Redeeming Oliver and David was simple, because not only were they perfectly innocent and deserving of a better life, but those who sought to redeem them had the financial means to do so. That is not the case with Pip: early in the novel, after Pip's mysterious inheritance, we soon learn that Pip is subject to envy, to malice, and to snobbery. His money gives him a sense of superiority over both Joe and Biddy, and he is ready and willing to throw them over in favor of the promise of a new life as a gentleman. Not only that, but the people who genuinely love Pip, who would hope to rescue him from his domineering and cruel sister, do not have the power or means to do so. Joe, the husband of Pip's tyrannical sister, is bullied by her in the same way that Pip is, and is only a lowly blacksmith. Biddy, Pip's one friend, is also an orphan, and just as poor. Redemption in the earlier novels required a flawless orphan and benevolent, wealthy rescuer: neither of these figures exists in *Great Expectations*. As such, any type of redemption in this novel must be different, more complicated than the redemption in earlier novels.

It is important to note that Pip is not simply flawed, but is a striking contrast to the image of the Romantic child that Dickens had inherited and embraced in his earlier novels. The

Romantic child was most prominent in the beginning of the Victorian era (and thus Dickens' earlier novels) and eventually disappeared as the century wore on. After years of advocating for social change and having children of his own, Dickens began to present the child in a far more realistic light – neither as a picture of innocence or as a convenient means of society's redemption, but as a figure as susceptible to vice as any adult. Dickens' view of society and the child had not necessarily become more cynical, however, but more true to life. The orphan's world is described in the entirety of its bleakness – at times even incredibly dark or grotesque – and the orphan himself is allowed to grow into a man who is flawed and self-serving. Though redemption is still present, the image of the Romantic child is certainly absent in *Great Expectations*.

Though the innocent orphan is absent from this novel, there *is* a unique figure present in *Great Expectations*: the failed redeemer. The failed redeemer is an adult in a position to care for the orphan, who not only fails to do so, but also abuses that orphan. The first failed redeemer is Pip's own sister: as his only surviving relative, more than twenty years his senior, she has the responsibility to care for and nourish him, but instead brings him up "by hand," filling Pip's childhood with a never-ending barrage of punishment. Molly, Estella's biological mother, not only fails to care for her, but expresses willful intent to harm her child. Both Magwitch and Miss Havisham, who willingly step into Pip's life as a sort of benefactor, use Pip to meet their own ends: Magwitch hopes to make Pip into a gentleman to seek revenge on the society that cast him out, and Havisham hopes to make Pip as miserable as possible by taunting him with the impossible prospect of marrying Estella. Jaggers, as a lawyer and representative of the law, orchestrates all of the manipulations in Pip's life, willfully withholding information from him

and allowing him to believe in the truths that he has concocted. Each of these adults has the power and responsibility to care for the orphan, yet each one fails to do so.

With a flawed and culpable orphan and a series of failed redeemers, the prospect of redemption in the novel is intricate indeed, and perhaps a definition of the term itself is required. In the most fundamental use of the word, to “deem” means “to judge,” and the prefix “re” means “again,” so that to “re-deem” means simply to re-judge. To re-judge something is to see it again and to make a new or different judgment. In Ackroyd’s biography of Dickens, he explains that Dickens had a desire to “rewrite the world, to make it a more vivid and yet more secure place, to dominate and control a reality... to turn even the details of his childhood into the fictional narratives of *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* so that the child himself can be remade and thus redeemed” (82). What Ackroyd is explaining here is that Dickens’ novels were a way of re-judging his past, of *redeeming* his childhood. In the same way, we later see Pip re-judging his own childhood when he meets Joe and Bidley’s son named Pip.

In another sense, to redeem means to forgive. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines redemption as “Expiation or atonement for a crime, sin, or offense; release from punishment” (def. 3a). The concept of redemption as atonement is more prevalent in *Great Expectations* than in other Dickens’ novels simply because *both* the orphans and adults have wronged others and need some kind of “release from punishment.” The entire story is, in a sense, a series of wrongs that require forgiveness: Compeyson wrongs Magwitch and Havisham, Magwitch (inadvertently) harms Pip while Havisham harms Estella, Estella in turn treats Pip badly and Pip goes on to treat Joe badly. Redemption as forgiveness is one of the most prominent ways that redemption is manifest, as Pip and Estella must forgive the adults who wrong them (and one another) while Joe must forgive Pip.

To redeem also has a unique biblical meaning. *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* explains that to redeem is to “[buy] back what was confiscated,” or “to ransom” (“Redeem”). In this sense, redemption has clear monetary implications. Much of the plot of *Great Expectations* revolves around money: Magwitch’s money earned in Australia and sent to Pip spurs on his expectations for the future and his alienation from Joe. Magwitch’s attempt to “buy back” or redeem Pip to the life of a gentleman is what further complicates the plot of the novel.⁸ In Christian theology, “redemption” means specifically redemption and salvation by Jesus Christ, though *Great Expectations* does not overtly mention Christ as Savior in the novel.⁹ Although Dickens himself claimed that he attempted to infuse some of his characters with “reflections of the teachings of our great Master” and that “[a]ll my strongest illustrations are derived from the New Testament” (qtd. in Ackroyd 504), these reflections of Christ and illustrations from the New Testament are implicit in *Great Expectations*, rather than explicit.

Redemption can also imply restoration, or “the action of saving, delivering, or restoring a person or thing” (*OED* “Redemption” def. 5a). It is this type of redemption that figures most prominently in Dickens’ other novels centered on the orphan. Oliver’s redemption comes when he is saved and delivered by Mr. Brownlow, and he is restored to a family and respectable society when adopted by the Maylies. Similarly, David is saved by his Aunt Betsey, is restored to his familial ties, and is also restored to society through a proper education, provided by his Aunt’s funding. This type of redemption is especially problematic in *Great Expectations*: the adults in a position to restore Pip and Estella to a loving family fail to do so. Though the term

⁸ In Patrick Brantlinger’s *Fictions of State: Culture and Credit in Britain, 1694-1994*, he comments on the role of money in life and literature: “Plots are often based on the question of the authenticity of the major characters’ claim to wealth. A similar sense of insecurity and, perhaps, insubstantiality particularly of the wealth of the nouveaux riches is evident in other narrative forms...” (145). The origins and legitimacy of Pip’s expectations are certainly a crucial element of the novel.

⁹ John Cunningham’s article “Christian Allusion, Comedic Structure, and the Metaphor of Baptism” does make a compelling argument for the recurring biblical imagery throughout *Great Expectations*.

“orphan” is traditionally applied to one who has lost both parents, the full definition in *The Oxford English Dictionary* explains that an orphan is “a person, *esp.* a child, both of whose parents are dead (or rarely, one of whose parents have died). In extended use: an abandoned or neglected child” (“Orphan” def. 1). It is the extended use of “orphan” that I am relying on in this study: with this definition in mind, Pip is an orphan because he has indeed lost both of his parents, but Estella is also orphaned, in a sense; her father believes her dead, and thus does nothing to find and care for her, and mother willingly gives her up to be adopted by Miss Havisham, as if her rightful parents were deceased. Though Pip and Estella, both orphaned, yet in different ways, may be saved from a life in the workhouse or begging as a pauper, they are not restored in the same sense that other Dickensian orphans are. The loving home and family are not offered to them, and in fact, Estella is brought into another abusive home. The questions this issue raises is, is there not any kind of restoration for the orphans?

My contention is that there is redemption in all senses of the word, as re-judgment, atonement, ransom, and restoration. Because of the complex relationship between the flawed orphans and the failed redeemers, what Stone called the “inverted fairy tale” has a type of “inverted” way to redemption. Pip’s fallen childhood is re-judged, but not with his own son, but Joe and Biddy’s; the characters who have wronged one another must forgive and be forgiven; the money that Pip lost must be paid back, but it is paid by the poor blacksmith, not the wealthy benefactors; the restoration is of Matthew Pocket’s family and fortune and of Joe and Biddy’s home, and Pip and Estella are restored to their childhood bench in the garden, to begin again. Certainly the path to redemption in *Great Expectations* is more complicated than in Dickens’ other novels, but rather than labeling Dickens a disenchanting old man because of it, or labeling Pip the “anti-hero” as Richard Locke does, it seems likely that Dickens in fact had a greater

appreciation for and faith in redemption because he allowed his characters to struggle so tremendously for it. In Estella's own words, "suffering has been stronger than all other teaching...I have been bent and broke, but – I hope – into a better shape" (538). The great deviation in *Great Expectations* is not that it lacks redemption, but that the redemption comes at enormous cost; perhaps the redemption that comes with the greatest cost is in fact the most beautiful.

Chapter 1

Maternal Figures or Monsters: Mrs. Joe and Molly

The concern of this study is with the two orphans, Pip and Estella, and the adults who fail to redeem them, yet a subtle irony lies in the plight of the orphans; while both Pip and Estella are adopted in the novel, they both have living relatives. Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe, is still alive when he learns of his expectations and is, in essence, adopted by Magwitch; Molly, Estella's mother, is still alive when Estella is adopted by Miss Havisham.¹⁰ The reason that Pip and Estella need to be rescued and redeemed, however, is because these maternal figures failed to nurture, failed to love. Before we look to the adults who fail to redeem the orphans, we must first look to the two maternal figures whose failure to act as mothers created the need for their redemption.

Pip's relationship to Mrs. Joe is strained at best, a fact evident from the opening chapters of the novel that take place on Christmas day. "'And where the deuce ha' you been?'" was Mrs. Joe's Christmas salutation..." (23). In many ways, Mrs. Joe's "Christmas salutation" to Pip reflects the nature of their relationship. Christmas day, a day that ought to be joyful (especially for our narrator, only a young child at the time) is interrupted by the harsh interrogation of his sister; with no hint of kindness or affection, this is the sort of greeting that Pip often receives from his sister. In fact, the very first words that she hurls at Pip in the novel are, "Where have you been, you young monkey?" (8). As the only living relative that Pip has, Mrs. Joe has the primary responsibility to care for him. Because she is much older than him, her role is closer to that of a mother than a sister, though she fails to fulfill either role with devotion or compassion. Mrs. Joe is not, however, the only woman in the novel who is devoid of maternal instinct. Molly, whom we first meet as Jaggers' housekeeper, is Estella's biological mother, though when we later learn of her eagerness to destroy her own child and quick willingness to give her up for

¹⁰ Magwitch is also alive at this time, but he believes that Estella is dead.

adoption, it becomes clear that she is neither suited for nor desirous of motherhood. My aim is to examine Mrs. Joe and Molly as the two women who create the need for redeemers for the orphans; these two women are the only adults in the novel who have a biological connection (and therefore responsibility) to the orphans, yet defiantly fail to care for them. In Mrs. Joe and Molly's failure to mother, they create an environment of abuse from which the orphans must be redeemed, inadvertently opening the door for others (those who we will later identify as failed redeemers) to intervene in their lives and cause them further harm.

To fully understand how the women fail in their maternal role, however, something must be said of the mythology surrounding motherhood and domestic life at the time. Victorian ideology looked to wives and mother as angelic in their care and protection of the home. Such beliefs had their roots in Coventry Patmore's narrative poem "The Angel of the House," in which Patmore praises women's worth and the devotion between husband and wife. The poem's narrator dotes on his wife, writing, "My deepest rapture does her wrong./ Yet it is now my chosen task to sing her worth as Maid and Wife;/ No happier post than this I ask,/ To live her laureate all my life" (38). The narrator elevates his wife to one worthy of hymns and praise, and from such praise a domestic ideology emerged. Ruskin's lecture "Of Queen's Gardens" further propelled the ideology. While Patmore made all wives angelic, Ruskin made the wife's domain, the home, heavenly, a place free from harm or fear:

But so far as it [home] is a sacred place, a vestal temple of the hearth watched over by household gods, before whose faces none may come but those who they can receive with love, so far as... roof and fire are types only of a nobler shade and light... so far as it vindicates the name, and fulfills the praise, it Is Home... and wherever a true wife comes, this home is always round her." (93)

If, in our study, we are to recognize and consider mothers in light of domestic ideology, then mothers are the ones who protect children from the world outside the home; in theory, then, if the mother is doing her job, then there is no need for an outside redeemer.

As is the case with many ideologies, however, the reality for many families was not so simple. The ideal was for men to act as the sole providers and women to work in the home and distribute the husband's income to the various household needs. In reality, only middle and upper-class women could afford to be concerned solely with matters of running the home (and could afford the servants necessary to make this possible), and most lower-class women still needed to work to bring in some income for the family. Though women of all classes were expected to run the house, there was also a certain expectation that the women were not to be *seen* laboring around the house. Boardman writes, "The home... was both a site of women's work and a denial of that work... housework, when performed by the house-wife herself, was to be rendered invisible... Women's work in the home became almost a symbolic or representational task" (154). Women were to be efficient managers of the home while still giving off the appearance of ease.

The two women in *Great Expectations* that we are concerned with, however, did not have the middle class luxuries that would have made such a home life attainable. As the wife of a blacksmith, Mrs. Joe is certainly not considered part of the middle class. The fact that their home is attached to Joe's forge is further indication of their lower social standing; Flanders explains that as the nineteenth century progressed, the wealthy moved further away from their respective workplaces, while the poor continued to live at or near their workplace (7), as the Gargerys do. While Mrs. Joe is part of the working class, Molly has perhaps an even lower social standing, having led a "tramping life" (434). Boardman makes an important note on the subject, though,

explaining that “[a]lthough the domestic ideal was far harder for poor people to maintain, it was nevertheless offered up as a potent ideal...” (154). Even without the luxury of household servants and a steady income from only the husband, the lower-class women had their own expectations of domestic life, yet as we will discover, that ideal never trickled down to Mrs. Joe or Molly.

Perhaps what is more significant than the social myth surrounding women and the home was what Dickens himself believed about the myth and how he usually expressed it in his writing.¹¹ Judith Flanders tells us that “‘a ministering angel to domestic bliss’ was what both Dickens and the majority of the population believed women should be” (13). In a number of other novels, Dickens does in fact create female character who fulfill this role of “ministering angel to domestic bliss.” For instance, in *Oliver Twist*, Rose Maylie and her aunt embody the kindness and loveliness of the domestic ideal, and their home in the country restores Oliver to full health and joy. What is of special note is that not only do Rose and her aunt fulfill the social norm for women, but they also willingly take Oliver in to mother as their own. When she first sees Oliver, Rose cries, “think that he may never have known a mother’s love or the comfort of a home, that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to a herd of men [Fagin and Sikes] who have forced him to guilt. Aunt, dear aunt, for mercy’s sake, think of this... have pity upon him before it is too late!” (264). Similarly, Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* gladly assumes the role of housekeeper, and later takes in the poor and desperately ill orphan Jo. While both the Maylies and Esther are middle-class women, women of lower social

¹¹ While research and discussion on Dickens’ own life will not be relied on heavily in this study, to fully highlight the unique figure of the failed redeemer, biographical information and Dickens’ other novels will be used for the sake of comparison and perspective.

standing are by no means omitted from Dickens' ideal of the angelic, compassionate woman.¹² Even Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, a prostitute, has the virtue and maternal instinct of her middle-class counterparts. Lisa Surrige points out that while Nancy is a prostitute, she embodies "womanly virtues (maternal nurturance, marital loyalty and domestic privacy) as conceived by the middle class" (36). In fact, Surrige goes on to say that Nancy plays a "central and redemptive role in *Oliver Twist*" (17). Although Dickens' novels are certainly filled with other women who are less compassionate, who do not embody the virtues of the domestic ideal, few females in his fiction act in such direct opposition to this ideal as Mrs. Joe and Molly.

While Mrs. Joe is not Pip's biological mother, she is the closest living relative that he has, and her decision to adopt him after the death of their parents would not have been uncommon in that time. Nelson explains that while England did not have any sort of official adoption act until 1926, informal adoption happened quite frequently, even between families (13). Although she agrees to raise Pip after the death of their parents, she makes it quite clear to Pip that the decision is one that she regrets: "And why I did it [raised him], I should like to know!... I'd never do it again! I know that" (9). To say that Mrs. Joe lacks an affectionate or maternal nature would be a severe understatement, but it is also important to note that Mrs. Joe has no children of her own. Penny Kane has pointed out that as the nineteenth century progressed, families had fewer and fewer children (ix), yet to have no children at all, as is the case with Mrs. Joe, would not have been common. Mrs. Joe and Joe have presumably been married since Pip was a toddler; when Joe meets Mrs. Joe, he has already heard of her bringing Pip up 'by hand,' and comments on how "small and flabby" Pip was as a "poor little child" (53).

¹² Murdoch points out an interesting historical note on this issue. She explains that reformers who sought to take children away from their poor parents believed that those children "could only develop as individuals within an institutionally re-created domestic space. At the same time, welfare workers described the urban dwellings as intrinsically undomestic and therefore unsuitable..." (46). What Dickens would have thought about this matter is certainly a question worth considering.

The novel is silent on the subject of the possibility of Mrs. Joe and Joe having children of their own, but the silence is significant. Nelson writes, “The Victorian cult of domesticity was above all a cult of maternity. The moral superiority that nineteenth-century convention attributed to women was firmly tied to women’s ability to mother. Pregnancy and childbirth were often seen as evidence of an innate feminine disposition to sacrifice for others...” (46). Although Mrs. Joe constantly harps on all of the trouble she has endured because of Pip, she has not “sacrificed” by having children of her own. Even in her role as adoptive mother, Mrs. Joe falls short.

If Mrs. Joe is a contrast to the Victorian ideal because she has no children of her own, the contrast becomes even more pronounced when we examine how she fulfills (or perhaps fails to fulfill) the role of wife. Most of the punishments that Pip endures as a child are also endured by Mrs. Joe’s own husband. In fact, Mrs. Joe treats her husband as another child, one whose mouth needs to be rinsed with tar-water (12), who is not permitted to speak at Christmas dinner (28), and who endures physical affronts as much as Pip, even dodging a candlestick launched by Mrs. Joe’s arm (108). Joe’s reaction to his less-than-angelic wife is a matter for another discussion (and his relationship to Pip will be discussed in a later chapter), but it is important to note that her domestic failure extends to the role of wife as well as mother.

Even the physical appearance of Mrs. Joe is a contrast to the idea of a domestic angel. Pip comments, “She was not a good-looking woman, my sister... My sister, Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg-grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony...” (7). This description is particularly unflattering because it is offered after Pip characterizes Joe as “a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided blue...” (7). The colors associated with Mrs. Joe’s physical appearance, black and red,

are a strong contrast to the color associated with Joe, that of “undecided blue.” Not only is her appearance formidable, but there are unique “props” that Mrs. Joe parades around with that further detract from her femininity.¹³ She is constantly wearing “a coarse apron, fastening over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles” (7). None of the words in this description connote an angelic domesticity; “coarse,” “square,” “impregnable,” and “pins and needles” imply more of a prickly battering ram than any maternal devotion. Mrs. Joe’s other regular household prop is “Tickler,” presumably some sort of disciplinary paddle, to be used especially when she is on what Joe calls a “Ram-page” (8).

While Mrs. Joe’s physical appearance fails to convey a maternal gentleness, her gestures towards Pip and her husband are equally devoid of a mothering touch. Mrs. Joe has made a reputation for herself by raising Pip “by hand.” Her disciplinary actions are indeed commented on frequently, and though such discipline was not uncommon -- Ginger Frost writes that Victorian parenting “commonly included slaps and even beatings of young children,” and that “mothers assumed that children needed strict discipline” (14)¹⁴ -- her action towards Pip are especially rough. He is made to drink tar-water as punishment, and Mrs. Joe has a certain way of cutting bread for Pip and Joe that includes “trenchant” motions and often results in a mouthful of pins and needles from Mrs. Joe’s coarse apron (9). When Pip is first sent to Miss Havisham’s house, Mrs. Joe takes it upon herself to give Pip a thorough cleansing, though with little attempt at tenderness in the process: “she pounced on me, like an eagle on a lamb, and my face was squeezed into wooden bowls in sinks, and my head was put under taps of water-butts, and I was

¹³ While some feminist criticism has focused on the masculinity of Mrs. Joe and the femininity of Joe himself, this study is less concerned with the presence of conflicting masculine/feminine characteristics and more concerned with the absence of maternal characteristics on the part of Mrs. Joe. A discussion of Joe’s character, as relates to his role as redeemer, will come in a later chapter.

¹⁴ Bidly, another poor orphan in the novel, is also said to have been “brought up by hand” (48).

soaped, and kneaded, and toweled, and thumped, and harrowed, and rasped, until I really was quite beside myself” (58). After a brutal washing from his sister and a traumatic first trip to Satis House, Pip returns home only to be jostled again as his sister demands an account of Satis House. “I soon found myself getting heavily bumped from behind in the nape of the neck and the small of the back, and having my face ignominiously shoved against the kitchen wall” (72). When Pip still cannot offer his sister sufficient explanation of his time spent with Mrs. Havisham, she prepares to again “fly at [him]”, and it is Pumblechook – a bully in his own right – who intervenes and cautions her, “No! Don’t lose your temper” (73). Mrs. Joe’s violent tendencies towards Pip are manifested in tasks as innocuous as cutting bread, washing, or asking questions.

Mrs Joe’s abuse extends beyond her physical punishments, however, and includes verbal barrages against Pip. In the first conversation - if their exchanges can be considered conversations, rather than verbal assaults – Mrs. Joe calls Pip a “monkey” (8), and at Christmas dinner, when Pumblechook surmises what would have happened if Pip had been a “four-footed Squeaker” rather than a boy, Mrs. Joe adamantly interjects that “He was [a pig], if ever was a child” (28). The effect of such comments on Mrs. Joe’s part is a very literal dehumanization of young Pip. Ian Ousby observes that at the Christmas dinner, most of the adults’ (including Mrs. Joe’s) exchanges with Pip are in the form of interrogation (785). Furthermore, he explains that “[h]er questions are not an attempt at communication, since the answers she requires from Pip are purely formulaic. The real, though unconfessed, purpose of the whole interrogation is to give Mrs. Joe a chance to indulge and soothe her frustration” (787). Not only is Pip dehumanized and interrogated when spoken *to* by his sister, but even when she speaks *about* him her words are dripping with disgust. At Christmas dinner she recollects all of the trouble that Pip has been the

sore cause of, “all the acts of sleeplessness I [Pip] had committed, and all of the high places I had tumbled from, and all the low places I had tumbled into, and all the injuries I had done myself, and all the times she [Mrs. Joe] had wished me in my grave, and I had contumaciously refused to go there” (30). In nearly any circumstance in which Pip is mentioned, Mrs. Joe deems it an appropriate time to find fault with him and air her grievances against his ever becoming her charge, her adopted son, as it were.

Mrs. Joe, in her role as maternal figure, stands in violent contrast to the cult of domesticity of the time, and yet even when she attempts to fulfill her household duties, she finds a way to make Pip and Joe suffer in the process. As she prepares the house for Christmas dinner, Pip remarks, “Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable and unacceptable than dirt itself” (24). The nature of Mrs. Joe’s housekeeping seems to run against the grain of the belief that “good housekeeping improved more than just the house... the virtues that orderly housekeeping could bring about were almost unending” (Flanders 17). Certainly Mrs. Joe’s housekeeping efforts had little to do with moral improvement, either for herself or her family. During one of Mrs. Joe’s “Rampages,” she becomes so incensed that she begins cleaning frantically, something that Pip immediately recognizes as a dangerous omen: “...[she] got out the dustpan – which was always a very bad sign – put on her coarse apron, and began cleaning to a terrible extent. Not satisfied with a dry cleaning, she took to pail and a scrubbing-brush, and cleaned us out of house and home, so that we stood shivering in the backyard. It was ten o’clock at night before we ventured to creep in again... (108). Mrs. Joe’s concern for domestic cleanliness and the consequent suffering of her household is almost a grotesque caricature of the cult of domesticity. Cingureanu even surmises that Mrs. Joe’s behavior is an intentional satire on a small but growing feminist movement that

called women to oppose the “patriarchal power of men in the house” (349). Whether or not satire was Dickens’ intention is open to interpretation, but what is clear is that Mrs. Joe fails in her role as angel of the house, and more importantly, fails to act as mother to Pip.

Most of what we know of Mrs. Joe comes from Pip’s own perspective, which may be colored by his own sensitive perception (he does, after all, make himself feel guilty enough about stealing the pork pie for the convict without his sister saying a single word.) Not all of Pip’s sentiments towards his sister, however, stem from visceral reactions to events like Christmas dinner. At some points in the narrative, Pip’s perception of his sister is far more introspective. For instance, after having his feelings hurt by Estella on his first visit to Satis House, Pip makes a poignant remark about his sister and his upbringing:

My sister’s upbringing has made me sensitive. In the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child can be exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is small... 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. (68)

What is important to recognize in this instance is that Pip’s reflection comes in the midst of his visit at Satis House; his sister is nowhere present. The remark is not an instant reaction to a painful punishment; he is able to clearly articulate the trauma inflicted on him by his sister. Pip’s sentiments towards Mrs. Joe and his sense of her injustice may not simply be a child’s exaggeration, but may actually be a product of years of suffering and abuse under her hand. Her failure to mother Pip created a circumstance that he needed to be redeemed from, one that

eventually left him exposed to the manipulation of others.¹⁵

Mrs. Joe's failure is made painfully clear in the opening chapters of the book, though Molly, who also failed to fulfill her role as mother, is a far more complicated figure. While Pip had first-hand experience to describe his sister, what we learn of Molly comes not from the narrator's own interaction with her, but of what he learns from other characters, namely Wemmick, Jaggers, and Magwitch. While Mrs. Joe plays a prominent role in the opening chapters, Molly's appearances in the novel are brief and scattered, though by the end, we learn that her actions and relationships with others have, in a very real sense, affected Pip's story. She was married to Magwitch, Pip's benefactor, and she is the mother of Estella, the woman he loves. Molly's failure to act as mother to her child leads to Miss Havisham's control over Estella (and through Estella, Pip) and Magwitch's desire to adopt Pip as his son, believing that his own child was destroyed by her. We should not overlook her importance in the novel's plot, and in a study of failed redeemers, we should also not overlook the fact that she is one of the only biological mothers in the entire novel.¹⁶ A note of clarification ought to be made at this point: as I mentioned in the introduction, Estella is not an orphan in the sense that both of her parents are dead (although she never realizes that her parents are alive), but she is being treated as an orphan here. Her mother hands her down willfully, her father believes her to be dead, and she is adopted by Miss Havisham in the same way that she would have been if both of her parents were deceased. The very fact that Estella functions as an adopted orphan in the novel is a testament to Molly's shortcomings as a mother.

¹⁵ Though Mrs. Joe is a changed woman (in more ways than one) after Orlick's attack, and she does eventually ask both Joe and Pip for forgiveness, that transformation and forgiveness will be dealt with in a later chapter.

¹⁶ The only other biological mother in the story is Mrs. Pocket, who also proves herself to be an ill-equipped mother, having "grown up highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless" (209). Her shortcomings as a mother are expressed by her son Herbert at various points in the narrative, and her other children are characterized as "tumbling up" rather than "growing up" (205). In-depth discussion of Mrs. Pocket is omitted here, as this study is focused on those who fail to redeem the *orphans* of the work, rather than *all children* in the text.

We are told little about Molly when she actually was a wife and mother, living with Magwitch and Estella. What we do know comes from other characters' hearsay, yet these explanations are the only fragments that we have for understanding Molly. Like Mrs. Joe and Joe, Molly and Magwitch were of low social standing, but lived in a most disreputable way. Wemmick explains, "They both led tramping lives, and this woman [Molly] in Gerrard street here, had been married very young, over the broomstick (as we say) to a tramping man" (434-45). Cingureanu notes that Gerrard street was known especially "for its brothels and prostitutes," and she further explains that the marriage initiated by jumping over the broomstick signifies "their marginal social status" (358). In a world of tramps, prostitutes, and jealousy, the popular domestic ideology holds no place in the marriage of Magwitch and Molly. Molly suspects her husband of infidelity and strangles the alleged mistress, and Magwitch is haunted by memories of his wife, even years later; as he tells Pip and Herbert about his life, he briefly mentions her and becomes disoriented, even angry: "My Missis as I had hard times wi' – Stop though! I ain't brought her in – ' He looked about him in a confused way, as if he had lost his place in the book of remembrance..." (386). From the murder that Molly committed to the horror Magwitch feels at the mere memory of his wife, it is clear that their marriage was a far cry from the domestic ideal.

While the limited information we do have about Molly and Magwitch's marriage does not include a description of their home (and thus no description about Molly as a domestic caretaker), her role as Jaggers' housekeeper does hint at Molly's shortcomings in a domestic role; Jaggers' house is described as "dolefully in want of painting, and with dirty windows," and with a hall that appears "bare and gloomy" (234). Molly serves as Jaggers' housekeeper, but the home's state of dilapidation does not speak well of her domestic abilities. Of course, these details

may tell us far more about Jagers and little about Molly, but it is the only glimpse that the book offers of Molly and her domestic duties, and may shed further light on the dissonance between her and the Victorian ideal of motherhood and the home.

Molly may be a poor housekeeper, but she is an even worse mother: though Magwitch expresses a love and affection for their daughter, a child “of whom he was exceedingly fond” (449), we are told little of any maternal love on Molly’s part. What we instead learn from Wemmick is that after killing another woman out of jealousy, she had hoped to punish her husband, Magwitch, (whom she to believed to be unfaithful) by destroying their child, “some three years old – to revenge herself upon him” (435). Molly’s supposed desire to destroy her own child is further supported by Magwitch’s own recollections; Magwitch had revealed to Herbert that on the night that Molly killed the other woman out of jealousy, she also “presented herself before Provis [Magwitch] for one moment, and swore that she would destroy the child (which was in her possession), and he should never see it again” (448). Molly demonstrates none of the what the Victorians assumed was a natural inclination to sacrifice for her child’s sake; instead, she is presented as violent, vengeful, and impulsive. Though abuse and violence were often attributed to husbands and fathers rather than wives and mothers,¹⁷ Magwitch and Molly’s marriage shows a great reversal of that trend, a ferocity on the part of the woman. Molly does not actually kill Estella (though Magwitch does not know that), but the threats against her daughter’s life are enough proof that she was in no way a suitable mother, and her willingness to hand her child over to Jagers (to be given to the equally terrifying Miss Havisham) is a further indication that she was neither an affectionate nor a tender mother. In fact, what Molly did was create a

¹⁷ Recently, more scholarly attention has been given to this kind of abuse and its prevalence in Victorian literature. For reference, see Lisa SurrIDGE’s *Bleak House: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (quoted earlier), Marlene Trump’s *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain*, and Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky’s *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth Century Literature*.

situation in which her own child needed to be rescued, to be redeemed, from *her*. Rather than acting as a failed redeemer, Molly's character is almost an "anti-redeemer," one who so dismally fails to love that she would destroy her own child.

The descriptions of Molly in the novel are also a physical manifestation of her lack of maternal softness, of her role as an "anti-redeemer." Pip first encounters Molly while dining at Jaggers' home, and describes her in ghastly terms: "I know that I had been to see Macbeth at the theater, a night or two before, and that her face looked to me as if it were all disturbed by fiery air, like the faces I has seen rise out of the Witches' caldron" (235). What is more remarkable than her face, however, are her hands. Jaggers intentionally points out her hands to all of his dinner guests, grabbing them in his own and commenting, "[t]here's power here... Very few men have the power of wrist that this woman has. It's remarkable what mere force of grip there is in these hands" (237). Pip is shocked by the brutal disfigurement of her hands, noting grimly that they were "deeply scarred and scarred across and across" (237). The repetition here is not accidental; Pip seems to be mesmerized in some way by the lashes across Molly's hands. Forker comments that "[t]he scarred, disfigured wrists of Mr. Jaggers' housekeeper are the tell-tale marks of her sinister past (282). Something in Molly's very appearance conveys a violence of her nature, further enforcing her role as an anti-redeemer.

Though Molly's actions, in a way, speak far louder than her words in the narrative, Molly's *lack* of dialogue in the novel is significant. In the few scenes of the novel in which Molly actually appears (as opposed to when she is talked *about*) she says very little. In the scene in which Jaggers takes her hands and shows them to his guests, the only words that she utters are, "Master...Don't!" and "Master... Please!" (237). Her words reveal her fear of Jaggers, whose dominance over her makes her pitiful despite her past. She pleads with Jaggers not to expose her

hands to the guests, calling him “Master,” but she can do nothing else to explain herself or to avoid Jaggers’ touch. When Pip again dines with Jaggers in the company of Wemmick, she does not utter a single word. Her silence is especially noteworthy on this second occasion because of the conversation that the men were having: the subject was her daughter, Estella. Jaggers comments on her recent marriage to Bentley Drummle, and the words that follow are haunting: “He [Drummle] is a promising fellow – in his own way – but he may not have it all his own way. The stronger will win in the end, but the stronger has to be found out first. If he should turn to, and beat her - ” (431). Jaggers’ speech is cut off by Pip’s horror at the thought of Estella being beaten by her husband, yet when Jaggers does continue in his speech, Molly is at his elbow bringing in a dish, and he addresses her directly: “Now, Molly, Molly, Molly, Molly, how slow you are to-day!” (432). Although we are told that she murmurs “some excuse” to Jaggers (432), she in no way comments on their discussion (it is possible, however, that her halted motion in serving the dish is a result of her distress at the mention of her daughter; the text is open to interpretation.) Again, she is only the housekeeper and it would be untoward of her to offer her opinion, but the subject is her daughter, and the possibility of abuse against her daughter. Yet Molly is silent, the same way that she is silent in Estella’s life. The text itself makes no comment on the subject of any hope or chance of a relationship between Molly and her daughter; her continued silence is, in a way, the antithesis of a maternal instinct, and so she becomes the antithesis of a redeemer.

Though Molly and Mrs. Joe have limited appearances in the novel, their roles as maternal figures make them crucial to our discussion. Both women demonstrate violence against their little ones rather than love towards them, both women allow their little ones to be adopted by complete strangers, and both women fail in their role as the primary caretakers of the orphans.

Eventually, Mrs. Joe and Molly's failure allow them to fade in the narrative as others step in to redeem their children. Those adoptive parents, however, also fail the orphans: it is to those adoptive parents, Magwitch and Havisham, that we now turn.

Chapter 2

Fallen Godparents and the Inverted Fairy Tale

As adoptive parents, Magwitch and Miss Havisham are staples in Dickens' traditional orphan tale. In many of his novels, the adoptive parents are both benevolent and wealthy, and become fairy godparents by rescuing the child from whatever drudgery, whatever abuse they have endured under the hands of tyrannical adults. In *Great Expectations*, however, Miss Havisham and Magwitch are more manipulative benefactors than loving godparents; while the novel has its share of tyrannical adults that the children must be rescued from (as discussed in chapter 1), the adoptive parents do not function as a benevolent contrast.¹⁸ Instead, Miss Havisham and Magwitch harm the orphans as much as Pip and Estella's own parents. Here, the fairy tale adoption is replaced with what Harry Stone calls an "inverted fairy tale" (299). Though fairy tales are often dark and focused on young children who are endangered by a witch, ogre, or other menacing creature, the fairy tale typically ends with the children fighting their way out of danger or being rescued by a hero who then adopts them; not so in *Great Expectations*. While the story is dark and Pip and Estella are certainly endangered by fearful adults - Mrs. Joe and Molly are menacing enough - instead of the traditional rescue by benefactor, as was the case in

¹⁸ In many of Dickens' earlier novels, there is an intentional contrast between the gentle, loving adoptive parent and the inept or uncaring biological one. In *David Copperfield*, David's own mother Clara, though loving, does little to defend her son against her bullying husband Mr. Murdstone. At one point, in the midst of Mr. Murdstone's harsh reprimand against David, David notices his mother's expression and her failure to defend him: "I thought my mother was sorry to see me standing in the room so scared and strange... she followed me with her eyes more sorrowfully still - missing, perhaps, some freedom in my childish tread - but the word was not spoken, and the time for it was gone" (56). David suffers as much while his mother is alive as he does when she dies. Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House* is unfeeling towards her children, concerning herself more with various charities in Africa than her own family; even the kind, gentle Esther cannot help commenting that "it is right to begin with the obligations of home... perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them" (67). The adoptive parents in the novels, however, act as a foil to the actual ones. In contrast to Clara Copperfield, we meet Betsey Trotwood, who has compassion and money enough to adopt David as her own; in contrast to Mrs. Jellyby, we meet Jarndyce, who has the kindness and finances to take in Richard, Ada, and Esther and provide for them.

Dickens' earlier novels, Dickens makes Havisham and Magwitch grotesque caricatures of heroes and redeemers, and the pattern of the "inverted fairy tale" continues throughout Pip's story.

While Havisham and Magwitch deviate from the pattern of traditional Dickensian godparents, Pip and Estella also deviate from traditional Dickensian orphans; neither is an innocent Oliver or a poor Dick. Both can be as selfish and cruel as their respective benefactors, and are held responsible for their actions, by themselves and their author. This inverted relationship between godparent and orphan creates a certain tension within the novel; no one character can be categorized as fully villain or fully victim. Miss Havisham is not just a witch; she is a broken woman. Magwitch is not just an ogre; he is a doting father. As such, the orphan's redemption cannot be a simple act of rescue and restoration, as it was in Dickens' earlier novels. There is no magical fix for the failings of the orphans and the adults. Stone describes Dickens' use of the "invisible world" - a term that includes "fairy tales," "folklore," and "enchantment" - as "deceptive" (ix). He writes, "his [Dickens'] storybook effects are usually part of a captivating and compelling realism. Like a master magician - and Dickens was an accomplished magician - he conceals in order to reveal" (ix). Dickens conceals many identities in the novel - Estella's true mother and Pip's true benefactor, most importantly - but he allows characters to initially be deceived in order to make a greater revelation: In *Great Expectations*, Dickens uses the inverted fairy tale to create a story in which the only chance of a happy ending, of redemption, is revealed through forgiveness that begins with the orphans.

To understand fully the relationship between Pip and Estella and their godparents, it is necessary to examine Magwitch and Havisham's lives before they ever imagined that they would adopt a child; the wounds from their own pasts have everything to do with their actions on the orphans' behalf. Pip learns about Havisham's past when he meets Herbert; Herbert explains that

Miss Havisham “was a spoilt child. Her mother died when she was a baby, and her father denied her nothing... Mr. Havisham was very rich and very proud. So was his daughter” (198). Herbert goes on to say that when he received her father’s inheritance, she became the object of prey to a certain man intent on gaining her fortune under the pretense of marrying her, but who instead deserted her on the wedding day. While many critics point to Miss Havisham’s slighted love and desire for vengeance as her sole motivation in adopting Estella, two other points are worth noting: the first is that her mother died when she was an infant, and Miss Havisham grew up without any maternal figure of her own. The second is that at the time of her engagement, her father had already passed away. Though a grown woman, one “too haughty and too much in love, to be advised by anyone” (200) she was an orphan when she was humiliated and left at the altar. Although she had her fortune and social standing to support herself, she had neither mother nor father who could have advised or warned her about her fiancé’s true intentions. Though Havisham’s desire for revenge fuels her actions in the novel, her own vulnerability – both an emotional vulnerability and a vulnerability to con men who would rob her of her inheritance – instill in her a sincere desire to protect a fatherless child like who was as vulnerable as herself. Sadrin explains, “if circumstances compelled her to give up all thoughts of child-bearing, Miss Havisham had not renounced motherhood, as her adoption of Estella shows” (232).

The trials Magwitch endured in his youth proved equally traumatic, but came in a very different form than Havisham’s. Magwitch had none of the comforts that Havisham did in his childhood; in fact, his earliest memory, when he first “become aware of [him]self” was when he was “thieving turnips” to survive (383). He has no recollection of his parents or family, and grew up being “took up,” or arrested, on a regular basis.¹⁹ Magwitch grew up as a child of the streets, a

¹⁹ Robin Gilmour has pointed out that although *Great Expectations* was published in 1860, it is actually set in the “early years of the nineteenth century when Pip and his creator were children” (111). Gilmour goes on to explain

criminal even before he understood his crimes. Thomas Wontner explains the plight of such a child at that time, writing, “the children of the poor are, per necessatis, brought up in ignorance, and are exposed to every evil and vicious example...they undergo great privations, without possessing the moral restraints which belong to children of more fortunate parentage” (3). These “great privations” are certainly evident in the childhood that Magwitch describes; Stone comments that Magwitch in fact “shows us [Victorian] society’s guilt in producing criminals” (309). We also know that Magwitch eventually married and became a father, but went into hiding when he believed his daughter to have been destroyed by his wife (Molly). The crime that ultimately leads to his conviction and imprisonment is a forgery scheme with Compeyson (the same man who orchestrated the plan that left Havisham at the altar). Certainly Magwitch is motivated to adopt Pip as his own in order to make him the gentleman that he could never be, to re-judge his own life through Pip, but he also has a genuine compassion for the young orphan when he meets him on the marshes. Magwitch and Havisham both intend to redeem the children when they adopt them, though the bitterness that stems from their own wounds – Havisham’s bitterness from the man who rejected her and Magwitch’s bitterness from the society who imprisoned him – cripples their attempts to redeem.²⁰

In adopting Estella, Havisham becomes more of a wicked stepmother than a fairy godmother. As an adoptive mother, the same expectations applied to Miss Havisham as they

that “Pip is born at the start of the nineteenth century into a world that is recognizably more violent and precarious than the world of 1860... The early chapters convey a powerful sense of the precariousness of human life, and here too the novel’s mood is faithful to the period when the rate of infant mortality was high: Pip and his sister are the only survivors of a family of nine” (127). The “precariousness” of Magwitch’s childhood is indeed true to the time in which Dickens set the novel.

²⁰ It is worth noting that Magwitch and Havisham’s reasons for adopting were not uncommon at the time. Nelson writes, “adoption came in a number of forms and arose from many different motivations: the longing to become a parent, the hope of replacing a biological child who had died, and the need for household help” (160). Havisham, on some level, adopts Estella because she longs to be a mother. She tells Pip, “I wanted a little girl to rear and love, and save from my fate” (443). Similarly, Magwitch does not adopt Pip simply to make him a gentleman, but to replace his own daughter who he believes has died.

would have to any biological mother; the same ideology that Molly and Mrs. Joe were expected to live by would have applied to Miss Havisham as well. Nelson writes, “The belief that the mothering instinct was present in all women, or at any rate all good women, whether or not they have ever given birth, was an article of faith for any number of Britons during this period...in addition, [many] thought that motherless children could be provided with a surrogate mother who would be just as effective as the original one” (143). In her decision to become a mother and not a wife, however, she has already deviated from the image of the angel of the house, of the doting wife who is her husband’s crown and praise. Cigureanu writes, “Miss Havisham ostentatiously chooses celibacy. When a woman opposes the patriarchal world... she becomes an object of ridicule, a grotesque figure, a monster, a stereotype pitted against the angel of the house” (354).

Miss Havisham’s aversion to the idea of the angel of the house is made evident in the house itself. When Pip first sees Satis House, he describes it in the following terms: “...we came to see Miss Havisham’s house, which was of old brick, and dismal, and had a great many iron bars to it. Some of the windows had been walled up; of those that remained, all the lower were rustily barred” (60). The house is dismal enough to be a witch’s castle, and when Estella comes out to meet Pip, the house’s eeriness only increases. She points out the empty brewery years to him, warning him “not [to] try to brew beer there not, or it would turn out sour” (62). What was once a symbol of the house’s affluence and income, the brewery, is now empty and abandoned, capable only of producing a “sour” brew. Estella goes on to tell Pip the name of the house: Satis House. “It [the name] meant, when it was given, that whoever had this house, could want nothing else. They must have been easily satisfied in those days, I should think” (62). Estella’s words capture the irony, perhaps even the grotesque nature, of the home. None of the inhabitants of the

house are satisfied, or even content; what was once a great mansion is now decayed, grander than the witch's cottage of a fairy tale, but quite as haunted.

As Pip ventures inside the house, his sense of foreboding continues to grow. All of the house's passageways are filled with a terrible darkness, and Miss Havisham's room is closed off entirely to any natural light. Pip walks in and first notices a "great table with a gilded looking – glass," one that he believes is "a fine lady's dressing table" (63). Hynes points to Miss Havisham's possession of such a looking glass as evidence of her true witch-like nature (259). As Pip takes in more of his surroundings, looking from Miss Havisham's ornate bridal gown, jewels, and veil, he too is convinced of Miss Havisham's ghastly nature:

I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its luster, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. (63)

This strange mix of the lavish and the decayed²¹ is characteristic of Miss Havisham's home, and in many ways of herself. She wears her wedding dress years after Compeyson left her on her wedding day; what was once a symbol of the bride's purity before marriage has become a tattered tribute to her bitterness. She will not stop wearing the dress because she will not relinquish the feeling that she has been wronged, that she has been ruined, and she uses such

²¹ The lavish and the decayed nature of Miss Havisham's room in turn lends to Pip's own sense of wonder at the finery in the room and horror at the ruined state of that finery. Such tension between wonder and horror is one that Stone believes characterizes Dickens' use of fairy tales. Stone describes two "chords" in Dickens' works: "The first chord is compounded in wonder, delight, innocence, freedom, though it sometimes takes on nostalgic harmonies of yearning and loss. It is coterminous with imagination and goodness, often with liberation and salvation. It surrounds the beneficent fairy tales or more beneficent parts of fairy tales. The second chord is compounded of horror, fear, and loathing, often strongly counterpointed by attraction or repulsion... it surrounds the violent, gruesome, nightmarish portions of fairy tales" (38). Pip's wonder quickly turns to repulsion on his later visits to Satis House.

feelings to fuel her manipulation of Estella. Stone calls Havisham a “Sleeping Ugly,” waiting for a prince who will never come, or a “blighted Cinderella” who wears only one shoe. “Betrayed by her faithless prince,” Stone writes, “she has turned witchlike and infernal” (313). Though Miss Havisham has withered and aged,²² the stopped clocks in the room show an actual arrest of time; time, like Satis House and its owner, has become stagnant. By his second visit to Satis House, Pip himself is convinced that she is the “Witch of the place” (93).

While Miss Havisham as Estella’s “wicked stepmother” is the primary focus of this study, it is important to note that Havisham also has a unique relationship to Pip. When he receives his expectations, she allows him to believe that she is his fairy godmother, the woman responsible for his sudden elevation. Stone explains that “Pip in his upside-down morality is certain Miss Havisham is his godmother” (310). Though Pip is mistaken in his belief, her interest in him as a child and her constant invitations to Satis House make his mistake understandable. In much the same way that a witch lures a child into her home in a fairy tale, Miss Havisham lured Pip into Satis House for her own “sick fancies” (64), to see his heart wrenched by Estella; his longing for Estella is very much a witch’s curse that Havisham casts on him.²³

The curse that Miss Havisham is to her own daughter, however, is far worse. We are given few specific details of Estella’s childhood in Satis House, and the little that we do know is

²² Physical appearance is not, of course, always a measure of virtue or character in Dickens’ works. Some beautiful women do not function as examples of virtue or domestication (such as Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*) and some women whose beauty is marred still maintain a warm maternal temperament (such as Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*). Rose Maylie, however, who cares for Oliver, does have an angelic appearance that perfectly compliments her angelic temperament: “The very intelligence that shown in her deep blue eye, and was stamped upon her noble head, seemed scarcely of her age, or of the world. . . the smile, the cheerful, happy smile – were made for Home, and fireside peace and happiness” (260). Rose’s beauty here is linked directly with her care in the home and hearth. Though not all of Dickens’ females have an appearance that matches their temperament, if Rose’s appearance is the embodiment of love and affection, then Miss Havisham’s ghastly appearance is an embodiment of the “sick fancies” (64) that she admits are inside of her

²³ Stone goes on to say that “Miss Havisham’s only gifts are witch’s curses – the curse of frigidity and suffering for Estella, longing and torment for Pip, degradation and jealousy for the Pockets” (310).

only revealed when Estella is a grown woman, talking to Pip about her satisfaction in seeing the Pockets' schemes thwarted:

For you were not brought up in that strange place from a mere baby. – I was. You had not your little wits sharpened by their [the Pockets] intriguing against you, suppressed and defenceless, under the mask of sympathy and pity and what not, that is soft and soothing. – I had. You did not gradually open your round childish eyes wider and wider to the discovering of that imposter of a woman who calculates her stores of peace of mind for when she wakes up in the night. – I did.

(296)

Although it is the home that she grew up in, Estella still calls it a “strange place,” and calls her mother an “imposter of a woman.” Even from Miss Havisham and Estella’s first interaction in the novel, it becomes evident that Havisham’s behavior towards Estella is not that of maternal affection, but of cold infatuation. On Pip’s first visit, Havisham demands that Pip call Estella into the room. Miss Havisham places a jeweled necklace on Estella’s neck, telling her, “Your own one day, my dear, and you will use it well. Let me see you play cards with this boy” (65). She places jewelry on Estella like she would a doll, dressing her up in her own wasted riches. What Miss Havisham means by “you will use it well” is ambiguous, but her next words to Estella express her meaning quite clearly: “You can break his [Pip’s] heart” (66). While Havisham’s curse to Pip is his longing for Estella, her curse on Estella is this perpetual attempt to use her as a weapon, to train her to break men’s hearts. Although Estella is only a child at the time, Miss Havisham is already grooming her to enact her own revenge on men, admiring her beauty only because of the destruction it can bring.

Even as an adult, Estella recognizes her mother's control over her. She tells Pip, "We have no choice, you and I, but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I" (294). Estella's use of first person plural here is significant because she includes Pip in the limitation that she feels; at this point in the novel, Pip still believes Miss Havisham to be his mysterious benefactor, a belief that she has cruelly perpetuated. As he listens to Estella, Pip begins to feel "as if [their] association were forced upon [them] and [they] were mere puppets" (297). They become puppets indeed, two orphans who were both manipulated and "cursed" by Miss Havisham since they were children.

The damage that Miss Havisham has done as a mother is most clearly expressed by Estella herself. On a visit with Pip back to Satis House, Estella paces the room with Miss Havisham, but stops to untangle her own arm from her mother's. With this one gesture, Miss Havisham becomes a furious wraith, calling Estella "ingrate," "stock and stone," and "hard and thankless" (338). Estella's composure is a foil to her mother's madness; when her mother demands love, Estella's response is articulate and unyielding: "Mother by adoption, I have said that I owe everything to you... All that you have given me, is at your command to have again. Beyond that, I have nothing. And if you ask me to give you what you never gave me, my gratitude and duty cannot do impossibilities" (339). Estella does not simply call her "mother," but "mother by adoption." She uses that particular epithet twice in their conversation, and the first time she uses the phrase it is a "retort" (339). This love that ties itself to jealousy and pain is not love at all for Estella. Havisham's response is frenzied, and she herself describes the love she gave to Estella as "a burning love, inseparable from jealousy at all times, and from sharp pain" (339). The scene becomes grotesque as Havisham crumples on the ground and Estella remains cold and erect, the pillar of ice that Havisham has made her. Jerome Meckier explains that Miss

Havisham had created her own “heartless monster,” and instead of a story in which a “fairy godmother” has a “thankful recipient,” the story becomes one in which “vengeful benefactors victimize ungrateful Cinderellas” (102). Estella is ungrateful indeed for the damage her adopted mother has done in her life.

Miss Havisham’s eventual penitence for her failure as a mother is perhaps as grotesque as her last exchange with Estella. She confesses that her intentions were only to love her, and that they had become more and more twisted as Estella grew older. She tells Pip, “as she grew, and promised to be very beautiful, I gradually did worse, and with my praises, and with my jewels, and with my teachings, and with this figure of myself always before her, a warning to back and point my lessons, I stole her heart away and put ice in its place” (442). While Miss Havisham’s repentance is a crucial moment in the novel (as much a symbol of her growth and of Pip’s growth in forgiving her),²⁴ she cannot undo what has been done to Estella. She cannot rectify the years of scars that Estella has received in her time spent at Satis House. By the time Havisham confesses all this to Pip, Estella is already married to Bentley Drummle, the “contemptible, clumsy, sulky booby” (344), who we later learn “[uses] her with great cruelty” (536). What began as a promise of restoration for Estella (though she hardly knew it, being only two or three when she was adopted) led only to a hardened heart and an abusive marriage; throughout, Miss Havisham was no fairy godmother, no benevolent benefactor, but a failed redeemer.

While Miss Havisham acts as a witch or wicked stepmother to Estella throughout her life, Magwitch is absent for most of Pip’s childhood and adolescence, though their first meeting on the marshes is terrifying enough for young Pip; the encounter is like a nightmare for Pip, who is threatened and bullied, unaware that the ogre-like convict will eventually become his benefactor.

²⁴ In the same way that we refrained from discussing Mrs. Joe’s final plea for forgiveness, a full examination of Miss Havisham’s repentance and redemption will be dealt with in a later chapter.

Pip first meets Magwitch on Christmas Eve while he is sitting at the graves of his parents. When Magwitch emerges from the graves, in what Cunningham calls “an ironic parody of resurrection” (87), his first words to Pip are a fierce threat: “Hold your noise,” he yells at Pip, “Keep still, you little devil, or I’ll cut your throat!” (2). Magwitch, after a brief interrogation of little Pip, promptly turns him upside down, an action that Stone believes “epitomizes the inverted fairy tale that Dickens is about to tell” (299). The rest of Magwitch and Pip’s exchange is characterized by more threats from Magwitch, as colorful and ominous as a comment about Pip’s fat cheeks and Magwitch’s reckoning to eat them (3), and a guarantee to cut out Pip’s heart and liver if he does not return with a file and food (4). As Magwitch threatens to eat Pip and shakes him upside down, he is more of an ogre or giant in Pip’s eyes, rather than a savior or benefactor. Stone looks to Magwitch’s very name, however, as a clue that Magwitch is not a true ogre or monster: “His very name is part of Dickens’ irony, for the ‘witch’ of his surname, an appropriate designation at the opening of the novel, proves to be the reverse of what Magwitch at last becomes – a saving fairy godmother” (310). Though Magwitch may eventually give Pip the money to become a gentleman, just as a fairy godmother might, Pip’s impression of him gives little indication of the fact.

The act that initially binds Pip and Magwitch together is Pip’s theft of the file from Joe’s forge and the food from Mrs. Joe’s pantry. Though the act presumably saves Magwitch from starvation in addition to allowing him to remove his leg iron, it is also the first of Pip’s numerous moral dilemmas that stem from his relationship to Magwitch. After his meeting with Magwitch on the marshes, Pip stuffs his own bread from dinner down his trousers at the risk of being caught by his trenchant sister, and because he “felt that I must have something in reserve for my dreadful acquaintance” (10). Pip acts more out of fear of the convict than compassion; he steals

the food and file only after a sleepless night of nightmares. Their second meeting is considerably less frightening for Pip, and as he sees Magwitch “handing mincemeat down his throat in the most curious manner” (19) and shiver as a man with the ague, he begins to feel compassion for the convict. “Pitying his desolation,” Pip recalls, “I made bold to say, ‘I am glad you enjoy it’” (20). This moment of pity and his kind words is significant because it is in response to these words that Magwitch first calls Pip “my boy” (20), the first time in the novel that Magwitch uses this epithet for Pip.²⁵

Pip’s theft on Magwitch’s behalf may have bound the two together in crime, but Pip’s compassion and Magwitch’s gratefulness bind them together in a far more profound way. When the party of soldiers, along with Joe, Pip, and Wosple, eventually catch Magwitch, the interaction between child and convict is telling. Pip initially tries to gesture to Magwitch to convey that he did not lead the soldiers to him. Pip recalls, “I looked at him eagerly when he looked at me, and slightly moved my hands and shook my head” (41). In response, Magwitch looks at Pip with an expression that Pip “did not understand” (41). Magwitch then willingly confesses to stealing food from Joe’s house, absolving Pip of any possible blame that his sister may lay on him. Magwitch returns Pip’s kindness by confessing in order to protect him. The expression on Magwitch’s face that Pip does not understand is explained much later in the novel; Herbert tells Pip that in a conversation with Magwitch, Magwitch had revealed that Pip “brought into his mind the little girl so tragically lost [his daughter, Estella], who would have been about your age” (450). The look that Magwitch gives to Pip, then, is perhaps a glimmer of the paternal fondness that he once had for his own daughter, a further connection between the orphan and convict.

²⁵ Notably, Pip later refers to Magwitch as “my convict.”

The bond between the two is made legal only when Pip receives his expectations, though. Morgentaler explains, “This symbolic kinship is, in effect, a relationship of father to son, achieved without any actual blood tie. The infusion of money into Pip’s young life created a relationship analogous to paternity” (80). Percora further explains the complexity that Pip’s expectations add to their relationship:

There is no biological or legal relationship between Pip and Magwitch, but Pip is more or less the sole recipient (for a time) of Magwitch’s wealth gained while criminally exiled in Australia. Pip is not technically Magwitch’s heir, since Magwitch’s generosity has been so far bestowed while the latter is alive and thriving; but Magwitch speaks of Pip very much as if he were – ‘I worked hard, that you should be above work’ – and Pip’s resentment is very much the emotion of a son who discovers that his financial father is a being he would rather not acknowledge and kin, or even kith. (178)

When Pip’s expectations are first revealed to him, he has already been working as an apprentice to Joe in the forge. Because adoption laws were not instated in England until 1929, adoption was often an informal process, though both Miss Havisham and Magwitch went through the attorney Jaggers when they chose to become a part of the orphans’ lives.²⁶ While Magwitch is considered an adoptive parent in this study, his role as an adoptive parent functions quite differently than Miss Havisham’s. After the first few chapters of the novel Magwitch does not appear again until the very end of the second stage of the novel; no one, least of all Pip, ever expects that his true benefactor, his true fairy godparent, is the convict. Although the news of Pip’s expectations requires being “immediately removed from his present sphere of life and from this place,” and being “brought up as a gentleman” (152), there is no mention of any sort of adoption taking

²⁶ Jaggers’ role in the novel is only alluded to here, but will be examined fully in the next chapter.

place. Pip is to be educated and Jaggers is to be his guardian, but no mention is made of who this benefactor is, nor is Pip permitted to inquire about the matter.

For most of the novel, Pip's relationship to Magwitch exists only in his acceptance of the money, merely an impersonal financial relationship, though such a relationship between father and child was not uncommon in that time.²⁷ While his godparent remains a mystery, Pip's elevated status and newfound monetary allowance make him a Cinderella-like figure. Meckier calls Pip's transformation, however, a "mordant parody of Cinderella and her fairy-godparents, a vengeful outcast turns a blacksmith's apprentice into a London gentleman" (1). Pip's story may indeed be a "mordant parody of Cinderella," though Magwitch is far more than "a vengeful outcast."

Though Miss Havisham very intentionally uses Estella to seek revenge, Magwitch's intentions for Pip are less clearly defined. He wants to make Pip the gentleman that he could never be, but part of the ambiguity of Magwitch's intentions stems from the fluctuating definition of what a gentleman actually was in that time. Victorians disagreed about whether or not everyone could become a gentleman, regardless of his original class. There was also the question of whether a gentleman was simply a man who was wealthy enough not to work, or if there were specific character traits and behaviors that defined a gentleman. Such questions are significant because the crux of Magwitch's devotion to Pip as an adoptive father is his desire to make Pip a "gentleman." Gilmour explains that while a gentleman was a man of wealth and high

²⁷ Though the Victorian father's primary responsibility was to provide financially for the family, there were greater hopes for paternity. Nelson makes a point of writing that although Victorian fathers were primarily providers, "fiction and non-fiction held out that paternity might be a major and positive force in a man's life" (47), and that "Victorian literature and lived experience often depict fatherhood as a potential emotional watershed" (63). There was a growing desire for fathers to be more than financial providers, and Dickens' novels reflect that desire. Nelson goes on to list a number of novels that portray some kind of redemptive transformation of the father, and her examination of *Dombey and Son* is crucial for our discussion. She points out that while Dombey is a wealthy businessman and provider, his failure as a father and "inability to love his daughter" signify his "inadequacy as a human being," but in learning to love his daughter he is redeemed (65). Magwitch too is redeemed through his relationship to Pip, but in a different manner, as we will see in later chapters.

social standing, there was also a “moral component” (3). It was not enough to have wealth and noble birth: one also needed to have “gentle manners” and to practice “gentle behavior” (4). Magwitch’s concern with making Pip a gentleman is based on an understanding of the gentleman in terms of social standing; when he returns, he is impressed with Pip’s lodgings, his ability to read and speak different languages, and his outward signs of affluence, but makes no mention of any moral aptitude of Pip’s. It is not insignificant that Magwitch’s first charge to Pip when he was a child was a charge to steal; Stone explains, “Pip’s altruistic acts are strangely and terrifyingly complex: they are also acts of sin, they involve stealing, lying, and secrecy...” (310). Magwitch may have made Pip a gentleman in terms of wealth, but Pip actually seems to lose his “gentle manners” and “gentle behavior” once he receives his expectations. Magwitch’s attempt at making Pip a gentleman seems to have far more to do with social and financial elevation (and experiencing that vicariously through Pip) than any moral improvement.

Magwitch, of course, cannot shoulder full blame for Pip’s poor manners when he becomes a gentleman; the narrator himself readily admits his own flaws and culpability. The moral backsliding that takes place once Pip receives his expectations, however, reveals another one of Dickens’ inversions in the fairy tale; Cinderella was ill-treated by her stepmother and step-sisters, but the fairy godmother does not intervene simply because Cinderella was abused, but because she was kind and thus deserved to be rescued and transformed. Pip is ill-treated by Mrs. Joe (who functions, in some respects, as a stepmother), but his snobbery and behavior toward Joe and Biddy make clear that he does not deserve to be rescued based on his high moral standards. It is, however, Magwitch’s sole focus on molding Pip into a gentleman in a social sense that eventually harms Pip. To redeem in only a financial sense by buying Pip back to society is not enough; there must be a restoration to a family. Other Dickensian godparents can

offer both a secure fortune and a loving home to the orphan: Magwitch can only offer the fortune. Though it was Miss Havisham's continual manipulation and control over Estella's life that hurt Estella, it was Magwitch's absence that hurt Pip; when he left the forge, he was restored to respectable society, but not to a loving family. The absence, of course, was not by choice: as an exile, to return to England was death. Without a home, without a country, and without a family, the only redemption that Magwitch *could* offer was monetary. Later in the novel, Stone explains that a final element in the fairy tale inversion is that Pip must simply accept his benefactor, "the beast," "as beast" (310).

Magwitch, orphaned and alone as a child and punished harshly by the justice system, needs to be redeemed himself, to be restored into a family. Similarly, Miss Havisham needs to be redeemed herself, to be forgiven for what she has done. The two godparents of the story are so wounded and flawed themselves that they cannot redeem Pip and Estella the way that the Maylies redeemed little Oliver or Betsey Trotwood redeemed David; Pip and Estella made so many of their own mistakes – Estella breaks hearts and Pip abandons Joe and Biddy – that their redemption demands more than a magical, fairy-tale rescue. The only possible redemption in this inverted fairy tale is forgiveness, as we will see in our final chapter.

Chapter 3

Jaggers and the State: The Inability to Redeem

While Mrs. Joe and Molly fall short in their roles as mothers, and Magwitch and Miss Havisham are unable to redeem the orphans they adopted, there is one man at the center of the plans that brought the orphans out of their homes, one man who orchestrates and executes their fates: Jaggers. As a lawyer and representative of the state, he has the expertise and power to intervene in their lives, but he also has a responsibility to act in the best interest of Pip and Estella; the fate of the nation's orphans was a unique concern of the British state. Laura Peters writes that "the orphan, as a special responsibility of the state, not only offered a unique hope but a distinct and worrying threat" (9). She goes on to say that if the children were well educated, they could become an asset to society, but if they were left alone, they could become a menace (9). Jaggers' motives remain mysterious for most of the novel, but what becomes clear is that Jaggers does not act to redeem Pip and Estella (though he has the power to do so) but instead perpetuates the cycle of manipulation and harm of the orphans that their parents (both actual and adoptive) had started. In making Jaggers equally culpable, Dickens points out the state's failure, its inability, to care for and redeem the orphans.

To fully understand why Jaggers, as a lawyer, has a unique responsibility to Pip and Estella, we must first understand the relationship of the child to the state at that time. As the nineteenth century progressed, the figure of the child became more and more prominent in the state and public's eye, and with that prominence emerged two primary concerns: early in the century, the Romantics voiced the concern that children ought to have a distinct stage of life that was protected from the labor and toil of the adult world. Later in the century, however, a new concern arose when it became clear that the state's children were experiencing no such childhood

and no such protection, and if there was no intervention for those children, the very fabric and future of society was at risk.

Although the Romantic movement had faded by the time that Dickens wrote *Great Expectations* (1860), Dickens himself had grown up with the Romantics in the earlier part of the century. In fact, Locke explains, “Dickens extended the romantics’ moral, psychological, and philosophical use of the child from the realm of lyric and personal epic poetry into that of encyclopedic Victorian novel so that a child’s welfare now also became the crucial index of a nation’s – indeed, an empire’s – social and political health and even its survival” (13). Though Dickens acted as an advocate for child welfare through his novels,²⁸ the reality was that many of the country’s poor children were still at the mercy of the state; though private charities and philanthropic organizations existed, the problem of street children was ultimately the state’s responsibility to deal with. Peters writes, “[f]or these children, more so than any of its [the state’s] subjects, the state stood in place of a parent” (8). What becomes clear in *Great Expectations*, however, is that the state, as a distant government entity, cannot act as a parent to orphaned children.

In the novel, Dickens uses Jaggers, the embodiment of the state’s law, to reveal the state’s inability to redeem. While the state’s involvement in child welfare increased over the century, with the enactment of more and more reforms regarding child labor and education,²⁹ the

²⁸ Dickens drew constant attention to the plight of children through his fictional works (*Oliver Twist* is certainly a prime example of this), but also in his works written while he was an investigative reporter. Ackroyd’s text details Dickens’ work in the social forum, looking specifically at a set of articles that Dickens had written for *The Examiner* about the cholera epidemic at a Juvenile Pauper Asylum (557); Dickens’ articles brought a scathing light to the mistreatment of children in such asylums. At the same time that he was fictionalizing child abuse in his novels, he condemned it in his own society.

²⁹ Traditionally, domestic and family life remained just that – a concern for the family. This belief meant that spousal and child abuse found no intervention from the state. How families treated one another was a private concern, not a public one. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, this belief came under scrutiny and the state began to intervene. Berry writes, “The private and privately governed domain of the home was now permeable territory, increasingly subject to such diverse and evolving authority as the educational and legal systems, the

state's intervention against child abuse or neglect was slow in coming. Monica Flegel's work explains the rise of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) in England, an organization that worked tirelessly on behalf of children. The forming of such an organization, however, came quite late in the century, and Flegel quotes William Clarke Hall's sentiments on the issue of the state and child welfare: "Prior to the passage of the 'Children's Charter' in 1889, there was no such offence known to English law as the mere-ill treatment, no such offence as the mere neglect of a child. The society resolved to create these offences" (1). Dickens never lived to see the Children's Charter passed (he died in 1870), and *Great Expectations* lacks a state representative who as is concerned about Pip and Estella's welfare as the NSPCC was. Jaggers is certainly not the voice of a philanthropic organization or a group concerned with child welfare; he is the voice of a distant, impersonal state.

Jaggers is not the first character that Dickens uses to represent a greater government body; in several of his earlier novels, various characters function as representations of institutions so that Dickens can criticize the institution *through* them. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens condemns the poorhouse system by creating scheming characters such as Mr. Bumble the beadle, who nearly starves the children under his care and even sends young Oliver away to work with the undertaker. In *Bleak House*, the Jarndyce case casts a scathing light on the Court of Chancery, as the family fortune is finally exhausted after years of circuitous court hearings. *Great Expectations*, however, is much more subtle is its social commentary; Jaggers, the embodiment of government law, is far more complex, as is his relationship to the orphans. Though he acts as a guardian to Pip and Estella, he simultaneously deceives them.

medical establishment, and the apparatus of social welfare. Even before some of these institutions had any formal existence, their development was supported by the fact that childhood and the child had become unquestioned and unquestionably public categories" (2).

While Jaggers knows the law and has the responsibility and power to carry out that law, he also has the ability to manipulate it (as he does when he acquits Molly for murder). This tension between responsibility and his ability to manipulate is evident in his relationship to the two orphans in the novel. He is a lawyer for Miss Havisham and Magwitch, but in acting as their lawyer he is asked to exploit Pip and Estella. Jaggers' efforts to remove Pip and Estella from their homes are not necessarily sinister, though; England did not have any formal laws regarding adoption until the twentieth century. While he seems to follow a legal contract when informing Pip of the stipulations of his expectations, his charge in finding a young child for Miss Havisham is more problematic. Jaggers is able to find a child for Miss Havisham (Estella) only by acquitting a guilty woman of murder and forcing her to relinquish her daughter. Jaggers is at the center of two intricate schemes that draw Pip and Estella away from their families, apparently to give them a better life (or at least a more affluent one), but in orchestrating those schemes he does far more harm to Pip and Estella. Jaggers' complicity in the manipulation of Pip and Estella's lives makes clear that he is not the state's redeemer.

From Jaggers' first appearance in the novel, he is demanding and inquisitive. Pip initially meets Jaggers at Satis House, a fact that is telling in itself. The two meet in a stairway on Pip's second visit to see Miss Havisham; by now, Pip already knows the terror and antagonism that await him at the house, and because Jaggers first appears in a dark stairway of the house – Jaggers is “groping his way down” the steps and has to walk by candlelight (91) – he too becomes a manifestation of the terror of Satis House. As Pip and Estella make their way up the stairs, Jaggers makes his way down, and when he notices Pip he is immediately ready to question the two. “Whom have we here?” Jaggers asks, and follows up by inquiring, “Boy of the neighborhood? Hey?” (91, 92). Persistent in his line of questioning, Jaggers also asks Pip, “How

do you come here?” (92). After only three questions, Jaggers makes his judgment about Pip, declaring, “I have a pretty large experience of boys, and you’re a bad set of fellows. Now mind!” (92). His questions are short barks, and he is confident in his declaration that Pip is of a “bad set of fellows.” Already hurt by Estella and frightened to be at the house, his encounter with Jaggers further unnerves him.

Not only is Jaggers’ language harsh, but his appearance and gestures make his inquisition all the more terrifying. When he sees Pip, Jaggers “took [his] chin in his large hand and turned up [his] face to have a look at [him] by light of a candle” (91). Forker views such a gesture as a symbol of manipulation, one that is a “premonitory instance of the same impulse to enslave others [that Jaggers later exhibits]...” (28). At the time, Pip has no knowledge of the role that Jaggers will eventually play in his life and expectations, but he remembers vivid details of Jaggers’ appearance. Pip describes him as a “burly man” with “bushy black eyebrows that wouldn’t lie down but stood up bristling,” and whose “eyes were set very deep in his head, and were disagreeably sharp and suspicious” (91). The expression in Jaggers’ eyes is true to his manner: sharp in his line of questioning and suspicious of every answer that he receives.

When Jaggers later comes to inform Pip of his expectations at the Three Jolly Bargemen, another sharp line of questioning takes place, though this time Wopsle is the victim of the interrogation, rather than Pip. As Wopsle reads aloud from a newspaper report about a recent murder trial, he is convinced that the man being tried is guilty. As Wopsle pronounces this verdict, Jaggers interjects to cross examine Wopsle; Jaggers is merciless, and stops only when the men in the Three Jolly Bargemen are “all deeply persuaded that the unfortunate Wopsle had gone too far, and had better stop in his reckless career while there was yet time” (150). When Jaggers first questions and belittles Pip, Pip is a mere child, though Jaggers effectively belittles

Wopsle in much the same way. Of the exchange between Jaggers and Wopsle, Ousby writes, “despite his [Jaggers’] nominal concern to establish the truth of the matter, the lawyer is merely indulging in a display of personal power” (780), and Ousby further characterizes Jaggers’ behavior as “bullying” (788). Ousby’s analysis certainly raises the question of whether Jaggers is more concerned with the integrity of the law or his own dominance, a question that becomes more and more important as we examine his interaction with Pip and Estella.

When Jaggers finally reveals Pip’s expectations after his exchange with Wopsle, he assumes guardianship of Pip, yet immediately rejects the gratitude that Pip would offer him, an indication of the intentional emotional distance that he keeps from Pip. He is willing to act on Pip’s behalf by finding a suitable tutor and housing for him in London, but refuses to forge, or even acknowledge, a relationship with his charge. Jaggers hastily explains, “I tell you at once, I am paid for my services, or I shouldn’t render them” (153). He is intentionally non-committal, refusing to admit that he even “recommends” a tutor to Pip, only that he “mentions” the name of a tutor. Only with apparently great reluctance does Jaggers assume guardianship, and he makes clear that he will not be a caregiver to Pip, nor will he be emotionally available in any way. In assuming the role of Pip’s guardian, however, he is taking that role from Joe, the only adult who has ever been emotionally available to Pip or shown any sense of compassion towards him. Ousby writes, “Jaggers is, after all, offering to replace Joe’s role in Pip’s life: the apprenticeship bonds which bind Pip to Joe are to be dissolved and replaced by the legal trust of which Jaggers is the guardian” (793). Jaggers assumes the maintenance of Pip’s future without commitment to the care of that future; Jaggers, like the state, can only act as an impersonal director, rather than a savior or redeemer.

Such an intentional emotional distance is in fact characteristic of all of Jaggers’

relationships, not simply his relationship to Pip. He maintains that distance even from Wemmick, the clerk with whom he works daily. Jaggers is shocked and incredulous when he learns that Wemmick has a life outside of their office, almost disbelieving that Wemmick could have “an old father,” “playful ways,” or “a pleasant home” (456). He is equally distant from his clients who come to him pleading for his legal services; even those who would “[kiss] the hem of [his] garment,” he pushes away from him “with supreme indifference” (184). This intentional distancing is embodied in Jaggers’ affinity for washing his hands after meeting with clients. At one point, Pip observes him in a closet in his office washing his hands: “...he washed his clients off, as if he were a surgeon or dentist. He had a closet in his room, fitted for that purpose... It had an unusually large jack-towel on a roller inside the door, and he would wash his hands, and wipe them and dry them all over this towel, whenever he came in from a police-court or dismissed a client from his room” (223). The hand washing is habitual for Jaggers, and Forkner points to the act as an “especially sinister and irresponsible” sign of “impersonality”, one that “clearly links him with Pontius Pilate” (285).

The connection with Pontius Pilate is significant; in the same way that Pontius Pilate cannot actually absolve himself of the guilt of Jesus’ death, Jaggers cannot fully separate himself from society. In the biblical account, Pilate acts against his own conviction that Jesus is innocent and allows him to be crucified. Although Pilate recognizes that the Jews want to crucify Jesus only “out of envy” (Matthew 27:18) and Pilate’s own wife declares Jesus to be a “righteous man” (27:19), he nevertheless hands him over to the Jews. When he does, however, Pilate washes his hands in front of the crowd and declares, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves” (27:24). What the public hand-washing and proclamation suggest, of course, is that while Pilate, as governor, must act as the hand of justice, he does not willingly assume the guilt

of Jesus' blood. Jagers, like Pilate, must act as the hand of justice, yet he does not seem to wash his hands to clear himself of innocent blood as much as he seems to wash his hands to keep himself untainted from his clients, the guilty men and women whom he represents.³⁰ For all his attempts at washing off his clients, however, Jagers is still connected to them. He is intimately involved in their lives because he is their lawyer, and by nature of that relationship he must be responsible for them in some way. By accepting this responsibility with cold impersonality, however, he can redeem neither his clients nor the orphans in his charge; neither Jagers nor the state can redeem at a distance.

Another important outward expression of Jagers' character is the casts that he keeps in his office and what they suggest about his representation of the law. On his first visit to Jagers' office Pip is unnerved by the two staring casts, and later asks Wemmick about them. Wemmick explains, "These are the two celebrated ones. Famous clients of ours that got us a world of credit" (220). What made the clients so celebrated is unclear, as both were found guilty, but something about Jagers' work on their behalf brought them immense popularity. The casts, then, are a morbid sort of trophy. As a lawyer, Hagan calls Jagers the criminal's "hope of salvation and resurrection" (178), yet Jagers' clients do not seem to find such salvation from him. The clients who were made into casts were both hanged, and Molly, whom Jagers defended even though he knew her guilt, becomes his housekeeper and lives in fear of him. Randall points out that "Molly is hardly set free... she becomes a servant to her attorney... and in the process [Jagers] assumes a god-like control over her life" (116,118). The casts in his office are not a symbol of justice, but a grotesque representation of his clients and their suffering.

Jagers may be dominant, if not ethical, in his practice in the law, but our major concern

³⁰ While not many of Jagers' cases are explained in detail in the novel, we know of at least three guilty clients who Jagers defended: the man and woman who were made into casts (both of whom were found guilty and hanged) and Molly, who was acquitted.

is how that dominance and those blurry ethical boundaries relate to Pip and Estella. Although we have established Jaggers' reluctance to become Pip's guardian and his clear emotional distance in assuming such a charge, we understand the ramifications of Jaggers' role in Pip's life only when Magwitch returns to the narrative and reveals himself to be Pip's benefactor. It is in this moment that Pip recognizes his false assumptions about his benefactor, and goes to meet Jaggers in his office once more. As usual, Jaggers is non-committal in their discussion of Pip's benefactor. Before Pip even utters a word about his reason for being there, Jaggers cautions him "Don't commit yourself, and don't commit any one. You understand – any one. Don't tell me anything; I don't want to know anything; I am not curious" (370). These words articulate what seems to be Jaggers' perpetual stance in the novel: he is distant and uncommitted, and thus can never act as a redeemer to Pip, though he is certainly in a position to at least tell him the truth, to protect him from his own misconceptions.

The reason that Jaggers cautions Pip not to commit himself is because he himself will not – although his participation as lawyer means he is intimately involved in Pip's fate and expectations, he will not do anything outside of his immediate duties as Pip's legal guardian. Locke writes, "The one figure in the novel who knows the whole story – and does nothing to correct Pip's misunderstandings of it – is his guardian, the violent Jaggers, who thrives at the center of the modern hell of Little Britain" (45). Pip admits, however, "I am not so unreasonable, sir, as to think you at all responsible for my mistakes and wrong conclusions; but I always supposed it was Miss Havisham" (370). Jaggers' body language, however, shows no sympathy for Pip: he looks coldly at him, bites his forefinger – a gesture that Forker explains "conveys both contempt and inscrutable abstractedness" (280) – and calmly explains, "I am not at all responsible for that" (370). What Pip and Jaggers both willingly admit is true: Pip's

misconceptions are no fault of Jaggers, but the coldness in his manner betrays no pity for the young man with crushed dreams, no compassion for the boy to whom he has acted as guardian.

Jaggers fulfills his legal responsibility as Pip's guardian, but does nothing more on Pip's behalf; but his responsibility to Estella, his failure on Estella's behalf, is far more insidious. Jaggers falls short in his actions on Pip's behalf, but he oversteps his bounds in his actions on Estella's behalf. Jaggers not only fails to redeem Estella, but he actively works against her chance of redemption to a loving family. Only late in the novel does Jaggers reveal the full scope of his relationship with Estella, and of course, when he reveals his actions he "admits nothing" (457). At the same time that he was at work defending Molly, he was also employed by Miss Havisham, charged with finding "a child for [the] eccentric rich lady to adopt and bring up" (457). Not only is he defending a murderer, but he knows that he is finding a child to be brought to an "eccentric rich lady." Surely Jaggers knows the extent of Miss Havisham's madness, far beyond what he admits are eccentricities. Randall goes further and writes, "It would be impossible for him not to recognize while 'groping his way [up and] down' the dark passages of Satis House, that the Stygian setting would stunt the growth of any child confined within it" (120). After accepting such a charge from a woman as bitter as Miss Havisham, Jaggers also forces Molly to give up her child; he is actively breaking apart an existing family. Certainly, no case is being made that Molly is a suitable mother, but the child does have a father, Magwitch, who loves her. Jaggers, however, knowing that Magwitch "believed her dead" (457), takes her from both parents and delivers her to Miss Havisham. Though taking Estella from her murderer mother may have been an act of mercy, taking her from the father who loved her dearly was no act of mercy. It is the state's responsibility to care for orphans and abused children, not to take

children from their parents while they still live.³¹

When Jaggers explains his motivation for his actions, however, his role as a redeemer of the state becomes more complicated. He explains, and perhaps defends himself to Pip and Wemmick:

Put the case that he [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... he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar... 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... he had reason to look upon [them] as so much spawn, as to develop into the fish that were come to his net – to be prosecuted, defended, foresworn made orphans, be-devilled somehow. (457)

Jaggers is here admitting that his atmosphere, perhaps that of the justice system or all of Victorian society, is an evil one, one in which children are caught into a web of crime and misery.³² His role in taking Estella from her mother, then, from a poor criminal, is, in his eyes, an act of mercy. “Put the case, Pip, that here one pretty little child out of the heap who could be saved,” Jaggers continues (457). He is assuming the role of savior to Estella – Locke even calls

³¹ Interestingly enough, there were children in that time whose parents were alive but who were brought up in state institutions. Murdoch explains the case of one philanthropist, Barnado, who was known for raising sympathy for abandoned children by taking and circulating pitiful photos of children who he claimed were orphans, but who had actually been brought to a foster home by parents who intended to reclaim the child when they were financially stable. Murdoch calls such children “imagined orphans.” For further reading, see her work *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London*.

³² In Thomas Wontner’s *Old Bailey experience. Criminal Jurisprudence and the Actual Working of Our Penal Code of Laws* (published 1833) he makes a statement about the justice system that is remarkably similar to Jaggers. On speaking of children and the crime, he writes, “...the children of the poor (especially in London) are trained up to habits which become fixed and radicated, forming a part of their very nature, and that when the mind becomes fully sensitive of error in maturer years, their then position in society is not one of choice. Consider, too, what an extraordinary power of internal resistance it will require to overcome the vicious principles and propensities in which they have, from the cradle, been nurtured... nothing short of a miracle could enable them to break [them]: they are, in fact, prisoners to circumstances – slaves to fate” (4).

him a “secretly benevolent father” (46) – the one who would rescue her from the poor criminal underworld and bring her to a rich mother. The problem is that while Jagers brought Estella to a mother who could provide financially, he did not bring her to a mother who could love her.

Jagers’ speech is also unsettling because he delivers it in third person; he is simply “putting a case.” In his speech, he explains that “he,” a hypothetical legal advisor, took on the trust of finding a child, that “*he* often saw children tried at a criminal bar” (456 emphasis added). He takes it upon himself to orchestrate Estella’s fate (all the while keeping her in ignorance) yet will admit nothing. According to Locke, Jagers speaks “as if she were no more than a figure in a draft of a legal deposition... this ostentatious depersonalization... is one of Jagers’s defining traits” (45). As a representative of the state and one who does have the power and means to take a child from her mother and bring her into a new life, the depersonalization has devastating consequences. Even if Jagers honestly hopes to rescue Estella, the distance from which he tries to orchestrate her fate, his unwillingness to tell Estella the truth or to have a relationship with her, make it impossible for him to become her redeemer. Furthermore, Dickens seems to suggest that the state cannot redeem because it is as distant and inhuman as Jagers makes himself.

In other instances in which Estella is mentioned, Jagers shows a cold indifference, an indifference that borders on cruelty. When he defended Molly in the murder trial and pointed to the scratches on her wrists, his defense rested in the proposition that such marks could have been made by her child while Molly was in the act of destroying her. “For anything we know, she may have destroyed her child, and the child in clinging to her may have scratched her hands. What then?” Jagers asks. “You are not trying her for the murder of her child; why don’t you?” (436). Though Jagers knows full well that Molly has not killed her child (he has already made plans to bring Estella to Miss Havisham) the cold indifference that he exhibits regarding the possibility of

Estella's murder, of infanticide, is shocking. This is not the only occasion in which Jaggers remarks casually on the possibility of Estella's harm. One night when Jaggers has both Pip and Wemmick over for dinner, he mentions Estella's engagement to Drummle, a man he has already called a "spider" whom he "liked the look of" (235). Jaggers goes on to muse about the couple, remarking, "The stronger will win in the end, but the stronger has to be found out first. If he should turn to, and beat her –" (431). Before Jaggers can complete the thought Pip interrupts him, aghast at the suggestion, "with a burning face and heart" (431), yet Jaggers continues, and as is typical for him, offers the disclaimer that he is simply "putting a case" (431). When Jaggers does put the case, he reduces their impending marriage to the struggle for "supremacy" (431), nothing of the love or satisfaction of husband or wife. If Jaggers were indeed concerned for Estella when she was a child or a grown woman, surely his words would reveal some feeling, something more than a calculated observation about the possibility of infanticide or domestic abuse.

After revealing (if his "putting the case" can be considered a "revelation" at all) to Pip and Wemmick all that he had orchestrated in Estella's life, he poses one final question: If Estella's parents are both still living, in fact living in close proximity of one another without the other's knowledge, and Estella herself is already married, does the truth of Estella's life need to be revealed? "For whose sake would you reveal the secret?" asks Jaggers. "For the father's? I think he would not be much the better for the mother. For the mother's? I think if she had done such a deed she would be safer where she was. For the daughter's? I think it would hardly serve her, to establish parentage for the information of her husband, to drag her back to disgrace, after an escape of twenty years, pretty secure to last for life" (458). The suggestion in Jaggers' words is again that his actions, or lack of actions in revealing the truth, are an act of mercy. The

implication is that not one of the parties involved would benefit from the revelation that the members of that family – mother, father, and child – were still alive. He justifies his decision to withhold the information by suggesting that no one can benefit from the situation, and furthermore, Estella would actually be harmed by the information.

In Jaggers' eyes, the knowledge that her father and mother exist, the possibility of reuniting with those parents, could only bring social ruin. That social ruin, from Jaggers' perspective, outweighs any possible good that would come from the restoration of a family. Perhaps Jaggers is correct – Magwitch *is* a convict, and Molly *is* a murderer, and Magwitch's reappearance in Pip's life *does* bring a certain upheaval – but is it Jaggers' place to make that decision? His reasoning for keeping the secret is not one filled with legal jargon, but one that considers the well being of each party involved. Presumably, Jaggers does not stand to lose or gain from the secret being kept or the secret being unveiled, and so must genuinely be acting out of consideration for others. The problem is that he evaluates the situation based on social and economic gain, rather than on the potential for relationship and restoration. Pip agrees with Jaggers at the time, but he finally reveals the secret to Magwitch while he lays on his deathbed: In Magwitch's final moments, Pip reveals to him that his child lives, that she “is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her!” (511). Although Magwitch learns the truth before he dies, both Estella and Molly are, for better or worse, left in ignorance; Jaggers withholds from them any chance of reconciliation. What this secrecy implies about Jaggers, then, is that his concern is with status and wealth rather than human compassion, and as such, neither he nor the state can ever truly redeem.

In initially taking Estella and Pip away from their homes, Jaggers was fulfilling his charge as a lawyer, and even in keeping the truth of Pip's benefactor from him, he was simply

accepting the terms that his client had set. Jaggers cannot be held responsible for whatever eccentric requests that his clients may make, but in carrying out those requests – finding a daughter for Miss Havisham and removing Pip from the forge per Magwitch’s request – Jaggers in some way becomes complicit in those actions. In spite of that complicity, he refuses to condescend to the level of the orphans, his young charges; he remains devastatingly impersonal throughout the novel. Even if his final speech about his hopes of rescuing Estella is a sincere one, the fact remains that he does *not* rescue her. He actively breaks apart her family, just as he actively takes the role of Pip’s guardian away from Joe. For all of the hopes that the Victorians had that the state could act as a parent to orphaned children, could equip and enable them through legislation or programs, Dickens uses Jaggers to reveal that the state is unable to redeem.

Chapter 4

Joe, Pip, and the Pattern of Forgiveness

Reflecting on his own writing, Dickens once remarked, “one of my most constant and most earnest endeavors has been to exhibit in all my good people some reflections of the teachings of our great Master... All my strongest illustrations are derived from the New Testament” (qtd. in Ackroyd 504). In *Great Expectations*, Joe Gargery is that reflection of the “great Master,” of Christ. While he most clearly embodies the New Testament values that Dickens infused into his good characters, characters like Mr. Brownlow or the Maylies, Esther Summerson or Agnes Wickfield, Joe does not rescue and redeem Pip in the same way that earlier Dickensian characters rescued and redeemed the orphans of the novels; Joe possesses the kindness and love of other Dickensian benefactors, but not the means to become a fairy godparent or redeemer to Pip. Joe’s character is far more complex than the other “good people” that Dickens created, just as Pip is far more complex than the orphans who came before him.³³ Joe is not quite father to Pip, but he is certainly more than a brother-in-law; his camaraderie with Pip is a source of comfort to the orphan, but his deference to Mrs. Joe allows for abuse; his physical strength is undisputed, but the meekness of his temperament puts restrictions on that strength. As a blacksmith, what Gilmour calls the “archetypal pre-industrial craftsman” (127), Joe has neither the wealth nor the social standing to redeem Pip to society. Though Joe does not fill the typical role of benefactor or fairy godparent in *Great Expectations*, his role is far more profound: Joe consistently forgives those who wrong him (including Pip himself), and sets an

³³ Auerbach further explains the trouble in defining Pip and Joe’s relationship: “It [the helplessness] is inherent in Pip’s situation: he really is alone. For the first time in the novels we have looked at, the orphan’s parents are implacably dead, equated only with their tombstones. Father figures though generations of critics have rightly called them, neither Magwitch nor Joe is really Pip’s father...” (412).

example of forgiveness for Pip. The characters in *Great Expectations* are redeemed in the end because they are forgiven, and Joe and Pip are central in enacting that pattern of forgiveness.

In the beginning of the novel, Joe acts as Pip's greatest advocate. When Pip comes home from his encounter with Magwitch on the marshes, Joe warns him, "Mrs. Joe has been out a dozen times, looking for you, Pip... she's been on the Ram-page, this last spell, about five minutes, Pip. She's a coming! Get behind the door, old chap, and have the jack-towel betwixt you" (8). Joe is well aware of his wife's violent temper, and does as much as he is able to deflect her anger away from Pip. Joe's epithet for him and Pip is "ever the best of friends" (53), and the oft-repeated phrase is telling. Joe is old enough to be Pip's father, and though Mrs. Joe assumes the role of Pip's mother, Joe is not in a position of authority over Pip, or even over his wife. Joe becomes an equal of Pip's because he will not intentionally go against his wife's authority; though he recognizes his wife's foul temper, he continually refers to her as a "fine figure of a woman," (52), one whom he reveres. Joe and Pip's relationship is that of "fellow-sufferers" under Mrs. Joe's temper, and the two share only a "good-natured companionship" (10). Thus, though Joe cares deeply for Pip, as an equal and a "fellow-sufferer," Joe cannot act as Pip's rescuer.

Though Joe does not act as Pip's rescuer, he does act as a defender for the child, and the differences between the power to rescue and the power to defend are significant. Other adults in Dickens' novels are able to act as rescuers because they have the power and the means to remove the orphans from drudgery and abuse and to offer them a new life, one with greater social and economic opportunities. They are able to accomplish such a rescue when they encounter orphans because they are well established and prosperous in society; they are, in a sense, benevolent "outsiders" who intervene on behalf of the orphan. Joe, however, is not an "outsider"; Pip and

his sister have lived with Joe for as long as Pip can recall. Joe has no secret, prosperous life outside of what Pip knows; their home is connected to the forge, and Joe has nothing more to offer Pip than an apprenticeship as a blacksmith. Joe cannot rescue Pip as other benefactors rescue orphans because he cannot remove Pip from his present state, given that he is, in fact, inherently part of that present state, married to Pip's abuser and a constant reminder of the low social status that Pip has been born into. During Pip's childhood Joe can, at best, act as a defender during Mrs. Joe's "rampages," though when Pip is a grown man, Joe eventually acts as his forgiver.

When Joe tries to defend Pip as a child, he does so through his actions, rather than his words. As a warning to Pip that Mrs. Joe is in a foul mood, Joe crosses his fingers. Forker explains, "The code of finger crossing, in its fanciful way, obviously dramatizes the bonds of love and understanding between the two" (288). Similarly, when Pip is bullied by his sister, Pumblechook, and Wopsle at Christmas dinner, Joe continues to heap gravy on Pip's plate as a sign of some comfort. According to Pip, "There being plenty of gravy today, Joe spooned into my plate, at this point, about half a pint" (28). Ousby explains that contrast at the dinner between Joe and the other adults: "Unlike the rest of the adults in the village, Joe is no rhetorician... Joe is happier with gesture rather than speech. He exists on a level of physical grace and vitality, and so it is natural that his relationship with the young Pip should be created out of physical signs (791-92). Though Joe's efforts on Pip's behalf are not often expressed verbally, they are clearly demonstrated through his gestures.

Joe is also a physically impressive figure, but he uses his strength to protect Pip as much as possible rather than to lash out in violence. Joe uses his strength against someone only when he is forced to fight Orlick to defend his wife's honor. Pip recalls, "without so much as pulling

off their singed and burnt aprons, they went at one another, like two giants. But, if any man in that neighborhood could stand up long against Joe, I never saw the man. Orlick, as if he had been of no more account than the pale young gentleman, was very soon among the coal dust..." (128). When the occasion demands it, Joe proves his strength and ability, but in all other scenarios he consistently acts as protector, not aggressor. When Mrs. Joe comes home looking to punish Pip with the Tickler, she throws the child at Joe, "who, glad to get a hold of me on any terms, passed me on into the chimney and quietly fenced me up there with his great leg" (8). Later, when the men go out with the soldiers to find the escaped convicts, "a bitter sleet came against [them] here on the east wind, and Joe took [Pip] up on his back" (37). The act of carrying Pip on his back through the marshes symbolizes Joe's constant efforts to protect and care for Pip. Though Joe does not use his strength to control his wife, it is important to note that Pip does not blame Joe for his lack of physical intervention; in fact, when Joe explains his own upbringing to Pip, his father's violence and his mother's suffering, Pip comes to appreciate him in a new way:

I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart... that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman... I wish there weren't no Tickler for you, old chap; I wish I could take it all on myself; this is the up-and-down-and-straight on it, Pip, and I hope you'll overlook shortcomings. (54-55)

Joe's speech, his admission that he wishes to do more for Pip and that he worries about "going wrong" against Mrs. Joe, rather than stirring resentment in Pip's heart, brings about a new sense of respect. "Young as I was, I believe that I dated a new admiration of Joe from that night... I had a new sensation that I was looking up to Joe in my heart" (55). Joe's meekness and gentleness become a virtue in Pip's eyes, rather than a flaw.

While Joe is Pip's main advocate and defender as a child, he is also the one who first sets an example of forgiveness for Pip. The first clear example of forgiveness occurs on the marshes when the company of soldiers, along with Joe and Pip, finally locate Magwitch. When Magwitch confesses to stealing a pie from the forge and apologizes (although it is actually Pip who stole *for* Magwitch), Joe's reply is thick with grace: "God knows you're welcome to it – so far as it was ever mine... We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur" (42). Joe easily forgives Magwitch's theft as he looks compassionately on him. While the theft of a pork pie and file might have only been a simple act of forgiveness, Joe also forgives his abusive father, a much greater act. Joe tells Pip, "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" (50-51). Joe remembers running away from his father, only to be found again and hammered once more. Joe was forced to forego any schooling of his own and work to support his parents, and yet he holds no bitterness against his father. He explains to Pip, "rendering unto all their doo, and maintaining equal justice betwixt man and man, my father were good in his hart, don't you see?" (51). Pip does not, in fact, understand Joe's explanation, because he cannot understand why Joe has excused the person who abused him throughout his childhood; the situation is one that Pip is quite familiar with, although in his case, it is an abusive sister, not an abusive father. Understandably, when Joe tries to explain to Pip how much his sister has done for him, Pip is doubtful. Joe explains that when he met Pip's sister and saw him as an infant, he told her, "bring the poor little child... there's room for *him* at the forge!" (53). After hearing of Joe's compassion, Pip's composure changes, and he quickly "broke out crying and begging pardon" (53). While he may not understand Joe's forgiveness and compassion, Pip begs his pardon

because he knows that Joe is gracious, despite their plight with Mrs. Joe. From the very beginning of the novel, Joe is willing to forgive, though Pip only learns from Joe's example much later.

Before Pip can understand Joe's willingness to forgive, Pip himself sins against Joe, beginning with his sense of superiority over him. Pip attends school with Mrs. Wopsle's great aunt, and he first realizes Joe's lack of education when he comes home from school to show Joe his progress, only to realize Joe's own illiteracy. Though Joe recognizes and appreciates Pip's success, calling him an "oncommon scholar" (78), he himself can recognize no more than the J and the O from his own name. "I derived from this," Pip explains, "that Joe's education, like Steam, was in its infancy" (50). Slowly, perhaps unconsciously at first, Pip begins to feel a sense of superiority over Joe,³⁴ but after his visit to Satis House, that sense of superiority becomes a sense of shame. After Estella laughs at him for his ignorance in cards, Pip examines himself and feels that his own shortcomings are an extension of Joe's. "I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard, to look at my coarse hands and my common boots... They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now... I wished Joe had been rather more genteely brought up, and then I should have been so too" (68). Not only is Pip ashamed of Joe, but he is distraught about how "common Estella would consider Joe" (79).³⁵ When Pip recognizes Joe's lack of education and the contrast between Joe's forge and Satis House, the pattern of Pip's offenses against Joe begins.

³⁴ Sadrin makes an important note about Joe's character, pointing out that he is the novel's true gentleman. She writes, "Upright, truthful, generous, industrious, 'proud' (remembering, of course, that 'there are many kinds of pride,' 168) Joe, although not 'genteely brought up' (92), is of all the characters in the novel the one who best qualifies for the name of 'true gentleman' after the Smilesian and Dickensian ideal" (94-95).

³⁵ Remarking on the significance of Joe's coarse hands, Forkner explains, "Since a gentleman must, if possible, avoid sullyng them by work, his hands, as importantly as his accent, become the index of social status. Almost the first step in the corruption of Pip's values is the unworthy shame he feels when Estella cruelly remarks on the coarseness of his hands... Pip imagines how Estella would look down upon Joe's hands, roughened by the work of the smithy..." (283).

The strain in Joe and Pip's relationship that begins at Satis House does not take immediate effect, however; after lying about what happened with Miss Havisham, Pip confesses the truth to Joe. It is important to recognize that Pip feels guilty only because he had lied to Joe. "Now, when I saw Joe open his blue eyes and roll them all round the kitchen in helpless amazement, I was overtaken by penitence; but only as regarded him – not in the least as regarded the other two. Towards Joe, and Joe only, I considered myself a young monster..." (76). Ousby expands on Pip's sense of guilt towards Joe alone, writing, "Pip feels so little affection for Mrs. Joe that he has no compunction at having deceived her. But Joe is another matter, and Pip feels uneasy about his failure to confide in him...He fears the loss of a sense of physical closeness, of a silent communication with Joe" (793). It is not insignificant that Joe is the only person to whom Pip confesses and from whom he desires forgiveness.

Even as Pip grows more ashamed of Joe and his trade, Joe remains constant in his love for Pip. According to Pip, "Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But Joe had sanctified it, and I believed in it" (118). The word choice here is not accidental; the word "sanctified" has clear religious implications. To sanctify is to purify or to forgive, both of which Joe will do for Pip before the novel ends. Although *Great Expectations* has relatively elevated or idyllic language that was so common in Dickens's earlier novels, almost all of the romanticized language in the book refers to Joe. Though Pip feels some shame in his apprenticeship to Joe, he nevertheless recognizes Joe's redeeming influence on him, and this sentiment is expressed in one of Pip's many asides about Joe's virtue:

It was not because I was faithful, but because Joe was faithful, that I never ran away and went for a soldier or a sailor. It was not because I had a strong sense of virtue of industry, but because Joe had a strong sense of virtue of industry, that I

worked with tolerable zeal against the grain... I know right well that any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe, and not of restless, aspiring, discontented me. (119)

Though Pip is ashamed of Joe's trade, he never loses sight of his kindness to him.

Joe is actually one of the few adults in the novel who acts only in Pip's best interest. While Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook hope to benefit from Pip's relationship to Miss Havisham, and Magwitch has motives of his own for improving Pip's status, Joe's concern is only for Pip's good. When Jaggers explains the terms of Pip's expectations to Pip and Joe, he asks Joe if he requires any compensation for losing Pip as his apprentice. Joe replies to the question "in his combination of strength and gentleness," saying, "Pip is that hearty welcome, to go free with his services, to honour and fortun', as no words can tell him. But if you think as money can make compensation to me for the loss of the little child – what come to the forge – and ever the best of friends!-" (155-56). Though Jaggers is presumably prepared to offer Joe some sort of monetary compensation for taking his apprentice, Joe is adamant that there can be *no* compensation "for the loss of the little child." Joe, although he cannot act as Pip's rescuer by taking him away from the work at the forge, is a stark contrast to those who do try – or at least pretend – to act as rescuers, as Miss Havisham, Magwitch, and Jaggers do.

Although Pip does not speak of Joe often after he leaves for London, his references to Joe are often characterized by a sense of guilt. When Joe does visit Pip in London, he cannot make himself comfortable with Herbert and Pip in their London apartment or in his cravat and collars, and Pip easily recognizes his discomfort. Before leaving him, Joe admits to Pip, "I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong outside of the forge, the kitchen, or off th'meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even

my pipe” (249). In his own reflection, Pip recognizes that “this was all my fault, and that if I had been easier with Joe, Joe would have been easier with me” (246). Although disappointed in his own behavior towards Joe, Pip intentionally avoids visiting him even when he returns home to the marshes to see Miss Havisham. Pip’s sense of guilt towards Joe is perpetual in his new life; as he and Herbert both indulge in a lifestyle beyond their means, Pip reflects, “I lived in a state of chronic uneasiness respecting my behavior to Joe” (302). In spite of his uneasiness, Pip does not return home to Joe or change his lifestyle.

The great change in Pip comes only when Magwitch finally reveals himself as Pip’s true benefactor; it is this revelation that is the beginning of change and repentance in Pip. When he realizes that the convict from the marshes is his true benefactor, he immediately thinks of Joe, regretting that the “sharpest and deepest pain of all” was “that I had deserted Joe... I could never, never, never, undo what I had done” (359). In the same way that Pip, as a child, had felt guilty about lying only because he had lied to Joe, he now feels guilty primarily because he has wronged Joe. When Pip discovers that Magwitch is his benefactor, he recognizes the depth of his offense against Joe; he is horrified when he realizes that he so quickly abandoned and denied Joe in order to pursue the expectations that were offered to him not by some wealthy, benevolent widow, but by the escaped convict from the marshes.

At this point in the novel, Dickens has established a complex web of relationships: Pip has been wronged by his sister, by Miss Havisham and Estella (though she too has been wronged), and by Magwitch. However, Pip has also wronged Joe, the one adult who has done him no harm. Both orphan and failed redeemer are flawed and fallen and need redemption; while many orphans in Dickens’ earlier novels were good, innocent, and passive, and were redeemed by adults who were equally benevolent, Pip must be active in the process of redemption because

he needs forgiveness as much as any of the failed redeemers. The only possibility that any of these characters have for redemption is through forgiveness, and that forgiveness essentially comes from Joe and Pip.

The compounded guilt of Pip and the adults in his life takes away from the possibility of rescue for either party; Pip is no longer a child who can be removed from his painful upbringing, and the adults must accept that their offenses against the orphan are irrevocable. Rather than offering redemption through rescue, Dickens systematically offers these characters forgiveness. In the novel, redemption through forgiveness of sins is far more comprehensive than redemption through rescue; not all of the characters are equipped and able to rescue, yet each of the characters is able to forgive. To rescue requires power, wealth, and, of course, benevolence, but the only pre-requisite for forgiveness is an offense committed. In this way, forgiveness itself becomes a pattern in the novel, and though Joe sets the model of forgiveness early on, Pip eventually perpetuates this pattern.

Mrs. Joe is the first of the failed redeemers to be forgiven. Though she is the brute of Pip's childhood, Orlick's attack leaves her helpless and incapacitated. In spite of her physical limitations, Pip explains that "her temper greatly improved, and she was patient...she would often put her hands to her head, and would remain for about a week at a time in some gloomy aberration of mind" (136). Although she can no longer express herself in words (she keeps a tablet to try to communicate through writing), a clear transformation has come over her. She plays a relatively small role in the novel when Pip leaves for London, but what happens on her deathbed is significant. When Pip returns from London for his sister's funeral, Bidley tells Pip about Mrs. Joe's death: in her final moments, she "wanted me to put her arms around [Joe's] neck, and she laid her head down on his shoulder quite content and satisfied" (315). In this

position, she utters her final words: “Joe,” “pardon,” and “Pip” (315). Mrs. Joe’s speech has been mostly unintelligible after her accident, yet her last words are a clear request for pardon from Joe and Pip. As terrible as Dickens makes Mrs. Joe in the opening chapters in the novel, he allows her a moment of forgiveness, and though Pip is not present for the scene, his pardon is requested. Cunningham comments on Mrs. Joe’s repentance, writing, “Penance, asking forgiveness, amendment of life, requisites for adult baptism, precede the entry of Mrs. Joe... into death, which the church sees as a second baptism” (44-45). In asking forgiveness and in what is perhaps a symbolic baptism, Mrs. Joe is forgiven and thus redeemed as she rests on her husband’s shoulder.

In the same way that Mrs. Joe, culpable as she is, is allowed a dying request for pardon, Dickens also allows Miss Havisham an opportunity for forgiveness, although her request comes much differently. While it takes a leg iron to the head to change Mrs. Joe, Miss Havisham’s initial change comes from a moment of empathy for Pip. On Pip’s last visit to Satis House before Estella is married, he confronts Miss Havisham about his belief that she had been his benefactor, and though her initial response is anger, she slowly recants. When Pip asks her if it was kind to let him believe that she was his benefactor, she screams, “Who am I, for God’s sake, that I should be kind!” (397). Her wrath continues to flare up until Pip confesses to Estella all that he has endured because of Miss Havisham: “It would be cruel in Miss Havisham, horribly cruel, to practice on the susceptibility of a poor boy...if she had reflected on the gravity of what she did. But I think she did not. I think that in the endurances of her own trial, she forgot mine, Estella” (400). With these words, Miss Havisham looks back and forth between the two children who she so cruelly manipulated, and she puts her hand on her own heart. As Pip confesses his love to Estella and his crushed hopes of ever marrying her, he notices Miss Havisham sitting, staring at

them still, “all resolved into a ghastly stare of pity and remorse” (403).

Though Havisham says nothing more to Pip as he leaves, she calls him back to Satis House once more to offer him the money he asked for on Herbert’s behalf. Not only does she agree to give Herbert the money (secretly, as Pip requests), but she intentionally asks if Pip might ever be able to forgive her, “though ever so long after my broken heart is dust” (440). Pip’s response is telling, because it reflects their mutual guilt and need for forgiveness: “There have been sore mistakes; and my life has been a blind and thankless one; and I want forgiveness and direction far too much to be bitter with you” (441). It is no accident that the very reason that Pip is able to forgive Miss Havisham so easily is that he himself must be forgiven. His readiness to forgive Miss Havisham stems from his own recognition that he has harmed others as much as Miss Havisham, that her need for forgiveness is no greater than his own. Not only does Pip forgive her, but when Miss Havisham catches on fire and becomes insensible, Pip saves her life, burning his own hands in the process, something that Cunningham believes is part of Pip’s own “baptismal death by fire” (45). While Cunningham describes Mrs. Joe’s forgiveness as a requisite for her “adult baptism,” he writes that this incident is Miss Havisham’s “fiery baptism” (46). Friedman goes further and states that “[t]he forgiving of Miss Havisham – by Pip and us – seems earned by her sincere repentance and by the expiation of her death from shock after she had been burned in a kind of purgatorial fire” (419). For all of her manipulation, Miss Havisham is indeed repentant, and Pip proves himself to be forgiving.

Magwitch is also forgiven, though his forgiveness comes in a different way because he, unlike Miss Havisham, does not maliciously use Pip. He does, however, hope to become a gentleman vicariously through Pip – “I says to myself, ‘If I ain’t a gentleman, nor yet ain’t got no learning, I’m the owner of such” (357) – and in so doing, wreaks havoc on Pip’s life. Because

Magwitch does no intentional harm to Pip, it is appropriate that Pip's forgiveness of the convict is more subtle; there is not overt request for forgiveness, but rather a slow effort on Pip's part towards forgiving, even loving Magwitch. At first, Pip is horrified by the returned convict, by his manner of speech and clothes and his rough appearance, but as he learns that he must hide and protect his exiled benefactor, he begins genuinely to care for him.

As he leaves him to hide in Clara's home, Pip is surprised that his heart could be "as heavy and anxious from parting from him as it was now" (419). Pip is even attacked and kidnapped by Orlick in his efforts to protect Magwitch; when Pip receives a note regarding his "uncle Provis" (the name he had given to Magwitch to hide his identity), he goes to meet with the author of the mysterious note in order to protect Magwitch. The note, however, is a trick from Orlick to lure Pip out, and he is nearly killed. The reason that there is no need for an overt offer of forgiveness on Pip's part is because his actions and willingness to suffer so clearly demonstrate his willingness to forgive Magwitch. Cunningham explains this pattern of suffering and forgiveness in the novel:

Pip suffers and Miss Havisham is redeemed; Joe and Pip suffer and Mrs. Joe is redeemed. In order that Magwitch may know redemption Pip goes beyond Jagers' prudential advice that he abandon the returned felon. These acts of substitution (of suffering and forgiving) [that are] essential to the economy of the novel partake in a pattern of Christian analogy. They are acts of charity, or disinterested love. (47)

When they fail to bring Magwitch out of the country safely, however, Pip spends as much time as he can with Magwitch in prison, knowing that the wounds he sustained while trying to flee are fatal. As he stands beside him, Pip reflects, "my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in

the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I saw only a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously towards me with great constancy through a series of years” (495). In his willingness to suffer for Magwitch, Pip forgives and redeems him, staying with him even until his death in prison.

Just as Pip suffers for and forgives Magwitch, he also suffers for and forgives Estella, whose full redemption is revealed only at the very end of the novel. From his first visit to Satis House, Estella demoralizes Pip, commenting on the names he uses for the playing cards (“He calls the knaves Jacks, this boy,” she yells at him), and looking down on his “coarse hands” and “thick boots” (66). Estella is certainly as much a victim as Pip in the novel, though in the same way that Pip is held accountable for his behavior towards Joe, Estella is held accountable for her behavior towards Pip. In their last meeting together before Estella marries Drummle, Pip confesses not only his love for Estella, but his forgiveness. He tells her, “in this separation I associate you only with the good, and I will faithfully hold you to that always, for you must have done me far more good than harm, let me feel now what sharp distress I may, O, God bless you, God forgive you!” (402). Estella makes no indication that she solicits or requires his forgiveness, but Pip offers it nevertheless. It is only at the end of the novel, when the two return to Satis House after the deaths of Havisham and Drummle and years without contact, that Estella finally does ask for Pip’s forgiveness. She reminds Pip that he once told her, “God bless you, God forgive you,” and goes on to say that “if you [Pip] could say that to me then, you will not hesitate to say that to me now – now, when suffering has been stronger than all other teaching... I have been bent and broken, but – I hope – into a better shape” (538). Again, this connection between suffering and forgiveness is evident, and as Pip suffered because of Estella and forgave her,

Estella herself has suffered and now understands that need for forgiveness.³⁶

For all of his efforts in forgiving others, Pip is also forgiven in the end, and the pattern of forgiveness in the novel returns to Joe. When Pip discovers his true benefactor and is horrified at his own behavior towards Joe, we ought to note that he does not repent immediately. In fact, he continues to avoid seeing both Joe and Biddy, and Joe only re-enters life after Magwitch passes away. After Magwitch's death, Pip is feverish, hallucinating even, and Joe comes to London to nurse him back to health. Though Pip has neither seen nor heard from Joe in years, Joe assumes the same role as Pip's protector that he had when Pip was a child: "He would sit and talk to me in the old confidence, and with the old simplicity, and in the old unassertive protecting way..." (518). Joe's forgiveness of Pip is inherent in his actions here; he makes no mention of Pip's wrongs, and simply acts in the same tender way that he always had towards Pip. Gribble actually likens Pip's journey in the novel to that of the prodigal son, and she believes that Joe acts as the prodigal's father here: "In Pip's illness and destitution, Joe takes the father's generous initiative of love and forgiveness" (235). Joe indeed assumes the role of a forgiving father, though he does far more than nurse Pip back to health.

Though we have established that Joe cannot act as Pip's rescuer and redeemer (he lacks the means to redeem Pip to a better life), he actually acts as a redeemer in another sense by paying Pip's debt. Before Pip falls ill, he is distraught with the amount of debt that he has accrued in his lavish lifestyle, and when the state seizes the remainder of Magwitch's fortune after his death, Pip is "seriously alarmed by the state of [his] affairs" (512). Pip's alarm precedes his illness, and though he assumes his creditors have suspended their demands until he is well

³⁶ Of Estella's fate at the end of the novel, Sadrin writes, "Dickens was more concerned with having Estella redeemed than remarried... Estella never enjoyed matronly care and life has been as unfair to her and it has been to Pip. If Pip has been redeemed, why should redemption be denied her?... 'A second chance for Pip requires a second chance for Estella,' writes Martin Mesisel" (176-77).

enough to meet them, he learns that Joe has already paid his debt in full. According to Pip, “I had never dreamed of Joe’s having paid the money; but, Joe had paid it, and the receipt was in his name” (524). In paying a debt not his own, Joe becomes a redeemer in a very clear financial sense. Not only does Joe pay Pip’s debts, but Pip also characterizes the care he receives from Joe as part of the “wealth” of his good nature (519), another clear financial reference that describes Joe’s goodness. Though Joe was unable to rescue Pip when he was a child, he does become his redeemer in a literal sense by paying his debts.

When Pip finally does return to the forge, he plans to ask for Bidley’s forgiveness and hand in marriage, even rehearsing his speech so that she might “receive [him] like a forgiven child” (524). Though Pip is ready to make his confession and begin a new life with Bidley, he meets Bidley and Joe only moments after they have been married. His own disappointed hopes are nothing compared to the forgiveness he hopes for when he finds Joe and Bidley, though. Pip begs of them, “And now, though I know you have already done it in your own kind hearts, pray tell me, both, that you forgive me! Pray let me hear your kinds words, that I may carry the sound of them away with me and then I shall be able to believe that you can trust me, and think better of me, in the time to come!” (533). Joe and Bidley of course grant Pip forgiveness, and Gribble comments further that Pip’s words of confession “beat like a rhythmic pulse through Pip’s inner life... in this way, Dickens catches the tone of the prodigal’s repentance” (236). Pip is indeed the novel’s prodigal son, and he is forgiven fully by Joe and Bidley.

Though Pip is repentant, the restoration of a family belongs to Joe and Bidley, not to him. Joe and Pip are the two pillars in the novel’s cycle of forgiveness, but it through Joe that Pip’s own life is re-judged. Joe and Bidley eventually have their own child and name him Pip, although this Pip is not orphaned; he has a loving mother and father. Pip eventually returns to the forge

and meets the child, and he takes him down to the graveyard, setting him on a tombstone in the same way that he first sat when he met Magwitch. The story is being re-told, though this time the child has no need to fear an ogre or a convict jumping up at him. Pip's life at the forge is literally being re-judged through this new family, another facet in the novel's redemption.

The redemptive process in *Great Expectations* is certainly a complicated one, quite different than that of Dickens' earlier novels. Indeed, the child is not society's savior and the romantic overtones have faded, but what the work does suggest is that a child who is used and broken may one day grow up to be a man who forgives his abusers, and in that act of forgiveness, he may be the one to redeem the world around him. While Locke considers the novel's close an "utterly believable 'miserable' end" (49), the theme of forgiveness in the novel is too intentional to be ignored or discounted. Dickens very intentionally redeemed even the most callous characters in the novel, Mrs. Joe and Miss Havisham and Magwitch included, and though the novel's end may differ from the traditional end of Dickens' earlier novels, it is certainly not without redemption. Indeed, this redemption through forgiveness is perhaps greater than the redemption through rescue that characterized Dickens' earlier novels; Pip emerges a hero not because he is rescued, but because he is forgiven and is able to forgive those who trespass against him.

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