

Charles Dickens and Women : Development from His Mid-Career

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Abstract

Dickens is well known for supporting the Victorian norm of femininity and modern readers tend to criticise his stereotyped characterisation of women in his works. Female characters of his earlier works are often dismissed as either “angels” or “monsters”. However, there are significant changes in his treatment of female characters from around 1850 onwards. In *David Copperfield*, the typical “angelic heroine”, Agnes, is overshadowed by some lively, attractive characters including Betsey Trotwood. Moreover, in *Great Expectations*, Dickens vividly describes the sufferings and conflicts of three “deviant” women who fail to conform to the ideal of femininity. In particular, one may perceive an advance in Dickens’ view of women through the character of Estella. Though Dickens “punishes” her for transgressing against the Victorian gender ideology as he does in the cases of Mrs. Joe and Miss Havisham, it is important to note that he suggests the potentiality of growth and future prospects for the heartless femme fatale, which is further to be developed in the heroine of the next novel, *Our Mutual Friend*.

Few people would disagree that one of the great attractions in Charles Dickens lies in his characters with powerful personalities. There are many unforgettable characters in Dickens’ works : Mr. Bumble, the brutal beadle of the parish workhouse in *Oliver Twist* (1838); Ebenezer Scrooge, the avaricious old miser in *A Christmas Carol* (1842); Sarah Gamp, the tipsy old midwife in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844); and Uriah Heep, the hypocritical clerk who cunningly defrauds his employer in *David Copperfield* (1850). Needless to say, these are only parts of a long list of his memorable, living characters. On the other hand, however, it is also true that Dickens’ characters are often criticised as one-dimensional or “flat” as E. M. Forster designates it (73). In particular, this seems worthy of note regarding women who appear in his works.

Indeed, Dickens’ female characters are generally classified into two basic types ; “angels” or “monsters”. For instance, one may think of the character of Mrs. Chirrup, who is “a condensation of all the domestic virtues, – a pocket edition of the young man’s best companion” (584) in “Sketches of Young Couples” and the characters of Mrs. Bumble and Mrs. Mann, the fearsome viragoes in *Oliver Twist*. Miriam Margolyes, an award-winning British actress and well-known Dickens enthusiast, says that Dickens is incapable of drawing “a complete, believable, fully realised female” (16). However, it is important to note that all of the abovementioned characters are creations in Dickens’ earlier years. As Michael Slater writes, Dickens’ treatment of women underwent some changes through his career as a novelist (243–97). In this paper, I will mainly discuss female characters in Dickens’ works after *David Copperfield* (1850), for, I believe, this novel indi-

cates the beginning of significant changes in his depiction of women.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens depicts various types of female characters : ①“child-wives” such as Mrs. Copperfield and Dora Spenlow; ②the idealized “Angel in the House”, Agnes Wickfield; ③“fallen women” such as Martha Endell and Little Em’ly; ④“forbidding spinsters” like Jane Murdstone and Rosa Dartle. Added to these, there are interesting portrayals of David’s warm-hearted surrogate mothers, Clara Peggotty and Betsey Trotwood, and Mrs. Micawber, who persistently repeats, “I’ll never desert Mr. Micawber”, in tragicomic manners.

Obviously these women play important roles in the life of David. What is peculiar about this novel is that the heroine, Agnes, is rather overshadowed by other characters despite the novelist’s admiration for her. Throughout the novel, her goodness is stressed, as is encapsulated in her own words in Chapter XXXV: “I hope that real love and truth are stronger in the end than any evil or misfortune in the world” (516). When Agnes first appears in the book, she acts as the “little housekeeper” for her widowed father (233); looking after house keys, doing needlework, setting the table and serving tea. After David lodges at their house, Agnes supports his emotional development as the “better angel” of his life (844). Looking back upon the old days, the narrator David writes :

She filled my heart with such good resolutions, strengthened my weakness so, by her example, so directed – I know not how, she was too modest and gentle to advise me in many words – the wandering ardor and unsettled purpose within me, that all the little good I have done, and all the harm I have forborne, I solemnly believe I may refer to her. (525)

As Slater suggests, in Dickens’ novels, women often exercise these kinds of “spiritually redemptive powers” (308) for the good of the men around them. In this sense, Agnes is represented as the Victorian feminine ideal, the “Angel in the House”.

Ironically, however, Agnes’s virtues might not be so appealing to modern readers. Borrowing the words of Graham Storey, “everything about her is too explicitly good” (99). Indeed, she looks almost unreal because of her “superhuman saintliness”¹ (Slater, 251), as is illustrated in the words of David, who often associates her with the image of stained glasses: “I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the colored window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always” (242). On the other hand, however, there are hardly any concrete physical descriptions regarding this heroine such as the colours of her eyes or complexion, and because of this, the reader cannot think of her “in fleshly terms” (Ayres, 23). It is well known that George Orwell dismisses her as “the real legless angel of Victorian romance” (85).

However, as Slater discusses, there are some female characters in this novel to illustrate significant achievements of the middle period of Dickens’ work (250, 275). For instance, Dora Spenlow and Betsey Trotwood, might initially look like stock characters, but as the story proceeds, they gradually grow out of the stereotypes and become individualised, developing characters. As for Dora, at first, she looks exactly like Mrs. Copperfield, a silly, pretty “child-wife”; however, the reader is induced to see that in a sense, she is wiser and more perceptive than David thought her

to be. Loving David so much, Dora realises the problems of their marriage and foresees what their relations would be like in the future. What she says on her deathbed clearly illustrates this :

“I am afraid it would have been better, if we had only loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it I was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldn't have improved. It is better as it is.” (772–73)

Later, towards the end of the novel, Agnes confesses to David that Dora asked her to marry him after she was gone. In this moving scene, Dickens seems to appreciate Dora's intuitive knowledge about what would be the best for David.

Similarly, Betsey Trotwood, who is first identified as one of the “choleric masculine spinsters”, is rescued from the stock comic type as she is shown to be helpful to many other characters. For example, she saves David from the ruthless hands of the Murdstones, frees Mr. Dick from the asylum to which his brother committed him, and supports the Micawbers financially. Her goodness is not passive like that of Agnes, who just anxiously watches Uriah Heep gaining control over her father. In Chapter LII, in which Heep's fraud is exposed by Micawber, there is a hilarious description of this spirited lady : “What was my astonishment when I beheld my aunt, who had been profoundly quiet and attentive, make a dart at Uriah Heep, and seize him by the collar with both hands!” (762). Merryn Williams aptly observes that Betsey Trotwood is “the real heroine of this novel” (83). Indeed, tough and stubborn as she occasionally is, “Aunt Betsey” is undoubtedly an affectionate person. The reader is told at the beginning of the novel that generally she dislikes boys ; nevertheless, she becomes attached to David and takes in the pitiful orphan and brings him up with loving care. Also, it is almost moving that she remains good to her former husband, who treated her cruelly.

In this novel, Dickens is much concerned with the sufferings of unfortunate women victimized by men. Apart from Betsey Trotwood, for instance, the reader may recall Little Em'ly and Rosa Dartle, both of whom are seduced and discarded by the frivolous James Steerforth. Particularly in the character of Rosa, Dickens interestingly explores the perverse forms of love and hatred for the man, who is insensitive to her feelings towards him (Storey, 63). The following scene in Chapter XXIX may clearly illustrate this. Here, complying with Steerforth's request, Rosa sings to him and David, accompanying herself on the harp. While David senses “something fearful” in her passionate performance, Steerforth is utterly incapable of appreciating the intensity of her suppressed emotions, or, agonies of unrequited love for him.

A minute more, and this had roused me from my trance : – Steerforth had left his seat, and gone to her, and had put his arm laughingly about her, and had said, “Come, Rosa, for the future we will love each other very much!” And she had struck him, and had thrown him off with the fury of a wild cat, and had burst out of the room. (442)

By hitting Steerforth, Rosa seems to declare that she would not be his “doll”, “a trifle for the occupation of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with, as the inconstant humour took him” (806). Indeed, as several critics including Barbara Black have suggested, the scar on her face, the irreparable damage caused by Steerforth in his boyhood, symbolises “a wounded sexuality” (95). However, Rosa cannot resist loving Steerforth and desperately yearns to marry him: “I could have loved him, and asked no return. If I had been his wife, I could have been the slave of his caprices for a word of love a-year” (806). While Dickens does not sympathetically describe her fierce jealousy and malice towards Little Em’ly, who temporarily attracted Steerforth, he presents vividly the distress of this passionate woman, who has no prospects of marriage, the generally expected course of a woman’s life those days. In Chapter XX, the narrator David says, thinking back on the day when he first met Rosa: “I concluded in my own mind that she was about thirty years of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little dilapidated – like a house – with having been so long to let” (301).

Indeed, as was suggested in the character of Rosa Dartle, Dickens came to show an increasing interest in depicting women who fail to conform to the Victorian gender norms after his mid-career. In the masterpiece of his later years, *Great Expectations* (1860), for example, one can hardly find the “Angel in the House”, apart from the virtuous Biddy, who is gradually relegated to the periphery of the novel. The three major female characters such as Mrs. Joe Gargery (violent “she-dragon” [Ayres, 87]), Miss Havisham (vengeful “man-hater”), and Estella (heartless “femme fatale”) obviously deviate from the ideal of Victorian femininity. They are all considered to threaten men’s liberty or welfare and pay dearly for their “trespasses” in the end. Dickens forcefully describes the frustration, rage, and remorse of these “deviant” women under the pressure or restraint the society imposes on their sex.

As for Mrs. Joe Gargery, she is an exemplary tyrannical wife and “bad mother” Dickens creates (Waters, 153). From the early part of the novel, the narrator Pip recurrently emphasises Mrs. Joe’s dominant position in the household:

My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery ... had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up “by hand.” Having at the time to find out for myself what the expression meant, and knowing her to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand. (7–8)

Indeed, Mrs. Joe is shown to hit little Pip with the cane, “Tickler”, nag constantly at her husband, and force them into total submission. In short, she is constantly frustrated, which may be symbolically implied in the following passage concerning her “apron”:

She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should

have worn it at all : or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, every day of her life. (8)

Here the words such as “impregnable” and “full of pins and needles” suggest Mrs. Joe’s lack of maternity and tender feeling for Joe and Pip. In fact, the reader is told that sometimes the pins and the needles even get into the bread she cuts for them. However, as she makes much of “the reputation from the neighbours” (e.g. “she brought up Pip by hand”), she obsessively wears the apron to keep up appearances as a good domestic woman. In this sense, the coarse apron that she is proud of is virtually regarded as a heavy burden she has to bear. Seen in this light, Mrs. Joe’s habitual irritation seems to be largely attributed to the socially expected feminine ideal, “a devoted wife and mother” that she fails to embody (Waters, 153).

It is interesting that while Dickens seems to show some understanding of the inner struggle of Mrs. Joe, ultimately he “punishes” her for transgressing against the Victorian gender ideology. Throughout the novel, she is called “Mrs. Joe” instead of her Christian names, Georgiana Maria. In a sense, this might indicate that she has lost her name and identity, or rather, they have been completely obscured by her husband’s (Schor, 166). On the other hand, however, as Ayres discusses, it is also possible to think that Dickens chooses to call her “Mrs. Joe” to satirically convey she has “stolen” masculine power (87).

As some critics including Waters indicate, the relation between Joe and Mrs. Joe seems almost to “reverse” the traditional traits of husband and wife (153). In Chapter 14, for instance, the narrator Pip confesses : “home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister’s temper. But Joe had sanctified it, and I had believed in it” (106). Indeed, Joe is often presented like an “angelic Victorian heroine” who always cares for the welfare of those around her. He always comforts little Pip when the latter is harshly treated by Mrs. Joe. Also, as is mentioned by Waters, the reader remembers that Joe firmly refuses the pecuniary compensation offered by the lawyer, Jaggers, for the loss of his apprentice (154). Looking back, the narrator Pip is struck with profound gratitude and admiration for Joe’s deepest, selfless love for him : “O dear good faithful tender Joe, I feel the loving tremble of your hand upon my arm, as solemnly this day as if it had been the rustle of an angel’s wing!” (141) It is not surprising that such a gentle, self-sacrificing man assumes a subordinate role in the household ruled by the aggressive Mrs. Joe. In an earlier chapter, there is an impressive scene in which Joe warns little Pip that they should learn to read together “on the sly” without the knowledge of his wife : “Your sister is given to government ... and in partickler (sic) would not be over partial to my being a scholar, for fear as I might rise. Like a sort of rebel, don’t you see?” (48–49)

In this way, Mrs. Joe impairs male authority and ultimately, she is “chastened” and “silenced” for her sins (Ingham, 83). Brutally attacked by Joe’s journeyman, Orlick, she is completely deprived of her power in the house : her sight and hearing are gravely damaged and her speech turns almost unintelligible.² As Pip witnesses, she “humbles” herself and even shows a placatory attitude to Orlick like “a child towards a hard master” (124). After some years, she dies quietly, freeing Joe to marry Biddy, who embodies the true worth of domesticity. Thus, as Ingham argues, disorder turns to order in the end when the subversive power of the “deviant” woman is removed

(83). This pattern is also to be seen in the character of Miss Havisham ; however, Dickens' treatment of her is generally more complex than in the case of Mrs. Joe.

In the first half of the novel, Miss Havisham is depicted as a "grotesque, mad woman" with a mysterious background. When Pip first visits her in the grand, desolate mansion, "Satis House", he is astonished to find her sitting in the decayed remnant of a wedding garment in a large, dark room : "I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and ... had shrunk to skin and bone" (58). He then remembers "some ghastly waxwork at the Fair" and "a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress" he had once seen, when the ghostlike lady startles him by saying :

"Do you know what I touch here?" she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.

"Yes, ma'am" (It made me think of the young man.)

"What do I touch?"

"Your heart."

"Broken!" (58)

Later Pip learns about a tragic incident in her youth and understands what she meant in the strange conversation. When she was a young rich heiress, she was jilted on her wedding day by a suitor, who defrauded her of a large sum of money. In her agony, she stopped the clocks and shut herself up in her house. She then chose to adopt a little girl and bring her up to wreak revenge upon the male sex.

As Waters suggests, one may perceive a peculiar combination of "decay" and "fierce passion" concerning the character of Miss Havisham (157-58). In Chapter 8, for example, roaming about Satis House, Pip finds it "a deserted place": "there was a wilderness of empty casks" in the disused brewery yard (63). Here Miss Havisham lives among the relics of the past such as the rotten wedding cake covered with cobwebs and the yellow, withered tablecloth. The tattered bridal dress she is wearing is regarded as "the emblem of faded virginity" (Waters, 157). In this sense, Waters discusses that she is represented as "a decaying woman in white" who has "failed to undergo the 'proper' female development from bride to mother" (157).

With the prospect of marriage shattered, Miss Havisham took in a girl, Estella, and lavished love and care on the adopted child. In fact, as Pip notices, there is "something positively dreadful" in Miss Havisham's keen affection for Estella : "She hung upon Estella's beauty, hung upon her words, hung upon her gestures, and sat mumbling her own trembling fingers while she looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared" (302). Actually, the reader is told earlier that she shows "a miserly relish of Estella's moods" (95). Also, in Chapter 29, Pip is frightened to witness her kissing her hand to Estella "with a ravenous intensity" (239).

Interestingly, Dickens often induces the reader to feel pity for Miss Havisham by stressing that she is a victimised woman starving for affection. To cite an illustration, there is a pathetic scene in the middle of the novel in which she feverishly pours out her deep anger and grief to Pip :

“I’ll tell you,” said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, “what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter – as I did!” (240)

One may imagine from her words that her faithless lover, Compeyson, inflicted a fatal blow upon her. All her dreams of marriage were smashed to pieces and she realised that she belonged nowhere in Victorian patriarchal society. Ironically, such expressions as “blind devotion”, “unquestioning self-humiliation”, “utter submission”, and “trust and belief” evoke the image of the “Angel in the House” she has eventually failed to be. Seen from this viewpoint, her resentment and distrust of men may be fairly understandable. However, as will be shown later in her quarrel with Estella, what she really needs is reciprocation for her love rather than retaliation.

In this way, Dickens seems to be more sympathetic to the suffering of Miss Havisham as the story proceeds. However, as I have suggested earlier, his final judgement on her may be viewed as “punitive”. She has made irreparable mistakes by luring Pip into her vindictive schemes as well as deforming Estella’s nature through her “education”. In Chapter 49, Dickens describes a dramatic scene in which Miss Havisham tearfully begs Pip to forgive her on her knees: “Until you spoke to her the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done!” (399) Immediately after this, her wedding dress catches fire, and despite Pip’s desperate effort to put out the flames, she is seriously wounded and dies, still imploring his forgiveness. The fiercely burning fire may symbolise Miss Havisham’s self-consuming passion. Certainly her life represents a tragedy in which a wealthy young woman, who is solely dreaming of marriage, is deceived in the name of love. Thus, though Dickens is well aware that women are subject to exploitation in the structure of patriarchal society, he punishes Miss Havisham for involving others in her personal grief to destroy all men’s happiness.

Lastly, let us examine the character of Estella, the coldhearted beauty whom Pip is hopelessly in love with: “When I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, if not always, that I loved her against reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be” (232). According to Michael Slater’s classification, Estella is considered to be a woman as the “unattainable sexual object” Dickens often describes in his later works (Margolyes, 12. Slater, 277). For example, one may think of such characters as Lucie Manette (*A Tale of Two Cities*), Estella (*Great Expectations*), Bella Wilfer and Lizzie Hexam (*Our Mutual Friend*), and Rosa Bud (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*). Among those characters, Estella seems to be particularly interesting, because, to use Angus Wilson’s expression, she represents “a real advance in Dickens’s perception of women” (271). As was indicated, Estella is entirely different from a good, submissive, “angelic” heroine. In the early chapters of the book, the reader finds her a proud and haughty child who is downright nasty to Pip, the “common labouring-boy” (60). Under the schemes of the vindictive Miss Havisham, such a girl has grown into a dangerous woman who mercilessly toys with men’s affections. Indeed, Dickens punishes this “deviant”

woman for inflicting suffering on men. However, it is important to note here that the novelist also suggests the potentialities of her change, or, spiritual growth in the end.

In the greater part of the novel, Dickens presents Estella as a passionless woman who has “no heart”. To give an illustration, in Chapter 38, there is an impressive scene in which she has a quarrel with Miss Havisham. Pip witnesses Estella trying to detach herself from her adoptive mother, who clings tightly to her arm. “‘What!’ said Miss Havisham, flashing her eyes upon her, ‘are you tired of me?’ ‘Only a little tired of myself,’ replied Estella, disengaging her arm, and moving to the great chimney-piece, where she stood looking down at the fire” (303–4). As will be shown below, the contrast between the violent emotion of Miss Havisham and the icy self-possession of Estella is striking.

“So proud, so proud!” moaned Miss Havisham, pushing away her grey hair with both her hands.

“Who taught me to be proud?” returned Estella. “Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?”

“So hard, so hard!” moaned Miss Havisham, with her former action.

“Who taught me to be hard?” returned Estella. “Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?”

“But to be proud and hard to *me!*” Miss Havisham quite shrieked, as she stretched out her arms. “Estella, Estella, Estella, to be proud and hard to *me!*” (305)

Here Miss Havisham is described as a lonely, pitiable woman. This is the only scene in the novel in which Estella takes an explicitly defiant attitude towards her “mother by adoption” (304). The way she is pulling free from Miss Havisham’s grasp symbolises her rebellion against the latter, in which, as Wilson argues, one may see the novelist’s “recognition of a woman as an individual having her own demands on life” (271). Shortly after this, in spite of the opposition of Miss Havisham, Estella marries the vicious Bentley Drummle, because she is “tired of the life” she has led and wants to change it (364). Probably she is sick of being taken to the “marriage market” to attract men’s attention. In Chapter 33, for example, Estella tells Pip “carelessly” that she is going to stay with an old friend of Miss Havisham’s in Richmond: “I am going to live ... at a great expense, with a lady there, who has the power – or says she has – of taking me about, and introducing me, and showing people to me and showing me to people” (266). Indeed, her marriage with Drummle radically changes her life. What she has failed to foresee is how vulnerable a woman could be when she is incorporated into patriarchal relations by a loveless marriage. Though the actual details of her unhappy marriage are not described, the reader is told that Drummle, who is “a compound of pride, avarice, brutality, and meanness” (482), abuses her most cruelly before he dies from an accident due to his mistreatment of a horse.

The final chapter is suggestive of Estella’s spiritual development as well as Pip’s. It is well known that Dickens changed the ending he had originally conceived on the advice of a fellow-novelist, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who found it too disappointing to the reader (John Forster, 289).³ In the revised ending, Estella and Pip meet again after eleven years, in the ruined garden of Satis House and the latter as a narrator concludes the story by saying, “I saw the shadow of no

parting from her” (484). This revised version is seemingly more cheerful and romantic than the original⁴, but, as Schor stresses, the future relation between the two characters remains ambiguous (176), for Estella actually tells Pip that they “are friends” and “will continue friends apart” (484). In this sense, Schor argues that the revised version only points to the gap, or discrepancy in their feelings for each other (176). Despite those kinds of ambiguities, however, the second ending is significant in terms of Estella’s change and prospects. Importantly, Dickens makes her speak about herself more than he does in the original ending: “There was a long hard time when I kept far from me, the remembrance of what I had thrown away when I was quite ignorant of its worth”; “... suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but – I hope – into a better shape” (484). These words of Estella’s suggest that she has matured as a person after going through bitter hardships. Her stormy marriage with Drummle is considered to be a sort of retribution Dickens metes out to her (“bent and broken”) for bringing misery to the hero. However, viewed from a different perspective, the novelist’s attitude to this “deviant” woman is fairly ambivalent. As Deborah Wynne acutely observes, this is manifested in the words she says to Pip when she visits the ruins of Satis House: “The ground belongs to me. It is the only possession I have not relinquished” (624. *Great Expectations*, 483). Dickens often seems to consider that women tend to be incompetent managers of their own property (Wynne, 624). One may recall that the wealthy heiress, Miss Havisham fell victim to the mercenary suitor, Compeyson. He received an enormous sum of money out of her insisting that he should run the brewery as her future husband. His subsequent betrayal hurt her so much that she left the whole property in a state of desolation. In a way, her death in the latter part of the novel closes the door on the painful past. In the penultimate chapter, for instance, Pip discovers that Satis House is up for sale and is to be pulled down in due course of time. Estella, who has succeeded to the property, intends that the land should be built on. Seen in this light, Satis House “is awaiting redevelopment” as Lyn Pykett describes it (166). Thus, Estella has chosen to destroy and redevelop the property, which is also to be regarded as a new start in her life⁵ (Wynne, 625).

As we have seen so far, there are significant changes and achievements in Dickens’ characterisation of women from his mid-career. In *David Copperfield*, he portrays a variety of female characters including the “Angel in the House”, “fallen women”, and “forbidding spinsters”. I have demonstrated that some of them such as Dora Splenlow and Betsey Trotwood eventually grow out of stereotypes and turn out to be attractive, developing characters. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens displays a deeper concern for women who are outside the Victorian gender ideology. As he basically believes in the separate spheres between men and women and promotes the gender norms, he punishes the “deviant” women for crossing the lines and challenging male authority. However, it is important to state that he is increasingly conscious of the pressures and restraints they endure in Victorian patriarchal society. Especially Dickens’ attitude towards Estella is ambivalent: he suggests the potentiality of change and future prospects for the coldhearted “femme fatale” after giving her bitter afflictions. As some critics such as Wilson note, Estella’s strong will and energy are further to be developed in the character of Bella Wilfer (*Our Mutual Friend*), who outgrows her materialistic desires and determines to marry for love in the end (277)⁶. Dick-

ens does not fully explore the self-realisation of a woman as Charlotte Brontë does in *Jane Eyre* ; however, it is important that he skillfully presents the fascinating portraits of the changing heroines, Estella and Bella, in his later works⁷.

Since the bicentenary of Dickens' birth in 2012, several important works have been produced focusing on his depiction of women. For example, the previously mentioned Miriam Margolyes performed a wide range of Dickens' female characters in her one-woman show, "Dickens' Women". Also, Ronald Frame wrote a prelude to *Great Expectations, Havisham : A Novel* (2013) in which he explored the youth of Miss Havisham in the first person narrative. They are exceedingly interesting in presenting us the stories of Dickens' novels from a woman's point of view. As I have tried to show in this paper, Dickens' portraits of female characters are more complex and ambiguous than they apparently seem to be, and the depth, as well as the limitations of his insight into women, will continue to attract many readers today.

Notes

1. Slater suggests that the "sanctified shadow" of Dickens' sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, who died an untimely death at the age of seventeen, falls on the character of Agnes (100).
2. As Ingham suggests, one may perceive in Orlick's assault on Mrs. Joe the secret desire of Pip/Dickens to overthrow the despotic rule of this "deviant" woman (86).
3. According to John Forster, Lytton objected to a close that should leave Pip a solitary man (289).
4. In Dickens' original conception, Pip has a final meeting with Estella, who is married again to a Shropshire doctor, in Piccadilly.
5. It is interesting that in *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*, Hilary M. Schor reads *Great Expectations* as "Estella's novel" (154).
6. Angus Wilson discusses the influence of Dickens' mistress, Ellen Ternan, on his characterisation of Estella and Bella (277). As for Ellen Ternan's life and her relationship with Dickens, see Claire Tomalin's *The Invisible Woman* (1990), which was made into a film under the same title in 2013.
7. Slater particularly appreciates the character of Bella though he regrets that she should end up as the typically good, angelic wife of John Harmon in their "doll's house" (283-84).

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