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### Obsession in Charles Dicken's *Great Expectations*

*Great Expectations* is filled with characters that each have their own peculiar obsessions, the domination of one's thoughts or feelings by a persistent idea, image or desire. As a consequence, it is not hard to frame a global theme around obsession. The narrative framework of the book is intricate and certain obsessions are connected to one another. For instance, Miss Havisham's unhealthy obsession with revenge causes Pip, the protagonist, to develop his own obsessions. This essay will focus on the obsessions of Pip and show how the obsession of Miss Havisham has caused his obsession. First, this essay will discuss Pip's early obsession, which is life-changing and how it results in him abandoning his former prospect of becoming a blacksmith. Secondly, this essay will discuss how Pip's obsession with Estella is the main cause of his first obsession, and show how after a long time he still longs for her love. The third, and final point of the essay will revolve around Miss Havisham's obsession with revenge, and her own broken heart, arguing that Miss Havisham's obsession is the main cause of Pip's obsession. This essay will show how obsession is a central theme in the book and show that Miss Havisham's obsession is the main cause of Pip's obsession.

The main obsession of Dicken's novel is Pip's obsession. Pip's obsession with Estella causes a change in his ambitions and acts as a leading thread in the rest of the novel. This paragraph will examine Pip's change of heart and how this obsession was developed. Pip's future plans get dishevelled due to his visits to Satis House. Before his visit to the house of miss Havisham, Pip was at peace with his future prospect of becoming a blacksmith but after the visit he begins to have doubts about it. He becomes sensitive to the opinion of Estella:

[M]y young mind was in that disturbed and unthankful state, that I thought long after I laid me down, how common Estella would consider Joe, a mere blacksmith: how thick his boots, and how coarse his hands. [...] That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. (p. 125)

This is all due to the influence of Estella. Estella looks down on Pip. For instance, her first reaction when Miss Havisham urges Pip and Estella to play a game of cards is reluctant and degrading: "With this boy? Why, he is a common labouring-boy!" Furthermore, she shows contempt at his phrasing when he calls knaves jacks, moreover, she calls his hands coarse (p. 105). All this makes Pip very insecure, he begins to feel ashamed of his hands, and of his boots, all thoughts which he never had. The psychological impact of his first meeting with Estella has a life-lasting influence. This is exemplified in his behaviour from this point onward, for instance, Pip tries to become less coarse for Estella and goes to Biddy for tutoring. The obsession only grows stronger, the idea that being a blacksmith is no longer his aspiration keeps on surfacing in his reflections and may be safely called an obsession.

Pip's desire for educational improvement is, in truth, a by-product of his obsession with Estella. As long as he is an ignorant country boy, he has no hope of being with Estella. At first he does not even realize that he is in love with her. He

simply wants to work towards being in a fit station for marrying her. Later he reflects up on his love for Estella, and recognizes how irrational his love for her is:

[T]hough my fancy and my hope were so set upon her, though her influence on my boyish life and character had been all-powerful [...]The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. (pp. 410-411)

Pip states it himself, her influence had been all-powerful. That fact is undeniable because this reflection takes place long after Estella and Pip's first encounter when Pip is already living in London. It takes place right before Pip enters Satis House with the idea that he will be adopted by Miss Havisham, and that he is to marry Estella. This is all an illusion. This wishful thinking of Pip and his constant reflections about Estella show that he is deeply obsessed with her. His thoughts are persistently dominated by the image of Estella. Curiously, Pip has come to the unproven idea that Estella is part of his great expectations and that Miss Havisham is his benefactor. This is what makes him believe that he is meant for Estella. When Pip arrives back in London, his friend Herbert tries to talk some sense into Pip. He tries to convince him that it is very unsure whether Estella is meant for him and that nothing was ever said about it when he received his great expectations. He acknowledges that his love for Estella can lead to terrible things but when Herbert asks if he can detach himself he answers: "No. Impossible!" (p. 444), again showing how he is irrationally obsessed with Estella.

Notably, there is another obsession in the story that is a very large contributing factor to Pip's unhealthy obsession. This is Miss Havisham's obsession with revenge, which in turn facilitates the intercourse between Pip and Estella. Miss Havisham has been in an obsession for years on end, as the story evolves, the reader finds out that this obsession is caused by a heart break. Miss Havisham's lover never arrived at their

wedding. That this has caused an obsession is obvious in her attire, her surroundings, and her behaviour towards Estella. Her life is haunted by the domination of the persistent idea of her abandonment. All the clocks in her house, and her watch are stopped at twenty minutes to nine, the time when she received a letter from her lover with the information that he would not come. She still wears her bride dress, and it seems that she has never washed or left the house ever since. The wedding cake is also still in the room. All very strong images that give shape to her obsession. Estella is raised to break hearts, in fact, Pip is one of the targets of this endeavour. It is very possible that she has planned Pip's visit in order to break his heart. After the first encounter between Pip and Estella, when they play cards, she watches in "a watchful and brooding expression" (p. 106). When Pip and Estella continue playing together, Miss Havisham often asks if Estella is growing prettier and prettier. It is almost like she is enticing Pip to love Estella. That this is a scheme is quite obvious, because on the same occasions she draws Estella towards her, embraces her and murmurs in to her ear: "Break their hearts my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!" She succeeds, because the influence on Pip's life is undeniable:

"It would have been cruel in Miss Havisham, horribly cruel, to practice on the susceptibility of a poor boy, and to torture me through all these years with a vain hope and an idle pursuit, if she had reflected on the gravity of what she did. But I think she did not." (pp. 642)

The gravity of Miss Havisham's actions is big. It causes Pip to long for Estella's love, even though he finds her insulting. It causes Pip to rethink his ambitions and complicates his whole life. In that way one obsession leads to another. Miss Havisham's actions are irresponsible, however, she can not be blamed, she herself is a victim of a broken heart. Miss Havisham's obsession is the cause of Pip's obsessions.

His mind is occupied constantly by Estella and his prospects, and his whole life is formed around it. The fact that he can not abandon the idea of marrying Estella, and that this image constantly persists in his thoughts, shows that it undeniably an obsession. All that was previously said in this essay shows how, looking at the book from this perspective, obsession acts as a central theme.

Works Cited

Dickens, Charles. *Great Expectations*. "Great Expectations". *Planetpdf.Com*, 2018,  
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