Gender Identity In Great Expectations

Gender roles during the Victorian society created what “normal” means and others judge if caught breaking out of the roles. Great Expectations acts as a bildungsroman novel that shows development of certain characters. Pip develops through three parts in the novel showing negative and positive changes through his characterization. Other characters like Mrs. Joe, Joe, Biddy, and other characters take a role in affecting his life throughout the novel with life choices or relationships. Most characters develop a gender inversion. Women stand characterized by their masculinity and men stand characterized by their femininity bringing up the social issue of gender identity. The usage of characterization in Dickens’ novel, Great Expectations represents gender identity and the unusual Victorian gender norms as a central social issue in Victorian society through the character’s actions and impacts in certain relationships. Gender ideals created a social controversy throughout the Victorian Age. Women were specifically to stay contained in the house and maintaining the care of the home as well as taking care of the children. Women also acted as a moral and religious guide for men. Dickens’ has an idealization that most Victorian women must maintain a full moral and spiritual potential. Men, on the other hand, had the freedom to leave the house for work and other leisurely activities. Men earn money to purchase goods for the household by working in the marketplace. Timothy Farrell states, “As we shall see, conflict in the novel emerges when its characters do not conform to this gender construction.” and the solution to conflict in Great Expectations utilizes violence. For example, Molly gets tamed by Mr. Jaggers if caught not doing her job around the house. Overall, men have much of the power during the Victorian Age. Mrs. Joe, being the first character described in the novel, serves as a figure that femininity but characterized by her masculinity. With both parents of Pip being dead, he relies on his sister for those parental roles. The description that Pip uses for

Gender roles during the Victorian society created what “normal” means and others judge if caught breaking out of the roles. Great Expectations acts as a bildungsroman novel that shows development of certain characters. Pip develops through three parts in the novel showing negative and positive changes through his characterization. Other characters like Mrs. Joe, Joe, Biddy, and other characters take a role in affecting his life throughout the novel with life choices or relationships. Most characters develop a gender inversion. Women stand characterized by their masculinity and men stand characterized by their femininity bringing up the social issue of gender identity. The usage of characterization in Dickens’ novel, Great Expectations represents gender identity and the unusual Victorian gender norms as a central social issue in Victorian society through the character’s actions and impacts in certain relationships.

Gender ideals created a social controversy throughout the Victorian Age. Women were specifically to stay contained in the house and maintaining the care of the home as well as taking care of the children. Women also acted as a moral and religious guide for men. Dickens’ has an idealization that most Victorian women must maintain a full moral and spiritual potential. Men, on the other hand, had the freedom to leave the house for work and other leisurely activities. Men earn money to purchase goods for the household by working in the marketplace. Timothy Farrell states, “As we shall see, conflict in the novel emerges when its characters do not conform to this gender construction.” and the solution to conflict in Great Expectations utilizes violence. For example, Molly gets tamed by Mr. Jaggers if caught not doing her job

around the house. Overall, men have much of the power during the Victorian Age.

Mrs. Joe, being the first character described in the novel, serves as a figure that femininity but characterized by her masculinity. With both parents of Pip being dead, he relies on his sister for those parental roles. The description that Pip uses for Mrs. Joe describes her as harsh and unapproachable which acts as the opposite of the typical Victorian mother figures. Being opposite of the typical motherly figure, she also acts opposite of the ideal Victorian women in general and lacks the feminine identity. "'What is detestable in a pig is more detestable in a boy.' 'Or girl,' suggested Mr. Hubble. 'Of course, or a girl, Mr. Hubble,' assented Mr. Wopsle, rather irritably, 'but there is no girl present.'" (Dickens 26). This quote occurred when Mrs. Joe and Joe hosted a Christmas dinner. Mrs. Joe remains present when they said this quote. Mr. Wopsle and Mr. Hubble identify that the operating household has no feminine influences meaning Mrs. Joe has no feminine influence in other characters' perspectives. With this view of Mrs. Joe, she also enacts the role of being the "man of the house":

My sister, Mrs. Joe, with her 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 rather than soap. She was tall 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. (Dickens 6).

This gives the impression that she works all over the house all the time. Without the feminine side of her showing, she continues to not be considered the "angel of the house" because of how she acts and becomes the opposite of Victorian woman. Since Mrs. Joe cannot act as a motherly figure to Pip, Pip finds that in another character.

On the other hand, Joe has a gender role reversal and takes the motherly role from Mrs. Joe. Ferrell affirms, "Like the ideal wife in Victorian culture, Joe neglects his own comfort and well-being than disturb the family setting." which proves gender role reversal in different characters in the novel. Joe's past childhood experience gives him the ability to fulfill the role that way Pip does not go through the same experience he did:

'I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself. I wish it was only me that got out, Pip; I wish there warn't no Tickler for you, old chap; I wish I could take it all on myself.' (Dickens 51)

Joe shows that he would sacrifice himself for Pip showing true mother instincts that Mrs. Joe does not. Joe also uses caretaking skills towards Pip when he becomes sick. Joe's character continues to develop through his femininity. While Mrs. Joe takes a masculine role and Joe takes a feminine role, Pip has confusion of his own role.

Miss. Havisham has the traits of Victorian femininity, but her actions show another side of her. Alexa Van Brunt notices that Pip describes Miss. Havisham with an unwomanly matter:

It was not in the first few moments that I saw all these things, though I saw more of them in the first moments than might be supposed. But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre 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. (Dickens 59)

Miss. Havisham here had no Victorian women beauty with her withered dress and no brightness in her eyes. Miss. Havisham coming from a higher class does not do any of the household work but has others do it for her. She spends her time dwelling on the past and teaching Estella. Teaching Estella to break hearts makes her lack the Victorian womanly ideal of having a full moral and spiritual potential. She teaches Estella to become “femme fatale” instead of the typical ideal of developing into the “angel in the house”.

Miss. Havisham’s teachings brings Estella, who becomes known as the “femme fatale”. Femme fatale means to act attractive and seductive which occurs as the opposite of the “angel in the house” who act as women that become devoted to her husband and their children. Estella stays for status and does not know how to truly love because Miss. Havisham teaches her to break every man’s heart. Other than the other woman characters in the novel, she travels more than anyone but still confined in certain locations and she also continues to not characterize by her masculinity. So, with that being said, she has many symbols of Victorian femininity in her character development. Innocence becomes the most important symbol throughout the novel for Miss. Havisham. It starts with Miss. Havisham teaching her to act attractive and seductive rather than devoted and loyal. Estella becomes used to rejecting men instead of committing to long term relationships. This symbol continues to stay important because it shows that Estella remains not mentally ready to accept control for herself. An example of Estella confirming her love for Bentley Drummle to Pip: “She looked towards Miss Havisham and considered for a moment with her work in her hands. Then she said, ‘Why not tell you the truth? I am going to be married to him.’” (Dickens 384-385). Estella staying afraid of control becomes proven with her looking for Miss. Havisham approval with each of her actions. This also proves how Miss. Havisham has impacted her life emotionally and mentally by using her to create revenge on all men. Also, Estella’s character encounters violence by Bentley Drummle: “I had heard of the death of her husband, who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, avarice, brutality, and meanness.” (Dickens 513).

Throughout Dickens’ novel, Great Expectations, characterization expressed gender identity and gender social problems through certain character actions and relationships. Gender inversion in the novel becomes common towards middle class characters while the upper-class characters just break gender normality. Also, noticing that conflict emerges when characters break gender normality develops to violence which proves what Victorian society was like and why gender identity continues as a social problem throughout the novel.