The Supremacy of Women

The gender of a character plays a key role in deciding the outcome of Pip’s life. The character of Miss Havisham provides us with a mysterious, Boo Radley-like figure who works to affect his life in a very negative way. “The witch like Miss Havisham” (Scheckner) strikes fear into the heart of Pip as she is bent on destroying him and destroying every other male because of her tormented past that is finally revealed near the end of the novel. Miss Havisham was left at the alter by Compeyson and thus she chooses to stop her entire life the way it was at that embarrassing moment, never wanting to forget just how hurt she was so that she may protect herself from ever being hurt like that again. “By stopping time, symbolized by all the clocks reading twenty to nine, Miss Havisham has stopped her life, which thereby becomes death in life” (‘Pip, Estella’). Miss Havisham has nothing to live for anymore so she turns to the poor soul nearest to her to enact her ghastly revenge. This poor soul is Estella. Estella is one of the common characters that many drift towards when they think of a certain female character altering the course of Pip’s journey. Estella is first interpreted as a dainty innocent girl with whom Pip is merely playing games. However, using Estella’s beauty, Miss Havisham manipulates her into a soul-killing machine determined to break the heart of any pious being that is too incompetent to see through her. Miss Havisham “stole her heart away and put ice in its place” (Dickens 395), which in turn allows Pip to fall wholeheartedly for Estella. So, in contrast
to popular belief, Miss Havisham is the real reason why Pip ends up broken and defeated at the conclusion of the novel.

The character of Estella is an intriguing figure because she represents not only the power women possess over men, as in her case with Pip, but also in the power portrayed by women over women, is in the case of Miss Havisham and herself. Estella’s true intentions are deadly as “Estella has been trained by Miss Havisham to be instinctively proud and insulting” (Shores) for a reason that Pip does not discover until well into the novel. He can tell that Estella “derives bitter pleasure” (Shores) from playing off of the inevitable feelings he assumes for the beautiful young girl. Nevertheless, “Estella’s sincere affection for Pip should not be dismissed” (Shores) even though when she is confronted by Miss Havisham and asked if she has feelings for the boy, something Miss Havisham cannot have happen due to her vendetta against the entire male gender, she denies the whole thing, telling Miss Havisham that “[She] is serious” (Dickens 448) about completing Miss Havisham’s mission of breaking the hearts of all men. This focus and drive proves the strength she possesses over herself and over Pip as “Estella [is] a character who could not be denied her rights as an individual” (Shores). Estella’s grasp on the heart of Pip is so unbelievably strong due to his lack of maturity in handling love. “Pip has shown himself to be first a boy then a young man” (Shores) time and time again especially when it deals with Estella. “Pip’s love is a strongly emotional and uncontrollable sensation” (Shores) that breaks him down into the meager being he once was in the cemetery at the beginning of the novel; scared, hurt, and broken, Pip’s love is his emotional downfall. “[Estella] asserts that she cannot love” (Shores) anyone, as a means to try and soothe the pain of heartbreak on Pip. She attempts to make him realize that it has nothing to do with him, and has everything to do with the fact that Miss Havisham has broken Estella and that “Estella’s notorious pride is only a defense against her
feelings of inadequacy” (Shores). The power Estella is possessed with is actually power that is forced upon her by Miss Havisham, showing that Estella is also a victim of female power. This victim attitude is what allows Estella to show regret and remorse at the end of the novel. She is faced with the reality of the situation:

   When the artificiality of her upbringing becomes contrasted with the naturalness of Pip’s [and] she seems to become all the more resentful of this life that has been forced upon her without her consent. As a woman she knows that Miss Havisham has warped her personality beyond repair and she is ashamed of what she has become. (Shores)

This realization is what gives both Pip and Estella some closure and helps them to form a sense of normalcy towards the waning moments of the book. After this occurs, they are finally able to find love in a hopeless place.

*Great Expectations* is a novel where the male characters must have a firm belief and understanding that their love for female characters also involves a strong acceptance of female power; “it is, in other words, a feminist novel” (Ioannou). The role feminism plays in the novel
Works Cited


