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In the late nineteenth century, at the time of Charles Dickens, death was all around London. Public hangings were still a common scene during his childhood, and grave-robbing was a relentless activity for thieves almost until his death. Despite widespread technological advances and general progress, Victorians held fast to folklore and in literature a Gothic undercurrent remained. Dickens refrains from directly identifying monsters in *Great Expectations*, but he nonetheless creates a story in which some characters are closer to being monstrous than they are to being realistically human. According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, a monster is "any imaginary, frightening creature, especially one that is large and strange, or a person who does very cruel and evil acts; a cruel person." Dickens writes a variety of such cruel persons on the pages of his story, each engaging a different monstrous quality.

At the opening of the novel, escaped convict Abel Magwitch, is one such monster. Preying on a small, weak orphan mourning in the graveyard where his family lies, the menacing Magwitch starts "up from among the graves" (Dickens 10) and viciously grabs young Pip by the throat—if not ultimately by his innocent heart. Pip is seduced by the fear Magwitch imposes upon him, a fear which quickly morphs into guilt, as Pip begins a journey of lost innocence perpetrated by the convict's needs and desires. At the same time that Pip is losing his innocence, in a town not far from the graveyard, a reclusive heiress insidiously manipulates her adopted daughter. Miss Havisham's grief, fear and anger from lost love, turn upon herself and the child. Through molding Estella with her own deep-seated rage, Miss Havisham exchanges an innocent girl for a life-draining seductress. Having been fashioned by others into monsters themselves, Magwitch and Miss Havisham are like grave-robbers or Dr. Frankenstein; with a desire to seek revenge, they exploit the bodies and craft the emotions of their innocent victims turning them into monsters who exploit others and are emotionally void.

Abel Magwitch, who was himself monstrously forged by circumstance, finds in Pip a woeful opportunity to create what he could never himself become. As he engages in the vengeful act of one-

upping his former companion in crime Compeyson, Magwitch baits the innocent Pip with promises of great harm, and later, with the fantasy of a gentleman's life or "great expectations," all the while burying Pip's innocence in guilt; submerging him in a life free of personal responsibility. Dickens often evokes the power of names and in Abel Magwitch there is no exception. "Abel" is perhaps in contrast to Compeyson's "Cain"—thus the reader anticipates his redemption that eventually comes, but at great expense. Yet still, he is a "magic witch" who can raise weak and tender young boys—almost from the dead—in graveyards, only to kill their innocence. Divulging gothic conventions in *Great Expectations*, John Bowen, professor of nineteenth-century literature at the University of York, writes:

"When Magwitch leaves the graveyard, he looks to Pip 'as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in.' What is true for Pip is also true for us as readers of the book; at certain moments, the dead seem to reach up to grab you." (Bowen)

The dead grab at Magwitch, at the reader, and at Pip's imagination. Watching Magwitch hobble across the marsh, Pip contemplates "a gibbet with some chains hanging" where a pirate was once hanged: "The man was limping on towards this latter, as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again." (Dickens 12). To Pip, Magwitch may well be a pirate; he steals some part of the boy that can never be regained.

Surrounded by death from his first breath of life, Pip begins his story as an innocent child just coming into awareness, but who soon deviates from the small sense of self he had, altering himself to the purpose of others' until becoming a Frankenstein-like fabrication of himself. His world is one of bleak marshes and gravestones: "five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long" whose "first fancies regarding" his family "were unreasonably derived from their tombstones" (Dickens 9). From here Pip gains most of the few comforts life affords him, assigning names to his family and to himself—the end of life for many is the beginning of life for Pip. Hoisted roughly atop a gravestone by the monstrous Magwitch and precariously upon it while interrogated, Pip's feelings of being at home are reinforced when he refers to the tall stone as "my gravestone" (Dickens 11). This is a reference to both his impending doom, and his feeling of ownership of this place. His heart lies here, and under these stones; his family—but too, the reference piques the thought of grave-robbers and making monsters from the dead. Having brought a small meal with him in his pocket, thinking to eat it here with his family, but instead unintentionally feeds his slice

of bread to Magwitch while on the graves. Unwittingly, Pip gestures a ceremony for death, perhaps foreshadowing the death of his own innocence in the novel. Researching these customs, social historian Ruth Richardson notes that it was "widespread custom" to provide "final refreshment customarily taken at eighteenth-and nineteenth-century funerals before the corpse left the house" (Richardson 8). Pip is small and weak—nearly a corpse himself—yet it is Magwitch who eats. Pip gives up his food to him in the same way he will give up his innocence. It is as though Pip is his own funeral-host with this grim refreshment. Manipulated into feeling guilty for the hunger pangs of the magic-witch, Pip's guilt grows stronger when he sneaks food for that monster from another; his monstrous sister, Mrs. Joe, who "raised him by hand" bottle-feeding him as an infant when Pips mother joined Pip's dead family in the graveyard. As well, Mrs. Joe's raised hand is a constant threat of punishment to Pip, and it is she who literally controls his bread and butter. From her recurring beatings, he is predisposed to victimization, and is ravaged by guilt when he steals sustenance for Magwitch. Instantly, Pip is transformed into a monster in his own mind, sharing the sins of the convict. Fearing the threats of Magwitch more than his sister's abuse, he becomes a liar and a thief: "under the weight of my wicked secret, I pondered whether the Church would be powerful enough to shield me from the vengeance of the terrible young man if I divulged to that establishment" (Dickens 24). Pip considers repenting, but the opportunity does not present itself, and his fear is too great to pursue absolution. He carries this forward, building upon the foundation that Magwitch carves. As he sinks deeper into his guilt, the torment from Magwitch's threats become a festering psychic wound. Pip, transforming into his own sort of monster, is overcome with a self-serving obsession for exploiting his "great expectations" when unlimited and unguided financial resources arrive.

The pestilence in Magwitch's early manipulation of Pip makes itself known as the years go by in Dickens' story. Learning that Magwitch is his benefactor, the one who has raised him with an invisible hand, Pip feels great revulsion toward Magwitch, but even more so, toward himself. Dickens' Pip reflects upon Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* when he says, "The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made, was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me" (Dickens 254). Here Pip compares himself to a monster-maker, when he himself is a monster: He is, as Bowen points out, "like a creature created by a monster: a kind of monster's monster. This tiny gothic allusion, over in a sentence, tells us so much about Pip, his state of mind and his relationship with Magwitch"

(Bowen). Bowen pinpoints the gothic nature in *Great Expectations* and Dickens' acknowledgement of his character's darker nature.

There is another ghostly character in the novel, Miss Havisham, that Dickens condemns to his tradition of monster-making. Rich with money but little else, Miss Havisham is like the undead; a ghostly presence eternally dressed in the yellowed-innocence of her wedding gown. She protects her memories within the dark walls of her crumbling estate and survives, it would seem, upon the decayed fantasy of her wedding feast, while spiders and rodents devour the crumbs. She is a monster of a different sort—an animated corpse—and responsible for Pip's first venture out of the marshlands of his birth; the place where he found comfort around his dead family in the church graveyard and in the roof over his head—even if it was provided by an abusive sister. Seemingly satiating a hunger; "a sick fancy" (Dickens 51), Miss Havisham has Pip brought to her and commands him to "play" as though by observing his actions she will reanimate herself: "So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards" ruminates Pip, "I have often thought since, that she must have looked as if the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust." (Dickens 52). Miss Havisham is a different type of monster than is Magwitch. Much like a vampyre, she is frail, but not fragile. She plays the role of victim while simultaneously sucking the life-blood out of those she attacks. Bowen says: "Miss Havisham is both the victim of her abandonment and the dominant, powerful, even seductive, oppressor of Pip and Estella" (Bowen). By introducing Pip to her beautiful daughter Estella, who she teaches to taunt Pip, Havisham seduces Pip by false love as was she in her youth. Pips sense of being cared for by Havisham and Estella too is false, although it is ultimately more Pip who does the care-taking than the surrogate parents; Miss Havisham posing as one and Magwitch as another. Pip's upbringing and education in the Marsh and with Miss Havishim do not provide for lessons in discernment, and he flails about, not understanding what in his relationships is real, and what is fantasy. Miss Havisham's emotional and financial influence over Pip and Estella grows not from love or good-will, but from the fungus upon her heart. Her proud attitude serves as a thinly-veiled costume for her real intentions; solely to cause hurt to others.

Estella, raised with the deteriorating bride-cake of Miss Havisham as a constant backdrop, is a morsel upon which the monstrous heiress thrusts her rage over love's rejection. Estella is a counter-balance to Pip, as she has no "great expectations" for herself but rather, she herself is the great expectation of Miss Havisham. In the clutches of the jilted bride Havisham, Estella is raised to capture the hearts of men, yet to be void

of any feeling toward them. In her close analysis of gender and hunger in Dickens' novels, Prof. Gail Houston observes that Estella becomes "the nightmare version of the Victorian young woman bred to have no desires and no appetites, trained to be desired and to be the object of appetite" (Houston 159). Indeed, in contrast to the ravenous appetite of Magwitch, Miss Havisham and Estella never consume food, but instead, feed off of the naïveté of Pip. Estella's objectification as a "plaything" allows her to tease and provoke men, but she "plays", or does so, only at Miss Havisham's command. In the words of Houston: "Estella views herself as Miss Havisham's ornamental object, to be dangled before men to tantalize them and break their hearts" (Houston 159). Sucking life from Pip, Estella plays for Miss Havisham a monstrous game of hearts.

When they are no longer children, Pip and Estella's games become more subtle. Pip escorts Estella to a departure for Richmond, where, in her words; a lady will be "showing people to me and showing me to people" (Dickens 203). Pip, in what might be considered an emerging self-awareness, questions her as to the enjoyment of life she will have there where her whole being will be consumed by the vanity of others, but she answers him "so carelessly" that Pip observes, "You speak of yourself as if you were someone else" (Dickens 203). Seeing her in this fashion indicates Pip is growing into a matured perspective about their childish games and monster natures. While there are many instances of Estella's cruelty toward Pip in Dickens' story, here she has become vacant—and no longer playing the old games with him that she will continue to play with others in Richmond. Estella is the hollow, vampyre-like creature of Miss Havisham's design. She is the innocent child that has been replaced by an emotionless void without the ability to love even her maker, not out of cruelty, but out of the simple facts that describe her existence.

In Dickens' *Great Expectations*, the author creates an array of monsters who feed upon one another both financially and emotionally. Magwitch is the solitary character in this patch-work family to whom great expectations are actually offered. His exile to Australia—as punishment for crimes—provides a new beginning for him, even if inadvertently. But his need for revenge overpowers his sensibility. Originally a criminal by circumstance, he choses to use his freedom and subsequent wealth in the new land to form Pip into a monstrous "gentleman." And it is Magwitch's ability to choose that leads him full-circle back to Compeyson; the "Cain" to his "Able" and one of his own makers. Against all better judgment, Magwitch returns from Austrilia to see in-person what his money has bought him: gentleman Pip. Although Pip is initially revolted when Magwitch unsettles his adult

world—returning into his life like a resurrection from that long-ago graveyard—it is when Magwitch views what he forged—his creation Pip—that the reader can see a transformation from monster to man; Magwitch is released from his ghoulish form by his love for Pip and the belief that he has achieved his goal of transforming the little boy from the Marsh into a gentleman. The death of his master, Compeyson, and the compassion shown him by Pip, affirms his redemption.

Dickens purges Miss Havisham of her monster nature with fire. He kindles the flames with her decrepit wedding dress and fans the blaze with her dried and shriveled past as her old gown catches fire. Pip too, is injured by flames as he rescues her from total consumption, but she emerges cleansed, asking him, "perhaps you can never believe, now, that there is anything human in my heart?" (Dickens 295). Learning his own lessons, as the goodness in her heart is revealed, Pip becomes the beneficiary not of her fortune, but of the legacy of her monstrous nature: "There was an air of utter loneliness upon her that would have moved me to pity though she has willfully done me deeper injury than I could charge her with. I stood…thinking of how in the progress of time I too had come to be a part of the wrecked fortunes of that house" (Dickens 295). Pip sheds more of his own monster-self as the true nature of his makers, and his own folly, is revealed to him.

Devouring the fantasy created by Miss Havisham and his own imagination, young Pip had no discernment; he held "great expectations" about being a gentleman rather than a poor boy from the marshlands, but Dicken's character flounders without grounding about what makes life meaningful beyond money. As Houston notes: "Pip becomes property as much as he inherits it" (Houston 162). Magwitch owns him financially the unknown source of distant but plentiful money and without direction and guidance, Pip knows no boundaries; his morality frays. It is only the return of the living Magwitch that enables him to realize his own monstrous behavior toward those who truly love him. He remains eternally wounded, but sheds his monster skin along with his unrealistic "great expectations" redefining his sense of morality and humanity.

With the spider-infested bridal-cake belonging to Miss Havishim as a representation of her own life, Estella escapes the darkness of that monster's manipulations only to marry Drummle, aptly nicknamed "the spider". A more sinister monster than she, Drummle eventually consumes Estella, much like the spiders feast upon her mother's cake. And as though his abuse was retribution for her own cruelty to others, Drummle's treatment sparks her transformation and thus she sheds

her monster nature too. Yet as with her mother, Magwitch and Pip, it is not without cost.

In the end Estella admits the positivity of her transformation to Pip: "I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape" (Dickens 358). Her suffering has overcome her training as she too, is shed of the monster-skin. Having lost all they thought they were—and at her childhood home, Satis House, as Dickens' novel closes—Pip and Estella are like the survivors of a great siege, after which they have laid their monsters to rest, burying them forever in the graveyard of their hearts. Pip does not return to the old graveyard where his innocence and his family lay buried, but he and Estella do return "home", where the great tomb—the home of Miss Havisham—is dismantled. And with the physical place destroyed, they move to an emotional place where Pip's true nature is revealed to himself, where the monsters have finally been confessed, and where love—even love—may be waiting.

Dickens crafts humans into monsters in his novel, Great Expectations. He gives them human form and voice then weaves into them individual stories of perceived oppression, privilege, power, and denial. Like spiders building web upon web, he layers the persona of his characters, but then catches them in their own webs, offering escape only through the shedding of their old skin. Although death is the inevitable end for some, Dickens is equally ready to give his characters new life through transformation. He not only gives us monsters, he shows us how they form, and how they subsequently redeem themselves; how they feed off of each other, and how they transform each other. In the end, each character is able to fill the void formed by the expulsion of the monster through the essential human characteristics of forgiveness, compassion, redemption, and love.

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