The Great Barriers Of Great Expectations: The Influence Of Miss Havisham

In our society, each person faces psychological pressure from their environment, whether it is sheer manipulation or academic pressure. As one reads, they are bound to pick up on the similar pressures that the characters in Dickens' literary society suffer through. In Charles Dickens' Great Expectations, characters are psychologically programmed by physical barriers that develop social distinctions as seen through Pip, Joe and Estella, which characterizes the social hierarchy of the book.

Throughout the novel, Pip experiences a feeling of classlessness and detachment in both the city and country that can only be attributed to his emotional abuse from Mrs Joe and Estella. James Crowley analyzes Pip's interactions with Mrs Joe and his reaction to her demise. "... a consistent pattern of being reminded of the burden he [Pip] has been to raise 'by hand' and he 'could scarcely have recalled [his] sister with much tenderness'; on learning of her death, is only a 'shock of regret' for the manner in which she died instead of a redemptive grief" (Crowley). Pip's constant physical and emotional abuse from Mrs. Joe is what gives him a sense of detachment from her and a desire to abandon his past. She constantly talks of Pip as a burden, when Mrs Joe dies, Pip still has that sense of disconnection from her, when all he feels is a 'sense of regret' for the way she died. Pip feels that in the country, he can't expand to his potential and believes life has better things in store, but later in the city, he sees that London is a dark and unwelcoming setting, which leaves him disappointed. This creates a dilemma for Pip, as he doesn't have anywhere left to turn to and he is never able to be fully satisfied. Mrs Joe is only half of Pip's emotional abuse, Estella is the other half. She makes comments that have Pip questioning his own upbringing and home, " I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before...she denounced me for a stupid, clumsy laboring boy..."(Dickens 55). Estella and Pip have a toxic relationship that leads to psychological issues, like Pip losing a sense of belonging from his town. She targets things that he never noticed, but has possessed for a long time, like his hands. He becomes ashamed of his past and his class, and is determined to move up in life for a chance to have this undesirable object and star, Estella. Pip finds that this sense of not belonging follows him no matter where he goes, city or country.

In the novel, Joe's repeated inability to adapt to higher classes and cities is due to him being accustomed and psychologically bound to his life in a working class and the country. Joe's visit to Pip in London highlights his awkwardness in a city, "I'm wrong in these clothes, I'm wrong out of the forge...You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer" (Dickens 209). Joe tries to join Pip in his new life, but he has been psychologically programmed as a simpleton by the pressures of society and is flustered when he has to move out of his comfort zone. When Joe had to go see Miss Havisham, he tries to make a good impression for Pip, but he still remains tense: "I could hardly have imagined dear old Joe looking so unlike himself...with his tuft of feathers ruffled, and his mouth open as if he wanted a worm" (Dickens 93). He is out of place in fancy clothes and prefers being a working man because that is what society molded him for. Joe fidgets with his hat and is unable to talk directly to Miss Havisham. Pip being a young boy, has not been given a fixed role to play in society and he doesn't understand Joe's struggle . The hat begins to symbolize the strictness

and barriers between the classes. Joe being unable to move and adapt to different settings is because of him being psychologically programmed by society as a working man.

Estella's manipulative behaviour towards people of lower class, can only be due to her emotional abuse and reclusive life with Miss Havisham. She is adopted by Miss Havisham who uses her to get revenge on all men. Theresa Atchinson analyzes Miss Havisham's manipulation, "In her [Miss Havisham's] mind, the only agency women wield is sexual, and her chosen weapon is Estella. While always attractive, Estella blatantly occupies this immaculate, sexually infused position..." (Atchison). Miss Havisham adopts and raises her for the sole purpose of vengeance. Estella's behavior with lower classes can be traced back to this, as Estella grew up in this vengeful environment, she is poisoned into a life of manipulation. Her behavior towards Pip illustrates that as she bullies him relentlessly to fuel her sense of self-importance. All of her behavior portrays her as "a princess" who is too above the simple lives of the lower classes. The location of Miss Havisham's house enforces this, "...everybody had heard of Miss Havisham up town-as an immensely rich and grim lady who lived in a large and dismal house, and who led a life of seclusion" (Dickens 48). In Great Expectations, the rich are always above, as seen through the phrase "up-town". Estella's life of loneliness and seclusion also ties back to her manipulation and lack of opportunities to form bonds. Miss Havisham's manipulation of Estella leads her to psychologically damage others because of the poisonous environment she is raised in.

In Great Expectations, Dickens creates strong social commentary through Estella, Joe and Pip who are all characters who have been programmed to develop social distinctions. This elaborates on the psychological impacts of a harsh childhood and egos of the upper classes.