

PAROLE RUBATE

RIVISTA INTERNAZIONALE
DI STUDI SULLA CITAZIONE



PURLOINED LETTERS

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF QUOTATION STUDIES

Rivista semestrale online / Biannual online journal

<http://www.parolerubate.unipr.it>

Fascicolo n. 25 / Issue no. 25

Giugno 2022 / June 2022

Rivista fondata da / Journal founded by

Rinaldo Rinaldi (Università di Parma)

Direttori / Editors

Nicola Catelli (Università di Parma)

Corrado Confalonieri (Università di Parma)

Comitato scientifico / Research Committee

Mariolina Bongiovanni Bertini (Università di Parma)

Dominique Budor (Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris III)

Roberto Greci (Università di Parma)

Heinz Hofmann (Universität Tübingen)

Bert W. Meijer (Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Instituut Firenze / Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht)

María de las Nieves Muñiz Muñiz (Universitat de Barcelona)

Diego Saglia (Università di Parma)

Francesco Spera (Università Statale di Milano)

Segreteria di redazione / Editorial Staff

Giandamiano Bovi (Università di Parma)

Maria Elena Capitani (Università di Parma)

Simone Forlesi (Università di Pisa)

Francesco Gallina (Università di Parma)

Arianna Giardini (Università Statale di Milano)

Chiara Rolli (Università di Parma)

Esperti esterni (fascicolo n. 25) / External referees (issue no. 25)

Nicola Bonazzi (Università di Bologna)

Francesca Borgo (University of St Andrews / Bibliotheca Hertziana)

Francesco Brancati (Università di Pisa)

Valeria Di Iasio (Università di Padova)

Paolo Lago (Livorno)

Filippo Milani (Università di Bologna)

Eugenio Refini (New York University)

Enrica Zanin (Université de Strasbourg)

Progetto grafico / Graphic design

Jelena Radojev (Università di Parma) †

Direttore responsabile: Nicola Catelli

Autorizzazione Tribunale di Parma n. 14 del 27 maggio 2010

© Copyright 2022 – ISSN: 2039-0114

INDEX / CONTENTS

<i>Seconda serie</i>	3-5
NICOLA CATELLI (Università di Parma)	
CORRADO CONFALONIERI (Università di Parma)	

PALINSESTI / PALIMPSESTS

<i>“Eteocle e Polinice” da Venezia a Modena.</i> <i>Variazioni operistiche sul mito tebano</i>	
ILARIA OTTRIA (Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa)	9-34
<i>Il dialogo tra le fonti nel trattato di architettura di Alessandro Galilei</i>	
ROSA MARIA GIUSTO (Iriss-Cnr, Napoli)	35-67
<i>Links between the Legend of “Los amantes de Teruel”, Challe’s “Continuation de Don Quichotte”, and Rousseau’s “Julie”</i>	
CLARK COLAHAN (Whitman College – Walla Walla, WA)	69-94
<i>Fratelli ‘latini’. Su alcune citazioni classiche nel capolavoro di Alberto Arbasino</i>	
STEFANO COSTA (Milano)	95-123
<i>Testori, Iacopone e il planctus Mariae</i>	
SILVIA LILLI (Università di Roma Tor Vergata)	125-149
<i>A Madwoman’s Repressed Story: Ronald Frame’s Prequel “Havisham”</i>	
CLAUDIA CAO (Università di Cagliari)	151-181

MATERIALI / MATERIALS

<i>Bandello, la scientia mali e Machiavelli.</i> <i>Alcune osservazioni sul dittico III, 55</i>	
SIMONE FORLESI (Università di Pisa)	185-202
<i>Citare i classici per non essere poeti: l’umanesimo di Francesco Berni</i>	
CHIARA CASSIANI (Università della Calabria)	203-226
<i>Il carme V di Catullo in Torquato Tasso</i>	
GIANDAMIANO BOVI (Università di Parma)	227-243
<i>Un gioco di citazioni incrociate: “Giotto dipinge il ritratto di Dante” di Dante Gabriel Rossetti</i>	
VERONICA PESCE (Università di Genova)	245-259
<i>Reminiscenze decameroniane in “Quelle signore” di Umberto Notari</i>	
MILENA CONTINI (Università di Torino)	261-277



CLAUDIA CAO

**A MADWOMAN’S REPRESSED STORY:
RONALD FRAME’S PREQUEL “HAVISHAM”**

Introduction

Great Expectations is one of the most rewritten and adapted texts among of all the Dickensian works. It is singular, however, that compared to the fortune of the character of Magwitch – inspirer of a trilogy, rewritings and adaptations for cinema, TV and other web channels –¹ Miss Havisham has received a reduced number of adaptations² and she is the protagonist of a single rewriting: *Havisham* by Ronald Frame.³ The two characters, in fact, are considered the two directors of the main plot of the

¹ On the fortune of Magwitch see C. Cao, *I ritorni di Magwitch. Adattamenti, spin-off, riscritture sul forzato dickensiano*, in “Altre Modernità”, XVIII, 2017, pp. 45-57.

² A poem by C. A. Duffy, *Havisham*, has been dedicated to this character (in *Mean Time*, London, Anvil, 1993) and she is also featured in *Lost in Book* by J. Fforde (*Lost in Book*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2002). See G. Letissier, *The Havisham Affair or the Afterlife of a Memorable Fixture*, in “Études anglaises”, LXV, 1, 2012, pp. 30-42.

³ R. Frame’s rewriting (*Havisham*, London, Faber and Faber, 2013) has also been adapted as a radio drama for BBC Radio 3.

story, that concerning Pip and Estella, in which Miss Havisham plays a leading role just like the protagonist's putative father. Miss Havisham can be defined as the driving force behind the whole plot, behind the relationships among the characters, and as symbol of the overlap of genres that characterises *Great Expectations*. The eccentric woman is the catalyst for the entire story, the narrative device from which the various subplots unfold: on a diegetic level, not only is it due to her that the first meeting between Pip and Estella takes place – which motivates Pip's desire for a gentleman's education and for social ascent – but it is also she who contributes to the network of fallacies that increases the suspense and the aura of mystery around Pip's story. In terms of character relationships, in fact, Miss Havisham represents the connection, the main bridge between the different, seemingly unrelated story kernels:⁴ it is she who, together with Jaggers, combines the stories of Magwitch, Molly and Estella; she plays a pivotal role in the secondary triangle composed by Magwitch, Compeyson, and Arthur Havisham; she is related by kinship or professional reasons to the figures in charge of Pip's training in London (the Pocket and the lawyer Jaggers). She is therefore the most powerful figure of the entire plot, whose sphere of influence affects the destiny of characters whom she does not know, like Biddy and Clara.

Miss Havisham also serves as the point of intersection for the many genres criss-crossing *Great Expectations*. She is the fulcrum of the Gothic strand of the story, constantly associated with the spectral condition, the cadaveric one⁵ and the supernatural one, because of the enchanting power

⁴ See S. Chatman, *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca-London, Cornell University Press, 1978, pp. 53-56.

⁵ See C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, in *Great Expectations. Authoritative Text. Backgrounds. Contexts. Criticism*, edited by E. Rosenberg, New York, W. Norton and Company, 1999, p. 50 and p. 52: "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

of her words and of her rooms in Satis House, suspended in time. Miss Havisham occupies an uncanny position of suspension between life and death:⁶ “this self-destructive (but also self-preserving) staging of herself as a bride on the threshold of her wedding arrests her in time, at the moment of traumatic revelation”. The Gothic background, due to her weaving together of love and death, is therefore essential to understanding the past and the origin of the figure of Miss Havisham.

She is also at the centre of Pip's abortive fairy tale:

“She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me, and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin – in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess.”⁷

In one of the possible narratives evoked by Dickens, and in the illusion cultivated by Pip, her role is that of the “fairy godmother”⁸ who will help him to free Princess Estella from the castle. Miss Havisham could even be seen as the protagonist of a fairy tale destined never to reach her happy ending. From her first appearance, she is portrayed with only one shoe (“she's a blighted Cinderella”),⁹ or as a kind of Gothic Sleeping

to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly waxwork at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress, that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me”; “So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards”.

⁶ See J. Bowen, *The Gothic in “Great Expectations”*, in “British Library. Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians”, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-gothic-in-great-expectations>.

⁷ C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, cit., p. 179.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁹ H. Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Novel-Making*, London-Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1980, p. 313.

Beauty waiting “in deathlike immobility for a promised prince, a prince who will never come, who will never kiss and waken her”.¹⁰

Critics have defined Miss Havisham as eccentric, uncanny, associated at the intertextual level with various Victorian madwomen: emblem of the ambiguity and contradictions of the Dickensian plot, she incarnates the roles of both benevolent and avenging mother, and at the same time, she embodies gender transgression, – a transgression also remarked by her portrait with only one shoe, “being ‘shoeless’ [...] a sign of revolt or a sign of some aberrant passion”.¹¹ Miss Havisham, indeed, acts in the “male” roles of owning property and exercising her authority over a woman (Estella), but also in the “female” role, exercising her power over a man (Pip).¹²

At the same time, Miss Havisham is the character of greatest symbolic impact in the novel, especially with regards to the distinctive details of her rooms: here, she is fixed as an iconic figure,¹³ crystallised in the moment that her dreams were wrecked, still wearing her wedding dress, the table still laid, and the wedding cake now being slowly consumed by vermin.¹⁴ The symbolic contiguity between her reclusive figure and her living space is suggested by the oft-mentioned spiderwebs that drape every room. Pip even hallucinates her hanging from the ceiling, reminding us of one of the mythical-symbolic substrates that underlie her representation:

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ S. Thornton, *The Burning of Miss Havisham: Dickens, Fire and the ‘Fire Baptism’*, in *Charles Dickens’s “Great Expectations”*, edited by H. Bloom, New York, Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2010, p. 81.

¹² See L. Raphael, *A Re-vision of Miss Havisham: Her Expectations and Our Responses*, in “Studies in the Novel”, XXI, 4, 1989, pp. 400-412.

¹³ See G. Letissier, *The Havisham Affair or the Afterlife of a Memorable Fixture*, cit.

¹⁴ If we consider rewritings and adaptations also as a means to verify the fortune of individual characters, it is significant that the image of Miss Havisham is adopted as a leading image in a large part of posters and covers for graphic novels and BBC or cinema transpositions.

Miss Havisham is a modern Arachne, a maleficent weaver, whose nature can be expressed in terms of “absorption of being in its own center”.¹⁵ As Barzilai states she “is caught in her own trap, hoist[ed] by the petard she helped to make. [...] The spider is in some deep and stable sense a fly, caught in the dialectic of the web, the circular route of the victim - who would be the victimizer - who becomes victim again”.¹⁶ It is she, indeed, who weaves together the many plots around Pip's story, entrapping him with the illusion of a happy ending.¹⁷

On the thematic level, Miss Havisham's story is interrelated with the two main strands that cross Pip's *Bildung*: those of guilt and repression. As Pip learns at the end of his path of disillusionment, guilt and desire cannot be separated: in psychoanalytic terms, guilt is in fact a manifestation of repressed desire.¹⁸ Desire and guilt are two themes that are also closely related to the story of Miss Havisham. The difference between the two characters is that while Pip is not able to recognise the origin of repression and guilt¹⁹ – the encounter with the convict –, in Miss Havisham's case, Dickens assigns to a specific time and attributes to a well-known experience the beginning of that “primary repression”²⁰ from which her

¹⁵ S. Barzilai, *Dickens's "Great Expectations": The Motive for Moral Masochism*, in *Charles Dickens. Modern Critical Views*, edited by H. Bloom, New York-Philadelphia, Chelsea House Publishing, 1987, p. 276.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ See C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, cit., p. 269: “You made your own snares. I never made them”.

¹⁸ See M. P. Ginsburg, *Dickens and the Uncanny: Repression and Displacement in Great Expectations*, in *Great Expectations. Authoritative Text. Backgrounds. Contexts. Criticism*, cit., p. 703.

¹⁹ See P. Brooks, *Reading for the Plot. Design and Intention in Narrative*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1984.

²⁰ M. P. Ginsburg, *Dickens and the Uncanny: Repression and Displacement in "Great Expectations"*, cit., p. 703.

condition and her desire for revenge originate, as well as the sense of guilt of the woman.²¹

However, in contrast with the Dickensian version of Miss Havisham's past, it is not this interpretation that seems to be suggested by the rewriting of her story produced by Ronald Frame: as we will see, Frame's explanation of the origin of Miss Havisham's trauma and repression serves to diminish the weight of Compeyson's actions in her development and to re-evaluate the importance of her female genealogy (or lack thereof). As a prequel, *Havisham* in this study is considered "the childhood" of *Great Expectations*,²² aimed at reconstructing the phase before the repression, at going in search of the origin of repression, when the *heimlich* had not yet become *unheimlich*.²³

Like most prequels, this novel is characterised by an ambiguous, paradoxical status, since its narration progresses forward in time, but its journey is not towards "the end", but towards the beginning of the novel from which it originated.²⁴ Actually, *Havisham*, demonstrating the anti-hierarchical value of Frame's choice with respect to the source text, continues to travel the events of the protagonist's story until her death, hinting at questioning the "original" version of the facts, namely the novel which Pip is planning to write.²⁵ If the preeminence of the ideological and axiological factor is already communicated to the readers by the choice of giving centrality to a subplot that Dickens had left unspoken, we will see

²¹ See C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, cit., p. 297: "What have I done! What have I done!"

²² See D. Meneghelli, *Senza fine. Sequel, prequel, altre continuazioni: il testo espanso*, Milano, Morellini, 2018, pp. 62-63.

²³ See M. P. Ginsburg, *Dickens and the Uncanny: Repression and Displacement in "Great Expectations"*, cit., p. 703.

²⁴ See D. Meneghelli, *Senza fine. Sequel, prequel, altre continuazioni: il testo espanso*, cit., p. 59.

²⁵ See R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 349.

that the end of Miss Havisham's story recalls this preeminence but maintains the features of the prequel: therefore, it does not result in the creation of a real "displacement", of an "essentially different version of the protoworld, redesigning its structure and reinventing its story"²⁶ with the aim of discrediting the validity of the original version.²⁷

Starting from a conception of the prequel as a "hermeneutic device"²⁸ meant as a tool for finding the causes of Miss Havisham's condition, this essay examines the act of rewriting in psychoanalytic terms, as an act of excavation in the unconscious of the hypotext, in search of the primary repression from which begins the chain of repetitions which determines the destiny of Miss Havisham and Estella. The trauma created by Roger Frame, starting from brief references to the Dickensian text, is the death of Miss Havisham's mother while giving birth to her. The intent of this contribution is firstly to illustrate how, albeit in apparent "fidelity" to the Dickensian version of Miss Havisham's past, the processes of expansion, addition, displacement or omission operated by Ronald Frame allow us to re-interpret and re-evaluate the figure of Miss Havisham. In order to fully understand the effects of the additions and the shifts made by Ronald Frame, this study builds on the feminist reflection, in particular from Irigaray's psychoanalytic approach, and examines the protagonist's

²⁶ L. Doležel, *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 206.

²⁷ The most well-known example of Dickensian rewritings in this sense is Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (London, Faber and Faber, 1997): what differentiates *Havisham* from *Jack Maggs* is that, while in Frame's work the narration of the events is attributed to a secondary character who shows that Pip may have distorted the facts on her in *Great Expectations* due to being uninformed, in *Jack Maggs* the metatextual reflection on the genesis of the Dickensian narrative is much more pronounced. It is the focus of the whole novel and what is being staged in the course of the narrative is precisely the struggle to acquire the authority to authenticate the story between Dickens (Tobias Oates) and Magwitch (Jack Maggs).

²⁸ D. Meneghelli, *Senza fine. Sequel, prequel, altre continuazioni: il testo espanso*, cit., p. 59.

condition as a “buried alive” character. Starting from the *topos* of the matricide collocated at the beginning of the rewriting, this contribution analyses Miss Havisham’s relationship with her female genealogy: in line with other neo-Victorian novels, in which the theme of family is intertwined with the motif of trauma,²⁹ in this case, too, the “pattern of cyclical repetition [...] casts new light [...] on the darkest and most forcefully repressed aspects of the Victorian family”.³⁰

1. *A subject written by others: Miss Havisham’s Dickensian story*

Returning to the information given by Dickens about the lady’s past is not only essential to fully understand the rewriting strategies adopted by Frame on the diegetic level, it is also necessary to show the meaning these strategies acquire in a comparative investigation.

The reconstruction of Miss Havisham’s story starts with the fragments that emerge during the two metadiegetic stories told by Herbert and Magwitch. The first trait that can be observed is in fact that most of the information we possess derives from others’ narratives, while Miss Havisham’s comments about her wedding day, on Estella’s arrival and on her own desires and emotions are elliptical, sibylline, often difficult to decipher: they are the first sign of her impotence as a subject, as *auctoritas*. The main authors of her story are in fact consistently male figures who have shaped her destiny and conveyed that image fixed in the collective

²⁹ See, for instance, P. Ackroyd’s *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem*, London, Sinclair Stevenson, 1994 (I thank Marie-Luise Kohlke for drawing my attention to this aspect and this convergence between the two novels).

³⁰ S. Onega, *Family Traumas and Serial Killing in Peter Ackroyd’s “Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem”*, in *Neo-Victorian Families. Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics*, edited by M. L. Kohlke and C. Gutleben, Amsterdam-New York, Rodopi, 2011, p. 294.

imagination; the last of these, of course, is Pip as the fictitious author of his autobiographical novel.

While the privilege of becoming the narrator of one's own story is granted to other secondary figures such as Magwitch and Joe Gargery, for Miss Havisham, as for Estella, it is Pip who serves as the chronicler of the events concerning her and the figures that intersect her story. Therefore, in this shift of perspective and authority – from Pip to Miss Havisham – the first significant aspect is that the same fragments of information collected by Pip during his journey are also those on which the first-person *Havisham* narration is based.

The reader must wait until the twenty-second chapter, Pip's arrival in London and his encounter with Herbert, to receive information about Miss Havisham's inscrutable past. Indeed, Herbert introduces a metadiegetic story that appears to be a search for the causes of what has remained a characteristic trait of this woman: "Miss Havisham [...] was a spoilt child".³¹ According to him, "her father denied her nothing" because "her mother died when she was a baby".³² Since Herbert attributes Mr. Havisham's over-indulgence of his daughter to the loss of the mother, what emerges is the substitute function of paternal goods and wealth. Implicitly, therefore, maternal death and a substituting and memorial function of the Havishams' riches are closely interconnected.³³

A second comment by Herbert concerns the woman's origins. The quick mention of the cook as a potential second mother to Miss Havisham offers the readers a further detail: even her existence, like that of the true

³¹ C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, cit., p. 141.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ See M. Fusillo, *Feticci. Letteratura, cinema, arti visive*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2012. All translations from the Italian edition of the book are mine. For the English translation see *The Fetish: Literature, Cinema, Visual Art*, Eng. trans. by T. Haskell Simpson, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

mother, is mentioned exclusively to state her death. For reasons of family social status, the possibility of a relationship between her and Miss Havisham is hindered by the Law of the Father, “the symbolic law that describes a cultural order of the exchange of women between men”³⁴ and which separates them, necessarily setting them up as rivals.

Until the moment of the encounter with Compeyson, in Herbert’s metadiegetic story Miss Havisham has never acted as the agent in any episode, nor have her feelings or reactions to the events ever been expressed: this now happens for the first time with regard to the attentions of this man, to whom, after a first moment of indifference, she showed “all the susceptibility she possessed [...] and she passionately loved him”,³⁵ and “she perfectly idolised him”.³⁶ Miss Havisham, therefore, both in the present of Pip’s story and in the past of Herbert’s narration, is represented only as a figure of excesses, of indomitable feelings, be they love, pride, or the desire for revenge.

In conclusion to the first metadiegetic story, Herbert hypothesises that Compeyson had abandoned Miss Havisham because he was already married. Once again Miss Havisham is inserted without her knowledge in a triangular relationship that has at its apex a male figure and is placed in a position of rivalry to the other woman. Miss Havisham’s definition of love (“love [...] is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter, as I did!”)³⁷ is the one that probably best explains why she had done what she had for Compeyson. The words “blind devotion” recall the word “idol” already adopted by

³⁴ K. Campbell, *Jacques Lacan and Feminist Epistemology. Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism*, London-New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 158.

³⁵ C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, cit., p. 142.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

Herbert to define her love for her fiancé and are further evidence of the subordinate position in which this female figure is framed, incapable of correctly interpreting events.

It is the second metadiegetic story, this time told by Magwitch and focused on his own life, which adds particulars to the subplot underlying Miss Havisham's story, the one related to the world of corruption through the characters of Compeyson and Arthur. In a certain sense, Magwitch tells us about the 'sequel', 'the second episode' related to the moment after the marriage failure, and the fate of the characters left in the shadows, Compeyson and Arthur. Once again Miss Havisham acquires negative traits, being related to the archetypal figures of the Furies, haunting his brother and demanding revenge until the moment of his death. And once again, she is implicitly inserted in a triangular relationship with another woman, Sally, Compeyson's wife, who appears in this episode, caring for Miss Havisham's half-brother in the last moments of his life.

The last episode of Miss Havisham's story is the one in which the most human traits of the woman arise. She persistently seeks Pip's forgiveness: the request for absolution is in fact the last sentence repeated in her delusions after having been saved from the flames, when Pip takes leave of her for the last time. It is significant that, after hearing her expressing her regret for the first time, Pip associates this new image of Miss Havisham with that of a past that no one has ever known: "[...] dropped on her knees at my feet; with her folded hands raised to me in the manner in which, when her poor heart was young and fresh and whole, they must often have been raised to Heaven from her mother's side".³⁸ After the failure of the relationship with Estella, this image of Miss Havisham's childhood next to her mother and this reference to the purity of her heart

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

emerge as a textual repression referring to a pre-oedipal phase, in which the link with her mother is also a symbol of a purity negated by her access into the Law of the Father.

The flames that surround her shortly after, at Pip's entry in her room, appear as an apt punishment for the anger and desire for revenge that had fuelled her existence from the moment of her humiliation at the hands of Compeyson. In the deterministic logic of the *unicuique suum* ("may all get their due") characterizing the Dickensian work, as Arthur is persecuted by the image of his sister, and Compeyson by Magwitch, Miss Havisham is also punished by the flames of that same anger and consequent revenge which she used against Pip. The last image of her that is offered to the readers is the fulfilment of her prophecy:³⁹ Pip gives her the last goodbye while she is placed on the table where she had wanted to be laid after death, covered with a single white sheet after the destruction of the wedding dress. She actually dies a few weeks later, as Pip learns in Chapter 57 from Joe. Therefore, her death, like her life, becomes a secondhand story told by a male narrator.

2. A buried-alive character: the womb, the cave, and the female genealogy

Starting from this last point, Frame's project, to write a sequel that destabilises the prevalent feature of the prequel genre – since they often do not follow the story to the protagonist's death and beyond – takes on a

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

specific value: by telling the story in the first person, the rewrite restores to Miss Havisham her place in the story as an agent.⁴⁰

Pip's role, that of a narratee, the custodian of all the versions that have been narrated of her story (“[...] *I saw in this, Miss Havisham as I had her then and there before my eyes, and always had her before my eyes; and I saw in this the distinct shadow of the darkened and unhealthy house in which her life was hidden from the sun*”)⁴¹ is also a projection of the reader of the Dickensian novel that Frame's rewriting means to challenge, beginning with the emphasis on the silence of the main character. Frame starts from the original Dickensian textual nodes, in particular those related to female relationships – with her mother or between women or with feminine models *tout court* –, to expand and amplify them, in search of the causes of the condition of suspension of Miss Havisham's *Bildung*, the moment in which, as initially said, the *heimisch* (familiar) has turned into *unheimlich* (uncanny).

Showing those moments that Dickens omitted, therefore, allows us to read the Dickensian character in another perspective, to discover “the usually hidden aspects of the private self”.⁴² Frame illustrates how the Dickensian story of this character is conditioned by the limitations imposed by the family and the social systems of the time. The rewriting, therefore, suggests that the key of her “monstrous transformation lies in the [...] traumas caused by the assumption of [her] expected role within patriarchal family structure”.⁴³

⁴⁰ See J. King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, Basingstoke-New York, Macmillan, 2005, p. 2.

⁴¹ C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, cit., p. 229. Emphasis mine.

⁴² D. Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, Basingstoke-New York, Palgrave, 2001, p. 153.

⁴³ See J. King, *The Victorian Woman Question in Contemporary Feminist Fiction*, cit., p. 2 and S. Onega, *Family Traumas and Serial Killing in Peter Ackroyd's "Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem"*, cit., p. 280.

Frame's *Havisham* resumes with a certain fidelity to what has been reported so far by *Great Expectations* in order to emphasise the aspects neglected by the source text. It is Frame himself who suggests this objective to the readers in one of the many metatextual reflections on the act of rewriting and on the intertextual nature of his novel disseminated throughout the narration: "every little chip was fitted into the mosaic, and maybe she thought I was too fastidious about it, but this was my method, to repeat her words – to turn them over, scrutinise, test them – and then to refashion them into the images I saw with my mind's eye".⁴⁴

The story is divided into six sections, the first four of which develop the real prequel of the story of Miss Havisham before the arrival of Estella, while only the last two intersect with the events narrated in *Great Expectations*. Bridging the silences in Miss Havisham's story, the white spaces remaining between the ellipses of the two metadiegetic stories by Herbert and Magwitch, does not simply mean expanding Dickens' account, but altering it. In fact, although it is a homodiegetic rewrite, which does not change the historical-cultural context of the source text, each of the operations at the diegetic level – change of perspective, and consequent additions and expansions – also involves the thematic and axiological levels of the work. The same "transfocalization"⁴⁵ and "transvocalization"⁴⁶ – the adoption of a new point of view and a narrative voice different from Pip's one – imply first of all a devaluation of the previous main character. In this case, it is significant that Pip becomes a satellite figure, and that therefore the story of his great disappointed expectations is left at the

⁴⁴ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 303.

⁴⁵ G. Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, Eng. trans. Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1997, p. 287.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

margins of Miss Havisham's perspective, demonstrating the irrelevance of that project of revenge in the (new) perception of the woman.

It is similarly significant that Frame chooses the first Dickensian ending, preventing Estella from becoming the object of conquest of the Dickensian protagonist, and that Miss Havisham is the custodian of the truth about Estella's history ("Her mother was a Romany, a felon defended by Mr Jagers on a murder charge; it was claimed she'd strangled a rival for a man's affections. The father was native-born, with a misapplied intelligence, fallen into bad ways and transported").⁴⁷ In addition, it should be noted that in this rewriting she not only acquires the power of enunciation, but also a more defined identity, since in the source text, she is only known by her title (and thereby her status as a "maiden") and her family name, while Frame gives her the name Catherine and thus a sense of individual identity.

The most predictable effect of these pragmatic changes is above all a "secondary valuation",⁴⁸ that in this case is the promotion of a character who until that moment has been narrated, but has not been able to tell her own story, from which derives, as Genette observes, an effect of "transmotivation":⁴⁹ the change of perspective, indeed, explains the reasons for her eventual fate that the hypotext had neglected, inspiring readers to empathy for one of the most enigmatic characters of the Dickensian text.

Despite the general fidelity of the rewrite, there are some significant additions or displacements, catalysts of the transmotivation process, mainly afferent to the feminine axis of the plot. Frame opens the book by implicitly referring to Herbert's story ("Her mother died when she was a

⁴⁷ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 267.

⁴⁸ G. Genette, *Palimpsests*, cit., p. 343.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

baby, and her father denied her nothing”)⁵⁰ only to insert an addition and a displacement: “I killed my mum. I had turned round in the womb, and the surgeon needed to cut her open to let me out. He couldn’t staunch her, and by the end of the day she had bled to death”.⁵¹ The action with which the story of Miss Havisham begins is above all emblematic of the rewriting strategies used by Frame: the event has no effect at the diegetic level in relation to the Dickensian version, since nothing had been told of a childhood shared with the mother or the whole family. Compared to the hypotext it simply implies a chronological shift that anticipates the woman’s death, while it is on the thematic and value level that the most significant effects are to be sought, especially from a feminist perspective, since matricide is considered the founding act of Western civilization under paternal law,⁵² a necessary act for the passage from the Imaginary to the Symbolic according to Lacan and therefore essential for the acquisition of language, of the word that this incipit suggests, conferring authorial power on a character who had been deprived of it until that moment. Equally significant is that the child’s first action is one of reversal: if the moment of birth is also a moment of (re)birth of the new figure of Miss Havisham and of this new version of the novel, her inverted position immediately implies the change of perspective that the new text is performing, an invitation to see the other side of the Dickensian text, where the reader could only have a distorted version of her image. The motif of the reversal will also echo in the text in the motif of the parody, which returns both explicitly and

⁵⁰ C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, cit., p. 141.

⁵¹ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 5.

⁵² See M. Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot. Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1989, p. 28. See also L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, Eng. trans. New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 9-21.

metaphorically, through the recurrence of the motif of masking and carnival.⁵³

Moreover, if in Herbert's version material goods appeared exclusively as the father's attempt to fill in for the maternal figure, in the first pages of *Havisham* the fetishist atmosphere is evoked above all in relation to Catherine's own attempts to recall the maternal presence: the reference to the clothes that after years still maintain her smell,⁵⁴ suggesting their fetishised function of maternal substitute, to make animated what is inanimate,⁵⁵ is immediately followed by the consideration of not even knowing where her mother was buried. If the grave, as in the Dickensian incipit, is usually the place of dialogue with the dead, symbol of the survival of the memory of the dead among the living, for Catherine Havisham it is Satis House itself that acquires this memorial role. Its fetishised atmosphere is repeatedly emphasised throughout the story, especially in reference to the woman's jewels:

"In addition he passed over to me, item by item, my mother's jewels. Those had older-fashioned settings than my birthday presents. [...] My mother had inherited some of the pieces, and I was aware of the quiet dignity of their age. They weighted me to my chair, they slowed me slightly when I walked – not because they were heavy, but because they came to me complicated by their history – and it wasn't at all an oppressive sensation. *I felt that I'd been granted an intimate contact with my mother.* We were sharing this occasion of my wearing a necklace or a bracelet, and somehow my increased pleasure was being transmitted to her, through time and space. This experience was being recreated in another dimension; by wearing the necklace or bracelet, I was helping to close a circle."⁵⁶

The traumatic event of matricide originates a symbolic chain of repetitions that gradually involves Catherine's feminine genealogy, clearly

⁵³ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 40. See also p. 249 and p. 207.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ See M. Fusillo, *Feticci. Letteratura, cinema, arti visive*, cit., p. 22.

⁵⁶ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 40. Emphasis mine.

evoked by the circle which she creates when closing her necklace or her bracelet. The first repetition of the trauma occurs at her father's hands, as he gradually removes the image and memory of his wife from the house,⁵⁷ then when he replaces her with another woman, the cook, and finally breaks contact with Catherine's maternal grandmother. The character of the maternal grandmother is an addition of the rewrite, also emphasised by the motif of her father's control over the letters that Catherine sends to her. Her expulsion from the protagonist's life recalls the repetition of the maternal loss, not just because of the blood relation but also because she had served as spokesperson for her daughter Antoinette's wishes with regard to the relationship between Mr. Havisham and the cook. The very choice of the mother's name, Antoinette, is a further textual clue for the value attributed to female genealogy, since it recalls another woman silenced by Victorian literature: Charlotte Brontë's character of Bertha Antoinetta Mason, who, in her afterlife in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, is known only as Antoinette. It is Antoinette's daughter, Catherine Havisham, who will receive this inheritance, repeating her destiny as a removed figure, silenced by the patriarchal system and fixed in the collective imagination as a madwoman.

The search for a substitute bond of the ancient love for the mother finds expression in a form of secondary love, of sisterly nature,⁵⁸ for another female figure, Sally.⁵⁹ In terms of rewriting strategies, this is another particularly significant shift, since Sally's name had already appeared in *Great Expectations*: she was Compeyson's wife, the one who

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10: "I didn't know where my mother was buried. 'Far off,' my father said. 'In a village churchyard. Under shade.' I asked if we might go. 'Your mother doesn't need us now'. 'Don't we need *her*?' 'Some things belong to the past.' [...] But those occasions were followed [...] by the purchase of another expensive plaything for me."

⁵⁸ See L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, cit., p. 20.

⁵⁹ See R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 38 "[...] obeying our instincts only, about whom we called our *consoeurs* and best friends".

had implicitly benefited from Compeyson's deceit, and the reason why he could never have married Miss Havisham anyway.

Frame instead casts Sally as the daughter of a maid working in Satis House, with whom Miss Havisham develops a sisterly bond, in a mirror image of the fraternal feeling between Pip and Herbert. The specular nature of the relationships is suggested by the teachings through which Miss Havisham seeks to elevate her friend in terms of education and manner: "I taught her some of what I knew. Good table manners. How to hold herself. How to tone down the Kent in her vowels".⁶⁰

Sally's figure is at the centre of two repetitions of the trauma, essential for understanding Miss Havisham's condition of exile from her own female genealogy that is an unintentional result of her choice to withdraw from the wider world. A first repetition of the trauma foregrounds once again the patriarchal origin of the control to which their sisterly relationship is subject, since Sally, during their teenage years, is removed from the house for sleeping in Catherine's bed, remarking their closeness without male intermediation. After Mr. Havisham's death the repressive paternal power is reiterated by his son Arthur, author of the new replica of the trauma for Miss Havisham: if in the Dickensian hypotext the figure of Sally had only a marginal role in the deceptions against Miss Havisham and a limited, probably unaware, responsibility in the triangular relationship that binds the two women to Compeyson, Frame's rewriting, instead, gradually offers a series of textual clues that acquire full sense and organicity only at the moment of the realization of the new repetition of the trauma for Catherine. Rather than becoming Compeyson's wife, Sally, in this version, becomes Arthur's, and thus the main ally of both in the realization of the trap in which Miss Havisham falls.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

During the meetings between Catherine and Compeyson – as the prequel follows the same gradual construction of suspense and detection seen in *Great Expectations* – it gradually becomes clear that Sally is the only possible source for Compeyson's information. In fact, the rewriting makes the readers witness to the set of meetings and dialogues through which Compeyson approaches Miss Havisham and gradually gains her trust: the image of a woman of passion and excess is substituted by that of an isolated woman, deprived of any models of female authority or even of femininity. These emerge as the main reasons for the fragility that renders her easily manipulable by the homosocial alliance between Arthur and Compeyson.

In a play of mirrors and intertextual doubles, Miss Havisham is set up to anticipate Estella's path in both Dickens' and Frame's versions: she is removed from her own home by her father's will, to receive an education aimed at guaranteeing her a marriage adequate to her social status. If on the one hand this exile confirms that her development must occur within an entirely patriarchal system – in which her personal realization is defined exclusively in the role of mother and wife –⁶¹ on the other hand, Sally is distanced from her own female figure of reference and left vulnerable to becoming, in turn, a manipulable tool for Arthur, easily assimilable into the male economy, that male exchange market in which marriage is the only form of participation.

The displacement of Sally and the emphasis on her role in the rewriting have the function and the effect of bringing to the fore what the Dickensian text omitted: it suggests that the main cause of Miss Havisham's failed *Bildung* is her condition of isolation. Without mother,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133: “‘Some man will count himself lucky. When he first sets eyes on you.’ ‘So... that is what my education's for.’ ‘It's the prospect for every young woman. To be married. Her responsibility even.’ ‘Or...?’ ‘There is no ‘or’. In your case.’”.

grandmother, or sister, Miss Havisham finds herself deprived of her own identity, of a consciousness of herself, of another prospect beyond that proposed by her father.⁶²

It is from the two women's condition of mutual isolation that Compeyson and Arthur benefit. The opportunity offered to Sally, whose inferior social position is repeatedly remarked, is that of a social ascent through the union with a Havisham: emblematic in this sense is her wearing clothes that had belonged to Miss Havisham during their meeting in London, years after her departure from Satis House, a sign of that mimicry to which women have historically been associated, of those "mirror games, identifications, and more or less rivalrous appropriations",⁶³ highlighted by Catherine herself ("a very passable imitation of myself - an imitation or a parody").⁶⁴

Another victim of the same homosocial alliance,⁶⁵ Sally, through Arthur, becomes Compeyson's main informer in the trap set for Miss Havisham. Her awareness that she is betraying her friend, in this case, is alluded to by her moving away, by the lies in her letters, and by the gradual interruption of their relationship. The textual hints sown during the meetings with Compeyson, concerning the information that he possessed even on very intimate aspects of Catherine's life, allow the reader to take a privileged position in relation to the character – as he already knows the

⁶² See L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, cit., p. 71: "Defined as the often dark, even occult mother-substance of the world of men, we are in need of our *subject*. To be the term of the other [...] paralyses us in our becoming. As divinity or goddess of and for man, we are deprived of our own end and means."

⁶³ L. Irigaray, *This Sex which is Not One*, Eng. trans. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985, p. 172.

⁶⁴ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 149.

⁶⁵ See E. K. Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1985.

“sequel” of the story – and to recognise Miss Havisham’s inability to comprehend the trap:

“His discoveries about me occurred in several quite different conversations. [...]

‘I can’t betray my source. Or sources.’

‘I’m under surveillance by someone? Who?’ [...]

I was bemused, but not alarmed. He might have been guessing sometimes, he might have had good hearing for eavesdropping; [...] It might been telepathy that was responsible, his kindred soul exactly in sympathy – in imaginative conjunction – with my own.”⁶⁶

Compeyson’s instrumentalization of Sally – a veritable secret diary as Miss Havisham repeatedly defines her in the narrative (“What I might have recorded in a diary, Sally received from me”)⁶⁷ – frames the feminine relationship in a triangulation that shows a man, Arthur, at the top, and inserts the two ‘sisters’ in a male exchange economy, placing them in a position of rivalry.

The loss of each female reference point in the course of Miss Havisham’s development is also expressed in the proliferation of writings and disguises that the work puts in scene, which on a metatextual level remind us of the intertextual origin of this novel, but also make manifest Catherine’s search for female models. Through the continuous more or less explicit quotations from canonical authors, *Havisham* intends to question the patriarchal tradition,⁶⁸ as demonstrated by the repeated reflection on Dido’s sacrificial gesture: the image of Dido who immolates herself on a pyre along with Aeneas’s armor recalls the ancient image of the woman as

⁶⁶ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 121.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶⁸ See S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1979, p. 439. See also R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 249, when Catherine says that “mythical beings [...] are the archetypes”, remarking their foundational role in Western culture.

a sacrificial victim in the creation of the Western social order. It is indeed the image of Dido, as can be seen in the dialogue with one of her friends, the Chadwycks (“‘The more foolish’ I tagged on, ‘the more instinctive, the more natural... then the better’”),⁶⁹ one of the archetypes evoked by Dickens in his portrait of Miss Havisham, and it is to this romantic ideal of sacrifice that Catherine looks with admiration during her formative years.

The reflection on female canonical models is also insisted through the recurring motif of the mask and of the masking: besides corroborating the motifs of fiction and deceit that are the background of Miss Havisham's entire history from childhood to engagement, they also echo in the preparations for the marriage, just before the abandonment by Compeyson, reminding us once again of the role of mimesis in the construction of the identity of the protagonist:

“My eyebrows were plucked to fine arcs. I was whitened again. They painted my lips, and ringed my eyes lightly with kohl, turning them up slightly at the outer corners. My fingernails were buffed and glazed, and my hands were creamed.

She was a woman I scarcely recognised, the one in the mirror, looking out at me with increasing incredulity and fascination.

It was a carnival mask.

Sophisticated, experienced, worldly, a little arch, a little ironic: all the things Catherine Havisham hadn't been.”⁷⁰

When she perceives her own made-up face in the mirror, Catherine does not recognise herself in that woman, who represents “all the things [she] hadn't been”.⁷¹ A sign, to say it again with Irigaray's words, of being “forced to comply with models that do not match [her], that exile, double, mask [her], cut [her] off from [her]self”.⁷² The mirror is in fact “a sort of

⁶⁹ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 140.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

⁷¹ *Ibidem.*

⁷² L. Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, cit., p. 64.

[...] mysterious enclosure in which images of the self are trapped”⁷³ and reflects her having turned into a false idol, an image predetermined by her father, one which sees in marriage “a woman’s crowning glory”.⁷⁴

The very moment of the failure of marriage is defined as a horizon, as a point of arrival (“I had reached the end of the life I’d had. It was lost to me now”):⁷⁵ the bridal dress becomes a fetish, initially assuming the value of symbolic substitute of a happy ending which she initially does not want to renounce, deprived of an alternative prospect within the male genealogy of reference (“I felt that if I was still wearing my dress, then the wedding would still take place”).⁷⁶

A confirmation of the close connection between her condition of living entombment, chosen by Miss Havisham after the abandonment, and the condition of exile, of exclusion from the patriarchal system in which her experience is framed, is found in the addition in Frame’s rewriting of a new attempt to pursue the paternal company immediately after the failure of the marriage. Miss Havisham, trying to take her father’s place in leading the brewery, “will confront the necessity of breaking through the debilitating roles available to the single women the Victorians termed ‘redundant’”.⁷⁷ However, without the validating gaze of the father, “ghostly presence [...] in the office”⁷⁸ or of a husband, she is not entitled to play a role of responsibility in the family economy (“I knew what they wanted, which was to have a man in charge [...]”).⁷⁹ On the other hand, she can no

⁷³ S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, cit., p. 341.

⁷⁴ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 208.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁷ S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, cit., pp. 406-407.

⁷⁸ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 233.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

longer recognise herself in the conventional image of the virgin waiting for a husband. Her awareness of her social exclusion in the patriarchal order is testified in the narration of Miss Havisham's years while confined at Satis House, which has the effect of illustrating a very different interpretation of the iconic image that is fixed in the collective imagination with the wedding dress: if in the beginning keeping the dress on means not wanting to give up the happy ending which is the celebration of marriage, and it means prolonging the illusion that something can still happen, after her awakening – the moment in which she understands that she cannot replace the father and Compeyson in running the company – wearing the wedding dress becomes an unconventional gesture, a parodic signal for all the virgins who still believe in a conventional happy ending (“Look at me, in my train and veil. Tell me what magic you see. This is awful damage that men do. And still the foolish, forlorn virgins go on believing”).⁸⁰ While traditionally the wedding dress is worn only once in life, she will keep it on for years; and though women are supposed to possess only one, she ends up buying herself a couple of spares.⁸¹ The world of Satis House, as she remarks, is an artificial one, which first of all acquires metatextual value, reminding us of Frame's literary creation of a world of paper (“[...] feeling like a paper person, the figure of a woman who had been cut out of paper [...]. I felt like I had no substance”)⁸² and its critical function towards the Victorian feminine ideal from which it originated. Compared to the original Dickensian wedding dress, Miss Havisham's new ones have been de-functionalised. They no longer have a substitute value, but, like the spaces of her rooms, they are part of that “performative fetishism”⁸³ which intends

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 261 and p. 276.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁸³ M. Fusillo, *Feticci. Letteratura, cinema, arti visive*, cit., p. 117.

to dismantle “every dogma of fidelity to the literary tradition and absolute identity”.⁸⁴

“The presentation on my dressing table was a symbol. It would be twenty minutes to nine for ever, but – in order to be symbolic – the moment had to be reconstructed, and that meant replenishing and replacing but taking care that the containers weren’t moved, that the unworn slipper remained where it always was. It wasn’t a lie, what she saw: it was an artful illusion.”⁸⁵

After Miss Havisham’s exclusion from the social order and her loss of any female role models, her *Bildungsroman* ends prematurely, resulting in a condition of suspension. She finds herself on a threshold between life and death. Satis House becomes her “mausoleum”,⁸⁶ “sepulchre”,⁸⁷ “a memorial to the real Catherine Havisham”,⁸⁸ where everything “shall be impervious to change”,⁸⁹ in a “present, where an event happens repeatedly and eternally”.⁹⁰ The eternal return in which Miss Havisham’s life is suspended finds expression at the diegetic level in the circularity of her story. Just as in the beginning, after the death of her mother, Satis House becomes like a tomb. Following Antoinette Havisham’s death, in the first days of Catherine’s life, in fact, Mr. Havisham had draped the windows and closed the shutters, even covering the chandeliers, transforming their dwelling into a sepulchre.

“My father draped the public rooms of Satis House in dust sheets. the chandeliers were left in situ, but wrapped in calico bags. The shutters were closed completely across some windows, and part-drawn at others. My first days were lived

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸⁵ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 316.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

out in a hush of respectfully lowered voices as a procession of folk came to offer their condolences. My eyes became accustomed to the half-light.”⁹¹

The uncanny that Catherine embodies, her position between life and death (“[...] I failed to die”⁹²; “[...] this soon-to-be cadaver”)⁹³ is therefore expressed in the traits assumed by Satis House and leads us back to the initial trauma of maternal loss: the two aspects – her condition as a “buried alive” character and the recurring search for a maternal figure – are closely linked since, as Freud observes,

“To many people the idea of being buried alive while appearing to be dead is the most uncanny thing of all. And yet psychoanalysis has taught us that this terrifying phantasy is only a transformation of another phantasy [...] – the phantasy, I mean, of intra-uterine existence. [...] This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where everyone dwelt once upon a time and in the beginning. [...] his mother’s genitals or her body. In this case, too, the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, homelike, familiar; the prefix “un” is the token of repression. [...] the uncanny is nothing else than a hidden, familiar thing that has undergone repression and then emerged from it, and that everything that is uncanny fulfils this condition.”⁹⁴

The circularity of Miss Havisham’s life, her eternal return to the starting point is first of all readable in terms of a chain of repetitions generated by the initial traumatic event, destined to repeat itself since the repressed element, the mother, continues to exercise its regressive force, leading Catherine to repeat her destiny of exclusion. Like her, Catherine “is condemned to a[n] [...] expulsion into nowhere or a suffocating burial in her own non-existence”⁹⁵.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁹⁴ S. Freud, *The Uncanny*, Eng. trans. in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by J. Strachey, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1976, vol. XVII, p. 244.

⁹⁵ S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, cit., p. 416.

The return to the semi-darkness of Satis House rooms takes on numerous meanings in the symbolic network created by Frame: it recalls the repetition of the destiny of the mother, a silenced figure, removed from the family story, reminding us of the impossibility of narrating the stories of mothers and daughters in Victorian fiction except as a denial and a textual repression;⁹⁶ it is refuge in the maternal womb, reunification with the origin, but also, again with reference to the first pages, a burial place, in which Catherine too is reduced to “madwoman” (“I wasn’t just a woman, I was a madwoman”),⁹⁷ silenced and excluded from the social order; finally, in the intertextual network woven into the chapters of her training at the Chadwycks’, she also reminds us of the semi-darkness of the Platonic cave, from which Miss Havisham was unable to exit in absence of a leading figure remaining trapped in those predetermined images that she sought to reproduce and deceived by lies, firstly by her father and then by Compeyson. The maternal womb and the Platonic cave, therefore, coincide because “a cave is [...] a female place, a womb-shaped enclosure, a house of earth”⁹⁸ and the return to the uterine life confirms the weight of the female genealogy of which Catherine has been deprived, its leading role in the possibility of freedom from patriarchal control in developing and defining her own identity.

It is in her relationship with Estella that the last repetition of the trauma will take place: deprived of alternative models of femininity, Estella will also look to marriage as an escape route (“Estella was tired of her life with me, just as *I* had grown weary of my life at home. She longed to make

⁹⁶ See M. Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot. Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, cit., pp. 4-5.

⁹⁷ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 229.

⁹⁸ S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, cit., p. 93.

her escape, just as I had longed to make mine”)⁹⁹ and, at the moment of her union with Drummle, in order to enter the Law of the Father, she reiterates the matricide and Miss Havisham’s destiny of disillusionment:

“Pip wrote to me. He had heard [...] that Estella was quickly losing the man’s affection, if she’d ever truly had it. There were rumours of drinking sprees, and women up in London [...] Only one certitude awaited her: it was my abominable bequest to her. Everything was revealed to me in a freak instant, and left me wringing my hands, pulling the combs from my hair. There was no future beyond the future. Estella’s fate would be this. To suffer, and to know nothing else.”¹⁰⁰

Miss Havisham, in her relationship with Estella, embodies the same patriarchal figure that she herself had been oppressed by: just as Miss Havisham had been surveilled and manipulated, she does the same to Estella. When she speaks of the relationship between Estella and Drummle, she puts romantic love in terms of coercion, slavery, and loss of freedom and self-respect.¹⁰¹ Since Estella, in turn, is unable to access full freedom, she follows Miss Havisham into the same trap: guardian and prisoner are bound by the same chains, and their relationship remains inscribed within patriarchal institutions and paradigms.

In keeping with the intents of neo-Victorian fiction, in which often “it is the very structure of the family [...] which produces self-perpetuating traumas”, the ending of *Havisham* proposes “the quest for alternative structures [and] explores the possibility of eventually breaking the cycle of transgenerational traumatization”.¹⁰² The conclusion of Estella’s story after Miss Havisham’s death, indeed, alludes to an opening, to a possibility of a

⁹⁹ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 329.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹⁰¹ See S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, cit., p. 420.

¹⁰² M. L. Kohlke and C. Gutleben, *Introducing Neo-Victorian Family Matters: Cultural Capital and Reproduction*, in *Neo-Victorian Families. Gender, Sexual and Cultural Politics*, cit., p. 34.

different future, using the same fetishes of maternal genealogy that had appeared at the beginning in order to re-work them. In one of the final scenes, Estella examines herself in the mirror that had belonged to her maternal grandmother, Antoinette. She is wearing one of her grandmother's favourite necklaces and thinks that it is an outdated model, but that the stones can be reused to remodel the jewel: "The necklace heavy gold filigree is likewise rather too fussy, but (she wonders herself) the stone could be reset, couldn't they, into a simpler arrangement? And what about the South Sea pearls?"¹⁰³

The jewel, as it had for young Catherine, here acquires the value of a synecdoche and this time it recalls the motif of the inheritance to hint at the possibility of reconciling past and present in a new model of femininity, creating an opening towards the future which is partially mentioned in the concluding paragraph, chronologically detached from the events of the novel, and dedicated to the musealization and collecting of those objects that once had furnished Satis House:

"In after years the contents of Satis House were scattered about several countries, sold at auctions or already in the hands of pawn-brokers or debt-collectors. Furniture and effects continued to change hands. They were displayed in shop windows, with coded price tags attached [...] the objects may have been less inanimate, however, than on first appearance."¹⁰⁴

The closing scene, in reminding us of the function of fetishes of animating what was inanimate, corroborates at a metatextual level the revitalization of the figure of Miss Havisham and of the Dickensian text implemented by Frame. The rewriting's memorial function has allowed the ghost of Miss Havisham, silenced by the literary tradition, to speak.

¹⁰³ R. Frame, *Havisham*, cit., p. 356.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

To conclude, the matricide with which *Havisham* begins and the insistence on the search for maternal substitutes – both fetishes and female reference figures like those of the grandmother and Sally – confirm the role of female genealogy in the possibility of the liberation of Miss Havisham from those images predetermined by the patriarchal order, embodied by the father, by Compeyson, and by the literary tradition on which her education is based. Catherine's isolation and gradual separation from her female genealogy, in large part due to her own father and to Compeyson, are proof of the need for the patriarchal power to dissolve female alliances in order to be able to establish itself. Miss Havisham's uncanny condition of living entombment can therefore be read as an expression of the regressive power of the primary repression, the loss of her mother, and thus as an attempt to recover and reconcile with her female genealogy. In this, her uncanny suspension between death and life has become one of the most powerful metaphors of the destiny of alienation of the silenced madwomen of Victorian literature, deliberately deprived of female alliances in order to be subsumed by the patriarchal order.

Copyright © 2022

*Parole rubate. Rivista internazionale di studi sulla citazione /
Purloined Letters. An International Journal of Quotation Studies*