Social Closure in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*

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Abstract

Social closure, the sociological concept introduced by Max Weber, characterizes a process in which certain interest groups draw boundaries and set limits on access to resources and constrain social mobility with the aim of protecting their privileges and preventing others from sharing these privileges with them. The concept is more nuanced than the Marxian notion of class conflict, and incorporates status and cultural elements in examining the interaction between different classes and social groups in society.

This paper attempts to apply this Weberian concept to Charles Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*. It argues that despite the general tendency to consider the nineteenth century a period of great changes, particularly in terms of the social structure of British society, there were still insurmountable social and cultural barriers which frustrated the endeavours of ambitious young individuals, like Pip in *Great Expectations*, and even distorted their sense of identity. It shows that the novel presents the characters who stick to their social group in a positive manner while showing that all the characters who try to transcend their class end up in failure.

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The Theoretical Framework

The term "Social closure" is a key sociological conceptthat refers to the process of drawing boundaries, constructing identities and building communities in order to appropriate resources for a certain group or groups. In that process, individuals and groups, in their attempt to protect their interests and privileges, tend to exclude other individuals and groups. The concept appeared first in Max Weber's *Economy and Society* (1922 [trans. 1968]).[1] Weber noted that there was a tendency for the economically successful to preservetheir position by closure.A relationship that is closed against outsiders is one in which the "participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subjected to conditions."[2]He argued that many relationships, including the exclusive erotic monopoly of marriage, membership of sects, personal relations of loyalty, the caste system, exclusive clubs, guilds, monastic orders, and various kinds of hereditary groups also used the means of closure.[3] In the context of the economy, the idea of closure as monopolization is related to the concept in economics of rent seeking,[4] and Weber noted that there

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1 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978.

2Ibid., P. 43.

3Ibid.,p. 45.

4"Monopolizing activity. This is much criticized as it produces a social waste ratherthan a social surplus." Donald Rutherford, ed., *Routledge Dictionary of Economics*, 2ndedn., London and New York: Routledge, 2002. A more detailed definition, provided by the *Economist* online dictionary is "Cutting yourself a bigger slice of the cake rather than making the cake bigger. Trying to make more money without producing more for customers. Classic examples of rent-seeking, a phrase coined by an economist, Gordon Tullock, include: a protection racket, in which the gang takes a cut from the shopkeeper'sprofit; acartel of firms agreeing to raise prices; aunion demanding higher wages without offering any increase inproductivity; lobbying the government for tax, spending or regulatory policies that benefit the lobbyists at the expense of taxpayers or consumers or some other rivals. Whether legal or illegal, as they do not create any value, rent-seeking activities can impose large costs on an
economy."http://www.economist.com/economics-a-to-z/r#node-21529810.

was a tendency for the economically successful to preserve their position by closure.

The concept of closure was revived in the 1970s and 1980s, when it was applied and elaborated in two different ways.The first of these uses was based on an argument that the traditional Marxian criterion of class membership no longer corresponded to the distribution of wealth and life chances, and where social position was transmitted and preserved between generations by means other than the inheritance of wealth.

Among the intellectual sources of the idea of social closure as a solution to this and related problems about the nature of power was Randall Collins's book *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification* (1979), which suggested that modern society was a "credential society", in which such credentials as academic and professional certification, which were more accessible to the children of the successful, had become primary determinants of income and social power.

Another early source was Frank Parkin's*Marxism and Class Theory* (1979), in which he argued, against the Marxian concept of exploitation, that exclusion from the work force rather than the exploitation of the employed was the major determinant of life chances. He also believed that another mark of privilege, 'status', was essential to the preservation of interests. He argues that this was one of Weber's major emphases, since Weber writes that the "status order would be threatened at its very root if mere economic acquisition and naked economic power prevailed."[5] Status groups try to gain a monopoly of certain privileges whereas the market is a great leveller that reduces everything to money. Status groups, Parkin argues, seek to "monopolise certain resources by erecting barriers to outsiders and are organised to exclude other groups that might encroach on their areas".[6] Developing Weber's idea, he thus claims there are two sorts of closure. One is 'exclusion' whereby one group erects barriers to maintain its privileges against lower status competitors. Another is 'usurpation' whereby a lower group seeks to move upward by undermining these barriers.[7]

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5 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, p. 936.
6 Quoted in Kieran Allen, *Max Weber, A Critical Introduction*, London: Pluto Press, 2004, p. 86.
7 Ibid.

Raymond Murphy in *Social Closure: The Theory of Monopolization and Exclusion* (1988) later developed these ideas by arguing that the power to exclude or monopolize better explained the phenomenon of economic power than Marxian notions and avoided their difficulties, notably with the labour theory of value. Murphy also argued that many social conflicts could be understood in terms of the creation and defence of monopolies, which were then contested by those who were excluded, who attempted to gain access to their benefits, or to usurp them.

However, there are others who believe that Weber's ideas about class did not differ greatly from those of Marx. Kieran Allen, in his book, *Max Weber, A Critical Introduction*, states that Weber never had the slightest doubt about the importance of class in his era. His cold realism led him to focus on power struggles at the centre of social life. He found that the unions and the Social Democratic Party in Germany testified to the importance of working-class organisation. The influence of Marxist ideas also meant that Weber was less confident about challenging them on their home ground. Allen concludes that "One therefore finds that some of Weber's comments on class read like an echo of Marx."[8] It seems that sociologists are quite divided about the extent to which Weber's ideas were in agreement with those of Marx. This situation is summed up by Anthony Giddens:

> There are few intellectual relationships in the literature of sociology as difficult to interpret as that between the writings of Karl Marx and those of Max Weber. It has been the view of many that Weber's writings – particularly *The Protestant Ethic* and the *Spirit of Capitalism* – provide a 'refutation of Marx's materialism'; others have taken an opposite view, considering that much of Weber's sociology 'fits without difficulty' into the Marxian scheme.[9]

The second major use is associated with James S. Coleman, in *Public and Private High Schools: The Impact of Communities* (1987),

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8Kieran Allen, *Max Weber, A Critical Introduction*,London: Pluto Press, 2004, P. 81.
9Anthony Giddens, *Politics, Sociology and Social Thought: Encounters with Classical and Contemporary Social Thought*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 57.

who applied the notion of closure to informal processes of social contact, to explain an important and anomalous empirical finding in the study of American schools. He had discovered that students in Catholic schools did significantly better than state school students on standardized tests, and that controlling for differences in the students and the schools did not explain the discrepancy. He argued that the relatively closed social relations between parents in Catholic schools enabled the development of norms for student behaviour, and that this was a valuable form of social capital that raised and enforced expectations, leading to improved life chances. He later applied this insight to norm-generation in general.[10]

This paper does not presume to be part of the argument about whether Weber's ideas agreed with those of Marx or challenged them. Yet, it finds that the concept of social closure goes a long way in explaining the complexity of the relationship among different social, economic and professional groups, and even among individuals, as portrayed in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* andin the context of nineteenth-century England.

The Nineteenth-century Context

In the nineteenth century, money came to play an extremely determining role in social relations, something severely criticized by prominent nineteenth-century intellectuals and novelists. As it became clear that the possession and exchange of money would take the place of other, traditional forms of status and community, money was criticized because it negated not just its metal referent but all human capacities and therefore all social relations. "Cash payment," wrote Thomas Carlyle in "Chartism" (1839), his defence of the political movement for universal male suffrage and the economic survival of workers, "is the sole nexus between man and man."[11] Like other Victorians driven to political reaction by the total transformation overcoming them, he desperately recalls a time when capacities reflected intrinsic value:

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10 This summary is based on Stephen P. Turner's article in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Sociology*, ed. Bryan S. Turner, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 567-68.
11 Thomas Carlyle, "Chartism", in *Selected Writings*, ed. Alan Sheston, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, p. 199.

And now what is thy property? That parchment title-deed, that purse thou buttonest in thy breeches-pocket? Is that thy valuable property? Unhappy brother, most poor insolvent brother, I without parchment at all, with purse oftenest in the flaccid state imponderous, which will not fling against the wind, have quite other property than that! I have the miraculous breath of Life in me, breathed into my nostrils by Almighty God. I have affections, thoughts, a *god-given capability to be and do*; rights, therefore – the right for instance to thy love if I love thee, to thy guidance if I obey thee.[12]

Without money one did not appear at all except as ugly, lame, bad, dishonest, or stupid. Being human happiness in the abstract, money's acquisition could become an end in itself. Aristotle in the *Politics* foresaw the problem with money made from and for more money[13], calling usury "unnatural" and "incestuous": "The birth of money from money" in usury "is the most unnatural way of enriching yourself."[14] Dante followed Aristotle when he placed the usurers with the sodomites in Hell.[15] The problem with money was the havoc it played with presumed natural social relations. People were either commodities, to have their value augmented by money, or creatures with capabilities to be and do, to love and be loved, to guide and be guided. Without that, "the particular fetish in which the money, or the commodification of social relations, was embodied, was to little account."[16] According to Marx, "Capital was not a thing, but a social relation between persons . . . Property in money, means of subsistence, machinery, and other means of production, do not yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative – the wage-worker."

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12 Ibid., 194.

13 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edn., ed. Robert C. Tucker, New York: Norton, 1978, p. 766.

14 Cited in James Buchan, (1997), *Frozen Desire: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Money*, London: Picador, 1997, p.32 .

15 *RegeniaGagnier*, "Money, the Economy, and Social Class," in Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing eds., *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002, p. 56.

16 Ibid.

But there is no doubt that the great novelists saw the world in terms of social groups or classes in contact and often in conflict, in which no private life, as George Eliot wrote in *Felix Holt, the Radical*(1866), was not determined by a wider public life. In most cases, this wider public life was determined by the socioeconomic or professional class into which one was born: in *Sybil* (1845) Disraeli called the rich and the poor "The Two Nations" – the book's subtitle – and set the conflict in the Chartist agitation of the 1840s.

The development of steam power in Britain, beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, gave rise to a newly dynamic industrial economy, in which forms of mechanized production transformednot only the rhythms of daily life but also the very sense of human possibility. The impacts of that development on social order were not only profound but paradoxical as well. On the one hand, the new economy offered unprecedentedpotential for the accumulation – and loss - of capital, and hence for social mobility. On the other hand, however, the rise of industrial capitalism led individuals to see themselves locked into economic conflict with those whoplayed different roles in the dynamics of production. In the preindustrial economic order, social hierarchy was presumed to be harmonized byreciprocal bonds of moral obligation. Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1843, "We call it a Society and go about professing openly the totalestseparation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility."[17] As "cash payment", in Carlyle's words, became the foundation of human relations, individuals discovered forms of collective affiliation through shared economicinterests.Factory workers, for example, came to see themselves as members of a group inherently at odds with their employers. With this development, a new form of social awareness came into being: the modern experience of social class.

Through Marx's writings, the analysis of the experience of class in nineteenth-century Britain, made an impact around the world. Yet, whereas Marx understood class conflict in purely economic terms -as indicated above - more recent scholarship has tended to study class as the

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17Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, New York: New York University Press, 1965, p. 148.

elaboration of an entire way of life.[18]In this view, class is about a complex mediation between economic and social orders, which depends on recognition across a wide social spectrum– a form of social exchange that the novel was especially well-equipped to represent. Since it requires recognition from others, social class frequently becomes entangled with status hierarchies that seem ambiguousor absolutely arbitrary. Nevertheless, these hierarchies remain powerful. In *Great Expectations*, Herbert Pocket asserts in amazement that "It is indisputable that while you cannot possibly be genteel and bake, you may be as genteel as never was and brew". (*GE*, 178). Class affiliation is further complicated by the inertial force of ancestry, which acts as a hindrance to social mobility (both upward and downward). The individual who realizeda new level of income or economic activity rarely escaped the suspicions attached to the *parvenu* or *arriviste*, whose social standing hovered uneasily between established classes. James Eli Adams notes that "the proliferation of such terms in the nineteenth century in itself suggests the conservative dynamics ofclass".[19]In general terms, secure class membership tended to be reserved for those born into the relevant class; the triumphs of the upwardly mobile could only be fully enjoyed by their children, or more remote descendants.

Given such complications, outsiders are usually baffled by the intricacies of Victorian social hierarchy. The young American heroine of Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* (1881)exclaims: "Gracious,how many classes have they? About fifty, I suppose."[20]But these subtleties were typically articulated within the framework of a broadly tripartite pyramid, which persisted from an older discourse. Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* referred to three 'interests' or 'orders' in society.[21] At the very narrow top, the upper class comprised primarily the aristocracy and

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18 Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender, and the Reform Act of 1867*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 13-20.

19*James Eli Adams,* "'The boundaries of Social intercourse': Class in the Victorian Novel" in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Francis O'Gorman, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005, p. 49.

20Henry James, *Portrait of a Lady*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1881, p. 110.

21 In Asa Briggs, "The language of 'class' in early nineteenth-century Britain, in R. S. Neale, ed., *History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1983, p. 11.

landed gentry, whose income derived principally from the ownership of land. Over the course of the nineteenth century, it increasingly accommodated families who had amassed large fortunes in industry and commerce –one of many developments that complicated class boundaries. Then came the broad middle class, comprising those engaged in either the professions or 'trade', which might include anything from banking to manufacturing to retail exchange, so long as it entailed the ownership of capital or stock, and extending down into a borderland of office workers, many of whom made little more than well-trained craftsmen. At the broad base of the pyramid, much the largest in population, were 'the working classes', whose propertyconsisted almost entirely in their labour power. This group encompassed highly skilled artisans – the 'labour aristocracy', such as watchmakers, tool makers, and iron workers – lesser skilled or unskilledlabourers, of whom agricultural workers formed the largest category, domestic servants, and finally a variable but large number of the desperately poor. It has been noted that the distinction between 'working class' and 'poor' is especially unstable: given low wages and erratic employment, nearly all members of the working class at times lived in poverty.[22]

Of course, the boundaries in such schemes are always blurred. Quite apart from the subtle but momentous gradations within the large strata– as between 'squires' and 'farmers', for example – the division even between working class and middle class could be elusive: 'trade', for example, was a term that might well blur distinctions between highly skilled artisans, who owned their own tools and perhaps even workshops, and 'manufacturers' (indeed, at the beginning of the century that term actually referred to those who worked with their hands).But the large structures of class offered a framework within which historical individuals experienced, and novelists attempted to represent, far more complex and highly individuated forms of experience and identity. One of the special appeals of the novel was precisely the intricacy with which it drew 'the boundaries of social intercourse', in Eliot's phrase, and evoked a sharply particularized social psychology, often through

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22James Eli Adams, "'The boundaries of Social intercourse': Class in the Victorian Novel" in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Francis O'Gorman, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005, p. 50.

resistance to large categories. The novel seemed a discourse uniquely suited to capture the textures of social interaction, aspiration, conflict, and anxiety, within which social hierarchy could seem botha barrier and a stimulus to new awareness, including (again in Eliot's terms) 'new consciousness of interdependence' connecting disparate individuals and groups. The novel achieved this primarily through focus on private life, on forms of experience ostensibly insulated from the world of economic and political conflict.[23]

With enhanced geographical mobility and the declining importance(however gradual) of kinship and patronage, social exchange of all kinds increasingly brought one into contact with strangers, with whom one had to negotiate an appropriate, mutual recognition of social standing. In a world where personal or family history no longer offereda ready guide to social identity, the interpretation of strangers had to rely more on visible social signs: dress, speech, behaviour, place of residence, style of living. Leonore Davidoff notes that "Much of the elaborate etiquette we think of as distinctively Victorian is at root a strategy for dealing with social mobility. Etiquette, that is, affirms one's own claims to social recognition while at the same time sustaining a social distance that allows one confidently to 'place' new acquaintances."[24]

The social and economic mobility that characterized nineteenth-century Britain caused considerable anxiety for individuals who faced unprecedented opportunities and challenges. People found that the possibility was there for them to ascend the social ladder and join a class higher than their own. This made them feel unsatisfied with their economic and social status and put them under significant pressure to improve it. Likewise, there was the possibility of the loss of fortune and status as a result of severe competition and the ensuing brutal market forces. With the limited yet increasing porousness of social classes, the upper and even middle classes started to design political, economic and cultural mechanisms, in the form of barriers, to filter their intake of aspiring individuals and ward off unwanted 'encroachers'. The next part of this paper will examine in detail how these mechanisms played out in

23 Ibid, pp. 50-51.
24Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Women and Society in Victorian England*, Totowa, NJ: Rowman& Littlefield, 1973, p. 131.

the Victorian world of Dickens's *Great Expectations* and the impact they made on aspiring individuals. The argument is that Pip's experience on the road to gentlemanliness is one of the clearest examples of status anxiety in the nineteenth-century English novel and the frustration caused by social closure.

Great Expectations: social closure at work

It seems that Dickens made a deliberate decision to start *Great Expectations* at the very bottom of the social scale with an encounter between an orphaned child, Pip, and a convicted criminal, Abel Magwitch. Significantly, the narrator, the adult Pip, explains how his own name has been reduced from Philip Pirrip to Pip, a reduction which sums up his perception of his diminutive status. Self-perceptionis also mirrored by how society perceives him: "So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip." (*GE*, 3)Pip encounters Magwitch in the churchyard where his parents and siblings are buried. His childish reflections on how his parents could have looked like, added to the fact that his five siblings died in childhood, an additional reflection of extreme poverty, anchors his social status unequivocally at the lower end of the social system. Later in the novel, Magwitch tells Pip his story, a chronicle of poverty, vagrancy, ignorance, crime and an enhanced sense of low self-esteem. In "a mouthful of English," as he puts it, his life was a series of "In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There, you've got it.That's *my* life pretty much." (*GE*, 342-3)Yet, he elaborates a little thus:

> I've been done everything to, pretty well – except hanged. I've been locked up, as much as a silver tea-kettle. I've been carted here and carted there, and put out of this town and put out of that town, and stuck in the stocks, and whipped and worried and drove. I've no more notion where I was born, than you have – if so much.(*GE*, 343)

In the first part of the novel, Pip is being brought up "by hand" by his stern and overbearing sister and by her rough but gentle and good-hearted husband JoeGargery, the village blacksmith. Joe is perhaps the only character in the novel who is satisfied with his lot in life, makes the best of what he has got and does not aspire to move up in society. He is at

his best in the forge in his work clothes. Even in his Sunday clothes, he looks a little awkward and a little comic: "he pulled up his shirt-collar so very high behind, that it made the hair on the crown of his head stand up like a tuft of feathers." (*GE*, 97)

It is clear that social class in the novel is determined by the extent of education one receives and how easily individuals can get access to education. Both Pip and Joe are close to illiterate. Joe's father, a blacksmith too and a drunkard, used to abuse him and his mother physically, which was in Joe's words "a drawback on my learning." (*GE*, 45)Pip's consciousness of his ignorance, coarseness, commonness and inferiority was triggered by his meeting Estella at Miss Havisham's house and seeing how refined and cultivated she was. His immediate reaction was to ask Bidy to teach him. He thought:

> the best step I could take towards making myself uncommon was to get out of Biddy everything she knew. In pursuance of this luminous conception I mentioned to Biddy when I wentto MrWopsle's great-aunt's at night, that I had a particular reason for wishing to get on in life, and that I should feel very much obliged to her if she would impart all her learning to me.(*GE*, 71)

His encounter with Estella was the catalyst which raised Pip's class awareness and heightened his anxiety. He suddenly felt unhappy with his surroundings and wanted to push his way through the social system and become a gentleman. He imparts this intention to Biddy: "'Biddy,' said I, after binding her to secrecy, 'I want to be a gentleman'." (*GE*, 125)He expounds further:

> I am not at all happy as I am. I am disgusted with my calling and with my life… I never shall or can be comfortable – or anything but miserable – there, Biddy! –unless I can lead a very different sort of life from the life I lead now. (*GE*, 125)

As soon as Pip is appraised of his having 'great expectations', his guardian, MrJaggers embarks on equipping him with the necessary credentials which would enable him to become a gentleman, for that was the brief given to MrJaggers by Pip's benefactor. The process is initiated by acquiring the right set of clothes, for they emblematically indicate the class he intends to join and are part of the strategies employed in dealing

with social mobility, something of which the shrewd MrJaggers is fully aware. When Pip is provided with money, it seems that one barrier, used as an instrument to apply social closure, is removed and in terms of appearance, Pip can assume that he looks like a young gentleman.

The next step was to provide him with gentlemanly education; and for that task the help of Mr Mathew Pocket and his son Herbert is enlisted. Herbert serves as his major role model of a gentleman, and consequently Pip strives to emulate him. Herbert and his father seem to be genuinely good people. Herbert passes on his father's philosophy of gentility which includes refinement of emotion and a good heart. Pip believes that by simply emulating Herbert's behaviour he can become a 'good' person like him. Ostensibly, his education is focused on table manners, behaviour in polite company, places to frequent in London and acquiring expensive habits, thinking that simply acting like a gentleman is all it takes to be a decent person. In this context, the criterion to define someone as a gentleman in the nineteenth century was the extent to which he had received public - actually private - school education in either of Eton, Harrow or Rugby schools, regardless of his antecedents. In an endeavour to establish himself as a gentleman and lead a gentlemanly way of life, Pip employs a servant he names the Avenger. He hardly needed a servant and the Avenger was more of a burden than a helper but, in the words of James Elis Adams, servants were essential not merely for labour, but as a badge of social rank.[25] And as Eric Hobsbawm points out, "thesafest way of distinguishing oneself from the labourers was to employlabour oneself."[26]

However, an examination of the changes Pip underwent after this course of education shows that he became an incredibly selfish figure throughout most of the novel. His priorities are clearly misaligned. He fails to capitalize on seemingly obvious opportunities to help out those close to him. After Pip finds himself in London in a greatly improved financial situation, he seeks ways to improve his own personal decency through manners and refinement, yet he never spares a thought for the good he could do for his afflicted sister with just a small portion of his

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25James Eli Adams, "'The boundaries of Social intercourse': Class in the Victorian Novel" in *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. Francis O'Gorman, p. 66.
26Quoted in Bruce Robbins, *The Servant's Hand: English Literature from Below*. Durhamand London: Duke University Press, 1993, p. 15.

income. Just a few pounds would seem a fortune to his sister and Joe, and he never gives them a second thought, concentrating only on himself and those he sees as being more worthwhile. It seems that the residents of his village no longer exist to him. His fierce selfishness never allows him to awaken to the larger problems of class in which he is immersed.

Another example of the role of education as an instrument of social inclusion/exclusion is the case of Magwitch and his partner and master in crime, Compeyson. While Magwitch is low class and has not acquired any kind of education, Compeyson is upper class and educated. "He set up fur a gentleman," Magwich says of him, "this Compeyson, and he'd been to a public boarding-school and had learning. He was a smooth one to talk, and was a dab at the ways of gentlefolks. He was good-looking too." (*GE*, 343) The implications of such a condition are shown in the treatment each of them received by the British legal system. This is Magwich's account of their trial:

> When we was put in the dock, I noticed first of all what agentleman Compeyson looked, wi' his curly hair and his black clothes and his white pocket-handkercher, and what a common sort of wretch I looked. When the prosecution opened and the evidence was put short, aforehand, I noticed how heavy it all bore on me, and how light on him. … Andwhenitcometo character, warn't it Compeyson as had been to the school, andwarn't it his schoolfellows as was in this position and in that, andwarn't it him as had been know'd by witnesses in such clubsand societies, and nowt to his disadvantage? Andwarn'titmeas hadbeen tried afore, and as had been know'd up hill and down dalein Bridewells and Lock-Ups? And when it came to speech-making,warn't it Compeyson as could speak to 'emwi' his face droppingevery now and then into his white pocket-handkercher– ah! Andwi' verses in his speech, too – and warn't it me as could only say,''Gentleman, this man at my side is a most precious rascal''? And when the verdict come, warn't it Compeyson as was recommended to mercy on account of good character and bad company, and giving pall the information he could agenme,andwarn't itmeas got nevera word but Guilty? (*GE*, 347)

What this passage illustrates is that Victorian society valued education as an instrument for self-improvement, networking and the protection of privileges. Educated people joined exclusive societies and clubs and protected each other against the lower classes or against those who did not have the same upbringing and culture, and consequently used it as an instrument of social closure. Obviously, Dickens finds that such a social structure constitutes a hindrance to the ethos of work, self-advancement and ambition. Likewise, Estella's education is shown in an equally negative light. Her early education is entrusted to Miss Havisham who makes it her mission in life to teach her how to break men's hearts. All her instruction can be summed up in her injunction: "Break their hearts my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!" (*GE*, 93) The result of that education proved to be disastrous especially for Estella and Miss Havisham who end up only inflicting pain on others and on themselves.

Money has always been an instrument of social closure separating the "haves and the have nots", in the words of Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quixote*. It is important to note that even political reform in nineteenth-century Britain was implemented gradually and on the basis of how much money people had. Both reform acts of 1832 and 1867 were based on the value of household property or the rent paid for that property.[27] In other words, political participation was opening upto individuals with certain wealth qualifications while remaining closed – for decades - to those who do not possess a qualifying amount of money. Yet, different sources of income continued to have varying degrees of respectability, hence the nuances related to the question of class and status discussed above. The issue was debated by Pip and Herbert over the source of Miss Havisham's wealth, and came to the conclusion that money generated by brewing – the original source of Miss Havisham's money - was 'genteel' and respectable money.

Pip lives for a great part of the novel under the illusion that his benefactress was Miss Havisham, and was obviously happy in his illusion. He spent what he thought to be Miss Havisham's money with no tinge of compunction. He thought that she was preparing him to be fit for

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[27]Norman McCord andBill Purdue, *British History 1815–1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 154, p. 283.

Estella. Pip was bewildered by his own rapid social ascent:"Iwas a blacksmith's boy but yesterday; I am – what shall I say I am– to-day?" (*GE*, 245)He was filled with hope, optimism and belief that the social system was opening up to him. Everything changes, however, when he knows that his real benefactor is Magwitch who returns from Australia, where he had been transported for life as a convicted criminal. Magwitch tells Pip that every penny he had made in Australia he saved for Pip to spend as a gentleman:

> I says each time – and I goes out in the air to say it under the open heavens –''but wot, if I gets liberty and money, I'll make that boy a gentleman!''And I done it. Why, lookat you, dear boy! Look at these here lodgings o'yourn, fit for alord! A lord? Ah! You shall show money with lords for wagers,and beat 'em!'(*GE*, 315)

Magwitch is motivated by his gratitude to the little boy who brought him food and drink when he was an escaped convict starving on the marches and hunted down by the authorities. We know later that his paternal feelings towards Pip have their origins in the fact that he lost a little child, almost the same age as Pip, and consequently found in his devotion to Pip a compensation for the loss he felt in relation to his own child. Magwitch's story about his life in Australia, which he tells to Pip and Herbert, is marked by spontaneity and emotion. He makes no pretence except to hard work and good fortune. He wants Pip to have all his money and do with it whatever he wanted, satisfying himself with the pleasure of watching him spend it as a gentleman. Pip, however, feels he cannot take any more money from Magwitch on account of its being convicted criminal's money. Magwitch jeopardized his own life by returning to England in order to see Pip and watch him prosper, but Pip, fully ingrained now by Victorian values, finds it morally unacceptable to use the money of a convicted criminal no matter how repentant and reformed he is now. The attempt on the part of Pip and Herbert to smuggle Magwitch out of the country and return him to Australia fails, Magwitch is taken very ill to prison and his money confiscated by the state. Even during the brief period he spends in London, he is symbolically hunted down and, with all his wealth, is denied any visibility in his city of origin.

The fate of Magwitch and his money highlights the insecure relationship between money and status. A moral comparison between Miss Havisham and Magwitch, in the final analysis, proves to be very much in the latter's favour. His crimes were committed as a result of extreme poverty and ignorance simply in order to survive in a brutal and prejudiced environment. She, however, inflicts a great deal of pain and suffering on Pip and Estella motivated purely by vengeance and hatred towards men. Nevertheless, her money secures her place in the upper class and continued to be sought after. And despite the fact that Magwitch amassed a fortune by hard work, he continued to be rejected by the social system to the very end.

Pip's ambition to transcend his class and become a gentleman is not fulfilled in England, and that is why he decides to leave and seek his fortune in the colonies, the usual place for ambitious people whom the social and economic system in England cannot accommodate.He realizes, very late that the barriers erected before him are impossible to surmount. Estella, who is found in the end to be Magwitch's daughter, suffers a similar fate. Although she is adopted by Miss Havisham and brought up and educated as a lady, she ends up abused by her husband and left friendless after Miss Havisham's death. Both of them ended up outside the social system which allowed them only a temporary stay inside it but ultimately rejected them, not on any moral grounds, but because of the barriers the social order continually erected to keep the privileges of those within and block those outside it and prevent them access to these privileges. Pip's affection towards the convict in the end and his standing by his side, despite his knowledge that he will not be receiving any of Magwitch's money, is spurred by concluding perhaps that both of them are actually on the same side of the social divide.

Pip's move to London, on his journey towards the realization of his great expectations, is paralleled by MrWopsle'sendeavour to abandon his job as a church clerk and become an actor. Wopsle's rise as an actor functions as a sort of parody of Pip's rise as a gentleman. Wopsle starts his acting career with the illusion of trying to revive the fortunes of drama, but in Pip's words:

> I was aware that MrWopsle had not succeeded in reviving the Drama, but, on the contrary, had rather partaken of its decline. He had been ominously heard of, through the playbills, as a faithful

Black, in connexion with a little girl of noble birth, and a monkey. And Herbert had seen him as a predatory Tartar of comic propensities, with a face like a red brick, and an outrageous hat all over bells. (*GE*, 378)

Remarkably, both Joe, the coarse, ignorant but good-hearted blacksmith, and Biddy, the simple, undistinguished but good natured and intelligent young woman, prove to have a better understanding of their society and to be more comfortable with who they are. As soon as Pip is appraised of his great expectations, Joe realizes that a gap has opened between them. He feels very awkward in his company in London and tells him so:

Pip, dear old chap, life is made of ever so many partings weldedtogether, as I may say, and one man's a blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith, and one's a goldsmith, and one's a coppersmith.Diwisions among such must come, and must be met as they come. If there's been any fault at all to-day, it's mine. You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else butwhat is private, and beknown, and understood among friends. Itain't that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong in these clothes. I'mwrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th'meshes. (*GE*, 222)

Despite his simplicity, Joe seems to have an instinctive awareness of the determinants of social hierarchy and the force of social closure. When he visits Miss Havisham with Pip, Dickens describes Joe as possessing a mixture of "argumentation, confidence and politeness," (*GE*, 98) yet he is still unable to speak directly to Miss Havisham due to the fact that he cannot identify with someone from another class. The novel illustrates that the characters who remain in their 'natural' environment and do not attempt to cross social barriers end up happier. Joe and Biddy lead a contented life and Joe ends up even helping Pip out of his debts and saving him from prison.

The novel shows other forms of social closure based on status, group and professional affiliation more than on class membership. Jaggers'sbehaviour, mannerisms and language emphasize continuously

his 'acting' in a professional capacity to the extent that he appears, for most of the novel, as completely detached from any human concern or sympathy. His obsessive hand washing symbolizes his persistent desire to wash away the 'dirt' which attaches to him, not only through dealing with all types of criminals, but also through interaction with members of other social groups. In his professional capacity, he deals with members of different classes without getting involved socially or emotionally with any one. He and his clerk, Wemmick, work together professionally but are worlds apart socially. Each of them insures that the other knows as little as possible about him. In response to Pip's question whether MrJaggers 'admires' Wemmick's house, he says:

> Never seen it,' said Wemmick. 'Never heard of it. Never seen the Aged. Never heard of him. No; the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me. (*GE*, 206)

Conclusion

This paper has tried to demonstrate that despite the general tendency to think and write about nineteenth-century Britain in terms of great economic and social change, particularly when it comes to social mobility, a novel like *Great Expectations* shows the limitations imposed on that mobility through the agency of social closure. It is true that market forces made a tremendous impact on British society, particularly causing the middle and upper classes to share interests, form alliances and even create an amalgamation between the two classes. Nevertheless, there remained a significant degree of resistance to social mobility expressed by placing subtle, and sometimes crude, barriers to prevent the lower classes in particular from ascending the social ladder.

The novel portrays lower class members who are not satisfied with their status and who strive to transcend or change it as selling out and abandoning their 'natural' environment without being accepted by the more powerful classes. By the same token, the characters who stick to their class and to their surroundings are portrayed positively. It is fair to conclude that however much radicals admired him, Dickens was never a radical author, but he was unparalleled in his sensitivity to social problems and in characterizing them accurately and sympathetically.

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