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**“The Identity of Things”:
Pip’s Journey from Thing to Subject in *Great Expectations***

In 1858, two years before *Great Expectations* appeared in weekly parts, Charles Dickens wrote in the Preface to the Cheap Edition of his 1848 novel *Dombey and Son*:

Mr. Dombey undergoes no violent internal change, either in this book, or in life. A sense of his injustice is within him all along. The more he represses it, the more unjust he necessarily is. Internal shame and external circumstances may bring the contest to the surface in a week, or day; but it has been a contest for years, and is only fought out then, after a long balance of victory.¹

Although Dickens writes about Paul Dombey, a notoriously cold and callous character in his fiction, his claim about the “contest” between “internal shame and external circumstances” profoundly resonates both with Dickens’s own personal experiences,² and with those of characters in his later novels, especially *Great Expectations*. Dickens writes that Mr. Dombey undergoes no “violent internal change,” as he “represses” the great “injustice” of his young son’s death in the story; however, Dickens suggests, both in the resolution of *Dombey and Son* and in his Preface ten years later, that bridging the gap between internal feelings and external reality remains possible for overcoming such emotional injuries. In *Great Expectations*, Pip’s relations with his own “external circumstances,” particularly through inanimate objects, as I will show, provides him a productive means of coping with his sense of shame and injustice throughout the

¹ From “Appendix I,” *Dombey and Son*, ed. Andrew Sanders (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), p. 949.

² In *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (1952), Edgar Johnson sympathetically relates Dickens’s harrowing childhood experience of working at family friend Robert Warren’s blacking factory after his father had been committed to debtor’s prison (28-41). As Dickens later wrote in a fragmentary autobiography, the experience caused him much “shame” and occupied the “secret agony of [his] soul” (qtd. in Johnson 32), which haunted him throughout his life and provided the basis for much of his fiction (Johnson 41).

novel. Through Pip's character, Dickens suggests that positively interacting with one's outer world leads to the ability to shape and redefine one's internal identity. By 1860, Dickens thus continues to narrow the divide between "internal shame and external circumstances," which he articulates through Mr. Dombey in 1858.

As many scholars have noted, the relationship between the internal and external worlds of Dickens's characters acquires particular significance through a study of "things," or objects, in his novels. In her chapter on *Great Expectations* in *The English Novel* (1953), Dorothy Van Ghent argues that "[p]eople were becoming things, and things...were becoming more important than people...[p]eople were being de-animated, robbed of their souls, and things were usurping the prerogatives of animate creatures" (128). Van Ghent further claims that such "daemonic" people, who turned into the objects of their projections (131), reflected Dickens's interpretation of a Victorian cultural obsession with commodities by the mid-nineteenth century.³ Such a viewpoint, however, has been met with more recent criticism in light of Bill Brown's influential article and basis for critical theory, "Thing Theory" (2001), urging scholars to focus on the larger "subject-object relation" that "things" signify (4). In response to Van Ghent, Elaine Freedgood, for example, has suggested that we look past "things" as cultural evils in Dickens's novels in order to "learn something important about subjects from objects" ("Commodity Criticism" 160). She first explains these concepts in her 2006 book, *The Idea in Things*, arguing that the nineteenth-century novel, especially Dickens's, where things appear in unorganized "lists, catalogs, inventories," inhabits "a rich field in which to undo some of the social destruction of

³ Studies in Victorian commodity culture also emphasize the "living" nature of Dickens's objects. For example, Thomas Richards writes, "In the mid-nineteenth century, the commodity became the living letter of the law of supply and demand. It literally came alive. In Dickens's novels furniture, textiles, watches, handkerchiefs seem to live and breathe" (2).

meaning that our neglect of reading things has unwittingly produced” (103).⁴ Such studies of subjects’ relationships to their surrounding objects provides much insight into an analysis of *Great Expectations*, a novel in which Pip, as a child and an adult, attempts to understand his position in perplexing natural and social environments through the things that surround him.

Few critics, however, have examined the intersection of “thing” studies and Pip’s social development in *Great Expectations*, particularly in relation to his personal shame both under the gazes of Miss Havisham and Estella and as part of the refined London society he joins as a “gentleman.” Scholars who have made such connections tend to focus on Pip’s object-like trajectory as the story progresses, both in terms of his being commercially “made” or “produced” as a gentleman (Houston 22),⁵ and in his relationship with Estella, through which he transforms into “an object desirable to women” (Marcus 180). Nevertheless, Dickens creates a striking connection in *Great Expectations* between Pip’s encounters with objects and the objectifying nature of his shame as he develops socially. Moreover, I will argue that objects provide Pip a productive means of understanding his social surroundings and subject position in his world. Pip progresses from ontological encounters with things, whose bewildering mode of being and relationship to young Pip’s own existence remains unclear, to socially instrumental interactions that enable him to master new codes and points of reference foreign to his upbringing. As objects continually mediate Pip’s thoughts and encounters with people, he more clearly recognizes the parameters of object and subject, self and other, and his own independent

⁴ In her chapter on *Great Expectations*, Freedgood examines how the social history of “negro-head tobacco,” to which Dickens specifically refers in connection with Magwitch, is reconfigured in the novel to tell a “dominant narrative...one that concerns its subjects” (12).

⁵ For example, Gail Houston argues that for Pip, “the making of the self rests in the space between the meanings of reproduction and production...the home and the market” (16), and that “[f]allen into the world of production and consumption, Pip is not born; he is made...With no nourishing mother figure, Pip becomes the object of market relations, learning only to consume or be consumed” (18).

consciousness by the novel's end. As Pip redirects others' shameful gaze outward, he creates the possibility for internal reflection and ultimately develops into a self-aware subject in his society.

The object-subject dichotomy that Bill Brown explains in "Thing Theory" strongly resonates with the language of shame theory and provides a rich intersection for studying Pip's social and psychological development in *Great Expectations*. The crux of Brown's "Thing Theory" lies in the relationship between things and objects and, subsequently, between objects and subjects. He claims that whereas "things" are simply "what we encounter" in the everyday (Brown 3), objects signify ideas. For Brown, things lack social value and only transform into objects when humans project beliefs onto them. More importantly, objects differ from things because they depend on a relationship with a human subject in order to acquire the worth that a "thing" lacks. Brown further explains: "The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and this is the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (4). In shame studies, not only are the lines between object and subject similarly permeable, but they also rely on reciprocity between both sides to produce a shaming effect. For example, in *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology* (2000), Stephen Pattison claims that shame involves a feeling of personal exposure, as one is typically "ashamed in front of someone else" (72). He argues that the person experiencing shame often feels "objectified" by another's gaze and, in turn, the boundaries between self and on-looker, subject and object, become blurred (72). Similarly, Pip's worldview remains confused between these various states of objectivity and subjectivity, as articulated in both thing and shame theory, as they relate to his social development. Pip progresses from a child attempting to identify himself as a "thing" among other things in his environment, to a boy who occupies the object of Estella's scornful gaze, and finally to an independent gentleman, a

subject among other subjects in his environment. In this way, Pip's interactions with his external environment provide crucial stepping-stones to his conscious subject-formation, as he confronts both his boyhood shame and his shameful behavior as an adult by the novel's end.

From Confounding Thing to Object of Shame

As early as the first page of *Great Expectations*, Dickens complicates Pip's notions of object and subject, person and thing, as Pip's world gains focus. The reader's first image of Pip involves him interacting with things; for example, Pip studies the "shape of the letters" on his father's tombstone and consequently pictures his father as a "square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair" (*GE* 3).⁶ At this early juncture, Pip conflates stones that represent his departed family members with their living images in order to better comprehend his position in this world. As Pip goes on to describe the "memorable raw afternoon" when he first met his convict, he explains that he gained his "first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things" that day (*GE* 3). While "the identity of things" implies Pip's general knowledge of his surroundings, Dickens's syntax in the following sentence suggests that Pip exists quite literally as another "thing" among these things that make up his environment:

At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; ...and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; ...and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.

(*GE* 3-4)

⁶ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Charlotte Mitchell (New York: Penguin, 1996). I will abbreviate subsequent citations to the novel as *GE*.

As Pip progressively discovers “the churchyard,” “the marshes,” and “the sea,” Dickens constructs accumulating subordinate clauses that lead to Pip as the last and most important part of this environment. Pip not only “found out for certain” this day that he actually exists in this milieu, but also that he exists as a thing scattered amongst other things, such as “nettles,” “dykes and mounds and gates,” and he describes himself as such a thing: a “small *bundle* of shivers.” Pip projects his fear onto his surroundings as he envisions this “bleak place,” the churchyard as a “dark flat wilderness,” and the sea as a monster, springing from a “distant savage lair.” Pip’s inner feelings not only shape his outer world in this scene but also help to define his confused identity, caught between lifeless thing and conscious subject.

Pip’s self-formation progresses as he identifies himself first as a fellow “thing” on the marshes, and then as an object with a specific social “value” to Miss Havisham and Estella. Upon entering the cultured world of Satis House, Pip feels ashamed and self-conscious of his “coarse” and “common” self compared to Estella’s cultivated manners and her scornful gaze (*GE* 65). The gaze, as Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark explain in *Scenes of Shame* (1999), “refers to the vision of an objectively self-aware subject or self, to the double-focus...of human consciousness,” which involves “the alienation of self through a paralyzing self-consciousness in relation to the other” (8). After Pip has developed his own, albeit thing-like, identity on the marshes, then, Estella “alienates” and destabilizes this self, “paralyzing” Pip as the object of her gaze.

As Pip becomes increasingly ashamed of his unrefined self in comparison with Estella, he realizes that neither Biddy nor Joe, his closest friends, can properly understand his feelings. Instead, Pip transfers his shame onto his milieu and continues to confuse the limits between

object and subject. As Pip fears Estella's stare on the forge, he merges her beautiful image with his "common" world:

Often after dark, when I was pulling the bellows for Joe, and we were singing Old Clem, and when the thought how we used to sing it at Miss Havisham's would seem to show me Estella's face in the fire, with her pretty hair fluttering in the wind and her eyes scoring me, – often at such a time I would look towards those panels of black night in the wall which the wooden windows then were, and would fancy that I saw her just drawing her face away, and would believe that she had come at last. After that...I would feel more ashamed of home than ever.... (GE 108)

Pip's internal "thought" of singing "Old Clem" produces an actual vision of "Estella's face in the fire," as she becomes a non-human image embodying these animate flames. Pip sees Estella's face "often after dark," when the light-dark contrast between the "black night" and the "fire" mimics the disparity between Estella's cultured world and Pip's coarse surroundings. As Estella's eyes "scor[e]" Pip, Dickens posits that this mere image actually could be Estella herself watching Pip at the forge.⁷ However, Dickens's subsequent phrase "those panels of black night," or "glassless windows,"⁸ reinforces the permeability both of physical boundaries in the paradoxically "glassless windows" and of Pip's confused mental conceptions of person and image. Pip would "*fancy*" seeing Estella and would "*believe* that she had come at last," as Dickens's word choice highlights Pip's uncertainty of Estella as fantastic object or human subject. Only after Pip views Estella's image does he feel "more ashamed of home than ever,"

⁷ Pip's self-consciousness, as he imagines Estella's gaze through the window, resonates with Dickens's childhood shame of working in the "public window" at Warren's blacking factory, where Dickens's father witnessed "the public exhibition of the boy, engaged in menial toil" (Johnson 39-40).

⁸ See Note 1 to Volume I, Chapter XIV (GE 492).

suggesting that projecting her figure onto the fire particularly allows him to then reflect internally on his emotions.

As this imaginary encounter with Estella suggests, Pip over-signifies his milieu with physical representations of his feelings as his internal identity develops. Alex Woloch similarly writes that Pip “externalizes his own interior consciousness; he swallows up what is physically around him, transforming it into an elaboration of what is inside him” (206). Such externalization allows Pip to connect things from his “world” to his “mind” (Woloch 206), in a way that language, especially his youthful literal language, fails to do. For example, Pip describes “Tickler,” his sister’s choice beating object, as “a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame” (*GE* 9). While Pip understands Tickler’s purpose, his literal phrasing that Tickler’s wear was due to a “collision with my tickled frame” obscures the fact that his sister uses this object to strike him. In this way, young Pip struggles to understand the value of specific things in shaping his personal and social growth. Elaine Freedgood’s definition of what she calls “Victorian ‘thing culture’” offers insight into understanding Pip’s ontological relationship with things as they represent a baffling mode of being in a vague connection to himself. She writes that commodity culture was preceded by “Victorian ‘thing culture’: a more extravagant form of object relations than ours, one in which systems of value were not quarantined from one another and ideas of interest and meaning were perhaps far less restricted than they are for us” (*Idea in Things* 8). For Victorians, then, objects acquired equal statuses in their simply “being” things. So for young Pip, things occupy linguistic and conceptual registers that remain interchangeable with his confused notion of his human existence.

Pip begins to realize through more figurative relations with things, however, that they can

be useful in shaping his own position in his world. Pip often construes language as tangible and thing-like, as words and their broader significations become muddled in Pip's mind. In the following passage, Pip cares for Mrs. Joe after her attack; he feels guilty for the assault, as he "infers" that his "convict's leg-iron" that he "had seen...on the marshes" was the assailant's weapon (*GE* 121). Pip's inner emotions color his confused perceptions of words and things:

As she was (very bad handwriting apart) a more than indifferent speller, and as Joe was a more than indifferent reader, extraordinary complications arose between them, which I was always called in to solve. The administration of mutton instead of medicine, the substitution of Tea for Joe, and the baker for bacon, were among the mildest of my own mistakes. (*GE* 122)

As Pip ironically attempts to determine Mrs. Joe's already jumbled thoughts due to her "indifferent spell[ing]" and Joe's "indifferent read[ing]," he explains that he kept a slate beside her, "that she might indicate in writing what she could not indicate in speech" (*GE* 122). Written language becomes a visible object on the slate, and Pip's task involves assigning value to words, or making them useful objects for Mrs. Joe, Joe, and himself. Here, the potential for Pip's figurative, rather than literal, associations to things becomes significant, as the connections he makes may help to alleviate the guilt he feels over his sister's attack. However, he remains so distracted by the leg-iron image, which, as Alex Woloch notes, establishes a series of metonymic devices that "exert[] a hold on Pip's consciousness" (200), that he fails to make the correct correlations between Mrs. Joe's thing-like writing and her human needs.

While mistaking "mutton" for "medicine," "Tea for Joe, and the baker for bacon" provides a comical display of Pip's object-subject confusion, he learns that language should not always be taken literally, as these miscommunications represent the "mildest" of his blunders

with his sister. Pip then misconstrues Mrs. Joe's drawing, this time of "a character that looked like a curious T...the mysterious sign" (*GE* 123-24), and only Biddy can connect the symbol with Orlick as Mrs. Joe's attacker. Even though Pip misreads the links among these various signs, objects such as the leg-iron,⁹ and the "T" for hammer and Orlick work as vehicles that connect the things in Pip's external reality both to their value in defining his domestic role and to his conscious recognition of his inner feelings, thus furthering his subject-formation.

When Pip receives news of his "great expectations" and prepares to become a gentleman (*GE* 138), he begins to understand certain objects as influential to his social elevation. For example, Pip's transition to a "gentleman" requires a physical change of clothes to signify his new status. As Sharon Marcus has argued, clothes in *Great Expectations* "have a plot....They exemplify the novel's themes of social pretense, stolen identity, and the grip of the past" (183). She further claims that Pip is "an expert in the use of clothes to conceal shameful origins" (182), which first can be seen when he buys new outfits before traveling to London. After the "memorable event" of being measured by Mr. Trabb, Pip narrates his visits to various stores:

I went to the hatter's, and the boot-maker's, and the hosier's, and felt rather like Mother Hubbard's dog, whose outfit required the service of so many trades....It was not necessary to explain everywhere that I had come into a handsome property; but whenever I said anything to that effect, it followed that the officiating tradesmen ceased to have his attention diverted through the window by the High-street, and concentrated his mind upon me. (*GE* 152)

Notably, Pip's travels to "the hatter's," "the boot-maker's" and the "hosier's" allude to the children's story of "Mother Hubbard's dog." This rhyme, which relates Mother Hubbard's

⁹ Alex Woloch further notes that these symbols, including the "chain, iron, file," begin to "thematically signify contiguity itself" (199), in addition to Pip's formation as a full subject, as I argue.

surprise upon seeing her dog riding a goat after she went to buy him a coat,¹⁰ provides an apt metaphor for Pip's identity switch: his rather magical transition from common boy to gentleman via clothes. Pip not only views the clothing from these stores as a means of converting his outer identity, but he also wishes for others to value his character differently because of his expectations and "handsome property." Instead of the tradesmen's attention being "diverted through the window by the High-street," Pip occupies the object both of their awe-filled gaze and of their "concentrated mind." As a reworking of the forge scene, where Pip imagines Estella's scornful stare through the window, he now exudes admiration rather than shame as he replaces any more important scenes on "High-street" that the men may watch.

Clothes thus provide the ultimate metaphor for Pip's social success.¹¹ They embody a magical power, as clothes both disguise his shameful self and transition him from an object on the marsh and under Estella's gaze, to a burgeoning subject as a gentleman.¹² In this way, clothes as "things" become fetishistic for Pip, through what Bill Brown describes as "methodological fetishism" in "Thing Theory." Brown writes, "You could imagine things...as what is excessive in objects...the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems" (5), further claiming that such fetishism becomes a "condition for thought...about how inanimate objects constitute human subjects" (7). As Pip puts on the clothes, he hopes that such "inanimate objects" will convert him to a valued social subject, deserving of positive attention

¹⁰ See Note 3 to Volume I, Chapter XIX (*GE* 493). Sarah Catherine Martin's poem reads: "She went to the tailor's / To buy him a coat, / But when she came back / He was riding a goat."

¹¹ Sharon Marcus documents Pip's continued desire to purchase clothes in London, writing that even after Pip "breaks with his irresolute past self, he retains his zeal for clothes, expressing his newfound vigor by going on a shopping spree" (182).

¹² Pip also takes much care in choosing clothing to disguise Magwitch's criminal nature and to hide him from the authorities when he reveals himself as Pip's benefactor in London. Pip realizes, however, that clothes fail to perform a similar identity transformation for Magwitch as they did for himself as a gentleman: "To my thinking, there was something in him that made it hopeless to attempt to disguise him. The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching fugitive on the marshes" (*GE* 337).

instead of others' shameful stares.¹³

As another such fetishistic figure, Estella provides Pip insight into his budding subject position in comparison to her object-like existence. Estella fails to “constitute a human subject,” in Brown’s language (7), and she becomes a fetish and an idol: for Miss Havisham, she remains a “fashionable doll, set off by jewels and lovely clothes” (Marcus 168), and for Pip, an unattainable prize. While Sharon Marcus focuses on the “erotic appeal” of Miss Havisham’s owning Estella as a “sexual subject” (174), I suggest that, like clothing for Pip, Estella proves to be a valuable object for him to recognize his own emotional transformation as his self-awareness develops. For example, after Pip has met true friends in London, namely Herbert Pocket and Wemmick, he dines with Estella while she travels through the city, and Pip begins to internalize how cold and “statue”-like she really is (*GE* 268). Estella describes Miss Havisham’s “plans” for her: “I am to write to her constantly and see her regularly, and report how I go on – I and the jewels – for they are nearly all mine now” (*GE* 270).¹⁴ Like an owned piece of property, Estella must report to Miss Havisham “constantly,” as Miss Havisham remains as concerned about the jewels as about Estella. Dickens’s syntax here, “I and the jewels,” separated by dashes, visually and conceptually forms Estella into an object both on the page and in life; she and her ornaments now occupy interchangeable identities. As only “*nearly* all mine now,” however, the jewels allow Estella to recognize her dependence on Miss Havisham and to wish that one day the jewels will be completely hers. As Pip narrates after this encounter, “I never was happy with her, but always miserable,” he realizes and expresses the anguish Estella has caused him, despite his

¹³ Elaine Freedgood aptly notes that fetishism finds a “particularly comfortable home” in realism “because of the predominance of things, of details, of qualities – in short, of metonymy – in its figural ground” (*Idea in Things* 101).

¹⁴ Dickens frequently associates Estella with jewels, signifying her “property” status to Miss Havisham. In Pip’s first experience at Satis House, he narrates, “Miss Havisham beckoned [Estella] to come close, and took up a jewel from the table, and tried its effect upon her fair young bosom and against her pretty brown hair. ‘Your own, one day, my dear, and you will use it well’” (*GE* 60)). Sharon Marcus also observes that, ironically, jewelry is later responsible for much of Pip’s debt as a gentleman (180).

constant love for her. As a useful object, then, Estella provides Pip the means to reflect productively on his own emotions, which acts as another stepping-stone in Pip's self-development.

Objects as Instrumental to Subject-Formation

Upon news of his expectations, Pip is rescued from his "common" apprenticeship, and his benefactor presumably gains the ability to determine his future. Even though Pip's notions of object and subject remain muddled when he arrives in London, his new status provides him more opportunities to communicate his feelings to people, instead of solely transferring them onto things, as he forms new personal relationships. In further describing objects' use value in "Thing Theory," Bill Brown writes that "[w]e begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us" and that this constitutes "the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (4). In tracing Pip's developing social relations and corresponding journey to confront his shame, I will suggest that when Pip realizes how things *start* working productively as useful objects for himself and for others, he then understands their social worth as instrumental to his personal development. Moreover, he begins to progress as a subject in his new surroundings, instead of merely existing as the object of others' "expectations" for him.

Prior to comprehending objects' influential social importance to him, Pip connects things with their mere physicality through his interactions with Wemmick. Upon arriving in London, Wemmick is one of the first people Pip meets; he immediately characterizes him in terms of his "thingness":

His mouth was such a post-office of a mouth that he had a mechanical appearance of smiling. We had got to the top of Holborn Hill before I knew that it was merely a mechanical appearance, and that he was not smiling at all. (*GE* 172)

As Pip describes Wemmick's "post-office of a mouth," he connects Wemmick's position as Jaggers's clerk, or functionary, to Wemmick's own functionality as a person. Wemmick's mouth had the "mechanical appearance of smiling," and Pip fails to determine, at first, whether Wemmick actually was smiling. Such a "mechanical appearance" recalls Dorothy Van Ghent's claim that "people were becoming things" in Dickens's novels, and that such "demonizing" acted as a larger comment on Victorian commodity culture (128). Pip's determination that Wemmick indeed maintained his "mechanical appearance" and "was not smiling at all" would support Van Ghent's assessment of a person-turned-thing. However, Pip soon learns that for Wemmick, "the office is one thing, and private life is another" (*GE* 208). After visiting Wemmick's "Castle" for the first time, Pip realizes that as soon as Wemmick transitions from Castle to office, he becomes "dryer and harder...his mouth tightened into a post-office again" (*GE* 210). Pip thus begins to understand how objects prove helpful in constructing and compartmentalizing one's social identities, both public and private in Wemmick's case.

For Pip, Wemmick occupies an intermediary space between object and subject. He both exudes "the physicality of things" (Brown 4), with his "square wooden face" and "post-office mouth" (*GE* 171-72), and serves a useful social purpose for Pip in his association with Jaggers. More importantly, Wemmick provides Pip a model, upon entering the bewildering London world, for connecting objects' economic value with their social worth, as Wemmick and Pip bond over Wemmick's "portable property." Pip's curiosity about Wemmick's "mourning rings" and "personal jewelry" leads to Wemmick's explaining the importance of "portable property":

“They’re curiosities. And they’re property. They may not be worth much, but, after all, they’re property and portable. It don’t signify to you with your brilliant outlook, but as to myself, my guiding-star always is, ‘Get hold of portable property’” (*GE* 201). Even though Wemmick’s idea of “portable property” may not “signify” much to Pip with his “brilliant outlook” as a gentleman, this discussion of objects not only forms one of Pip’s first social interactions in London, but also leads to an invitation to Walworth, which implies entrance into Wemmick’s private sphere and the beginning of a friendship. Wemmick says to Pip, “If at any odd time when you have nothing better to do, you wouldn’t mind coming over to see me at Walworth, I could offer you a bed, and I should consider it an honour. I have not much to show you; but such two or three curiosities as I have got, you might like to look over” (*GE* 201). The “portability” of Wemmick’s property, in its movement from office to home, mirrors Pip’s transitional journey from objective, functional encounter with Wemmick to subjective, friendly interaction. Wemmick thus acts as a significant agent in Pip’s subject-formation, as a bond over “portable property” leads to the beginning of a positive relationship.

Just as objects become socially influential in forming Pip’s rapport with Wemmick, they also constitute one of his first meaningful interactions with Herbert Pocket, the formerly nameless “pale young gentleman” of his youth (*GE* 90), who quickly becomes Pip’s “intimate companion and friend” in London (*GE* 203). One of Pip’s first experiences as a gentleman involves him bonding with Herbert over the proper use of utensils, during which Pip does not have to feel ashamed of his unrefined self in front of Herbert:

‘Let me introduce the topic, Handel, by mentioning that in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth...[the fork] is not put further in than is necessary.... Also, the

spoon is not generally used over-hand, but under....' He offered these friendly suggestions in such a lively way, that we both laughed and I scarcely blushed. (*GE* 179)

This tutorial on the etiquette of tableware also acts as a larger lesson on the proper role of objects in Pip's world. As Herbert stresses how each utensil is *not* to be used in London and calls Pip by the nickname "Handel," he reminds him of his "blacksmith" origins,¹⁵ and Pip's embarrassment manifests when he "scarcely blushed." Pip's "scarcely" blushing here becomes significant in both suggesting a departure from a stronger, more shameful blush before Estella, and in briefly revealing his feelings to himself and to Herbert instead of shifting them onto his surroundings. Herbert's "friendly suggestions" that he offers in a "lively way," so different from Estella's "scoring" gaze (*GE* 108), eases Pip's embarrassment and establishes Herbert as his confidant. The utensils, or objects, in this scene act as conduits for Pip to identify himself and Herbert as fellow subjects, who share emotions without fear of shameful exposure.

Although Pip feels more comfortable expressing his inner sentiments to friends such as Herbert and Wemmick as the novel progresses, he continues to project his feelings onto his external world to gain better awareness of his own subject position. Like Wemmick, who becomes instrumental in both his physical "thingness" and his role as a fellow subject and friend for Pip, other minor characters provide Pip a means of progressing toward his self-formation. As Alex Woloch argues, Orlick occupies such a character space, as he embodies Pip's "double," or the "externalization of Pip's psychological tendencies" (238). As a dark figure from his childhood whom Pip wishes to avenge for his sister's attack, Orlick becomes both the externalization of Pip's childhood guilt and the projection of his adulthood shameful behavior toward Joe upon becoming a gentleman. In studying shame, Adamson and Clark observe that

¹⁵ Herbert refers to Handel's song the "Harmonious Blacksmith;" see Note 2 to Volume II, Chapter III (*GE* 495).

shameful exposure, or “the vivid imagery of the self in the other’s eyes” creates “a ‘doubleness of experience,’ which is characteristic of shame” (qtd. 9). In order to become a full subject, then, Pip must experience such “doubleness” through Orlick, both physically and mentally, to overcome the horrific man as the object-like embodiment of his internal feelings.

Pip’s final altercation with Orlick at the limekiln not only resonates with his frightening childhood interaction with this man, but also signifies Pip’s transformation from mere “thing” in his environment to subject by the end of the novel. For Pip as a child, Orlick occupies a monstrous space in his mind, as the demonic man often told Pip that “the Devil lived in a black corner of the forge” (*GE* 113). Their initial exchange proves particularly terrifying for Pip, whose identity in this already bewildering marsh world remains unstable. At the forge, Pip imagines himself as the literal object of Orlick’s rage:

Orlick plunged at the furnace, drew out a red-hot bar, made at me with it as if he were going to run it through my body, whisked it around my head, laid it on the anvil, hammered it out – as if it were I, I thought, and the sparks were my spiriting blood...
(*GE* 113)

As Pip pictures himself as the “red-hot bar” that Orlick planned to “hammer out,” he becomes another “thing” in this scene, just as he existed as a thing among the “nettles” and “gates” on the marshes in the novel’s first scene (*GE* 3). This display of Orlick’s brutality, as Pip imagines the anvil’s “sparks” as his corresponding “spiriting blood,” returns at the end of the novel, when Orlick lures Pip to the limekiln. As Pip enters the kiln, he narrates that Orlick “struck again with the flint and steel...As sparks fell thick and bright about him, I could see his hands, and touches of his face...but nothing more” (*GE* 423), and this encounter appears just as eerie as their first altercation at the forge. As Orlick repeatedly calls Pip “wolf” (*GE* 424), Pip both embodies the

object of Orlick's hunt and reverts back to his childhood existence, defined between an incognizant "thing" and a fully self-aware subject.

During this adulthood encounter with Orlick, however, Pip's focus remains on others, instead of himself, as he imagines his death. Pip narrates:

My mind, with inconceivable rapidity, followed out of all the consequences of such a death....The death close before me was terrible, but far more terrible than death was the dread of being misremembered after death. And so quick were my thoughts, that I saw myself despised by unborn generations – Estella's children, and their children – while the wretch's words were yet on his lips. (*GE* 425)

As Pip contemplates the "consequences of such a death," he considers how much more "terrible" his death will be if he is "misremembered." Pip focuses on "Estella's children, and their children," the future grandchildren of Magwitch, as he thinks that through his death, Magwitch "would believe I had deserted him" and that Joe and Biddy "would never know how sorry I had been" (*GE* 425). As Pip further pictures his death, Herbert and other men apprehend Orlick, and Pip loses and then regains consciousness during the commotion (*GE* 429). Pip recovers consciousness, and he realizes that he has finally defeated Orlick, the physical manifestation of his inner feelings. He then gains clear awareness of his shameful behavior toward the fellow subjects who have meaningfully shaped his self-development.

As Pip productively transfers his emotions onto his external environment, he both identifies himself as a sentient subject in his world and grasps his own shameful treatment toward Joe by the novel's end. Physically gaining consciousness signifies Pip's larger internal reflection on and awareness of his position as a feeling subject among other subjects in his life.

When Pip suffers from stress and fever after Magwitch's death, his semi-conscious state paradoxically enables him to recognize Joe as his most significant observer and supporter:

[T]hat I suffered greatly...that I confounded impossible existences with my own identity...that I was a brick in the house-wall, and yet entertaining to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me; that I was a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf...That sometimes I struggled with real people...I knew that there was an extraordinary tendency in all these people sooner or later to settle down into the likeness of Joe. (*GE* 462-63)

In his dream-like condition, Pip realizes that he “confounded impossible existences” with his “own identity”: he not only has confused boundaries between self and other, but he also has succumbed to an “impossible existence” as a gentleman in a society forced upon him. As Pip imagines himself as a “brick in the house-wall” and a “steel beam of a vast engine,” both he and the sturdy objects in this passage take on agency: the “brick” is “*entertaining* to be released” and the “beam” is “*clashing* and *whirling* over a gulf.” These action verbs suggest a persistent urge for the brick and beam to break out of their “thingness,” just as Pip desires to be the agent of his own future. Rather than existing as a thing as he did as a boy on the marshes, or as the object of Estella's haughty gaze, Pip discovers an “identity of things” that now includes an identity of self as mediated through “things.”

By the end of *Great Expectations*, Dickens thus ameliorates Pip's “struggle with real people” and finally clarifies his confusion of object and subject, self and other, through Pip's internal awareness of both his own position and Joe's place in his world. Pip renounces Estella as an unfeeling object and views himself and Joe as “real people” who care for and express feelings with each other. In Pattison's work on shame, he suggests that such confusion between

subject and object as a result of another's critical gaze often leads to one's "loss of agency and responsibility" (72). However, Pip's struggle with self-other boundaries constructively works to reframe both his internal and external perceptions. By externalizing his inner sentiments throughout the novel, Pip increasingly gains, instead of loses, individual agency as he better understands and communicates his feelings. Pip refocuses the shameful gaze inward rather than merely outward by the end of the novel: he admits to his dishonorable treatment of Joe and discovers his own role in shaping his identity, instead of letting social expectations mold him.

Identity Formation in Victorian Commodity Culture

In situating Pip's "identity of things" in the midst of a Victorian culture saturated with commodities, Dickens mimics the bewildering mode of being that Victorians experienced in developing new codes and meanings to capture their novel relations with objects. In *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England* (1990), Thomas Richards studies the Great Exhibition of 1851, arguing that "the Exhibition fashioned a phenomenology and a psychology for a new kind of being, the consumer, and a new strain of ideology, consumerism" (5). While Dickens does not seem primarily concerned with consumerism in *Great Expectations*, Richards's point that commodity culture insisted upon a "new kind of being," or identity, for Victorian consumers nevertheless provides an especially relevant lens through which to study "things" in Dickens's novel. Pip also must develop an appropriate reference system to carry him from an ontological relationship with objects to a phenomenological understanding that enables him to recognize both his subject-position in society and the psychological awareness of his internal shame.

In agreeing with Elaine Freedgood, who argues that scholarly criticism (more than anything inherent in Dickens's novels) has convinced us that Dickens's "thingfulness" adequately represents "the commodity's invasiveness" in Victorian culture ("Commodity

Criticism” 153), I believe that the social dynamics Dickens wishes to establish in *Great Expectations* resound more strongly with identity formation than with commodification. Dickens merely uses commodities as one cultural lens through which Pip views and achieves self-realization. As both Richards and Freedgood note, Dickens’s excessive lists of objects humorously illustrate the overwhelming nature of things in Victorian culture (Richards 2; Freedgood, *Idea in Things* 103); Dickens mimics the Victorian problem of making metonymic connections both among his various novelistic things and the objects in readers’ own worlds (*Idea in Things* 103). As I have emphasized, however, the various things in *Great Expectations* provide a helpful and instrumental means of understanding larger social prescriptions for subject-formation and, for Pip, confronting his internal emotions. In light of Dickens’s comment in 1858 regarding Mr. Dombey’s battle between “internal shame” and “external circumstances,” Dickens offers readers, through Pip’s self-discovery, a method for using “external circumstances,” such as the prevalence of “things” in Victorian cultural life, to better understand and combat “internal” demons, particularly shame, which only come to be “fought out...after a long balance of victory.”

Annotated Bibliography

Adamson, Joseph and Hilary Clark, eds. "Introduction: Shame, Affect, Writing." *Scenes of Shame: Psychoanalysis, Shame, and Writing*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999. 1-34. Print.

The authors claim that the basic affective qualities of shame are crucial to understanding shame psychodynamics in literary works. As examined through Lacan's theory of desire, the authors' explanation of the double-awareness of self and other, which the "gaze" produces, provides helpful background for my analysis of Pip's sense of shame in conjunction with his developing selfhood.

Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry*. 28.1 (2001): 1-22. Web. *JSTOR*. 5 Mar. 2012.

Brown studies the distinctions and relationships between things, objects, and subjects, ultimately arguing that a study of things is a study of their social context and, more significantly, of an overarching subject-object relationship. I use his theory as a guiding principle for my argument that Pip's relationship with things facilitates his social and conscious subject-formation.

Freedgood, Elaine. "Commodity Criticism and Victorian Thing Culture: The Case of Dickens." *Contemporary Dickens*. Ed. Eileen Gillooly and Deirdre David. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009. 152-68. Print.

Freedgood argues that the majority of Dickens criticism regarding the "things," or objects, in his novels has convinced us that such "thingfulness" adequately represents Victorian commodity culture. She suggests that we look "past" and not "at" things to uncover their social role and their relation to Victorian subjects (153).

---. *The Idea in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006. Print.

Taking her theoretical cues from Bill Brown's "Thing Theory," Freedgood removes novelistic things from their literary context, studies their social and historical properties, and examines how this reconfigures the novel's narrative of its subjects. Her reading of "negro-head tobacco" in *Great Expectations* assisted me in understanding the types of metonymic and metaphoric connections Pip makes to certain objects, and how Dickens's "thingfulness" at once subscribes to and attempts to solve the problem of readers' "recuperation of metonymic connections" (103).

Houston, Gail Turley. "'Pip' and 'Property': The Re(Production) of the Self in *Great Expectations*." *Studies in the Novel*. 24.1 (1992): 13-25. Web. *ProQuest*. 25 Apr. 2012.

Houston argues that as a departure from Dickens's other novels, production supersedes reproduction in *Great Expectations*, as both Pip and Estella, who lack strong maternal figures, are economic products of society. Her claim that the self is a thing, "caught in the cycle of consumption" (16), supports my argument about Pip's "thingfulness" as a child and Estella's perpetual existence as an object.

Johnson, Edgar. *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*. Rev. and Abr. ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1977. Print.

Johnson provides a comprehensive biography of Dickens's life as related to his literary success. His chapters on Dickens's early life are particularly helpful for understanding the author's childhood shame with which he struggled throughout his adult life and which manifested itself in many of his novels.

Marcus, Sharon. "The Female Accessory in *Great Expectations*." *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 167-90. Print.

Marcus innovatively argues that *Great Expectations* revolves around Pip's mimetic desire to occupy either the space of Miss Havisham or Estella in their exclusively "female dyad" (167). Of most interest to me is her study of desire through the lens of Victorian commodity culture, as she argues for Estella's erotic appeal to Miss Havisham as an "instrument, object, or appendage" (174), and Pip's efforts to make himself a desirable object to women.

Pattison, Stephen. "The ecology of shame." *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 69-92. Print.

Pattison breaks down important characteristics and issues pertaining to shame as a phenomenon into what he calls "conceptual ecologies" (69). I use his explanation of the "gaze" and the sense of personal exposure that shame causes in my analysis of Pip's shame in front of Estella.

Richards, Thomas. *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle, 1851-1914*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. Print.

Richards's study of Victorian commodity culture, especially through the lens of the Great Exhibition of 1851, emphasizes Victorians' social and psychological adjustment to the new ideology of consumerism. His claim that the Exhibition shaped "a new kind of being" for the Victorian consumer is useful for me in situating Pip's identity formation within a culture in the midst of redefining its relationship to "things" as commodities.

Van Ghent, Dorothy. "On *Great Expectations*." *The English Novel: Form and Function*. New York: Harper, 1953. 125-38. Print.

Taking her cues from V. S. Pritchett who argues, in *The Living Novel* (1947), that Dickens's characters are "solitaries...caught living in a world of their own" (qtd. 125), Van Ghent studies the strange stylistic forms Dickens employs to capture characters' isolated, solitary experiences. I take issue with her claim regarding the interchangeability of people and things in *Great Expectations*, as she focuses on things that represent a "daemonically motivated world" (129), rather than offering insight into a more socially productive relationship between people and things.

Woloch, Alex. *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003. Print.

Woloch studies characterization in the nineteenth-century novel, specifically how authors distribute characters within the limited space of the narrative (“character space”) and how such intersecting spaces affect both the plot as a whole and main characters (“character system”) (14). His chapter on *Great Expectations* has particular relevance to my argument as Woloch examines how a host of minor, exterior characters in the novel affect Pip’s interior consciousness and conception of “self” as the central character.