

# Liminal Identities in Charles Dicken's Great Expectations<sup>1</sup>

Asst. Lect. Abeer Ali Dinar

Department of English Language, College of Education,  
Sawa University, Almathana Iraq.

DOI:10.37648/ijrssh.v13i03.005

Received: 18 April 2023; Accepted: 24 June 2023; Published: 04 July 2023

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## ABSTRACT

The diversity of gender and the struggle of identity are considered as two of the main themes in literature equally in the classics and modernist, from the gender perspective; the male identity was reflected as supreme to the female as they were being projected in an inferior position. Yet in the post-modern literature different spaces have been emerging to create a plot where gender and identity weren't limited to the traditional space but either liminal in one stage or rather liberal from all limitation; both of these possibilities are to be considered in this study.

**Keywords:** *Great Expectations; Liminal Identities; Dickens*

## INTRODUCTION

*Great Expectation* (1861) by Charles Dickens which is considered his second literary attempt to write a text from the perspective of a first person narrator, he is best known for his themes and characterization. Although few critics might disagree on the way he creates his own characters, on one hand there are few memorable characters in his work on the other hand; many believe that his characters are only "one dimensional or even limited" to one specific role (E. M. Forster, 1985. P.73). In *great expectation* Dickens tried to decorate a further expectation of his characters by liberate and impression them at the same time.

This study will be textually limited to two main literary text which is *Great Expectation* (1861) by Charles Dickens. Theoretically, this study will be focused on the theory of liminalism, exploring the limitation and non-limitation of gender and identity.

This study will examine the main female and male characters in the literary text. It will also investigate the social and environmental elements associated with the general characterization and gender oppression in both of the literary text. Finally, this study will explore the method in which both male and female authors chose to establish and paint their own female and male fictional characters.

Although both of the literary texts are considered to be one of the classics and for such reason many literary studies were conducted. However, this study will provide the first outlook on both literary texts from liminalism theory. It's also the first study done which addresses the female/male authorial perspective on their female/male characters using gender and identity concepts. This paper will provide a fresh perspective on the settings, events and the characterization of romantic texts from post-modern ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> Dinar A.A., (July, 2023); Liminal Identities in Charles Dicken's Great Expectations, *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, Jul-Sep 2023, Vol 13, Issue 3, 45-53, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37648/ijrssh.v13i03.005>

## METHODOLOGY

*Great Expectation* (1861) by Charles Dickens and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë are two of the most extraordinary English literary text until this day they are regarded as the most fantastical literary creation. The qualitative approach is to be applied on studying these two literary texts with the employment of close reading to highlight the settings, themes and characters within the complex language and the plot.

This study will provide a detailed information on the theory used to analysis both texts which is Liminalism theory; moreover, stress the importance of gender and identity from liminalism theory perception. The focus however will be on the female/male characterization in both of the literary texts

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Liminalism Theory

Liminalism is a theory which was created by Arnold van Gennep and called “Liminality” in 1902m he didn’t just gave a meaning to this concept but along he explain the theory behind it. Liminalism means in the second edition of Oxford dictionary is “pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process.” Both liminal and liminality are derived from the Latin “limen,” which means “threshold”—that is, the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building”.

The Liminal theory view any indispensable type of change wither it is change in place, time, Social statue, change in age, grow of personality, mental shifting etc... Arnold believed that any process of changing and transforming from one statue to another go through certain stages ‘**separation**’ which the first level.

“Liminality is the in-between moments, the space between an inciting incident in a story and the protagonist’s resolution. It is often a period of discomfort, of waiting, and of transformation. Your characters’ old habits, beliefs, and even personal identity disintegrate. He or she has the chance to become someone completely new.” (Joe Bunting, p.1)

Arnold theory stand on the base that the entity must loss it place in which it would-hold. The next step is Liminality which means being limited to oneself, the final step which is the Union meaning rising to the next level and evolve to the next self. The main focus is the second stage “liminal phase in which the individual acquires the experience of becoming completely obscure and detached from reality” (Irma Ratiani, p. 1).

The liminal person can’t be found in one place but s/he holds the passion of the betweenness, vanish from both the old place which s/he was holding and the next place that s/he hasn’t reach yet “A liminal phase in its essence and function is a Transitional, dynamic, intermediate condition, placed between hardened and transformed structures” (p.1).

From birth a man falls under the classification of an individual from a specific state, culture or nationality. The state, as a rule, guarantees that its individuals are helped to remember such enrollment on a day by day basis. In this sense, national personality turns into the constrained having a place that infers strict confinements on individuals’ state of mind, their desires, and their dependability. This specific place only works as a kind of limitation for humans ‘putting them in one place’ and disregards the world.

“A liminal space is a blurry boundary zone between two established and clear spatial areas, and a liminal moment is a blurry boundary period between two segments of time. Most cultures have special rituals, customs, or markers to indicate the transitional nature of such liminal spaces or liminal times. Examples include boundary stones, rites of passage, high school graduations, births, deaths, marriages, carrying the bride over the threshold, etc.”(David Damrosch, 2004)

## Gender Identity

The concept of gender confliction is not something that considered as modern, from the romanticism which is the main movement in the eighteenth century had addressed the notion of identity and individuality in such ambivalence understanding. Thus such gender stereotypes which were founded to limit the personalities as Masculine or feminine were precisely the main idea behind this paper.

Feminine term which was used to describe the women in the Romantic era was only taken from the patriarchal framework especially when such term was held into an account the social limitation as well. The ideology that:

“Female role was labeled with the images of emotional weakness such as the fragile management of the situations; they are being projected as weak and inferior to men” (Claudia Carolina Prieto, 2015. P.11)

According to Laura E Berk in his book, *Child Development gender stereotype* is “widely held beliefs about characteristics deemed appropriate for males and females” (2003). She believes that gender roles are “the reflection of these stereotypes in everyday behavior” (Berk, 2003). Berns (1994) approves on the notion of gender role as “a constellation of qualities an individual understand to characterise males and females in his or her culture.” (Block, 1973).

The specific gender role term has been reused in different social and psychological studies by Walter Lippmann in his book *Public Opinion* in (1922). He mentioned that stereotypes are a “pictures in our head”. Lippmann claims that “people create representative of reality in their minds, and thus they respond to those representatives and not to objective reality” (Vu, 2008). And the reason behind that is “the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting to direct acquaintance. ... To traverse the world men must have maps of the world” (Lippmann, 1922). Some scholars have agreed with that statement like Stroebe & Insko (1989) considered stereotype as stable, simplified or prejudiced attitude toward particular social groups. While others, proposed “A stereotype is the perception that most members of a category share some attribute.” (Brown, 1995). According to Linda Brannon gender stereotype and gender role are extremely related.

“Consists of beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men or women. Gender roles are defined by behaviors, but gender stereotypes are beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity” (2004)

Gender stereotypes are very dominant; they impact on the conceptualizations of females and males and create social classifications for gender. These classes depict “how people think, and even when beliefs vary from reality, the beliefs can be very powerful forces in judgments of self and others” (Linda, 2004). Consequently, the history, construction, and purpose of stereotypes are significant topics in realisation the influence of gender in people’s way of life.

In a study conducted by Deborah Gorham which was titled *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* in (1982) where she examined the role of females during the victoria era hence she highlighted the notion of “Feminine” which was used to address the women. She stated that:

“Women of those times were seen as objects that complemented men; and on the contrary in the romantic era which appeared a certain hints of emancipation. The general quality of the terms which might be associated with the reinforcement of women’s subordination as they must behave appropriately and also adopt the behaviors fit for their sex” (P. 85)

The notion of masculine identity which recognizes the significance of the social an economic diminution in creating gender identity for both men/women, the difference of identities can be measured with the power location (Connell, 1995. P. 35). The Hegemonic masculinity which is considered the popular term in every society, this image of “what a man should be or how he should look like” can be seen idealized by social media and even literature.

“If we look at the older culture we see immense and focused efforts going into the raising of boys [...] rituals, teaching methods and processes which have only feeble equivalents in our culture. The Sioux hunters and the Zulu warriors’ even gods and heroes lived glorious lives and cared for and

protected their people and their world. Why should a modern man be any less of a man than his ancestors if he wasn't suited to the masculine list?" (Biddulph, 1994. P.12)

In many studies regarding the male and female identity, certain aspects which became popular statements others might define them as common sense understanding of what a man and woman should be.

### **Great Expectation (1861) By Charles Dickens**

Charles Dickens's *Great Expectation* (1861) which tells the story of a multi-dimensional subplot to develop the general events and the themes of the story. Dickens's geniuses in creating a complex plot made him as one of the best English Literature writers of all times hence, it's very challenging to summarize any story line writing by him especially *Great Expectation*.

The novel tells the story of an Orphan which is known as Pip, he lives at the beginning with his sister and Joe Gargery her husband in the city of Kent which is located in the Marshlands of England. Pip is the main character and the narrator of the story where he tells his story as an old man reflecting on his past. The story starts with young little Pip where he was running into the local convict in which it ended with him doing Pip a simple favor. Shortly afterwards the convict was held prisoner and deported far away to the new land Australia. Life was going very normal for Pip until one day when he was invited by Miss. Havisham. Her story was the talk of the town as she was left at the altar while she was young and because of that event she became mentally unstable and hateful; she even rejects to take off her wedding dress even since that day. Miss. Havisham lives in this local, old and big castle with her daughter Miss. Estella, she raised her daughter to be strong and cold hearted same as her also to be rejects and punish all men. When Pip meets the lovely and beautiful Miss. Estella he recognize for the first time his low social ranking as he lack the proper education and manners of the higher class. Pip keeps on visiting the castle until all of the sudden he was told not to come back to the castle again. After such harsh rejection Pip goes to London and started to create a new version of himself, when he was paid by anonymous sponsor to get him out from the small time and turning him into a gentleman. Pip believed that the strange kind faith was acutely Miss. Havisham since he believed that she intended to marry him to her daughter Miss. Estella. Pip finally knows the truth about the identity of his sponsor which was the Convict who helped young Pip who is name Abel Magwitch. With this new information Pip's dream of marrying the beautiful Estella was shattered. Estella ended up marrying another man but Pip ended up becoming a respected young man with great wealth and when he hears the news of Miss. Estella tragic divorce he goes again to marry her and they live happily ever after.

Katherine Lipp in (2015) published a paper titled "Brought Up By Hand: Adoption and Identity in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectation*" where she utilized the notion of self-help and identity in the classic Romantic literature. She mentioned that:

"The 19<sup>th</sup> Century British literature which is known for particular foudness of the self-help or Orphan narrative such as Dickens which offers the body of the work by offering numerous characters to become the archetype of the genre which is offers the rising of social station and self-evolvement" (P. 2)

In (2015) a thesis by Minna Pukari named "*The purpose of Dialect in Charles Dickens's Novel Great Expectation*" in which she addressed the linguistic aspect and the language in the story by exploring the language and the elements of the conversation within the text. Charles Dickens is known for his usage of dialect through a varying dialogue to limit his characters into certain roles, although he was heavily critics in misrepresenting the original English Language.

"Dickens uses dialects in order both to create individualize characters and to connect them into the larger group. These groups tend to be socially marked and using different dialects Dickens establishes the social justice" (P.21)

Furthermore, a study by Göksel Kaya in (2018) titled "*Ambivalence of identity as an Ectension of the colonial Discourse in Charles Dickens's Great Expectations and Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger*" in this study which presented a new outlook on the literary text from a colonial perspective by using post-colonial theory by addressing both the western and the eastern oppression and focusing on the terms of "national identity" and the "other"

“By giving voice to the oppressed who struggle for a better life so as to seize a place in the new established world order under the domineering of the social ruling and the overthrow of one’s humanity such example can be seen in the classic literary text as Australia represent the new land and the mimic life of some characters to overcome the social ladder” (p. 35)

Luo Jian Ting in (2016) published a study named “*The Analysis of Pip’s Characteristics in Great Expectation*” in which the character was viewed as both the sinner and the saint. Pip is the center of the story as the story begins with him being “alone, nervous, scared, frightened little boy” yet he is able to alter his reality and escape his imprisonment. Pip’s personality wasn’t the product of individualism but the accompanying efforts of different elements such as the natural environment which made him honest and thankful for his life and chances, but his environment was changed “profoundly changed” hence

“Pip’s personality has also changed from the young innocent boy to Luxurious of power controlling adult” (P. 503)

Dr. Chung Chin-Yi in (2015) published a study paper under the name of “*MORAL ENLIGHTENMENT IN GREAT EXPECTATION*” this study had focused on the moral and spiritual journey of Pip in which he discovers the reality of happiness and the worth of few things such as family and friendship that could never be bought.

“Pip’s Journey from the lowly blacksmith’s intern to a gentleman in which he acquire money but class snobbery and social pretension along with it” (P.45)

Great Expectation same as Dickens other novels experienced the same joyful tone of happiness and sorrow mixed with the frustrations of changing one’s self and rising in station.

### ***Wuthering Heights (1847) by Emily Brontë***

Wuthering Heights (1847) by the English author Emily Brontë, it’s her first and only novel which attracted a lot of attention and considered to be part of the English Romantic-classic literature. In a gothic style the story describes an Orphan who is named Heathcliff as he witness change within from innocence into harsh curl hated and revengeful man. At the end of the story he finally wakes up from the evil within and start to fix his life by preserving his love with the heroine Catherine Earnshaw. The most interesting element in the story which is the setting, the novel only sets in two old mansions. The first mansion which is located in Wuthering Heights is a beautiful place surrounding by nature and raw life; the other mansion which named the Thrushcross Grange is covered by green garden and high walls.

The story is being told in the late 1801 about a humble man named Lockwood, he is looking to rent a house which is called the Thrushcross Grange which is located in the far countryside of England. In there he meets the landlord which is a young and wealthy woman named Nelly Dean who is staying at the old Manor house of Wuthering Heights. Lockwood asks Nelly to tell him the story behind Wuthering Heights, and she starts to recall her childhood as a simple servant working in the old Mansion. The owner at that time named Mr. Earnshaw, as he goes to Liverpool one day and comes back with a young brown orphan named Heathcliff. The two children named Hindley and Miss. Catherine of Earnshaw didn’t like young Heathcliff however, Catherine and Heathcliff started to love each other and they grew inseparable. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw who preferred Heathcliff, the mansion and the Range are being inherited by Hindley and he started to treat Heathcliff like a common servant. After suffering for a long time all the characters dies from hate and revenge where no one is left happy or fulfilled.

In 2011 a thesis by Ala’a Abdulkareem named “A Psychoanalytical Reading of Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights”, in this study she examined the psychological insights in the text which are considered as “Strikingly Modern” (P.1) each of the characters carries a certain ambiguity and the power of wickedness yet, they also display a kind of defense mechanism to preserve their mental and psychological stability which was the focus of this study.

“Heathcliff’s suffering throughout the novels has created a conflict between his conscious and unconscious mind. This suffering is resulted in the adoption of defense mechanism as these are repressed, and in constant denial also projection. Also Catherine which display a psychological ambiguity as there is a contrast between what is saying and how she behaves” (P.5)

A thesis by Wraida Marai Imsallim (2014) titled “Symbolism and Imagery in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*” this study had investigated the different forms of images and symbolizes in the text which are being viewed from different angles.

“The surroundings or rather our perception of our surroundings reflects and effects directly upon the personal growth, therefore symbols and images in literature hold much more significance than mere physical presence as they hold within the story of character’s evolution throughout the novel” (P. 103)

Furthermore, a journal article titled “The Aesthetic Concept of the Beauty in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*” by Mohammad Hussein Oroskhan and Esmaeil Zohdi in (2015), this study was dedicated to inspect the application of Edmund Burke main concepts of beauty and aesthetic in literature. This study had drawn the attention to the slandered of beauty and identity at classic England and modern England where it mentioned that:

“In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff, Hindley, Hareton and Joseph are all types of the sublime while Isabella, Cathy and Frances are all considered beautiful. The fact that Edger Linton and Linton Heathcliff cannot be considered as sublime because of their soft and small features which was oppose with the male slandered beauty” (p. 110)

Finally, a thesis titled “The confluence of Gender and its Influence: Towards a new vision of Characterisation in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*” in (2015) by Claudia Carolina Prieto Prieto. In this study the elements of female and male identity were closely being recognized and centered, the female element in the story which was positioned in front of the male identity as supreme had being emerging in the late Romantic era literary texts.

“In *Wuthering Heights* where women are appreciated as agents and at the same time as submissive characters” (P. 4)

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

### Liminal Identity in *Great Expectation* by Charles Dickens

*Great Expectation* is a story of limitation where characters seen to be unable to escape their liminal space and even if they were able to escape it physically they were still imprisoned psychologically.

The protagonist of the story which is Pip starts the story with a conflicts of names by explaining to the readers that his family name was different from his own name and at the same time he has yet another name which is not Pip.

“My Fathers family name being Pirrip, and my Christian name Philip, my infant tongue could make both names nothing longer or more explicit than Pip. So, I called myself Pip and came to be called Pip” (p.2)

Pip’s parents had died when he was quite young hence; his identity had changed from the loved son to the young orphan living in the poor countryside with his cruel sister. The story introduced Pip physical identity as small and weak little boy

“Looking at the scenery, shaking with fear and the sniveling little thing, is Pip” (P.4).

The first identity of Pip as the scared little boy who finds it easier to go and ask for help from his friend Joe or the police rather than to lie or to steal

“Don’t cut my throat sir’, he pleased in terror” (p.2).

He was a child living in constant fear and sorry for himself and others even for bad people such as the escaped prisoner. His childhood represents the innocent and the pure part of his character. And as a child his gender identity was limited only to the ‘Good boy’ since he didn’t steal nor lie to anyone. The young good boy Pip was also afraid that if he had any secret, people from around the world will now his sins and punish him for it. When he was young at Christmas

lunch he had a secret for helping the escaped prisoner he was afraid from his sister's reaction that he used his fingers to twist Wopsle's big nose keeping him from telling the truth

“When sister writes that it is not I that is talked, I noticed to Wopple's that Roman nose, I'm very anxious to go up and twist it, do not twist the brotherhood of the Wopple never stop him [...] there are police waiting to catch me in the kitchen” (P.21)

Pip met his first love Estella he had recognized the limitation of his identity, he wasn't just the orphan boy he was also the poor boy. The social class in England is one of the key element highlighted in the story and it causes both identity and gender limitation. As a young man, Pip shouldn't be innocent, afraid and anxious he should be more like 'a man' to their slandered of 'what a real man should be'. At the same time he shouldn't love or care for Estella since they are not in the same liminal social class.

Pip's key struggle to the firm structure of his identity is the result of the vast contextual significance for the root rejection which he received. Thus, when Pip started his quest for higher and Nobel existence was for the purpose of altering his reality and identity to seem fit for Estella and her high social demands

“I went along deeply revolving that I was a common laboring boy [...] that I was much more ignorant that I had considered myself last night and generally that I was in a low lived bad way” (P. 100)

Such rejection had empowered Pip to reject his former self and he started his mission in launching an unrealistic vision of a new identity and new man only to disassociate his personality and his roots further away.

After facing such differences it became Pip's mission to escape his original liminal space and to create a new one identity for him. To his idea getting into anew higher social class and becoming famous will help him to endure the harsh set of his own reality. When Pip received the unexpected gift which helped him to move far away from his small countryside home to the vast civilized London where he attended school and studied at the best universities and also enquired new knowledge and culture. In London Pip was able to create a new identity for him, completely different from his former self but Dickens as mentioned is the master of limitation. In London he form a new inner and outer identity for him by imitating the upper class he became a mimetic individual; such example when Pip's best friend Joe goes to visit him in London Pips tries to keep his new identity by changing the way to talk to Joe as the new him not the old one

“Whenever he subsided into affection, he called me Pip, and whenever he relapsed into politeness he called me Sir” (P.204)

Joe also confused by the new Pip that he finds it hard to address him as a friend or as new person. But Joe understands Pips causes for change and he recognized that the young little boy he once love is not the same

“You and me is not two figures to be together in London; [...] I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge the kitchen or off th' meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress with my hammer in my hand or even in my Pip” (p. 205)

The method in which Joe expressed himself to his best friend Pip displays the difference between the two different worlds and personalities. Joe understands his realities and for that he accept it yet Pip rejects who he is and desire to change it.

Pip tries to mimic the same life style of Miss. Havisham and Estella as they represent the level in which he desires to be; at the same time he rejects Joe and his sister as they represent the person that he tries to forget or denies. His journey for the new self-started when he was invited to Miss. Havisham's house, this invitation wasn't just limited to the location but also for new identity hence, Pip starts his inner and physical transformation as he lost the reality of his social and individual identity. The house affected him greatly as he goes into the new world and being faced with new life possibly.

“I fully believe it, so there can be no competition or perplexity between you and me. And as to the condition on which you hold your advancement in life - namely that you are not to inquire or discuss to whom you own it” (P.323)

Pip knows that his choice of leaving everything behind and starting fresh is considered risky, but he also gives an example of trying to destroy one's limitations and creating new ones

“We change again, and yet again, and it was now too late and too far to go back, and the world lay spread before me” (P.146)

When Pip discovered the truth behind the sender of the money his new identity is being shattered along with it. The dream of climbing the social ladder which he had built for himself has collapsed with his new founded self. From the name of the story the matter of escaping one's identity is just a simple expectation not reality. Pip's search for individuality and selfhood was ended since he rejects to learn that the being a gentleman is an internal change rather than the external imagery of self thus, he mentioned how things have changed and how they are different now

“Finally, I remember that when I got into my little bedroom, I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but once was not now” (P.96)

Furthermore, the main female character which is Miss. Havisham is considered yet another example for Dickens Liminal characters, after getting rejected in her wedding day she remained liminal in her own traumatic space

“The marriage day was fixed, the wedding dresses were bought, the wedding tour was planned out, and the wedding guests were invited. The day came, but not the bridegroom. He wrote her a letter ... which she received I struck in when she was dressing for her marriage” (P.321)

After getting rejected in the way Miss. Havisham keeps wearing her wedding dress and refuses to take it off. People thought that she was mad but according to Dickens it's just another self-imprisonment for liminal individuality.

Both Pip and Miss. Havisham are looking for their true identity and existence in the progression of their personal problems to settle into that one specific identity which goes under the issues of social class and social perception. The story expressed the emotional struggle and the psychological oppression for desiring and achieving a better life. To create and to challenge the established limited world in order to establish a new one by this transforming who we once were to what we ought to be.

## CONCLUSION

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectation* displays different notions of liminal identity yet at the same time different levels of limitation. In *Great Expectation* the characters are trapped in their liminal identity and existence as they reject and are unable to escape their fate hence characters such as Pip and Miss. Havisham remain to struggle as they suffer from Truman and rejection of the mimetic self on their path to achieve the next liminal space which is individualism liminality.

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