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Reviewed work(s):
Source: *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 73-98
Published by: Indiana University Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3829059
Accessed: 28/10/2011 05:38

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Bodies of Capital: *Great Expectations* and the Climacteric Economy

SUSAN WALSH

> "Better not try to brew beer there now, or it would turn out sour, boy; don't you think so?"
>
> "It looks like it, miss."
>
> "Not that anybody means to try," she added, "for that's all done with, and the place will stand as idle as it is, till it falls. As to strong beer, there's enough of it in the cellars already, to drown the Manor House."
>
> —Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (86)

After his first meeting with the extravagantly grotesque Miss Havisham, eight-year-old Philip Pirrip roams about the silent wreck of a once-bustling family brewery and soon finds himself within a veritable "wilderness of empty casks." To his young eyes and nostrils, the rotting barrels stacked in the by-yards have a "certain sour remembrance of better days lingering about them; but it was too sour to be accepted as a sample of the beer that was gone." "In this respect," he notes, "I remember those recluses as being like most others" (93). Who those recluses are most palpably like, as Pip's word choice suggests, is the notorious recluse he has left just minutes before, the "immensely rich and grim lady" of Satis House (81). For like the "stubborn and coquettish" dwelling of Miss Emily Grierson, yet another famous "fallen monument," Satis House serves as the architectural correlative of its female inhabitant, a public digest of a thwarted woman's private mental and bodily decay. And like Miss Havisham in her bridal shroud, the brewery's barren casks, their fermentative essence dried up long ago, convey discordant impressions of utility and disuse, productiveness and sterility, residual youth and moribund old age. So unsettling are these opposed qualities that the boy who confronts them perceives both house and environs as extremely hostile environments for such a frightened little seedling ("pip") as himself.

Taken together, Miss Havisham and her derelict brewery present stunning images of insolvency. Senescent, irascible, decaying like the barrels with their "sour remembrance of better days," Miss Havisham is characterized by how her garden grows: rankly. Populated

by melons and cucumbers misshapen into "pieces of old hats and boots" and an occasional "battered saucepan," her plot of ground produces nothing but sad simulacra of genuine articles, silent emblems of the psychologically "battered" Estella and Pip (118). As Herbert Pocket recounts her history, years ago Miss Havisham had been bilked, jilted, and humiliated by a false fiancé; in response, she had immolated her woman's body and the brewery's manufacturing economy in one furious sweep. In so doing, she effectually repudiated the role of women's economic and bodily capital within the family enterprise system, a business model still central to Victorian culture in general, and crucial in particular to this novel's conservationalist nostalgia. When Pip casts Miss Havisham in the role of fairy godmother and himself as the "dummling" youngest son, he unwittingly invokes more than the popular *Märchen* story of up-from-below success. He draws upon an established nineteenth-century pattern of advancement in which young men's economic agency is partially underwritten by female relatives expected to invest annuities, legacies, and independent funds in manufacturing and trade.

Miss Havisham, I want to argue, is an important index to the local economics beneath the more ahistorical fairy tale motifs that structure *Great Expectations*; she is one of the means by which Dickens demarcates the commercial parameters within which Victorian men operated. Her history as a swindled investor enacts the rash speculation and reckless overtrading which, to some observers, had led to the stock frauds, bankruptcies, and bank crashes of the middle decades. Her history as an unmarried heiress conjures up mid-century debates about women's changing roles and financial commitments. For just when the rise of larger corporations seemed to augur the breakdown of traditional forms of commercial organization and, in the wake of the Limited Liability Act of 1855, to encourage dangerously incautious business practices, more middle-class women began to argue their right to enter the work force. Additionally, reformers began to advocate that the married woman be granted the power to own and dispose of property as a "*feme sole*." Miss Havisham, as a moderately wealthy "*feme sole*," already enjoys these prerogatives. Before the novel begins, she has acted independently of male advice, squandered her money upon an imposter and, at least initially, fallen delinquent in her duty to offer monetary support to real or surrogate male relatives. From a conservative

point of view, her errors as a single woman would seem to reflect badly upon measures aimed at giving all women greater freedom to modify or reject their customary economic roles.

However meticulously plotted in the 1820s, Dickens's "Copperfield of the inner man" offers a ruminative response to the shifting socio-economic grounds of the 1840s and 1850s (Meisel 278). In the essay that follows, I want to explore the dual ways in which Miss Havisham becomes part of this response. At a metaphoric level, her aging female body figures a dysfunctional market economy; at a literal level, her sterile wealth indicates how much Victorian capitalism depended upon women's traditional habits of investment, habits that appeared subject to change. Miss Havisham's status as an economic "figure"—both as symbol and participant—not only lies at the heart of her story, but also throws into high relief otherwise shaded features of the commercial landscape Pip must traverse, as new economic Everyman, on the treacherous road toward great expectations.

I

The homologous relationship between the social body and the human body has a long history, from Plato's *Republic* to Hobbes' *Leviathan* to Herbert Spencer's writings on political economy. However, as Catherine Gallagher has argued, in nineteenth-century England not everyone agreed about how the homology was to be configured or about what it ultimately revealed. Thomas Malthus, for example, rejected the healthy body-healthy society relation posited by the utopianists William Godwin and the Marquis de Condorcet (and by David Hume and Adam Smith), radically reconceiving "the social and economic significance of the vigorous body" (Gallagher, "The Body" 83). For Malthus, the body's own reproductive power "will eventually destroy the very prosperity that made it fecund, replacing health and innocence with misery and vice" (84). The thriving body no less than the starving body, therefore, could both signal and actively contribute to economic decline. Whether one imagined the body (as did Malthus) as providing the true basis of the labor theory of value, or whether one examined its vitality (as did Henry Mayhew) through the fascinating yet repulsive costermonger, whose working-class physicality and crass circulation of goods served to make visible the ugly dynamics of production and

exchange, writers who completely problematized the body thereby helped to confirm its centrality within economic discourse.

As Gallagher's analysis suggests, contradictory aspects of the body could be blamed for or invoked to illustrate the same social evil. While Malthus's view of the self-destructive body seriously complicated the healthy body-healthy society link assumed by earlier economists, it did not entirely displace it. Mid-century proponents of laissez-faire drew upon Hume and Smith's more traditional analogy in characterizing financial panics as free market "convulsions" in which circulation has been hampered by "constriction" or "obstruction." Writing *Great Expectations* against the backdrop of mid-century commercial crises, Dickens appears to modify this homology so that the sick human body becomes aged and female. The reason isn't far to seek. Women's bodies, as advertisements, medical handbooks, and health manuals made clear, were the human bodies most agitated by cyclical "crises." W. Tyler Smith, for instance, argued that although older men and women both suffer from "climacteric disease," periodicity is nevertheless "more indelibly marked upon the female than upon the male constitution." In fact, the "climacteric" (menopausal) woman faced greater hazards as she struggled towards "the death of the reproductive faculty" than did women who contended with menarche or pregnancy (601).[1] The older female body, therefore, became available as a potent analogue for economic as well as reproductive "bankruptcy," the complete foreclosure of the machinery of material production. Dickens draws from the representational reservoirs of medicine and economics when the half-"waxwork," half-exhumed "skeleton" of Miss Havisham makes her gruesome debut (87).

More specifically, Dickens introduces his infamous recluse into a cultural context within which it made sense to link the afflicted economic body with the disordered female body. Artists for *Punch,* for example, waggishly depicted the financial crises of 1847 and 1857 as an ailing Old Lady of Threadneedle Street, her prominent, balloon-shaped bottom half sketched as a giant money bag partly covered by an apron of bank bills. In one 1847 cartoon (fig. 1), a groaning Old Lady grasps a bedpost while Prime Minister Peel, his face flinty with determination, reins in her midriff in a preposterous gesture of husbandly help. For an actual older woman, this maneuver would constitute a painful and misguided attempt to recreate the supple elasticity of youth. In the

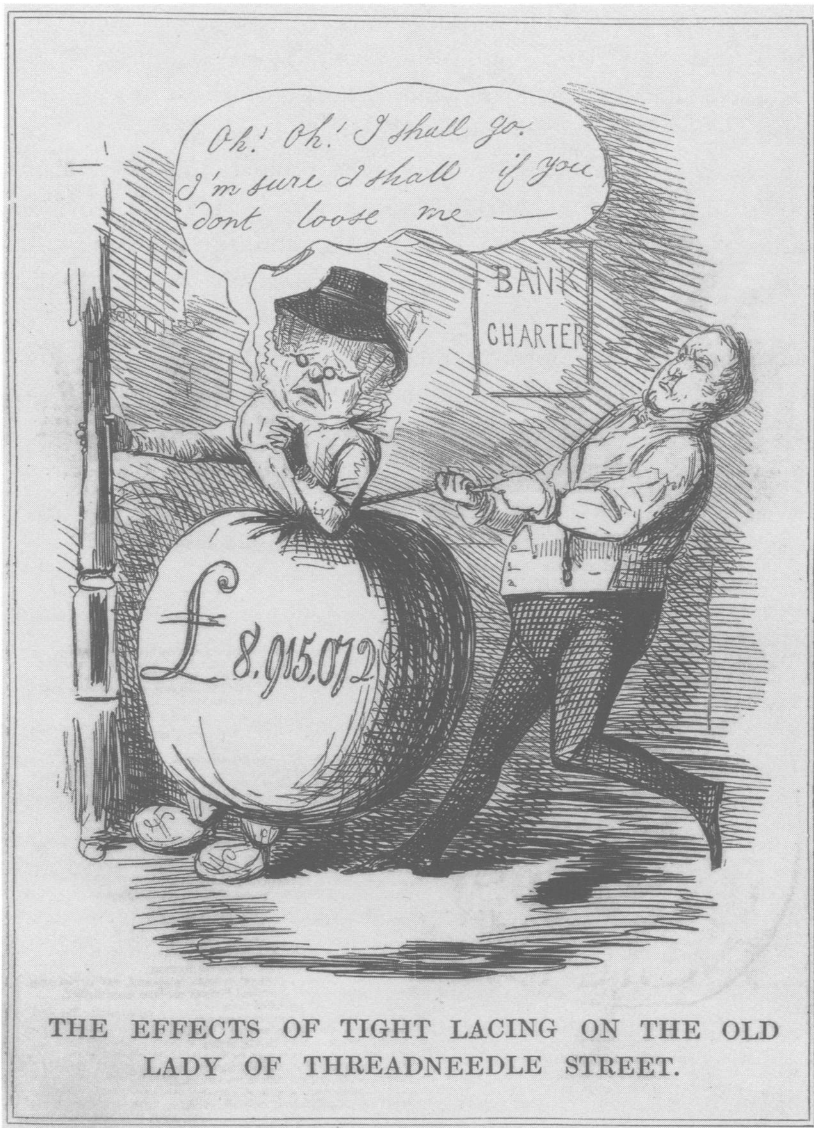

Figure 1. "The Effects of Tight Lacing on the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street." *Punch* 13 (July-Dec. 1847) : 115.

Bank of England's case, the tight-lacing pantomimes the credit restrictions imposed by the Bank Charter Act of 1844, which drew shut the purse strings of the Issue Department's precious metal reserves whenever bullion could not cover all the notes it ostensibly backed. A zealous supporter of the Charter Act, Peel was utterly convinced that it would, in Colonel Torrens's words, finally prevent "the recurrence of

those commercial revulsions—those cycles of commercial excitement and depression, which...result from the alternate expansion and contraction of an ill-regulated circulation."[2] Yet far from insuring tranquility, in October of 1847 the Charter Act incited panic when the Bank limited its extension of credit and in some instances suspended it altogether. Accordingly, *Punch*'s 1847 cartoon travesties the Act by illustrating its effects upon the body of Mrs. Threadneedle, whose vascular tract stands in for the Bank's own circulatory system. For as any medical student or political economist could have predicted, and as the Old Lady's billowing extremities attest, vital currents blocked in one direction will either find egress somewhere else or burst their vessels. As suggested by her pinched waist and her distended feet, the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street appears to have arrived at this apoplectic juncture. "Oh! Oh!," she moans, "I shall go. I'm sure I shall go if you don't loose me—." *Punch*'s Threadneedle Street cartoon thus seems based on a familiar blood-currency analogy.

Herbert Spencer, for instance, argued that the social body is constituted like the human body. Coin and all representative currency (notes, cheques, bills of exchange) provide the economy's nutrition, mimicking the blood's nourishing action. Any artificial meddling with the circulation of gold, silver, or paper "corpuscles" would, by this logic, convert the "quick, regular pulsation" of the major mercantile centers into arhythmic spasms leading to seizure, paralysis, or worse ("The Social Organism" 294, 296). For Spencer, the "currency theorists" behind the 1844 Charter Act had falsely pictured the nation's healthy banking arteries as leaky veins from which "the body-politic would bleed to death but for a State-styptic" ("State-Tamperings" 25).

In nineteenth-century parlance, however, the "obstruction," "constriction," or "depression" of an "ill-regulated circulation" in women meant more than digestive or circulatory arrest: these terms were code words for stopped menses, whether the result of delayed menarche, pregnancy, menopause, or a general ovario-uterine "derangement." Countless remedies offered to "purify," "restore," and "regulate" malfunctioning menstrual systems. Frampton's Pills of Health, advertised in the London *Times*, promised to relieve females of "all obstructions," in addition to "the distressing headaches so very prevalent with the sex, depression of spirits, dullness of sight, nervous affections, blotches, pimples, and sallowness of the skin"; other nostrums guaranteed the

same. What exercised physicians most was the necessity of alleviating "constriction"—not so much the problem of menstruation itself but its suppression (Shuttleworth 64). Doctors and quack advertisers agreed: even under relatively normal conditions, a woman's uterus could become "a disturbing radiator" in her reproductive "economy" (Meigs 49), behaving like a badly calibrated engine that periodically throws its entire assembly into "violent commotion" (Colombat 19).

Some medical writers not only assumed an implicit analogy between the economic and the female body; they established a direct cause-and-effect relationship as well. For W. Tyler Smith, the hyperaesthesia typical of women in "catamenial decline" was exacerbated in ways directly traceable to the contemporary economic scene. Beset not just by "the excessive stimulus of education" and "numerous forms of social excitement," women were placed under additional strain by "the rapid transaction of business" characteristic of modern commerce. Such influences, Smith argued, have raised climacteric hyperaesthesia to a pitch "which has never been hitherto observed" (602). The idea that a stressful economy adversely affects women's bodily economies seems to have led *Punch* artists to an even more specific analogy: the change-of-life woman is like an economy of men in acute financial distress. In 1857, a domestic crisis had been touched off by skyrocketing raw material prices, system-wide industrial depression, depleted bullion reserves, and a banking crash in America that sent shudders through Great Britain's monetary networks. Two related spoofs set the stage for an updated Old Lady of Threadneedle Street cartoon. The first, "MRS. THREADNEEDLE'S COMPLAINT," springs from a long line of plaintive broadsheet songs performed by undone women, in this instance England's "old...soldier," who delivers the following lament:

> I AM a poor old lady, and my health is rather failing me,
> The Doctors are to meet and try to find out what is ailing me,
> And, please the pigs, I hope and trust they'll manage to discover it,
> And though my time of life is such, perhaps I shall get over it.
>
> 'Tis a return of that complaint at intervals that teases me,
> Every ten years or thereabouts that regularly seizes me;
> A sort of a contraction, with a tightness and a dizziness,
> That won't allow a body for to go about her business.

> It comes on with a pressure, and a clutching and a clawing,
> Then there's a running at the chest, a pulling, and a drawing,
> And then there is an emptiness, and sort of feel of sinking,
> With a kind of nervous shaking, and a fainting and a shrinking.
>
> And then I've noises in my ears; a breaking and a crashing,
> A blowing up and bursting, and a falling, and a smashing,
> Which worries me to that degree which is beyond expressing,
> None knows but they that feels how them there noises is distressing....
>
> I am too old a soldier to cajole, or coax, or wheedle,
> And still enjoy so good a sight that I can thread my needle,
> My dwelling is Threadneedle Street, and England is my nation,
> And Parliament and PALMERSTON I look to for salvation.
> (28 Nov.: 220).

Ten pages later the second entry appears, this time burlesquing a familiar mid-century advertisement for "Du Barry's Delicious Health Restoring Revalenta Arabica Food."

> GREAT RELIEF OF SUFFERING
> [Advertisement]
> THREE WEEKS OF INDESCRIBABLE AGONY, heartbreaking, distress, feelings of sinking, alarm, and terror, oppression and tightness of the chest, shaking and convulsions, horrible nightmares, frightful visions, gloomy forebodings, increasing incapacity for any kind of business, and a threatening break-up of the whole system.—MARIA JOLLY MOTHERBANK, Threadneedle Street, London, has been completely cured of the above symptoms by the delicious PAPYRUS ANGLICANA FOOD, administered by PALMERSTON AND CO. This invaluable article of diet acts so benefically on the constitution as to arrest the most dangerous disorder, to restore its pristine soundness, and renew a healthy circulation, recourse being required to NO BILLS, or ANY OTHER MEDICINE. The Use of Gold in a great measure superseded by this remedy, which acts as a universal solvent. Prepared and issued at the Bank of England, by authority of PALMERSTON AND CO., Downing Street, and to be obtained at all respectable Establishments in Town and Country. (5 Dec.: 230)

As Victorian doctors describe her, the woman undergoing the climacteric often exhibits "the over-anxious look, the brimful eye, the terror-struck expression, as if fearing to see some frightful objects" (Tilt, *Change* 36). She vibrates during attacks of the fidgets; she despairs under oppressive feelings of "sinking" (20, 93). She faints, she droops, she suffers insomniac broodings.[3] Mrs. Threadneedle and Maria

Motherbank, through their abject dread, their contractions, their feelings of sinking, fainting, and trembling enervation, likewise demonstrate those "oscillations of vital power" mischievous to money markets and female bodies alike (11). For during the climacteric "crisis," women's already precariously balanced uterine "machine" displays an even greater hair-trigger sensitivity. The slightest disturbance (bad news, wet feet, a scrofulous French novel, dancing in hot rooms) might propel a mild-mannered woman into peevishness, irrationality, convulsions, the milder forms of moral insanity, or even death. By the same token, rumors whispered about a bank or discount house's alleged reverses could wrack the financial system, inducing hysteria, setting off bankruptcies, and traumatizing the entire business community. A mismanaged Bank of England could cripple the private sector by stockpiling masses of sterile bullion in its own coffers, thus starving commerce of much-needed capital. A woman experiencing the climacteric, in turn, could suffer from her own sort of errant or checked circulation, since "part of the blood is still directed every month toward the womb, which is thereby congested" (75).

In short, in matters economical, emotional, and physical Mrs. Threadneedle seems the model of a modern business spectacle: the distraught merchant, the wild-eyed speculator, the failed manufacturer, the ruined financier. Her older woman's recurrent "complaint" signifies, among other things, the menstrual irregularity typical of the "dodging time," the months or years that precede complete cessation. Since the "dodging time" inevitably leads to shutdown, Mrs. Threadneedle encodes both the reassuring possibility of stability (an end to fluctuation and change) *and* the frightening spectre of total economic collapse (an end to production). Fortunately in the 1847 and 1857 credit constrictions, disaster was at least temporarily averted when the Parliaments of Russell and Palmerston mercifully cut the Old Lady's stays.

Considering the challenge that economic "convulsions" posed to bourgeois doctrines of success predicated upon diligence, self-help, and shrewd business acumen, the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street cartoons are more than humorous; they are ideologically useful. By representing women's economies as the circulatory systems periodically undermined by paroxysm, they work to alleviate apprehensions about corporate and individual bankruptcy, about anarchic market forces beyond anyone's power to predict or command. The problem is

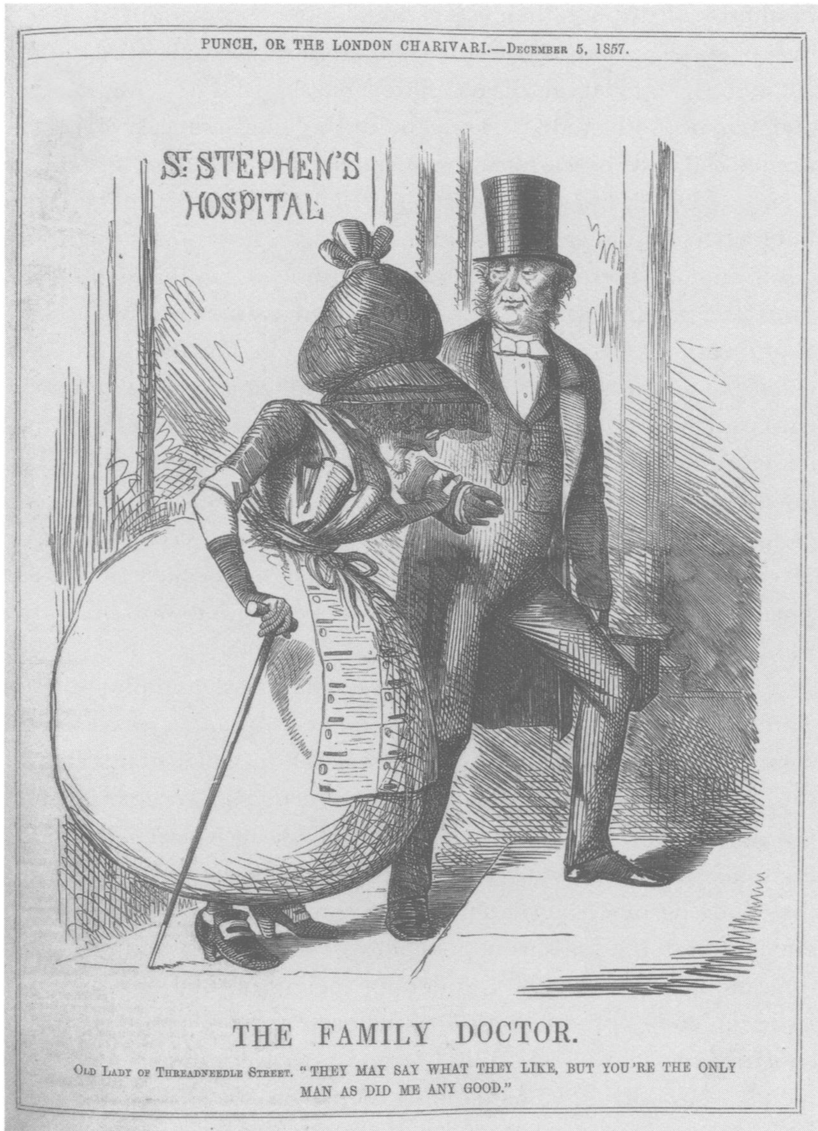

Figure 2. "The Family Doctor." *Punch* 33 (5 Dec. 1857) : 231.

displaced, transported away from men and resituated within women's bodies. In the 1857 cartoon (fig. 2), one look at Palmerston's supremely benevolent face as he escorts the Old Lady into St. Stephen's Hospital (the House of Commons) confirms how thoroughly all the trouble has been located in the tottering figure beside him. What helps to make the *Punch* parodies and cartoons funny rather than alarming is their

use of medical language itself, because it offers the promise of mastery through diagnosis and cure (Palmerston the Good Physician). Medical paradigms about sickness and health assume that human bodies are intelligible, if not always treatable; nineteenth-century medical texts give the impression that the borders of ignorance ever shrink before the physician's exploratory forays. By using medical terminology to analyze economic phenomena, critics could make the economy subject to the representational codes of medicine and, therefore, appear at least potentially subject to analogous powers of control.

But even the most confident physician recognized that it was not possible, nor even desirable, to forestall or correct every malady; doctors warned against women's attempts to stave off natural life-stages like the climacteric, just as laissez-faire economists and politicians argued against meddling with the economy. Given the metaphorical correspondences between material production and biological reproduction, it is not surprising that political disputes about how or whether to regulate industrial capitalism occurred side by side with medical discussions about how best to regulate human bodies, especially if those bodies were female. For while women were celebrated for their lovely exteriors, their spiritual refinement, their reproductive capacity and maternal instincts, these same creatures were also portrayed as tyrannized by their generative organs, cruelly determined by "aberrations of the formative power" underlying menstruation, gestation, birth, lactation, and menopause (Smith 608). So too the Victorian economy: during boom intervals it was applauded for producing wealth, but the commercial "formative power" that ought to fructify industry, banking, and trade could turn "aberrant" and destructive during crisis. Some Parlimentarians and general observers theorized that although England "ran through [a] vicious cycle every eight or ten years," convulsions were not necessary but rather "gratuitous" and preventable (*Hansard's* 148 [7 Dec. 1857]: 286, 287); others suggested that panics were unavoidable given "the state of trade of this country" ([11 Dec. 1857]: 646). The idea that Britain's "reckless system of banking" brought about, "as surely as the years come round, periodical crises of danger to the honest merchant, and misery and ruin to thousands," may have seemed simultaneously reassuring and alarming (London *Times* [1 Dec. 1857]: 10). Certainly, the most heated arguments about the economy revolved around the question of whether the stricken pa-

tient should be subjected to legislative cure, or left to nature's own invisible powers of recuperation.

Arguably, *Punch*'s Threadneedle spoofs may be mocking their own premise for comic effect, downplaying the severity of commercial panics by implying how ridiculous a convulsed economy begins to seem when it is imaged as an older woman's constricted body. And yet much of the humor appears to derive from the appropriateness of making precisely this connection. Like Dickens's depiction of Miss Havisham as agent and embodiment of a faltering economy, *Punch*'s homology is a compelling means through which to express anxiety about the future of England's "climacteric" marketplace.

II

Where *Punch*'s Mrs. Threadneedle points to the increasing agedness of England's own "Motherbank," a short essay published in Dickens's *All the Year Round* (1859) focuses upon the individual investors whose monies constitute the Bank itself. Entitled "Great Meeting of Creditors," this sketch presents an array of typical fundholders which concludes in an arresting portrait of the British investor as a decrepit yet dangerous old woman. In offering her as an actor within, as well as a symbol of, the capitalist system, the *AYR* essay may fittingly serve as both postscript to the Threadneedle Street parodies and prelude to the economic matrix of *Great Expectations.* Most dramatically, the sketch demonstrates the sheer numbers of women involved in sustaining the economy; on "creditor's day" at the Bank of England, they seem to emerge from every socio-economic nook and cranny.

However, "Great Meeting of Creditors" does not paint a reassuring picture of the hidden female investor. The *AYR* "reporter" begins by describing the vivid, cross-class panoply of shareholders and annuitants who underwrite the National Debt, "that numerical abstraction, that perilous jungle for currency doctors" (153). Like lepers to the healing founts of quarterly profits, he tells us, "the lame, the blind, the palsied, the jaundiced" flock to the Bank of England on dividend day. Creditor types include the parsimonious father, the open-handed patriarch, the demure daughter scouting for a husband, the fugitive skulking about under an alias. In pursuit of their mutual purpose, they rub elbows with the circus clown, the entrepreneurial crossing sweep,

the popular low comedian, "thin, limp, damp-smelling women" and, most remarkably, a certain "gay-looking lady" who has wisely sunk her disreputable gains into the reputable funds (154). Scores of women arrive to secure their profits; fully one-third of the descriptions involves widows, matrons, spinsters, young women, and girls. Indeed, the essay's culminating and most elaborate portrait of the female creditor is that of an ancient bundle of unwashed rags "borne in like a nodding Guy Fawkes in November...on an old, brown, creaking Windsor chair" (155). Her stare is vacant and glazed; her chin lies submerged in her chest. She has been transported to the Bank because rules stipulate that fundholders apply for their dividends in person. Her incapacity, however, requires special dispensation from a head clerk, with whose assistance she makes "the sacred sign which stands for new life in either state of existence." And yet it was not always so:

> When first she became a creditor of the state, she was young, and, perhaps, sightly.... Now, her helpless withered arm is lifted up, and clumsily made to form a thick inky cross, with a juicy full-charged quill, as it might have been unresistingly lifted up and made to stab a Rotunda beadle. When her money is, at last, procured, it turns out to be some thirty shillings, which are passed before her listless eyes to give her comfort, and then placed in her pocket under her cold, bloodless, listless touch. (155-56)

Cadaverous and awful, this old woman personifies the female investor's potential for committing violence against the economy and its male managers. Her "sacred sign" of the splotchy cross signifies death as well as life; her aspect recalls crazy effigies of England's most famous incendiary. Yet this female shareholder, like all female shareholders, is willingly accommodated by the Bank even though she may damage, intentionally or not, the system it is her proper function to support. Like Miss Havisham, she is a grotesque old woman who wields phallic economic power—the "juicy full-charged quill"—in a manner almost as horribly powerful as it is pathetically impotent.

For some readers, Miss Havisham and the aged "Guy Fawkes" of "Great Meeting of Creditors" might well have suggested worrisome things about women's financial powers, especially within the context of general anxiety about the health, tractability, and essential fairness of a burgeoning industrial marketplace. In *Great Expectations*, women provide at least two sorts of relief. They act as angels in the house who

conserve old-style domestic and economic arrangements, or alternatively, they become places where economic trouble can be displaced and thereby symbolically disposed of. Miss Havisham offers the second kind of solution, and she is eventually rehabilitated enough also to offer the first. Before we can see how she both represents and finally helps to compensate for a pitiless economy, however, we need to understand how Dickens proves the economic problems of his day upon the pulses of his male characters.

By mid-century it had become increasingly evident, amidst calamitous tales of broken banks and broken men, that although the ethos of self-determining individualism was borne out in the prosperity of some, it was nothing but a tantalizing illusion in the careers of others. If laborers were "slaves to necessity," as Samuel Martin claimed in 1773, it required little stretch of the imagination to recognize that masters too could be the bondsmen of market forces beyond their control (qtd. in Gallagher *Industrial Reformation* 7). As Sally Shuttleworth has pointed out, while the proponents of laissez-faire commerce extolled economic man as a "rational, independent actor" with Smilesian talents for upward mobility, critics of industrial capitalism characterized him as an exploited drudge, a shackled automaton or an insentient cog (54). In *Great Expectations* these competing definitions become hallucinogenically real. In his delirium following Magwitch's death, Pip dreams that he has become soldered into an implacable industrial machine, fixed like "a steel beam of a vast engine, clashing and whirling over a gulf"; at the same time, he envisions himself standing outside the nightmare apparatus pleading "in my own person to have the engine stopped, and my part in it hammered off" (471-72). But he can no more entirely disengage himself from the mechanics of wage-earning and production than he can live out the fairy-tale plot of benevolent godmothers, beautiful princesses, and kingdoms distributed to worthy youngest sons.

For as Dickens well knew, in the 1850s economic conditions had been particularly unforgiving for young men like the chastened Pip and the irrepressible Herbert Pocket "looking about" them for the main chance (207). By the time of *Great Expectations*, biographers report, Dickens had begun to view the undistinguished careers of his sons with exasperation and dismay. Seriously concerned about their inaptitude, and fearful that they had inherited their mother's laziness

and their paternal grandfather's genius for debt, he steered his sons away from dim domestic prospects and towards foreign venues like Hong Kong and Australia (Kaplan 420-23). W. J. Lohman, Jr. has observed that while there is much of Dickens in Pip, Herbert Pocket embodies Charley Dickens and his hapless comrades (62). Dickens's own ineffectual sons also haunt the opening paragraphs of *Great Expectations* where, amidst echoes of Wordsworth and Blake, they seem to make cameo appearances as Pip's small deceased brothers. Close by the graves of Philip and Georgiana Pirrip, the father and mother Pip knows only from the suggestive qualities of their headstones, lie five stone lozenges "sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine—who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle." To the little lozenges Pip owes his "religiously entertained" belief that his brothers "had all been born on their backs with their hands in their trousers-pockets, and had never taken them out in this state of existence" (35). Unlike the interrogated maid of "We Are Seven," Pip feels no deep, unsevered connection between himself and his churchyard siblings. Instead, as the surviving eighth member of a defunct family of seven, he knows their deadness at the same instant he recognizes his own separate identity as a "small bundle of shivers...beginning to cry" (36). Sadly, the only family likeness he can detect is a shared superfluity, the same inherent worthlessness attributed to his small, shivering person by every adult around him except Joe.

In Pip's imagination, therefore, his brothers assume the posture of indolent little slackers, their premature deaths apparently the natural result of a congenital inability to get on in life. A far cry from Wordsworth's "Child of Joy" who leads to "soothing thoughts that spring / Out of human suffering," Pip's dead siblings offer only infant intimations of financial mortality. With hands in empty pockets, they seem compliant casualties of that universal economic struggle where mastery, as Carlyle proclaimed in *The French Revolution*, is conferred by the "least blessed fact" upon which "necessitous mortals have ever based themselves...: That *I* can devour *Thee*" (qtd. in Gilbert 92). *Great Expectations*, as Elliot Gilbert has remarked, is so rife with literal and metaphoric devouring that here, as in many Dickens novels, the ravenous boast from *The French Revolution* modulates into an even more distressing rule of public and private consumption: "Try as I will, I cannot *keep* from devouring thee" (98).

Magwitch invokes this ferocious hunger in the lurking young man, the fictitious convict whose fondness for boys' hearts and livers terrifies the child in little need of persuasion. Pip's already strong suspicions about adult voracity are quickly confirmed by Uncle Pumblechook's Christmas discourse on the similarity between a plump, greedy boy and a plump, savory "squeaker." From Magwitch's wolfish appetite ("what fat cheeks you ha' got") to Pumblechook's gluttonous leers, the taint of male-male carnivorous consumption permeates the book. It haunts the marshes, Little Britain, and Newgate, follows Orlick and Compeyson like an infectious cloud, and even corrupts the air when Pip boxes against the plucky "pale young gentleman." His impromptu fistfight with Herbert, Pip later remembers, made him feel uncomfortably like "a species of savage young wolf" (121), exactly the kind of "fierce young hound" Magwitch had hoped he was not (50). In fact, their bare-knuckle contest in the garden, which Herbert conducts in a spirit "at once light-hearted, businesslike, and bloodthirsty," reads like a sunny, juvenile parody of the economic competition so tangible throughout the novel:

> His spirit inspired me with great respect. He seemed to have no strength, and he never once hit me hard, and he was always knocked down; but, he would be up again in a moment, sponging himself or drinking out of the water-bottle, with the greatest satisfaction in seconding himself according to form.... He got heavily bruised, for I am sorry to record that the more I hit him, the harder I hit him... [until he] finally went on his knees to his sponge and threw it up: at the same moment panting out, "That means you have won." (120)

An unknown antagonist, whose class rank is clear but whose life, origins, and motives are otherwise a mystery, suddenly presents himself as a foe to be vanquished simply by virtue of appearing on the scene with his fists up. In this case the ideal economic script prevails. The victor's natural superiority carries the day and the combatants shake hands without hard feelings. No rules have been broken; no grievous hurt has been premeditated, and none has been suffered.

And yet, as the guilt-ridden Pip pummels his opponent, and as he later contemplates traces of Herbert's reproachful "gore," which cries out from the ground like Abel's blood, he intuits the brutal, wolfish truth about "that universal struggle," namely, that one man's fortune depends upon his creating or exploiting some other man's

weakness. Years later, Pip makes the connection explicitly. He loves his friend Herbert for his "natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean," but this guileless decency is precisely what handicaps Herbert the would-be Insurer of Ships (201). Honest and undaunted, he endures the "blows and buffets" of business disappointments in a manner "very like" the amiable spirit in which he suffered Pip's fists (208). The garden battle, despite its good nature, exhibits the novel's general ambivalence about what it means to be an economic man, about the problem of pursuing one's own interests without being stained by Smithfield "gore" or dusted with Newgate "cobwebs." As Wemmick says, we might all stand charged since all are guilty, with or without the benefit of an official accusation (280). We might all learn from tracts entitled "TO BE READ IN MY CELL" (132), or set our hands to "manuscript confessions written under condemnation" (231).

According to Sarah Ellis, John Ruskin, and other writers of domestic economy, Wemmick's society of potentially felonious men was an almost inevitable result of cutthroat capitalism. Men struggling within a merciless public arena had to contend not only with their competitors' foul play but also with powerful daily inducements to behave treacherously themselves. Only the meliorative influence of gentle Christian women, whose spiritual teaching provides "a kind of second conscience," Ellis remarks, helps to preserve embattled husbands, sons, and brothers from "the snares of the world...and temptations from within and without" (qtd. in Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation* 118). But in *Great Expectations*, Ruskin and Ellis's deferential helpmate takes a perverse, exaggerated form in Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham is a voluptuary of pain, spokeswoman for the masochistic dark side of domestic ideology. "Real love," in her hissed definition, means "blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter" (261). She strikes back at the "smiter" by training an avenging angel, Estella, to "break [the] hearts" of aristocrats, masters, and men, to retaliate against the brotherhood of unscrupulous plotters who, in the persons of Compeyson and Arthur Havisham, first defrauded her adoptive mother. Set loose in the world like an enemy agent, Estella is no moral "guarantor," the role Mary Poovey suggests nineteenth-century domestic ideology imagined for women within laissez-faire capitalism (36). Rather,

she is a cold-blooded anti-monitoress who seems to atomize rather than harmonize the competing interests of covetous men (See Gallagher, *Industrial Reformation* and Armstrong).

But as Eve Sedgwick has pointed out, male homosocial traffic in women—the manipulation of women as exchange objects, or as capital bodies—cements male bonds regardless of whether they arise from cooperation or antagonism. The more passionate the hatred, in fact, the more intense the bond. When Miss Havisham instructs Estella to play the contested woman of many suitors, she seeks to render men incapable of acting collectively or conspiratorially, yet ends up only reinforcing the male unity she wishes to disrupt. In many respects, the rivalry among Estella's admirers is but an adult version of "Beggar My Neighbor," Estella and Pip's childhood card game, where the agreed-upon object of play is to capture what one's "neighbors" desire for themselves. It was for Estella as object-prize, Pip learns, that his early fight with Herbert Pocket was effectually though unintentionally staged. When she rewards the victor with a kiss, dispensing her favor as she might "a piece of money," Estella acknowledges that all transactions are commodity transfers where parties "beggar" or are "beggared," buy, sell, or are bought. At first, Estella seems both a realpolitik master of the sexual game and its principal spoil, but her miserable life with the abusive Bentley Drummle indicates how little power she truly has over the assignation, circulation, or preservation of her "value." For his own part, Pip thinks, such coinage as a kiss is "worth nothing"; he is tempted by the romantic overlay that disguises class and sexual politics, and his will to believe is strong (121). As two of the novel's large company of "self-swindlers," both Pip and Estella recapitulate Miss Havisham's earlier error of refusing to attend carefully enough to the economic grammar beneath the language of love.

Judged according to the conventions of Victorian economic practice, Miss Havisham, like Mrs. Threadneedle and Maria Jolly Motherbank, illustrates a significant sort of female failure. Because she wrecks the brewery and refuses to sponsor her male relatives, she blocks her financial capital from circulating within the proper channels of investment and trade, thus rendering it economically barren. And because she dedicates herself to angry spinsterhood, she condemns her sexual body to infertile disuse and enters her forties as a textbook case

of the tragically embittered climacteric woman. Under the best of circumstances, physicians reported, the climacteric sufferer often feels driven to "revenge supposed grievances by making miserable those under her control" (Tilt, *Change* 158). She chews "the cud of baleful introspection" (101) and "peoples the void with imaginary evils... [sitting] alone for weeks and months, in the darkened room of some gloomy dwelling, without any other enjoyment than solitude, or that of brooding over unbegotten evils" (159). Such women turn "sour, excitable, irascible; often falling into passion without provocation, they become unjust toward every body" (Colombat 40). Some, experiencing a recrudescence of sexual desire, become "tyrannized by the memory of past love," which nearly always leads to "the most formidable results" (Colombat 40).[4] Health manuals and conduct books, likewise, urged the climacteric woman to cast aside perverse obsessions with youth and chastely eschew "every thing calculated to cause regret for charms that are lost, and enjoyments that are ended forever" (Colombat 551). For notwithstanding these grim prognoses, writers assured her, the apocalypse of menopause would almost certainly give way to the millenium of peaceful old age. And while nothing can bring back the splendor in the grass, climacteric survivors may yet find strength in what remains behind—charitable works, new-found serenity, relief from the hazards of childbearing—once "their features are stamped with the imprint of age, and their genital organs are sealed with the signet of sterility" (Colombat 549).

Contrary to advice, Miss Havisham keeps the idea of a sexual self always before her, gleefully watching the gap widen between bridal promise and atrophied reality. Her perambulations with Pip, as he wheels her about the decayed remains of the wedding feast, not only parody the breakdown of economic "circulation" (the defunct production-and-exchange life of her father's brewery) but also mimic the mental orbits of the older woman trapped in the circular grooves of memory. Incongruous images of youth characterize Miss Havisham to the end. When Estella reproves her for her harsh curriculum of heartbreaking, she falls prostrate with her long grey hair "all adrift upon the ground, among the other bridal wrecks," more like the adulterous wife in Augustus Egg's *Past and Present* than a castigated mother (325). Later, when she kneels for Pip's forgiveness, she presses one of his hands as he clasps her supplicating body, and then, much to his horror,

sinks further "down upon the ground," drawing him with her (410). Finally, when she bursts into flames in the spectacular fire scene filled with sexual overtones of assault and rape, Pip works hard to extinguish not so much the return of the repressed but the last, furious eruption of the all-too-expressed.[5]

As in the case of Mrs. Threadneedle and Mrs. Motherbank, the same paranoia, sleeplessness, and desolation that identify Miss Havisham as a climacteric woman also mark her as the quintessential swindled capitalist. At the urging of Compeyson, her husband-to-be, she had bought out her brother Arthur's brewery stock at an enormously inflated rate so that her husband might exercise absolute control over the business. When the "handwriting forging, stolen bank-note passing" lover betrayed her, she fell victim to a version of the uncontrolled speculation and fraud many thought had precipitated the 1840's railway crises and the Depression of 1858 (362; see Hughes, Checkland, Johnson, and Crouzet). And like her predecessors Mrs. Threadneedle and Mrs. Motherbank, as an older woman Miss Havisham offers a displaced resolution to the macroeconomic problem of financial crisis, to the microeconomic threat of individual bankruptcy, and to the general predicament of toiling men whose powers of economic self-determination seemed cramped, thwarted, or nullified entirely. Pip succeeds in forging a modest competency within the humanizing offices of Clarriker and Company. But Miss Havisham, despite making contrite atonements, despite awaiting death wrapped in gauze bandages, essentially departs from the novel in a blaze, as if she were the self-consuming engine of old finally burned up by its own overheated works. Hers is the tyrannized body and shackled mind, the internal "clashing and whirling" within a terrible apparatus. Where Pip awakes from his fevered hallucinations into renewed life, she moves inexorably from nightmare into death.

Miss Havisham had begun as a young woman eager to assume her role in nineteenth-century England's dominant form of commercial organization, the family enterprise, that heterogeneous, adaptable business form which evolved out of the family household. Willingly, even insistently, she would have played wife and silent partner within the matrimonial operation of Compeyson and Havisham. In this she merely acceded to common practice, for wives often "were de facto 'partners'" in the family enterprise, their dowries having supplied seed

money for a husband's business. Women as a group held significant assets— their properties were likely to be "passive" income-generators administered by male trustees—although the code of coverture defined married women as the legal wards of their husbands (Davidoff and Hall 200). But once cheated and abandoned, Miss Havisham withdrew her money from her father's brewery, "laid the whole place waste" and, in so doing, declared war against traditional economic structures supported by the dependent female investor (205). For when women are the means by which families recruit new business partners, consolidate wealth, reap investment profits, and bear future generations of mercantile sons, the fruits from their bodies and purses, it is assumed, will reach down and enrich the enterprise ground. Miss Havisham's contrary example dispels this picture, illustrating the perilous capacity of independent, propertied women to waste family fortunes upon sharp practitioners dressed in gentlemen's clothing. Within the economic microcosm of *Great Expectations*, her climacteric barrenness and her relentless hostility towards the family enterprise are closely related pathologies, each warning of a downward slide into socio-economic depletion and death. Little wonder, then, that Dickens couples her emotional and physical wreck with the gothic wasteland of Satis House.

For the novel to arrive at some sort of happy conclusion, however, Miss Havisham must fulfill her proper economic role, or other female characters must take up that role for her. By novel's end, both of these things occur. The truant benefactoress of the Pocket family has become the key replenisher of other people's pockets. Through helping Herbert Pocket, Miss Havisham also indirectly aids Pip, whose own pockets had been shaken out by Magwitch, then filled with secret funds, then emptied again when Magwitch reappears. Her financial legacy to "Cousin Matthew" may help soften that Pocket's domestic purgatory, his own efforts in this line having been restricted to writing eloquent treatises on household economy while attempting, unsuccessfully, to exit his own chaotic home by tugging himself upward by the hair. When Miss Havisham accepts her role as the female investor who supports various "family enterprises," then, she becomes one of the moving forces behind the novel's reconstituted economics. With Pip's assistance, her quiet subsidy of Herbert Pocket ensures that the past, romanticized in Joe and Biddy's harmonious forge, can be reproduced within the present, converted into contemporary terms, and given life

by Herbert and Clara Pocket, the modestly prosperous new economic couple.

III

Great Expectations makes the past usable for the present even as it acknowledges that "the old order changeth, yielding place to new." The careful signposts by which Dickens recognizes the gap between England in the first quarter of the century and the moment in which the novel is read call attention to how difficult it is to row against the currents of time. But not impossible: we *can* go back again, the novel suggests, by clinging to those who move forward in slow, conservative ways. This is the message of Biddy and Joe's forge, complete with tiny replicas of Biddy and Pip ("and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was—I again!" [490]). Within the model family, Biddy performs the maternal and economic duties Miss Havisham had abdicated. She not only supplies an infant Pip for the cottage corner, but also replaces with the "light pressure" of the wedding ring on her "good matronly hand" the clenched fists and explosive passions of Mrs. Joe, Molly, and Miss Havisham. As Pip noticed as a boy, Biddy knew the smithing business so minutely that "theoretically, she was already as good a blacksmith as I, or better" (153). Proficiencies that might masculinize her, such as her "theoretical" forge skills or her scholarly learning, at which she also excelled as a girl, become her woman's contribution to the family enterprise. Good wives like Biddy guarantee historical continuity and economic equilibrium by perpetuating values and practices from one generation to the next; they become one of the means by which Dickens "figures history as home" (Crosby 70). They do so as reproducers of people and cultures without themselves being the "subjects," Carlylean heroes and makers, of the official historical record.

The plot line involving Pip, however, does not fully participate in the novel's recuperative ending, hindered not only by Pip and Estella's emotional exhaustion but also by the representational limits of Dickens's narrative. After all, like the *Punch* artists and parodists before him, Dickens cannot change the mechanizing and dehumanizing dynamics of laissez-faire commerce by locating them within an older woman's climacteric body. "Analogizing" the problem may offer symbolic reso-

lutions yet must inevitably stop short of effecting "real" reforms of a recalcitrant material culture, the world "out there" filled with journeyman Pips. For Miss Havisham, convulsion has ended whether we read her death as occurring peacefully (she is a successful survivor of the "catemenial decline") or violently (she is an unfortunate victim of the climacteric gone awry). But cyclical crises remained a problem for the Victorian economy, as was amply demonstrated in the "depressions" of 1862 and 1868 (Crouzet 57). By the last chapter, the novel's eat-or-be-eaten universe appears nearly as inhospitable as it did at first:

> There was no house now, no brewery, no building whatever left, but the wall of the old garden. The cleared space had been enclosed with a rough fence, and, looking over it, I saw that some of the old ivy had struck root anew, and was growing green on low quiet mounds of ruin. A gate in the fence standing ajar, I pushed it open, and went in. (491)

Pip and Estella meet in "the desolate garden-walk" as two human fruits of Miss Havisham's weird cultivation, bent and twisted out of shape like those earlier "weedy offshoot[s]" of deformed melons and cucumbers. Perhaps, Estella hopes, she has now been "broken" into "a better shape." But as Gail Turley Houston has observed, at the end Dickens enrolls Estella in the company of self-denying heroines such as Florence Dombey and Agnes Wickfield; because we are not given access to Estella's wishes or to the long process of her chastening, it appears "only that she has been 'bent and broken' into 'better shape' in order to fulfill Pip's desires" (23). And whether she will fulfill them or not, many readers find the conclusion of *Great Expectations* so autumnal that evidence for a happily-ever-after ending seems as slim and unsupported as the optimistic ivy sprouting out of refuse mounds.

Perhaps, this doubt is the final legacy of the "immensely rich and grim lady" of Satis House. For if Miss Havisham is a symbolic indicator of economic problems, she is also an actual, monied woman whose economic transgressions have lasting, discernible effects upon the commercial and marital destinies of the novel's young people. When the famous mists of the novel's last line rise to reveal a "broad expanse of tranquil light" in which Pip, in that ambiguous phrase, sees "no shadow of another parting from her," they also disclose a future not yet under construction. What Pip and Estella stand upon is the "desolate" ground of the family enterprise leveled by Miss Havisham,

the dupe and perpetuator of a ruthless, "Beggar My Neighbor" economics. Even the triumphs of the more fortunate are subtly qualified. No married couple in the novel has successfully merged domestic felicity and commercial engagement without also being dissociated from contemporary England in some way. Joe and Biddy inhabit an idealized forge already relegated to the past; Herbert and Clara prosper in Cairo, a foreign annex of Britain's trading empire; Wemmick and Miss Skiffins live in a moated, miniature castle that epitomizes the *cordon sanitaire* Victorians drew around "Walworth sentiments" to protect them from "Little Britain" heartlessness.

Pip and Herbert Pocket turn out to be tolerably good specimens of the modern economic man, but they can only do so abroad, a crucial limitation. It is as if, in *Great Expectations,* Dickens can see his way clear towards preserving the capitalist dream of the self-determining male economic agent, yet cannot tell a lie. Propertied godmothers do not always underwrite young men, or raise up dutiful daughters as future partners within the family enterprise. The climacteric body of Great Britain's Motherbank cannot really escape the periodic convulsions typical of older women in "catemenial decline." In this novel, when young men with empty pockets "look about" them in a world destabilized by shifting women's roles and a fickle, exclusionary marketplace, they cannot always wake from their economic dream to find it real.

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NOTES

[1] Edward Tilt likewise follows "many illustrious philosophers and medical men" in dividing the human lifespan into seven-year stages (*Elements of Health* 27). Whereas man "descends the hill of life" between his 49th and 63rd years, woman usually starts entering her "declivity" (20) between the ages of 42 and 49. For her, the climacteric is an epoch "of real trouble, anxiety, and danger; for on the manner in which she crosses this broad *Rubicon* will depend whether the 20 or thirty years of after-life will be passed in tranquil happiness, or will be embittered by an endless succession of infirmities" (326).

[2] Colonel Torrens, one of the "currency" men and partisan advocates of the Act quoted by James Wilson in the House of Commons (*Hansard's* 95 [30 Nov. 1847]: 422). Members of Parliament used a variety of medical metaphors in their debates over the crises of 1847 and 1857. In 1847, the Chancellor of the Exchequer defended the 1844 Charter Act by likening it to an approved course of medical treatment which, in special cases, might be departed from without impugning the "ordinary" curative principle upon which it was based (377). By contrast, Lord Portman argued that England's commercial malady "was not like a chronic disease which could await the careful and deliberate attention of the physician, but it was a case which required the active hand of a skilful surgeon" (*Hansard's* 148 [3 Dec. 1857]: 7).

[3] Samuel Ashwell lists "timidity, a dread of serious disease, irritability of temper, a disposition to seclusion, impaired appetite and broken sleep, with physical weakness and inquietude" as typical climacteric complaints (198). Some women, heretofore healthy, will become "corpulent," liable to "attacks of apoplexy, paralysis, pulmonary obstruction, and cough" (199).

[4] Tilt, while disagreeing that erotomania is frequent during this period, concedes that there is "some truth in the old French proverb about '*Ce diable de quarante ans, si habille a tourmenter les femmes,*' for towards the change of life there is sometimes a temporary rekindling of passion, thought to be altogether extinguished, like the sudden re-awakening of a smothered flame" (*Change* 169).

[5] Tilt recommended that camphor be administered as an anaphrodisiac to "[appease] the excitement of the organs of generation at the change of life" and "correct the toxic influence which the reproductive system has on the brain of some women" (*Change* 79). In his experience, a "distaste" for sexual relations often signals the approach of menopause; increased sexual desire during the change, by contrast, "is a morbid impulse" attributable to some "'ovario-uterine condition'" (94). Doctors suggested that women's unseemly efforts to look youthful were often what caused menopausal depression in the first place (see Smith-Rosenberg 193).