



UGC Approved Journals

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

ISSN-2321-7065



Editor-in-Chief

Volume V, Issue V May 2017

www.ijellh.com

[About Us](#) | [Editorial Board](#) | [Submission Guidelines](#) | [Call for Paper](#) | [Paper](#)
[Submission](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Terms & Condition](#) | [More.....](#)

ISSN :2455-0108

[IJO-Science](#)

(INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ONLINE OF SCIENCE)

MEENU SHARMA
MA ENGLISH, NET
UDHAMPUR, J&K.
INDIA

FROM YOUNG SPINSTER TO MYSTERIOUS OLD WOMEN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MISS HAVISHAM AND MISS EMILY

Abstract

Charles Dickens Miss Havisham and William Faulkner's Miss Emily attributed an analogy in respect of the mysterious as well as miserable life they lead. Despite the fact that both memorable characters are created in dissimilar periods and by different writers, shared fundamental similarities. This comparative study is not only focusing on the common plights, conflicts and circumstances, but also examine the contrasting points of their lives. The writers effectively used the description of physical appearance to illustrate their psyche. The paper also concentrates on their gradual development from young & cheerful spinsters to desolated old women, left to live a frustrated, loveless and isolated life, even worse than death. Both belong to reputed and wealthy families, dreamed of a successful married life, but abandoned by their lovers and remained unmarried over the entire course of life. They stuck in the time by restricting themselves within the walls of their old decayed house and deny every truth and change forcefully.

Keywords: old age, denial, truth, isolated, time, development, mysterious

A standout amongst the most exceptional Novelist of the English Literature, Charles Dickens is best known for illustrating a galaxy of characters in his outstanding novels. Miss Havisham is the central character of the novel, Great Expectation and esteemed as the most remarkable female character of Dickens. She is an eccentric woman with unique traits and complex personality. As Pip recounts her as: “....*The strangest lady I have ever seen.*” (Great Expectations 99) She is the

only daughter of a wealthy brewer and raised up without her mother. However, her father subtly got married to another woman, she inherited a good fortune from him. As a cheerful young girl, she fell in love with a fraudster named Compeyson and hopes for a happy married life, like every other girl of her age but jilted by him on the altar of the wedding. Humiliated and heartbroken, she continued to live in her Satis house with her adopted daughter, Estella. She represented as an aristocratic woman of Victorian Age who has pride and stubbornness, coming out of her status but even then treated inferior to men. In Victorian period women, whether a rich aristocratic woman or a commoner are treated as angels of the house, responsible for raising the children and bringing moral purity to the home. Her identity and status in society were determined by the man to whom she married. Absence of marriage or husband was a woman's greatest fear and if come true ruined the life thoroughly as did to Miss Havsham.

On the other side, Miss Emily is the protagonist of the most remarkable short story of American Nobel laureate, William Faulkner. Faulkner presented her as a mysterious but pitiable character to commiserate. She is the only daughter or the last generation of an old aristocratic, Southern family of America after the civil war. She is portrayed as an innocent girl, nurtured under the control and values of her father, who himself is an epitome of old Southern beliefs. His father eliminated all his suitors as did not find them suitable for her. *“Griersons held themselves a little too high for what they really were. None of the young men were quite good enough for Miss Emily and such. We had long thought of them as a tableau, Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, her father a spraddled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back-flung front door.”*(Collected Stories 123) The sudden demise of her father left her shocked as well as single at the age of thirty, along with forced her to live a frustrated and loveless life in such an era, where women are supposed to live under protection and control of their father or husband.

The first feature of comparison between the two female characters is that both are courted, but abandoned by their lovers. Miss Havisham loved Compeyson a young, attractive man who attired like a gentleman, but an imposter in reality. She fell in love with him passionately, even though he was lower to her, in position. In retaliation, he conspires with her step brother, Arthur for the money. Too much vigorous in love, she never doubts of his reality. *“but was too haughty and too much in love to be advised by anyone.”* (Great Expectations 320) She was getting ready for the wedding excitingly, but received a letter of abandonment from Compeyson. Miss Havisham's life was ruined afterwards as she frozen in the moment of betrayal. She loved him devotedly, but earn

deception in exchange. The intensity of her passion revealed by her as she clearly stated when talked to Pip, *"I'll tell you what love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter-as I did!"*.(Great Expectations 425 -426).She kept the moment alive for the rest of life and don't let any tiny change took place. She adopted Estella and groomed her to break the hearts of men to take revenge of herself .By using her money, she victimized Pip and call him to play with Estella.However, Pip regarded her as his wicked Godmother for she persuade him to fell in love with Estella and dreamt of marrying her. In words of Miss Havisham, *"Love her , love her , love her! How does she use you?" Before I could answer (if I could have answered so difficult a question at all), she repeated, 'Love her , love her , lover her! If she favours you, love her . If she wounds you, love her . If she tears your heart to pieces - and as it gets older and stronger , it will tear deeper - love her , love her , love her!'* (Great Expectations 425)- She did all this to make him feel shattered as she felt after betrayed at the hand of her fiancé.

When the aspect of love discussed in example of Emily, the same thing applies. Her father driven away all his suitors furthermore end her hopes for a loving life partner. The sudden demise of Mr. Grierson causing her to be exceedingly afraid of being alone.She found love in Homer *"a Yankee- a big, dark, ready man, with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face"*(Collected Stories124) He was a person lower than her in social status, but she didn't care about that. *"It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness."*(Collected Stories125) As her yearning for companionship is so intensified that she wants to win him at any cost, lacking care of her purported southern nobility. Homer does not reciprocate her feeling, His reason behind the friendship with Miss Emily is purely self seeking such as doing so grant him identification and a worthy prominence in the town and the riddle regarding his sexuality remain unsolved till the end of the story. The Narrator states, *"She will persuade him yet,"*because Homer himself had remarked-*"he liked men, and it was known that he drank with the younger men in the Elks' Club- that he was not the marrying man."*(Collected Stories126). Her dream of happy married life, like other women got shattered. She does not want to live a solitary life so decide to poisoned Homer and keep him beside her for rest of life even though lifeless.

The most important aspect of comparison between the two female characters is that each of two denies change forcefully and clutched in the past. It was noticed by pip when he first met Miss Havisham that *"her watch had stopped at twenty minutes to nine, and that a clock in the room had*

stopped at twenty minutes to nine". (Great Expectations 101) One of the most astonishing trait of her character is that she stuck herself in the time when she was deserted by her lover. She was joyfully getting ready for her wedding, received the letter from Compeyson. *At twenty minutes to nine?" "At the hour and minute," said Herbert, "at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks* (Great Expectation 321) Miss Havisham was heartbroken by the betrayal at hands of the person she loved most. She stopped the time the first reason was her denial of the truth or reality and the another one is to remain lit up the fire of humiliation and dejection to take revenge of his betrayal from all men. She stopped everything exactly the same time the brewery was shut down, the wedding cake left to rotten. Dickens says, *"Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on — the other was on the table near her hand — her veil was half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass in these words she is portrayed as a half ready bride."*(Great Expectations100) After get abandoned, she fell ill and when get recovered, she decided to avoid sunlight remain in dark from that day. As narrated by pip when he first entered in the Satis house. *the great front entrance had two chains across it outside - and the first thing I noticed was, that the passages were all dark, and that she had left a candle burning there.*"(Great Expectations 97) She is aware of her eccentricity and asked pip *You are not afraid of a woman who has never seen the sun since you were born?"*(Great Expectations 101) The satis house reflect the mystry and gloominess of her life. She further asserts *"I know nothing of the days of the week; I know nothing of weeks of the year" "I know nothing about times"* (Great Expectations 107)

The same thing we find in Miss Emily, she conserves herself in an imaginary sphere and keeps on struggling to clasp time and forbid changes. The first implication is her denial of death as she is not ready to accept the reality of her father's sudden death. *"She told them that her father was not dead. She did that for three days, with the ministers calling on her, and the doctors, trying to persuade her to let them dispose of the body."*(Collected Stories 123) Emily tried to defy death by holding on to her father's corpse and treating it as if he were still living. She want to remain that time alive around herself when her father was alive. She didn't allow any change to take place whether in her life or in her old decayed house. No change has ever been made in her antique house and maintained as well while every other house acquired change completely over these long

years. As interpret by Faulkner *“only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps-an eyesore among eyesores.”*(Collected Stories 119) As years go on and the times begin to change, she retreats into her house, refusing to go along with the new styles of living. *“The disruption of a traditional family, shown in the Griersons, epitomizes the Southerner's loss of their property. Emily's house is “symbolic of the isolation she comes to live in.”*(Skei 310)

When she come to know that her relationship with Homer cannot be fulfilled, she decide to poisoned Homer so that she can keep him beside her for rest of the life. *“Emily takes her fear of losing people to another level by poisoning Homer”* (Skei, 232). It is the another stage of denial of truth and change. She kept his corpse in the bridal chamber with all those thing she bought for Homer and slept next to his corpse over these years. *“Then we noticed that in the second pillow was the indentation of a head. One of us lifted something from it, and leaning forward, that faint and invisible dust dry and acrid in the nostrils, we saw a long strand of iron gray hair.”* (Collected Stories 130).

In case of presenting female characters, Physical delineation is a striking tool applied by both writers effectively. Dickens was expert in picturization of the character and it is also prove true in matter of Miss Havisham as he used the detailed account of her appearance to illustrate her mental state. Her appearance tells her tragic story on her behalf and serve as the mirror of her psyche as well. Miss Havisham was introduced in the novel by the narrator or protagonist Pip. In words of Pip: *“She was dressed in rich materials — satins, and lace, and silks — all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white”*. (Great Expectations 100) Her appearance of an old maiden in bridal dress. She was happily getting ready for her wedding, when received a letter from his fiancée and come to know of his betrayal. She stuck herself in the time and continued to live in same condition through out her life. Over these years every thing is changed but she remained the same as her dejection, humiliation and hatred for man continued. Her appearance was mysterious and successful in showing the passage of the time. Pip noticed: *“I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its luster, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had*

shrunk to skin and bone.” (Great Expectations 100) The faded wedding dress and her pale and skinny structure is the mouthpiece of the depressed and isolated life she is living. Pip was frightened to see her first time and compared her to some ghastly wax-work at the Fair, once he saw. Pip compared her with a corpse: *“So she sat, corpse-like, as we played at cards; the frillings and trimmings on her bridal dress, looking like earthy paper”*. (Great Expectations 105) It seems as she died along with the trust and love which she has given to her lover and deceived. The change that took place in her appearance after nearly three decades is serve as sign of the positive change that come in her mature. In chapter 49 she begged pardon for her wrong deed to Pip and after that caught into fire. *“Though every vestige of her dress was burnt, as the told me, she still had something of her old ghastly bridal appearance; for, they had covered her to the throat with white cotton-wool.”*(Great Expectations 717) It seems as her humiliation and hatred got burnt with her dress and those white bandages in which she was dressed up after getting burnt stands for pure fellings she has after repentance. The old wedding dress is being replaced by white bandages same as old humiliation and revenge replaced by repentance and realization.

Similarly, the description of Miss Emily’s look is being applied by Faulkner, to illustrate variations in her transitional psychotic condition from a young maiden of the thirties with hope and happiness to an embittered elderly woman. Everytime she found with new appearance or can say with new mental stage. As the story opens up Faulkner termed her *“a fallen monument”* (Collected Stories 119) and certainly she is not considered as a living creature by the townspeople. She is being reflected by them as *“..... a tradition, a duty, and a care; a sort of hereditary obligation upon the town.”* (Collected Stories 119) As in the early thirties, Faulkner portrayed her as *“a slender figure in white”* means a chaste, virtuous, slim and attractive maiden who possessed plenty of suitors. The first change come into her life was her father’s sudden demise, that changed her completely and it can be easily identified in her very first appearance after her father ‘s’ death. *“When we saw her again, her hair was cut short, making her look like a girl, with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows, sort of tragic and serene”*. (Collected Stories 124)The next image of miss emily presented in the story is the final image of Emily as a hoary woman, delineated in the doorway whilst discussing her taxes, contrasted sharply with the portrait of her youth *–“a small, fat woman in black, with a thin gold chain descending to her waist and vanishing into her belt, leaning on an ebony cane with a tarnished gold head. Her skeleton was small and spare; perhaps that was why what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in*

her". (Collected Stories 121) the whole image is of devastating look and also devastating life of image of death "*She looked bloated, like a body long submerged in motionless water, and of that pallid hue. Her eyes, lost in the fatty ridges of her face, looked like two small pieces of coal pressed into a lump of dough as they moved from one face to another. . . Then, they could hear the invisible ticking at the end of the gold chain. . . Her voice was dry and cold*" (Collected Stories 121) The final portrait describes that she became metaphorical, a living corpse.

Both memorable characters can also be compared on the basis of their relationship with the society. As each of them belongs to wealthy aristocratic families of their times and reflected a proud and stubborn nature toward the society, which is very obvious. "*In most cases, people take pride in community involvement since they feel to be part of something big*" (Kennedy and Gioia, 324). Miss Havisham serves as both the victim and culprit of society. She is victim of the society, where a spinster is considered unfit to live in and get marginalized. The different side of the picture is that she also use the society to take revenge upon them and on her own conditions. She cut herself from the outer world and met the people on her wish. Even she didn't allow the sunlight to enter in her world and kept on living in the dark for many decades just to ignite up the fire of revenge in her heart. She used Estella as a weapon to break heart of man as Pip, who is also called on her wish to play with Estella. It was her own choice to escape from the outer world and get immersed in her own sphere of dejection and humiliation. In contrast of Emily she is less mysterious as she herself told her story to Pip and also the readers. She is not locked within the walls of her world of fantasy as in the case of Emily. Emily didn't allow anybody to enter in her imaginative and mysterious world. She murdered Homer and kept sleep next to his corpse for over four decades but the truth come into light only after her death. Although she cut herself from the outer world even then she is the integral part of the town, Jefferson. She is a matter of great concern and interest for the townspeople. The first implication is when the narrator sheds light on how the town reacts over her death. The narrator says that the whole town attended Miss Emily Grierson's funeral out of respect as she is the last generation of southern aristocracy also presented as a fallen monument by the narrator. She is a matter of curiosity for the whole town as she limited herself in her house after the death of her father and disappearance of her lover. The lack of social relationship can be attributed to the unique relationship she has with her father. *This is clearly applicable to Emily, whose father took away all of her opportunities to meet loving people.* (Skei, 197). Actually the tradition of being confined to the house is initiated by her father, who chased away all the suitors she had. According to the narrator "None of the young men could be considered well enough for

Miss Emily. Faulkner says, *“We did not say that she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that. We remembered all the young men her father had driven away, and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will.”* (Collected Stories 124) He dismissed all opportunities of happiness and relationship for Emily out of the house. However townspeople anticipated a new beginning of her after the death of Mr. Grierson, but she had maintained this state even after his death. *“.....as if that quality of her father which had thwarted her woman's life so many times had been too virulent and too furious to die”*. (Collected Stories 127) She rarely come out of the house after her father's demise and stop completely after the disappearance of Homer. Her Negro servant is the only medium between her and the town. Emily ignored all the tax notices that were sent to her and when her house was visited by officers, she said *“See Colonel Sartoris. I have no taxes in Jefferson”* (Collected Stories 121). It is thus clear from the discussion that even though their communal lives varied considerably, neither woman ever ended up with a normal social life. Each have lonely lives, but the difference is that Miss Havisham chooses it herself and these are circumstances and further her own desire which keep her away from making a genuine link with people. Though a matter of pity, Miss Havisham, Miss Emily, chose to lock themselves away from the world rather than trying to overcome their situations. Perhaps they could have done something more to help themselves, but it seems that they did not try.

Another worth noting aspect of comparison is repentance or self-realization. Miss Havisham feels only hate towards men for nearly thirty years, and she wanted them all to suffer the way she suffered on her wedding day. For this purpose she trained Estella in such manner. Dickens states: *“That girl (Estella) is hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree, and has been brought up by Miss Havisham to wreak revenge on all the male sex. (Great Expectations 311).”* Miss Havisham is indeed depressed and heartbroken, after the tragedy happen to her, despite the fact she has expectation to take revenge to recover from the loss she had. She called up Pip for this intent keeping in mind and constantly endeavored to ruin his life, wanting to make him feel wretched for the mistake of somebody else. Over the course of the novel, she came to realize her mistake and repent over it. She states: *she is 'not all stone.....that there is anything human in my heart'*. (Great Expectations 705) She realized her mistake when see Pip in the same state in which she was and her heart got changed. She herself says: *“Until you spoke to her [Estella] the other day, and until I saw in you a looking-glass that showed me what I once felt myself, I did not know what I had done. What have I done! What have I done!”* (Great Expectations 711) When Pip makes

last visit to her house, she is much regretted and feels remorseful for the manner she treated him. *"I had never seen her shed a tear before, and, in the hope that the relief might do her good,"* (Great Expectations 709) Although it is too late, but she seeks pardon from Pip and dies a few weeks later as burnt in her own Satis house. She won the sympathy of readers at the end of the novel. She deceased eventually, but gets emancipation from the captivation of her revenge and negativity, even before her death.

On the other side of the picture, Miss Emily murdered Homer to keep him nearby as she was suffering for the longing of relationship intensively. She continued to sleep next to the corpse of Homer for about forty years, moreover died at the age of seventy four without any change or realization of her crime. Perhaps, she is not in the condition of understanding what she has done with Homer as strong signs of mental illness can be easily identified in her behavior. In contrast to Miss Havisham, Emily is more pitiable character at the start of the story, but gradually the disgust side of her personality come into the light and sympathy of readers got lessen for her, until they took her as a victim of mental illness. It cannot be determined from the story whether she had any repentance or realization of the crime she committed.

Being an analogous study, the close parallels, identical situations, attitudes and approaches of the women characters are juxtaposed for comparative analysis and interpretation. In the course of discussions, it can be determined that although the two characters, "Miss Emily" and "Miss Havisham" appears two different women living in two different time periods; but share many similar aspects of life.

Works Cited

- Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily." Collected Stories of William Faulkner. New York: Vintage, 1995. Print.
- Kennedy, X. J. and Gioia, Dana. An Introduction to Fiction. Longman Publications. Print.
- Skei, Hans H. William Faulkner: The Novelist as Short Story Writer, Oslo: U of Oslo, 1985. Print.
- Planet PDF. "Great Expectations." Planet PDF. EBooks, 2006. Web. 07 May 2017.