

Compare and contrast Pip's first visit to Satis House (*Great Expectations*, chapter 8) with its dramatisation in David Lean's film version.

In this essay, I will compare and contrast Pip's visit to Satis House in *Great Expectations* (volume I, chapter VIII) and the dramatisation of this book in the 1945 film directed by David Lean.

The first thing to note is that although the film must lose the first-person point of view of the book, it focuses on Pip, what he sees, and the way he reacts. The camera frequently captures the expression of his face, the attitude of his body, or even the movement of his eyes, which is then followed by the exposition of what he is looking at.

In the book, Pip spends the night with Uncle Pumblechook, only going to Miss Havisham's house the next morning at a quarter past ten. For the sake of continuity with the previous scene, however, the dramatisation has the two of them coming there right after leaving Joe and his wife, in the afternoon. Instead of Pumblechook's bothersome arithmetic drilling, as in the book, the film has him asking Pip to read the time (which is a quarter past three), and following this by a self-righteous remark. Pip is shown wearing a stiff jacket and a hat, obviously feeling very awkward and shy, speaking very softly.

The general atmosphere evoked in both cases is one of eeriness and foreboding, especially with music in the case of the film. However, where Dickens emphasizes the idea of seclusion through the repetition of 'bars', 'barred', 'walled up', 'chains', David

Lean underlines the idea of dereliction and neglect, using ivy-covered walls, weed-infested paths, and the squeaky bell-chain and gate. In the film, also, we discover the name of the house, 'Satis House', inscribed on the gate next to the gate. In the book, that name is disclosed and explained later to Pip by Estella ('Enough House'), a device which would have been clumsy on the screen. An interesting omission of the dramatisation is the old brewery next to the house.

The dramatisation follows the book quite faithfully at that point, matching the dialogues and the action; Estella answers the bell from the window, then saunters towards the gates with the keys in her hand, her nose up in the air and her tone arrogant. The camera captures the exchanges of glances between her and Pip, the latter looking somewhat awed, thereby illustrating his feelings. The text, instead, can directly tell us what Pip thinks about Estella (a 'very pretty' and 'very proud' young lady). The film shows her wearing an elegant white dress.

As I mentioned before, the mention of the old brewery and the explanation of the name of the house are omitted in the film; the brewery is an important detail, as it explains where Miss Havisham's fortune comes from. It is useful in the novel, to give depth to her character; but this digression, as well as the one concerning the name, must be removed from the dramatisation, which has to keep the plot going. Instead, at this point, Lean adds an old clock tower, stopped at twenty to nine.

The film uses to great effect the contrast between light and darkness evoked in Dickens's description of the interior of the house; we see Pip following Estella, leaving the light of the outside world for the darkness of Satis House, walking behind her as she carries a candle through dark passages, full of dust, cobwebs, and old paintings and sculptures, underlining the faded grandeur of the place. Lean puts into images what Dickens describes later in the chapter as: 'her light came along the long dark passage like a star' (which her very name suggests). He adds at that point another stopped clock, also at twenty to nine, at the bottom of the stairs, as a visual counterpoint to the stopped clock tower. He also has Estella asking Pip to take off his hat: so that he looks weak, holding his hat in front of him like a servant.

Then comes the meeting with Miss Havisham; Lean translates almost every details of Dickens' description of the room. Although Pip is part of the picture, we see the room and Miss Havisham from his point of view. Apart from her missing shoe and her position, Lean follows the text, including the dialogues, to the letter. A shot of Pip, followed by a shot of the dressing-table where we can see a prayer-book covered by cobwebs (which are echoed at the end of the film), once again hint at the first-person narrative of the book; but where Dickens can introduce the scene bit by bit, and digress about Pip's remembrance of the 'ghastly waxwork', the film has to show the whole scene at once. The text reveals the details about Miss Havisham's stopped watch and clock at this point; Lean instead introduced the clock tower outside, and the clock at the bottom of the stairs, to let us know that fact.

The film shortens Miss Havisham's impatient demand that Pip play, and shows Estella walking into the room: Lean has already used the image of her coming as a star in the darkness. In the next shot, Miss Havisham, sitting, and Estella, standing proudly by her side, are facing us and Pip, who we see from the back, and who is positioned slightly lower than them, so that they seem to look down on him. Estella taunts him ('With this boy! Why, he is a common labouring-boy'); the dramatisation has her saying: 'and look at his boots', a detail only mentioned later in the book, but which makes more sense at that point in the film. Then, Estella and Pip play cards, under the watchful gaze of Miss Havisham, who we see above them, slouched like a forlorn queen on her throne. She teases Pip, alluding to Estella's beauty and arrogance, in a tone reflecting Dickens' description: 'low, and with a dead lull upon her'.

Lean then skips the passage where Miss Havisham arranges Pip's next visit; although some lines of the text are used later in the film, for instance: 'I know nothing of days of the weeks; I know nothing of weeks of the year', at the end, read by Miss Havisham as a voice-over. We see Estella accompanying Pip back to the gate, and telling him to wait there while she returns briefly into the house, then walks back almost right away. In the foreground, Pip leans against the gate, cries and kick the wall, mirroring Dickens' words.

The entire episode in the brewery, where the ghostly apparition of a hanged Miss Havisham frightens Pip, is omitted in the dramatisation. This is understandable: if previously in the book there are actions, dialogues, descriptions which can be translated to the screen, at this point Dickens concentrates on Pip's memories and impressions,

which cannot easily be shown. Lean concludes the scene with Dickens' dialogue, and with Estella looking mockingly at Pip.

Because of the limitation of the medium, Lean has to extract from the novel the main plot, the visual elements and the dialogues. He has to sacrifice in the process the background of the characters, like the brewery, or devices like Pip's first-person narrative. Although he simplifies some aspects of the novel, he amplifies others, using visual clues like the opposition of light and darkness, the focus on facial expressions, or on specific objects like the clocks or the prayer book on the dressing table. As this chapter is connected by hints to the rest of the novel, so this scene is connected by these visual clues to the rest of the film.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

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