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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Bringing up a Child by Hand: An Examination of Mrs. Joe Gargery's Ways in Charles Dickens's Great Expectations

Armél MBON<sup>1</sup>✉, Abraham NGALOUO-ANTSO<sup>2</sup> and Daniel René AKENDENGUE<sup>3</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Université Marien NGOUABI, Congo

<sup>3</sup>Université Omar BONGO, Gabon

**Corresponding Author:** Armél MBON, **E-mail:** [abdulhameed\\_arts@yahoo.com](mailto:abdulhameed_arts@yahoo.com)

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways of bringing up her younger brother in Charles Dickens's novel. Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways of bringing up Little Pip in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, are not indeed those which could be expected from a woman, even less from an elder sister. In fact, her conduct, habits, or attitudes towards either her brother or her husband led the Victorian novelist to the use of the phrase 'by hand' which appears seventeen times throughout the novel, fourteen of which are related to her character traits in raising her brother. These traits of hers are mostly negative and place her side by side with such other characters as Shakespeare's Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* and Dickens's Miss Sally Brass in *The Old Curiosity Shop* to quote only these two. For this study, since it examines Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways, there is recourse to the formalistic approach, especially the figures of speech used by the author, as all the interpretations it seeks to bring are supported by evidence found in the text.

## KEYWORDS

bring up, child, by hand, virago, ways

## Résumé

Cet article examine les manières dont Mrs Joe Gargery élève son jeune frère dans *Les grandes espérances*, roman de Charles Dickens. Les manières dont Mrs Joe Gargery élève le petit Pip dans *Les grandes espérances* de Dickens ne sont pas vraiment celles que l'on pouvait attendre d'une femme, moins encore d'une sœur aînée. En fait, sa conduite, ses habitudes ou ses attitudes envers son frère ou son mari ont conduit le romancier victorien à utiliser l'expression « à la main » qui apparaît dix-sept fois tout au long du roman, dont quatorze sont liées à ses traits de caractère pour élever son frère. Ses traits à elle sont pour la plupart négatifs et la placent aux côtés d'autres personnages comme la reine Margaret dans *Henry VI*, pièce de théâtre de Shakespeare, et Miss Sally Brass dans *Le magasin d'antiquités* de Dickens dans pour ne citer que ces deux-là. Pour cette étude, puisqu'elle examine les manières de Mrs Joe Gargery, il y a recours à l'approche formaliste, en particulier les figures de style utilisées par l'auteur, car toutes les interprétations qu'elle cherche à apporter sont étayées par des éléments de preuve trouvés dans le texte.

## Mots clés

élever, enfant, à la main, virago, manières

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## **1. Introduction**

Reading Charles Dickens's writings, especially novels, is reading about child heroes and heroines of English literature. Dickens is, in fact, unstinting in his praise and championship of children when they are mistreated. It should perhaps be interesting to read what he (qtd by Shepherd, 1937, p. 193) said at the Anniversary Festival of the Hospital for Sick Children in London on Tuesday, February the 9<sup>th</sup>, 1858, in front of one hundred and fifty gentlemen, in the Freemasons' Hall, "Ladies and Gentlemen, it is one of my rules in life not to believe a man who may happen to tell me that he feels no interest in children." For Grant (1995, p. 92) Dickens "will continue to be read for his many other qualities as a novelist. . . . But he is uniquely celebrated as the novelist of childhood."

In his social reform of Victorian England, Charles Dickens had often used children as his hobbyhorse in most of his novels. Such novels as *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* to cite only these, feature prominently. In these novels, the issue of education is addressed in one way or another. In *Great Expectations* especially, Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways of bringing up Little Pip in this novel, are not indeed those which could be expected from a woman, even less from an elder sister. In fact, her conduct, habits, or attitudes towards either her brother or her husband, led the Victorian novelist to the use of the phrase 'by hand' which appears seventeen times throughout the novel, fourteen of which are related to her character traits in raising her brother. Charles Parish (1962, pp.286-287) has this to say about the phrase "Brought up by hand":

there may be evidence for a quite specific denotation of the phrase, one that has slipped out of the language or has been swallowed up by connotation (...) "Brought up by hand" thus meant-at least it did twenty-two years before Dickens's book-"bottle-fed," and this is the labor for which Mrs. Joe deserves praise; the assumption, a valid one, is that it is harder to bottle-feed and spoon-feed an infant than to nurse him."

Based on Charles Parish's assumption, my purpose in this presentation is to lay emphasis on Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways of bringing up her younger brother in Charles Dickens's novel, *Great Expectations*. Therefore, since it examines Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways, there is recourse to the formalistic approach, especially the tropes used by the author to this effect. In fact, according to Parish, the denotation of the phrase "brought up by hand", which specifically means bottle-fed or spoon-fed, has slipped out of the language or has been swallowed up by connotation, which means that there are social or emotional values that may be associated with this phrase. In other words, there are several figurative meanings of this expression to discuss, which is the aim of this presentation.

Much has been said on the use of the phrase "Brought up by hand" used by characters in Dickens's *Great Expectations*. However, the figures of speech around this expression have not yet received the critical attention they deserve. Hence, a question is raised, to viz: What meanings surround Mrs. Joe Gargery's bringing up by hand of her younger brother Pip in Dickens's *Great Expectations*? Violence in all its forms verbal and physical, is supposedly, those meanings that surround Mrs. Joe Gargery's bringing up of Little Pip. Yet, since there is the author's recurrent recourse to them, figures of speech also help explain those ways. As it examines Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways, there is recourse to the formalistic approach, especially the tropes used by the author, as all the interpretations it seeks to bring are supported by evidence found in the novel under scrutiny.

Mrs. Joe Gargery's character traits are mostly negative and can be referred to by way of such descriptive adjectives as arrogant, argumentative, aggressive, apathetic or unable to empathise, insulting...The interpersonal traits between her and her younger brother Pip leave much to be desired as seen in the following sections respectively discussing Mrs. Joe Gargery's arrogance, her insults, and her argumentativeness and aggressiveness.

## **2. Arrogance**

One of the first things about the communication between Mrs. Joe Gargery and her younger brother Pip, is that it shows an exaggerated sense of her own importance or abilities. Mrs. Joe treats both Pip and her husband Joe very harshly, although it should be remembered she has had, in many ways, a harsh life. Mrs. Joe is more than twenty years older than Pip, and she raised Pip from the time that their parents died when Pip was so young that he was not yet even weaned. However, Mrs. Joe holds these sacrifices she has made over Pip's head and uses them as an excuse to emotionally and physically abuse him.

Mrs. Joe Gargery has no place either among Dickens's European humane characters or among African humanity. In fact, under some skies in Africa, a dead mother is automatically replaced by her elder daughter, in whom a housekeeper is found. Joe Gargery is such an inhumane lady because of her behaviour towards not only her henpecked husband, but also her own younger brother for whom she should have cared like a child from her own womb. She rather enjoys rearing him arrogantly. The boy relates, "My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than I, and had established a great reputation with herself and the neighbours because she had brought me up 'by hand'" (p. 11).

The fact of having established a great reputation with herself and in the neighbourhood shows that she takes pride in doing this, and such is to every observer's eye, a way that is unpleasantly proud and which shows that Mrs. Joe Gargery thinks she is more important or knows more than other people. This is the more so obvious that when young Pip comes from the churchyard where their mother was buried, she haughtily scolds him for this:

'I have only been to the churchyard,' said I, from my stool, crying and rubbing myself.

'Churchyard!' repeated my sister. 'If it warn't for me you'd have been to the churchyard long ago, and stayed there. Who brought you up by hand?'

'You did,' said I.

'And why did I do it, I should like to know?' exclaimed my sister.

I whimpered, 'I don't know.'

'I don't!' said my sister. 'I'd never do it again! I know that. I may truly say I've never had this apron of mine off, since born you were. It's bad enough to be a blacksmith's wife (and him a Gargery) without being your mother.'

My thoughts strayed from that question as I looked disconsolately at the fire. (p. 11)

The question "Who brought you up by hand?" that she asks her brother may mean that the latter proved a disobedient boy and a disappointment for her. It is true that bringing up a child is a burdensome task. However, what proves that her question is rather an expression of carelessness than of carefulness is, apart from other evidence in the novel, Pip's disconsolate look after the conversation with his sister. Another piece of evidence of that arrogance of hers is the fact that when they sat down to dinner, Mr. Wopsle said grace upon which she fixed Pip with her eye, and said, in a low reproachful voice, "Do you hear that? Be grateful", and Mr. Pumblechook to complete, "Be grateful, boy, to them which brought you up by hand" (p. 34).

The use of this postal or correspondence expression 'by hand' carries along with it a notion of carelessness and of roughness with which Little Pip's upbringing is associated. '*By hand*' is quite a harsh metaphor; its harshness is felt in its unheated repetition by the boy. Besides, the phrase is used fourteen times in the novel from the kind of upbringing Little Pip received, to Mr. Pumblechook's revelation of this upbringing of the boy by his sister, to a waiter. Whitaker (1973, p. 52) has this to say about the expression 'by hand':

Charles Dickens' description of how Mrs. Joe brought up young Pip "by hand" is usually regarded as an example of the author's penchant for grotesque exaggeration; yet an examination of English children's literature from the seventeenth century to the 1830's suggests that the view of the child held by Pip's sister conforms rather closely to that promulgated by many adult authors.

When Joe Gargery, young Pip's brother-in-law, reminds him, "when I got acquainted with your sister, it were the talk how she was bringing you up by hand" (p.66), it is possible to infer from this that she intended to present this as a personal achievement whereas she is the villain of the Gargerys' matrimony. The gap between arrogance and insults is not big enough to notice, especially when these negative traits are both combined by the same character.

### 3. Insults

One of Mrs. Joe Gargery's character traits is that she is insulting and insultable. She combines ugliness and naughtiness, which are phonologically and metrically a good match. Oftentimes, ugliness and naughtiness are used interchangeably inasmuch as ugly people are sometimes naughty by nature. For the case of Mrs. Joe, in relation to her younger brother Pip, ugliness and naughtiness are a perfect match insofar as her physique and behaviour can be both qualified with the same adjective "bad". Not only does she often insult her younger brother, but because she is capable of being insulted due to her nature of a virago. For her physical look, one can retain this from her portrayal by Dickens given in Pip's account:

My sister, Mrs. Joe, with black hair and eyes, had such a prevailing redness of skin that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a nutmeg- grater instead of soap. She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front, that was stuck full of pins and needles. She made it a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe,

that she wore this apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it at all: or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off, every day of her life. (p.9)

As it can be seen in this passage, Mrs. Joe is described like a beanpole, which does not need more explanations to understand that she is a troll. A lady who recognises herself as such, usually feels inferior to others; this inferiority complex can turn her into a sort of a virago. Hence, there is a great likelihood that Mrs. Joe's arrogance owes a lot to this.

The ridicule which is heaped on young Pip gets worse with insults either from Mrs. Joe or other characters in the novel. These insults are tinted of animalisation and dehumanisation of Pip. Mrs. Joe often has hard words for her younger brother. For example, when the boy comes back from the churchyard, stamping her foot, she insultingly asks, "Where have you been, you young monkey?" (p. 13). Additionally, the hunger-stricken escapee licking his lips, called Pip, "young dog" (p. 5). For this reason, Tomita (2009) argues that "dehumanisation is the most frequent and sophisticated technique in the novel, with 59 examples in all" (p. 34).

One realises that a character like Mrs. Joe who is prejudiced against a young boy is always ready to describe him as such or such. This supposed identification of Pip with the hound connotes disturbance and harassment. Dickens's dehumanising portrayal of child characters also includes supernatural beings like monster, imps...More than mere hypothesis, this is Little Pip's own assumed metaphor, "Towards Joe, and Joe only, I considered myself a young monster, while they sat debating what results would come to me from Miss Havisham's acquaintance and favour" (p. 162).

The comparison of this child with a pet like a dog is synonymous with evil as the dog has nothing more than guard and hunting to show off. Informally, a dog is generally held responsible for various evils in some areas. It is a thing of poor quality, a failure in North America, and an informer or traitor in Australia and New Zealand to cite only these areas in which a dog carries a bad connotation with it. As for the monkey, the child appears ridiculous or is a burden to other characters. So, whether these characters that are seen prejudiced against the child are aware of the connotations of these abusive metaphors or not, what matters is that Dickens portrays the latter with such a craftsmanship which could have originated from no pen but his. In Graah-Hagelbäck's Master's thesis (Abstract), we can read:

Animals appear in many guises in Charles Dickens's novels, as wild animals, domestic animals, animals used in the service of humans, and, not least, as images and symbols. Based on a close reading of all of Dickens's major novels, this thesis centres on the symbolic use of (both metaphorical and actual) animals in the depiction of human characters, the chief aim being to explore a phenomenon that Dickens frequently resorts to, namely, the animalisation of human characters. Certain Dickensian characters are in fact more or less consistently compared to animals – to animals in general, or to specific animals. On occasion, not only individual characters but also groups of characters are animalised, and sometimes to the point of dehumanisation. By and large, being animalised equals being portrayed in a negative light.

Discussing animalism in *Great Expectations*, Kreilkamp (2007, p.91) states that "Orlick's attack on Pip foregrounds the problem of human-animal resemblance and constitutes a terrifying fulfillment of Pip's deepest fear: that he will disappear and be forgotten or mis-remembered like a dog", and he claims that "Orlick's revenge may be seen as a revenge of the animalism that has always been defined as the abjected other of the human". This revenge aborts, however, as Pip is saved by his friends. But the fear of death and of "a form of dehumanization, an annihilation so complete that it would prevent any true memory of Pip to outlive him."

The treatment given to the children in Victorian England had so moved Dickens that when he put his pen to paper he often portrayed them with those social and emotional values known as connotations that could have been produced by the craft of any other Victorian novelist but his. In fact, a wolf is connotatively or figuratively applied to cruel, greedy, rapacious, and destructive men. Yet in spite of his emotion, Dickens takes a lot of liberties to depict Little Pip as a wolf in such dressing. If we refer to dressing like a wolf, we understand that it was disagreeable dressing, as if this child were in rags. If we refer to the Bible as Dickens's writings are heavily influenced by Christian thinking, we realise that he uses Little Pip as the Benjamin of *Great Expectations* major characters, who, according to Genesis 49:27 "shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." We know what the tribe of Benjamin was like among the twelve tribes of Israel. Isaiah 11:6 reports that "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb (...)" Some scrutiny would thus tell us who is really who in this promiscuity of characters. Finally, do we realise that Dickens uses this connotation ironically. Little Pip is rather the lamb, and those who are prejudiced against him, wolves. Like the Lord Jesus in Luke 10:3, he would order Little Pip and suchlike children, "Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves."

Tomita (2009, pp. 25-41)) successfully tries to examine the metaphorical functions of what he calls 'Dickens's animal-metaphors' and shows their frequency of dehumanisation in terms of character sketch, but he fails to distinguish between such imagery that is metaphors and similes, a study he carried out six years previously with more accuracy. With regard to animal metaphors, Meier (1982, p. 61) writes, "both animals and humans are living creatures, the barrier between them is generally considered strong enough to permit the creation of forceful and telling metaphors."

Dickens's portrayal of the child characters whatsoever it is, appears understandably irrespective of the question of gender. This is illustrated by young Pip himself when he speaks his mind on his suffering. Comparing himself to Biddy, who was Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's granddaughter, Little Pip confesses, "She was an orphan like myself; like me, too, had been brought up by hand" (p. 76). So, the treatment received by both the male and female children was quite equal in length as well as in intensity in Victorian England. They were both victimised by the same injustices all along their life of orphans and were not spared by the quality of such treatment.

There is thus no wonder if Little Pip confesses that he "was staggering on the kitchen floor like a little drunkard" (p. 72). What casts this feeling of a drunkard upon the boy is that there are factors of fast sleep and uneasy waking up expressed by Dickens with figures of insistence which bring about such a feeling with the boy, living under his elder sister's argumentativeness and aggressiveness.

#### 4. Argumentativeness and Aggressiveness

While bringing up her younger brother Pip, Mrs. Joe Gargery is unjustly prone to behave in a way that involves arguing or attacking him. Mr. Joe Gargery treats Little Pip well whereas Mrs. Joe Gargery, Little Pip's own sister maltreats him. One of the ways of analysing Mrs. Joe Gargery's upbringing of Pip is to take into account Dickens's use of punctuation marks. The most compelling proofs thereof is that when Little Pip came from the churchyard where he met Abel Magwitch, that fearful man, his sister, crimson with anger, whipped him as hard as she could and threw him at Joe, her henpecked husband. In the following lines, the boy cannot help revealing their domestic strife, "I often served as a connubial missile - at Joe, who, glad to get hold of me on any terms, passed me on into the chimney and quietly fenced me up there with his great leg" (p. 13).

The hyphen that follows the comparison of the child with a connubial missile loses de facto its essential meaning of union and then takes the form of their discord, a discord which is best expressed by the use of 'at', a preposition expressing hatred when used in its dynamism. Besides the boy concedes that Joe Gargery and he were both brought up by hand by her (p. 11). Commenting on this system of punctuation, Ackroyd (1990, p. 243) highlights the strong link between this system and the rhetorical power of Dickens's work in these words, "Dickens gave his words a punctuation which suggests a more rhetorical or declamatory style; it is almost as if he had revised it so that it could be more easily read aloud."

The child opens his heart on what was going on about her sister's authority over his brother-in-law, "By this time, my sister was quite desperate, so she pounced on Joe, and, taking him by the two whiskers, knocked his head for a little while against the wall behind him: while I sat in the corner, looking guiltily on" (p. 18).

In such a situation where the man cannot exercise his authority over his wife, what can a child living with them expect as for mother's affection? What is however good with such a man's failure to stand up to his wife is his obvious soft treatment of children. This lets us know that Joe's tenderness was so beautifully proportioned to his need, that he "was like a child in his hands" (p. 833). In fact, when one's mother dies, the elder sister is her best substitute. Nothing hereupon equals motherly affection. If both of the Gargeries loved him, he would rather talk about his sister who is her deceased mother Georgiana's immediate successor. Thus, the tenderness that lies in this simile is but the child's lack of choice. In his analysis of Pip's characteristics, Luo (2016, p. 499) has this to say about Pip's sister:

His sister is a rude woman, and is so easy to lose her temper that all the family members will be received by her bad languages. However, his brother-in-law Joe Gargery, who is an amiable loyal and kind man, it is him who really cares about Pip.

Obviously when she loses her temper, bad things often happen, and when Dickens puts his pen to paper, he does not help having recourse to figures of addition or insistence like polysyndeton, which is a way of drawing his readers' attention to this

child's distress. In fact, the use of the extra coordinating conjunction 'and' in the prose account given below by Pip himself would have had a better meaning in verse for a rhythmic effect than in prose:

With that, she pounced upon me, like an eagle on a lamb, and my face was squeezed into wooden bowls in sinks, and my head was put under taps of water-butts, and I was soaped, and kneaded, and towelled, and thumped, and harrowed, and rasped, until I really was quite beside myself. (p. 91)

Even though Mrs. Joe is depicted as offensive, Pip is not defensive, but inoffensive and compared to a lamb who does not claim his rights. An eagle's attack understandably does its prey no favour. Therefore, the picture painted here in these words, is that of the natural vulnerability of a prey, Pip, facing his predator, Mrs. Joe. In fact, a soap is used for cleaning the surface on which something will be applied, and once the impurities are taken away from a formerly rough skin, the latter softens and becomes vulnerable and fragile to any knock. Dickens's diction is so rich that he chose these synonymous verbs with meticulous care. At first sight, the verbs used in Pip's account, give the reader the impression that the child was in good hands; as the enumeration goes on, with the following verbs, we notice, however, that the author makes his boy hero jump out of the frying pan into the fire. The proof is that when we take the trio soap – knead – towel, we have not the faintest idea of what the child is like. On the other hand, we have a clear understanding of what the boy looks like with the last trio made up of the verbs thump – harrow – rasp.

Knight is one of those critics who focused their attention on the monstrous women in Dickens's novel *Great Expectations*. While describing Mrs. Joe as a suppressed and raging housewife, she (2007, p.15) argues:

The violent and domineering Mrs. Joe is a monstrous woman because she lacks traditional feminine characteristics; in fact, she is depicted as masculine because she is aggressive, violent, and even ambitious: all traits that would have been well-suited for a man in the public sphere, but not suited for Victorian domesticity. Mrs. Joe detests being a working-class wife to Joe and adoptive mother to Pip.

Christoph recognises the same arrogance that is discussed early in this examination of Mrs. Joe Gargery's ways in bringing up her younger brother against whom she is prejudiced. With such a comment as "Mrs. Joe repeatedly announces that she has "brought [Pip] up by hand," a phrase ostensibly meaning that she took great care raising her young brother, but in actual fact an ironic statement referring to severely damaging emotional and physical abuse", she (2009, p.15) agrees wholeheartedly with Knight. The way Gilmour had seen Mrs. Joe's treatment of Pip is not different. According to him (1981, p.130), "Mrs. Joe's system of bringing up by hand is sanctioned by a primitive rural society, and it is harsh, unjust, brutalizing and morally diminishing." One of the most recent comments, Bekmurodova's (2023, p.29) did not beat the bush. In it, one can read:

Pip is traumatized by his sister's abuse, which leaves him with deep-seated emotional scars that affect his interactions with others. Her negative influence on Pip is also reflected in the fact that he becomes ashamed of his humble origins and aspires to rise above his station, which ultimately leads him to compromise his own values and relationships. In many ways, Mrs Joe's manipulative behavior can be seen as a microcosm of the societal norms and constraints that characters like Pip face in Victorian England, which highlights the damaging effects of patriarchal power structures and the importance of breaking free from them.

As evidenced in the preceding arguments, argumentativeness and aggressiveness are characteristic of Mrs. Joe Gargery not only in upbringing her younger brother Pip, but also in treating her own husband. She deserves what Shakespeare's character, York, (1974, p.559) said of Queen Margaret, "O! Tiger's heart wrapp'd in a woman's hide/Thou stern, obdurate, flinty, rough, remorseless."

## **5. Conclusion**

From the foregoing indications, it is concluded that violence including arrogance, insults, and aggressiveness is a clear meaning of Mrs. Joe Gargery's bringing up of Little Pip. The expression 'brought up by hand' is repeatedly used by Mrs. Joe as a token of pride, but in fact of arrogance. Mrs. Joe boasts about the way she brought up Pip herself ever since he was a baby. She is often stating that she raised him "by hand," and due to her violent ways, Pip thinks that this means she brought him up by hitting him often with her hand. Despite these subpar parenting traits, Mrs. Joe has developed a deep sense of self-importance for her perceived nobility in raising Pip. She also displays her pride by carrying some of her most prized items with her when she leads Pip and her husband Joe to Mrs. Havisham's house for a visit to which Mrs. Joe herself has not been invited. She uses metaphor

and simile in the insults she utters at her younger brother. Polysyndeton, another figure of repetition, is used in young Pip's account of his harsh upbringing.

Mrs. Joe seems to constantly feel that Pip and Joe have both set about irritating her and making her life as difficult as possible, regardless of what either of them has done. She responds to this by being tyrannical and abusive towards both her little brother and her husband. She often uses a cane named "tickler" for this purpose, violently "tickling" both Pip and Joe so often that the cane is worn smooth. All this helps understand how arrogant, abusive and aggressive she is towards not only her younger brother, but also her husband.

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