

Between Realism and Idealism:
The Construction of Reality
in *Great Expectations*

Sakiko Nonomura

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the relation between Dickens's mature fiction *Great Expectations* and realism by considering the novel's referentiality and reflexivity. The novel appeared in *All the Year Round*, weekly, from December in 1860 to August in 1861, in the very period of the rise of realism. It discloses the vanity of the ideal and warns us to put no trust in surface illusions. Dickens seems to have inquired further into the matter of the real and the ideal. He works at the period when realism and idealism intersected with each other, and it is reasonable to say that the tension between them is one of the characteristics of his novels.

"Realism" is an elusive term whose meaning varies with its degree and emphasis. It could be said that fiction reflects reality and all art belongs to the realm of realism, but it is generally considered that realism is a dominant characteristic of Victorian literature: "Realism, heralded by romanticism and continued by naturalism, has been the animating current of nineteenth-century literature" (Levin 198).

In the mid-nineteenth century there arose a discussion of the novel as a literary form, both by English critics and by the English novelists themselves. The terms "realism" and "realist" occurred in an article on Balzac as early as 1853 and Thackeray was called "chief of the Realist school" in

1851 (Wellek 229). In 1859 David Masson criticised that, contrasted with Thackeray, Dickens was “a novelist of the Ideal, or Romantic school” (34). While the aim of traditional realism was considered “to represent life as it is actually and historically,” Dickens was criticised as being “light” and “poetic,” as depicting “ideal perfection and beauty” or “ideal ugliness and brutality,” as belonging to “the supernatural” (35).

The traditional definition of realism is the truthful representation of reality. Art must be true to nature. Its referentiality to historical reality is significant. Realistic criteria such as truth of observation and a depiction of commonplace events, characters and settings are almost universal in Victorian novel criticism (Wellek 229). Realism is “the art of verisimilitude,” “representation or ‘lifelikeness’” (Frye 136, 134). By these criteria Dickens’s method is judged to be idealistic or sentimental, for it tends to much extravagance and caricature. Dickens is seen as one of “sensational novelists” who combine melodrama with careful social documentation (Davis 215). “Ironically, Dickens also came to be thought of as an obstacle to the development of Realist ideas” (Williams 116).

The concept of realism has changed considerably. In Russia the debate on “socialist realism” arose and among the Marxists Georg Lukács has developed the theory of “type.”¹ In compliance with the rise of socialist realism the concept of realism has changed into “a depiction of contemporary social reality” which implies “a lesson of human pity, of social reformism and criticism, and often of rejection and revulsion against society” (Wellek 242). As in Marxism, the concept of realism has become widely diverse and manifold.

Furthermore, there is a conscious rejection of the accepted Victorian concept of realism, which involves a critical rehabilitation of realism, in the twentieth century. The accepted Victorian concept of realism is turned upside down. It is replaced by the views that realism means different things

in different contexts and that it is not objective but subjective, dependent upon the individual consciousness.

In the process of diversification of “realism,” it has kept open the question “What is reality?” Reality means all things to all men. Its concept is perpetually changing in compliance with human consciousness. We have no way of distinguishing between the real and the unreal in any absolute sense. Imagination and reality are identical (Miller 36). Reality is fancy, fantasy, dream, or illusion. What we believe to be real is created in our brains.

The concept of realism has been diversified and defined as “anything but an unmediated record of reality” (Levine 253). Realism is “a formula of art which, conceiving of reality in a certain way, undertakes to present a simulacrum of it on the basis of more or less fixed rules” (Becker 36):

To write realistic novels is to deal with imaginary events and characters and with the hypothetical formulation of possibilities, in other words with the counterfactual, for the sake of illuminating political, social, economic, psychological, or moral “truths” of an age. (Kaminsky 230)

All fiction, even realistic fiction, is fiction. Realism, I say, is a sort of creation, imaginative and constructive.

From this modern perspective, the reflexive function of realism becomes more significant than the referential one. “The language that appears referential, innocently pointing toward an objective world beyond it, can now be seen as opaque, self-reflexive, gesturing toward its own principles of operation” (Ermarth xiii). The novel literally “objectifies” the world. Through the act of writing, subjectivity passes into objectivity, but without losing its subjective aspect. By means of this objectification, the narrative presents its world as an autonomous reality self-reflexively. By this

redefinition of the term “realism,” Dickens seems to be regarded as a realist. His mature novels reflect “not selected aspects of the surface of social life, but the *essential* condition of social relations within a *whole society*,” and his method is considered not “passive or mechanical” but “creative and critical” (James Brown 14-15).

In this novel Dickens seems to have escaped from the limitations of Victorian realism and provided for us new possibilities of reality that have not been debated in his period. He investigates the matter of reality in dealing with the main plot, the rise and fall of the protagonist’s great expectations. Pip believes that his benefactor is Miss Havisham and pursues a dream of becoming a gentleman and marrying Estella. Later, however, he learns that his true benefactor is Magwitch the convict and that all his belief is only a fanciful dream that would never come true. Pip thus confounds reality and illusion. After being misled by imagination into a false ideal, he gives up dreaming away his life and accepts his construct of reality. “In *Great Expectations* Dickens reverts to his more pessimistic view of imagination, seeing it as mainly delusive” (Higbie 145). However, considering that he explores the tremendous power of imagination which conjures up more truthful a story than the actual facts, it seems to be necessary to examine how Pip uses his imagination to construct reality/realities and how the construct influence his self-formation(s).

The novel opens up with the description of Pip’s self-naming. Because his infant tongue has not pronounced his name Philip Pirrip properly, he says, “So, I called myself Pip, and came to be called Pip” (3; ch. 1). This seems to be his denial of his real name and his personal declaration of his self-creation. He insists on his authority as the subject of his life. “Pip chooses life, unwittingly seeking to become the father of himself, someone freed from the conditioning realities of social class, of place, of time” (Frank 152). Pip means to construct reality/realities of his life by himself.

The novel is “multilayered”² with realities of characters in the transitional stage. First, I will provide three specific examples of Pip by considering his relationships with Joe, Estella and Magwitch, and then, I will point out other characters’ cases as well. Pip’s constructs of reality gush out of his early traumatic experiences, and he is conscious of being in bondage to them:

Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron or gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day. (73; ch. 9)

Although he emotionally appeals to the reader, it is Pip himself who forms “the first link” and binds himself with “the long chain.” These metaphors for imprisonment express Pip’s reality, which is his subjective construct based on his experiences. I aim to examine this causality in terms of memory and desire.

By origin Pip is a blacksmith’s boy living in a cut-off village. It is a closed world, as he recollects that “I had had no intercourse with the world at that time” (42; ch. 6). His older sister Mrs. Joe is conceited about having brought him up “by hand” (8; ch. 2), but as his severe surrogate mother she often tortures him with the “Tickler.” Joe is the young Pip’s guardian and the “fellow-sufferer” of Mrs. Joe’s violence (11; ch. 2). Pip respects Joe and dreams to be an apprentice to him:

But, Joe sanctified it [home], and I had believed in it. I had believed in the best parlour as a most elegant saloon; I had believed in the front door, as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls; I had believed in the kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment; I had believed in the forge as

the glowing road to manhood and independence. (106; ch. 14)

By Joe's influence Pip believes in the sanctity of home and in the pride as a blacksmith. For the young Pip, it is his only belief that his rural life promises a golden road of his life. Considering Pip's repetition of the expression "I had believed," his strong belief itself seems to engender a sense of reality. Pip thus invests the exterior world with his subjective value, and it could be said that dualism of subjectivity and objectivity breaks down. Objective referentiality is impossible in any absolute sense. As he enters the larger world, Pip's self is more diversified and he cannot maintain the belief any more.

In Satis House he encounters Miss Havisham and Estella who represent the genteel values of the upper class. Estella shows a sharp contempt for him, calling him "a common labouring-boy" (61; ch. 8), so that he feels nervous about his commonness for the first time:

"He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!" said Estella with disdain, before our first game was out. "And what coarse hands he has. And what thick boots!"

I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it. (61; ch. 8)

Pip cannot challenge Estella's values but obediently acquires them. He feels so ashamed of his own self that he can no longer have belief in his home and his future as a blacksmith. Pip judges the values of his hands and boots subjectively. It is clear from the verbs such as "thought" and "consider" that what he believes to be real is created in his consciousness.

Pip is captured by Estella's values, because she is the object of his love

and desire. Estella instils in him a desire for wealth and gentility, as he says, “I want to be a gentleman on her [Estella’s] account” (128; ch. 17). He internalises her values, helplessly dreaming of money and gentility and despising his job and home, that is, the reality in which he has always had great belief:

Truly it was impossible to dissociate her presence from all those wretched hankerings after money and gentility that had disturbed my boyhood—from all those ill-regulated aspirations that had first made me ashamed of home and Joe—from all those visions that had raised her face in the glowing fire, struck it out of the iron on the anvil, extracted it from the darkness of night to look in at the wooden window of the forge and flit away. In a word, it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life. (236; ch. 29)

Pip falls into self-conflict, because his wild desire for wealth and gentility haunts him perpetually and he cannot maintain his belief in his job and home. He seems to oscillate between the two antithetical values: one, represented by Joe, is the virtue and sanctity of job and home, and the other, represented by Estella, is wealth and gentility.

As a result, Estella’s value surpasses Joe’s virtue in Pip’s mind. As he ardently declares his attachment to her later, Pip recognises that his fancy of Estella seems to be so real to him and has captured his mind:

“You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made, are not more real, or more impossible to be displaced by your hands, than your presence and influence have been to me, there and everywhere, and will be.” (362; ch. 44)

Under her influence his dream of becoming a gentleman and marrying her seems to come true. His desire dominates his mind and leads him to construct reality that is suitable for his fancy. Judging from his comparison between his fancy and London buildings, it is clear that the referentiality to the exterior world is subjective.

Pip often imagines himself to be a gentleman, as he repeats such descriptions of the subjunctive mood as “if I were a gentleman” (116; ch. 15). For Pip, his ideal is more precious and more “real” than the actual facts. His imagination gives him a sense of reality. In other words, he takes his fiction for reality. What he desires and believes to be real is real for him. Moreover, he makes a favourable story in which he will “do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess” (232; ch. 29). This chivalric discourse of the passage, instead of the forge, signifies Pip’s new golden road of life. As he imagines himself to be a suitable hero for the fancy, he imagines himself to be a gentleman. Seeking for an identity as a gentleman, he constructs reality until he loses control of it and becomes bound by it.

Pip’s subjective construct of reality has an intimacy with a dominant desire for wealth and gentility. His imagination becomes more real to him as “the stupendous power of money” (150; ch. 19) is repeatedly demonstrated to him. Money verifies the reality of his imagination. It is the decisive moment for him when Miss Havisham gives him a bag containing twenty-five guineas as a premium for his services. He witnesses the tremendous influence money exercises upon people. Although he avoids stating his own impressions of the money and cynically observes the feverish excitement it induces in his sister and Pumblechook, this experience leads him to re-discover that he is only “a common labouring-boy” and reproduces a strong desire in him more impressively. His desire seizes him and tortures him until he believes that his imagination is real. He thus represses his “past”

image of self and believes that his new construct is his “true” self.

It is after this experience that Pip finds himself unavoidably haunted by the fancy of Estella. He is afraid that she may witness him being in his common state:

What I dreaded was, that in some unlucky hour I, being at my grimest and commonest, should lift up my eyes and see Estella looking in at one of the wooden windows of the forge. I was haunted by the fear that she would, sooner or later, find me out, with a black face and hands, doing the coarsest part of my work, and would exult over me and despise me. (107-08; ch. 14)

Pip internalises Estella’s gaze and watches himself by acting in her place. “Pip begins by trying to capture the Other in vision, but ends up himself captured in the Other’s stare” (Connor 130).³ In this case Pip is captured by the imagined Other’s stare. Pip seems to be insisting that he is confirming the actual facts, repeating the expression “I saw” on his first visit to Satis House (58-59; ch. 8). Nonetheless, he averts his eyes from the facts and pursues his ideal and illusion.

Pip is captured by his imagination that Miss Havisham, like a fairy godmother, will allow him to realise his dream. And therefore, when he is informed that his great expectations are to be realised, he promptly believes that his benefactor must be Miss Havisham: “My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale” (137; ch. 18). With the return of Magwitch, Pip at last learns who his true benefactor is and that all his belief in “Miss Havisham’s intentions” towards him is “all a mere dream” (320; ch. 39). Magwitch’s presence is “sober reality” which Pip must believe, but his memory causes him to construct another sort of “reality.” Pip imprisons

himself in the detestable memory of having helped the convict Magwitch, who has made an overwhelming impact on him in the opening scene. This memory haunts Pip continually and influences his self-formation until he fancies himself to be a convict, thinking “of the guiltily coarse and common thing it was, to be on secret terms of conspiracy with convicts—a feature in my low career that I had previously forgotten” (79; ch. 10). He tries to suppress the dark memory and break off the imaginary “conspiracy” with the convict, but eventually he fancies that it is inside him, saying, “the secret was such an old one now, had so grown into me and become a part of myself, that I could not tear it away” (121; ch. 16). His memory seems more significant and more “real” to him than the actual facts of his life. In his hard efforts to keep the secret from others and banish the memory from his consciousness, he is paradoxically imprisoned in it and recognises it as reality.

This construct of reality is also deeply connected with his desire for wealth and gentility. It is intensified by his experience of witnessing the tremendous power of money. He suffers from the memory, especially when a secret-looking stranger, who is in fact the escaped convict and Magwitch’s messenger, gives him a bright new shilling wrapped in two one-pound notes. Here again Pip refrains from comment on the value of money and observes its power from the reaction of Joe and Mrs. Joe, but he honestly confesses his fear, saying “a nightmare to me, many and many a night and day” (79; ch. 10). This experience concerned with money strengthens his fear of memory and his reality of being in “conspiracy” with the convict. This reality precedes his desire to become a gentleman and marry Estella, and his irresistible impulse to erase the memory eventually intensifies his desire for wealth and gentility.

I have observed the process of Pip’s constructing reality. His fancy haunts him continually until he confines himself in the closed world of his

own making. His belief in it is caused by his desire for wealth and gentility. His direct experiences of money reproduce a strong desire in him, which seizes and tortures him day and night, and he creates a fiction and then takes it for reality. Because of his strong desire and belief he cannot control his construct of reality but it dominates him. In this sense, he is a victim of “the stupendous power of money.”

It is generally discussed that in the later novels Dickens denounces the evil influence of industrial society. There are the power relationships between characters that result in dehumanisation. Individuals are “controlled or manipulated, bought and sold” (James Brown 20). “Everyone is a god to someone else’s mortal: Magwitch to Pip, Miss Havisham to Estella” (Vernon 122). The power relationships seem to be supported by the characters’ confined worlds of their own making. Magwitch confers power on Pip by making him “a brought-up London gentleman” (319; ch. 39). He projects his desire upon Pip, but he is captured by his own fiction, because his image of gentleman, which is so real to him, is ironically a false one, modelled on his enemy Compeyson. Miss Havisham uses Estella as a method of revenge on men and gratifies her repressed desire, but she also imprisons herself in her fictitious world. Saying “I know nothing of days of the week; I know nothing of weeks of the year” (63; ch. 8), she believes herself to be outside of the current of time, regardless of the gradual decay of herself and of her house.

The novel is thus multilayered with subjective constructs of reality. Dickens shows us that reality is fiction. Hence, his realism aims, not at referentiality to an objective, external, social, or personal “reality,” but at referentiality to a created one. Therefore, his realism seems more aligned to the reflexive axis than to the mere referential one, or it could be said that his realism aims to be self-reflexive as a result of achieving the referential function. By means of its referentiality the novel presents its world as an

autonomous reality self-reflexively.

There is an influx of imaginative realities, but the novel presents a certain mode of reality as a reliable guide to Victorian morality, that is, the ideal of the gentleman. Now I would like to investigate the novel's referentiality to history. We find its referential function at work, for the novel points towards an objective world beyond it, not innocently or mechanically but creatively and critically, so that it helps us towards a better understanding of the novel to consider how the novel combines the functions of referentiality and of reflexivity.

In the mid-nineteenth century Britain was the world's industrial superpower at the top of the capitalistic hegemony, and the Victorians were threatened with the infectious effects of the utilitarian and commercial spirit, and raised the cry for idealism to protect their noble minds (Houghton 267-71). They cherished the ideal of the gentleman, which was represented in Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* published in 1859, the year before Dickens started the novel. In the closing chapter Smiles discusses true gentlemanliness. He sets up the ideal of the gentleman and emphasises the need for morality, selflessness, courage, self-control, independence, and responsibility. Considering that the sales of this book continued briskly through the beginning of the twentieth century,⁴ the Victorians seem to have shared the ideal.

Dickens works at the intersection of realism and idealism. The novel is centred on the ideal in the process of the rise and fall of the protagonist's great expectations. Pip pursues a false ideal and gradually learns what "a true gentleman at heart" is (179; ch. 22). The novel takes the form of the autobiography of Pip. In his first-person narrative he represents his autobiography as a *Bildungsroman* in which he depicts his struggles in his early life until he builds the ideal life of a gentleman. My aim is to investigate how the novel reaches the ideal and how it represents the historical reality

with the ideal.

This novel is regarded as a *Bildungsroman*. In comparison with *David Copperfield*, as a *Bildungsroman* "*Great Expectations* is undoubtedly the more impressive novel, for its narrower, sharper focus allows a much fuller characterisation of the narrator, who is once again the protagonist" (Buckley 43). It seems to be the narrator's scheme to enforce the reader to interpret his autobiography as such. As we have seen, Pip represses his detestable memory and fabricates a favourable story. It deserves careful examination how he makes up and forges a plausible *Bildungsroman* in regard to its referentiality to history. The English *Bildungsroman*, including Pip's, is considered to be "less sensitive to major historical changes than the continental one, in the respect of the stability of narrative conventions and basic cultural assumptions" (Moretti 182). But the referentiality to history seems to be still open to further consideration, because the purpose and result of *Bildungsroman* are closely connected with the cry for idealism in the period. And moreover, the characteristics of *Bildungsroman* in the nineteenth century place considerable stress upon subjectivity and narcissism, and it becomes essential to write a 'self,' to construct an order from the chaos, to locate oneself in some way within the ordering of power (Carolyn Brown 65). It seems reasonable to examine the *Bildungsroman* with some reference to its historical background.

The distinction is crucial between the young Pip who sees and the mature Pip who professes, and it is the latter who controls the perspective of the narrative. The narrator carefully chooses the memories of the past to write about, and examines and interprets the depiction of each memory, according to his values and experiences. The narrator is a worker of Clarriker House, the firm of shipping broker, so that he belongs to the so-called middle class. The narrator is considered to be a "moderately successful, middle-aged businessman," and he is "confident, secure, and

powerful” (Jordan 78-79). But it seems to me that he is a deceptive and concealing narrator.

Pip represents his autobiography as a record of his efforts of drawing on an ideal true gentleman, which is clearly described in Smiles’s *Self-Help*. Smiles explains that the qualities of a true gentleman are truthfulness, integrity, and goodness. “[A true gentleman] is strong to do good, strong to resist evil, and strong to bear up under difficulty and misfortune” (323), and the ideal is realised by self-discipline, self-control, self-respect and self-culture. In comparison with this ideal, the novel is considered to be “an unequalled record of the small daily pains, embarrassments, gauchenesses, involved in self-culture for the poor boy trying to become a gentleman” (Gilmour 121). Pip’s self-representation follows Smiles’s idea of the gentleman, and he narrates his autobiography as a *Bildungsroman* from the perspective of an ideal gentleman.

Near the ending of Pip’s story we find that he stabilises his own living by himself, not relying on such a dream as his earlier great expectations, but supporting himself with certainty and reliability. The narrator describes his life after his departure from England: “I must not leave it to be supposed that we were ever a great House, or that we made mints of money. We were not in a great way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits, and did very well” (476; ch. 58). This is the ideal life in the Victorian period, for he supports himself on a sound business. Pip, after suffering his bitter experiences, at last lays the foundation of his life and sets it on its path. “Pip’s business career involves a parade of traditional middle-class virtues—thrift, earnestness, duty (he repays his debts), industry, perseverance and patience (his deserved promotion)” (James Brown 140-41). Pip seems to find a new golden road of his life, which seems to be right and “real.” But, as the others were fragile fictions, this one also threatens to dissolve.

Pip's principal motive to write his autobiography seems to be self-justification.⁵ He intends to write it as a plausible *Bildungsroman*, because he is afraid to be misunderstood by others: "The death before me was terrible, but far more terrible than death was the dread of being misremembered after death" (422; ch. 53). It could be said that Pip is still living in the gaze of the other. He now wants the reader to know how distressful his life has been and wishes to be appraised rightly and satisfactorily. With this strong motive he skilfully controls the reader in his autobiography.

The narrator arbitrarily emphasises his mental development by using such expressions as "I did not know then, though I think I know now" (96; ch. 12). In the novel the young protagonist ceaselessly tries to construe the secret before him, but he misunderstands it, as he wrongly believes that his benefactor is Miss Havisham. When he recognises the facts of Satis House, he says, "I saw in everything the construction that my mind had come to, repeated and thrown back to me" (301; ch. 38), and he learns that he has believed an improbable fiction. Different from the young self, the narrator now tries a correct reconstruction of the whole story in this autobiography. The novel seems to represent Pip's transition from fiction to fact. Unlike his earlier self, who holds a firm belief in his fiction, the mature narrator exceeds the fictive world and writes his autobiography in conformity with the actual facts.

Nonetheless, the authenticity of his narrative is still doubtful. As he confesses himself to be one of "self-swindlers" (225; ch. 28), he deceives even himself into believing a fiction of his own, for the purpose of self-justification. He denies the past and construes it as he pleases, wishing the reader to misunderstand it in a favourable way. He sets up an ideal of himself by concealing the facts.

The narrator Pip treats Joe as a model in his narrative. Even though he despises Joe for his commonness and simplicity, and although he cannot

confide all his feelings to him, Joe always plays the role of a barometer for Pip that indicates his moral degradation. And moreover, Pip accepts Joe's values as part of his own self and internalises his gaze to measure himself by his standard. Pip the narrator rather strengthens this tendency. Unlike Pip's early illusions, Joe represents the plain, unvarnished truth for Pip. In his autobiography the narrator judges his past by the subjective values that are adopted from Joe. In order to justify himself, he shows his mental development, performing as a self-made man who does not feel confused by apparent gentility or snobbery. Pip takes Joe as a credible model of the prime virtue and follows his example in his *Bildungsroman*.

Joe is depicted as an ideal true gentleman of the Victorian period. "Riches and rank have no necessary connexion with genuine gentlemanly qualities," and a true gentleman is "honest, truthful, upright, polite, temperate, courageous, self-respecting, and self-helping" (Smiles 334). Joe is depicted in parallel with the ideal. He functions as the moral standard in the novel. Before he actually wrote the novel, Dickens told his friend Forster that he conceived of Joe as "good-natured, foolish man" (Forster 734). The narrator also depicts Joe with nostalgic attachment: "He was a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow—a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness" (8; ch. 2). Even when he feels discontented with his common life, Pip recollects Joe as a symbol of virtue, saying that "all the merit of what I proceed to add was Joe's" (107; ch. 14). He compares Joe's hand to "an angel's wing" (140; ch. 18) and admires him for being "just as simply faithful, and as simply right" (463; ch. 57). Pip thus bestows his unqualified praise on Joe.

Pip recognises that Joe is not influenced by outward gentility and snobbery. Joe consoles him, saying, "Whether common ones as to callings and earnings . . . mightn't be the better of continuing fur to keep company with common ones, instead of going out to play with uncommon ones" (72;

ch. 9). Thus Joe insists on divisions of society. When he visits Pip in London, Joe, being exceptionally full of self-confidence, explains his faith to Pip: "life is made of ever so many partings welded together. . . . Divisions among such must come, and must be met as they come" (224; ch. 27). Joe makes a clear statement about his faith in divisions of the society and insists on his satisfaction in his part in it. Thus Joe is depicted as an ideal true gentleman, who does not care about the outward appearance but cultivates virtues in his mind. The narrator respects Joe and admires his honesty and simplicity. It seems remarkably desirable for people in power in the mid-Victorian period that Joe, who belongs to the working class, shows a conservative attitude. Unlike the young Pip, Joe seems to be satisfied with his life, so that he is not to overstep the boundary between class divisions.

The novel thus establishes the ideal of "a true gentleman at heart" on Joe. The novel may be criticised as being unrealistic. According to the traditional definition of realism, the novel must be criticised as escaping from the truth and pursuing the ideal. Joe may be considered as a mere caricature, which is ideally perfect. More recently, however, the concept of realism has become widely diverse. After the rise of "socialist realism," it claims to be "all-inclusive" and "didactic, moralistic, reformist" (Wellek 253). The character of Joe as the ideal gentleman seems to be admired as such. But the concept of socialist realism does not apply to Joe, because he conservatively supports the hierarchical system in the society, while in socialist realism "it is necessary to show where it is going, and that is toward the inevitable future of the communist society" (Becker 21).

Given the matter of referentiality to history, the idea of the true gentleman represented in *Self-Help* is only an ideal that has not been realised actually. "The idea of the gentleman was therefore much more influential than precise; and it was loaded to support the social hierarchy" (Best 247).

Ironically, the idea of the “true” gentleman is a fiction that will never be “true.” On the contrary, the ideal is not only available as a model for the rising bourgeoisie but also operates within the reformation of English capitalism (Carolyn Brown 62-63).

The novel pursues the ideal as well, but its representation reflects history more closely, because, unlike *Self-Help*, it represents the social hierarchy truthfully, as is shown in Joe’s advice to Pip. Although the novel seems to be a record of Pip’s transition from the fictive world to the factual world, the novel still binds itself by another sort of ideal that Joe represents. As Magwitch believes the false model of Compeyson as a true gentleman, the idea of true gentleman itself is a subjective construct. Here again, the referentiality is proved to be subjective, and then, the novel seems more aligned to the reflexive axis by presenting an autonomous reality. And moreover, the ideal has a paradox and the novel rather denies the possibility of its realisation inadvertently.

Now my question is about the authenticity of Joe’s nature as an ideal true gentleman. The novel paradoxically gives us a negative answer, for Joe actually has desire in his mind but conceals it, pretending to be satisfied with his present status. The narrator Pip does not mention it in the narrative at all. It is possible to think that Pip may not recognise it, but I suspect that he notices it but rather conceals it in conspiracy with Joe by establishing an ideal on Joe, which is a subjective construct. Now let me divulge the deception of Joe and Pip.

One factor is to tell a lie. It is a kind of disguise and a way of keeping up feigned appearances, far from honesty and simplicity. When Pip confesses that he tells a lie about Satis House, Joe gently reproves him for his dishonesty: “Howsoever they [lies] come, they didn’t ought to come, and they come from the father of lies, and work round to the same” (71; ch. 9). When he visits Satis House, however, Joe himself tells a lie, telling Mrs. Joe

that Miss Havisham has given “her compliments to Mrs. J. Gargery” (103; ch. 13), and that she has given money as a premium not to Pip but to Mrs. Joe. Pip then rearranges Joe’s story, so that they do not contradict each other. Neither focusing on Joe’s lie sharply nor blaming him for it, the narrator only describes that “Joe’s intellects were brightened” and that “he invented a subtle and deep design” (102; ch. 13). He seems to overlook Joe’s lie because he has a good understanding about his motive. Both Joe and the narrator save appearances before others by telling lies and maintaining the conservative attitude.

Furthermore, on the contrary to his precept to Pip, Joe seems to harbour a secret desire for money and gentility but pretend to be indifferent, and the narrator seems to be in conspiracy with him. I suggest an episode to prove that Joe is captured by the idea of keeping up appearances. When Pip consults with Joe about his revisit to Satis House, Joe gets an idea of giving a present to Miss Havisham. Though Pip tries to stop him, Joe repeats the discussion about a present, offering concrete examples such as “a new chain for the front door,” “a toasting-fork” and “a gridiron” (110-11; ch. 15). Joe may mirror Pip’s inward desire, but it is Joe himself who develops the idea of saving appearances. Thus Joe unconsciously reveals his secret desire, while he warns Pip not to wish to communicate with such “oncommon” people as Miss Havisham. It is Joe who is one of the “self-swindlers” and deceives himself. Although Pip depicts him as invariably honest and simple, Joe is a two-sided character, for he represses his desire and outwardly keeps the conservative attitude. And moreover, although he emphasises the divisions of the society, Joe paradoxically insists on linking them by showing his own desire for gentility. Joe wishes to participate vicariously through Pip’s success in the gentility. If Pip follows his advice, then Joe is in a superior position as a mentor of the gentleman Pip.

As we have seen above, Pip repeatedly emphasises that Joe has sanc-

tified home and influenced him to believe its importance. However, Joe paradoxically encourages the hierarchical structure of the society, both of the divine home sphere and the public, governing system; in the home he supports Mrs. Joe's "government"; in the public sphere he recognises the hierarchy and passively supports it as well.

Joe recognises Mrs. Joe as the governor of the home, saying to Pip, "[y]our sister is given to government" (49; ch. 7). Although he admires Pip, who expresses eagerness to gain knowledge, saying "You ARE a scholar" (46; ch. 7), Joe later expresses his disagreement:

"And She [Mrs. Joe] ain't over partial to having scholars on the premises," Joe continued, "and in partickler would not be over partial to my being a scholar, for fear as I might rise. Like a sort of rebel, don't you see?" (50; ch. 7)

On the pretext that he is only voicing Mrs. Joe's beliefs, Joe persuades Pip that gaining knowledge means becoming "a sort of rebel" and produces disorder in the home. Joe recognises the role of home as a substructure of the governing system, and maintains it by remonstrating gently with the young Pip. "From the viewpoint of ego psychology Joe identifies with the aggressor, suggesting his unconscious collusion with his wife's violence" (Berman 129). Joe seems to be a "fellow-sufferer" of Pip, but, if he really feels sympathy for Pip, why does he overlook Mrs. Joe's abuse of Pip? Joe has a capacity to prevent disorder in the home, but he does not head off Mrs. Joe's violence. He later makes an excuse for it that he has not protected Pip to prevent her further violence. Pip then only affirms that Joe is "always right" (465; ch. 57), and here it could be said that Pip has a blind praise for Joe as the ideal. Instead of stopping her from bullying Pip, Joe rather tells Pip to obey her, repeating that "your sister is a fine figure of a woman" (48;

ch. 7). Joe thus passively maintains the control of home as the substructure of the governing system.

In the public sphere he also keeps his conservative attitude and does not express his inmost desire for wealth and gentility openly, but the scenes are depicted almost like comedies and it is remarkable that in each of the scenes Pip is ashamed of Joe. When he visits Satis House, Joe looks “so unlike himself or so like some extraordinary bird; standing, as he did, speechless, with his tuft of feathers ruffled, and his mouth open, as if he wanted a worm” (100; ch. 13). When Jaggers first comes to inform them of Pip’s great expectations, Pip considers that Jaggers may recognise “in Joe the village idiot, and in me his keeper” (140; ch. 18). When he confronts people of higher status, he cannot remain as an ideal gentleman but rather appears only a fool, by hiding his inmost desire.

It is clear from his attitude when he sees Pip in London that Joe recognises the social hierarchy: “‘Which you have that growed,’ said Joe, ‘and that swelled, and that gentefolked;’ Joe considered a little before he discovered this word; ‘as to be sure you are a honour to your king and country’” (219-20; ch. 27). For Joe, the social hierarchy means something significant. It seems to be noteworthy that Joe, a member of the working class and the weak in the society, supports the hierarchical structure. The novel seems to be conservative on this point. “One of the important perceptions of Dickens’s fiction is of Victorian society as one in which the weak support the strong, the starving underwrite the satiated, the poor prop up the rich, the children sustain the parent—and the female upholds the male” (Houston 13).

What does it mean that the narrator Pip admires Joe and follows his example? “Pip’s traumatic disappointment with his father surrogate produces a wounded image of masculinity,” and “Pip needs to idealise his father in order to restore his own wounded image of malehood” (Berman 130-31).

I offer another reason—that the narrator agrees with Joe, supporting the divisions of the society and respecting the boundary of class division. The narrator now looks back upon his experience and criticises his error of being blinded by money and outward gentility. It is Pip himself who succeeds to Joe's role as a moral barometer. And moreover, it is remarkable that the narrator, whose desire is now thwarted and repressed like Joe's, repeats Joe's attitude. In his autobiography Pip duplicates Joe's story of repressing desire.

Pip learns the conservative attitudes from Joe. Like Joe, the narrator maintains the divisions of the society. He now regrets having violated the class divisions and disturbed the social order and regards that part of his life as an ungrateful digression. Having his desire diminished and repressed, he repeats Joe's role by remonstrating with the reader on the digression to prevent it henceforth. Pip thus represses his desire in conspiracy with Joe; however, their secret desires divulge themselves spontaneously. In this sense, this deceptive *Bildungsroman* paradoxically reveals the truth.

Although Pip depicts Joe as the ideal, Pip eventually does not return to the forge but goes abroad with Herbert. It is noteworthy that Pip's later success as a gentleman is not due to Joe's values but to the individual benefactor Miss Havisham, because it is made possible, indirectly, by participating in Herbert's business. Pip's final independence as a gentleman is dependent on Miss Havisham's money. Joe represents the narrator's ideal, paradoxically, because the narrator does not follow him. Owing to a nostalgic feeling the narrator can depict Joe as a model and recollect him not with hatred or resentment but with affection. The novel establishes the ideal on Pip and Joe, but they betray it by their own actions.

As we have examined, the novel tends to idealism in regard to the idea of the true gentleman. It seems to be a record of Pip's transition from fiction to fact, but it is only a return to the ideal. With this ideal the novel

achieves the referential function of realism in two ways. First, in comparison with *Self-Help*, the novel clarifies that the ideal is loaded with ideological assumptions that it supports the social hierarchy, and that it is utilised for the formation of capitalism. Second, the novel reflects the actual facts of the Victorian society inadvertently, by revealing the failure of the ideal in the relationship of Pip and Joe.

I have investigated the relation between the novel and realism. The novel combines the functions of referentiality and of reflexivity. It moves around the referential axis by adopting the Victorian idea of the true gentleman and pointing towards the historical reality creatively and critically, but it also moves towards the reflexive axis by suggesting that reality is a subjective construct and presenting its own world as an autonomous reality. Between realism and idealism, Dickens's method of the novel exceeds the dualism and explores the new possibilities of reality.

Notes

¹ Georg Lukács has developed the concept of "type," that is, "a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations"(6). He explains it as follows:

What makes a type a type is not its average quality, not its mere individual being, however profoundly conceived; what makes it a type is that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development, in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete the peaks and limits of men and epochs. (6)

² I quote this term from Auerbach's *Mimesis*. In the first chapter of the book he compares the Homeric style with the Elohistic text and observes that the most important thing in the latter is "the 'multilayeredness' (*Vielschichtigkeit*) of

the individual character” (13). He uses the term to explain the problematic situations of characters that are fraught with background.

³ Steven Connor uses Lacanian theory of the mirror stage to interpret the novel. He furthermore observes “a transition from Imaginary looking to Symbolic looking” (130).

⁴ 20,000 copies of *Self-Help* were sold in the first year, 55,000 from 1860 to 1863, and 269,000 from 1864 to 1905 (Altick 390).

⁵ Jordan advances four hypotheses about Pip’s reasons for telling his story: a need to express gratitude to Joe, Biddy and Magwitch; a need to get revenge upon Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, Miss Havisham and Magwitch; a need to wrestle with his deathless desire for Estella; and a need to justify his present life (79–84). I want to investigate the fourth one, his self-justification, because it leads to his motive of writing his autobiography as a plausible *Bildungsroman*.

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Synopsis

Between Realism and Idealism:

The Construction of Reality in *Great Expectations*

By Sakiko Nonomura

The aim of this paper is to investigate the relation between Dickens's novel *Great Expectations* and realism in regard to referentiality and reflexivity.

"Realism" is a slippery term, which has been recklessly used and has not been given a consistent definition. The term has a relatively short history, for it first appeared in the mid-nineteenth century. The traditional concept of realism has been considered as the truthful representation of reality, and Dickens has been criticised for not fulfilling the criterion. In the twentieth century its concept has been widely diverse and all-inclusive, and its reflexive function has become more significant than its referential one.

As the concept of realism has changed considerably, it has kept open the question "What is reality?" Reality means all things to all men, including fancy, dream and illusion. I interpret the novel under the assumption that reality is imagination.

Dickens seems to have escaped from the limitations of Victorian realism and explored new possibilities of reality. The novel is "multilayered" with subjective constructs of reality. Pip's constructs of reality gush out of his early traumatic experiences. By the influences of Joe, Estella and Magwitch, Pip creates a fiction and takes it for reality. His direct experiences of money verify the reality of his imagination, and his impulse to suppress his memory intensifies his desire for money and gentility. By suggesting that reality is a subjective construct, Dickens's method seems to aim at the reflexivity of realism.

There is an influx of such subjective constructs of reality, but the novel seems to present a certain mode of reality as a guide to Victorian morality, that is, the ideal of the gentleman. I examine the novel's referentiality to history, in comparison with Smiles's idea of gentleman represented in *Self-Help*. The novel

seems to be a record of Pip's transition from fiction to fact, but it is only a return to another sort of fiction, the ideal of the true gentleman. With this ideal the novel achieves the referential function in two ways. First, it is loaded with ideological assumptions that it supports the social hierarchy and that it is utilised for the formation of capitalism. Second, it reflects the fact of the Victorian society creatively and critically, revealing the failure of the ideal.

I consider that the novel combines the functions of referentiality and of reflexivity. In the former, it reflects the historical reality by adopting the Victorian idea of the gentleman, but the method is not objective but creative and critical. In the latter, it suggests that reality is a subjective construct and presents its world as an autonomous reality. Between realism and idealism, the novel exceeds the dualism and provides the wider perspective on reality.