

5

Great Expectations: A Bought Self

Perhaps the most striking feature of public discourse in the late 1850s and early 1860s was the virtual disappearance of anxiety about the working class. Up to that time the labouring poor featured continually within dominant discourse as a perceived source of menace to the moral, economic, social, and physical well-being of the nation. In the journals of 1859 and 1860 a silence seems to have fallen upon the problem of the poor – a silence strikingly acknowledged in *The Times*: 'We are all glad not to hear the long loud wail of the poor' (25 June 1860).

The late 1850s and early 1860s have been seen as the golden age of Victorian England, an epithet utilized at the time: 'In spite of rail, and steam, and machinery ours is even more a golden than an iron age' *The Times* wrote (26 July 1860). In the same year the *Christian Observer* remarked that, 'At home we enjoy profound repose. England was never so great, yet never was she governed with so much ease; never did she exhibit, in all classes, so much contentment' (1860, p. 797). Nothing illustrated this climate of 'contentment' so clearly as the lack of interest in the proposal before Parliament for further electoral reform. Whereas in 1832 the subject was charged with passion and violence, the reaction recorded in all the journals was summed up by *The Times*: 'All classes have resolved to treat the subject as unimportant because they are tired of it' (1 March 1860). In its 'Retrospect of the Year 1859' the *Christian Observer* concluded that 'the experience of every year confirms and extends the conviction in all classes that the English constitution... is still the best... the world has ever seen... The wildest reformers never venture to hint at a democracy' (1860, p. 69). Within this dominant discourse of contentment, which characterized the age, the representation of class relations underwent a change from imagery stressing opposition and difference to that of association and linkage. Instead of reiterating the irredeemable separation of the working class from the ideal

of respectability, public pronouncements began to assert their assimilation to this desired image. The eighteenth-century notion of society as a ladder or chain of connection was rediscovered.¹ The *Christian Observer* wrote of the nation as 'one great family' (1860, p. 710); the *Edinburgh Review* declared that 'the different classes of society are more firmly knit together' (109 (1859), p. 282); while the *Westminster Review* argued in favour of 'nicely-shaded social relations and inter-woven charities of life' (71 (1859), p. 151).

The title of 'golden age' for this era is appropriate in yet another way. Replacing anxiety about the state of the poor, the major topic of dominant discourse at this time was concern with wealth and its conspicuous display. Throughout 1859 and 1860 evangelical journals printed sermon upon sermon deprecating 'the feverish endeavour after the accumulation of wealth' (*Methodist Magazine*, 1859, p. 401). This theme was echoed in the *Westminster Review*: 'intense desire for wealth,' wrote a reviewer, was due to the 'indiscriminate respect' paid to affluence and riches so that 'wealth and respectability [have become] two sides of the same thing' (71 (1859), p. 385). Within this discourse upon wealth the words 'fashionable' and 'worldly' constantly recurred; it was the life-style and outward spectacle of wealth that fascinated and were desired. 'Wealth is one of the most attractive "fashions" that the world assumes,' wrote the *Methodist Magazine*, 'it dazzles with its brightness' (1859, pp. 600-1). The *Christian Observer* described the 'Perils of the Present Day' as 'the fashionable dress, the late hour, the luxurious display' (1859, pp. 219-20). Not surprisingly, this attraction towards the outward style and symbolism of wealth corresponded with a renewed popularity of royalty and the aristocracy. However, this was less a reverence for the mystique of birth than the more modern desire to participate vicariously in the glamour which nobility symbolized. This is what Bagehot, writing at the time, called 'the theatrical show of society ... a certain spectacle of beautiful women; a wonderful scene of wealth ... [a] charmed spectacle which imposes on the many and guides their fancies as it will'.² Bagehot pointed to this admiring identification of the mass in the glamour of the few as explanation for the absence of political discontent in England. His view was endorsed in the *Edinburgh Review*; the working classes, it wrote, were not tempted by republicanism or socialism, 'they love the monarchy, they take pride in the aristocracy' (112 (1860), p. 291). A letter to *The Times* declared it was the duty of government to maintain this high position of the aristocracy in the people's esteem, and it was signed in ostentatious deference, 'A Common Fellow' (11 February 1860).

This fantasy identification with the spectacle of wealth and nobility was aided, during these 'golden' middle years of the century, by widespread dissemination of the myth of individual success. If society was indeed a chain of connection, everyone could aspire to reach its heights. The *Methodist Magazine* asserted in 1859 that the 'inevitable circumstances of birth [and] early life' have little effect upon a man's destiny. 'Loneliness and insignificance' were barriers to be 'beaten down' by 'a strong will and hand' on the 'upward progress to wealth and fame'. Echoing further the imagery in *Great Expectations*, the journal warned that those who fail in this path to success were usually those who had themselves 'woven' the chains of 'entanglement' (1859, p. 427). The following year the *Christian Observer* drew attention to 'the fashion of late years, especially with our public lecturers' of holding out the 'golden image' of success to young men as in the keeping of their own will to achieve it. This 'sentiment has been, within the last few years, a hundred times repeated' (1860, p. 352). It was the *Westminster Review* which most fully explored the social implications of the continuous reiteration of this 'golden image' of success and the resulting identification of wealth with respectability. From earliest years, wrote the reviewer, a poor boy has it 'burnt into his memory that poverty is contemptible' so that before long the desire for wealth becomes an 'organic conviction'. But, according to the reviewer, this desire was not so much for wealth itself, as for its outward spectacle, 'the applause and position which [it] brings' (71 (1859), p. 385).

Undoubtedly, throughout the 1850s and 1860s the wealth of the middle class increased spectacularly and this allowed them to purchase a life-style of conspicuous luxurious display. But, as the quotations above suggest, this period also marks the initial moment of that long wooing of the working class with the dream of a consumerist life-style; a shift from inhibiting interpellation in terms of lack and guilt, to interpellation as promise. In reality, though, this consumer dream, the 'golden image' of wealthy style, remained only a fairytale for all but a very small proportion of the working class. Social mobility actually decreased after 1850, and the huge increase in national prosperity barely trickled down to the working class at all in the fifties and sixties. Furthermore, the emphasis on fashionable style and consumer display, far from creating any genuine national unity of 'contentment', actually functioned to create ever-finer nuances of social distinction and division. Stark class boundaries (and therefore class solidarity) were conveniently blurred by this increasing consumerism, but, wrote the *Westminster Review* astutely, 'by the accumulation of wealth, by style,

by beauty of dress . . . each tries to subjugate others, and so aids in weaving that ramified network of restraints by which society is kept in order' (72 (1859), p. 3). Even in dominant discourse like this the ambivalence of the recurring chain/weaving trope points to the duplicity of the hegemonic myth of society as a benevolent chain of connection. Chains more frequently hold things in place.

The dark side of the 'feverish endeavour after wealth' and pressure for conspicuous display was an increasing interconnection of money with crime, especially crimes of greed, malpractice, and business fraud. 'If anyone would obtain a key to the forms of English life in the year 1860,' wrote *The Times*, 'he would do well to read carefully from day to day the records of conflicting interest and crime' (5 April 1860). A few months before this a leading article characterized the age as one in which 'corruptions are bubbling up to the surface every hour' (5 January 1860). The *Westminster Review* also confirmed this view, suggesting that endemic crime, especially commercial malpractice, was a 'gigantic system of dishonesty . . . [with] roots which run underneath our whole social fabric' (71 (1859), pp. 386–7). Public perception of a criminal underside to wealth disturbed that ideological construction of a golden haze of general prosperity interweaving the whole nation into unified contentment. However, what posed the greatest threat to this hegemonic fairytale was the continuing poverty of large numbers of the working class, for whom belief in the 'golden image' of success could prove a cruelly mocking enchantment. 'In the most brilliant thoroughfares of modern London we brush against human beings whose life is one long martyrdom,' wrote *The Times*. Frequently these were those 'whom the real or imaginary wealth of London and the innumerable openings it is supposed to present to enterprise have allured away from home' (24 December 1860). The solution to this inconvenient problem of continuing destitution, which challenged the hegemonic culture of contentment and enterprise, was to exclude it from public notice and consideration. Ironically, in view of the increase in crimes of greed, it was the poor who were constructed as criminalized.

The process of exclusion and containment of the working class poor was much aided by the increasing separation of classes, as the well-to-do retreated to fashionable suburbs away from 'the annoyance of the crowded city' (*Christian Observer*, 1859, p. 487). This growing trend was commented upon frequently in the journals of the early 1860s, and this comfortable residential seclusion allowed uncomfortable facts about the labour which produced both the wealth and the items of its display to be forgotten. In 1860 the *Westminster Review* printed a long

article detailing the terrible injuries and debilitation suffered by those employed in luxury trades; it pointed out that although the wealthy 'have never given a thought' to the manner in which its wants are supplied, yet 'every article of luxury' in their drawing-rooms 'would disclose to us pictures of workmen transiently or permanently disabled in the production of them' (111 (1860), pp. 2–3). *The Times*, too, on Christmas Eve, sought to remind its prosperous readers of the real interweaving of their wellbeing with the 'class created, as it were, for our convenience'. Fashionable demand was locked into a causal chain with poverty. *The Times'* writer continued, 'few are aware how large a proportion of those who minister to our daily wants and comfort are liable to be thrown out of employment by a very slight oscillation in the balance of supply and demand . . . disturbances of the labour market, we are told, right themselves in time, but meanwhile flesh and blood have succumbed and men and women have been starved or reduced to beggary' (24 December 1860).

The grim reality of this chain of interconnection, which produced, out of sheer necessity of life, a ready supply of workers for poisonous trades was ignored within the myth of national contentment. This ignorance of the real conditions of labour facilitated the rewriting of the working-class poor as a semi-criminalized sub-class of those too dishonest or lazy to will their own success. This myth was strengthened by a glowing report in 1860 on the working of the Poor Laws which claimed that pauperism (the dependency culture) had been eradicated at a saving of over £33 million to ratepayers. Within this euphemistic discourse, the favoured term for the poor became 'the residuum', with the consoling implication that the main problem of class poverty was resolved.

In effect, by criminalizing and shaming poverty the Poor Laws had merely taught it to hide its face. 'While we are all glad not to hear the long loud wail of the poor,' wrote *The Times*, in response to the Poor Law Report, 'much is done that is never known' (25 June 1860). In the House of Lords, Lord Shaftesbury spoke of 'the many unhappy beings [who] are so filthy and ill-clad that they are ashamed to come out into the light and expose themselves to the public gaze. They creep forth under the shadow and shelter of night' (*Christian Observer*, 1859, p. 278). In addition to internalized shame, improved surveillance methods also kept poverty out of sight and perceived as criminalized. Earlier in the century, troops and force were the only means of reacting to social unrest. By the 1850s, the police force had sufficient numbers and efficiency to maintain a perpetual watchfulness on behalf of the

propertied. If the presence of the poor attracted attention, a police officer would inevitably appear to disperse them. Mayhew wrote bitterly of the 'aristocratic pride of the commercial classes' in utilizing the police to force street people continually to 'move on' (II, 3). This repression of the reality of poverty from the knowledge and experience of prosperous life led to the erosion of outrage. The problem of class poverty and its discontent had not been solved, but it had been silenced – pushed out of sight and out of mind.

Dialogic engagement with the hegemonic golden images of success, wealth, and contentment, and their silenced reverse of poverty and crime, is displaced into the wholly appropriate fairytale form of *Great Expectations*. Clearly this novel constructs a parodic fable aimed at an ironic exposure of national enchantment with the myth of great expectations for all. The narrative not only unmask the inter-connection of money, crime, and power hiding beneath glamorous spectacle, but also it stages a scandalous return of the repressed and criminalized poor. However, fairytale is a rich, archaic form, closely associated with rituals of transformation and with symbolic figuration of desire, and these traditions remain active in the text, adding a polysemic complexity to its exploration of aspiration and social identity. The radical contentiousness of the novel is disguised by backdating the story to earlier in the century, although Herbert's search for a career opening in shipping insurance situates it within the financial and imperial world of the post-1850s. However, this backdating, like the fairytale form, is multiply functional. The earlier period of criminal transportation allows for the dramatic enactment of return. More importantly, it produces an effect of condensation so that synchronic novelistic images articulate the complex process of historical change, whereby control of discontent moved from external force to inner coercion, and then to the persuasive promise of consumer dream. In addition to this, the text seizes dialogically upon the words 'common' and 'fellow' and upon images of connection recurrent in dominant discourse and renders them sites of immediate ideological conflict, to be resaturated with radical intent.³

Great Expectations opens with the fictional subject it is to construct first coming to a sense of 'the identity of things' (1). As character, Pip is shown to acquire a perception of self through experienced difference; as a small, sentient, 'bundle of shivers' enacted upon by a hostile physical universe (1). Thus from the first inception of the narrative, Pip is represented as a subjected subject. This is the common inheritance of all creatures, and Pip's shivering flesh underlines his fellowship with

'the terrible man' who had been 'soaked in water...lamed by stones...stung by nettles...who limped and shivered...and whose teeth chattered in his head' (2). It is this bondage to fundamental physical needs of hunger, warmth, and creature contact which inscribes human commonness. By contrast, the main function of socially-created artificial needs is to rewrite this connection, and thereby invest 'commonness' with an opposite derogatory value. Consumer life-styles construct what the *Westminster Review* correctly designated 'a network of restraints' whereby the 'identity of things' becomes caught up in a signifying system of social esteem. Recognition of common need is articulated in young Pip's pity for the convict's 'desolation' and in the discourse of Joe: 'We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur' (36).

However, in the world represented by the text, subjection to physical force comes largely from fellow human beings. Mimetic representation of Pip's first moment of awareness of self as subject of a physical world, is immediately followed by his brutal subjection to human force. Prior to this he has been subject to his sister's bringing-up by hand and by 'Tickler'. Magwitch, too, is depicted as a creature shackled with the physical chains of oppressive state power, and these chains are used later to subdue and subject Mrs Joe. Bonds of connection binding family or state are unmasked in the text as largely characterized by violence and intimidation, not as ladders to success and prosperity. Smithfield and Newgate lie side by side in the heart of London, mirror-images of each other and reflecting the ultimate manifestation of physical state power: creatures herded out 'to be killed in a row' (156).

However, the efficacy of physical power is limited to its presence. From the eighteenth century onwards, the state came to rely less and less upon terrorizing and punishing the physical body of those resistant to its authority, and more and more upon means of internalizing restraint and fear in those perceived as even potentially discontented. These means can be generalized as the inculcation within the individual subject of a sense of perpetual surveillance. The apparatuses of this subjection were multiple, from incarceration regimes like the Silent System, monitoring systems in education, and the construction of the police force, but undoubtedly the most powerfully dispersed influence was evangelicalism, with its relentless insistence upon inner guilt perceived by an ever-watchful God. The representation of Magwitch provides an illustrative image of this

historical transition from external force to inner coercion. In order to retain power over the child Pip when he is no longer present to exert physical terror, Magwitch is forced to invent the young man who has 'a secret way, peccoliar to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver. . . . that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open' (3-4).

This young man with such terrifying powers of secret access foreshadows the representation of Jaggers, whose total inscrutability, combined with a terrorizing reputation for clairvoyance, constructs him as the very personification of the panoptican State. The depiction of Jaggers's methods reveals the efficacy, in terms of social control, of criminalizing the subject. Jaggers deliberately extends opportunities for petty crime in the way of those perceived as potentially unlawful in order to bring them fully into his control – so that 'he has 'em soul and body' (249). Those brought thus within the system of law become not only subjects to be punished, but also objects of knowledge, individualized and spotlighted within an all-encompassing scrutiny – souls rather than bodies are the object of this power. Magwitch has his head measured as part of this process whereby criminality became an object of knowledge, dispersing and banishing discontent amidst a grid of 'scientific' statistics. Jaggers is represented as taming a 'wild beast' by making her the object of his knowledge, but the power he represents extends beyond those actually guilty of crime. The coercively forensic style of his character discourse persistently insinuates access to guilty personal secrets, and thus imposes self-perception of a guilty, criminal subjectivity upon all those he interpellates. In this way he gains a 'detrimental mastery' over his 'fellow-creatures' (155). Under exposure to the gaze that seems to know 'something secret about everyone', characters are depicted as feeling a compulsion 'freely' to confess inner guilt (128). Asked by Pip what he was 'brought up to be', Magwitch is represented as confessing with alacrity 'A warmint'. He answers truly in that being 'brought up' before the law initiated that process of internalized social control whereby the potentially discontented are constructed as guilty, criminalized subjects.

'Sin and law are things which assume the necessity of each other' asserted the *Methodist Magazine* in an article whose title, 'Conscience in Young People', seems an echo of those meditations upon self-guilt articulated by Pip as narrator. The young person, the journal continued, 'perceives the authority of the "law" within him, and understands the dread tribunal to which conscience manifestly refers'

(1859, pp. 200-2). Evangelical discourse persistently obliterated boundaries between God, state, and parent so that children must have felt themselves bound in every aspect of life within a totalized system of scrutinization and judgement.

In the text of *Great Expectations* the direct and indirect speech images of Mrs Joe's character discourse reproduce this repressive language, constructing around Pip, as child, a similar sense of exacting surveillance of which he is at once the known, judged, and punished subject. This represents Pip's first loss of self, as he is recast – forged – in the language of original sin. He is 'a young offender', his birth an offence committed against 'reason, religion, and morality' and this guilty state is signified by clothes made 'like a kind of Reformatory': a complete fusion of the terminology of sin and crime. Appropriately, therefore, the adult Pip's narrative discourse articulates this internalized guilt by constructing its subject as social sinner. The predominating word within narrative language of self is 'conscience' and the narrative voice constructs a sense of subjectivity burdened with a guilt which seems to well up spontaneously from within in an urgent desire to confess.⁴ This distinguishes it sharply from the first person confessional narrative of *David Copperfield*, and this difference registers a difference in class representation. The narrative discourse of the adult Copperfield constructs its subject as hero of moral progress, an ego-ideal of bourgeois individualism. In *Great Expectations*, the adult narrator's self-condemnation articulates the ineradicable social guilt of those born poor.

However, the representation of Pip as character, opened up to desire by Satis House, offers a fictional exploration of the subsequent historical shift in the ideological means of containing discontent away from internalized repression to the promise of plenitude. With the expansion into mass-production capitalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, the interpellative emphasis began to shift from the construction of subjects in terms of inhibiting lack and guilt, to that of promise. Instead of functioning as measure of hopeless distance, desire for an Imaginary ego-ideal was increasingly deflected into a dream of consumer plenitude, thus functioning not only to contain potential discontent, but also to stimulate demand-led economic expansion. When the *Methodist Magazine* drew attention in 1859 to a change in the methods of social control, it referred not to internalized guilt, but to the power of consumer persuasion: 'The world has more effective engines than the rack, and the wheel, and the gibbet; it has pleasures and riches and honours' (1859, p. 31).

At Satis House Pip is shown to catch the 'infection' of social shame (55); in the words of the *Westminster Review* it is 'burnt into his memory that poverty is contemptible'. Significantly, the contempt is attached, from the very start, to attributes of lifestyle, to the thick boots, rough hands, and colloquial speech of 'a common labouring boy' (55). In rejecting the contemptible self-image these attributes signify, there is an awakening of desire for all that is perceived as uncommon: for the glamour, refinement, and exclusivity of Estella as a carefully constructed image of desire. That Pip as character is seduced by a fairytale of wealth is indicated in the images he is represented as inventing, whose function is to mark an absolute separation between the world symbolized by Satis House (a misnaming of plenitude, as Estella reveals, p. 51) and the realities of life, now perceived as fundamentally lacking, at the forge. Coaches, golden dishes, enormous dogs, flags and swords are props from a spectacle of fairytale pomp. They conjure a magic world with Pip as participant in its ceremonies of cake and wine – a phantasy wish-fulfillment engendered by actual experience of distance and exclusion.

Desire for the ideal is an inescapable impulse of human life originating, according to Lacan, in the misrecognition of a phantasy specular ego-ideal. The drive throughout life to rediscover that lost perception of self-plenitude is the unconscious impulse stimulating an inventive urge to transform present actuality; but it is also a discontent easily displaced into the conforming ideals of self valorized and glamourized within social structures. Increasingly this unconscious desire has been captured by the fairytale promises offered in the phantasy glamour and plenitude of consumer style. Within the discourse of Pip as character, the star imagery associated with Estella condenses and contains these oppositional directions of desire. The image of the star and the poetic intensification of language associated with it function in the text to create a felt pulse of yearning desire for a transforming, visionary expansiveness able to transcend the physical and mental confinement of a low horizon. This aspect of the speech image constructed by Pip's character discourse remains always outside the judgemental domain of the narrator's moral discourse and uncontainable by its self-repressing guilt.

However, the star image also embodies the sense of an aloof, glittering social world, tantalizing and glamorous. Its double interpellation of hopeless distance and teasing infatuation is articulated in Pip's explanation of his 'lies': 'She had said I was common . . . I knew I was common and . . . I wished I was not common' (65). Just as the word

'conscience' is the key signifying term within the moral discourse of the adult narrator, so from this point the word 'common' becomes central and recurrent in the speech image associated with Pip as character. The word functions continually and ironically to separate and reject lifestyles and attributes perceived as contemptible. 'I had believed in the best parlour as a most elegant saloon . . . I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence . . . Now, it was all coarse and common' (100). Rejection of 'commonness' is represented as leading to loss of connection with that non-hegemonic oppositional sense of 'commonness' inscribed in the opening episodes of the text. Throughout the novel common needs like hunger and clothing are shown as elaborated into uncommon practices of differentiating lifestyle, forming 'networks of restraint' like those depicted inhibiting Joe on the visit to London and indicated by the separating encroachment of 'Sir' into his character discourse. Appropriately the principle of differentiating lifestyle is articulated most explicitly in the character discourse of Estella: 'Since your change of fortune and prospects, you have changed companions . . . what was fit company for you once, would be quite unfit company for you now' (223). Acceptance of these social rules governing degrees of connectedness is represented mimetically in Pip's increased tendency to use money rather than personal contact as the currency of human relations. This retreat from connection with the reality of other lives – from commonness – is shown to lead to the erosion of compassion. Pip's first reaction to Newgate on arrival in London is represented as one of outrage and horror. Later, having been conducted inside by Wemmick, his response is depicted as having changed to that of abhorrence at his own contamination with its reality. The speech image of Pip as child to the convict articulates pitying fellow-feeling, the character discourse of Pip as gentleman expresses the will for disconnection: 'I cannot wish to renew that chance intercourse with you of long ago . . . our ways are different ways' (301).

Narrative construction of Pip as gentleman reveals that more is lost in the materialization of that fairytale 'golden image' of wealth than connection with the lives of others. It represents a second loss – or forging – of self. Pip is shown to mark his changed expectations by a metamorphosis of self-image. He orders himself a 'fashionable suit of clothes', 'an article much in vogue among the nobility and gentry' (143). So he begins to construct the appropriate style of wealth. Indeed, the only employment of Pip as gentleman offered by the narrative account is that of conspicuous consumption and display. The

studies with Mr Pocket are never detailed, but reader attention is frequently called to descriptions of lifestyle. His rooms are luxuriously furnished, his personal appearance enhanced by jewellery, his status advertized by the canary livery of the Avenger, and his reputation confirmed by membership of a fashionable club. Pip as character is shown to become a gentleman by assuming the style of wealth. This is probably the first representation of the yuppie in fiction. What this constructs is a life of surface, a consumerist perception of self as bought. The dialogic challenge to this within the text is Wemmick's inventive pleasure in a self-made domestic lifestyle whose gadgets are all intended to enhance connection by breaching the Aged's isolating deafness. 'I am my own engineer, and my own plumber, and my own gardener' he is presented as telling Pip (196).

In Pip's case, even the bought style is based upon growing debts, and this in turn is based upon false expectations. The whole existence as gentleman is represented in the text as a falsification and a counterfeiting of self. The fairytale form of transformation into prince reverses over into the curse of stolen or enchanted identity. The adult narrator names himself with the deep bitterness of loss a 'self-swindler', cheating himself with 'spurious coin' of his own making (213). There is a sad diminishment in the movement of the narrative from that initial fairytale invocation of transformation and celebration in terms of golden dishes and velvet coaches to the representation of Pip's empty pretence of plenitude in London, that 'gay fiction among us that we were all constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did' (260). Despite its fictionality the process of genteel restyling is depicted as devoid of imagination. Pip's capacity for playfulness died at Satis House. The text presents his transformation into gentleman as merely a matter of buying the appropriate style of display. Nothing could be more different from the inventive and opportunist process of continuous self-making represented in the street characters of Dickens's earliest texts. Sam Weller's theatrical performance of self constitutes a celebration of superfluity in common life, refusing the low horizon of an existence bounded by mere necessity. Its spectacle is inclusive, irradiating participants with shared glamour in a spirit of playful transformation. By contrast the spectacle of wealthy style as presented in Pip as character is intended to intimidate those it separates off as 'common', and it counterfeits self in a bought image. As gentleman, Pip fully reveals that to 'Havisham'. This falsification of self is appropriately articulated in the parodic mirroring of Pip's pretensions by Trabb's boy, a wonderful

re-invention of the urchin: 'Don't know yah, don't know yah, pon my soul don't know yah!' (232).

This imagery of shamming, counterfeiting, or forging is the master trope of the text, locking together the interconnection of money with criminality. Almost all the crime mentioned in the story is of coining, forging, or swindling. Jiggers is even said to keep a smelter on the premises. The whole system of law, as represented in the novel, is implicated in a pervasive network of counterfeiting. Witnesses are paid to 'sham' respectability, innocence is bought from the lawyer best able to construct its appearance. Underlying this forgery of justice by money, is subservience to style. The *Westminster Review*, in writing about the 'gigantic system of dishonesty' running beneath 'our whole social fabric', concluded, 'we are all implicated . . . Scarcely a man is to be found who would not behave with more civility to a knave in broadcloth than to a knave in fustian' (71 (1859), p. 387). The account of Magwitch's trial provides a fictional exposure of this use of money to construct the style of respectability and lawfulness.

In 1860, *The Times* described the plight of children orphaned or 'turned out of doors [to] become what are called Arabs of the streets. They have not a hope or a thought but of mendicacy or robbery . . . in the streets, in the school of crime, and on the way to prison, or the penal settlement' (15 August 1860). This is a real-life version of the fictional story of Magwitch: 'In jail and out of jail . . . carted here and carted there . . . tramping, begging, thieving, working sometimes when I could' (329). In the speech image of Magwitch the text constructs a powerful and passionate voice to represent the silenced and criminalized poor. In opposition to the exclusion of poverty from hegemonic discourse of national contentment, Magwitch's character discourse is dominated by an urge for reconnection. While the speech image of Pip as gentleman struggles to defend a sense of separation and differentiation, Magwitch's reiterated interpellation of him as 'dear boy' seeks to pull him into a recognition of affection and intimacy – a 'commonness' which he dreads. The representation of Magwitch's physical gestures, too, stress the impulse to make fellowship material in actual bodily contact. In detailing Pip's shuddering reaction, narrative discourse most powerfully recreates the repugnance and shrinking of the prosperous from the physical reality of those Lord Shaftesbury described as so 'filthy' and 'ill-clad' that they only 'creep forth' at night. The representation of the fairytale sham of fashionable style is shattered by dialogic contact with the intensity conveyed of Magwitch as a physical bodily presence – this is a triumph of the

novel's mimetic realism. Once returned, the immediacy and passion of this physical challenge to a counterfeit reality can no longer be pushed from consciousness: 'everything in him that it was most desirable to repress, started through that thin layer of pretence, and seemed to come blazing out at the crown of his head' (319). The energy of the verbs here seems to deny the possibility of any further containment.

However, Magwitch, too, is represented as having bought the consumer dream. His discourse lovingly recognizes and catalogues the items of Pip's fashionable lifestyle: lodgings 'fit for a lord', gold and diamond rings, fine linen, books (305). But Magwitch's discourse overtly connects this consumer desire to the lack which makes its idealized images so impelling to the poor and outcast – the need to escape from a self-image perceived as low or contemptible. 'And then, dear boy, it was a recompense to me, look'ee here, to know in secret that I was making a gentleman' (306). Even a vicarious investment in wealthy style offers defence in phantasy against interpellation as an 'ignorant common fellow', as Bagehot recognized when he described the 'charmed spectacle of society' as 'imposing on the many and guiding their fancies as it will'. Royalty, joined now by various 'stars', constructed, like Estella, as objects of desire, offer that same vicarious and consoling identification with glamour to those unlikely ever to share it, articulated in the character discourse of Magwitch. More importantly, his speech reconnects wealthy lifestyle and conspicuous consumption to the reality of their source in degraded and punishing labour. 'I lived rough, that you should live smooth, I worked hard, that you should be above work' (304). Those words, in their starkness, lay bare the exploitative chain of connection structuring the economic inequality of class. This is always the uncomfortable truth repressed and excluded from the fascinating spectacle of wealth.

Pip, like the prosperous in the real world, is represented as inscribing the space of this repressed knowledge with criminality: 'In the dreadful mystery that he was to me . . . I would sit and look at him, wondering what he had done, and loading him with all the crimes in the Calendar' (319). Pip even mimics the urge to incarcerate the poor, locking Magwitch into his room at night. However, the text does not sanction this recontainment. Magwitch's first person account of his life constructs the criminalized poor, not as object of knowledge, but as passionately knowing subject whose discourse reconnects the link between common needs and 'crimes' of want. While the new discourse of science was elaborating a mystifying typology of criminality constructed upon irrelevant statistical measurements, the language of

Magwitch, in *Great Expectations*, asserts the simple compulsion of hunger: 'What the Devil was I to do? I must put something into my stomach, mustn't I?' (328). The laws of property cannot bind those denied work, food, and shelter. In addition, Magwitch's discourse functions to expose the chain of connection between crimes of need and crimes of greed. Even a slight disturbance of the labour market, *The Times* disclosed, could reduce men and women to starvation and beggary. This level of common need pushed the poor, like Magwitch, into the power of those, like Compeyson, involved in crimes of swindling and fraud, not in order to stay alive, but to indulge the cultivated needs of wealthy lifestyle. The chains of social interconnection as represented in *Great Expectations* are altogether more harsh and sinister than those presented in the hegemonic myth of 'interwoven charities of life'.

The character discourse of Magwitch is represented as the means of reconnecting Pip with origins in commonness. This narrative pattern of circular return is so obsessive in the later novels of Dickens that the repetition must articulate a desire which refuses containment. Readings which recontain the strong impulse of desire inscribed in the text of *Great Expectations* usually do so by imposing the hegemonic myth of moral progress. Pip's willing public commitment of fellowship to Magwitch is interpreted as the climax of his individual moral regeneration. However, this restriction of the story to the private ignores the deliberately archetypal representation of Magwitch. The name 'Abel' associates him with the first biblical sacrificial prefiguring of Christ; he comes into Pip's life at Christmas and is sentenced to death in April, the season of Easter. Such symbolic dimension is out of proportion to an individualized reading of Pip's story. Clearly, Magwitch is intended to represent the scapegoat poor of prosperous mid-Victorian England, criminalized and punished for the guilt of poverty. As usual, biblical intertextuality opens out the more radical implications of the text. The parable Pip reads to the dying Magwitch is told in Luke 18 as a warning to the wealthy who 'despised others', and it concludes with the words, 'for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted'. The chapter then continues with Christ's advice to the wealthy man 'to sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor', concluding with a forewarning of how Christ himself will be despised, and beaten, and crucified.

The problem of the two endings to the novel is usually felt to centre upon the disjunction between the narrator Pip and the character Pip:

two subjectivities never fused into a unified individual identity. There is, indeed, a persistent dialogic opposition between the narrative discourse of guilt and the language of desire associated with Pip as character. The first ending is often preferred; its sobriety of tone and the brief meeting and parting of Pip and Estella in London seem more consonant with the modest realism of the moral plot (Pip working hard to repay his debts and earn decent profits), and with the pervasive sense of guilt and loss constructed by the moral discourse of the adult narrator. However, that realism splinters off from the fairytale form of the novel as a whole. Moreover, the self-condemning discourse of the narrative voice, with its urge endlessly to confess, expresses the initial forging of identity into that of sinner. It enacts the repression of desire and its discontent in an inhibiting interpellation of self as guilty.

The fairytale form is used ironically to parody and mock hegemonic promises of prosperous contentment for all. However, fairytale as an archaic form has always functioned to articulate a desire for transformation. The second conclusion articulates the return of that desire. However, it is desire no longer dazzled and bewitched with the promise of exclusive and glamorous style. It reconnects into the imaginative impulse for creative transformation of present low horizons condensed in the star imagery associated with Estella. In this final instance the sense of hopeless distance is evaporated as glittering stars are transposed into tears, a figure of common suffering. The final poetic image of the text, therefore, offers the glimpsed possibility of an oppositional vision of desire as social transformation. Union with Estella as the daughter of Magwitch and Molly is a consummation of commonness, not of differentiating gentility. Together, they are represented walking away from a delusive Eden, shut off from common realities, taking friendship and desire out into the fallen world of work and suffering.

Notes

1. For detailed documentation of this see Asa Briggs' essay, 'The Language of 'Class' in Early Nineteenth-Century England', in *Essays in Labour History*, edited by Asa Briggs and John Saville (1967), pp. 43-73.
2. Quoted in Geoffrey Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-1870* (1979), p. 259.
3. Dickens entered into this conflict in his current journalism also. Having heard a preacher address a working-class congregation as 'sinners', he wrote passionately, 'Is it not enough to be fellow-creatures, born

yesterday, suffering and striving today, dying tomorrow? By our common capacities for pain and pleasure, by our common laughter and our common tears . . . Surely it is enough to be fellow creatures' ('Two Views of a Cheap Theatre', *All the Year Round*, 25 February, 1860, reprinted in *Uncommercial Traveller*, p. 36.

4. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1981), p. 60. For an illuminating and detailed reading of *Great Expectations* in relation to Foucault see Jeremy Tambling, 'Prison-bound: Dickens and Foucault', *Essays in Criticism*, 36 (1986), pp. 11-31.

Dickens's Class Consciousness: A Marginal View

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