

THE REFLECTION OF SOCIAL CONDITION UNDER CAPITALISM IN 19<sup>TH</sup>  
CENTURY ENGLAND IN CHARLES DICKENS' *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

A Thesis

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Research

Each period in history of England has specific characteristics and different social backgrounds. For Victorian Era, it was an era of imperial glory and expansion. As John Mulgan and D.M David stated in *An Introduction to English Literature*, “if we think, then, of the Victorians as prosperous—which on the whole they were—and self-satisfied...” (1947:113). The life of nation relies on the development of industry, which was started by industrial revolution at this era. Accordingly, it is safe to conclude that economy is the main cause which greatly determines the life of nation.

One of the writers that came from Victorian Era and who also shows the influence of economic system toward the lives of the people was Charles Dickens. Charles Dickens who was born in Portsmouth, England was a popular writer in Victorian age. He writes in his works reflections of social condition in Victorian era. His most popular work is perhaps *Great Expectations*—a novel that tells many things about socio-economic condition of its time.

A critical perspective that can explain the relation between socio-economic condition and literature is Marxist approach. This point-of-view may help us to see

the motivations of characters in this novel (e.g. how a person from working class struggles to get high position like the upper class). This is in accordance to the basic idea of this approach that sees the economic base of society determines other aspects of society such as culture, or literature in particular.

In the tradition of Marxist thoughts, A Hungarian Marxist, George Lukacs who developed the critical theory of reflection states that reality of life is reflected by literature. He believes that realist work can reflect the totality of social condition including the contradictions based on economic system of capitalism (1998:493). In relation to the theory, the novel *Great Expectations*, as a realist work should be able to reveal the total condition and contradiction of capitalism.

It talks about pip an orphan boy who lives with his sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, a Blacksmith's wife. He lives in working class society about a mile from the church. As a member of working class family, Pip is asked to work in an upper class house owned Miss. Havisham. Miss. Havisham has an adopted child who will later influence Pip to aspire to be a gentleman. Miss. Havisham conveys capitalist ideology to Pip that to be an upper class is better than a working class. Soon after, Pip has great expectations to be an upper class person and has to face various conflicts.

From the brief summary above, there are interactions of people from two different classes: the working class and the bourgeoisie. They are unequal and therefore have potentials to create typical social dilemmas that occur in class society. In relation to this, the writer is interested in seeing the reflection of society in

Dickens' novel as critical realism because the interactions of social class in the novel are shown critically with its emphasis of social problems faced especially by the working class.

The writer believes that literature reflects reality of social life and all the social life which is reflected within the work is a social life that determined by economy. Based on reflection theory by George Lukacs, the writer will see the negative side of capitalism in the society as reflected in the novel and see the wholeness of social existence in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, the writer entitles this research *The Reflection of Social Condition under Capitalism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England in Charles Dickens' Great Expectation.*

## **1.2. Identification of the Problem**

Pip is a working class boy. He lives with his sister in a working class family. As a working class family, he is exploited by his sister in Miss. havisham's house. Pip meets Estella, an adopted girl of Miss Havisham. Miss. Havisham actually prepares a scheme for Pip. Estella has to make Pip falls in love with her and break his life. After Pip falls in love with Estella, she refuses his love for the reason that Pip is uneducated man. He wants to be an educated man in order to get Estella's love. Pip changes his social status only for Estella. Even after he succeeds changing his social status, he never gets his happiness.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Through the characters, *Great Expectation* succeeds to reflect the society in Victorian Era under capitalism. This novel also criticizes the capitalist ideology which assumes the inferiority of a working class person. It shows how money and social status plays important role in society and how they produce negative effects in people's lives.

After analyzing *Great Expectation*, a novel of critical realism, the writer has found critique toward capitalism. This proved Lukacs theory that a realist work do not only reflects society but also can be a critique of the society, its economic system, and the prevailing ideology. In *Great Expectations*, the social wholeness of Victorian Era is reflected in the novel and offers us critiques of the ideology of capitalism. In the novel, Dickens shows how the capitalist ideology could shatter Pip's life. Pip has shown us that for a working class person which is trapped in class-divided capitalist society, the pursuit of getting high social status is often merely a dream produced by the upper class.

According to this analysis, the writer finds out three main critiques of capitalism in *Great Expectations*. They are children exploitations, the obsessions of lower class people to achieve higher status, and consequences of the obsession. Three of them show the negatives side of capitalism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century era.

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