

A Noise
Within
Study
Guide

Charles Dickens' Great Expectations

Costume Design by Angela Balogh Calin



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California's Home for the Classics

The Heart of the Matter 10/11 SEASON

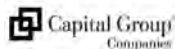
Charles Dickens' Great Expectations

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Cast of Characters

Pip and his family

Phillip Pirrip, who goes by Pip
 Joe Gargery, Pip's brother-in-law
 Mrs. Joe, Pip's sister
 Mr. Pumblechook, known as
 Uncle Pumblechook

Miss Havisham and her family

Miss Havisham, a spinster
 Estella, Miss Havisham's adopted daughter
 Sarah Pocket
 Herbert Pocket

Characters from Pip's childhood

Abel Magwitch, a convict
 Mr. Wopsle, a church clerk
 Biddy, Mr. Wopsle's cousin

Pip's foes

Bentley Drummle
 Compeyson, a convict

Characters that uphold the law

Mr. Jaggers, a lawyer
 Wemmick, Jaggers's clerk
 A Sergeant



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In the A Noise Within version of the play, all characters are played by only 11 actors:



Mr. Pumblechook/
 Sarah Pocket/
 Bentley Drummle
 Mitchell Edmonds



Joe Gargery/
 Mr. Jaggers
 Geoff Elliott



Mrs. Joe/Biddy/
 Wemmick
 Jill Hill



Herbert Pocket/
 Compeyson
 Stephen Rockwell



Miss Havisham
 Deborah Strang



Estella
 Jaimi Paige



Pip/
 Mr. Phillip Pirrip
 Jason Dechert



Abel Magwitch/
 A Sergeant
 Daniel Reichert



Ensemble
 Darby Bricker



Ensemble
 Elizabeth Fabie



Ensemble
 Taylor Jackson Ross

About the Play: Synopsis

SCENES 1-6

FROM THE OPENING SCENE of Neil Bartlett's *Great Expectations*, viewers are drawn into Pip's confidence. The 34 year-old protagonist reflects on his childhood as an orphan and Mrs. Joe, his sister who "brought him up by hand" with no affection. Audience members are drawn into Pip's memory as Pip the child stands in the local churchyard over the graves of his deceased parents and siblings. The young Pip is suddenly

held at knife-point by a convict with an iron on his leg. The convict is Magwitch, who has escaped across the marshes from the prison ships called the "Hulks." Magwitch threatens to send Compeyson, another escaped convict whom Magwitch describes as "a young man [with] a particular way of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver," to find Pip if the boy does not return the next morning with a file and "wittles"—or food.

Back at Pip's home, Mr. Joe the blacksmith warns Pip that his wife Mrs. Joe is on a "Ram-Page," out to physically punish Pip. Scene 2 ends with a glum view of Pip's life, where he is often beaten and punished for being an orphan and a burden to Mrs. Joe.

The next morning, after stealing the file and wittles, Pip searches for Magwitch on the marsh. In the process, he disturbs Compeyson. Upon learning Pip has seen Compeyson, Magwitch goes into a frenzy and demands Pip tell him where he saw Compeyson while filing furiously at his iron.

Pip returns home to the admonishment of Mrs. Joe, but also to Christmas dinner with church clerk Mr. Wopsle and Mr. Pumblechook, whom Pip calls Uncle though they are not biologically related. Mr. Wopsle and Mr. Pumblechook praise Mrs. Joe for her generosity towards Pip and frown at Pip's ungratefulness. At the end of the meal, Mrs. Joe goes to the pantry where she cannot find the brandy or pork pie she wished to

serve as dessert, both items Pip gave to Magwitch just before. Pip runs from Mrs. Joe's wrath.

A violent banging on the door introduces a sergeant to the dinner party who employs the aid of Mr. Joe in fixing broken handcuffs which he intends to use on run-away convicts. Mr. Joe fixes the iron, Magwitch's iron, and the sergeant invites the



Costume Design by Angela Balogh Calin



men to accompany him on the hunt for the convicts. Only Mr. Joe and Pip join the search. The soldiers overtake Magwitch and Compeyson who are locked in fight on the marshes, apparently both trying to turn each other in. When Magwitch sees Pip he insists that he alone stole the file and food from Mr. and Mrs. Joe's and apologizes to Mr. Joe. Pip tries to nonverbally communicate to Magwitch that he didn't betray him but the convicts are taken away too quickly.

SCENES 7-11

Sometime later, Pip is sent for by the "immensely rich" Miss Havisham to play at Satis House, her mansion up town. Mr. Pumblechook, a tenant of Miss Havisham's, had mentioned Pip to her, and Mrs. Joe, anxious to make a good impression on someone of such high social standing, scrubs Pip spotless for the occasion. As Mr. Pumblechook rides with Pip, he expresses his incredulity at Miss Havisham's invitation to a boy of such low rank.

Upon their arrival, Estella, Miss Havisham's seven-year old ward, coldly leads Pip through the

mysterious house to Miss Havisham's chamber. The old woman appears like an apparition, wearing a wedding gown, and reveals that she hasn't seen the sun in years. She tells Pip that her heart was broken, and he notices that all of the clocks are stopped at twenty minutes to nine. When Pip's bewilderment prevents him from playing at her command, Miss Havisham calls in Estella, demanding that they play a game of cards. Insulted by this association, Estella calls Pip a "common laboring boy" and continues to criticize the signs of his inferior breeding. When Pip says that he would like to go home, Miss Havisham tells him to come again in six days. Although he agrees to return, Pip dwells on Estella's humiliating insults.

Mrs. Joe interrupts Pip's musings with sharp questions about his visit, which he answers with an embellished account while confessing his true impression to the audience. He relays his revulsion of Miss Havisham, his admiration of Estella's beauty, and his shame at discovering his commonness. Pip falls asleep thinking about Miss Havisham's and Magwitch. ❖

AN INTRODUCTION TO

Great Expectations

by Neil Bartlett

UNDERNEATH THAT CONVENIENTLY tautological hold-all of an adjective 'Dickensian', there is an extraordinary range of tones and qualities in the man's work. For all that its plot has the outline and mechanics of a classic mystery, the retrospective first-person narrative of *Great Expectations* gives it an interior quality — a particularly damaged, guilty kind of melancholy — that is a long way away from, say, the lurid theatrical excitements of *Oliver Twist*, or the incomparably confident 'tuppenny coloured' economy of *A Christmas Carol*.

In large part, this particular tone springs from the fact that the novel's plot is rooted in the dark heart of Dickens' own life; it digs as deeply into his favourite theme of the abandoned child as anything he ever wrote. Pip, the archetypal orphan, is surrounded by surrogate family — parents: Joe, Mrs Joe, Biddy; uncles: Jaggers and Pumblechook; brothers: Herbert — and in finding forgiveness in his heart for both Miss Havisham and Magwitch, he has finally to come to terms with perhaps the most memorably terrifying Bad Mother and Bad Father in all of English prose fiction. In the process of doing so, he is moved as much by anger as by guilt — Pip has the most terrible temper — and inflicts (on his author's behalf) truly dreadful deaths on the

mother- and father-figures whom he holds responsible for his betrayals and sorrows. In the original novel, the punishment handed out to Mrs Joe, for instance, for her bringing-up of her brother 'by hand', is callous to the point of authorial brutality.

This depth of emotion presents anyone who wants to convey their admiration for this magnificent novel to a theatre audience with some specific problems. How can a language for actors — which must always be capable of moving swiftly — be quarried out of a book which orchestrates its emotional themes with the same slow force as the river that runs through it? And how, in particular, is one to deal with the fact that Pip is so fond of telling us exactly what he is feeling — something which one is reliably informed that actors, in general, should always be advised to avoid? Well...

TALKING TO THE AUDIENCE

This adaptation assumes that the actors — especially the actor playing Pip, but also the actors of the company which both colludes with him and Conspires against him in its re-enactment of his memories — take the audience into their confidence even before the first line of the evening is spoken. This can be justified either as an allusion to the melodramatic conventions of the Victorian theatre which Dickens so loved, or as an



up-to-date deployment of the marvellous rediscovery made by several 'physical theatre' companies and practitioners in recent decades — namely, that establishing collusion with the audience is always a prerequisite for good storytelling.

CHARACTER

In Dickens, it's perhaps not so much a question of character, as of characteristics — anyway, for him, the two are inseparable. To capture the physical rhythms of the characters, I have wherever possible employed Dickens' original lines; but inevitably, the actors of this piece will help themselves a great deal if they acquaint themselves with all the descriptions of actions and inflections that, if they had been included here as stage directions, would have made the script at least as twice as long as it is. Sometimes, it is a question of noticing quite subtle things — Estella's arch calm, or her ability to be always 'gliding away'; Pip's characteristic flares of temper; Herbert's light, tripping, tender breathiness; the way in which Miss Havisham's language moves between smouldering — slow, subterranean, ashen — and blazing — sudden, ferocious, wild. Sometimes, it is a question of being prepared to steal, wholesale, such gifts to the actor as Dickens' description of Sarah Pocket when she first sees Pip dressed a gentleman: 'Miss Pocket positively reeled back when she saw me so changed; her walnut-shell countenance likewise turned from brown to yellow to green.' There's at least one of those on every page...

On first reading, I'm sure that it will seem that some of the most important emotional geography (of the second half of the story especially) is either obscure, or just plain absent. For instance, Pip's great struggle with how much he loathes Magwitch's hold over him, and with how hard he finds it to return Joe's love, are, apparently, barely hinted at in the written dialogue given here. To infuse the lines with their proper weight, I think the actors are going to have to be well acquainted with the novel. This is not just true of the big moments; for instance, (on another level of meaning entirely) the description of Wemmick's mouth as 'the letterbox' is surely the key to his whole character — tight, metallic, efficient, good with official papers and quite capable of snapping off your fingers. This reliance on acquaintance with the book is perhaps strongest in my writing of Mr Wopsie, which requires that anyone lucky enough to be cast in the part is going to have to condense the whole of Dickens' brilliant portrayal of the man's vanity, idiocy, condescension and self-theatricalising small-town frustration into a single, reiterated word, since that's more or less all I ever give him to say.

THE SETTING

The setting for any show is of course determined entirely by the budget; this script relies on the assumption that no one has been foolish enough to give the designer one big enough to build a succession of heavy, well-upholstered, location-specific fixed sets. On the contrary, it assumes that the story can move as fast as Dickens does from place to place. Any solution to this challenge will have to accommodate the two very different kinds of spaces in which Pip experiences his loneliness. Everyone remembers the marshes — the wide, desolate, sodden, river-haunted space in which the book opens, and which then brilliantly returns to reclaim Magwitch in his death by drowning amidst the mud and black waters of the Thames at Gravesend. This child-dwarfing landscape is set off against a series of subtly claustrophobic interiors, each of them claustrophobic for a different emotional reason: the Gargery kitchen; Jaggers' office; the strangely imprisoning rooms of Herbert's lodgings in Barnard's Inn and the bow-fronted house on the river where he temporarily conceals Magwitch — and, of course, the haunted labyrinth of Satis House itself.

Every production of this script must find its own solutions to how to stage this story, but it is probably worth mentioning two things which I noticed about its telling while working on this adaptation. The first is how Dickens uses light — in particular, how often he uses a single light source surrounded by darkness to isolate key moments or images of the story. Potent examples would be the torches which illuminate Compeyson's face out on the marshes; the candle with which Estella leads Pip through the darkness of Satis House; the light by which Pip is reading his book on the dark night when Magwitch returns; the firelight and candlelight — never daylight — which accompany Miss Havisham, and which of course finally consume her in the book's most terrifying variation on its overriding theme of illumination of light-amidst-darkness. At the end, it seems somehow strangely characteristic of the story — and strangely satisfying — that the final scene doesn't replace all this darkness with blazing sunlight, but with a strangely ambiguous moonlight. Pip starts his story in a freezing fog — and ends it chilled by moonlight...

The second thing I noticed was how the story makes uses of recurrent sounds. The sound of metal on metal seems very important — files, chains, keys, locks, a blacksmith's hammer on an anvil. The echoing percussions of the guns on the marshes, of the fatal steamboat paddles, of various knockings on various doors — and of Pip's own beating heart — also appear and reappear at crucial points. Sometimes Dickens even seems to be making a sound a quite deliberate

leitmotif; he specifies, for instance, that it is the very same wind that was blowing across the marshes when Magwitch first appeared that then travels vengefully up the Thames into the very heart of London on the night that he returns.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

The stage directions in this script were an attempt to make some of my intentions clear to the director of the very first production, for whom this script was commissioned. I would of course expect that any future directors and actors would ignore them entirely, and find their own way of doing things.

DOUBLING

This adaptation was written to be performed by a company of eight; I don't *think* it can be performed with less — though I'd love to see someone try. It could of course be performed by more. My only suggestion would be that the actor playing Pip should never double, and that all the actors not playing Pip should; there seems to me to be something essential about the dynamic of Pip-versus-the-world, Pip-aided-and-abetted-by-the-company as they re-enact his dreams and memories.

Some of the doubling proposed for the first production had its own emotional logic. There is (I hope) something satisfying about the parental double-act of Joe and Mrs Joe giving way to the very different double-act of Joe and Biddy — and then again to the very different (or should that be oddly similar?) symbiosis of Jaggers and Wemmick. There is, I hope, something peculiarly unsettling (and, for this story of nemesis, peculiarly right) about the suggestion that the features of the eminently lovable Herbert should suddenly transform into those of the implacably hostile Compeyson.

The doubling does assume that actors can switch roles in seconds, and in full sight of the audience. This does mean that the costume design, no less than that of the set, will have to capitalise on Dickens' great ability to make a characteristic evoke a character; Mrs Joe, for instance, is her apron, and Joe-in-London is a clutched hat — just as much as Miss Havisham is a piece of rotted silk, coming much too close to a flame...

This script was commissioned by the Aberystwyth Arts Centre, for a production directed by Alan Lyddiard which opened there in March 2007. I am glad to dedicate it to the company of actors which created that first production. ❖

Neil Bartlett
November 2006

Charles Dickens (1812-1870)



CHARLES DICKENS, English writer of novels and short stories, was born to John and Elizabeth Dickens in Portsmouth, England on February 7th, 1812.

He is one of the most famous English novelists of the Victorian Era. As a young child, Dickens spent most of his time reading. Due to financial difficulties, the family relocated several times until they settled in Camden Town, a poor neighborhood in London, where at the age of 12 Dickens was sent to work in a “blacking” or shoe polish warehouse. The years spent working in the warehouse made a deep impression on young Charles Dickens, inspiring him to include many economic and child labor issues later in his fiction.

While he worked and lived at the warehouse, Dickens’ father was arrested and confined to a debtor’s prison. Although an unexpected inheritance relieved Dickens’ father from his debt, young Charles was forced to work as an office boy at the age of 15, and later as a stenographer in the law courts of London.

By 1832 he became a reporter for two London newspapers and in the following year, began to contribute a series of impressions and sketches to various publications. The same year, Dickens began to write *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* in several monthly installments. This form of serial writing became a standard method of writing fiction in the Victorian era. In 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of

the editor of a London newspaper. Together they had ten children.

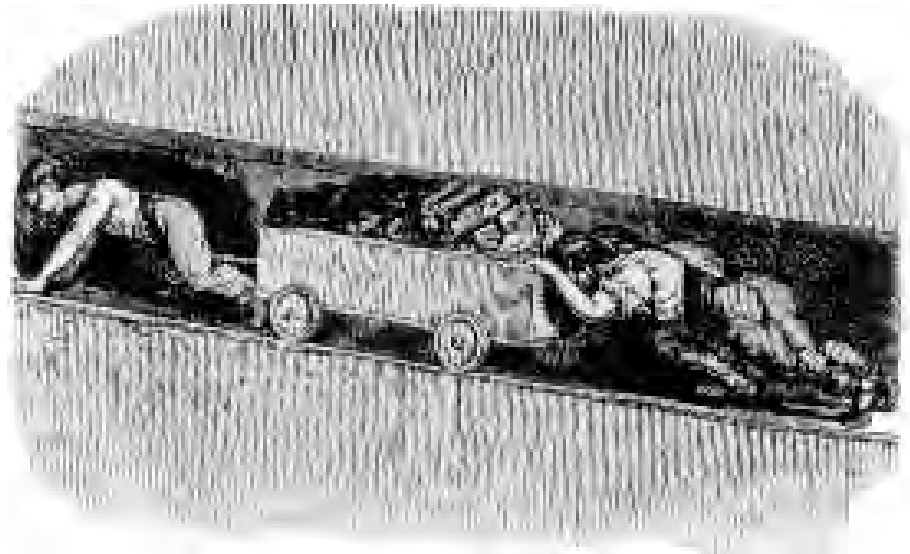
During his 30’s, Dickens went on a 5-month long lecture tour of America, speaking out strongly for the abolition of slavery and of other reforms, and upon his return, he wrote *American Notes*. When he returned, Dickens was confronted with the death of his father and one of his daughters within two weeks. Partly in response to these losses, Dickens began writing what are now known as his “dark novels” which include *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, and *Little Dorrit*. In 1857 Dickens fell in love with an actress named Ellen Ternan, and separated from his wife after many years of incompatibility.

From December 1860 to August 1861, Dickens serialized the largely autobiographical *Great Expectations*. The story was published in *All the Year Round*, a periodical owned and created by Dickens. Other novels that were originally serialized include *A Tale of Two Cities* and works by various authors.

At the end of his life, Dickens devoted much of his time and energy to public readings from his novels. At the time of his death in 1870, he was writing *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, leaving it unfinished. He is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Other novels by Charles Dickens that were adapted into plays produced at A Noise Within include: *A Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*. ❖

Timeline of Dickensian England



1807
Abolition of the Slave Trade

1812
Charles Dickens born

1824
Charles Dickens works in the Blacking Factory as a result of his family's sentence to debtor's prison.

1825
The first public passenger railway opens

1833
Abolition of slavery

1834
Poor Law sets up workhouses, where the poor are sent to work off their debts. Many are without homes, so they are able to reside there in return for doing work.

1837
Queen Victoria becomes Queen at the age of 18

1840
First postage stamps came into use. Only approximately 20 percent of children in London have any schooling at all.

1842
The Mines Act ends child labor in underground mines

1845-49
The Great Potato famine of Ireland. 800,000 people die of starvation. Large numbers of immigrants flee to Britain, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

1847
Parliament passes the Ten Hours Bill – which limits both women and children to work 10 hours per day. This bill is to be enforced in all of England by a total of four inspectors.

1848
Cholera breaks out in British towns

1850
Approximately 120,000 domestic servants in London alone — most work 80 hour weeks for one halfpence per hour. Thousands of prostitutes between the ages of 15-22 at work in London.

1851
The Crystal Palace Exhibition — a fair of modern engineering and manufacturing arts

1860
Charles Dickens begins publishing *Great Expectations* in *All the Year Round*. Its story begins in 1812 and finishes in the year 1841.

1863
The rules of football are formalized

Facts About Child Labor

THE TREATMENT OF CHILD LABORERS



A child works in a coal mine as a coal tub puller.

Children working in factories during Dickensian England were frequently orphans. Maltreatment of the child workforce was often justified by factory owners because room and board were often provided for these homeless children.

However, conditions were squalid and food was scarce. Often, children reported not being given time during the day to eat — even if there was food available they were not allowed to stop working in order to have a meal. One child reported that food left uneaten by the children was given to the hogs because there was no set meal time. Children were frequently beaten and were subject to verbal abuse. One consequence of being late for work that was often inflicted on child workers was to tie a heavy weight around their neck. The child was then forced to walk up and down the aisles in full view of the other children working as an example. This was called being “weighted”, and led to severe back and neck injuries.

Testimony of Sarah Gooder, aged 8 years

I'm a trapper in the Gawber pit. It does not tire me, but I have to trap without a light and I'm scared. I go at four and sometimes half past three in the morning, and come out at five and half past. I never go to sleep. Sometimes I sing when I've light, but not in the dark; I dare not sing then. I don't like being in the pit. I am very sleepy when I go sometimes in the morning. I go to Sunday-schools and read *Reading Made Easy*. She knows her letters, and can read little words. [...] I would like to be at school far better than in the pit.

Testimony of Mary Barrett, age 14

I have worked down in pit five years; father is working in next pit; I have 12 brothers and sisters — all of them but one live at home; they weave, and wind, and hurry, and one is a counter, one of them can read, none of the rest can, or write; they never went to day-school, but three of them go to Sunday-school; I hurry for my brother John, and come down at seven o'clock about; I go up at six, sometimes seven; I do not like working in pit, but I am obliged to get a living; I work always without stockings, or shoes, or trousers; I wear nothing but my chemise; I have to go up to the headings with the men; they are all naked there; I am got well used to that, and don't care now much about it; I was afraid at first, and did not like it; they never behave rudely to me; I cannot read or write.

These testimonies were reprinted in, *Readings in European History Since 1814*, edited by Jonathan F. Scott and Alexander Baltzly, published by Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. in 1930.



WAGES: NOW VERSUS THEN

Shilling: A coin used in the United Kingdom, worth one twentieth of a pound, 5 new pence, or 12 old pence prior to 1971.

A typical week's wages for the average child laborer in 19th Century London was 4 shillings per week, or 1/5 of a pound. Today, a pound is equivalent to \$1.69. This means that child workers in Dickensian England earned approximately 34 cents per week. 14% of the workforce in 1740 was under age 14.

The average wage for an adult worker during this time was 15 shillings — nearly 4 times as much.

In the United States today, minimum wage is \$6.55 per hour — a typical 40 hour week would result in a laborer earning \$262.00 per week. Minimum wage in London today is £5.73 — or \$9.70 per hour.



CHILD LABOR IN 2008:

Children are still forced to work in many countries around the globe today. Laws prohibiting child labor exist in many countries, but still have yet to be developed in many areas. According to UNICEF, there are an estimated 250 million child laborers aged 2 to 17 worldwide. In 1990, every country in the world except Somalia and the United States signed the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which provides the strongest governing language prohibiting child labor, but does not make it entirely illegal. Raids in recent years on factories in India and Liberia have revealed children as young as 5 years old operating machinery and working in illegal embroidery and tire factories. The U.S. is not immune to this atrocity. One study reports that as recently as the late 1990's, there were still over 59,000 children under age 14 working in the United States. As recently as August of this year, the Iowa meat packing plant *Postville* revealed it had employed 57 minors in violation of State Law. The case has been turned over to the Attorney General for prosecution of "egregious violations of virtually every aspect of Iowa's child labor laws." ❖

Playwright's Perspective: An interview with Neil Bartlett

What are some of the challenges you encountered in adapting *Great Expectations*? Underneath that convenient hold-all “Dickensian” there is an extraordinary range of tones and qualities in the man’s work. For all that its plot has the outline and mechanics of a classic mystery, the retrospective first-person narrative of *Great Expectations* gives it an interior quality — a particularly damaged, guilty kind of melancholy — that is a long way from, say the lurid theatrical excitements of *Oliver Twist*.

This play has some very unique elements of sound — can you describe your thoughts surrounding the sound design for this play?

The sound world of this play is rough, raucous, vivid. I wanted something that would rise to the occasion of Dickens’ incredibly vivid and forceful prose. The story makes use of recurrent sounds — sometimes Dickens’ own text suggests the sounds are leitmotifs. The sound of metal on metal seems very important — files, chains, keys, locks, a blacksmith’s hammer on an anvil.

“The sound world of this play is rough, raucous, vivid.”



Your play features characters that break the fourth wall — could you share some of your thoughts that went into this artistic decision?

Dickens tells his stories in order to affect people — he talks directly to the reader all the time. So for me it would be inconceivable to have a staging which didn't do this. Also the adaptation was created first time round for a theatre in which the audience is very close to the actors, the kind of theatre which invites that communication. *Great Expectations* is a very involving story — it's about provoking extremes of sympathy and horror. We knew right from the start that the narrator would be the company — not a solitary, distanced figure, but a company of very engaged actors. Dickens' narration is not cool — it is hot, angry, comic, demanding engagement and a shared response.

In your work with *Great Expectations*, did you research Dickens' own life? To what extent do you think does Dickens' personal biography affect his view of children as depicted in the play?

All of Dickens work is very autobiographical,

but *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* are especially so. His feelings of abandonment are expressed in a very extreme form. He transforms his own experience of being abandoned in London by his parents into a parallel experience in which an abandoned orphan is offered the surrogate family of his sister and her husband. Along the way, Pip struggles to create a family of his own in Estella — and is taken in by a host of outsiders — including Miss Havisham and Magwitch.

This play brings to light some of the so-called underbelly of Dickensian London — what fascinates you about this world?

I love underbellies. Underbellies are what we go the theatre for — we can get nice at home. Dickens takes hopes and fears that we can all share — the most primary ones there can be — and acts them out in the darkest possible land of the imagination. But his great trick is to make us believe that the world of *Great Expectations* is not merely a surreal one, or merely a social-realist one; the image of the child in peril is real on both levels. ❖

NEIL BARTLETT was an early member of Complicite, collaborating on their Perrier-Award-winning *More Bigger Snacks Now* in 1985. From 1988-1998 he worked as part of *Gloria*, a music-theatre collective with whom he created thirteen original pieces including the semi-legendary *Sarrasine*, *A Judgement in Stone* (with Sheila Hancock), *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*, and *The Seven Sacraments of Nicolas Poussin*. He also staged theatre pieces for the Derby Playhouse (*The School for Wives*, 1989), the Royal Court (*Night After Night*, 1993) and the National Theatre In London (*The Game of Love and Chance*, 1992).

In 1994 he was controversially appointed Artistic Director of the Lyric Hammersmith in London. Over the next eleven years he staged twenty-nine productions including radical re-evaluations of Shakespeare, Moliere, Kleist, Marivaux, Genet, Maugham, Wilde and Rattigan alongside populist Christmas shows and collaborations with Robert Lepage and Improbable Theatre. In 2001 he was awarded an OBE for his work at the Lyric.

Since 2005 his work has included; his first opera production, a new staging of *The Rake's Progress* for the Aldeburgh Festival in 2006; Christopher Marlowe's *Dido Queen of Carthage* at the American Repertory Theatre in Boston; a transfer of his staging of *Oliver Twist* from Boston to off-Broadway and The Berkeley Rep; a

staging of his own new translation of Genet's *The Maids* for the Brighton Festival; a *Twelfth Night* for the Royal Shakespeare Company with John Lithgow as Malvolio; a site-specific performance based on Wladislaw Szpilman's *The Pianist* with concert pianist Mikhail Rudy for the first Manchester International Festival and a new staging of Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* for the Abbey, Ireland's National Theatre.

As well as being a director, Bartlett also works as a playwright, translator and author. His adaptations of Moliere, Marivaux and of Dickens (*Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Great Expectations*) in particular have been performed throughout the world; his play *In Extremis*, commissioned for Corin Redgrave to mark the centenary of Oscar Wilde's death, was premiered at the National Theatre in London in 2000. His solo performance pieces have recently been collected in the volume *Solo Voices*. His first book, *Who Was That Man?* (1988), was a polemic study of Wilde; he has also published acclaimed three novels; *Ready to catch him should he fall* (1990), *Mr Clive and Mr Page* (1996) and, most recently, *Skin Lane*, which was nominated for the Costa Award in 2007. His future theatre projects include collaboration with Justin Bond and a major new commission for the second Manchester International Festival in 2009. Neil's website is www.neil-bartlett.com.

English Language Arts: Vocabulary from *Great Expectations*

Affianced

Engaged to be married.

Beggar-My-Neighbor

A Dickensian card-game, similar to "war". Also called "Beat Jack Out of Doors".

Baronetcy

The title and lands bestowed upon a person upon reaching the rank of baron or baroness.

Benefactor

Financial supporter — sponsor.

Boors

Boring or "boorish" people with no intellectual spark.

Colliers

Coal miners. Also, merchant ships that used to haul coal.

Convict

Convict; felon.

Covetous

Inordinately or wrongly desirous of wealth or possessions; greedy.

Elders and Betters

People older and of a higher social position.

Fancies

Fantasies; desires for.

File

A metal file, used to whittle down metal pieces, such as the shackles on Magwitch's leg.

Guinea

A coin, worth about one pound.

Hackney Carriage

A horse-drawn taxi. The name "hackney" is thought to come from the French *haquenée* — which was a horse of medium size. The name could also have evolved from the town of Hackney, now a part of London.

Hulloa

A variant of "hello."

Hulks

Prison ships; massive ships used as a floating prison. All rigging is removed from the ship except for its central ability to float. Punishment was severe aboard these hulks, and many prisoners died of disease.

Indentures

As in "indentures to sign" — this is the legal contract drawn up which obligate a young person to work for a specified period of time as an apprentice to a particular tradesman.

Iron

Magwitch's leg is encased in iron — meaning he has been chained or handcuffed around the ankle.

Larks

Joe's line, "Pip old chap...what larks, eh Pip?" essentially means, "What pranksters!" — referring to frivolous, good-natured jokes or jokesters.

Likeness

Similarity to; resemblance.

Loiter

To stand around or wait idly, with no apparent purpose.

Mesh; meshes

The mesh was a low-lying area of land, near water — similar to a marsh. This area was near the docks in the London Dickens describes in *Great Expectations*.

Musket

A long, thin weapon similar to a rifle. Loaded from the muzzle with shot and powder.

Nigh

Near; close to.

Respite

Rest; relief from suffering.

Riven

Split or cracked into two. As in "...a great slab of stone is to fall on a bed...the rope riven to it." In this case, it probably means that the rope holds the slab crosswise, "splitting" it into two pieces.

Shilling

A coin — one of the central units of currency in Britain in the Dickensian era. There were 20 shillings to one pound during this time, and a pound is the modern equivalent of a dollar, although worth slightly more.

Snare

A trap.

"To Let"

For rent — Wemmick describes doors posted with signs saying "To Let," meaning that many houses were unoccupied.

Undesigning

Straightforward; having no ulterior motive. As in "...how many undesigning persons I suspected of being him..."

Warmint

Varmint; despicable creature.

Wicious

Mr. Pumblechook calls Pip "wicious," meaning vicious.

Wittles

For "vittles," meaning food.

Visual Arts: Creating the World of *Great Expectations*



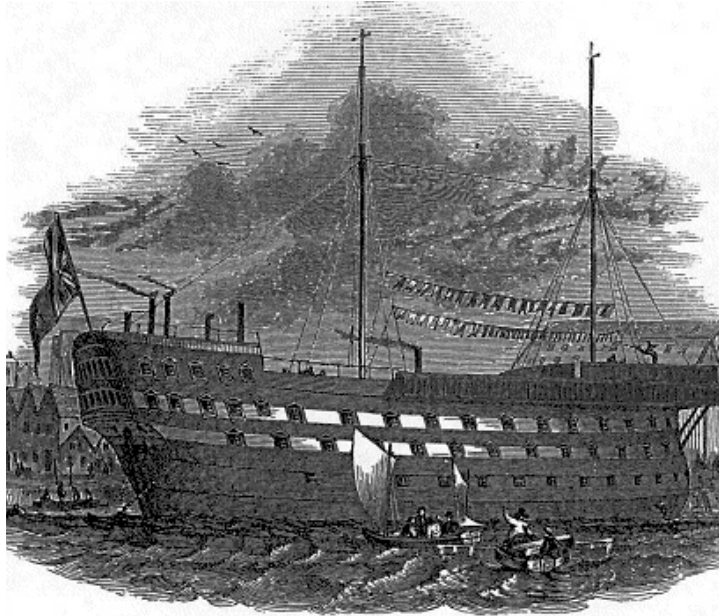
Scenic Design by Kurt Boetcher

The setting for any show is of course determined entirely by the budget; this script relies on the assumption that no one has been foolish enough to give the designer one big enough to build a succession of heavy, well-upholstered, location-specific fixed sets. On the contrary, it assumes that the story can move as fast as Dickens does from place to place.

—Neil Bartlett

IN CREATING THE SCENIC DESIGN for *Great Expectations*, designer Kurt Boetcher considered his previous work as designer for *A Noise Within's* production of Neil Bartlett's adaptation of *Oliver Twist*. His design influences were tied closely to the economically ravaged state of its characters Pip, Magwitch, and the ravaged appearance of Miss Havisham:

*"This adaptation of Neil Bartlett's *Great Expectations* is similar to his adaptation of *Oliver Twist* in its theatricality, but whereas *Twist* captured the chaotic energy of *Oliver's* journey through Dickens' London (and how the actors on stage collectively took the audience to each one of those locales), *Great Expectations* recounts Pip's emotional journey through life, much of which unfolds in interior scenes. *Great Expectations* has a sense of grandiosity as well as decay, as seen in the*



British hulk—or prison ship.

estate of Miss Havisham, for example. We want to world to feel both slightly larger than life and intimidating, and also be malleable so we can also give certain scenes and environments a claustrophobic feeling. Great Expectations has a fairly architectural quality, and the world should also transition quickly, so we can take the audience from the dark, ominous moors to a blacksmith's shop, to a party in a grand ballroom."

Boetcher and Director Julia Rodriguez-Elliott worked to remain true to the original novel and its depiction of the nightmarish existence of Pip as he pulls himself up by his own bootstraps, and finds his way through a maze of harsh, menacing, often dangerous series of entanglements. The set for this series of shifts in locale — as Bartlett describes in the quote above, — needs to be evocative in terms of easily communicating a specific environment, but shift quickly so that the storyline is not punctuated by a series of pauses for scene changes.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1. Using the sketch of the set design for *Great Expectations*, create a white-on-black, high-contrast sketch of a room or still life subject. Use black paper and white oil pastel, pencil, or acrylic as media. What kinds of elements are drawn sharply into focus when color is removed from the composition? In what ways can white on a black ground convey light, shadows, and dimension?

2. Collage: Gather representations of criminality as depicted in art. These can be depictions of prisoners in various countries throughout the world, prisons (including prison ships,) shackles, chain gangs, and other means of punishment or confinement. Ask students to pick a central theme on which to focus in their collage — whether it is women in US prisons, or the role of prison wear as identification. (One could include Hester Prynne's scarlet letter "A" in such a collage.) As a group, ask students to share their artwork and articulate their perspective to the class, noting the ways in which the current social, economic, and political contexts influenced their interpretation of the images they selected.



Theatre Lore

What is a raked stage?

Where do the terms upstage and downstage originate?

Historically, stages were built on inclines, with the backs of the stages slightly higher than the fronts. The incline was called a rake and helped those in the back of the audience see the action onstage. Eventually, theatres started placing seats on inclines instead of stages, but the terminology stuck. Downstage is the front of the stage, closest to the audience, and upstage is the back of the stage. Some theatres, like *A Noise Within*, still participate in the tradition of using raked stages.

What is a ghost light?

There is a superstition that if an emptied theater is ever left completely dark, a ghost will take up residence. In other versions of the same superstition the ghosts of past performances return to the stage to live out their glory moments. To prevent this, a single light called a ghost light is left burning at center stage after the audience and all of the actors and musicians have gone.

Now, those in the world of theatre know that a "dark" theatre is one without a play. There is nothing sadder to a dramatic artist than an empty house and a playless stage. Therefore, a light is left burning center stage so that the theatre is never "dark;" it is simply awaiting the next production.

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Being an Audience Member

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of amusement: going to the theatre. But attending a live theatrical performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of entertainment. In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd. Although playhouses in the past could sometimes be rowdy, participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance today. Shouting out (or even whispering) can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After *A Noise Within*'s performance of *Great Expectations*, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

Theatre Vocabulary

These terms will be included in pre- and post-performance discussions at *A Noise Within*.

blocking: The instructions a director gives his actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

character: The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

conflict: The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

dramatic irony: A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

genre: Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

motivation: The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

props: Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

proscenium stage: There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

set: The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

setting: The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

stage areas: The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place.

Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. **Downstage** is the area closest to the audience. **Center stage** defines the middle of the playing space. **Stage left** is the actor's left as he faces the audience. **Stage right** is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

theme: The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

thrust stage: A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

About A Noise Within

A NOISE WITHIN'S MISSION is to produce the great works of world drama in rotating repertory, with a company of professional, classically-trained actors. *A Noise Within* educates the public through comprehensive outreach efforts and conservatory training programs that foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of history's greatest plays and playwrights.

As the only company in southern California working in the repertory tradition (rotating productions using a resident ensemble of professional, trained artists), *A Noise Within* is dedicated solely to producing classical literature from authors such as Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Shaw, and Euripides.

The company was formed in 1991 by founders Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, both of whom were classically trained at the acclaimed American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. They envisioned *A Noise Within* after recognizing a lack of professional, classical productions and education in Southern California and sought out and assembled their own company of actors to meet the need. All of *A Noise Within's* resident artists have been classically

trained, and many hold Master of Fine Arts degrees from some of the nation's most respected institutions, such as Juilliard, Yale, and the American Conservatory Theatre.

In its 17-year history, *A Noise Within* has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

In 2004, *A Noise Within* accepted an invitation to collaborate with the Los Angeles Philharmonic for a tandem performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Hollywood Bowl.

More than 25,000 individuals attend productions at *A Noise Within* annually, and the company draws over 10,000 student participants to its education programs every year. Students benefit from in-school workshops, conservatory training, and an internship program, as well as subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, discussions with artists, and state standards-compliant study guides.

Study Guides

A Noise Within creates California standards-compliant study guides to help educators prepare their students for their visit to our theatre. Study guides are available at no extra cost to download through our website: www.anoisewithin.org. All of the information and activities outlined in these guides are designed to work in compliance with Visual and Performing Arts, English Language, and other subject standards as set forth by the state of California.

Study guides include background information on the plays and playwrights, historical context, textual analysis, in-depth discussion of *A Noise Within's* artistic interpretation of the work, interviews with directors and designers, as well as discussion points and suggested classroom activities. Guides from past seasons are also available to download from the website.



Study Guide Credits

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