



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**

## **Dickens, Australia and Magwitch Part II: The Quest for le cas Magwitch**

Litvack, L. (1999). Dickens, Australia and Magwitch Part II: The Quest for le cas Magwitch. *The Dickensian*, 95(2), 101-127.

**Published in:**  
The Dickensian

**Document Version:**  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:**  
[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

### **General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### **Take down policy**

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact [openaccess@qub.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@qub.ac.uk).

## Dickens, Australia and Magwitch Part II: The Search for *le cas Magwitch*

LEON LITVACK

PART I OF THIS STUDY (*Dickensian* Spring 1999) provided a critical survey of the material available to Dickens about Australia before 1860. This information, gleaned from parliamentary reports, journalism, travelogues, and fiction, as well as Dickens's own involvement in emigration schemes, provided ample material for his own novelistic art, and contributed to his brief accounts of transportation and emigration in works from *Pickwick Papers* to *David Copperfield*. *Great Expectations* differs, however, from these earlier novels because there the colony becomes a location from which the plot is directed; even then it is only hazily described, and never visited. Australia is the backdrop against which Magwitch acquires his fortunes and formulates his plan to become Pip's benefactor; his time there should, then, serve as an interesting site for scrutiny

Yet in attempting to penetrate the mysteries surrounding Magwitch, his Australian experiences, and their importance to the text of *Great Expectations*, a degree of caution must be exercised. While there is some evidence in the text concerning his activities in the colony, it must be remembered that Dickens was an imaginative writer rather than a social historian, and chose not to disclose too many details to readers. Also, his correspondence from the period of the novel's genesis and publication (September 1860-June 1861)<sup>1</sup> reveals almost nothing concerning his conception of a convict as a focus for interest or incident,<sup>2</sup> and there is nothing linking him or his work directly with Australia during this period.<sup>3</sup> The most plausible explanation for this reticence is that unlike George Eliot – who was meticulous in her attention to detail – Dickens was not obsessed with accuracy in his depiction of Australia. In this he resembles Shakespeare, who provides an imperfect rendering of an actuality in plays like *Hamlet*. As an illustration of this principle, Philip Collins, in *Dickens and Crime*, recalls A. J. A. Waldock's caveat, directed at historical critics who 'treat *Hamlet* as if it had actually occurred in real life, as if it were, authentically, *le cas Hamlet*'<sup>4</sup> The observation, which Collins discusses in the context of the unfinished *Edwin Drood*, is equally applicable to *Great Expectations*, where *le cas Magwitch* must be treated with the same degree of self-consciousness concerning investigative method and expected results. Because of the paucity of textual evidence, it is necessary to enter into the realm of speculation in order to disclose anything further concerning the character of Magwitch, or to investigate Dickens's attitude to Australia and to

convicts during the period 1860-1.

The quest for the 'historical Magwitch' might begin with the dating of events in the novel. The ground-breaking work done by Mary Edminson concludes that the story dates from 1807-10 to 1823-26; Anny Sadrin dates it slightly earlier – 1804-7 to 1820-3.<sup>5</sup> Sadrin acknowledges Edminson to be the 'authority on chronology'<sup>6</sup>; but Edgar Rosenberg, in his long-awaited Norton Critical Edition of the novel, asserts that this accolade should be shared with Jerome Meckier, whose 'Dating the Action of *Great Expectations*' is deemed 'the most exhaustive treatment of the subject'<sup>7</sup> Meckier premises his study on the principle that Dickens was concerned with chronological accuracy – a claim based on the working notes for the novel, which contain sections labelled 'Dates' and 'Tide';<sup>8</sup> from the evidence assembled Meckier attaches dates to various key events. He concludes that Magwitch was born in 1768, fathers Estella in 1805, and becomes Compeyson's partner in 1808. He then swindles, forges, and passes stolen banknotes, before being apprehended in 1812 and sentenced to transportation for fourteen years. On 24 December 1812 (the date on which the novel opens), while on the hulk awaiting transportation, he escapes; the next day (25 December), after struggling with Compeyson, he is apprehended, returned to the hulk, and transported for life.

During Magwitch's absence the convict theme is kept alive by the appearance in 1813 of the stranger who stirs his drink with Joe's file at the Three Jolly Bargemen, and gives Pip two pound notes. This incident has a marked effect on Pip, who that night sees 'the file coming at me out of a door, without seeing who held it' (*GE*, 79). The same stranger appears again in 1825, closely guarded and travelling to the hulks with another man, on the same coach as Pip; the two convicts enter into a conversation concerning the two one-pound notes, and how Magwitch managed to pass these to the stranger to give to Pip. The reaction of Pip is less well defined than before, though equally disturbing:

I could not have said what I was afraid of, for fear was altogether undefined and vague, but there was great fear upon me. As I walked on to the hotel, I felt that a dread, much exceeding the mere apprehension of a painful or disagreeable recognition, made me tremble. (*GE*, 230).

The reappearance of Magwitch, then aged 60, follows at the end of the second stage of Pip's expectations, which Meckier pinpoints to late November or early December 1828 – one week after Pip's twenty-third birthday. The pair remain together until March 1829, when they attempt to flee the country; in the ensuing struggle on the river Compeyson is killed, and the injured Magwitch is recaptured. He is taken to the Police Court the next day, and committed for trial in April 1829. Magwitch dies ten days after sentencing, in Newgate Prison.

Meckier's dating seems plausible, and is based as far as possible on textual evidence.<sup>9</sup> *If* Dickens did maintain chronological integrity during

composition, then a good deal can be extrapolated concerning Magwitch's transportation and life in Australia. First of all, he was taken aboard a hulk, which in 1813 still had the appearance of a 'wicked Noah's ark' (*GE*, 41). While awaiting a place on a transport ship, he might have worked in the government dockyards, being taken off the hulk at dawn and rowed back to it at dusk; if this is plausible, it might help to explain his escape. Hughes explains that chained convicts working for the Royal Navy at Portsmouth, Deptford, or Woolwich were a tourist attraction, presenting a formative spectacle for both adults and children, but also adding to the convict's shame, and their objectification in the eyes of the British public.<sup>10</sup>

If Magwitch's arrival in the colony (Fig. 1) occurred in 1813 (a year when official statistics record that 199 men and 125 women were transported to New South Wales), it would have been during the tenure of the relatively liberal, pro-emancipist Lachlan Macquarie (Governor from 1810 to 1821), a time of widening opportunity for transportees.<sup>11</sup>

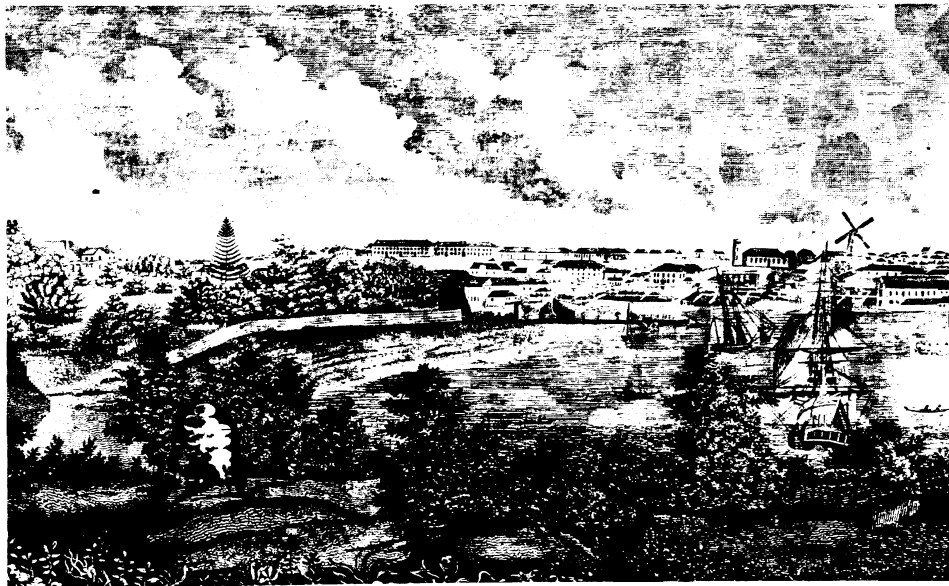


Fig. 1 John Eyre, *A North East View of the Town of Sydney, the Cappital [sic] of New South Wales, Taken from the West Side of Bennelong's Point, 1812*. This engraving depicts Sydney as it would have looked at the time (according to Meckier's calculations) of Magwitch's arrival. Courtesy of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

Magwitch tells Pip that he had been working for a 'master' (as an assignee), had received his 'liberty' (or ticket-of-leave), and had gone to work for himself (*GE*, 318). His emancipation cannot be precisely dated, but according to Meckier's chronology it occurred at a time when tickets-of-leave were readily granted; in fact, as Shaw notes, Macquarie was criticised for being too generous: from 1810 to 1820 he granted parole to 2319 convicts – or one-fifth to one-quarter of the total who arrived during this period.<sup>12</sup> He was prepared to favour any convicts – irrespective of their crimes or prior histories – who had served three years of their sentences, displayed good conduct and sincere contrition,

and could support themselves without government assistance. Shaw summarises the effects of Macquarie's programme:

In New South Wales the men could make a fresh start, the errors of their past lives would be overlooked, and rewards and punishments would be based solely on current behaviour. This was certainly much easier for immediate discipline, but made transportation a less effective deterrent to English criminals.<sup>13</sup>

The impression that such favourable conditions existed for convicts influenced English perceptions of Australia long after Macquarie ceased to be governor, and certainly affected Dickens's pamphlet proposal to Lord Normanby in 1840.<sup>14</sup>

Macquarie declared himself 'the Patron and Champion of all Meritorious Persons who have been Convicts' His benevolent concern for their welfare extended well beyond the granting of tickets-of-leave. Unlike his predecessor William Bligh (Governor 1806-1810), who objected to ex-convicts holding positions of trust and never invited them to Government House, Macquarie not only dined with emancipists, but appointed them as magistrates, agricultural superintendents, surveyors, and architects. Thus it seems that the legacy of reforms instituted by Macquarie affected not only individual destinies, but also provided a broad range of possibilities for fictional portrayals of convicts and emancipists.

The question of how Magwitch amasses his fortune is a point on which Dickens is reticent. The text reveals that his benevolent master (who was an emancipist) leaves him money, after which he is granted his ticket, and becomes 'a sheep-farmer, stock-breeder, and other trades besides' (*GE*, 318, 315).<sup>15</sup> It is possible that he was able to earn some money while still under assignment, owing to a scheme whereby convicts were paid for out-of-hours employment; in this way industrious and enterprising workers could earn up to £5 a week on their own time.<sup>16</sup> Whether he participated in such activity or not, it is clear that the bulk of his fortune must have been made after emancipation. He engaged in occupations reminiscent of Two-Handed Dick and Robert Patterson from *Household Words*,<sup>17</sup> and sent to Jaggars not only 'the gains of the first few year', but also his master's legacy (*GE*, 318). Magwitch's prosperity is plausible, particularly given its attainment under Macquarie's regime, when a number of spectacular achievements came to light. The most famous case was that of Samuel Terry (1776-1838, known as the 'Rothschild of Botany Bay'), who by 1820 had acquired 19,000 acres of land, and held more mortgages on property than the Bank of New South Wales. Later in life he turned to charity and politics, and became an enthusiastic supporter of emancipists' rights. When he died he received a more lavish funeral than any previously held in the colony.<sup>18</sup> Such individuals were, of course, exceptional, but they were living proof that Australia was a place where emancipists could, on occasion, rise to spectacular heights.

The formation of Magwitch's character while in Australia is also worthy of examination. He explains to Pip that he was a 'hired-out shepherd in a solitary hut' – a situation which allows him to reflect intensely on the boy, to the point where he is able to exclaim, 'I see you there a many times, as plain as ever I see you on them misty marshes' (*GE*, 317). This process of continual recollection helps him to forge a lasting bond with Pip, and strengthens into a resolve to transform him into a gentleman. These epiphanic experiences, particularly associated with out-stations, were a recognized phenomenon, and have been poignantly analysed by Hughes. He quotes the observations of a visitor to the Maitland area in the 1830s:

The extreme silence that prevails here almost exceeds what the imagination can conceive... One would imagine that a residence in such a lone place would be liable to cause a change of some consequence in the minds and habits of any person; and it would be an interesting point to ascertain the effect on the convict stock-keepers, who, for weeks together, can have no opportunity of conversing with a white man, except their sole companion; for there are always two in a hut.

Hughes notes the creation of a similar impression on Alexander Harris in the 1840s: 'Men under these circumstances often stand by one another through thick and thin; in fact it is a universal feeling that a man ought to be able to trust his mate in anything'<sup>19</sup>

The effect of such an association, notes Hughes, was the promotion of pair-bonding, the feeling of reliance on one's 'mate' which became the foundation of male social behaviour in Australia. He also posits that such experiences had the potential to reform the socially useless criminal by teaching him skills and giving him time to reflect, aided by exposure to a sublime landscape; Hughes terms the phenomenon 'Wordsworth applied to penology'<sup>20</sup> – a subject which held a deep fascination for Dickens, whose penetrating examination of Dr Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities* is but one example of his insight into the effects on the mind of prolonged isolation.<sup>21</sup> It is impossible to know whether Dickens conceived of Magwitch's isolation in the terms outlined by Hughes; but the coincidence is noteworthy. In his solitary existence in the outback, Magwitch conjures up an image of a companion in the person of Pip, 'looking at me whiles I eats and drinks'; he makes a commitment to Pip, which can be seen to be based on an amalgam of mateship, 'bush-honour', and even loyalty among thieves.<sup>22</sup>

By making himself Pip's benefactor Magwitch wishes to mould the young boy's personality in order to provide compensation for his own embitterment and frustrations. In English society he can never be a gentleman himself, but he believes he can make one of Pip. Throughout the novel Magwitch is depicted as an outsider longingly looking in upon a world he can never enter. This is made clear from the outset, where his appearance is described as 'fearful' (Fig. 2), 'all in coarse grey, with an



### *The Terrible Stranger in the Churchyard*

Fig. 2 Frederick W Pailthorpe, 'The Terrible Stranger in the Churchyard', *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, London: Robson and Kerslake, 1885. This illustration (part of a series reproduced in the Oxford Illustrated Dickens) depicts Pip's first sight of the convict; in the text Magwitch is described as 'A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied around his head' (*Great Expectations*, p. 4). The emphasis in the text and in the illustration is on the difference which Pip perceives between himself and this objectified Other. It is also interesting to note that Marcus Stone, who drew the illustrations for the Library edition of 1864, did not depict Magwitch.

iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied around his head' (*GE*, 4).<sup>23</sup> The ghastly impression is amplified by suggestions of cannibalism: Magwitch threatens to eat Pip's 'fat cheeks', and cut out his heart and liver (*GE*, 5, 6).<sup>24</sup> The emphasis is clearly on 'alterity' or difference, and Dickens uses all the fictional means at his disposal to distinguish Magwitch from his surroundings, and deny him a place to hide.

While his initial appearance is relatively brief and stereotypical, Magwitch's subsequent entrance (Fig. 3) which signals an end to the second stage of Pip's expectations, is more revealing and problematic. Dickens wishes to develop a complex parent-child relationship between Magwitch, the self-appointed father figure, and Pip, the surrogate son whose ideas about social conventions are turned upside down. Pip's expectations concerning his own position are overturned, and he declares:

All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew. (*GE*, 316)



On the Stairs

W. Pailthorpe

Fig. 3 Frederick W. Pailthorpe, 'On the Stairs'. *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. London: Robson and Kerlake, 1885. Pailthorpe's second depiction of Magwitch is more benevolent in conception, with the returned emancipist extending his arms to embrace a startled Pip. Dickens's text is, however, more ambiguous, and employs various techniques, such as the descriptive headlines in the 'Charles Dickens' edition of 1868, to maintain the distance between Pip and Magwitch.



His attitude to Magwitch changes; but as Hollington points out, 'there is never any sentimentalizing or picturesque aestheticising of the figure of the convict'<sup>25</sup> Magwitch continually refers to Pip as 'dear boy', in an attempt to gravitate towards the gentleman he has created, and to confirm that his power over the lad depends upon the certainty of Pip's affection. Occasionally Dickens softened his impressions of Magwitch in the transition from manuscript to printed text. In volume 3, chapter 3 (single volume chapter 42), Pip watches Magwitch 'as he spread his hands broader on his knees, and lifted them off and put them on again' (*GE*, 348); the MS then reads 'I saw something like the old click come into his throat', thus recalling a physical trait first observed on the marshes (*GE*, 19, 41). Rosenberg suggests that in deleting this line at proof stage Dickens might have wished to divest Magwitch of 'these unpleasant canine noises of old', yet he acknowledges that 'Dickens's (or Pip's) attitude toward Magwitch is extremely complicated and the change not perhaps wholly believable'<sup>26</sup> It is also important to recall that while Pip recognises his benefactor's life-threatening predicament, and formulates a plan for spiriting him out of the country, he never becomes Magwitch's 'child' in any meaningful way. The distance is maintained in the violent killing of Compeyson by Magwitch on the river, and also through the trial, imprisonment in Newgate, and sentencing. In killing off Magwitch Dickens emphasises that this character has abandoned the moral imperative, and has confirmed his position as the antipodean Other: he has lived a violent and brutal life, and comes to an end which epitomises his character.

In addition to straightforward textual strategies for the objectification of Magwitch, Dickens employed a more subtle technique, in the form of descriptive headlines, which were added to the 'Charles Dickens' edition in 1868. In his fascinating study of the problems and processes involved in preparing a critical edition of the novel, Edgar Rosenberg examines these headlines in detail, and demonstrates how they add to the conception of character.<sup>27</sup> A good many of them were conceived without much forethought, and give perfunctory notice of whatever Pip happened to be doing at the time; the exception, however, is the unique treatment of Magwitch.

When Dickens identifies characters in the headlines he almost invariably does so by name, or by relationship to the protagonist; thus Joe is always Joe, Estella is always Estella, and in *David Copperfield* Betsey Trotwood is always 'my Aunt' However Magwitch, who features in the headlines a dozen times after his reappearance, is hardly ever mentioned by name or condition, but almost always described – or circumscribed – pronominally. The precise designations are revealing; they include 'He explains my great mistake', 'I try in vain to hide him', 'Necessary to know his History', 'He relates his Life and Adventures', and 'The time draws near for his escape' On other occasions Dickens employs elusive appellations, such as 'Provis' (referring to the fact that Magwitch discloses his assumed name to Pip at that point), or generic ones, such as 'my Visitor' and 'the Prisoner' Rosenberg observes that

this practice is nowhere else apparent in the novelist's *oeuvre*, and thus points to a specific process of objectification. The effect of the headlines is to maintain the distance between Magwitch and the rest of the characters; this oblique identification is substantiated in the text, where Pip is circumspect in referring to Magwitch by his proper name, and the reticence becomes more pronounced as Magwitch approaches his end. By the time he describes the convict's illness and death in volume 3 chapter 17 (chapter 56 in single-volume editions) the third-person pronoun recurs well over a hundred times.

From an analysis of attitudes to Australia and to convicts in the years leading up to the publication of *Great Expectations*, it is possible to make sense of Dickens's naming strategy, and his designation of Magwitch as an antipodean Other. In Australia, the stigma of a convict background was omnipresent, despite the fact that emancipists did manage to take advantage of the new opportunities afforded them. While the social stratification in Australia was not as pronounced as in Britain, as time went on it did widen, as free settlers came in ever larger numbers, either to fulfil the agrarian dream envisioned by Dickens, Sidney, and Chisholm,<sup>28</sup> or to participate in the gold rush of the 1850s. The latter was a phenomenon which changed the character of the colony dramatically: it quickly increased the population; led to the end of transportation; and diversified markets and production, creating in the process an oligarchic Australian bourgeoisie.<sup>29</sup> The huge influx of free settlers posed difficulties for convicts, who had up to that point been the key participants in the foundation of Australia's economy. By the 1850s they found that their presence was openly resented (Fig. 4); but even before the discovery of gold, when convicts and emancipists formed the bulk of the population, the stigma attached to the word 'convict' was strongly in evidence.



Fig. 4 'Colonists and Convicts'. *Punch*, 29 October 1864. This illustration points to continued opposition on the part of free settlers to the arrival of convicts, even at this late date in the history of transportation to Australia. Its relevance to the case of Magwitch lies in the fact that British journals did not perceive any abeyance in antagonism towards these 'Others' in Australian society.

As Hughes points out, the term 'convict' grated on the ears of emancipists and their descendants. In the 1820s the polite form of address was 'government man' or 'legitimate' These were later displaced by 'exile' or even 'empire builder', in an attempt to soften the rub of convict status, and with the added effect of confirming their political and social allegiance to Britain.<sup>30</sup> At the time Magwitch was supposed to have been in Australia, gangs of convicts were pervasive, not only in Sydney (Figs. 5-6), but also on road building projects, such as that across the Blue Mountains (Figs. 7-8). Yet despite their pronounced presence and sheer numbers, convicts constantly made comparisons between themselves and free settlers. Magwitch is not exempt from this process; when recounting his history to Pip, he tells of 'the blood horses [thoroughbreds] of them colonists', who 'might fling up the dust over me as I was walking' He imagines them saying of him, 'He was a convict, a few year ago, and is an ignorant common fellow now, for all he's lucky' (*GE*, 318-9).

The word 'convict' appears a total of 79 times in the novel, and Dickens is clearly aware of its implications and its functioning as a pejorative term. In fact, the subject of the 'convict', which is emphasized on Magwitch's reappearance in volume 2, chapter 20 (single volume chapter 39), was important to the overall conception of the weekly number of *All the Year Round* in which this scene is presented. The return of Magwitch appeared in the instalment published on 11 May 1861; in the same issue there appeared 'A Dialogue Concerning Convicts' by Dickens's friend Thomas Beard.<sup>31</sup> The concurrence cannot be coincidental, and cannot be attributed to W. H. Wills's agency as sub-editor. On 25 March 1861 Dickens had written to Beard, suggesting that he produce a synopsis of a recent pamphlet by Charles Measor entitled *The Convict Service*.<sup>32</sup> He notes:

I send you a pamphlet I have lately received, which in the main expresses the views I have often urged respecting Prison Discipline – which sensibly shows what evil is done by injudicious Jail-Chaplains – and points out in what glaring respects their set ways of carrying on, are wrong. Now, don't you think that you could write just such an abstract of this pamphlet, and accounts of this question according to its writer's views and experience, as I want?<sup>33</sup>

Beard sent his draft to Dickens, and received the following reply on 18 April:

I can HONESTLY tell you – which I do with the heartiest pleasure – that I think you have very skilfully presented the case of the pamphlet. The condensation, and slight touch here and there, which I think will improve it, I will mark in the proof. And if you can come to the office next Wednesday at 12, I will have the Proof there with my markings upon it, as a small guide for the future.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 5 Augustus Earle, *A Government Jail Gang, Sydney, N.S.W.*, circa 1830. This group, portrayed outside Sydney barracks during the governorship of Ralph Darling, consists of stereotypical brutes, some of whom are depicted in convict uniforms, distinguished by the broad arrow motif. Such presentations helped to foster the impression of convicts as individuals whose peculiarity was etched into their clothing, and whose propensity for evil was etched into their very features. It is interesting to compare this lithograph with Pailthorpe's depiction of Magwitch in figure 2. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



Fig. 6 J. Backhouse, *A Chain Gang: Convicts going to work nr. Sidney [sic] N.S. Wales*, 1838. The pinched and sallow countenances of the convicts, and the lack of stereotypical delineations, point to this presentation being more realistic than that of Augustus Earle in figure 5. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



Fig. 7 Charles Rodius, *Convicts building road over the Blue Mountains, N.S.W.*, 1833. This painting represents an attempt to diminish the effects of the convict presence on this immense road-building project, for which chain gangs provide the labour. In most sketches and paintings of the Australian landscape, convicts either do not appear, or they are rendered inconspicuous. The work of Rodius is especially interesting in this regard, as he was himself transported for purse-stealing. Despite the fact that convict gangs were seen everywhere, there was a tendency to reduce them to inconspicuous accessory items (or staffage) in landscape painting. At the centre of this picture is the point of access to the western plain, rather than the prisoners building the road which will reach this promising vista. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.



Fig. 8 Augustus Earle, *View from the Summit of Mount York, looking towards Bathurst Plains, Convicts breaking Stones, N. S. Wales*, circa. 1826-7. This watercolour is an example of an uncommon depiction of convicts in the Australian landscape: here the labourers are the focus of the picture. Unlike the depiction of Rodius, Earle moves the figures into the foreground, creating as much interest in them as in the natural scene behind. None are romanticized, but none are stereotypical brutes either: one convict in leg-irons is carrying water, while three others are hewing sandstone. They are not a pictorial embarrassment, but rather an integral part of the image. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

As editor Dickens had the prerogative to amend any contribution; but in this case it is interesting to observe him not only taking such an interest in his friend's piece, but also following it through to publication in the same weekly part as the reappearance of Magwitch in *Great Expectations*.

The aim of Beard's article is to encourage prison reform; in the process, he considers land-based prisons such as Portland, as well as convict hulks. Of the system of transportation (which at that time still conveyed prisoners to Western Australia) he writes:

These ships are in truth floating hells, and have been so described by some of the better disposed convicts themselves. "Could I sum up in words, or foul my mouth with words," says one of them, "I might be able, perhaps, to give you a feeble idea of the doings that are carried out on a convict ship," – where, as Mr. Measor tells us, "three hundred men are packed, like a herd of condemned souls on their way to Tartarus, into the hold of a ship, with sleeping berths in two rows one above the other, giving a space of about sixteen inches by six feet to each prisoner;" and where a state of things in consequence prevails which sets discipline at defiance. This hideous evil has been over and again brought under the notice of the authorities, yet it is still continued, and no attempt is made to remedy it.

Beard wished to point out the mental anguish and 'depressive influence' suffered by convicts in such circumstances, and hoped that, with improved conditions, the prisoner could be encouraged to contemplate 'better and nobler things'<sup>35</sup>

Given Dickens's involvement in the Beard essay, the appearance of this article treating the mental state of convicts in the same number of *All the Year Round* as the return of Magwitch would appear to be more than a coincidence. The psychological state of Pip – and his relation to Magwitch – at this point in the text, is crucial. On discovering the truth concerning his benefactor, Pip recalls:

I could not have spoken one word, though it had been to save my life. I stood, with a hand on the chair-back and a hand on my breast, where I seemed to be suffocating – I stood so, looking wildly at him, until I grasped at the chair, when the room began to surge and turn. He caught me, drew me to the sofa, put me up against the cushions, and bent on one knee before me: bringing the face that I now well remembered, and that I shuddered at, very near to mine. (*GE*. 316)

Up to this point, Pip was able to use the convenient label 'convict' to refer to Magwitch: however once he realises what Magwitch had done for him, his terms of reference change.

'Convict' is used in a number of ways in the text. The primary sense denotes the situation of those like Magwitch who are condemned criminals, awaiting transportation for various offences. When each

individual character is considered in this light, the results are as follows: Magwitch is called 'convict' 31 times in the text; Compeyson 16 times; the stranger whom Pip meets, first at the Three Jolly Bargemen and then on the stagecoach, 11 times; and the stranger's companion on the coach, 9 times. Before any names are revealed, Dickens uses 'convict' to refer to members of stereotypically imagined collective outcasts from society. Yet Dickens manages to differentiate between them through the peculiar system of naming adopted by Pip: Magwitch becomes 'my convict'; Compeyson 'the other convict'; the stranger is 'the convict I had recognized'; and his companion is called 'the convict I had never seen'<sup>36</sup> Pip is thus able to use a generic term in a particular sense; yet the construction is such that it allows him to believe that he is maintaining a sense of distance from these men and the sphere of experience they represent.

Yet Dickens is still aware of the power of the generic term, and uses it to suggest brutality and violence beyond the experience of those living by the marshes. From the first appearance of the word, when Joe remarks 'There's another convict off' (*GE*.14), a system of association is established which attempts to represent the characters of Magwitch and Compeyson. Their physical features suggest ferocity and destructiveness: Magwitch is described as 'A fearful man. all in coarse grey,.... who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled'; Compeyson is 'dressed in coarse grey, too... and was lame, and hoarse, and cold, and was everything that the other man was: except that he had not the same face', but was 'livid to look at' (*GE*, 4, 18, 37). The sergeant refers to them as 'game', suggesting that they should be shot or trapped, and they are growled at, 'as if to dogs' (*GE*, 32, 41). The effect of the violent struggle between Magwitch and Compeyson in the ditch is to confirm for the onlookers any stereotypical attributes with which they were familiar. The tendency to violence is recalled later, on the discovery of the attack on Mrs Joe: Mr Wopsle hears it reported that the house was 'violently entered', supposedly by convicts (*GE*, 119) – an assumption given credence by the fact that prisoners had recently escaped from the hulks – and Mrs Joe is hit over the head with a convict's leg-iron. Pip believes it to be Magwitch's, but he does not implicate 'his' convict in the crime; rather, he widens the realm of possibilities beyond convicted felons. He believes 'one of two other persons to have become possessed of it, and to have used it to this cruel account. Either Orlick, or the strange man who had shown me the file' (*GE*, 120). Later on, in a violent confession, Orlick admits to the crime.

The appropriate apportionment of blame and recognition of benevolence are central to Pip's development in this *Bildungsroman*, and the process is interestingly evident in the evolution of his naming of Magwitch in the text. The reader is alerted early on to the convict's importance for Pip by means of a question:

While Mrs Joe sat with her head bending over her needlework, I put

my mouth into the forms of saying to Joe, “What is a convict?” Joe put *his* mouth in the forms of returning such a highly elaborate answer, that I could make out nothing of it but the single word “Pip.”

The question bears a striking resemblance to others asked by children in earlier novels: Paul Dombey asks his father, ‘Papa! What’s money?’<sup>37</sup> and David Copperfield asks Peggotty, ‘Were you ever married?’<sup>38</sup> In all three cases the concerns addressed in the questions are central to the texts: *Dombey and Son* focuses on how human relations are distorted by the Gospel of Mammonism; *David Copperfield* depicts the protagonist in a state of anguish and torment over marriage; and in *Great Expectations* Pip comes to understand not only the significance of the type represented by the word ‘convict’, but more importantly, how his personal circumstances and destiny are inextricably linked to those of this felon.

During the first stage of his expectations, Pip tries to distinguish between himself and the individual he repeatedly calls ‘my convict’ (*GE*, 37, 38, 39, 40, 78, 120; see Table below p. 127) – a construction which almost implies a master-servant relationship; yet even in childhood Pip is psychologically placed on a par with Magwitch, through his robbing Mrs Joe’s pantry. The language which the adult narrator uses to describe the child’s feelings is tinged with guilt, as he invites a comparison of Magwitch’s fate with his own:

“I wonder who’s put into prison-ships, and why they’re put there?”

If I slept at all that night, it was only to imagine myself drifting down the river on a strong spring tide, to the Hulks; a ghostly pirate calling out to me through a speaking-trumpet, as I passed the gibbet-station, that I had better come ashore and be hanged at once, and not put it off. (*GE*, 15)

Pip is also bound to Magwitch through a code of honour among thieves, which is invoked so that neither guilty party admits anything concerning the involvement of the other. Pip is keen to make Magwitch understand that it was not he who had told the soldiers where to find him. He notes, ‘I looked at him eagerly when he looked at me, and slightly moved my hands and shook my head. I had been waiting for him to see me, that I might try to assure him of my innocence’ In return, Magwitch explains to the sergeant, ‘I wish to say something respecting this escape. It may prevent some persons laying under suspicion alonger me’ (*GE*, 39, 40).

Despite the association between Pip and Magwitch suggested through this initial encounter with convicts, when Pip next meets a pair of felons (in his experience on the stage-coach) he likens them to a public spectacle:

Their keeper had a brace of pistols, and carried a thick-knobbed bludgeon under his arm; but he was on terms of good understanding with them, and stood, with them beside him,... rather with an air as if



the convicts were an interesting Exhibition not formally open at the moment, and he the curator.

Historically, working parties from the hulks attracted the attention of curious onlookers, and so Dickens is in part providing a context for his contemporary readers; but the process does not end here – he allows Pip to dehumanise the two convicts further:

The great numbers on their backs, as if they were street doors; their coarse mangy ungainly outer surface, as if they were lower animals; their ironed legs, apologetically garlanded with pocket-handkerchiefs; and the way in which all present looked at them and kept from them; made them (as Herbert had said) a most disagreeable and degraded spectacle. (*GE*, 227)

Pip is not recognised by the man from the Three Jolly Bargemen, and so the association between him and these convicts is relatively anonymous, limited to physical proximity, as in Pip's noting 'It is impossible to express with what acuteness I felt the convict's breathing, not only on the back of my head, but all along my spine' (*GE*, 228). Pip seems relieved that 'the man had no suspicion of my identity' because of the outward changes effected both by physical maturity and by his being 'so differently circumstanced' (*GE*, 230). Unlike his encounter with Magwitch on the marshes, in the ordeal on the stage-coach Pip's 'true' identity – both in the sense of being Philip Pirrip and being associated with convicts as a confederate in crime – is not disclosed. He can continue to be repulsed by these other convicts because his connection to them is never overtly revealed.

The great change in Pip's sensibility occurs with the return of Magwitch in volume 2, chapter 20 (single volume chapter 39). Before Pip realises the precise nature of the association, he continues to call Magwitch 'my convict' (*GE*, 313). However, once he learns that the visitor is his benefactor, a different process of dissociation occurs: he uses 'convict' sparingly, referring either to his boyhood recollections of Magwitch (*GE*, 320), or to the fact that the convict's money had enticed him into a downward spiral, leading to his abandoning his roots; he muses:

Sharpest and deepest pain of all – it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe. (*GE*, 320)

'Convict' is then replaced by such terms as 'my dreaded visitor' (*GE*, 325), or, more poignantly, by the third-person singular pronoun, in such pronouncements as 'I found myself sitting by the fire again, waiting for – Him – to come to breakfast' (*GE*, 327). At last 'He' recounts more of his history, and reveals that on board ship he took the name Provis, but that

his real name is Magwitch, 'chrisen'd Abel' (*GE*, 328). Dickens could at this point have developed the parallel with the murdered son of Adam, thus eliciting great sympathy for Magwitch, by turning him into a figure adversely affected by his circumstances and his association with Compeyson;<sup>39</sup> yet he continues with the process of objectification, by denying Magwitch full development of character or identity. Pip avoids calling him Magwitch, and instead adopts 'Provis' as his preferred form of address, using it a total of 42 times in the text (see Table). While this might reflect Pip's desire to keep the convict's true identity hidden from both Compeyson and the law, it also stains Pip indelibly with the taint of crime: in helping Magwitch to escape, he becomes an 'accessory after the fact'<sup>40</sup>

The exigency of using 'Provis' (a name recalling the Latin *provisus*, meaning precaution) is emphasized in Pip's exchange with Jaggers concerning letters from Australia:

"I have been informed by Wemmick," pursued Mr Jaggers, still looking hard at me, "that he has received a letter, under date Portsmouth, from a colonist of the name of Purvis, or –"

"Or Provis," I suggested.

"Or Provis – thank you, Pip. Perhaps it *is* Provis? Perhaps you know it's Provis?"

"Yes," said I.

"You know it's Provis. A letter, under date Portsmouth, from a colonist of the name of Provis, asking for the particulars of your address, on behalf of Magwitch. Wemmick sent him the particulars, I understand, by return of post. Probably it is through Provis that you have received the explanation of Magwitch – in New South Wales?"

"It came through Provis," I replied.

"Good day, Pip," said Mr Jaggers, offering his hand; "glad to have seen you. In writing by post to Magwitch – in New South Wales – or in communicating with him through Provis, have the goodness to mention that the particulars and vouchers of our long account shall be sent to you, together with the balance; for there is still a balance remaining. Good day, Pip!" (*GE*, 335)<sup>41</sup>

The effect is that of attempting to maintain a focus on 'Provis', rather than slipping into the more personal distinction of 'Magwitch'. It seems certain that Jaggers knows Magwitch is in England, but both he and Pip skirt round the fact by repeatedly affirming that 'Provis' sent the letter.

By calling Magwitch 'Provis', Pip believes that distance can be maintained. He is assisted in this effort by Herbert, who uses the name 11 times (see Table), particularly after the plan to spirit the convict out of the country is formulated. Herbert, however, introduces yet another alias for Magwitch: he is renamed 'Mr Campbell' once he is installed at Mrs Whimple's lodging house at Mill Pond Bank. Herbert's insistence on this new name parallels the emphasis placed upon 'Provis' by Pip and Jaggers:

When we got to the foot of the stairs. I asked Herbert whether he had preserved the name of Provis? He replied, certainly not, and that the lodger was Mr Campbell. He also explained that the utmost known of Mr Campbell there, was, that he (Herbert) had Mr Campbell consigned to him, and felt a strong personal interest in his being well cared for, and living a secluded life. So, when we went into the parlour where Mrs Whimple and Clara were seated at work, I said nothing of my own interest in Mr Campbell, but kept it to myself. (*GE*, 377)

While Herbert is Pip's accomplice in the planning of Magwitch's flight – and thus also an 'accessory after the fact' – his segregation from the convict sphere, whether conscious or unconscious, goes further than that of Pip, for Herbert does not use either 'convict' or 'Magwitch' to refer to Pip's benefactor: he only uses 'Provis' and 'Mr Campbell'. It is also interesting to note that Herbert renames Pip 'Handel' in volume 2 chapter 3 (single volume chapter 22), ostensibly because Pip reminds him of G. F. Handel's 'The Harmonious Blacksmith';<sup>42</sup> but prior to offering this explanation he notes, 'I don't take to Philip... for it sounds like a moral boy out of the spelling book' (*GE*, 177) – and from what is known of Pip, he does not fit this idealistic mould.

In comparison to 'Provis', the name 'Magwitch' appears infrequently (see Table). The convict's real name is disclosed to Pip at the opening of the third stage of his expectations (*GE*, 328), and serves a different function from the other terms of reference. It represents potential danger: Jaggers often uses 'Magwitch' in conjunction with the phrase 'in New South Wales', to emphasize the importance of maintaining the façade that his client has not returned to England (*GE*, 334, 335); the vengeful Orlick uses it to alert Pip to the danger of disclosing Magwitch's true identity, when he says, 'There's them that can't and won't have Magwitch – yes, *I* know the name! – alive in the same land with them' (*GE*, 425). It is also used by the 'man who held the lines' in volume 3, chapter 15 (single volume chapter 54) to reveal the convict's true identity: 'That's the man, wrapped in the cloak. His name is Abel Magwitch, otherwise Provis. I apprehend that man, and call upon him to surrender' (*GE*, 440).

The name 'Magwitch' is also used by Pip, who acknowledges that after his capture the convict is 'Provis no longer' (*GE*, 442).<sup>43</sup> After this crucial event Pip returns to Magwitch something of the identity that has so long been denied him: he first uses the name to distinguish his benefactor from Compeyson (*GE*, 442) – an act that involves a literal disengagement after the underwater struggle. This physical detachment might point to a metaphorical one, in which Compeyson is identified as 'the other convict of long ago' (*GE*, 441), thus emphasising his criminal nature, despite his gentlemanly appearance. Pip then uses 'Magwitch' as the preferred form of address for his benefactor, as he finally acknowledges, 'When I took my place by Magwitch's side, I felt that that was my place henceforth while he lived' (*GE*, 443).

At the close of Magwitch's earthly existence Pip addresses him in terms of endearment; the last time he uses the name is to tell Magwitch about Estella:

"Dear Magwitch, I must tell you, now at last. You understand what I say?"

A gentle pressure on my hand.

"You had a child once, whom you loved and lost."

A stronger pressure on my hand.

"She lived and found powerful friends. She is living now. She is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her!" (*GE*, 456)

The use of 'Dear Magwitch' cements the association between Pip and his benefactor: while previously Pip has only recognised Magwitch by establishing a gulf between them, here the distance has been narrowed, and the level of intimacy surpasses any previous encounter between the two in the novel. The convict has been confirmed as 'Magwitch', and is able to depart this life with his identity at least partially restored by Pip.

The fact that the restoration is incomplete is crucial to Dickens's project. Magwitch has largely been denied the opportunity to define himself. He naturally uses his own name as his preferred form of identification (see Table), firstly in response to Pip's question, 'What is your real name?' (*GE*, 328),<sup>44</sup> and then several other times, in terms which tellingly confirm his identity. When recounting his history to Pip, he muses on his personality, noting 'I first became aware of myself, down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living'; this arresting statement suggests that Magwitch's primary notions of selfhood are inextricably bound up with ideas of criminality. He immediately consolidates the connection, by introducing his own name:

I know's my name to be Magwitch, chrisen'd Abel. How did I know it? Much as I know'd the birds' names in the hedges to be chaffinch, sparrer, thrush. I might have thought it was all lies together, only as the birds' names come out true, I supposed mine did. (*GE*, 344)

The only other time when he refers to himself as Magwitch is in connection with his time in Australia, the one place where his true identity does not pose a problem. It is there, as he says, that 'Everybody knowed Magwitch, and Magwitch could come, and Magwitch could go, and nobody's head would be troubled about him' (*GE*, 433-4). It seems from this statement (where repetition is once again apparent), and from other facts he reveals about his colonial life, that in Australia he – an emancipist – was accepted for what he was. His return to England, however, presents insurmountable difficulties: as he explains to Pip, 'They ain't so easy concerning me here, dear boy – wouldn't be, leastwise, if they knowed where I was' (*GE*, 434).

Thus Magwitch's security was assured so long as he had no thoughts

of returning to England. In Australia he could be 'a sheep-farmer, stock-breeder, and other trades besides', and could do 'wonderfully well' (*GE*, 315); his problem is that he continues to look to England – and to Pip – for spiritual sustenance. As he readily admits, 'While I was over yonder, t'other side of the world, I was always looking to this side' (*GE*, 433). Hughes assesses the implications of Magwitch's return:

Dickens knotted several strands in the English perception of convicts in Australia.... They could succeed, but they could hardly, in the real sense, return. They could expiate their crimes in a technical, legal sense, but what they suffered had warped them into permanent outsiders. And yet they were capable of redemption – as long as they stayed in Australia.<sup>45</sup>

There are signals in the text confirming Magwitch's continued display of traits consistent with the stereotypical convict experience. Pip acknowledges that it is physically impossible to conceal Magwitch's true character:

To my thinking, there was something in him that made it hopeless to attempt to disguise him. The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching fugitive on the marshes. This effect on my anxious fancy was partly referable, no doubt, to his old face and manner growing more familiar to me: but I believe too that he dragged one of his legs as if there were still a weight of iron on it, and that from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man (*GE*, 335-6)

This view is confirmed in a subsequent exchange with Pip:

"But there is another question," said Herbert. "This is an ignorant determined man, who has long had one fixed idea. More than that, he seems to me (I may misjudge him) to be a man of desperate and fierce character."

"I know he is," I returned. "Let me tell you what evidence I have seen of it." And I told him what I had not mentioned in my narrative; of that encounter with the other convict.

Magwitch eventually has his opportunity to take revenge on Compeyson, killing him in the climactic encounter on the river.

It seems, then, that Magwitch has not undergone a change of heart, and his return to England cannot, therefore, be sanctioned. The propensity to violence lurks continually in the background, even extending – if John Carey's analysis is correct – to his fascination with fire.<sup>46</sup> This tendency never diminishes, and so a full regeneration is impossible. His displaced presence on the English landscape is an uncanonical aberration, posing insurmountable difficulties for himself, for Pip, and ultimately for Dickens.

The death of Magwitch, while inevitable, evokes a complex mixture of sentiments and motivations. On the one hand Dickens is attracted by the loyalty and kindness with which Magwitch has acted towards Pip, and for many chapters there exists the possibility of successful escape to Rotterdam; yet he seems repulsed by Magwitch's motives, which include wreaking revenge on Compeyson, and his self-centred and violent disposition. Likewise, he affords Magwitch a momentary deathbed vision of his long-lost daughter Estella, but only at the expense of having failed to create a gentleman. It is also significant that he dies in Newgate Prison; he thus remains, as Lansbury notes, 'a convict to the last'<sup>47</sup>

Magwitch experiences a crisis of identity, caught between the centre and the periphery, not fitting comfortably into either setting. He distinguishes between his own existence in Australia and that of the free settlers, and consoles himself by thinking of his support of Pip: 'I'm making a better gentleman nor ever *you'll* be!' (*GE*, 318-9). This statement clearly indicates that he places some credence in the potential of the class system in England (if not for himself then for others), for he believes that Pip will be able to rise in society by means of the resources provided by his benefactor. Yet his geographical and social detachment from the metropolitan centre has tragic consequences for him on his return. Edward Said explains:

The prohibition placed on Magwitch's return is not only penal but imperial: subjects can be taken to places like Australia, but they cannot be allowed a 'return' to metropolitan space, which, as all Dickens's fiction testifies, is meticulously charted, spoken for, inhabited by a hierarchy of metropolitan personages.<sup>48</sup>

The implication is that Magwitch's death is fated from the point where he declares, 'While I was over yonder, t'other side of the world, I was always looking to this side' (*GE*, 433). This statement is a disastrous misconception about potential acceptance in England. Magwitch returns imbued with all the bourgeois values of his enemies; he is a gentleman-maker, full of social ideals and ironically proud of the Compeyson-like Pip, from whom he differs, as Humphry House has pointed out, 'only in taste'<sup>49</sup> Pip's rise ends in disaster because it is part of an exotic fantasy, which can never be realised, and so the fortune must be launched into oblivion – or, ironically in this case, returned to the imperial power which ordered Magwitch to be transported in the first place!

The identity of Magwitch is problematic, but so too is that of Pip, because of his covert and overt associations with the convict. In the light of all that Pip has done – whether consciously or unconsciously – to assist Magwitch in fulfilling his fantasy, he requires rehabilitation if he is to continue to occupy a place in the English landscape. He must, therefore, leave any ideas of convicts, Magwitch, and Provis behind, by enduring a delirious illness which cleanses him of the taint of convict life. His memories of that time are illuminating:

That I had a fever and was avoided, that I suffered greatly, that I often lost my reason, that the time seemed interminable, that I compounded the impossible existences of my own identity. (*GE*, 458)

He is reunited with Joe, whom he had long forsaken, as a sign of his recovery and his search for a new sense of self. However, the sequence of disappointments which has accompanied his progress is not yet complete, for he devises a plan which is destined to fail: he resolves to offer his hand to Biddy, imagining that he 'would show her how humbled and repentant' he was (*GE*, 468); but on reaching the forge he discovers that she has already married Joe. Then in order to shake off the train of discontent completely, he regresses further, asking to 'look at my old little room, and rest there a few minutes by myself' (*GE*, 475). From this point of earliest memory and experience, he can finally look outward to see what the future holds, and it is significant that in his return to the scenes and personages of his childhood, he never once mentions Magwitch or the first fateful meeting on the marshes.

From this return to the point of origin, after losing everything he had hoped to achieve, he can start again. Pip decides to join Herbert in working for Clarriker & Co. Like David Copperfield, he undergoes a period of voluntary exile, spending eleven years abroad, primarily in the 'Eastern Branch' of the operation (*GE*, 476). The location (which is almost certainly Egypt) is significantly less problematic than Australia, because in 'the East' (*GE*, 476) Pip can appreciate fully the difference between the Western Self and the Oriental Other, and it is unquestionable where he stands in this relationship. Said explains:

Pip takes on a new career with his boyhood friend Herbert Pocket, this time not as an idle gentlemen but as a hardworking trader in the East, where Britain's other colonies offer a sort of normality that Australia never could.<sup>50</sup>

Thus by becoming a colonial businessman – in a place where, as Humphry House notes, 'gentlemen grow like mushrooms'<sup>51</sup> – the shadow of Magwitch and all he represents is finally laid to rest. Pip may return to England, chastened by his experiences, and ready to conform to the exigencies of English society

While attention is shifted away from Magwitch at the close of *Great Expectations*, considerable effort has been expended in maintaining the focus on the convict in adaptations of the novel. Foremost among these is Dickens's own reading adaptation, probably written between June and October 1861, but never performed. The narrative runs from the first meeting with Magwitch in the churchyard to his death in prison, and purges the feminine influence from Pip's career: neither Biddy nor Estella is ever mentioned. The effect of the condensed events included in the 160-page text is to maintain the focus clearly on Pip and Magwitch, even lending the same emphasis by referring to the convict as 'Provis' or 'he' rather than 'Magwitch'.<sup>52</sup>

Magwitch's presence has produced a marked effect on playwrights as well. Worth notes that he has been the focus of a number of British stage adaptations of the novel, such as *The Convict* by C. E. Openshaw and Ethel Dickens,<sup>53</sup> and *Pip and the Convict* by Guy Williams.<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to note that Australian adaptations seem to have lent a different emphasis: in several of these productions, such as that at the Gaiety Theatre in 1889, the last scene depicts Magwitch on his death bed, bestowing his blessing and fortune on Pip and Estella, who vow to make the long voyage to Australia. Lansbury notes that the reservations in Dickens's portrayal of Magwitch in the novel are generally not mirrored in the Australian stage plays: in these adaptations the darkest shadows emanate from England, whereas Australia is all sunshine and benevolence. She concludes that such portrayals permitted Australians to enjoy a comfortable feeling of superiority towards the imperial power, which was 'still festering in a morass of old iniquities and vicious inequalities'<sup>55</sup>

The presence of Magwitch in *Great Expectations*, and the interest this character's hidden aspects have generated, constitute an interesting site for investigation and reflection; but it must be remembered that, like *Edwin Drood*, this mystery can never be fully – or satisfactorily – resolved. As Waldock notes, 'If the accumulation of comment means anything, it means that we need no longer expect a solution in which all our perplexities will magically vanish'<sup>56</sup> Australia has been configured as a land of enlarged possibility, and thus a more problematic location for working out one's identity than England; yet it has been a necessary detour, for the exodus and return of the convict leave an indelible mark on Pip's personality. He also experiences another kind of return, in the form of an acceptance that Englishness, with all the social and political responsibilities entailed, is the only reality available to him – however challenging and difficult that might be. Dickens remains reticent about *le cas Magwitch* because he has his eye on the drama of the tale, with its sheer human tragedy and passion; any great attention to detail would have marred the overall effect. He could have disclosed more about how Magwitch's fortune was made, and could have taken steps to find out, because information was readily available to him; but this would be to miss the point. In a story which depends upon economy of detail to achieve its overall effect, the point is for the conjuror to draw our eyes elsewhere.

---

<sup>1</sup>While serialisation of the novel began on 1 December 1860, Dickens seems to have conceived of the novel as early as September or October of that year, as a remedy for the adverse reception of Charles Lever's *A Day's Ride*, which was then being serialised in *All the Year Round*. See Edgar Rosenberg's discussion of the relationship between Dickens and Lever in his fine Norton Critical Edition of *Great Expectations* (New York: W W Norton & Co., 1999), pp. 410-22; hereafter 'Norton Critical Edition'

<sup>2</sup>In a letter to John Forster of September 1860, Dickens notes that he has been writing a 'little piece', and that 'such a very fine, new, and grotesque idea' has come to him (*Letters of Charles Dickens*, the Pilgrim Edition, 9, ed. Graham Storey [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], p. 310; hereafter 'Pilgrim Letters'). This episode is identified as the germ of Pip and



Magwitch.

<sup>3</sup>In late 1862 Dickens contemplated the idea of going to Australia on a reading tour, and entered into correspondence with both Forster and Thomas Beard on the subject. See *Pilgrim Letters* 10, pp. 148, 152-3, 161. Dickens's letters on *Great Expectations* are reproduced in the Norton Critical Edition, pp. 531-6.

<sup>4</sup>A. J. A. Waldock, *Hamlet: a Study in Critical Method*; quoted in Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 304.

<sup>5</sup>Mary Edminson, 'The Date of the Action in *Great Expectations*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 13 (1958-9), pp. 22-35; Anny Sadrin, 'A Chronology of *Great Expectations*', (Unwin Critical Library, London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 30-43.

<sup>6</sup>p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Jerome Meckier, 'Dating the Action in *Great Expectations*: A New Chronology', *Dickens Studies Annual* 21 (1992), pp. 157-94. Rosenberg, in a note in the Norton Critical Edition (p. 537) explains that he collaborated with Meckier on the research for the article; while he dissents from some of Meckier's conclusions, he concedes that the article 'takes into account all previous chronologers' and examines 'all options'

<sup>8</sup>Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Margaret Cardwell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993). Appendix B, pp. 483-7. The Clarendon text is based on the three-volume 1861 edition, in which each book conforms to a stage in Pip's expectations; thus the chapter numbers extend from 1-19 in vol. 1, 1-20 in vol. 2, and 1-20 in vol. 3. In single-volume editions with continuous numbering of chapters, the correspondence is as follows: vol. 1, chaps. 1-19; vol. 2, chaps. 20-39; vol. 3, chaps. 40-59. All subsequent references to *Great Expectations* will be from this edition, and will appear in the text. 'Dates' provides signposts for the chronological development of characters such as Pip, Estella and Magwitch; 'Tide' provides crucial tidal information for the timeline to be followed during Magwitch's attempted escape in volume 3, chapter 13 (single volume chapter 54). Harry Stone notes that the working notes were written when the novel was in an advanced stage of composition. 'Dates', for example, was begun after portions of the last stage of the novel had been written (*Dickens' Working Notes for His Novels* [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987], p. 318). It is possible, therefore, that the notes were simply points of clarification for Dickens in the latter stages of writing, rather than evidence of a thoroughgoing concern with chronological accuracy from the moment of conception. Sadrin confirms that in compiling 'Dates' Dickens 'wanted to check the consistency of his dates for his own guidance'; she also notes that he wished 'to establish the chronology of long-past events to corroborate his conjectures', and that he 'tells himself more about the ages of his characters than he ever tells us in his novel' (p. 21). On the working plans see also Rosenberg's comments in the Norton Critical Edition, pp. 469-79.

<sup>9</sup>Rosenberg, is, however, somewhat uneasy about Meckier's tracing the novel's chronological framework to a single reference in chapter 19 (Norton Critical Edition, p. 537, note 2). An additional complication concerning dating is raised by Cardwell (Clarendon edition, p. li), in her description of the authorised dramatic version of *Great Expectations* made in 1861 (though probably not compiled by Dickens): she notes that the 58-page text, which begins with Pip aged fifteen, is headed 'TIME – 1815-20', thus situating the opening events of the novel around 1807.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Hughes, *The Fatal Shore: A History of Transportation of Convicts to Australia 1787-1868* (London: Pan Books, 1988), p. 140.

<sup>11</sup>See A. G. L. Shaw, *Convicts and the Colonies: A Study of Penal Transportation from Great Britain and Ireland* (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1977), p. 365. Sadrin generally concurs, though she suggests the end of 1809 – that is, just before Macquarie's arrival – as a possible date for Magwitch's placement into penal servitude.

<sup>12</sup>*Convicts and the Colonies*, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup>*Convicts and the Colonies*, p. 84.

<sup>14</sup>See *Pilgrim Letters* 7, pp. 817-8. Dickens's discussions with the Marquis of Normanby are treated in part I of this article, 'Dickens, Australia and Magwitch: The Colonial Context', *The Dickensian* 95.1 (1999), pp. 31-2; hereafter 'Colonial Context'

<sup>15</sup>It is interesting to note that the detail concerning Magwitch's being left money by his master was a later addition: it did not appear in the MS, or in the American serial printing in *Harper's Weekly*, which was typeset from advance proofs. On the MS see

Cardwell's note, *GE*, 318; on *Harper's Weekly* see the Norton Critical Edition, pp. 381, 399-401.

<sup>16</sup>Hughes notes that assignees generally worked a 56-hour week; if they were willing to work beyond this they could expect £1.4s per acre for breaking up new ground, 10s for felling an acre of trees, and 6d a bushel for pulling and husking corn (*The Fatal Shore*, pp. 288-9).

<sup>17</sup>[Samuel Sidney], 'Two-Handed Dick the Stockman: An Adventure in the Bush', *Household Words* 1 (4 May 1850), pp. 141-4; [William Howitt], 'Black Thursday', *Household Words* 13 (10 May 1856), pp. 388-95. For further details see 'Colonial Context', pp. 41-2.

<sup>18</sup>See Hughes, p. 335.

<sup>19</sup>Alexander Harris, *The Emigrant Family: or, the Story of an Australian Settler* (London, 1849), p. 326; quoted in Hughes, p. 353.

<sup>20</sup>*The Fatal Shore*, p. 320.

<sup>21</sup>For a concise treatment of this topic see Leon Litvack's entry on 'Prisons and Penal Transportation' in the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*, ed. Paul Schlicke (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 465-7.

<sup>22</sup>It is important to recall that the young Pip steals victuals from Mrs Joe to feed Magwitch; he remarks: 'I felt fearfully sensible of the great convenience that the Hulks were handy for me. I was clearly on my way there. I had begun by asking questions, and I was going to rob Mrs Joe' (*GE*, 15). For a full consideration of Pip's criminality see John P McWilliams, 'Great Expectations: The Beacon, the Gibbet, and the Ship', *Dickens Studies Annual* 2 (1972), pp. 255-66.

<sup>23</sup>Magwitch also mentions that each convict was referred to by number rather than by name (*GE*, 21). Rosenberg, in his note to the Norton Critical Edition (p. 22) confirms that the use of numbers stigmatised convicts as 'nonpersons'; by way of contrast, he observes that carriages and hotel rooms (like ships) were entitled to names instead of digits.

<sup>24</sup>The details Dickens includes in his description might relate to his familiarity with the case of the cannibal convict Alexander Pearce; see 'Colonial Context', pp. 45-6.

<sup>25</sup>Michael Hollington, 'Dickens and Australia', *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens* 33 (April 1991), p. 29.

<sup>26</sup>Norton Critical Edition, p. 452.

<sup>27</sup>Edgar Rosenberg, 'A Preface to *Great Expectations*: The Pale Usher Dusts his Lexicons', *Dickens Studies Annual* 2 (1972), pp. 294-335. The descriptive headlines are listed in Appendix G to the Clarendon edition, pp. 513-6, and in the Norton Critical Edition, pp. 489-90.

<sup>28</sup>See 'Colonial Context', pp. 33-8.

<sup>29</sup>See Hughes, *The Fatal Shore*, pp. 564, 571. *Household Words* did respond to public interest in the gold rush, and Dickens himself (with the assistance of Henry Morley) published an article on the refining process (*Household Words* 6, 13 November 1852, pp. 193-7). Many of these contributions, however, contained a cautionary note, warning potential prospectors of the difficulties they might face in embarking on such ventures.

<sup>30</sup>Hughes notes that until the end of transportation few – if any – emigrants would have thought of calling themselves 'Australian' (*The Fatal Shore*, p. 346).

<sup>31</sup>See Ella Ann Oppenlander, *Dickens' All the Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List* (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing, 1984), pp. 96, 250. Beard (1807-91) worked with Dickens on the *Morning Chronicle*, was best man at his wedding, and godfather to Charley Dickens.

<sup>32</sup>Charles Pennell Measor. *The Convict Service: A Letter to Sir George Cornewall Lewis, Bart., on the administration, results, and expense of the present Convict System: with Suggestions* (London: R. Hardwicke, 1861).

<sup>33</sup>*Pilgrim Letters* 9, p. 395. For Dickens's letter to Measor, in which he praised the prison reformer's work, see *Pilgrim Letters* 9, p. 396.

<sup>34</sup>*Pilgrim Letters* 9, p. 404.

<sup>35</sup>[Thomas Beard], 'A Dialogue concerning Convicts', *All the Year Round* 5 (11 May 1861), pp. 159, 158.

<sup>36</sup>For Magwitch as 'my convict' see, for example, *GE*, 37, 38; for Compeyson as 'the

other convict', 'the other one', and 'the other fugitive', and 'the convict whom I shall call the other convict' see *GE*, 37, 38, 40; for the stranger as 'the convict I had recognized', and his companion as 'the convict I had never seen', see *GE*, 228, 229.

<sup>37</sup>Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Alan Horsman (the Clarendon Dickens, Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), p. 93.

<sup>38</sup>Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. Nina Burgis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), p. 13.

<sup>39</sup>Rosenberg believes that 'too much has been made of Magwitch's Christian name' As evidence he observes that the novelist hesitated before identifying the convict thus: in the MS and proofs Dickens experimented with 'George' and 'Abe' before settling on Abel, 'clearly', Rosenberg explains. 'on second thought', and probably because it 'felt right', 'looked right', and 'sounded right' (Norton Critical Edition, p. 462).

<sup>40</sup>Rosenberg carefully examines the case, and concludes that Pip is an 'accessory after the fact' because in legal terms he 'knowing a felony to have been committed by another, receives, comforts, or assists the felon' Rosenberg adds that Pip, Herbert, and Startop might all have been imprisoned – or even transported – for this crime. This 'serious miscalculation' on Dickens's part is especially surprising, Rosenberg explains, because the passage of the Accessories and Abettors Act coincided with the publication of *Great Expectations* (Norton Critical Edition, p. 461). An additional complication is the question of how Magwitch's felony crime – his return from Australia – sits with the chronology of the novel proposed in this article. Critics and editors of *Great Expectations* have long relied on Philip Collins's comment in *Dickens and Crime* (p. 281) concerning the anachronism of Magwitch's sentence. Collins asserts that Magwitch need not have feared being arrested on his return from transportation, and that Dickens conceals or ignores the fact that this had ceased to be a capital offence at the time the novel is set. *If*, however, Jerome Meckier's dating of the novel is correct, then Magwitch was liable to be executed for returning from transportation for life in 1828, because the crime ceased to be a capital offence only in 1834 (Meckier, p. 180). When I presented my argument to Professor Collins, he responded – most helpfully – as follows: 'Of course this imperils my remark that Magwitch wouldn't have been hanged – "If", as you say, "Dickens does maintain chronological integrity"; but I would italicize that "If" (personal letter to the author, dated 17 December 1995). I would like to thank Professor Collins for his comments.

<sup>41</sup>Collins also speculates on whether or not the name 'Provis' was inspired by an article in the *Times* of 17 September 1853 – which Dickens is known to have read – concerning the case of Tom Provis (alias Sir Richard Smyth), investigated by Inspector Charles Field, who had recently retired from the Metropolitan Police. Field, the original for Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*, had led Dickens on a nocturnal visit to a slum, which the latter then translated into 'On Duty with Inspector Field' (*Household Words* 3, 14 June 1851, pp. 265-70). See *Dickens and Crime*, pp. 209-10, 342.

<sup>42</sup>'The Harmonious Blacksmith' was a nickname, first used in 1819, for the 'Air and Variations' of Handel's *Harpsichord Suite No. 5 in E Major* (1720); the rhythm vaguely resembles the sound of hammer strokes.

<sup>43</sup>In the MS Dickens wrote 'Provis is no more'

<sup>44</sup>In the MS Dickens wrote 'What is your own name?'

<sup>45</sup>*The Fatal Shore*, p. 586.

<sup>46</sup>*The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens's Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), pp. 12-16. Pip notes several instances of Magwitch's attraction to fire. These include the following: 'While we stood in the hut, he stood before the fire looking thoughtfully at it'; 'as Provis stood smoking with his eyes on the fire' (*GE*, 40, 351). The convict from the Three Jolly Bargemen is also associated with fire: 'As he looked at the fire, I thought I saw a cunning expression, followed by a half-laugh, come into his face' (*GE*, 76).

<sup>47</sup>Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia: The Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1970), p. 149.

<sup>48</sup>Edward W Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. xvii.

<sup>49</sup>*The Dickens World* (London: Oxford UP, 1960), p. 157. Sadrin notes that the plot of the novel 'crucially and disturbingly points to the interrelatedness of crime and gentility' (*Great Expectations*, Unwin Critical Library, p. 48).

<sup>50</sup>*Culture and Imperialism*, p. xvii.

<sup>51</sup>*The Dickens World*, p. 156.

<sup>52</sup>See Philip Collins (ed.), *Charles Dickens: The Public Readings* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), pp. 304-63. See also Jean Callahan, 'The (Unread) Reading Version of *Great Expectations*', in the Norton Critical Edition, pp. 543-56.

<sup>53</sup>Performed at the Westminster Theatre, London, 4 February, 1935. See George J. Worth, *Great Expectations: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1986), p. 30.

<sup>54</sup>London: Macmillan Education, 1971. See Worth, p. 32.

<sup>55</sup>Coral Lansbury, 'Terra Australis Dickensia', *Modern Language Studies* 1 (Summer 1971), p. 18. See also Michael Noonan, *Magwitch* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), for a fanciful fictional sequel to *Great Expectations*, in which Pip travels to New South Wales to investigate Magwitch's Australian experience. A more interesting and sophisticated novel which 'writes back' to *Great Expectations* is Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997); see the review by Leon Litvack in *The Dickensian* 94.1 (1998), pp. 58-60.

<sup>56</sup>*Hamlet: a Study in Critical Method*; quoted in Collins, *Dickens and Crime*, p. 304.

**Table**  
**Terms of Reference for Magwitch**

	'Convict'*	'My Convict'	'Provis'	'Mr Campbell'	'Magwitch'
Pip	8	17	42	1	9
Herbert Pocket	—	—	11	3	—
Jagers	—	—	7	—	6
Magwitch	—	—	1	—	6
Orlick	—	—	3	—	2
Joe	3	—	—	—	—
Mr Wopsle	2	—	—	—	—
Compeyson	—	—	—	—	1
Sergeant <sup>†</sup>	1	—	—	—	—
Man who held the lines <sup>‡</sup>	—	—	1	—	1

\*Includes cases where Magwitch is referred to in conjunction with Compeyson as 'convicts'

<sup>†</sup>See volume 1, chapter 5 (single volume chapter 5).

<sup>‡</sup>See volume 3, chapter 15 (single volume chapter 54).