Great Expectations:
This talk was given to the Central Fellowship by Dr Tony Williams (former Joint Hon Gen Secretary of the Dickens Fellowship, now research Fellow at the University of Buckingham) at the Charles Dickens Museum on 19 January 2011.

Last week I got to work on the new story. I had previously very carefully considered the state and prospects of All the Year Round, and, the more I considered them, the less hope I saw of being able to get back, now, to the profit of a separate publication in the old 20 numbers. However I worked on, knowing that what I was doing would run into another groove; and I called a council of war at the office on Tuesday. It was perfectly clear that the one thing to be done was, for me to strike in. I have therefore decided to begin the story as of the length of the Tale of Two Cities on the first of December -- begin publishing, that is. I must make the most I can out of the book. You shall have the first two or three weekly parts to-morrow. The name is GREAT EXPECTATIONS. I think a good name?

Dickens to John Forster on 4th October 1860. It is a letter which makes it clear that, not unusually for Dickens, part of the initial stimulus for this novel was an economic and publishing one. The resulting serialised novel, though, surpasses any such considerations and demonstrates Dickens as a master of his art.

All the Year Round, the second of his journals, and successor to Household Words was a weekly magazine comprising essays, fiction and poetry, and he had serialised A Tale of Two Cities as its leading piece from April to November 1859, as well as separately in the monthly parts he preferred. When this work was completed, he followed it with Wilkie Collins’s sensation piece, The Woman in White, and then from September by Charles James Lever’s A Day’s Ride which was not successful: sales dropped.

He was developing ideas about a new work of fiction, as we can see in the letters, from August 1860 onwards when he describes himself as ‘prowling about meditating a new book’. He wrote to Forster in September that year that such a very fine, new, and grotesque idea has opened upon me, that I begin to doubt whether I had not better cancel the little paper, and reserve the notion for a new book. You shall judge as soon as I get it printed. But it so opens out before me that I can see the whole of a serial revolving on it, in a most singular and comic manner.

-and again in early October

The book will be written in the first person throughout, and during these first three weekly numbers you will find the hero to be a boy-child, like David. Then he will be an apprentice. You will not have to complain of the want of humour as in The Tale of Two Cities. I have made the opening, I hope, in its general effect exceedingly droll. I have put a child and a good-natured foolish man, in relations that seem to me very funny. Of course I have got in the pivot on which the story will turn too -- and which indeed, as you will
remember, was the grotesque tragi-comic conception that first encouraged me. To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.

The first weekly instalment came out on 1st December 1860 and was well-received, especially for its comic effects, and it ran as the leading piece in *AYR* for 36 weeks. It was ‘a very great success and universally liked’ (CD to Mary Boyle on 28 December 1860 which was the actual release date of the first number). 150 years ago on today’s date, *(ie 19 January)* we would have been reading chapters 12 and 13, with Joe accompanying Pip to Satis House for Miss Havisham to make arrangements for Pip’s apprenticeship. Forster was later to write in his *Life of Charles Dickens* that ‘Dickens’s humour, not less than his creative power, was at its best in this book’ (9.3). It is a verdict which later generations seem to have agreed with, as Malcolm Andrews points out in his editorial to the latest issue of *The Dickensian*. *Great Expectations* remains very popular with a wide readership, not least for many people as their first encounter with Dickens’s work. It combines comedy with sinister and potentially tragic elements, grotesque characters with a serious exploration of the way in which we should live our lives.

*Great Expectations* is also, as you all know, a novel about growth, about growing up, about coming to terms with all those important human experiences we all have to encounter. It is a novel about what success and achievement means, about becoming a gentleman and about ways of being content with life. It is a novel which addresses that fundamental question we all have to face: who are we? What is our way in the world going to be? Will we be the heroes of our own lives?

The novel explores a carefully-plotted period of sixteen years in its hero’s life, from the ages of seven to twenty-three, in which he goes through childhood, adolescence (with its special pains of first love, infatuation and feeling ashamed of home) into early manhood. He has to face bereavement: ‘the first time that a grave had opened in my road of life’ (255: page references are to the Penguin Popular Classics edition). He makes all kinds of false moves and mistakes as he tries to discover his way in the world – much like most of us, I guess. He is capable of great self-deception and has to learn not to be. He is, at times, far from likeable. He has to learn to value what really matters. There is then a gap of eleven years, with Pip working overseas in Clarriker’s Cairo office, before his return in
chapter 59 and his meeting Estella again in that deliberately ambiguous conclusion, which Dickens used to replace the much darker conclusion he originally planned. If the essence of good story-telling is grabbing your reader’s attention from the very beginning, then we need look no further than the opening of this novel for a powerful example. There are several things worth noting and considering about the way Dickens works here. First is the way Dickens is able to manipulate his position as Pip as first-person narrator, the mature man looking back, and to move between it and the vision of the lonely, frightened child in the churchyard near the marshes. We are enabled to move between his terror and the reflective detachment which can be brought to the re-creation of the experience years later. In this way, we know that the convict, not yet named, is inventing his homicidal companion as a means of scaring Pip into doing what he wants and keeping quiet about it, so we smile in part, about that, we can see through his ruse. But we are also able to share Pip’s terror, as his world goes upside down (quite literally) and his threatened evisceration is put before us. The same technique works when Pip returns, with food and file, having mistakenly disturbed the other man – and the impact that has on his convict.

Dickens has a tremendous skill in capturing the child’s vision, of getting behind the child’s eyes. Pip, in these chapters, though frightened of the man, also cares for him (“my convict” 37) and has that imaginative and sympathetic engagement with his suffering which he later loses, as other experiences, particularly those generated by Satis House, crowd in on him and distort his moral clarity. The child sees clearly, as does Joe, who speaks to the convict as his “poor fellow-creature”, at the time of his being re-arrested. Joe, we recall, is “a larger species of child”. Look at that section towards the end of chapter 5 (pages 37-9) when Magwitch has been captured. Pip, out of fear but also because he does not want the convict to feel he has betrayed him,

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. It was not at all expressed to me that he even comprehended my intention, for he gave me a look that I did not understand, and it all passed in a moment. But if he had looked at me for an hour or for a day, I could not have remembered his face ever afterwards, as having been more attentive”.(37)

Later Magwitch confesses to the theft of the food which Pip had brought him, so as to exonerate the little boy (38-9).

Suddenly, he turned to the sergeant, and remarked:
"I wish to say something respecting this escape. It may prevent some persons laying under
suspicion longer me. ….. A man can't starve; at least I can't. I took some wittles, up at the
willage over yonder - where the church stands a'most out on the marshes."
"You mean stole," said the sergeant.
"And I'll tell you where from. From the blacksmith's."
"Halloa!" said the sergeant, staring at Joe.
"Halloa, Pip!" said Joe, staring at me.
"It was some broken wittles - that's what it was - and a dram of liquor, and a pie."
"Have you happened to miss such an article as a pie, blacksmith?" asked the sergeant,
confidentially.
"My wife did, at the very moment when you came in. Don't you know, Pip?"
"So," said my convict, turning his eyes on Joe in a moody manner, and without the least
glance at me; "so you're the blacksmith, are you? Than I'm sorry to say, I've eat your pie."
"God knows you're welcome to it - so far as it was ever mine," returned Joe, with a saving
remembrance of Mrs. Joe. "We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you
starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur. - Would us, Pip?"

It is a beautifully-captured moment of human contact: the boy’s care for the convict and
for the convict’s estimation of him- it matters to him that the convict should not think
badly of him; the convict’s desire to protect the boy from blame and likely punishment
and his wanting to let the boy know he understands he was not betrayed by him; Joe’s all-
embracing sympathy for a suffering human being, whatever his crime. It shows the best of
the humanity in the characters and it also sets in motion the plot. Magwitch has for once
been shown compassion and kindness, respecting him as a human being. He now has a
motive for his future life in Australia: to return the kindness the boy has shown him, and it
motivates all his actions through the rest of the novel, the process of ‘making a
gentleman’ (see chapters 39 and 40 for his account of this).

It is a masterly opening too, for some of its subtext. The first few chapters of the novel are
Christmas chapters, first published in the weeks running up to Christmas 1860. Dickens
has and had a massive reputation as a Christmas writer. It was one he guarded and
maintained jealously, suspending other work to produce his annual Christmas story
because the public expected it from him. But what a Christmas we have here! Anyone
who believes that Dickens’s Christmases are sentimental and sweetly-sugared ought to be
directed to this novel. The opening on Christmas Eve (surely a time of great expectation if
ever there was one) has several crucial components in its design. There is the family: the
orphan child at the grave of his dead parents and brothers. There is bleak, unmitigated
cold and rawness in the atmosphere. The suddenly this is all shattered by the appearance
of a convict, bringing crime, prison images which remain for the rest of the novel until
they are expunged towards the end and we finally emerge from the various real and
metaphorical prisons. It goes on: Pip’s Christmas Eve welcome when he gets home is Mrs Joe on the rampage with Tickler, threats of ending up in the Hulks, and a guilt-ridden evening planning a robbery. The next day brings more terror on the marshes, and the grotesquely comic Christmas Dinner, where Joe’s attempts to be kind threaten to drown Pip in gravy. Then we get the discovery of the theft, the arrival of the soldiers, the quest for the convicts. Not exactly a jolly Fezziwig or Pickwick of a Christmas.

Here is Dickens, re-exploring one of the aspects of his art which has made his reputation, but exploring it alongside those ever-recurrent haunting images of the isolated, suffering child and the prison, and here setting them at the point of his own birth date in 1812, about which more later. So much comes together in these opening two chapters, which constituted the first episode.

This is a novel full of children, and the child focus is there right from the start. Pip’s childhood is the one explored in most detail and we see the sufferings of an orphan boy subjected to the unpredictable outbursts of his sister, but one who is cared for and has the love of Joe to sustain him. Estella’s is a childhood subject to subtle cruelty in the way her personality is distorted in order to serve someone else’s desire for vengeance. She too is a rejected and isolated child. Herbert Pocket’s upbringing, though eccentric, is loving as he would have ‘tumbled up’ like his younger siblings. Remind yourself of the Pocket children on pages 171-3. Magwitch and Joe both give accounts of their childhoods, both of them with elements of brutality in them and one of them revealing all the deprivations which lead to a life of crime. When Pip challenges Jaggers about the relationship between Magwitch, Molly and Estella in chapter 51(page 377), the lawyer sums up the conditions of life for so many children in the nineteenth century, uncared for, rejected, unprotected:

“Put the case that he lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children, was, their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life, he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into the fish that were to come to his net - to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow."

"I follow you, sir."

"Put the case, Pip, that here was one pretty little child out of the heap, who could be saved...”
Estella is saved from those fates but at great cost to her personality in the way she becomes used as a weapon for Miss Havisham’s revenge. ‘You must know… that I have no heart…I have no softness there, no - sympathy – sentiment – nonsense’ she tells Pip (218-9) and again (331-3):

"It seems," said Estella, very calmly, "that there are sentiments, fancies - I don't know how to call them - which I am not able to comprehend. When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don't care for what you say at all. I have tried to warn you of this; now, have I not?"

"Yes. But you would not be warned, for you thought I did not mean it. Now, did you not think so?"

"I thought and hoped you could not mean it. You, so young, untried, and beautiful, Estella! Surely it is not in Nature."

"It is in my nature," she returned. And then she added, with a stress upon the words, "It is in the nature formed within me. I make a great difference between you and all other people when I say so much. I can do no more." (331)

Estella’s nature has been warped, twisted out of shape, to the point where she cannot respond to genuine feeling, where her own self is simply put to the uses decreed by another, as she points out to Pip on page 243:

We have no choice, you and I, but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I.

The last four novels Dickens wrote, *A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend,* and the tantalisingly incomplete *Mystery of Edwin Drood* all have a number of common features which make them different from earlier works. It was of course not known at the time that they would be his last. They all deal with many deeply personal issues about the rightness or otherwise of relationships, especially when these involve any kind of division between the participants, whether age, religion, or social class. They make much use of divided personalities, they ask what makes people what they are and the way they have to confront what is right action. They all come after Dickens met Ellen Ternan in 1857 and a whole train of consequences was set in motion.

In order to understand that, we need now to look more closely at the personal and literary context of *Great Expectations.*

The year in which this novel began its publication gives us a vantage point to consider what Britain was like in 1860. We are in what is known as the High Victorian Age, which
provides most people with their common concept of Victorianism; a period of stability, industrial and commercial growth and expansion; great international power.

1859 had seen the publication of two important texts for identifying the Victorian outlook. The first of these, Charles Darwin’s, *The Origin of Species*, with its mind-blowing theory of evolution, natural selection and the survival of the fittest, altered for ever the way we regard ourselves and our universe. The other, Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help* offered encouragement to those seeking achievement and material success, through education and effort, showing such social advancement as a highly desirable aim. Society is becoming more fluid; success is possible, even from lowly beginnings, as Dickens’s own career witnesses. In the final chapter of *Self-Help*, called “The True Gentleman”, Smiles offers a number of definitions of the qualities of such a figure: truthfulness, integrity and goodness, being brave and gentle, and the fact that none of these qualities are allied with particular social position.

*The poor man may be a true gentleman – in spirit and in daily life. He may be honest, truthful, upright, polite, temperate, courageous, self-respecting and self-helping. There may be a homeliness in externals, which may seem vulgar to those who cannot discern the heart beneath, but to the right-minded, character will always have its clear insignia.*

*Great Expectations* reflects Victorian achievement and explores what it takes to become successful in the modern world. Pip emerges from a rural backwater, moves to the metropolis, eventually working (not inheriting or winning the lottery) for what he lives on, in a commercial world and travels overseas to complete the process. He is the first working-class hero in English fiction. Joe’s work as a blacksmith places him firmly in the past, in the stagecoach world in which Dickens grew up. By the 1860s Britain was a railway world: Dickens’s letters from 48 Doughty Street in 1837 mention the construction of the first main line railway from Birmingham into London at Euston, the start of that great Victorian achievement, the Railway Age. The novel also explores what the success and achievement might be based on, and explores the darker side of a prosperous, high-achieving society. Who better than Dickens would appreciate sacrifice for success and achievement, the gospel of hard work, that great Victorian value?

By 1860, transportation to Australia (New South Wales) which began in 1788 had ended (in 1857, except for long-term prisoners in 1868). The Hulks were finally destroyed in 1856. Public executions, despite Dickens’s strong criticisms, did not end until 1868, but
the death penalty for returned transports, though not abolished until 1834, had not been used since 1810.

Dickens’s own life had undergone several significant changes by the time he began publishing *Great Expectations*. In 1860, his favourite daughter Katie married, and his brother Alfred died. He finally moved his main residence out of London, where his family home had been at Tavistock House since 1851, to Gad’s Hill Place at Higham, near Rochester in Kent, a property which he had bought in 1856. This purchase was the achievement of an ambition long-cherished. It returned him to the scenes of some of his happiest boyhood experiences, including walking with his father past the house and being encouraged to work hard so that some day he could come to live there.

It was at the start of September that Dickens, in the process of preparing to live at Gad’s Hill Place, burnt large amounts of his correspondence. “Would to God every letter I had ever written was on that pile”, he is reputed to have said. In October he moved in to Gad’s Hill as his permanent residence, and his letters at this time describe, often very amusingly, the trials of the houseowner dealing with his workmen.

On 30th April 1859, Dickens had embarked upon *All the Year Round*, the second of his journals, and successor to *Household Words* (1850-59). *AYR* was selling 100,000 copies weekly during the run of *GE*. There were no illustrations, just double columns of print, a couple of chapters each week, always on the front page. Even the first volume edition in 1861 had no illustrations; it was the 1862 edition which had eight pictures by Marcus Stone, in the new realist style.

There are two final elements in the picture of Dickens’s experiences and state of mind and feeling at this time, and they help to explain some of what else was going on. His separation from his wife Catherine had taken place in May 1858 as the result of Dickens meeting the young actress Ellen Ternan in 1857. He made his public statement in *Household Words* on 12th June 1858, referring to “some domestic trouble of mine”.

It is characteristic of Dickens that he should lay his emotional life openly before his public, so it is easy to understand some of the motivation behind the enormously successful Public Readings he began in April 1858. They offered an audience, face-to-
face, the opportunity to show their appreciation of his adaptations from his works, and becoming “the greatest reader of the greatest writer of the age”. He managed to combine this new career, which was to involve tours of Britain and the United States, with writing, always leaving the readings when a new novel was in the course of production. He prepared a reading text from this novel but never performed it. It concentrated on the Pip-Magwitch-Miss Havisham story, left out the love interest entirely and cut characters like Orlick, Trabb’s Boy, Drummle and the Barleys. We are to have a session on adaptations in April but it is worth mentioning here that the very few contemporary stage adaptations during Dickens’s lifetime took place in the USA and the first British one was in London in 1871. Others followed and later, in December 1939, there was another adaptation, done by Alec Guinness who also played Herbert Pocket, with Martita Hunt as Miss Havisham, roles they were both to reprise in David Lean’s film version after the war.

*Great Expectations*, then, emerges from a period of great turmoil in Dickens’s life: the separation from his wife, the relationship with a young actress, the new career as a public performer, the new publishing venture, and the new house. The last of these is also, of course, a return to his past, to Kent, near to “the birthplace of his fancy”. He is revisiting his past in many ways at this time, re-reading *David Copperfield*, that “favourite child”, so as to ensure there is no repetition in the new work. It is interesting to note that, once he had completed *Great Expectations* in 1861 he returned to work on the Public Readings including one from *David Copperfield*, first performing it in October 1861. Dickens is, therefore, spending a great deal of time and energy involving himself with his own past and the recreations of it in his writing.

Setting and location for the novel is also important. A journey from Kent to London, from country to city, seeking one’s fortune, may be seen as typical for the time. There are in the novel numerous return visits to Kent, and there is expansion into the wider world – Australia and Egypt. The crucial elements, however, remain Kent (origin, home, childhood) and London (temptation, suffering, discovery, growth). Both settings are realised in great detail, because both are central to Dickens’s own experience. Pip learns to take the best from both, in preparation for his excursions into the wider world. Especially, he learns not to reject his origins but to value what they bring to his process of growth. Landscapes, settings, are thus emotional and symbolic, not just places to be.
Dickens is writing in the modern, high Victorian world of 1860, but sets his characters’ experiences back in the earlier years of the nineteenth century, in the pre-Victorian age, and he takes great care over the chronology in the novel. The working notes he made for *GE* are much less detailed than for other works, and relate to the working out of events in the final part of the novel, of which he was very proud. He has thought out the relative ages of his characters and what happens when. In the text he gives us all kinds of time indicators. The soldiers at the start come “in the King’s name”, not the Queen’s (unlike David Lean’s film and the 1999 BBC adaptation) which certainly sets it pre-1837 and probably earlier. Wemmick’s bridges across the Thames in chapter 36 (267) are listed as they would exist in the 1820s, not earlier, with Southwark having been completed in 1819. The new London Bridge was begun in 1824. The characters’ ages are carefully plotted. He tells us Pip is about 7 at the start, and would traditionally be apprenticed at 14 for seven years. Jaggers comes to him in the fourth year of his apprenticeship. Pip reaches 21 in London, and is 23 when Magwitch returns.

If we trace the chronology, we can place Pip’s birth in approximately 1805, so he becomes, by that means, a representative nineteenth-century figure. This would indicate the narrative’s end in 1828, and make Pip’s novelistic life (chapter 1) begin in 1812 (the year of Dickens’s birth!). Dickens is writing in 1860, looking back across forty years.

The title, he thought, was “a good one”; it is also an odd one. He usually uses character names, or location names, for titles, so we should pay particular heed that he does not do so here. Even *Hard Times for These Times* tells us more about a contemporary judgement, than the highly abstract *Great Expectations*. It suggests a universality of theme, and a looking ahead into the future, with a hero whose nickname implies seed and growth. Is Dickens at 48 years old contemplating where he is going, in middle life, and in the midst of many changes? Is it a novel of painful uncertainty, poised between the past and the future? It is clearly a novel where the relation between past and present is very powerful.

The novel shows us how there can be guidance for us in the search for right action in our lives and we should now consider the moral centre of this novel, and this returns us to the piece I quoted from Samuel Smiles’s *Self-Help* earlier on. The opportunity to “become a gentleman” was an important concept for the nineteenth century as the opportunity for class change and development grew. The “self-made man” was a great Victorian icon –
Dickens was one himself, and also satirised it in Bounderby in *Hard Times*, a character who pretends to have made a success of life from poverty-stricken origins, but is in reality a fraud. Pip is, unusually, uniquely, a working-class hero who subjects himself to the strains of becoming a gentleman against all good advice and example (“Biddy, I want to be a gentleman” to which she replies “Oh, I wouldn’t if I was you.” (119), and for the wrong reasons. He does it blindly, badly, foolishly, but is redeemed by his capacity for repentance by the end. But if he is not to be a gentleman, what is he to be? A blacksmith? A moneyled gentleman? A commercial businessman who “worked for his profits”? And who is he to be? His name is oddly almost palindromic – Philip Pirrip. And his identity is given him by others (“You will always bear the name of Pip, you know”, “Handel”, “Wolf”, “you enemy”). The novel shows him searching for his identity and finding himself through pain and suffering, through fire and water.

And where is the firm ground? There are a number of embodiments of firm moral values in the distorted world of *Great Expectations*. We recall Matthew Pocket’s statement, for instance: “no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, … a true gentleman in manner…no varnish can hide the grain of the wood” (167). In a novel which is so powerfully about becoming a gentleman, that gives us plenty to think about. Other characters – Herbert, Startop, Wemmick and the Aged, even Trabb’s Boy, embody aspects of the novel’s certainties.

Nevertheless, it has to be Joe who is the truly significant character for this aspect of the novel, and there are so many sides of his character we could use to illustrate the theme. Joe’s self-sacrificing love for Pip, his care of him from infancy and orphaning, his sheer simplicity and goodness in his outlook on the world, his firmness of values, his attitude to Mrs Joe: all these are ways of building a character. It would be a danger, in the hands of a less great writer, for a character like Joe to become too good to be true, too obviously an allegory of right. Not so for Dickens, because Dickens can use his great power as a comic writer to make us laugh at as well as love Joe. The language he gives him is also a contributory factor in the creation, the slow evolution of his thought processes, and the comic turns of phrase, all work together. Have a look particularly at the conversation between Pip and Joe in chapter 7 (43f) where he tells us his own story, the story of another lost childhood, in the process of admiring Pip’s scholarly achievements – and I’m sure we all love the letter on the slate.
He becomes the standard by which we measure the changes in the novel’s hero and he comes to embody the nature of the true gentleman, one of the themes the novel explores and which is so significant for its times.

*Great Expectations* is a novel which emphasises the importance of compassion and forgiveness in a world where exploitation, victimisation, criminality, revenge and the urge towards material success seems to dominate the relationships between people. Over and over the novel encourages its central character and, through him, us as readers, to take a wide and sympathetic view of humanity.

It was fine summer weather again, and, as I walked along, the times when I was a little helpless creature, and my sister did not spare me, vividly returned. But they returned with a gentle tone upon them that softened even the edge of Tickler. For now, the very breath of the beans and clover whispered to my heart that the day must come when it would be well for my memory that others walking in the sunshine should be softened as they thought of me. (chp 35 p 236)

Pip’s story is one of learning to forgive and show humanity to others, not to be resentful about wrongs, real or imagined, that have been done to him. Forgiveness, compassion, recognition of a common humanity: these qualities appear again and again. Mrs Joe’s dying moments (260) have her saying ‘Joe… Pardon…Pip’; Miss Havisham begs Pip to write ‘I forgive her’ (368); Pip prays for mercy on Magwitch’s soul (420) and begs Joe and Biddy’s forgiveness (438). Compassion is the best of us and should be the way we identify our selves as we find our way in the world.

In his poem *Four Quartets* (1943) T S Eliot wrote:

“...the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”

In essence, that is the nature of Pip’s journeying and experience in this novel. It is a journey through a closely contextualized world for its writer’s past and present. What remains certain is that, through the imaginative engagement we make with this wonderful piece of creative art, it will have been the experience of all of us.