**The First Ending (unpublished in the author's lifetime)**

It was four years more, before I saw herself. I had heard of her as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, brutality, and meanness.

I had heard of the death of her husband (from an accident consequent on ill-treating a horse), and of her being married again to a Shropshire doctor, who, against his interest, had once very manfully interposed, on an occasion when he was in professional attendance on Mr. Drummle, and had witnessed some outrageous treatment of her. I had heard that the Shropshire doctor was not rich, and that they lived on her own personal fortune.

I was in England again — in London, and walking along Piccadilly with little Pip — when a servant came running after me to ask would I step back to a lady in a carriage who wished to speak to me. It was a little pony carriage, which the lady was driving; and the lady and I looked sadly enough on one another.

"I am greatly changed, I know; but I thought you would like to shake hands with Estella, too, Pip. Lift up that pretty child and let me kiss it!" (She supposed the child, I think, to be my child.)

I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance, that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be. — based on the proof slip reproduced by Edgar Rosenberg in the W. W. Norton (1999) edition of *Great Expectations*, p. 492.

**Questions**

1. How does the original ending affect the plot of the novel?

2. How does he passage affect our understanding of the characters and their motivations;

3. How does the passage exemplify Dickens's style?

4. How the passage affect our understanding of the work's major themes — the term “theme" implying “narrative intention expressed in the form of a statement"?



**Six responses by students in English 3412, Lakehead University, Ontario**

* [Suffering and Anti-aristocratic Feeling in the Original Ending](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/ge/mason1.html)
* [Realism versus Desire](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/ge/bailey1.html)
* [Coming to Consciousness](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/ge/anderson1.html)
* [The Validity of the Original Ending](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/ge/prinselaar1.html)
* [Generic Expectations and the Original Ending](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/ge/hareema1.html)
* Closure in the Original Ending

**THE TWO ENDINGS**

Wilkie Collins, a close friend and author of *The Woman in White*, objected to the not-happy ending Dickens first wrote for *Great Expectations*; Estella has remarried and Pip remains single. Dickens then wrote a more conventional ending, which suggests that Pip and Estella will marry. Writing to friends about the revised ending, Dickens seems positive: "I have put in as pretty a little piece of writing as I could, and I have no doubt the story will be more acceptable through the alteration" and "Upon the whole I think it is for the better."

The second ending has generally been published from Dickens's time to our own, so that it is the one which most readers know. Critics have been arguing the merits of both endings since the novel's publication. Dickens's friend and biographer, John Forster, felt the original ending was "more consistent with the draft, as well as the natural working out of the tale." The writers George Gissing, George Bernard Shaw, George Orwell, William Dean Howells, Edmund Wilson and Angus Wilson agreed with Forster's preference. In modern criticism, the stronger arguments tend to support the second ending.

This is a question which you may decide for yourself, since the text we read in this class includes both endings. I will list some of the arguments on both sides, without comment, for your consideration.

**Arguments Favoring the Original Ending**

* George Bernard Shaw: The novel "is too serious a book to be a trivially happy one. Its beginning is unhappy; its middle is unhappy; and the conventional happy ending is an outrage on it."
* The second ending is an artistically indefensible and morally cheap about-face; its purpose is to please a popular audience which expects a conventional happy ending (i.e., marriage).
* In the second ending, Pip gets more than he deserves. As a result, Dickens confuses the social and moral meanings of the novel.
* Estella's conversion in the second ending is not only unconvincing but contradicts the logic of the narrative and excuses the way Miss Havisham raised her. Miss Havisham does not need to be forgiven or redeemed, since neither Pip nor Estella was really damaged.
* In the original ending, though Estelle is softened by her suffering, she remains the lady, with the same characteristic superiority, who is perhaps slightly condescending to Pip.

**Arguments Favoring the Second Ending**

* The second ending continues the imagery of the garden and the mist and is better written.
* The second ending continues the patterns of union and separation and reconciliation, the connection of the past and the present, and Pip and Estella's meetings at Satis House.
* The lovers deserve to be happy because they have suffered deeply; their suffering has changed them so much that they are no longer the same people.
* It is appropriate that Magwitch's daughter finds happiness with Pip.
* Martin Price argues that the mature Pip, with the saving humor of self-acceptance, finally sees Estella as what she is; therefore, it seems appropriate she can return to him. "Each is a fantasist who has grown into maturity; each is a fantasist that has dwindled into humanity."

There are a few critics who have taken a third position; the novel should stop before Estella's final appearance. They note that Dickens, in his working notes on the novel, follows Pip's later career but does not refer to Estella. Miss Havisham referred to Estella's marriage many chapters earlier, so that there is no need to bring her up again; her fate is known.