

On the other hand, Pip is at heart a very generous and sympathetic young man, a fact that can be witnessed in his numerous acts of kindness throughout the book (helping Magwitch, secretly buying Herbert's way into business, etc.) and his essential love for all those who love him. Pip's main line of development in the novel may be seen as the process of learning to place his innate sense of kindness and conscience above his immature idealism.

Not long after meeting Miss Havisham and Estella, Pip's desire for advancement largely overshadows his basic goodness. After receiving his mysterious fortune, his idealistic wishes seem to have been justified, and he gives himself over to a gentlemanly life of idleness. But the discovery that the wretched Magwitch, not the wealthy Miss Havisham, is his secret benefactor shatters Pip's oversimplified sense of his world's hierarchy. The fact that he comes to admire Magwitch while losing Estella to the brutish nobleman Drummle ultimately forces him to realize that one's social position is not the most important quality one possesses, and that his behavior as a gentleman has caused him to hurt the people who care about him most. Once he has learned these lessons, Pip matures into the man who narrates the novel, completing the bildungsroman.

Estella

Often cited as Dickens's first convincing female character, Estella is a supremely ironic creation, one who darkly undermines the notion of romantic love and serves as a bitter criticism against the class system in which she is mired. Raised from the age of three by Miss Havisham to torment men and "break their hearts," Estella wins Pip's deepest love by practicing deliberate cruelty. Unlike the warm, winsome, kind heroine of a traditional love story, Estella is cold, cynical, and manipulative. Though she represents Pip's first longed-for ideal of life among the upper classes, Estella is actually even lower-born than Pip; as Pip learns near the end of the novel, she is the daughter of Magwitch, the coarse convict, and thus springs from the very lowest level of society.

Ironically, life among the upper classes does not represent salvation for Estella. Instead, she is victimized twice by her adopted class. Rather than being raised by Magwitch, a man of great inner nobility, she is raised by Miss Havisham, who destroys her ability to express emotion and interact normally with the world. And rather than marrying the kindhearted commoner Pip, Estella marries the cruel nobleman Drummle, who treats her harshly and makes her life miserable for many years. In this way, Dickens uses Estella's life to reinforce the idea that one's happiness and well-being are not deeply connected to one's social position: had Estella been poor, she might have been substantially better off.