

THE ROLE OF FATHER-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS IN CHARLES DICKENS' WORKS

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Abstract

Ch. Dickens is a representative of English literature, who depicted the lives of children in almost all of his novels. His works portray various family relationships, alongside kind and compassionate individuals as well as ignorant and cruel characters. This article will show at the intricate and frequently tense relationships between fathers and children in some of Dickens's best-known novels, such as David Copperfield, Great Expectations, and Oliver Twist. It will examine how Dickens makes observations on Victorian society – specifically, its class structure and how children were treated in that period.

Key words

Victorian era, novel, image, realism, orphanhood, relationship, genre, fathers and children.

Introduction. The Victorian era is considered a great period of English fiction, as the works produced were novels with strong plots, rich characters, large volumes, and realistic writing. Such works were very suitable for depicting socio-political life and for finding a place in the hearts of readers belonging to the middle class of society. An English novelist Charles Dickens also wrote brilliant stories that examined the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, frequently against the backdrop of a society that was changing quickly and frequently cruel.

The relationships between fathers and their children are one of the most powerful and recurrent themes among the many interactions he portrayed. Dickens depicted a wide range of father characters, from the kind to the careless, the oppressive to the intensely affectionate, all of whom added to the complex fabric of his books⁵¹. Dickens uses this examination of father-child relationships as a lens through which to view larger societal concerns, such as class inequality, the

⁵¹ Ledger Sally. Charles Dickens: The Major Novels. Routledge, 2000. P.78.

predicament of the orphaned and abandoned, and the very meaning of family, rather than just as a plot device⁵².

The various roles that father play in Dickens's writings will be examined in this article, along with how these relationships affect the lives and fates of their children and how they represent the author's own thoughts on Victorian fatherhood and its effects on both individuals and society. We will discover the importance of these paternal ties, both positive and negative, and their ongoing relevance to our comprehension of Dickens's social commentary and his profound understanding of the human condition by analyzing classic novels like *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Great Expectations*. Moreover, one of the most well-known authors of Victorian literature, Charles Dickens, is still regarded as a pillar of English literature because of his sharp social criticism and realistic depiction of 19th-century England. His books, including *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Great Expectations*, explore the moral intricacies of human nature in addition to reflecting the glaring social divides, hardships suffered by the poor, and inequities of industrialization of the time.

Dickens's works have been analyzed by critics from a variety of angles. Marxist academics highlight how he depicts class conflicts and capitalist exploitation, while psychoanalytic interpretations delve into the characters' complex psychological makeup. Postcolonial interpretations look at his portrayals of empire and racial otherness, while feminist analyses question the roles of women and gender dynamics in his stories. When taken as a whole, these methods demonstrate the depth of Dickens's body of work and provide fresh perspectives on its cultural and historical relevance⁵³.

The political and social situation of the time in which Dickens lived did not leave the author indifferent to the fate of children. Using the example of the life of orphans, the writer was able to realistically depict the relationships between representatives of different social classes. Analyzing the writer's works, we will witness the use of two categories of adult images that the main character encounters throughout his life:

1. Negative (selfish and unkind) adult images.
2. Positive (kind and compassionate) adult images.

In particular, in Charles Dickens's work "*Oliver Twist*" there are many images of these two categories. Through this novel, the writer reflects the vices such as extortion, robbery, theft, deceit, and fraud that are often found on the streets of

⁵² Schwarzbach, F. S. Dickens and the City. Athlone Press, 1979. P.134.

⁵³ Ledger S. Charles Dickens: The Major Novels. Routledge. 2000, Schwarzbach F. S. Dickens and the City. Athlone Press. 1979

London, as well as the desire of the oppressors to impose their judgment on the weak, especially the homeless, orphaned children, the consequences of injustice and inequality, the severe suffering of the poor people, in short, the real situation of that time.

Along with a number of unkind people, Dickens also creates generous, noble characters in realistic images, which shows that society is not completely doomed, and that there is always hope for the helpless. For example, the image of Mr. Brownlow can be a clear proof of our idea. He shows great trust and care for a street child whom he does not know well. He does not pay any attention to the warnings of those around him that no good will come of this child. He proves that children should be given a chance, that their hearts are innocent.

Another character Mrs. Bedwin, Mr. Brownlow's servant, takes care of Oliver with sweet words, like a loving mother.

The relationship between Pip and Joe Gargery in Charles Dickens's "Great Expectations" is reminiscent of a father-son relationship. Although Pip is an orphan raised by his sister and her husband, he does not receive any love from his sister. She is a harsh and cold-blooded woman who often beats Pip. However, his kind and simple brother-in-law Joe, always supports him, gives him fatherly love, and guides him.

The following description can support our idea: *Pip's absent and self-centered father figures are contrasted with Joe, who is a caring and moral character despite not being Pip's biological father*⁵⁴.

A lot of Dickensian fathers are emotionally or physically absent, which causes their kids to struggle and suffer. In David Copperfield, on the contrary, we see the image of an ignorant and cruel stepfather. Through the character of Mr. Murdstone, the author embodies the image of a man who did not have mercy on the orphan boy and punished him mercilessly.

Bradbury and Evans writes the following words about this image: *David Copperfield's nasty and repressive Mr. Murdstone adds to David's anguish*⁵⁵.

Dickens' writings feature redemption arcs in which some dads come to terms with their shortcomings and undergo positive transformations.

For instance, Ebenezer Scrooge in A Christmas Carol, who transforms and cares for Tiny Tim despite not being a biological father, teaches us the value of paternal love⁵⁶.

Dickens criticizes economic difficulties, social expectations, and the legal system's inability to protect children through father-child interactions. While some

⁵⁴ Chapman and Hall. Dickens Charles. Great Expectations, 1861. – P.112.

⁵⁵ Bradbury and Evans, Dickens, Charles. David Copperfield. 1850. P.54.

⁵⁶ Slater, Michael. Charles Dickens: A Life Defined by Writing. Yale UP, 2009. P.213.

of Dickens' parent characters are completely romanticized, others have serious flaws but good intentions. Dickens emphasizes the strength of love, the repercussions of neglect, and the potential for forgiveness in his depiction of father-child interactions, which serves as an emotional and moral examination of family dynamics. His writings, which address societal injustice and childhood misery in Victorian England, promote responsible and caring fatherhood.

Dickens examines themes of love, sorrow, and redemption in his short stories, with a particular emphasis on family dynamics. Dickens emphasizes the value of emotional ties and familial ties in *The Haunted man* and *The Christmas Tree*, presenting family as a source of fortitude and resiliency. On the other hand, narratives such as *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* examine dysfunctional family dynamics and illustrate how social pressures can erode interpersonal bonds⁵⁷. Dickens highlights the redeeming power of love and understanding within families through these stories, showing forgiveness and reconciliation as means of achieving healing and human development⁵⁸.

The intricate father-child relationships in Charles Dickens' works serve as a profound commentary on Victorian society. Through the portrayal of various paternal figures—ranging from benevolent to neglectful—Dickens reflects on the broader social structures that impact family dynamics. The recurring themes of abandonment, neglect, and redemption underscore Dickens' critique of an era that often failed to protect its most vulnerable members.

A crucial point of analysis is Dickens' emphasis on surrogate or adoptive father figures. The contrast between biological fathers and alternative paternal influences—such as Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations* or Mr. Brownlow in *Oliver Twist*—challenges the traditional notion of family. By portraying these non-biological father figures as more nurturing and morally upright, Dickens suggests that love and guidance outweigh mere blood relations. This notion aligns with the Victorian debate on the importance of nurture over nature in shaping an individual's character.

Furthermore, Dickens' personal experiences with his father, John Dickens, who was imprisoned for debt, have influenced his storytelling. The personal impact of having an untrustworthy father figure is clear in his frequent depiction of financial insecurity leading to familial anguish.

Another essential aspect of father-child relationships in Dickens' works is the role of emotional distance. Fathers who fail to provide emotional support, such as Mr. Murdstone in *David Copperfield*, contribute to the psychological distress of their

⁵⁷ Schwarzbach F. S. Dickens and the City. Athlone Press. 1979.

⁵⁸ Furneaux H. Queer Dickens: Erotics, Families, Masculinities. Oxford University Press. 2009.

children. This emotional detachment serves as a commentary on Victorian masculinity, where fathers were often expected to be authoritarian rather than affectionate figures. However, Dickens balances this portrayal with characters like Abel Magwitch in *Great Expectations*, whose unexpected paternal instincts towards Pip redefine traditional notions of fatherhood and redemption.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Dickens' portrayal of father-child relationships transcends mere storytelling; it serves as a lens through which he critiques societal expectations and the legal system's failures. His works advocate for a more compassionate and responsible approach to parenting, emphasizing the moral duty of fathers to provide not only financial support but also emotional guidance and care. Through his deeply personal and socially conscious narratives, Dickens continues to resonate with readers, shedding light on timeless issues of family, identity, and human connection.

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