

ORPHANHOOD IN “DAVID COPPERFIELD” BY CHARLES DICKENS

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Abstract: The prominent English writer Charles Dickens presented to the world literature several masterpieces describing the lives of orphan children. This article analyses the unique style of the author in creating orphan characters and provides vivid examples from the novel “David Copperfield”.

Key words: Charles Dickens, orphanhood, theme, motive, realism, novel, main hero.

Introduction: Orphan characters are prevalent in children's literature, both in folktales and in fiction [3, 1]. Particularly, during the reign of the Queen Victoria the most famous orphan characters in English literature were mostly introduced through the works of the great writer Charles Dickens, who could successfully illustrate an orphan hood and orphan heroes in almost all of his novels. While commenting on Dickens' novels William Makepeace Thackeray admitted that he possessed “an excellent skill” in this sphere. [5]

Dickens's masterpieces handled to show respective points as compared with other writers' works which were created at that time. Moreover, in his book “Charles Dickens: Oliver Twist” (Studies in English Literature chapter 16) an Indian scholar Chaudhuri B.P. (1992) defines Dicken's works as following:

Dickens has a unique position in English literature for his special form of self-expression in prose, fiction. Dickens's artistic method, his choice of material and his manner of rendering that material, is Dickens's style. (p. 32)

This article analyses the depiction of orphan hood and the inner world of the orphan hero in the novel “David Copperfield”. As the author himself always said, David Copperfield evoked emotions in him unlike any other work that he created [5].

The initial purpose of Dickens was to write an autobiographical novel; therefore, many events of the novel are similar to his own life. From the research of the novel one can notice exact scenes from the author's own life, more clearly, the events connected with David's life at Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse are quite the same as the years of Dickens in Warren Shoe Factory, with only one difference, the name Mr. Micawber was used instead of Dicken's father. David also experiences the same difficulties of life and starts working at the early age as his step-father forces him to do this.

Dickens successfully illustrates the adversities that orphans experienced and the main drawbacks are embodied in terms of education, social and working class, poverty and etc. Deep analysis shows the similarities between Dicken's works as Great Expectations, Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, particularly in creating the characters and describing events. All of these protagonists witness unfair attitude of society or people surrounding them. On the other hand, they receive help and support from distant relative, in some cases even from a stranger.

Although David's father dies six months earlier from his birth, David has a happy childhood with his mother, until she marries to a tyrannical and wicked man, at David's seventh age. After this event he starts to experience a number of hardships, and spends the most of his life struggling to find his place in the world [4, 221]. Alike to novels about orphanhood the hero suffers from the unkind treatment of a stepfather. As an evidence to our words we can take the following lines where the cruel punishments of Mr Murdstone have been described:

I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth, between my teeth, and bit it through. It sets my teeth on edge to think of it. He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death. Above all the noise we made, I heard them running up the stairs, and crying out -I heard my mother crying out -and Peggotty. [1,45]

After severely beating the poor boy, Mr Murdstone locks the door and leaves David in a very bad condition. The writer describes the sufferings of the child with such vivid images that they seem to be alive in the eyes of the reader. In the descriptions below we can easily witness this:

Then he was gone; and the door was locked outside; and I was lying, fevered and hot, and torn, and sore, and raging in my puny way, upon the floor. [1,45]

Unfortunately, at the age of nine David becomes completely orphan as his mother dies while giving birth to her baby. From this moment there can be felt how alone and helpless David was, as if there was no one in the world except him. The oppressions of the step father become more and more unbearable. He forces the poor little boy to do hard work having no affection on him. Instead of educating David Mr. Murdstone manipulated him for earning money, as it can be seen in the following passage:

I suppose you know, David, that I am not rich. At any rate, you know it now. You have received some considerable education already. Education is costly; and even if it were not, and I could afford it, I am of opinion that it would not be at all advantageous to you be kept at a school. That is before you, is a fight with the world; and the sooner you begin it, the better [1,134]

Thereby, Mr. Murdstone sends David away to the Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse easily in order to get rid of taking care of an orphan boy, however, after a while, David tries to find way to escape from the factory, where the owners manipulate his hard work in spite of the fact that he was hungry all the time. At least, he runs away to create his own path, his own destiny. The next events in his life are closely connected with his only known relative eccentric and kind-hearted aunt Betsey Trotwood, his great-aunt from his father's side. David spends several years with his aunt having peaceful life, she even supports him to study in a better school, where he possesses the opportunity of having good education.

Analyzes prove that Charles Dickens was able to create another successful novel in the style of a bildungsroman, as "Great expectations". In "David Copperfield", as in his other works, we see that the orphan hero did not lose his identity and kept his pure heart, despite the hardships and injustices.

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