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# THE IMAGE OF CHILDREN IN CHARLES DICKENS' LITERARY WORKS

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## ANNOTATION

Charles Dickens is a great representative of English Victorian literature who depicted the lives of orphan children. An in-depth analysis of the author's novels, including, "Great Expectations", "Oliver Twist", "Dombey and Son", "David Copperfield" show the writers mastery in creating images of oppressed children and the childhood experiences of the heroes.

**KEY WORDS:** Victorian literature, author, genre, novel, hero, image of children, Bildungsroman.

Charles Dickens is a prominent figure in the world of literature, whose writings capture readers with fascinating plots while also providing incisive glances into the socioeconomic intricacies of his day. Among the many themes that run through Dickens' books, the portrayal of children stands out as particularly heartbreaking and thought-provoking. This research explores into Dickensian literature's vast tapestry to uncover the complexity and nuanced representations of children. As we embark on this journey, the goal is to decode the underlying messages and commentary that Dickens communicates through his portrayal of the young characters, revealing not just the author's creative genius but also the societal reflections ingeniously embedded in the narrative canvas.

Understanding the significance of Dickens' portrayal of children requires an examination of Victorian England's historical and social background. Dickens wrote during an era of significant social and economic change, and his works, such as "Oliver Twist," "David Copperfield," and "Nicholas Nickleby" act as mirrors for society's issues, particularly those encountered by its youngest members. In "Oliver Twist" the oppressed image of Oliver with his "Please, sir, I want some more,"<sup>1</sup> vividly captures the harsh realities faced by impoverished children in the workhouse. Through his experiences among unfair members of society, he suffers mostly from mistreatments of elderly people. However, even he was caught by cruel street pickpockets and made to steal the boy didn't lose his innocence and was loyal to his own ideology. The writer describes the feelings of the young hero so skillfully, as if he wants to teach a lesson to those who can't fight against injustice treatment. His poor life and weakness portray the hard destiny of most children of that time.

Exploring the iconic images of children in Dickens' literature exposes a wide range of childhood experiences. Characters such as Oliver Twist, who experiences the difficulties of the workhouse, Tiny Tim, who represents fortitude in the face of physical challenges, and David Copperfield, who navigates the complexity of a difficult childhood, all provide distinct viewpoints.<sup>2</sup> Dickens uses these characters to weave a complex tapestry of childhood memories that encourages examination and interpretation.

Dickens, a master of symbolism and imagery, uses these themes to portray children in his novels. In "Great Expectations" Estella, epitomizes the societal impact on childhood innocence.<sup>3</sup> Estella's chilling words, "I am what you have made me. Take all the praise, take all the blame; take all the success, take all the failure; in short, take me,"<sup>4</sup> emphasize the influence of societal upbringing on an individual's character. She is characterized as being cold-hearted almost from the very beginning of the novel. Her cruel treatment towards Pip and other male characters is deliberately and successfully imprinted on her by Miss Hevisham. Due to the ambitions of a vindictive and ignorant Miss Hevisham the life of a young girl falls into a chaos. Through the image of the main hero Pip the writer skillfully illustrates the dreams and plans of simple poor children, their inner feelings and disappointments. We can vividly witness his expectations by the three stages of Pip's life:

- His boyhood living with his sister and her husband;
- His youth in London living an idle and careless life
- His growing into a man which required him to learn the humbling lesson that wealth did not bring him happiness.

Undergoing these stages of his life sometimes he makes mistakes, takes incorrect decisions, however, at the end he understands that he was wrong. In the following passage the writer describes his sufferings after treating Joe badly: "But,

<sup>1</sup> Dickens, Ch. (1992). *Oliver Twist*. (p. 14). Wordsworth Editions.

<sup>2</sup> Bernardi, M. (2013). *Children and the dark side of Charles Dickens. Children and the Dark Side of Charles Dickens*.

<sup>3</sup> Abdulmajid, M. A. M. (2018). *Analyzing the Portrayal of Children's Issues in some of Charles Dickens' literary Works* (Doctoral dissertation, Sudan University of Science and Technology)

<sup>4</sup> Dickens, C. (1992). *Great Expectations*. (p.304). Wordsworth Editions.





sharpest and deepest pain of all - it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe".<sup>5</sup> From these words it is clear that his heart hasn't become completely cold and unkind.

In "Nicholas Nickleby", characters such as Smike and the orphans represent society's weak and mistreated youngsters. Nicholas's passionate defense, "Is there no help for these poor outcasts?" reveals Dickens' advocacy for the marginalized youth. Children, whether they represent optimism, resilience, or societal neglect, add to Dickensian literature's overall thematic depth.

Dickens used his books not only to convey stories, but also to advocate for social reform. The portrayal of children becomes an effective instrument for shedding focus on current issues such as child labor, poverty, and defects in the Victorian social order.<sup>6</sup> In "Hard Times", Sissy Jupe questions the utilitarian approach to teaching, emphasizing the necessity of developing a child's imagination. Sissy's assertion, "Fancy does help, for I always fancy I would like to be able to do something better than I can,"<sup>7</sup> underscores Dickens' critique of a rigid educational system. Examining the influence of these portrayals illustrates Dickens' role as a social critic who advocated for reform through his literary work.

Furthermore, even the youngest characters were endowed with psychological complexity by Dickens. The novel "Dombey and Son" provides a more nuanced view of his examination of the human condition through the prism of childhood.<sup>8</sup> This psychological depth enriches the story, demonstrating Dickens' ability to convey the complexities of the human experience.

The examination of Charles Dickens' portrayal of children in Victorian literature reveals a multifaceted tapestry that goes far beyond basic literary concepts. As illustrated in "Oliver Twist" and "A Christmas Carol," the historical and social context of Dickens' time period provides the author with a background against which to depict vivid portraits of childhood. The classic images of children, ranging from Tiny Tim's perseverance to David Copperfield's hardships, provide a thorough picture of the different experiences of the young in Dickensian storytelling. The psychological complexity poured into Dickens' kid characters, as seen in works like "Little Dorrit" and "Dombey and Son," demonstrates the author's profound understanding of the human condition.<sup>9</sup> Dickens examines the complexities of emotions, motivations, and societal dynamics through the lens of childhood, providing readers with a profound grasp of the diverse nature of the human experience. In "David Copperfield" the hero suffers from unfair and cruel treatment by his stepfather, in spite having a mother by him. Here the author shows the helplessness of women and their

dependence on men: *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.*<sup>10</sup> These lines are evidence to our opinion on the social status of women. When Mr. Mudstone beat David his mother wasn't able to protect him.

In conclusion, almost all the novels by Charles Dickens describe the oppressed life of children either by unfair society or unkind family members. By conducting a thorough examination, knowledge of how Dickens skillfully constructed storylines that surpass temporal limitations, providing lasting perspectives on societal obstacles, the fortitude of the human spirit, and the complexities of growth is gained. The young characters in Dickens' writings are no longer limited to the pages of novels; they have become enduring symbols through which the author communicates important truths about the human condition and the society in which it unfolds. In Dickens' creative tapestry, the image of a child serves as a powerful lens through which we can see the tremendous intricacies and enduring relevance of his literary legacy.

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