

## Fathers and Sons: Paternal Bonds in Charles Dickens's "David Copperfield"

**Z. T. Safarova**

*PhD, Associate professor, BSU*

**F. U. Bekmurodova**

*MA student of AIU*

### ABSTRACT

*This article looks at the relationships between fathers, father figures (surrogates), and sons in Charles Dickens's novel "David Copperfield". It shows how different male characters influence David's life as he grows up. Some men treat him with love and care, like Mr. Peggotty and Mr. Micawber, while others, like Mr. Murdstone, are cold and cruel. The article explains how these relationships shape David's character, values, and future. By exploring these fatherly roles, the article shows how Dickens used family bonds to tell a story about growing up, learning right from wrong, and finding one's place in the world.*

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### Introduction

Charles Dickens's novel "David Copperfield" is not only a story about one boy's journey into adulthood but also a deep look at family, especially the relationships between fathers and sons. Since David grows up without his biological father, many different men take on father-like roles in his life. Some, like Mr. Peggotty and Mr. Micawber, are loving and supportive, while others, like Mr. Murdstone, are strict and unkind. These relationships show the strong impact of paternal bonds the emotional and guiding ties between father figures and sons. In literature, paternal bonds often help explain how characters grow, learn values, and find their place in the world. This article explores how Dickens uses these bonds in "David Copperfield" to shape David's character and show the importance of fatherly love and support in a young person's life.

The theme of paternal relationships in literature has been explored by many scholars, highlighting the complexity and importance of father-son dynamics in shaping characters and narratives. In "David Copperfield", Dickens presents paternal figures not only as biological fathers but also as surrogate father figures, reflecting the broader significance of paternal influence in a child's development.

One prominent scholar, John Bowen, emphasizes that Dickens often portrays father figures as both positive and negative forces in his characters' lives<sup>1</sup>. In his work, Bowen discusses how Dickens uses the figure of the father to represent authority, protection, and nurturing, yet also the dangers of tyrannical control and neglect. He notes that the absence of a strong, consistent father figure in David's life creates a sense of emotional struggle, something Dickens explored in various works.

Another important contribution to the study of paternal relationships in Dickens's works is Robert

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<sup>1</sup> Bowen, John. *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit*. Oxford University Press, 2006.-P.64.

Douglas-Fairhurst. In his analysis, Douglas-Fairhurst highlights how Dickens portrays the complexity of fatherhood through surrogate father figures<sup>2</sup>. He argues that characters like Mr. Micawber and Mr. Peggotty are essential to David's development because they provide guidance and care, despite their personal flaws. Douglas-Fairhurst connects these father-son relationships to broader Victorian societal views on parenting, which often required strict discipline but also valued emotional connections.

Furthermore, Gillian Beer investigates the psychological depth of paternal relationships in Victorian literature<sup>3</sup>. In her book, she examines how Dickens uses father figures to express emotional and moral growth. Beer discusses how David's relationship with his stepfather, Mr. Murdstone, represents the detrimental effects of emotional neglect and authoritarian control. In contrast, figures like Mr. Peggotty provide the nurturing, supportive environment David lacks, demonstrating the importance of affection and care in the development of a young man.

In addition to these scholars, Andrew Sanders focuses on the theme of emotional development within father-son relationships in Victorian novels, particularly in "David Copperfield"<sup>4</sup>. He discusses how the paternal bond influences David's emotional maturity and understanding of love and trust. Sanders suggests that Dickens contrasts the love and care from positive father figures with the emotional damage caused by Mr. Murdstone's harshness, underscoring how essential paternal care is to healthy emotional growth.

These scholarly perspectives show how Dickens uses paternal relationships as a central theme in "David Copperfield" to explore both the nurturing and destructive roles that fathers (and father figures) play in the lives of their children. Through these relationships, Dickens reflects the broader Victorian concern with emotional development, authority, and the role of fathers in shaping the future of their children.

This study uses a qualitative literary analysis approach to explore the representation of paternal bonds in "David Copperfield" by Charles Dickens. The focus is on understanding how the relationships between fathers, surrogate fathers, and sons shape the protagonist David Copperfield's development and influence the broader themes of the novel. The methodology involves both contextual analysis and literary analysis, drawing on close readings of key passages, character interactions, and the socio-cultural context of Victorian England.

In these passages from David Copperfield by Charles Dickens, we see how different characters show love and care for David, like a parent would. Even though David is not with his real parents, people like Peggotty and his mother still find ways to show their affection. This shows that parental bonds can come from many people, not just from parents.

*"I believe she and her son were devoted to one another"*<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Heep and Uriah are very close, but not in a healthy way. Their relationship is more like an unhealthy obsession, where they depend on each other too much. Uriah's mother is protective and controlling, which makes their bond feel strange and uncomfortable.

*"I have brought Agnes from the Canterbury coach, and her cheerful and beautiful face is among us for the second time. Agnes has a great liking for Traddles, and it is capital to see them meet, and to observe the glory of Traddles as he commends the dearest girl in the world to her acquaintance."* Agnes, as David's surrogate "sister," represents a guiding maternal influence in David's life. Her "cheerful and beautiful face" adds an emotional warmth to the scene, and she is portrayed as an ideal companion for both David and Traddles. Agnes's presence, particularly as she interacts with Traddles, further emphasizes the familial, almost parental bond she shares with David. She is a figure of stability and care, similar to a mother figure who ensures the emotional well-being of those around her. Agnes's role contrasts with Dora's more childish behavior, presenting a more grounded and maternal force in David's life.

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert. *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist*. Harvard University Press, 2012.-P.102.

<sup>3</sup> Beer, Gillian. *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Routledge, 2010.-P.20.

<sup>4</sup> Sanders, Andrew. *The Victorian Novel: A Guide to the Novel, 1837-1901*. Routledge, 2009.-P.34.

<sup>5</sup> Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Edited by Jeremy Tambling, Penguin Classics, 2004.-P.33.

*"We might have gone about half a mile, and my pocket-handkerchief was quite wet through, when the carrier stopped short. Looking out to ascertain for what, I saw, to my amazement, Peggotty burst from a hedge and climb into the cart. She took me in both her arms, and squeezed me to her stays until the pressure on my nose was extremely painful, though I never thought of that till afterwards when I found it very tender"*<sup>6</sup>. Peggotty shows a very loving, motherly side when she unexpectedly jumps into the cart to hug David tightly. Though it hurts David's nose, the hug is filled with love and protection. She doesn't say anything, but her actions speak louder. She cares for David as if he were her own child. This is a clear sign of a strong, nurturing bond.

*"But its most precious contents were two half-crowns folded together in a bit of paper, on which was written, in my mother's hand, 'For Davy. With my love'"*<sup>7</sup>. Inside the purse, David finds money and a note from his mother, Clara. The note says, "For Davy. With my love." Even though Clara is not with him, this small note shows that she is still thinking about him and loves him, even from a distance. It is a way for her to stay connected to David, even though she can't physically be there for him.

*"Having by this time cried as much as I possibly could, I began to think it was of no use crying any more, especially as neither Roderick Random, nor that Captain in the Royal British Navy, had ever cried, that I could remember, in trying situations"*<sup>8</sup>. David is feeling very emotional after all that's happened, and he tries to stop himself from crying because he thinks other men don't cry in tough situations. This shows how he is trying to deal with his feelings and be brave, but he is also missing the comfort and care that parents typically give. His internal struggle shows how much he still needs parental love and support.

The passages show that David is loved and cared for, even when he feels alone. Peggotty's hug, the gifts, and his mother's note all show strong parental love. This helps David feel supported, and reminds us that love can come from anyone who truly cares, not just from a mother or father.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the passage from "David Copperfield" shows that true parental love is not always about words, but about actions, care, and emotional support. Peggotty's silent goodbye, her thoughtful gifts, and the loving message from David's mother all show how deeply they care for him. Even though David is going through a difficult time, the love he receives gives him comfort and strength. Dickens shows that parental bonds can be strong even when they are not shown in the usual way.

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<sup>6</sup> Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Edited by Jeremy Tambling, Penguin Classics, 2004.-P.33.

<sup>7</sup> Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Edited by Jeremy Tambling, Penguin Classics, 2004.-P.34.

<sup>8</sup> Dickens, Charles. *David Copperfield*. Edited by Jeremy Tambling, Penguin Classics, 2004.-P.35.