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**Child and Childhood in Charles Dickens's Novels**

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## ZADÁNÍ DIPLOMOVÉ PRÁCE

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Kromě zařazení díla Charlese Dickense do kulturního období a literárního kontextu se studentka ve své diplomové práci zaměří na obecnou charakteristiku viktoriánského období se zvláštním důrazem na obraz dětství. Pro tyto kulturně-literární analýzy budou použity postavy dětských hrdinů z románů Charlese Dickense. Obraz dětství v kulturním kontextu viktoriánské Anglie bude charakterizován z několika úhlů pohledu: sociální postavení dítěte, tj. život v chudobě, zaměstnávání dětí, vzdělávání, apod.  
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**WILSON, A. N.. The Victorians. London : Arrow Books, c2003. 738 s. ISBN 0-09-945186-7.**

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## **Abstract**

This work focuses on characteristic of the Victorian period with a special emphasis on children and childhood. Two novels of Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*, are used for depiction of life of Victorian children. The analysis of the primary sources and its comparison with secondary sources is used for portrayal of child labour, life of children in workhouses, criminal behaviour of children, children's ailment and mortality, child-parent relations and education. The thesis aims to prove that Charles Dickens depicted different aspects of life of Victorian children realistically in the two novels.

## **Keywords**

child; childhood; Victorian period; Charles Dickens; *Oliver Twist*; *David Copperfield*

## **Název**

Obraz dětství v románech Charlese Dickense

## **Souhrn**

Tato práce se zaměřuje na charakteristiku Viktoriánského období se zvláštním důrazem na obraz dětství této doby. Pro zmapování života Viktoriánských dětí jsou použity dva romány Charlese Dickense, *Oliver Twist* a *David Copperfield*. Analýza primárních zdrojů a jejich srovnání se zdroji sekundárními se zabývá zejména tématem dětské práce, života dětí v chudobincích, dětské kriminality, dětských nemocí a úmrtnosti, vztahů mezi rodiči a dětmi a vzdělání. Práce se snaží prokázat, že Charles Dickens vyobrazil různé aspekty života Viktoriánských dětí ve zmíněných románech realisticky.

## **Klíčová slova**

dítě; dětství; Viktoriánská doba; Charles Dickens; *Oliver Twist*; *David Copperfield*

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# 1. Introduction

Charles Dickens is often denoted to be the greatest novelist of the Victorian period. His personality and his work have attracted a wide range of biographical as well as critical writings. However, K. J. Fielding thinks that many of them are not worth reading, as they are not of a good quality and they are not reliable. (3) Fielding's conclusion is that "[i]n spite of Dickens's immense popularity ... until quite recently he remained in many ways strangely neglected." (Ibid.) On the other hand, there have been numerous well-written biographies and critical works about Dickens's writings and his life, including works of G. Gissing, G. K. Chesterton, H. Humphry, J. Romano, and many others. These critics explored Dickens's writings and life from different viewpoints.

Writings of Charles Dickens were significantly affected by his childhood experience. As a child, Dickens was sent to work in a warehouse, which influenced his view on child labour and its depiction in his novels. *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*, two novels that are discussed in this work as primary sources, also deal with the problem of child labour, which will be discussed separately in chapter 5. The following chapter will be devoted to Charles Dickens, his personality and his novels. Some important and relevant thoughts of his critics will be presented and the chapter will also mention significance of the two novels and reactions of Dickens's audience on their publications.

Next chapter will provide background information for Dickens's writings, as it will outline the Victorian concept of childhood. Significant differences between life of children from poor families and life of children from rich families will be presented and they will be itemized in other chapters.

The individual chapters (chapters 4 – 9) will emphasize different aspects of life of Victorian children and their childhood. Surveyed aspects will be child labour, life in workhouses, criminal behaviour of children, education, high infant mortality rates and child – parent relations. The chapters will be focused on Dickens's depiction of the mentioned aspects in his novels, and its comparison with reality of the early Victorian period as it is depicted in secondary sources. Individual chapters will evaluate to what degree Dickens rendered a realistic account of Victorian childhood.



The aim of this thesis is to prove that Charles Dickens described childhood of his main characters Oliver Twist and David Copperfield in a way, which corresponds with a general idea of Victorian childhood. Dickens' work will be explored with a focus on his depiction of Victorian childhood in order to show that Oliver and David experienced the same Victorian childhood as their contemporaries did. The thesis is based on a textual analysis of the mentioned primary sources and their comparison with information from theoretical and critical secondary sources. *The Victorians* by A. N. Wilson and *The Rise of Respectable Society: a Social History of Victorian Britain 1830 – 1900* by F. M. L. Thompson, two books portraying life of Victorians, will be consulted as the main theoretical sources on Victorian period in this thesis. Furthermore, critical thoughts of the writers mentioned at the beginning will be confronted and used to support the statement of this thesis.

## 2. Charles Dickens and his children: Oliver and David

“Dickens, if any writer, has associated himself with the thought of suffering childhood.” (Gissing 1898, 12) He was one of the Victorian novelists who were interested in life of working-class children and depicted it in their novels in order to attract attention of richer classes to the miserable situation of the poor. Through his novels, readers learn about life of children from the Victorian period, “especially the London child whose sorrows are made so vivid ... by the master’s pen” (Ibid.). Dickens’s novels are concerned with unhappy orphans and child labourers.

As Wilson said,

Dickens had in common with most of his contemporaries a desire to put the old world of injustice, ignorance and disease behind him. He shared with them, too, however, sentimentality about the past, a sense that industrialization was wrecking the world. This dichotomy ... is to be one of the defining features of nineteenth-century socio-political debates. (21 – 22)

Batho also confirmed that Dickens was concerned with the working class. However, he claimed that Dickens did not apply the sentimental approach mentioned in the previous extract to writing about working classes:

Dickens in the main described the class from which he sprang, in his case the lower middle class. He has been blamed for beginning “the cult of the lower classes”, but whether or not blame attaches to that, it is not true. He hated the fact that the lower class existed, and often either reviled them or made fun of them; as far as they were concerned he is by no means sentimental. He had, at one time, perilously belonged to them himself. He understood little of the workings of the mind, and was entirely uninterested in general thinking; but he hated everything that was mean and cruel, and loved everything that was generous and of good report. (66)

Similarly, Chesterton said “Dickens, being in touch with the democracy ... discovered that the country had come to a dark place of divided ways and divided counsels.” (1966, 29)

Many Victorian writers believed that their writings should illustrate social and political problems of the country and that it should also serve as a code of conduct for readers. Therefore, writers of the Victorian period dealt with topics concerning changes in society and they put emphasis on moral propriety. Victorian literature is generally

characterized by a strong sense of morality and depiction of social oppression

Dickens was one of those who felt that the Victorian society needed reformation and he spread his feelings within novels. According to Fielding, the best writers on Dickens realized his unique ability to depict the contemporary life and they appreciated his choice of the Victorian society as a subject of his works. (24) As Dickens experienced both life of the middle class as well as life and world of the working class, he might have depicted both worlds and the unequal conditions of the classes in a more realistic way.

Dickens strongly criticized poverty and the unequal conditions closely connected with social stratification of the Victorian society. At a time when Great Britain was the world major economic and political power, Dickens highlighted life of people from the lower social classes – the working class and the under class. He did not approve of the Victorian class system as he believed that all people were equal and that the stratification of society was unfair. “Dickens (unlike the social reformers) really did sympathise with every sort of victim of every sort of tyrant. He did truly pray for *all* who are desolated and oppressed.” (Chesterton 1966, 121)

As Chesterton further explained:

Dickens was a mob – and a mob in revolt; he fought by the light of nature; he had not a theory, but a thirst. ... He had no particular plan of reform; or, when he had, it was startlingly petty and parochial compared with the deep, confused clamour of comradeship and insurrection that fills all his narrative. (Ibid. 81)

Through his works, Dickens campaigned on different aspects of class inequality and injustices that the poor suffered, such as workhouses or child labour. He condemned such exploitation and repression.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Dickens experienced child labour as a 12-year-old boy. When his father, John Dickens, was arrested and sent to Marshalsea Prison due to a serious financial debt. Charles Dickens was sent to work at Warren’s Blacking Factory in order to pay for his father’s debts. Based on this experience, he often openly criticized the subject of child labour in his works.

Many critics and biographers have studied context of the Warren’s Blacking story, its impact on Dickens’s depiction of childhood and they have noted that it influenced and formed the author’s pitiful treatment of working and lonesome children in many of

his novels, particularly *Oliver Twist* and highly autobiographical *David Copperfield*. According to Dyson, Dickens was “nostalgic about his childhood, [however] he never romanticised the past to compensate for his disillusionment with the present.” (38)

According to Gissing, Dickens’s “miserable childhood imprisoned in the limbo of squalid London; his grudge against this memory was in essence a *class* feeling.” (1898, 8) Dickens’s novels were an effort to draw attention of the wealthier social classes to the poverty situation of many children. As a result, Chesterton labelled Dickens “[a] man who really felt” (1966, 85) and, according to Nangonová, Dickens’s novels were “always morally appropriate” (124).

Dickens excelled at an ability to make people laugh, which is one of the reasons why he was and still is largely popular among his readers. Dickens had a great sense of humour and irony and was able to create unforgettable witty characters. People from middle class enjoyed his work as it was a good source of amusement and entertainment for them. Moreover, he purposely aroused pity towards his characters in his readers and, according to Gissing, “if once the crowd has laughed with you, it will not object to cry a little - nay, it will make good resolves, and sometimes carry them out”. (1898, 13)

According to Wilson, Dickens was “a hugely benign force in Victorian England” (22). Wilson wrote:

Dickens, partly because he is so consistently funny a writer, and so unpompous, reminds us of the existence of another Britain, in which the harshness of life is tempered by kindness. His belief in the power of good-heartedness to triumph over evil is expressed in terms, not of a political programme, but of personality. His world, like the world of Victorian Britain, is not a Marxian *mass*: it is a teeming, moving screen of hilarious characters. He was in some senses the least realistic of all great geniuses; more than most writers, he created his own world. Such was his success, however, that we can almost say that the early nineteenth century in England was the England of Dickens. (23)

There have been many critics who have appreciated his novels of social criticism and have studied his life as well as workings.

Overall, Charles Dickens was an influential writer of the Victorian period, whose works have gained public acceptance since his career beginnings. His works, concentrating especially on topics of social inequalities and oppression of poor people in the first half of the Victorian period, have been largely discussed. He was one of the authors who started discussions about child labour and other unfair treatment of poor

classes and, thus, contributed to change of Victorian people's view on inequality of the social system.

## 2.1. Oliver Twist and David Copperfield

As it was mentioned above, two novels which are used in this thesis as examples of Dickens's work on life of children in the Victorian period, are *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*.

*Oliver Twist* first appeared as a monthly serial in 1837 and its first book edition was published in 1838. It is a story of an orphan Oliver, who was born in a nameless workhouse, became an apprentice of an undertaker, but managed to escape and got to London, where he involuntarily joined a group of thieves. Owing to many improbable circumstances, he finally got to a family of a noble man and started to live a life of a middle-class child. As Dyson stated in his work *Dickens: Modern Judgements*, "it is a mistake to think of *Oliver Twist* as a realistic story: only late in his career did Dickens learn to write realistically of human beings; at the beginning he invented life." (54)

However, the aim of this thesis is not to analyse Dickens's methods of writings and his portrayal of saint-like Oliver, but his depiction of the Victorian childhood. Through the novel, Dickens managed to give an account of life in workhouses, apprenticeship of children, child labour, London underworld, poverty and a carefree, happy life of children from the middle class.

As Dickens described topics that were not pleasant to read about, he might have expected confused reactions from his readers. Audience appreciated his first novel *The Pickwick Papers*, full of humour and memorable characters, and they probably expected *Oliver Twist* (Dickens's second novel) to be similar to his first novel. (Gissing 1925, 21)

However, Dickens was prepared for inconsistent reactions on his novel:

[d]oubts might well have been entertained as to the reception by the public of this squalid chronicle, this story of the workhouse, the thieves' den, and the condemned cell; as a matter of fact, voices were soon raised in protest, and many of *Pickwick's* admirers turned away in disgust. When the complete novel appeared, a *Quarterly* reviewer attacked it vigorously, declaring the picture injurious to public morals, and the author's satire upon public institutions mere splenetic extravagance. For all this, Dickens was prepared. Consciously, deliberately, he had begun the great work of his life, and he had strength to carry

with him the vast majority of English readers. His mistakes were those of a generous purpose. When criticism had said its say, the world did homage to a genial moralist, a keen satirist, and a leader in literature. (Ibid.)

This excerpt indicates that Dickens finally succeeded and was appreciated by his readers. Furthermore, the last sentence proves that it was the presence of irony within the novel that contributed to Dickens's success, as written above.

The best attribute to describe the character of Oliver Twist is innocence. Dickens made Oliver innocent on purpose. He depicted Oliver as “[a] Rousseauistic child of nature” (Lucas 32), who

can introduce the reader to such different and concealed worlds as the poorhouse, Sowerberry's, Fagin's part of London, the courts, the condemned cell; and all with the innocent eye which guarantees truth and detail the horror. (Ibid. 39)

The contrast of Oliver's innocence and the corrupted world, in which he had to survived, is also one of the aspects which made *Oliver Twist* successful with his readers.

Most literary critics have agreed that *Oliver Twist* is not a novel of a great literary value. As Romano says “*Oliver Twist* is a novel famous for thrilling us with its portraits of evil and boring us with its portraits of good.” (119) Moreover, Chesterton wrote in that “[s]ome parts of it [*Oliver Twist*] are so crude and of so clumsy a melodrama, that one is almost tempted to say that Dickens would have been greater without it”. (1911, 262)

However, Chesterton further added to his critique that

even if he [Dickens] had been greater without it [*Oliver Twist*] he would still have been incomplete without it. With the exception of some gorgeous passages, both of humour and horror, the interest of the book lies not so much in its revelation of Dickens's literary genius as in its revelation of those moral, personal, and political instincts which were the make-up of his character and the permanent support of that literary genius. It is by far the most depressing of all his books; it is in some ways the most irritating; yet its ugliness gives the last touch of honesty to all that spontaneous and splendid output. Without this one discordant note all his merriment might have seemed like levity. (Ibid. 39)

Most literary critics have also agreed that the novel was of great importance due to the influence it had on its readers. As it was already stated, *Oliver Twist* started a discussion on topics which were till that time hidden from the sight of middle-class society.

*David Copperfield* is Dickens's eighth novel, first published in 1850. Its whole title is *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, And Observation Of David Copperfield The Younger. Of Blunderstone Rookery. (Which He Never Meant to be Published on Any Account)*. As the whole title of the novel suggests, it is a story of a boy from his birth till youth. Similarly to *Oliver Twist*, David had to overcome suffering (a tyrannical step-father, strict education at a boarding-school, death of his own mother and, later on, death of his wife) before he became happy in his life. This novel also deals with a topic of child labour. Furthermore, education and family life are other topics that are depicted in the work to a great extent.

As Cockshut wrote, "no book of Dickens is so difficult to assess fairly as *David Copperfield*." (114) The novel is partly autobiographical and "the emotional identification of Dickens with David is very strong" (Ibid. 115).

Dickens wrote in preface to "Charles Dickens" edition,

[o]f all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD. (1991, xlii)

As Gissing remarked, "Dickens held this to be his best book, and the world has agreed with him" (1898, 29) and Cockshut agreed with Gissing, writing that "it is certain that the book has been widely loved" (115).

As it was Dickens's eighth novel, he had been a popular and appreciated writer in the day of its publication. Therefore, public had known some basic facts of his personal life and when he used some of them in the novel, people believed that the whole book is about Charles Dickens and that "*David Copperfield*" is his pen name. Dickens was aware of the possible impact of his novel on its readers and he mystified the truth about his life. (Collins 8 – 9)

Each of the main characters in the two novels lives a different life; however, certain similarities can be noted. This thesis aims to evaluate to what extent their lives are similar to non-fictional Victorian children's lives. As Dickens lived in the Victorian period, he must have been inevitably influenced by the general approach of the time to childhood. The general approach of the Victorian society will be the topic of the subsequent chapter.

### 3. Victorian concept of childhood

The concept of childhood seems to be scarcely recognized as a formative and important phase before 1600. It lasted several centuries to establish its modern concept. Generally speaking, the Victorian period is considered to be the most important period for creating a modern perception of childhood by many historians.

The Victorian era (1837 – 1901), a period stretching through the reign of Queen Victoria, is regarded as one of the most glorious and important times in the British history. Queen Victoria, the longest reigning monarch in the history of Great Britain, was crowned after the death of her uncle William IV and the period of her reign is considered to be the beginning of modern age as well as a modern conception of childhood.

Nevertheless, the Victorian age was a period of significant contrasts. Dickens's opening lines of his novel *The Tale of Two Cities*, giving account of the period of French Revolution, could be used as well for description of the Victorian period. *The Tale of Two Cities* starts with the following lines:

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times;  
it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness;  
it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity;  
it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness;  
it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair;  
we had everything before us, we had nothing before us;  
we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going the other way. (1948, 1)

Similarly, Gissing called the Victorian period “[a] time of suffering, of conflict, of expansion, of progress”. (1898, 9)

Childhood became an important concern in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early Victorian period started the transformation of ideas about childhood. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century two important philosophers John Locke and Jean Jacque Rousseau influenced the concept of childhood. In works of J. J. Rousseau “we find the first expression of the view that childhood may be the best time of life” (Cunningham 66) and J. Locke “became the guide for innumerable middle-class families” (Ibid. 65).

The nineteenth century was influenced by works of the above mentioned philosophers. People began to perceive childhood more sensitively and an idea of



childhood as a stage of life with its own rights started to spread. This sensitivity towards childhood did not exist in previous centuries. (Ibid. 61)

However, the conception of childhood did not change immediately with the beginning of the nineteenth century. It depended on a position of children on the social ladder. With the start of Industrial Revolution, differences between poor and rich people were more significant. The Victorian period was a period of wealth and prosperity for people from middle- and upper- classes, but it was also a time of suffering and poverty for people from poor, working classes. At the beginning of the Victorian era, poor children did not experience childhood in the same way as rich children. The modern image of childhood was shaped gradually throughout the whole Victorian period.

In the early Victorian era, “the cult of childhood innocence was the privilege of the ever-expanding middle classes and mainly of the upper classes” (Wilson 260) and only children from wealthier social classes could enjoy a happy and carefree childhood. For children from lower classes, this concept did not exist:

Childhood, up to the 1860’s, was like brutish and nasty human life itself for children from working classes. Moreover, childhood itself as a time of carefree play, learning and innocent, merry amusement, was practically non-existent for the majority of Victorian children, as children from the working class prevailed children from the middle and the upper classes. (Ibid.)

Thoughts of J. J. Rousseau and J. Locke together with a romantic movement supported the way of thinking about childhood, especially within middle class. However, it did not have an immediate impact on the way children were reared, especially within working class families, which dealt with financial problems and sent their children to work as soon as possible. (Cunningham 77) The Victorian period can be denoted by contradiction of an innocent childhood idea and cruel reality.

Similarly, Oliver and David were depicted as innocent and pure children who were confronted with bitter reality. However, they managed to maintain their innocent minds through the novels. One might assume that Dickens wished to show that the idea of innocent childhood had a chance to spread and survive within all social classes.

## 4. Oliver's place of residence

The vast majority of people were poor during the Victorian era. As Wilson wrote, higher classes started to realize it and were shocked by the amount of poor people:

[w]hat shocked the early Victorians was the disparity between rich and poor, the visible unfairness of it all, made all the more visible in the railway age, when communications between the big manufacturing cities became so easy. In the rural, pre-railway age many of the more prosperous strata could avoid contact with the poor. In the 1840s they became much more visible because there were so many more of them. (30)

As Cramer suggested the group of poor people could be further divided into two subgroups:

Within the poor there were both the independent poor, and the dependent poor. The independent poor were the masses of the population, able to care for themselves. The dependent poor, or paupers, required support by either the government or charity. (5)

The Poor Law, which was passed in 1834, forced beggars to enter workhouses. The government established a system of workhouses, where paupers could be sent if they were not able to care for themselves.

Rather than extending charity to the poor in their own homes, the Commissioners had built a chain of workhouses across the country. It could be said that no one had to go to the workhouse. When the alternative, however, was to watch children go hungry, it is not surprising that the hated places began to fill up. (Wilson 12)

Dickens criticized also the mentioned system of providing food to homes. He criticized lack of control of this system in a passage when a parochial beadle, Mr. Bumble, said that "the great principle of out-of-door relief is, to give the paupers exactly what they don't want; and then they get tired of coming". (1994, 203)

Children were separated from their parents automatically after the arrival to any workhouse, which was one of the most stressful facts for family members. (Wilson 29) This fact is interlined in *Oliver Twist*, as there is no reference to parents of the children living in a workhouse. Workhouses were not a place where people would like to go if they did not have to.

As Anstruther noted,

“[t]he workhouses should be a place of hardship, of coarse fare, of degradation and humility; it should be administered with strictness – with severity; it should be as repulsive as is consistent with humanity. (In Wilson, 12)

Similarly, Nangonová mentioned that “[the workhouses] were built by parishes, and working conditions were prison-like in order to discourage the poor from regarding them as desirable rest centres.” (108) The “prison-like” conditions concerned nutrition, accommodation and treatment of people who had to live there.

Dickens realistically portrayed the shocking conditions of children in workhouses and used first pages of *Oliver Twist* to present how children were mistreated, starved, and neglected in the workhouses.

The Preface to the Third Edition argues boastfully that the author’s second novel performed “a service to society” in showing the denizens of the underworld “as they really are.” The same would apply, presumably, to the novel’s depiction of the Poor Law abuses. Thus the over-arching defence is a simple avowal of realism: “IT IS TRUE.” (Romano 137)

As Dickens wrote, *Oliver Twist* was born “into this world of sorrow and trouble” (1) and “proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish” (2). A pauper woman from the workhouse, who “had thirteen children of her own, and all on’em dead except two, and had them in the workus with [her]” (3) was present during his birth.

Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none. Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of churchwardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder. (4)

In the previous extract, Dickens criticized the paradox of class labelling. By using irony and sarcasm, he managed to invoke feelings that he probably intended to invoke. He displayed that all people are equal, because they are born equal and it is just clothes and money that makes the difference.

For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception. He was brought up by hand. ... The parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be ‘farmed’, or, in other words, that he should be despatched to a branch-workhouse, some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny’s worth per small head per week. Sevenpence-halfpenny’s worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. (4)

However,

[t]he elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them. (4 – 5)

Once again Dickens used irony and sarcasm to illustrate the ludicrous conditions of workhouses. However, this is not a criticism of the system itself. The previous excerpt is a criticism of people employed within the system. Dickens reprovved parish authorities’ lack of interest and sympathy.

Dickens amplified his criticism by vivid descriptions of workhouse nutrition. He ascribed:

The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. (14)

According to Dickens the nutrition in workhouses was not sufficient for the boys. “Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got ... voracious and wild with hunger” (15) and “his board needn’t come very expensive, for he hasn’t been over-fed since he was born” (22). “Oliver Twist’s ninth birth-day found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumstances” (6) and, later in the novel, Oliver remembered how

he and his friend Dick “had been beaten and starved, and shut up together, many and many a time” (61).

The idea of lack nutrition is an idea which Cramer does not agree with. In his work *The Early Victorian Workhouse*, which examined the period of ten years from passing the English Poor Law Act in 1834, Cramer states that “Dickens’ novels have given the workhouses established by the 1834 Poor Law an undeservedly bad reputation” (12). He confronts Dickens’s passage about nutrition in workhouses, stating that “[c]ontrary to *Oliver Twist*, it appears that the quantity of food was seldom an issue.” (Ibid.)

On the other hand, there is much evidence that people in workhouses suffered from lack of nutrition. Many shocking stories about life in workhouses and conditions of poor people were published in *The Times*.

Wilson quoted one of the scandalous cases in his book *The Victorians*. It was a case of Andover House:

In this parish all relief of the poor in their own homes was stopped. Single women with bastard children were obliged, if they wished to eat, to wear the yellow stripe of shame sewn across their coarse grey workhouse gown. The boys and men were set to the smelly work of bone-grinding, making fertilizer out of the bones of dead farm animals. They were so hungry they fell to gnawing the rotten bones and putrid horseflesh which came from the slaughterhouse ... Colin Mc Dougal, the workhouse supervisor ... regularly thrashed children as young as three from messing their beds and he kept his paupers on such short rations that some survived by eating candles. (32)

The stories provoked outraged reactions from the public. However, many of them were denoted as exaggerated or fictitious. (Roberts In Wilson 29)

Nevertheless, many registered cases were confirmed and many diaries maintained, so the situation in the Dickensian nameless workhouse could have existed. Charles Dickens described situation that could have existed probably not in all workhouses of the period as the conditions in individual workhouses were influenced by people who were in charge of them, but it certainly could have existed in some of them.

One of the best-known sentences from *Oliver Twist*, “Please, sir, I want some more” (15), may be regarded as a parallel between Oliver’s and Dickens’s wish. As “*Oliver Twist* has asked for more!” (16), Dickens asked for more too. He applied for more rights for poor people and simultaneously for middle-class people’s attention and

sympathy towards these people. Dickens summarised his request for reformation in this simple sentence.

In other words, Dickens was not satisfied with the conditions in workhouses and asked for more action that would help to settle the differences within the classes. He despised the ignorance that still prevailed among the middle class.

Dickens wrote:

“I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should like better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish.” (35)

Dickens strongly criticised the workhouse conditions. In his early chapter of *Oliver Twist*, he attacked the conditions and clearly stated that he did not agree with the Poor Law Act and the government actions. He wrote, “I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a workhouse, is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being.” (1) Chapters of *Oliver Twist* records beginnings of the Poor Law of 1834. Dickens used satire and irony to refer to the absurdity and cruelty of the law. He wrote:

when they [commissioners] came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered – the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poorer classes; a tavern where there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium, where it was all play and no work. ... So they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the water-works to lay on an unlimited supply of water; and with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal; and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll on Sundays. ... It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker’s bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two’s gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies. (13-14)

Dickens criticized the workhouse system and laws very openly. He wished to reform the society’s attitude; therefore, he used an innocent character of Oliver Twist to

attract attention of the public to the poor treatment and abuse of children in Victorian workhouses. He managed it by writing passages that described generally hard conditions of workhouses and children's misery in these institutions, including widely-spread child labour.

In the novel, Dickens wrote that "tears were not the things to find their way to Mr. Bumble's soul; his heart was waterproof." (331). This description of an unemotional personality of a parochial beadle, Mr. Bumble, can be understood as Dickens's parable between Mr. Bumble's approach and society's approach towards the situation of poor classes. However, Mr. Beadle, "after making a tour of the house, [thought] for the first time that the poor-laws really were too hard on people" (333). Similarly, Dickens could have hoped for society's awakening and people's realizing that the poor laws as well as child labour were cruel and abusive. Therefore, he chronicled conditions of workhouses and child labour, the results of the Poor Laws, in his novels.

## 5. Oliver and David make their living

The Industrial Revolution, which started in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, led not only to economic development, but also to many social problems. One of the problems was an increase in child labour. Financial situation of many working people was so disastrous that the entire family, including women and children, had to contribute to the family's income. Families tended to have more children, who could go to work and support the family financially. On the other hand, a numerous family needed more money to nourish all its members. Child labour became a frequently discussed issue and throughout the period various laws were introduced to limit it.

Nevertheless, child labour began even before the start of the Industrial Revolution. Working-class children from always helped their parents with household or worked in fields, but with the advent of the Industrial Revolution children started to do a different type of labour. "When in the late eighteenth century industrialization began to shift the location of the textile industries from home to factory, it was natural to look to children as a key component of the workforce." (Cunningham 87) Instead of labouring in fields or at homes, children laboured in factories and mines for employers and they got wages.

As explained above, many families were dependent on their children's income; therefore, many children had to start working as soon as possible and had to work long hours to earn enough money. As Cunningham wrote "children often started to work under the age of ten, and the industrial revolution period begins to regain the reputation it had until recent years as a black moment in the history of childhood." (89)

Wilson also acknowledges nowadays perception of child labour in the Victorian period. In his work *The Victorians*, he wrote:

In industrialising and urbanising Britain most children worked as many working hours as their parents did or even more. Millions of children in the nineteenth century had the experience of working in a grown-up world. At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, children were still regarded as a source of cheap labour and worked in many unpleasant and dangerous places such as mills, factories and coalmines. (260)

Further, Sewall portrayed child labour and confirmed the general knowledge about its shocking conditions. He wrote,



[i]n the silk industry, little children would stand for ten hours upon stools to perform their work. Crowded into suffocating spaces, with no ventilation, these work dens became the prison house of infants. The same was equally true of the textile mills where children as young as four and five, and incredibly even toddlers of three, were put to work. In abominable conditions, hundreds of thousands of children, half-ragged and half-washed, were literally worked to death in the shadow of the overseer. (1)

Orphans and children from workhouses were very often used for child labour as they could have been replaced easily. Moreover, they usually did not work for wages but they worked mainly to earn their food and accommodation. They worked either within the area of a workhouse or they could have been sold to their new employers, which also happened to Oliver Twist when he disobeyed rules of the workhouse, in which he lived. After he asked for more food,

a bill [...] was pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling. (16)

Oliver or any other boy could have been sold to a new employer and

if the master finds, upon a short trial, that he can get enough work out of a boy without putting too much food into him, he shall have him for a term of years, to do what he likes with. (32)

As Clarke emphasized in his article *Children and Childhood*, such exploitation of child labour by industrialism stood as a sharp contrast to the idealised childhood of the new middle class and upper class. (9) This contrast became the basis for the campaigns to abolish or at least to limit child labour. Literary works of many Victorian writers, including Charles Dickens, began to publicly protest against the child labour and commenced to criticise the law system of the Victorian period.

Gissing mentions in his work that

Dickens's biographer [Foster] makes a fanciful suggestion that the fact of his [Dickens's] having observed low life at so tender an age (from ten to twelve) accounts for the purity of tone with which that life is treated in the novelist's works. (1898, 22)

Despite Foster's suggestion, Gissing is still convinced that Dickens was a realistic writer. He wrote,

[a]dmitting his [Dickens's] limits, accepting them even gladly, he was yet possessed with a sense of the absolute reality of everything he pictured forth. Had the word been in use he must necessarily have called himself a Realist. (Ibid. 75)

Furthermore, Gissing wrote that “[o]f Dickens's true and deep sympathy with childhood there can be no doubt; it becomes passionate in the case of little ones doomed to suffering by a cruel or careless world.” (1898, 164)

One of the worst jobs for children was *chimney sweeping*, which was not abolished until 1875. Chimney sweeping was generally a job which only small children could have done because of their size, usually under the command of adult chimney-sweeps. Children had to climb chimneys which were very narrow. Sewell mentions that “some chimney flues in which children were forced to work were only seven inches (18 centimetres) square” and Holden claims that the chimneys were 9 x 14 inches (23 x 35 centimetres) (in Zimmer). The information in secondary sources differ, however, both of them agree that chimneys were very narrow and that only little children could have done this job. As Holden wrote, “[m]any chimney-sweeps were recruited from the age of four. Small boys were needed with bones soft enough to crawl through the tiny chimney flues.” (In Zimmer)

Holden described feelings of little chimney-sweepers and the content of their labour in the following lines:

“[E]mployed to scrape the soot from the sides of the flue, [the boys also had to] replace the mortar which had become dislodged and repair cracks in the brickwork. Oven chimneys were particularly unpleasant as deposits of congealed fat and soot made it difficult to get any firm grip. Constant lacerations were a permanent part of life. For some a relatively quick death by asphyxiation or by smoke inhalation may have been preferable to the long-term sufferings which were an occupational habit and which might have included asthma, inflammation of the eyes, burned limbs, malformed spines and legs and tuberculosis. ... These young children often developed cancer of the scrotum.” (Ibid.)

Such a horrible picture of chimney-sweeping was described similarly by Sewell, who targeted his attention at compulsory measures to force children to work diligently:

Their [children's] terror of the dark and narrow confines was overcome by the threat of greater terror from below. Chimney sweeps were beaten, stabbed by needles, or deliberately burned as a means of "encouraging" them to carry out their duties. (1)

The situation of chimney-sweeping boys was accurately mentioned in Charles Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist*. Oliver Twist could have become such an apprentice of an adult chimney sweep, Mr. Gamfield, as well. When Mr. Gamfield spotted the notice that a boy from workhouse was for sale, he "knowing what the dietary of the workhouse was, well knew he [Oliver] would be a nice small pattern, just the very thing for register stoves" (19).

Furthermore, Dickens included another remark about the horrors of chimney sweeping in this dialogue between the sweeper Mr. Gamfield and a parochial beadle Mr. Limbins:

"It's a nasty trade," said Mr. Limbins, when Gamfield had again stated his wish [to take Oliver as his apprentice].

"Young boys have been smothered in chimneys before now," said another gentleman.

"That's acause they damped the strax afore they lit it in the chimbley to make 'em come down agin," said Gamfield; "that's all smoke, and no blaze; vereas smoke ain't o' no use at all in making a boy come down, for it only sinds him to sleep, and that's wot he likes. Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy, gen'lmen, and there's nothink like a good hot blaye to make 'em come down vith a run. It's humane too, gen'lmen, acause, even if they've stuck in the chimbley, roasting their feet makes 'em struggle to hextricate theirselves." (20)

This extract proves that Dickens was well aware of the horrors of chimney sweeping and he strongly disapproved such an inhuman abuse of children.

Fortunately for Oliver, the wish of Mr Gamfield, who "did happen to labour under the slight imputation of having bruised three or four boys to death already" (21), was not fulfilled. Oliver, "who ... was regarding the repulsive countenance of his future master, with a mingled expression of horror and fear" (26) prayed the officers:

[He] fell on his knees, and clasping his hands together, prayed that they would order him back to the dark room—that they would starve him—beat him—kill him if they please—rather than sent him away with that dreadful man. (Ibid.)

After Oliver's prayers, the magistrates made a decision to "take the boy back to the

workhouse, and treat him kindly. He seems to want it.” (27)

That same evening, the gentleman in the white waistcoat most positively and decidedly affirmed, not only that Oliver would be hung, but that he would be drawn and quartered into the bargain. (Ibid.)

And “the next morning, the public were once more informed that Oliver Twist was again To Let, and that five pounds would be paid to anybody who would take possession of him.” (Ibid.)

Many children felt similarly to Oliver Twist, who would rather die. As Zimmer wrote in her overview of Holden’s book *Orphans of History—The Forgotten Children of the First Fleet*:

Indicating how much the children hated this work, Holden refers to a chimney-sweep in 1819, who gladly consented to the amputation of a leg crushed in a fall, after being told that he could not ascend another chimney with only one leg.

Chimney sweeping can be considered as the worst job for children, as they suffered from different illnesses due to the environment in which they had to stay long hours and they were also often seriously injured.

However, chimney sweeping was not the only difficult job for children. Oliver’s job in the workhouse was picking oakum, which was a typical job given to people in workhouses. Oakum means:

Loose fibres obtained by unpicking old ropes which were then sold to the navy or other ship-builders – it was mixed with tar and used for caulking (sealing the lining) of wooden ships. Picking oakum was done without tools of any sort and was very hard on the fingers. (Higginbotham)

When Oliver avoided becoming an apprentice of a chimney-sweeper, he became an apprentice of an undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry. His job was to help with infant as well as adult funerals.

Oliver accompanied his master in most of his adult expeditions, too, in order that he might acquire that equanimity of demeanour and full command of nerve which are essential to a finished undertaker. (49)

Being an undertaker is not considered to be a typical occupation for children. According

to Dickens, children could have done any kind of job if an employer paid for them. However, there has been no reference to children working as undertakers in secondary sources.

Dickens introduced another kind of child labour in *David Copperfield*. David worked in the Murdstone and Grinby warehouse.

It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old gray rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time, with my trembling hand in Mr. Quinion's. (154)

David's job in this warehouse was to clean and label bottles. Dickens described business of the warehouse and the job itself in the following passage:

Murdstone and Grinby's trade was among a good many kinds of people, but an important branch of it was the supply of wines and spirits to certain packet-ships. I forget now where they chiefly went, but I think there were some among them that made voyages both to the East and West Indies. I know that a great many empty bottles were one of the consequences of this traffic, and that certain men and boys were employed to examine them against the light, and reject those that were flawed, and to rinse and wash them. When the empty bottles ran short, there were labels to be pasted on full ones, or corks to be fitted to them, or seals to be put upon the corks, or finished bottles to be packed in casks. All this work was my work, and of the boys employed upon it I was one. (Ibid.)

The passage from *David Copperfield* describes feelings of the main character of the novel and as the novel is based on true memories of Dickens, we could conjecture that the words of David Copperfield are words of little Charles Dickens.

According to Gissing,

[Dickens] was well acquainted with the monstrous wickedness of that child labour in mines and mills; and, find where he might the pathetic little figures useful to him in his fiction, he was always speaking consciously, to an age remarkable for stupidity and heartlessness in the treatment of all its poorer children. (1898, 12)

What is more, Dickens concentrated not only on description of the work itself, but he described in detail feelings of working children. According to many historians and

critics, Dickens used information and lines from his biography, which he started to write before writing *David Copperfield*, in the novel. Described feelings are authentic feelings of a person who experienced child labour and, therefore, they should be perceived as credibly depicted.

These are the lines describing Dickens's feelings about his childhood experience with labour as they were reported in *David Copperfield*:

I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby. (154)

Dickens further wrote:

I never, happily for me no doubt, made a single acquaintance, or spoke to any of the many boys whom I saw daily in going to the warehouse, in coming from it, and in prowling about the streets at meal-times. I led the same secretly unhappy life; but I led it in the same lonely, self-reliant manner. (166)

And again:

I know that I worked from morning until night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond. (161)

Dickens managed to conclude all the facts about child labour and workhouses and also prejudices that prevailed in the Victorian period in the previous four lines. He mentioned long working hours "from morning until night", not enough nutrition when children were "insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed", and also a prejudice that children from workhouses, who are "dreadful creatures, that are born to be murderers and robbers from their very cradle" (Dickens 1994, 53), were from the margins of the society and were destined to become criminals as "[i]t cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop" (Ibid. 6).

Among the privileged classes there was an increasing number of people who were against the child labour, yet, there were also its loyal supporters.

“With few exceptions, the response to it [child labour] on the part of middle- and upper-class observers had been positive, and they had indeed invested much effort in attempts to create industries in which children could work.” (Cunningham 87)

Not only people from higher classes, but also poor families which had financial problems supported their children to work.

However, this fact is not mentioned in Dickens’s two novels. Oliver was an orphan; therefore, nobody minded to send him to work and David was sent to work to a warehouse after his mother’s death by his step-father and step-aunt that did not foster any warm feelings towards him either.

Situation of children “whose lives were spent in the black depths of coal-pits and amid the hot roar of machinery” (Gissing 1898, 11) changed gradually as the concept of childhood spread to minds of more people. Laws that would limit child labour began to be enforced. The Factory Act of 1833 was passed and set a minimum age of nine for children working in the factories. It also limited amount of hours that children could work in textile factories. In 1842 the law was extended to children in mines. Another Factory Act of 1844 further limited the employment of children.

Summarizing all the provided facts and passages from the novels, Dickens can be denoted to depict child labour in the Victorian period realistically. Horrors of chimney sweeping, oakum picking, as well as work in factories are described realistically in his novels, including feelings of the working children. Undertaker apprenticeship is not mentioned in the secondary sources, however, there is an information that children could have been sold to any master who wished to have an apprentice. Therefore, it is credible that Oliver was an undertaker apprentice. Dickens did not mention the important fact that child labour had its supporters not only within the higher classes, but also among numerous poor families. The reason why he did not mention it might be that Dickens was an objector to child labour, who intended to improve the situation of working children by writing about its injustices. Thus, mentioning child labour supporters from poor classes could lead his readers to a conclusion that working class people are satisfied with their situation and living conditions. It would not bring the intended effect on his readers, which was to arouse pity towards working children.

## 6. Fagin's children

In his novel *Oliver Twist*, Dickens concentrated on depiction of London underworld that certainly existed. As Lucas wrote,

[*Oliver Twist*] tries to show the criminals for what and as they are, and if we may judge from the shock and discomfort of Dickens's first readers, he succeeded only too well, [...] for *Oliver Twist* confronts its readers with a society which is rapidly becoming incapable of and unwilling to recognize itself and which in the process is becoming rapidly dehumanized. Dickens's readers are in the position of the respectable society of the novel itself. They are brought violently into contact with a world they would rather ignore. (25, 29)

Oliver escaped from his undertaker master and decided to go to London. As Dickens wrote about what was passing through Oliver's thoughts on the way:

The name awakened a new train of ideas in the boy's mind. London!—that great large place!—nobody—not even Mr. Bumble—could ever find him there! He had often heard the old men in the workhouse, too, say that no lad of spirit need want in London; and that there were ways of living in that vast city, which those who had been bred up in country parts had no idea of. (63)

Similarly to Oliver, many people from countryside thought that they would find a better life in London, but they were usually disappointed. Those people often ended among the poorest class and many of them became criminals. (Thomas 13)

Therefore, it seems realistic enough that poor Oliver met a gang of thieves when he got to the capital. The first person who noticed him was the Dodger. Oliver's impression about him was that the Dodger was

one of the queerest looking boys that Oliver had ever seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough; and as dirty juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age: with rather bow-legs, and little, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so lightly, that it threatened to fall off every moment – and would have done so, very often, if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man's coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back, half-way up his arm, to get his hands out of the sleeves: apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers. ... He was, altogether, as roystering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood four feet six, or something less, in his bluchers. (66)



The Dodger took him to lodging of his and his friends, where “seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men” (71).

Cunningham mentioned about children similar to the Dodger and his friends that,

these street children lacked all of what had become the accepted characteristics of children. A mark of this was their independence from adults. ... The freedom of this life had rapidly removed from them any of the marks of childhood, a fact all too visible in their body language. (146)

Dickens also belonged to the public who believed that street children lost their childhood qualities, therefore, he depicted them in the generally accepted way in *Oliver Twist*.

As a contrast to these children stands Oliver. He was depicted innocent on purpose to show the difference between him and street children. Oliver’s innocence accompanies him throughout the whole story and is also obvious when Oliver first meets with a theft.

The young gentleman [the Dodger] took him to an adjacent chandler’s shop, where he purchased a sufficiency of ready-dressed ham and a half-quartern loaf, or, as he himself expressed it, ‘a fourpenny bran!’ the ham being kept clean and preserved from dust, by the ingenious expedient of making a hole in the loaf by pulling out a portion of the crumb, and stuffing it therein. (67)

Oliver does not understand the theft and even appreciates the Dodger for his inventiveness and cleverness. Moreover, he considers the Dodger to be “the young gentleman”. He can be described in words of the Dodger, “He is so jolly green!” (77)

Oliver is taken to Fagin, an organizer of the child-thieves gang, but he still does not comprehend which society he has entered. Fagin asked children

whether there had been much of a crowd at the execution that morning. This made him [Oliver] wonder more and more; for it was plain from the replies of the two boys that they had both been there; and Oliver naturally wondered how they could possibly have found time to be so very industrious. (77)

Considering the character of Fagin, he was “a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare. (71) Thomas challenged the description of Fagin as a thief by explaining that “appearance and surroundings [of thieves and burglars] far removed from those of Bill Sikes, and the Artful Dodger” (2)

and therefore also Fagin. Here Dickens seems to be rather romantic and tries to provide a romantic picture of thieves. Similarly, Thackeray also objected to Dickens's romanticizing of criminals and making heroes of them. (In Lucas 26)

The Dodger is finally caught during pick-pocketing of a silver snuff-box. As Fagin says:

If they don't get any fresh evidence, it'll only be a summary conviction, and we shall have him back again after six weeks or so; but, if they do, it's a case of lagging. They know what a clever lad he is; he'll be a lifer. They'll make the Artful nothing less than a lifer. (404)

As Thomas reported, only some capital offences were punished by hanging. If the Dodger lived 30 years ago than he lived, he could have been hanged as in 1800 also children could have been hanged for minor thefts. (5)

Another character from *Oliver Twist* belonging to the London underworld is Nancy, a prostitute.

Even if prostitution were regarded as a facet of the criminal underworld, its practitioners seldom matched the stereotype of the diseased harpy weaving the nation's winding-sheet. (Thomas 1)

When Oliver met Nancy and her friend Bet for the first time

[t]hey wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and looked quite stout and hearty. Being remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As there is no doubt they were. (78)

Many women became prostitutes when they lost their job, but they usually turned back to them when they could. (Thomas 1)

Nancy later in the story changes her attitude towards her way of life and wants to save Oliver from the wretched life among thieves. She says,

"I am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it. I must have gone too far to turn back,--and yet I don't know, for if you had spoken to me so, some time ago, I should have laughed it off. ... How many times do you read of such as I who spring into the tide, and leave no living thing, to care for, or bewail them. It may be years hence, or it may be only months, but I shall come to that at last." (435)

As Lucas explained Nancy's behaviour, "Nancy's true nature is not the same as her class identity [...] she is given a manner of speech that belies her outer appearance" (28). Nancy's personality is strong enough to change her attitude, but not so strong to escape the underworld. Dickens's portraying is usually either black or white. He distinguishes between good and evil; therefore, Nancy's ambivalence is punished by murder.

The general approach was that street children such as the Dodger, Nancy, and others should be returned to childhood again. Victorian society felt sympathy for the children.

Think how young he is; think that he may never have known a mother's love, or the comfort of a home; that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt. (Dickens 1994, 265)

Attempts of government to deal with situation of the street children and criminals were unstably successful.

The method dating back to the fifteenth century for dealing with abandoned or delinquent children was to place them in an institution. From 1830s there was an intensified phase of institution-building, catering for children of all kinds thought to be in need. ... These institutions, whether established for orphan children or for juvenile delinquents, [...] ostensibly modelled themselves on Christian families, they subjected children to a highly-disciplined regime where the prime objective seemed to be to instil obedience. (Cunningham 146, 147 – 148)

The seconded initiative on behalf of deprived or delinquent children was even more radical than the attempt to establish institutions with a family feel: it was to place children in foster families. To do this within a state's boundaries was in some ways no more than an extension of the wet-nursing schemes used for foundlings for centuries. The children would be taken out of the unhealthy environment of the city, and placed in the countryside (Ibid. 149)

Oliver was one of the lucky children who managed to escape from the London underworld. He was able to distinguish evil, therefore, he was rewarded by getting to a respectable middle-class family of Mr. Brownlow. "Mr. Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son." (Dickens 1994, 507) Romano said that "Oliver is safe in the 'sentimental' refuge of Brownlow's house from the 'philosophical' evils of two worlds, Fagin's den and the workhouse." (124)

To sum up, Dickens showed in his novel that criminal behaviour of children and the London underworld really existed. He described the most frequent minor offences of

children, pick-pocketing. By mentioning the Dodger's group going out every day, he also denoted the frequency of minor crimes. On the other hand, his descriptions of the underworld characters may seem to be influenced by romantic tendencies to depict the criminals and outcasts of the society as heroes. Moreover, not many children were as strong as Oliver to withstand the criminal world. However, Oliver entered the world of criminals as an innocent attendant whose task was only to introduce the criminal world to readers. Therefore, the fact that Oliver managed to retain his innocence in contrast to many Victorian children when he was confronted with the underworld does not seem to be relevant.

## 7. Probability of Oliver's recovery

Oliver Twist fought against Victorian statistics of mortality since his birth. Dickens described Oliver's first "three minutes and a quarter" (2) of life in the following extract:

The fact is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to take upon himself the office of respiration, – a troublesome practice, but one which custom has rendered necessary to our easy existence; and for some time he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next: the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter. Now, if, during this brief period, Oliver had been surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time. There being nobody by, however, but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer; and a parish surgeon who did such matters by contract; Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. (Ibid.)

Oliver won over Nature, however, he had to win also over the workhouse system, which instead of immediately providing Oliver with care and food, postponed the help by nonsense administrative delays. Dickens attacked these delays by reporting:

The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities. The parish authorities inquired with dignity of the workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled in 'the house' who was in a situation to impart to Oliver, the consolation and nourishment to of which he stood in need. The workhouse authorities replied with humility, that there was not. (4)

According to Holden,

[m]ost of these [orphans] quickly perished. Others died more slowly from malnourishment, cold, exhaustion, neglect, cruelty or a range of diseases. Infants and children under five, overwhelmingly from the working-class, accounted for almost half of all the deaths in London during the mid-18th century. (In Zimmer)

However, Oliver managed to win the struggle with the workhouse system as well as he won the one when he was wounded during a robbery to which he was forced later in the story.

Whereas in the case of Oliver's birth, Dickens suggests it was Oliver's luck that he was born among people who did not care about him much, later in the story Dickens

contradictorily bless the fact that Oliver was cared by people from middle class.

A question whether Oliver would have any possibility to survive his wounds, if he was not cared by middle-class ladies and their family doctor, was queried by Dickens as

Oliver's ailments were neither slight nor few. In addition to the pain and delay attendant on a broken limb, his exposure to the wet and cold had brought on fever and ague: which hung about him for many weeks, and reduced him sadly. (284)

As Dickens further reported, "Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there." (292)

They were happy days, those of Oliver's recovery. Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly; everybody was kind and helpful; that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like Heaven itself. (116)

And again:

It was a happy time. The days were peaceful and serene; the nights brought with them neither fear nor care; no languishing in a wretched prison, or associating with wretched men; nothing but pleasant and happy thoughts. (292)

Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquillity, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village! (291)

It is not surprising that Oliver slowly recovered, not only physically but also mentally, under these circumstances. Due to his luck, he did not become one of many Victorian children in mortality statistics.

Level of mortality was shockingly high in the Victorian period. The situation started to change throughout the century due to better nutrition, improving environment and better medical care connected with decline of epidemic diseases. However, this was not true for a rate of infant mortality. Victorian period is marked by "the familiarity of children's coffins being trundled in glass-sided hearses down cobbled streets" (Wilson 307).

As Thompson wrote:

In the early years these high rates were thought to be distressing but largely unavoidable, the natural consequence of the hazards of childbirth and the frailty of babies that had to be accepted with pious resignation. Largely, but not completely, unavoidable; while medical and public-health efforts were aimed at high levels of general mortality rather than at infant mortality specifically, some medical and moralist opinion was directed at detecting peaks within, or on top of, the overall high level of infant mortality, and at assigning responsibility for them to maternal negligence [...] why infant mortality failed to fall during the nineteenth century at a time when general mortality declined by about 20 per cent remains something of a mystery. (115)

Dickens blamed all the mentioned factors that caused high infant and children mortality. According to Dickens, children died mainly in a result of poor environment, conditions and diet.

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens recorded:

when a child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered by accident; in any one of which cases, the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world, and there gathered to the fathers it had never known in this. (6)

Workhouse children did not necessarily succumb to a disease, but they fell ill and died due to the miserable conditions and neglect.

The [neglected] child was pale and thin; his cheeks were sunken; and his eyes large and bright. The scanty parish dress, the livery of his misery, hung loosely on his feeble body; and his young limbs had wasted away, like those of an old man. (Ibid. 151)

The high mortality rate is an issue that Dickens embodied in his novels by an instant shadow of death. When Oliver became an apprentice of an undertaker, he was confronted with death very often as “it was a nice sickly season. ... In commercial phrase, coffins were looking up; and, in the course of a few weeks, Oliver acquired a great deal of experience.” (49) Dickens further wrote that “there’s no denying that, since the new system of feeding has come in, the coffins are something narrower and more shallow than they used to be” (29) and during a burial “the grave was so full, that the uppermost coffin was within a few feet of the surface” (48).

Dickens further in the novel criticized a lax, appalling approach to ill workhouse people. In a conversation between Mr. Bumble, a parochial beadle, and Mrs. Mann, Mr. Bumble says: “[w]e put the sick paupers into open carts in the rainy weather, to prevent their taking cold.” (150)

Further Dickens noted a death of a pauper woman. The speech of her mourning husband is Dickens’s criticism of the absurdity of the workhouse system of relief. The man says:

I say she was starved to death. I never knew how bad she was, till the fever came upon her; and then her bones were starting through the skin. There was neither fire nor candle; she died in the dark – in the dark! She couldn’t even see her children’s faces, though we heard her gasping out their names. I begged for her in the streets; and they sent me to prison. When I came back, she was dying; and all the blood in my heart has dried up, for they starved her to death. I swear it before the God that saw it! They starved her! (45)

Dickens hereafter asked questions concerning mortality rates. He interrogated, “Fevers are not peculiar to good people; are they? Bad people have fevers sometimes; haven’t they, he?” (123) However, it was a general fact that mortality rates of population were very high in the early Victorian period in the whole society, no matter where people were on the social ladder.

In a passage describing a funeral of the dead woman, Dickens mentioned 2 boy characters that may also be used as an implicit criticism of society’s indifference.

[T]he two mourners waited patiently in the damp clay, with a cold rain drizzling down, while the ragged boys whom the spectacle had attracted in the churchyard played a noisy game at hide-and-seek among the tombstones, or varied their amusements by jumping backwards and forwards over the coffin. (47)

Further,

[t]he grave-digger shovelled in the earth; stamped it loosely down with his feet; shouldered his spade; and walked off, followed by the boys, who murmured very loud complaints at the fun being over so soon. (48)

The murmuring boys are middle-class boys, who do not seem to be aware to full extent of what death is. Funeral is fun for the boys as if death would be something that concerned only poor people and middle-class people did not have to be concerned.



Admittedly, the situation was better for the middle class and the upper class as they had more opportunities to live healthier life in a better living environment.

Thompson explained:

The healthier conditions of rural living, in terms of greater expectation of life and of lower death rates, were already well established by the 1840s. By the 1860s there was proof from the demographics statistics that enormous differences in infant mortality existed between rural and urban areas. [...] the explanation lay in environmental differences, in the abundance of fresh country air, and not in income differences or degrees of poverty. (117)

As already mentioned, Dickens was well aware of the enormous differences between life-threatening conditions in marginal parts of cities and healthier conditions in countryside. It was a common idea that children should be reared in nature and many middle class families that could afford it moved to a country. The conditions of rural living helped Oliver to recover after the robbery and, as mentioned before, Dickens did not provide him with much chance for survival in urban conditions.

The conditions of poor people were disconsolate on the score of miserable and polluted environment, insufficiency of proper food and impossibility to call a doctor due to financial situation. It is a general fact that mortality rates were much higher among poor classes.

The direct causes of these rates were largely gastro-intestinal disorders, with diarrhoea and dysentery the most frequently mentioned causes of infant deaths. These in turn were largely environmentally caused, the result of dirt, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, and fly-borne infections for which large concentrations of town horses and their dung may have been the main culprits. (Thompson 123)

Situation in cities was forlorn due to pollution caused by the Industrial Revolution and due to horse teams. Poor people had no choice but to live in poor quarters of cities.

In scenes that beggar belief, overcrowded slums sprung up like mushrooms overnight, lacking sanitation, clean water and ventilation. Filthy open cesspits, the standard form of primitive sanitation, became a breeding ground for all kinds of diseases such as cholera and typhoid, resulting in periodic epidemics. The polluted rivers, coloured with chemicals and dyes, that ran through these industrial towns were used for both drinking water and sewage. Under these conditions, infant mortality was very high. (Sewell)

The dead pauper woman from *Oliver Twist* who has been mentioned above lived in similar conditions. Oliver on the way to her house saw:

.... the most crowded and densely inhabited part of the town ... a narrow street more dirty and miserable than any they had yet passed through, ... high and large, but very old, [houses] tenanted by people of the poorest class ... some houses which had become insecure from age and decay, were prevented from falling into the street, by huge beams of wood reared against the walls, and firmly plated in the road ... many of the rough boards which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from their positions, to afford an aperture wide enough for the passage of a human body. The kennel was stagnant and filthy. The very rats, which here and there lay putrefying in its rottenness, were hideous with famine. (43 – 44)

“With hunger, filth, poverty, there came, inexorably, disease.” (Wilson 34) Epidemic diseases that spread within the society were primarily cholera, typhoid, tuberculosis, smallpox and black cough. As Wilson further wrote “most life-threatening of all the hazards facing the urban Victorians was the sheer squalor resultant from their failure to understand that cholera, typhoid and typhus fever were water-borne.” (155) Also Dickens remarked the high occurrence of diseases by stating that “[t]he oldest inhabitants recollected no period at which measles had been so prevalent, or so fatal to infant existence.” (1994, 49)

On the other hand, Charles Dickens did not condemn any of the criminal characters in his novels to death. Bill Sikes hung himself and, similarly, Fagin was sentenced to death by hanging. Neither of the thieves suffered from any disease. The reason might be that Charles Dickens did not consider such a death (a death from a disease) a proper death for a criminal. Charles Dickens wanted his readers to know that Sikes and Fagin were not connected with deaths of many other innocent people who suffered from diseases. The fact that Sikes and Fagin were sentenced to death was justice as justice was the aim that Dickens wanted to achieve.

Furthermore, children mortality rates were heightened also by accidents at work as children often worked with labours as inexperienced as the children were. Small children were employed in dangerous chimney sweeping or they cleaned and repaired machines which were usually in movement. Death or injuries of small labourers were very frequent in the Victorian period. Charles Dickens did not mention any work accident or injury, but this is just because Oliver managed to escape from becoming

a chimney-sweeper apprentice and the other works that Dickens focused on were not as dangerous to cause a death. Oliver and David could have stayed physically unharmed.

The situation started to change throughout the Victorian period as parents cared more for hygiene and as laws limiting child labour were enforced. The danger of child death was slowly disappearing. (Cunningham 77)

To conclude, Dickens accurately reported poor environment, nutrition and diseases of the time as some of the reasons of the high mortality rates and he also stressed the difference between social conditions of two different worlds. He considered death a punishment for criminals, therefore Sikes and Fagin died by violent death. A violent death of Nancy, which made her a saint-like figure similar to the figure of Oliver, was revenged. Speaking about Oliver and David, they were lucky children who survived all the mentioned factors of infant and children mortality, also due to the fact that their work was not physically dangerous. However, Dickens balanced their survival by condemning some of other minor characters to death. Furthermore, an instant shadow of death in his novels suggests that mortality was omnipresent in the Victorian period.

## 8. David and his family

The topic of relations cannot be generalized as many differences existed. The differences concern not only differences within classes, but also differences within individual families. Many factors have to be considered when discussing family relationships. Many children were sent to work or to boarding-schools, not to mention a system of workhouses, where children were separated from their parents.

Moreover, differences between child-father and child-mother relations were important. Cunningham wrote that “with romanticism, mothers regained the predominance they had held in the Middle Ages; child-rearing became a female occupation, and fathers were relegated to a subordinate position.” (69) Generally speaking, fathers were breadwinners who spent great parts of days at work in order to support their families. The consequence was that children hardly knew their fathers. They regarded them more as strangers.

As David mentioned in the first chapter of *David Copperfield*:

I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white gravestone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were – almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes – bolted and locked against it. (2)

David never knew his father as his father was dead. However, it is a question whether David's feelings would be different, if his father was alive. David referred that their house was “bolted and locked against it”. The reference to his father by the word ‘it’ confirms that David's father was a total stranger to David as many other fathers were strangers to their children.

Consequently, David felt more attached to his mother Clara. Clara was a passionate, loving and caring mother; however, Dickens depicted her as a weak woman and, therefore, predisposed to shrink under social prejudices and moral principles. David's mother became influenced by Mr and Miss Murdstone who tried to persuade her to increase a distance between her and her soon as “the higher up the social scale,

the more open about this distance from their children the parents were.” (Flanders 32)

As Cunningham explains this situation, “parent-child relationships became more distant and formal in the first half of the nineteenth century.” (61) The distance and formality between parents and their children was strengthened also by having a nurse, a nanny or a governess who could care for children. “There is no question that, however much the Victorians loved their children, they spoke of them, and thought of them, in a very different way than we have come to expect today.” (Flanders 31)

Thompson further explained,

[t]he regime operated by these arrangements was intended to treat children kindly, although unkind, thoughtless, or tyrannical nannies undoubtedly existed. It was also intended to bring children up in a highly structured, orderly, and regimented routine, partly to make life easy for parents by keeping children out of the way except when they were wanted, and partly because this was regarded as the best way to begin to train character and prepare children for their eventual adult duties and responsibilities. The nursery may not have been a nightmarish world ruled over by a female ogre with a rod of iron, but however cosy and gentle it was, it was designed to teach rules of discipline, obedience, honesty, cleanliness, tidiness, and humility. (126)

In *David Copperfield* a nanny named Peggoty was in charge of David. She was a contrary to the tyrannical nannies mentioned in the extract. She loved David and one might spot inconsistent feelings in David’s mother towards Peggoty. Clara likes Peggoty because Peggoty does all the household chores for her and saves her time. On the other hand, she is jealous of her as Peggoty spends more time with David. Clara sees that David likes Peggoty’s company and she starts to doubt her own motherly qualities. Clara feels that she has failed to be a good mother and enforces David to prove his feelings towards her:

“Am I a naughty mama to you, Davy? Am I a nasty, cruel, selfish, bad mama? Say I am, my child; say ‘yes,’ dear boy, and Peggoty will love you; and Peggoty’s love is a great deal better than mine, Davy. I don’t love you at all, do I?” (20)

According to Thompson, children felt inevitably distanced from their parents and they often kept warmer feelings to their nurses and nannies as they spent more time with them. (126) Therefore, feelings of loving and caring Clara were not unjustified and her doubts of her maternity were reasonable.

In addition, when reading the passage, in which Murdstones decide to send David to a boarding-school, it is Peggotty who does not have problems with showing her warm feelings towards David. On the other hand, Clara only says: “Good-bye, Davy. You are going for your own good. Good-bye, my child. You will come home in the holidays, and be a better boy.” (62) David’s immediate thought was “[Murdstones] had persuaded her that I was a wicked fellow, and she was more sorry for that than for my going away. I felt it sorely.” (Ibid.) Thompson confirmed that “children were left in no doubt that they were far removed from the centre of the world [of their parents]; they were subordinate to their parents.” (127)

The situation was rather different in poorer families. Many mothers from pauper families had to go to work as well as fathers. Children often did not see much of their parents as they spent numerous hours at work too.

Oliver Twist did not meet his parents either. He was an orphan, however, his workhouse companions might have had parents and, still, Dickens did not suggest any possible contact with them. As mentioned in the chapter about workhouses, children were separated from their parents when they entered a workhouse. However, the same sources also mention that parents could have visited their children. Nevertheless, such a system must have inevitably destroyed family life, which subsequently failed to exist.

As for poor people who were not forced to enter workhouses, a few reports were preserved. As Thompson wrote “Victorians clergy, doctors, or sanitary reformers who peeped in through the window at working-class home life almost invariably say something nasty, brutish, disorderly, and objectionable.” (128)

They saw drunken fathers belting their children for petty or imaginary offences; they saw distraught mothers quieting hungry children with Godfrey’s Cordial; they saw skinny, stunted, undernourished children with verminous clothes and their hair full of lice; they saw children who did not know how to use a fork and who had never seen a toothbrush; they saw gangs of young children playing rough games in the streets, hurling rude insults at strangers; they saw children who could not tell them who Jesus was, and who probably thought there is nothing wrong with incest. All these things existed. (Ibid.)

However, this is not a portrait that Dickens would provide about Oliver or David.

Dickens provided his readers with a portrait of middle-class families and relations in these families, as he was well-acquainted with them. His portraits of mutual relation

between David and Peggotty and also Clara give a true evidence of relations in Victorian families. As for poorer families, Dickens concentrated especially on depiction of their miserable conditions and not so much on mutual relations among its members. For this, Dickens cannot be criticised as “no simple generalizations about working-class childhood are likely to be correct” (Thompson 133).

## 8.1. Play time

Life of children was fulfilled with either work or studies, but they had also time for playing. Poor children made their toys from different materials, especially wood. Children from richer families had manufactured toys. The most popular toys were dolls and prams, pull-along toys, rolling horses, doll houses, toy soldiers and tea sets or marbles. Games that were played by Victorian children were, for example, football with a made ball or skipping games. Many games, particularly among richer classes, were controlled also for their moral content. (Thompson 123)

Children from working classes had more opportunities to spend their leisure time outdoor, providing that they were not at work. As Thompson suggested,

[a] working-class child was more likely than a child higher in the social scale to learn about cooperation, tolerance, and sympathetic understanding of others within the family, and about relationships with others in the local peer group outside the family. (134)

On the other hand, “the most respectable mothers tried to prevent their children playing out of doors, because of the danger of mixing with ruffians and of tearing their clothes.” (Ibid. 132)

However,

[t]he street life of children ... was rarely violent or criminal in the way that many middle-class observers supposed, but on the contrary was regulated by the rituals of games passed on from generation to generation. ... The important point, however, is that street games followed rules and conventions devised by the accumulated traditions of children themselves, and that in general they represented no deviance of parental or civil authority (Ibid.)

Dickens did not trouble himself with portraying children’s play time in a detail.

He mentioned David's imagination when he went to a church and fantasized "what a good place it would be to play in, and what a castle it would make, with the velvet cushion with the tassels thrown down on his [any friend's] head" (15). Later in the novel, David participated in flying a kite. However, no other specific reference to toys or games is provided. Concerning *Oliver Twist*, there is hardly any reference of playing either. Oliver Twist did not have any toy and did not participate in any game throughout the novel. Oliver and David may did not have any special toys, but it did not seem to be a matter that would bother them. They were too occupied with reality of their lives and did not have much time for imaginations, toys and plays.

The reason might be the fact that portraying play time was not important for the intended aim of Dickens's novels. Dickens wrote the novels with a wish to show miserable lives of children. Showing his characters surrounded by toys and playing careless games would not help him to reach his intention and his novels could lose their social impact on audience.

## **8.2. David versus Mr Murdstone**

It was a general concept of the period to use corporal punishment. "Most parents felt that discipline could not begin too early." (Flanders 35) This concept was widely spread among all social classes.

When David's mother married Mr. Murdstone, David's step-father, he had a conversation with little David:

"David," he said, making his lips thin, by pressing them together, "if I have an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?"

"I don't know!"

"I beat him."

I had answered in a kind of breathless whisper, but I felt, in my silence, that my breath was shorter now.

"I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, 'I'll conquer that fellow;'" and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do it. (46)

Similarly, Miss Murdstone, a sister of Mr. Murdstone, treated David in the same way. After her arrival, she disposed David in only two words: "Wants manner!" (48) David remembered in the novel: "If I move a finger or relax a muscle of my face, Miss



Murdstone pokes me with her prayer-book, and makes my side ache”. (52)

As David made a conclusion based on Murdstones’ treating him, he wrote:

Firmness, I may observe, was the grand quality on which both Mr. and Miss Murdstone took their stand. However I might have expressed my comprehension of it at that time, if I had been called upon, I nevertheless did clearly comprehend in my own way, that it was another name for tyranny; and for a certain gloomy, arrogant, devil’s humour, that was in them both. (49)

Also *Oliver Twist* was beaten and “repeated application of the cane” (1994, 18) was supposed to be good for him in a nameless workhouse. As the parochial beadle Mr. Bumble said “he [Oliver] wants the stick, now and then: it’ll do him good” (Ibid. 22).

The idea that punishing was the best way to rear children was widely spread. It was considered to be the best instrument for teaching children to discipline and obedience, tidiness, and humility. When Nancy, a prostitute, caught Oliver in a street, she appealed to scene witnesses. People reacted and advised her to beat Oliver more at home. They said that “[t]hat’s the only way of bringing him to his senses!” (134)

Parents were not generally remembered as affectionate, but they did on the whole appear to have been striving to do their best for their children, within the means available, and they showed concern to bring up their children in ways of behaviour, manners, and speech that were thought proper and which imparted a sense of right and wrong (134) ... The respectable majority [of children] were regulated and disciplined, rather than pampered or indulged; but that does not mean that they were not cherished. (Thompson 130)

Punishing of children was a general attitude, which could be compiled to one sentence from *Oliver Twist*, which is “[t]hey’ll never do anything with him, without striped and bruises” (57).

To conclude, it is not right to generalize relations between children and their parents or nannies. The unchangeable fact is that every family is and was different and Dickens described relations that he knew the best as he had experienced or seen them. Relations between David and his mother and his nanny were complicated by Clara’s remarrying Mr. Murdstone, but, generally speaking, they did not differ in any essential matter from relations in other Victorian middle-class families. Concerning the topics of play time and maintaining discipline, Oliver and David might have had fewer toys, but they were in contact with cane as frequently as their contemporaries.

## 9. Oliver and David get their lesson

At the beginning of the Victorian period, a unified system of primary education was not established.

Thus slowly and reluctantly the State took the first steps towards a national system of elementary education, but it was not till 1870 that all the children of the nation were brought into the system. (Armytage 369)

In the first half of the Victorian period, there existed many differences among different Victorian school institutions. Quality of education was usually dependent on whether institutions served to poor or rich pupils. There were also tremendous differences between education for boys and education for girls, who were usually taught to draw, sing, play an instrument or saw at homes.

Charles Dickens depicted only male characters in detail in his novels. We can see Oliver and David surrounded by their classmates, however, we do not see any female character being taught, except for brief mentions about singing or playing the piano as it was a standard for well-educated girls. It can be assumed that this fact reflects on the reality that education for girls was not so important in the first half of the Victorian period. Therefore, the chapter will deal only with education that was provided for boys.

Moreover, the chapter will consider only school institutions mentioned in Dickens's novels. As it was already mentioned, there existed many types of school institutions (ragged schools, public schools, Sunday schools, boarding schools). This chapter will concentrate on types of education and schools that Dickens sent David and Oliver to. The school institutions are a boarding-school, private home education and public schools???

Majority of children did not attend school at all or at least not on regular basis in the first half of the Victorian period. The situation improved through the century and education became compulsory for all children between 5 and 13 in 1870.

Therefore, it would be natural if Oliver Twist was one of the children who did not attend any school. In this case, he would stay illiterate at least till the time when he got to Mr. Brownlow's family. As an illiterate child from a workhouse, he would not be able to read.

However, Dickens depicted him as a smart boy, who knew London and who

proved knowledge of books, when Mr Brownlow asked him if he wanted to be a writer, and Oliver replied that he would rather become a bookseller. Furthermore, Fagin gave him a book about criminals to read and Oliver “[t]aking up the book which the Jew had left with him, began to read” (180).

Lucas (28) explained this discrepancy by saying that the same attitude as to the character of Nancy is used by Dickens to depict Oliver. He said that Oliver’s nature is not his class identity. (28) However, an image that a reader could make while reading the novel is that all Victorian children were able to read. However, the situation was the contrary.

## **9.1. Private lessons**

When *Oliver Twist* gets to a middle-class family, he is educated at home by private tutors. Even though, there is no specific description of Oliver’s private lessons, one can assume from the general impression of the novel that Oliver is happy in all aspects of his middle-class life. Therefore, one might expect that Oliver was satisfied with his private education.

On the other hand, in the story of *David Copperfield*, a space for long descriptions of David’s private lessons is provided. David read books with his nanny Peggotty from his young age and later on, Mr. and Miss Murdstone became in charge of his learning. David described the lessons with Murdstones in a very critical way:

these solemn lessons which succeeded those, I remember as the death-blow at my peace, and a grievous daily drudgery and misery. They were very long, very numerous, very hard – perfectly unintelligible, some of them, to me—and I was generally as much bewildered by them as I believe my poor mother was herself. (53)

David further recalled:

I come into the second-best parlour after breakfast, with my books, and an exercise-book, and a slate. My mother is ready for me at her writing-desk, but not half so ready as Mr. Murdstone in his easy-chair by the window (though he pretends to be reading a book), or as Miss Murdstone, sitting near my mother stringing steel beads. The very sight of these two has such an influence over me, that I begin to feel the words I have been at infinite pains to get into my head, all

sliding away, and going I don't know where. I wonder where they *do* go, by-the-by? (53)

Dickens does not criticize the private lessons, he criticizes the Murdstones for creating a stressful atmosphere for the lessons as David is frightened and stressed even before his lesson start. David further reports his feelings:

I hand the first book to my mother. Perhaps it is a grammar, perhaps a history or geography. I take a last drowning look at the page as I give it into her hand, and start off aloud at a racing pace while I have got it fresh. I trip over a word. Mr. Murdstone looks up. I trip over another word. Miss Murdstone looks up. I redden, tumble over half-a-dozen words and stop. I think my mother would show me the book if she dared, but she does not dare and she says softly: "Oh, Davy, Davy!" (53)

David says what happens when he finishes his lesson:

My mother starts, colours, and smiles faintly. Mr. Murdstone comes out of his chair, takes the book, throws it at me or boxes my ears with it, and turns me out of the room by the shoulders. (54)

The words of David when he recalls these lessons with Murdstones summarize the whole Dickens's opinions:

I could have done very well if I had been without the Murdstones; but the influence of the Murdstones upon me was like the fascination of two snakes on a wretched young bird. (55)

One might conclude that Dickens criticized private lessons. However, David finally got to Miss Betsy, his aunt, who taught him to be an honest and respectable man. Moreover, Oliver learnt at home when he got to the middle-class family of Mr. Brownlow and experienced happy moments. The fact is that Dickens was not against private lessons. He was against the system of the lessons when children had to parrot long passages from books and against the inhumane approach of some tutors. However, he did not provide any specific fact about private lessons. He just described his feelings towards it.

## 9.2. Boarding school

Dickens had probably never seen any other kind of school ... But he saw the cane and the buttered toast, and he knew that it was all wrong. In this sense, Dickens, the great romantist, is truly the great realist also. For he had no abstractions: he had nothing except realities out of which to make a romance. (Chesterton 1966, 87)

As Chesterton wrote, Charles Dickens seems not to have much theoretical knowledge of school institutions, but he concentrated on what his feelings were about the institutions to which he came into a contact and he did not approve their system.

One of the mysteries of English life, from the 1820s to the present day, is why otherwise kind parents were prepared to entrust much-loved children to the rigours of boarding-school education. (Wilson 278)

As Wilson further explained:

Many children tried to avoid school mainly because of the hot, noisy, odorous, and unsanitary classroom environment. ... The major public schools remained unsanitary nests of bullying, sexual depravity and – as far as a general knowledge of the natural or social world was in question – ignorance. (279)

David Copperfield was sent to a similar boarding school, Salem House School, by his step-father. David reported:

School began in earnest next day. A profound impression was made upon me, I remember, by the roar of voices in the schoolroom suddenly becoming hushed as death when Mr. Creakle entered after breakfast, and stood in the doorway looking round upon us like a giant in a story-book surveying his captives. (89)

And later:

In a school carried on by sheer cruelty, whether it is presided over by a dunce or not, there is not likely to be much learnt. I believe our boys were, generally, as ignorant a set as any schoolboys in existence; they were too much troubled and knocked about to learn; they could no more do that advantage, than any one can do anything to advantage in a life of constant misfortune, torment, and worry. (94)

From the description of the school days beginning, it is obvious that the atmosphere of the school was not convenient for education. Its description is similar to the description

of the lessons with Murdstones.

As it is written later in the novel:

“I have the happiness of knowing your father-in-law,” whispered Mr. Creakle, taking me by the ear; “and a worthy man he is, and a man of strong character. He knows me, and I know him. Do you know me? Hey?” said Mr. Creakle, pinching my ear with ferocious playfulness. (82)

It is obvious from the above written speech of Mr. Creakle to David that Creakle’s and Murdstone’s methods of teaching are very similar. The criticism of Mr. and Miss Murdstones as individual people is broadened to a criticism of one whole school institution.

On the other hand,

Doctor Strong’s was an excellent school; as different from Mr Creakle’s as good is from evil. It was very gravely and decorously ordered, and on a sound system; with an appeal, in everything, to the honour and good faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders. (237)

In such a school, children wish to “[learn] with a good will, desiring to do it credit” (237).

Charles Dickens tried to show that a humane approach of teachers to their pupils results in better educational aims, which is obvious from his critical comments on the Murdstones and Mr. Creakle and from praise of Mr. Strong. Similarly Litvack wrote that

Dickens believed in the extension of education on sound principles to all citizens; yet he did not offer specific strategies for achieving this aim. He exposed what he considered abuses and deficiencies, and praised what he believed were positive developments.

To conclude in words of Lucas

We can hardly object to a recommendation for a humane system of education, but we are forced to admit that vague recommendation more or less exhausts what Dickens has to offer us in his writing about the school. (181)

Charles Dickens chose types of education which he did not approve of and he referred to things that he did not agree with. By comparison of Salem House School and Doctor

Strong's School and also by comparison of the Murdstones and Miss Betsy, Dickens wished to change the general strict and impersonal approach to education. However, he did not provide any specific facts about the institutions or any suggestion how to achieve the change.

## 10. Conclusion

Dickens's realistic and romantic side of writing and their prevalence have been a frequently discussed issue by many writers on Dickens. Dickens's novels comprise romantic elements, but they also give a realistic account of the Victorian period. Among other things, they describe life of Victorian children.

Two novels, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*, have been chosen for the text analysis based on the fact that they provide a picture of the first half of the nineteenth century. *Oliver Twist* describes the period after the Poor Laws enforcement and *David Copperfield* was written at the end of the first half of the Victorian period. Moreover, both of the novels deal with a wide range of Victorian childhood issues that can be discussed. Therefore, topics of child labour and life in workhouses, education in different school institutions, relations between parents and their children, child mortality and health could have been analysed. As both of the characters from the novels experience both middle-class and working-class childhood, a picture of the both worlds can be compared.

As Dickens wished to reform the society's attitude, he used an innocent character of Oliver Twist to attract attention of the public to the abuse of poor children in workhouses. He realistically described the privation of children after the Poor Law enforcement. He portrayed conditions in which children had to stay without parental love, surrounded by restrained treatment. Dickens managed to provide his readers with an overall view on the inhuman workhouse system. He reflected on small food rations, objectionable accommodation and also widely-spread child labour, including information about a typical workhouse job of the time, oakum picking. Except for oakum picking, Dickens truly depicted horrors of chimney-sweeping, which is considered to be one of the worst Victorian jobs for children, by mentioning the fact that children used for this job were generally small in a direct speech of an adult chimney-sweeper. The fact that many of the little chimney-sweepers died due to the conditions of the job was also indicated. Child labour, which Dickens disapproved so much, had also its supporters not only within rich classes but also within poor classes. Poor families wanted their children to go to work and bring income. Dickens did not mention it in his novels because he did not want to evoke in his readers a thought that poor parents did



not mind their children to work. He wanted them to do the contrary, to feel pity for the children.

Furthermore, Dickens dealt with a topic of criminal behaviour and life of children within the London underworld. A character of innocent Oliver was compared with the corrupted soul of the Dodger and his friends to draw attention to the Victorian underclass. Nancy's personality traits stand between Oliver's and the Dodger's ones. Nancy finally proves that her soul is pure, but she does not find the strength to escape the corrupted world and is punished by murder. Dickens depicted the underworld characters in a romantic way as heroes. However, he chronicled the most frequent minor offences of children, pick-pocketing. By mentioning the Dodger's group going out every day, he also denoted the frequency of minor crimes.

Sikes and Fagin were finally punished and they died by a violent death as Dickens regarded death a punishment for criminals. The death of Nancy was revenged. Dickens also accurately reported death as a result of poor environment, nutrition and diseases of the time and he also portrayed the difference between social conditions of two different worlds and chances on survival of the children from different classes. Considering Oliver and David, they survived all the mentioned factors of high mortality rates, but Dickens balanced their survival by condemning some of other characters to death as death was omnipresent in the Victorian period.

Dickens reported also Victorian family relations. He portrayed Clara's jealousy of Peggotty, Peggotty's close attachment to David and David's love divided between the two women. The relations became finally more complicated by Clara's remarrying Mr. Murdstone, and a distance between parents and children typical in the Victorian period is obvious in Clara's and the Murdstones' behaviour. Family relations cannot be easily generalized, but David's relations with his mother and his nanny seem to be similar to relations of other middle-class children to their relatives. Also the topic of high discipline is included and both Oliver and David experience corporal punishment. As for relations in poor families, a generalization is not possible either. The story of Oliver Twist cannot provide an evidence of these relations as Oliver is an orphan.

Both of the characters are educated. Oliver Twist seems to be educated since the beginning of the story, which is irrational as majority of children were illiterate in the first half of the Victorian period. On the other hand, he is able to distinguish good and

evil and becomes a moral attendant of the Victorian world. Moreover, Dickens compared different school institutions to show the audience that Victorian approach to education is wrong. However, he only portrayed the strict and impersonal school environment, but he did not provide any specific facts about schools.

Charles Dickens wished to be “the best father” to his children, Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. As a model father, he did his best to help them overcome all the impediments that could have appeared in their lives. Therefore, he used the power to change the story line or modify any minor information if Oliver or David were trapped in the narrative and needed his help. Any minor inconsistencies with Victorian reality can be interpreted as pure exaltations in daily life of Oliver and David, but, generally speaking, they were provided with an opportunity to pass their childhood with their Victorian contemporaries and they could have shared with them all the suffering and merriment as they were described in secondary sources.

## 11. Resumé

Charles Dickens je jedním z nejvýznamnějších spisovatelů Viktoriánské doby. Jeho díla jsou považována za sociální protest proti Viktoriánské společnosti. S využitím humoru, nadsázky a ironie Dickens kritizoval průmyslovou revoluci a vznik společenských tříd, které měly za následek prohloubení společenských rozdílů.

Rodina Charlese Dickense pocházela ze střední třídy, avšak důsledkem dluhů otce rodiny, Johna Dickense, byl Charles Dickens nucen pracovat v továrně, aby alespoň z části dluh svého otce splatil. Bylo mu tehdy 12 let. Tato skutečnost jej natolik ovlivnila, že kritika dětské práce je zřejmá v mnoha jeho románech, mezi které patří také romány *Oliver Twist* a *David Copperfield*.

Oba romány se zaměřují na popis dětství hlavních hrdinů a nabízejí tak čtenářům možnost vytvořit si obraz o tom, jak vypadal život Viktoriánských dětí. Témata, která je možné detailněji zkoumat, jsou: dětská práce, život dětí v chudobincích, dětská kriminalita, vysoká dětská úmrtnost, vztahy mezi rodiči a dětmi a vzdělání. Cílem této práce je dokázat, že Charles Dickens popsal Viktoriánské dětství první poloviny 19. století realisticky. K práci byla využita především metoda textové analýzy primárních zdrojů a její porovnání s informacemi ze zdrojů sekundárních.

Viktoriánská doba je charakteristická velkými rozdíly ve společnosti. Se začátkem průmyslové revoluce se zvyšovaly rozdíly mezi lidmi a společenská hierarchie rozdělila obyvatelstvo na vyšší, střední, pracující vrstvu a spodinu, do které patřili ti nejhudší lidé. Tato vrstva byla také úzce spjata s kriminální činností. Toto rozdělení je zjednodušené, avšak pro účel této práce zcela postačuje.

Společenské rozdíly se nutně projevíly také v pojetí dětství. Viktoriánský koncept dětství byl značně ovlivněn Johnem Lockem a Jeanem Jackem Rousseauem. Díky těmto filosofům 18. století se dětství stalo důležitou etapou lidského života charakteristickou svou nevinností, bezstarostností a hravostí. Toto pojetí se šířilo převážně mezi společností střední třídy, avšak pro děti z nižších vrstev bylo takového pojetí nereálné.

Rodiny z nižších vrstev byly často závislé na příjmu svých dětí, které musely chodit do práce. V práci s nimi bylo zacházeno stejně jako s dospělými lidmi, někdy i hůře. Děti pracovaly mnoho hodin denně, dostávaly minimum jídla a často byly nuceny dělat ty nejhorské práce. Jednou z nejhorsších prací bylo vymetání komínů. Tato práce

byla určená těm nejmenším dětem, které mohly do komínů vlézt a ručně je vyčistit.

Ve zmíněných románech Charlese Dickense jsou také pasáže popisující hrůzy této práce. Dickens zmiňuje mimo jiné také fakt, že mnoho dětí při této práci zemřelo následkem udušení. Spousta dětí trpěla rakovinou plic nebo byla zmrzačena při pádu. Dickens jako další práci zmiňuje výrobu koudele z provázků, což byla jedna z typických prací ve Viktoriánských chudobincích. David Copperfield dále pracoval ve skladu, kde měl za úkol čistit a štítkovat láhve.

Dickens navíc kritizoval systém chudobinců, který byl zaveden v roce 1834, 3 roky před první publikací románu *Oliver Twist*. Dickens odsuzoval jednotlivé přiděly jídel, stejně tak i kruté zacházení s lidmi. Zaměřil se na vykreslení života malého sirotka a jeho přátel, protože oddělení rodičů od dětí bylo jedním z pravidel chudobinců. V příhodě, kdy Oliver Twist požádal o více jídla, Dickens napadá autority za jejich nelidský přístup. Stejně jako Oliver požádal o víc, také Dickens žádal víc. Dickens si přál více soucitu a lidskosti v přístupu k chudým lidem. Na humánnější přístup apeloval především vykreslením rozdílů ve společnosti. Oliver i David se alespoň na chvíli ocitli v obou světech – ve světě střední vrstvy i ve světě vrstvy pracujících, proto je porovnání obou vrstev zřejmé. Oliver se navíc v průběhu příběhu ocitl mezi kriminálními živly Londýna.

Mnoho lidí se stěhovalo z venkovských oblastí do průmyslových center za vidinou lepšího a bohatšího života. Avšak realita byla často odlišná od jejich očekávání. Mnoho lidí nesehnalo práci, industriální centra byla přelidněna a lidé často neměli z čeho žít. Spousta z nich nakonec byla bídou donucena ke kriminalitě. Nejčastějším způsobem obživy těchto lidí se stalo kapsářství. Oliver také odešel do Londýna, kde vstoupil do světa kapsářů jako průvodce, a ukázal tak čtenářům jejich způsob života. Seznámil čtenáře s organizovanou skupinou kapsářů, skládající se převážně z opuštěných dětí, vedenou Faginem, dále pak s prostitutkou Nancy, ale i zlodějem Sikesem a jeho společníky. Vliv romantismu na Dickense je zřejmý především ve vykreslení postav, avšak příhody, které Dickens popsal, jsou založeny na důvěryhodných faktech.

Kromě dětské práce, chudobinců a podsvětí je pro Viktoriánskou dobu typická také vysoká dětská úmrtnost. Děti umíraly v důsledku nízké životní úrovně, znečištěného prostředí a nevyživné stravy. Dalšími faktory navyšujícími statistické

údaje byly pracovní úrazy a také epidemie nemocí, které zasáhly Viktoriánskou dobu. Mezi nemoci patří především cholera, tyfus, tuberkulóza, neštovice, spalničky a černý kašel. Nemoci se nevyhýbaly ani dětem ze střední vrstvy obyvatelstva. Rodiče se často snažili přestěhovat s dětmi na venkov, kde byla úroveň životního prostředí vyšší v porovnání s průmyslovými městy, pokud jim to jejich finanční situace dovolila. Na venkově byl také více patrný vliv myšlenek J. J. Rousseaua, který zdůrazňoval soulad života dítěte s přírodou. Dětem ze střední vrstvy tak byl pobyt v přírodě umožňován co nejčastěji. Oliver také získal možnost pobýt na venkově, v domě obklopeném zahradou, která přispěla k jeho vyléčení poté, co byl postřelen během vloupání, ke kterému byl donucen.

Dickens ovšem nezobrazil jen starost rodičů o zdraví svých dětí, zachytil také vztahy mezi rodiči, dětmi a chůvami. Ve Viktoriánské době bylo typické, že si rodiny najímaly chůvy, pokud to pro ně bylo finančně přijatelné. Také David vyrůstal v péči své chůvy Peggoty. Dickens šikovně zachytil pocit žárlivosti v Davidově matce Claře, která si byla vědoma toho, že Davidova láska je rozdělena mezi ni a Peggoty. Davidův otec zemřel dříve, než se David narodil a stal se tak pro svého syna cizincem. Podobný vztah mělo ke svému otci mnoho Viktoriánských dětí, jelikož péče o děti byla rolí matek a otcové vydělávali peníze.

Vztahy v Davidově rodině se zkomplikovaly příchodem Murdstonových, pana Murdstona a slečny Murdstonové. Clara se opět provdala a vliv jejího nového manžela a jeho sestry se projevil také ve vztahu k Davidovi. Vztahy mezi rodiči a dětmi ve Viktoriánské době byly typické zachováním odstupu a odměřenosti. Děti byly ve výhradní péči chův a s rodiči přicházely do kontaktu pouze, když si to jejich rodiče přáli. Tento rezervovaný přístup byl zaveden také v Davidově rodině. Clara byla nucena nedávat své city k synovi otevřeně najevo, což David nejvýrazněji pociťoval především v soukromých vyučovacích hodinách, na které Murdstonovi dohlíželi.

Domácí hodiny se soukromými učiteli byly běžným způsobem vzdělávání. Dívky se učily především umění zpěvu, hry na hudební nástroj, vyšívání a kreslení. Jejich výchova směřovala k tomu, aby z nich byly reprezentující manželky. Chlapci byli v pozdějším věku často posíláni do internátních škol, jejichž úroveň se značně lišila.

Charles Dickens porovnával dvě školy obdobného charakteru, Salem House School a Doctor Strong's School. Srovnání těchto škol směřoval ke kritice

Viktoriánského způsobu výuky drilování a memorizováním. Některé Viktoriánské školy nesplňovaly hygienické podmínky a děti se snažily výuce ve školách podobných Salem Housu vyhnout. Na druhou stranu, spousta dětí neměla vůbec žádnou možnost chodit do školy, jelikož povinná školní docházka byla v Anglii zavedena až v roce 1870. Spousta Viktoriánských dětí tak bez vzdělání vyrostla v negramotné obyvatelstvo. Charles Dickens vykreslil Olivera Twista jako vzdělané dítě, které umělo číst. Oliver, který byl schopný rozlišit dobro od zla, se tak mohl stát důvěryhodnějším průvodcem Viktoriánským světem. Oliver, nepodlehli zlu a světu kriminálníkům, zůstal nevinným až do konce příběhu, a tak se stal morálním příkladem pro Viktoriánskou společnost. Charles Dickens tak také naznačil, že místo pro Viktoriánský kult dětské nevinnosti se najde ve všech vrstvách společnosti.

Charles Dickens se stal populárním spisovatelem již v době svého života. Jeho první román *Kronika Pickwickova Klubu* mu zajistil uznání široké skupiny čtenářů ze střední vrstvy. Jeho druhým románem se stal *Oliver Twist*, který vyvolal rozporuplné reakce čtenářů právě kvůli zjevné kritice Viktoriánské společnosti. Dickens psal o nižších vrstvách obyvatelstva, o které se až do té doby střední vrstva příliš nezajímala. Román vyvolal diskuzi o krutosti zákonů k chudým, dětské práci, ale i o kriminalitě. Kdyby Dickens nezaložil svůj román na realitě, těžko by tak mohl vyrovnat takové reakce ve společnosti. *David Copperfield* byl Dickensovým osmým románem a je nejautobiografičtější dílem ze všech jeho románů. Dickens použil některé události ze svého života, aby tak vypověděl příběh o svém životě. Vzhledem k tomu, že v době vydání románu byl Dickens již uznávaným spisovatelem, byl si vědom, že čtenáři snadno odhadnou na základě faktů, které o něm byly známy, že postava Davida je vlastně samotný Charles Dickens. S tím vědomím Dickens některá fakta pozměnil, i přesto však román vypovídá o realitě Viktoriánské doby.

Knihy Charlese Dickense se tak staly nejen zdrojem zábavy a kritických diskuzí, ale staly se také cenným zdrojem informací o Viktoriánské době pro mnoho dalších generací.

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