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**Cursed Victorian Children:**

**Portrayals of Child Labour in the Novels of Charles Dickens**

Prokletí viktoriánských dětí: Vyobrazení práce dětí v románech Charlese Dickense

Bakalářská práce

Lenka Špoková

Anglická Filologie

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, PhD.

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**Podklad pro zadání BAKALÁŘSKÉ práce studenta**

PŘEDKLÁDÁ:	ADRESA	OSOBNÍ ČÍSLO
ŠPOKOVÁ Lenka	Jeronýmova 425, Frýdek-Místek	F11728

**TÉMA ČESKY:**

Prokletí viktoriánských dětí: Vyobrazení práce dětí v románech Charlese Dickense

**NÁZEV ANGLICKY:**

Cursed Victorian Children: Portrayals of Child Labour in the Novels of Charles Dickens

**VEDOUcí PRÁCE:**

Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D. - KAA

**ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:**

- 1) Overview of child labour situation in 1800s: main historical events, statistics, deaths, legislation.
- 2) Dickens own experience as a child, his involvement with the issue.
- 3) Analysis of the theme in three novels: Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Little Dorrit.
- 4) Impact of his books on the issues.

**SEZNAM DOPORUČENÉ LITERATURY:**

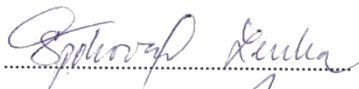
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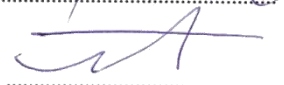
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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a řádně jsem v ní uvedla veškerou použitou literaturu.

V Olomouci dne .....

Podpis .....

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## INTRODUCTION

Memories of childhood are for most people the period of happiness, innocence and never ending adventure, but for Charles Dickens, it was something different, which haunted him for the rest of his life and never let him enjoy everyday precious moments. Instead, he kept on earning his living to avoid finding himself in the same social inconvenience he had once experienced. The concept of my thesis is based on the author's living memories which were reflected in his popular and world-wide known novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* or *Little Dorrit*, revealing in more details the actual standards of the social classes. My intent is to expose one particular feature that all the aforesaid characters have in common and that is child labour in industrial England.

Industrialization, renowned as the era of dramatic changes, brought with it many essential inventions such as steam power, coke-smelting or wrought iron, amongst other things. As these inventions were created, many families moved from rural areas into the cities and their living conditions began to vary. Social classes in England, two hundred years ago, might be perceived as two opposite worlds separated by the imaginary wall, the world of the wealthy and the poor. The oppressed low classes exposed to aloofness and indifference of corrupt society must have endured hardship and appalling working conditions that with a lack of sufficient income, nutrition and housing made their lives desperately miserable. Charles Dickens observed the hypocrisy and bribery of the contemporary authorities and was determined to deal explicitly with grievance and mistreatment of the employed children. The realistic image of apparent injustice and cruelty became a headstone for the above-mentioned novels.

Poverty is a persistent and complex issue currently considered as one of the most pressing problems of the globalised world. It is said to be a state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; conditions of being poor.<sup>1</sup> The International Labour Organization points out an appropriate definition stating "child labour is regarded as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. "poverty," <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/poverty> (accessed November 1, 2016).

their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.”<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Tuttle in her review remarked that “child labour refers to children who work to produce a good or a service which can be sold for money in the marketplace regardless of whether or not they are paid for their work.”<sup>3</sup> ILO’s and Tuttle’s theory are based on a strong feeling about those poor children who were, even two hundred years ago, victims of the social misdemeanour and the result of growing market demands for cheap but effective workers. Despite the fact that Charles Dickens is considered to be one of the most significant writers of the Victorian period due to his marvellous capability to depict social divergences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he never got over his terror of poverty and desperate attempts to help his family out of imprisonment for debt. On the basis of selected novels, my goal is to explore to what extent his own experience as a child and his involvement with the issue influenced his writing career.

The bachelor thesis is divided into two main sections, namely general and analytical. At first, the focal point of the thesis directs at the overview of child labour situation in the Victorian period providing the description of the most frequent occupations together with the example of children’ testimony in order to gain an insight into appalling working conditions. The following section is about to take into consideration author’s portrayal of life and his major reversal of his attitude towards the child labour. The reflections on author’s observations are to be seen in next chapter, where the intent of the thesis is to analyse interconnections between Dickens’ subjective perception of the topical issue and the selected novels reflecting the fragments of Dickens’ early childhood memories. Finally, the last section discloses the impact and the influence of Charles Dickens’ books touching on the subject.

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<sup>2</sup> “What is child labour,” *International Labour Organization*, <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm> (accessed August 3, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Tuttle, “Child Labor during the British Industrial Revolution,” *EH.Net Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert Whaples, <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/child-labor-during-the-british-industrial-revolution/> (accessed August 3, 2016).

## 1 OVERVIEW OF CHILD LABOUR SITUATION IN THE 1800S

The Industrial Revolution, generally considered from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a period of immense changes in all aspects of life. We may notice the obvious changes in the social strata. Before the era of factory expansion, the agrarian and rural societies predominated. People lived in the countryside in small and rural communities; they earned their living by farming or manufacturing and purchasing their hand-crafted products. The turning point of the British society was associated with scientific innovations and technological improvements. Industrial revolution introduced new techniques in the mining and manufacturing industry that contributed to the mass production of many goods; along with the development of transportation and communication, British society was regarded as industrial and urban. Unfortunately, the exploitation of child labours as well as the mistreatment of the poor and oppressed enormously rose at the expense of the economic prosperity.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1 CHILD LABOUR

It is no secret that children of working-classes or poor families had worked for centuries even before industrialisation. They basically started with housework when they were able to and do whatever they were requested. They were obliged to encompass a multitude of tasks, for instance, they assisted in the field cultivation or they helped in the family's enterprise. According to Tilly, "the interdependence of work and residence, of household labour needs, subsistence requirements, and family relationships constituted the 'family economy.'"<sup>5</sup> In the Victorian Era, child labour was covered in a broad spectrum of occupations such as Coal Miner, Chimney Sweeper, Factory Worker, Pottery Maker, Rat Catcher, Matchmaker, Ship Yard Helper, Seller in the Street, etc.<sup>6</sup> Emma Griffin substantiated that "most of these young workers entered the factories as "piecers", standing at the spinning machines repairing breaks in the thread. A few started as scavengers, crawling beneath the machinery to clear it of dirt,

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<sup>4</sup> "Industrial Revolution," *History*, <http://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution> (accessed October 20, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work and Family* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 12. <https://books.google.cz/books?id=-2PFBQAAQBAJ&lpg=PP1&hl=cs&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=true> (accessed October 20, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> "Victorian Child Labor and the Conditions They Worked In," *Victorian Children*, <http://www.victorianchildren.org/victorian-child-labor/> (accessed October 24, 2016).



dust or anything else that might disturb the mechanism. In the mines, children usually started by minding the trap doors, picking out coals at the pit mouth, or by carrying picks for the miners.”<sup>7</sup> I would like to provide the insight into at least a few of mentioned occupations that those children carried out.

## 1.2 THE ROLE OF CHILD LABOURERS

Working in coal mines was one of the most common forms of child labour because coal was regarded as one of the most prominent raw material in process of making steam power. The idea of children employment was profitable for many mining companies because children were smaller than the adults so that they were capable of squeezing through narrow spaces and convey their task, in addition to this statement they were at least three times less paid than their adult co-workers. Working conditions were appalling, considering being employed 12 to 18 hours a day it is easy to see how respiratory problems could arise. Children frequently suffered spine deformation or severe injuries due to confined spaces and the lack of safety awareness. It is presented that constant noise and rat infestation, as well as explosions or cave-ins, were regularly witnessed.<sup>8</sup> William Strange’s book *The Condition and Treatment of the Children Employed in the Mines and Collieries of the United Kingdom* exposed harsh conditions of poor children providing oral testimony of thousands of them. Here are just a few excerpts.

1. Philip Phillips (9 years old) - “Began work when seven years old. Has often fallen asleep when tired. Was burnt by the fire-damp nine months since, and laid by five months, expected to die. [...] “I was carried home by a man; the fire hurt me very badly; it took the skin from my face.” He returned to work three months after his recovery.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Emma Griffin, “Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians; Child Labour,” <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/child-labour#sthash.DoKSEiKg.dpuf> (accessed November 10, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> “Victorian Child Labor and the Conditions They Worked In,” *Victorian Children*, <http://www.victorianchildren.org/victorian-child-labor/> (accessed October 24, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> William Strange, *Condition and Treatment of the Children Employed in the Mines and Collieries of the United Kingdom* (London: 1842), 41. <http://www.bl.uk/collection-items/report-on-child-labour-1842> (accessed October 24, 2016).

2. Sarah Gooder (8 years old) - "I'm a trapper in the Gauber Pit. I have to trap without a light, and I'm scared. I go at four, and sometimes half-past three in the morning, and come out at five and half-past. I never go to sleep. Sometimes I sing when I've light, but not in the dark; I dare not sing then."<sup>10</sup>
3. Thomas Birkin (10 years old) - "About half a year since, Thomas Gibson, the loader, nipped him with his nails until he cut quite through the ears; has often nipped his ears both before and since."<sup>11</sup>
4. Margaret Gomley (9 years old) - "They flog us down in the pit, sometimes with their hand upon my bottom, which hurts me very much. Thomas Copeland flogs me more than once in a day, which makes me cry."<sup>12</sup>

The supervisors in the mines did beat the children, verbally abuse them and what is most pitiful they didn't take any consideration for their safety. Unfortunately, these testimonies were alike in another unpleasant occupation such as for example chimney sweeping. Working in the factories/mills or being employed as chimney sweeper did not bring better conditions either. Until Parliament passed several legislations, it was on a regular basis that children were regarded as a main labour source. Lawrence W. Reed in his essay labelled two major forms of child labour as "Parish apprentice children" and "Free labour children".<sup>13</sup> What is necessary to realise that there were plenty of child labourers who had to work under inadequate conditions for a minimal salary, but still after long terrible day they could go home and be with their families. According to Reed, "they belonged to the group of free ones, although there were still bound by duties."<sup>14</sup> As he further added to his statement, "parish apprentice children were those who had been taken in by the government and placed in orphanages. They were some of the first children to be brought into the factory setting. Rich factory owners approached

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<sup>10</sup> William Strange, *Condition and Treatment*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence W. Reed, "Child Labor and the British Industrial Revolution," *Mackinac Center for Public Policy*, last modified December 7, 2001, <http://www.mackinac.org/article.aspx?ID=3879> (accessed October 30, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

parish leaders to cooperate to be profitable on both sides.”<sup>15</sup> The idea was to take the children in, offer them food and housing in exchange for children’s work. As Carolyn Tuttle alluded, “these children were not paid a wage for the work they did; the compensation in basic needs was considered enough and in many cases just barely enough to survive on. These children were subject to unhealthy working conditions, long hours, and harsh punishment. It was uncovered that those children made up one-third of mills workers during 1784.”<sup>16</sup> In my opinion, child labour was seen through the lens of the upper class as harmless, moral and educational and the authorities intended to take full advantage of the labourers.

### 1.3. LEGISLATIONS, STATISTICS AND MORTALITY

When Michael Thomas Sadler the Leeds M. P. wrote *Report of the Select Committee on the Bill for the Regulation of Factories* nobody would reckon how much it would influence following events in Britain. His attempt was just to write a balanced report on the factory system, but in its final form, it exposed factory system in the worst possible light. According to him and his witnesses, childhood was being sacrificed at the expense of Britain’s industrial expansion.<sup>17</sup>

The traditional view of child labour in textile factories combined a strong moral condemnation of the system with belief that it was nevertheless necessary. Clark Nardinelli argued that “factory reformers called for the regulation of child labour rather than for its abolition, for they believed that families could not afford to give up the wages of children over the age of nine.”<sup>18</sup> No longer after the proper commissions were established to collect confirm evidence of that unfavourable situation, Parliament passed several Factory Acts, which brought light into dark times of child labour era. The Act of 1788 attempted to improve working conditions of Chimney Sweeper and their Apprentices. The Factory Act 1833 and Mines Act 1842 forbade the employment of children under the age of 9. The Factory Act 1847 limited working hours to 10 hours a

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<sup>15</sup> Lawrence W. Reed, “Child Labor and the British Industrial Revolution.”

<sup>16</sup> Wade Thatcher, “Child Labor During the English Industrial Revolution,” <http://wathatcher.iweb.bsu.edu/childlabor/> (accessed November 1, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Laura Del Col, “The Life of the Industrial Workers in the Nineteenth-Century England,” <http://www.victorianweb.org/history/workers1.html> (accessed November 2, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Clark Nardinelli, “Child Labor and the Factory Acts,” *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 4 (1980): 739-55, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2119999>.

day for women and children.<sup>19</sup> However, obeying the laws was in slow progress because the fines were not large and enforcement was not so strict enough. Children in the workplace remained largely unprotected from the mistreatment at the hands of employers and co-workers.

The population of England and Wales was at the second half of the 19th century nearly 18 million, during next 30 years it came up to almost 26 million. Despite the rapid growth of the inhabitants and several Factory acts approvals, the number of working children under the age of 15 employed in the mills and factories was still high. However, Peter Kirby remarked that “it is interesting that despite extensive urbanisation, traditional forms of production remained dominant, and most working children - males aged ten to fourteen were in agricultural, workshop, or domestic production represented 52% in comparison with 15% of same-aged males in large factories, while 70% of females again in the same age-group were employed in agriculture, handicrafts, or domestic service comparing with 24% in factories.”<sup>20</sup> Fortunately, the child labour rate started to decrease with the benefit of hindsight and the British society in gradual progress evolved into the state of social democracy.

As far as child mortality is concerned, the mortality rate of young workers in the Victorian era did not directly respond to child labour itself, of course, the evidence of children’s severe injuries were writ large at that time and it might have led to infection, amputation or inability to get back to work, but there were different factors causing death to many children at early age such as convulsions, tuberculosis, measles or smallpox.<sup>21</sup> In my opinion, living standards were not sufficiently developed, the sanitary conditions and medical treatments scarcely achieved the professional qualifications, and therefore we may assume under these circumstances it might have paved the way for infectious diseases, especially among poor families living in the execrable housing conditions.

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<sup>19</sup> “Living Heritage: Reforming society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century,” *Parliament*, <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/19thcentury/keydates/> (accessed November 3, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Peter Kirby, “History of Child Labor in Britain,” In *The World of Child Labor: An Historical and Regional Survey*, ed. Hugh D. Hindman (New York: Routledge, 2015), 544.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Millward and Frances Bell, “Infant Mortality in Victorian Britain: The Mother as Medium,” *The Economic History Review* 54, no. 4 (2001): 699-733, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3091628>.

## 2. DICKENS OWN EXPERIENCE AS A CHILD AND HIS INVOLVEMENT WITH THE ISSUE

“New thoughts and hopes were whirling through my mind, and all the colours of my life were changing?” –David Copperfield

Charles Dickens was one of the most remarkable people who had the power of voice and pen to open his readers' eyes and afforded illuminating insight into a real world of misery, despair and injustice of the poor and the oppressed. He was an empathetic person not afraid of facing reality and calling things by its right name.

### 2.1 CHILDHOOD

The whole story of the worldwide known author and social worker began on the seventh of February 1812, when Elizabeth and John Dickens became parents of their second child who was given the Christian name Charles John Huffam (“Huffam” after his godfather Christopher Huffman “Rigger to His Majesty’s Navy”).<sup>22</sup> The Dickens with their two children, older Frances Elizabeth (called Fanny) and newborn Charles, resided at 1 Mile End Terrace, in the little house on the outskirts of Portsmouth, now frequently visited 393 Commercial Road - Charles Dickens birthplace Museum.

Five months after Charles birth, the family removed to Hawk Street, one out of several moves which were marked in Dickens childhood memories and there is no doubt that these experiences must in some way have affected him.<sup>23</sup> Then, the second daughter, Letitia was born. The Dickens children were brought up by their mother who undertook the care and early education of the children and looked after the household, while Mr Dickens held the post of a clerk in Navy Pay Office. According to his colleagues, he was considered to be a fellow of infinite humour, lively, chatty and agreeable person appreciated by the authorities for his work and value.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, Hennessy opined that “Mr Dickens was said to be a jovial opportunist without money sense in addition to that he was irresponsible running up of bills so that he

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<sup>22</sup> Harold Collett Dent, *The Life and Characters of Charles Dickens* (London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1900), 30.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Vintage Books, 2002), 10.

<sup>24</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 33-36.

borrowed from any person to make him cash advances.”<sup>25</sup> One might assume that it was probably the reason why they changed residence quite often, another more prevalent theory was pointing to his occupation; according to Hennessy “as naval pay clerk had no fixed residence and was liable to be detached for service about the country at short notice.”<sup>26</sup>

## 2.2 BIRTHPLACE OF THE AUTHOR’S IMAGINATION

In 1817 after several removals the family ended up at 11 Ordnance Terrace on the border-line between Chatham and Rochester.<sup>27</sup> At the time of moving in, Charles was five years old and here he stayed until the age of nine. John Forster, a close friend of Charles and the author of Dickens’ autobiography, alluded to that period as the most durable of Dickens’ early impressions were received. Forster claimed, “Dickens was a lively boy of a good, genial, open disposition, not quarrelsome, as most children are at this age.”<sup>28</sup> As Dent commented, Dickens was a very queer small boy who had to struggle with often repeated illnesses at the form of attacks or giddiness accompanied by severe pain which prevented him from being at play in the churchyard with rest of his playmates.<sup>29</sup> Despite his unstable health condition, he did not lack entertainment. He was fond of reading books, thanks to his father short collection of novels comprising titles such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *Roderick Random*, *Tom Jones*, or *Arabian Nights*; he could let his imagination set him free from being held in illness captivity. When recovered, he enjoyed singing a comic song or reciting poems; together with other children, they organised homemade concerts and playacting, especially accompanied by his sister Fanny (who also had a talent for music). As Dent noted, they were seen through father’s lens as “distinct assets on social occasions.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Una Pope-Hennessy, *Charles Dickens 1812-1870* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 9th ed., vol.1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872), 3-5, <https://archive.org/details/lifecharlesdick04forsgoog>.

<sup>29</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 38-39.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

James Lamert, a stepson of Aunt Mary Allen, also played a key role in Charles' childhood. At first Lamert was admired by Charles and his companions for being a chief of those child actors to whom he helped to compose their own fictional performance, but later on, Charles could not stand Lamert for his later solution to the author's family depressing situation. Charles was a lover of theatre, especially pantomime. It is said in Dent's book that Dickens was just a little boy when visited the Theatre Royal at Rochester to see *Richard III*, in addition to that he was no more than eight his relatives took him to London to behold the splendour of Christmas Pantomime including great clown Grimaldi.<sup>31</sup>

Charles was undoubtedly an observant child, who made the best of exploring the area of Chatman and Rochester. Peter Ackroyd describes Chatman as "rough and dirty place, the haunt of the sailors and soldiers who were stationed there whereas Rochester seemed to be more respectable - an ancient market-town with his own castle, cathedral, and guildhall."<sup>32</sup> However looking through Charles' eyes, it was the birthplace of his fancy provided him enough vivid experiences, which he later applied as the primary source for the descriptive style of his remarkable writings.

Exploring the array of main sources I observed that there is no clear evidence whether Charles knew about his father's "money difficulty" from the early beginning or not, but the decline of the family budget was inevitable. The family was forced to economise once again so they were shifted into a cottage in St. Mary's Place, which was located in the vicinity of a Baptist chapel. William Giles, the son of the local pastor, had recently founded a small school in Clover Lane. Despite Mr Dickens' unstable financial situation, he decided to send both Fanny and Charles to school. Mr Giles recognised in Charles hidden talent and his "unusualness" so that he did his best to provide him with a proper education.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately Charles' study enthusiasm would not last for a long time.

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<sup>31</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 41-42.

<sup>32</sup> Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 17-18.

<sup>33</sup> Pope-Hennessy, *Charles Dickens*, 45-46.

### 2.3 THE BEGINNING OF DETERIORATION

The family was on the move again heading to London while Charles remained in Chatham to finish the winter term at school and was supposed to rejoin them later, but the baby sister died and he was called home to attend the funeral. Charles describes that cold welcome as "... there was Debt at home as well as Death, and we had a sale there."<sup>34</sup> To make his mental condition worse he claimed that "worse than debt or death he found his parents in a state of paralysed confusion."<sup>35</sup> It is certainly nothing to be surprised at. In fear of creditors Mr Dickens signed away most of his income, but he was still closer to his bankruptcy. Their financial difficulty made them move into a small house at Bayham-street, Camden-town. Forster describes the area as the poorest part of London suburbs, where Charles found hardly any sense of happiness that he later recalled as "being at a solitary condition unaccountable state of neglect."<sup>36</sup> Charles was charged to go on some poor errands including regular visits to the pawnbroker's. He was at that time nine years old, mentally far beyond his actual age, with his strong power of observation experiencing his inescapable degradation.

A deep sense of grievance had come to be apparent when his older sister Fanny gained a scholarship at The Royal Academy of Music.<sup>37</sup> As Harold Dent expressed, "despite Dickens' current situation he was not introspective, his mind craved activity."<sup>38</sup> He found interest in exploring London and the surroundings, especially the area of the Strand and Covent Garden, which served as inspiration for his later writing. Unfortunately, the family savings were almost exhausted so that Mrs Dickens decided to take matters into her own hands and open the school, but after her unsuccessful attempt to save the desperate family members including five children by that time, she lost the last remaining piece of hope too.

One day, James Lamert turned up with a suggestion to their misery. James' cousin George Lamert was running Warren's Blacking Factory at Hungerford Stairs. He

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<sup>34</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 49-50.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 50-51.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 52.



came with the idea of employing Charles at the factory where he would get paid six or seven shillings a week. Mrs Dickens immediately agreed whereas Mr Dickens was in two minds, on one hand, he wished Charles to be educated, on the other hand, he knew he had no other option. Thus the inevitable became the real. On 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1824, on Charles' twelfth birthday, he went down to the blacking warehouse. According to Harold Dent, James Lamert might have thought that comparing destitution of other children at that time, he did the boy favour as he "promised him instruction and a station,"<sup>39</sup> but Charles perceived the gesture of good will as a betrayal not only from his friend but from his family as well.

As Hennessy described, "Dickens' work consisted in tying bottles up neatly and sticking labels on to them, a task at which he soon became expeditious."<sup>40</sup> Every day he went three miles from Camden Town to the Strand, worked for 10 hours with one meal break and one tea break and then in the late afternoon he was returning home. Peter Ackroyd commented that "the boy of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily and mentally, now sitting at a work-table with scissors and string and paste, looking out at the dreary river just beneath him, bearing away his hopes."<sup>41</sup> Charles in his latter years revealed his secret inner feelings to his friend John Forster, who wrote the memoirs out of them and enabled readers to empathise with the author's affliction. I would like to provide an excerpt from his testimony:

"No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associated with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life."<sup>42</sup>

From the Charles' point of view, it is apparent that he must have been deeply affected by his sudden responsibility for the family sake.

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<sup>39</sup> Pope-Hennessy, *Charles Dickens*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 33.

Two weeks after Charles' commencement of work, Mr Dickens was arrested for a £40 debt and imprisoned in the Marshalsea. Even though Mrs Dickens made every effort to save some money of purchasing for example brooches and spoons, she finally resigned; at Lady Day she gathered up her children (except Charles) and joined her husband in the Marshalsea. While Charles was working all day in the factory and roaming the streets at the evening to cheer his mind up, his parents did not seem to be bothered about solving their miserable situation. They were quite confident that the creditors would not come and exact the owed sum from them. It follows that Charles was probably the only one hoping for better future.

Three months had passed before Charles could see light at the end of the tunnel. As Dent's work alleged, Charles' grandmother died, but she had bequeathed in her will the savings among her two sons so that the owed sum was at once paid into court and the Dickens family was released on 28<sup>th</sup> May 1824.<sup>43</sup> Charles' working conditions remained the same until another crucial moment had occurred. Once he was seen by his father when standing at the window and working with his fellow so that they captured the public attention and created a little crowd of curious passers-by in front of the factory. Dent stated that Mr Dickens was outraged about the fact that his son "was allowed to work under the gaze of the vulgar mob."<sup>44</sup> He picked a quarrel with John Lamert over a humbling experience, which led to the termination of the employment at the factory. Whilst Mr Dickens was firmly determined to compensate Charles all inconvenience and give him the opportunity to study properly, Mrs Dickens asked urgently for taking the boy back to the factory. The mother's statement left a scar on Charles' heart, he then declared his resentful attitude to her, "I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget that my mother was warm for my being sent back."<sup>45</sup>

Luckily, Charles was never sent back to the factory, instead, he continued in studying and developing his writing skills that paved the way for his forthcoming occupations.

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<sup>43</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Pope-Hennessy, *Charles Dickens*, 11.

### 3 ANALYSIS OF THE THEME IN THREE NOVELS

Charles Dickens is the prolific author of many noteworthy novels aiming at social issues; especially themes of poverty, injustice or children status in society were regularly targeted in his works. The following section of the thesis will analyse three worldwide known novels reflecting either literal or partially adjusted fragments of memories of author's own experience.

Charles Dickens was justly acknowledged for the capability of reflecting life as it was indeed seen through the lens of many burghers coming from the lowest social stratum. We may notice his frequent involvement of wretch child in the array of his novels. The author regarded a child as an embodiment of physical and mental purity, innocence, and delicacy. This is probably the reason why he opted for children who were left to their fate living in grinding poverty although he himself as a young boy never met with the real depth of poverty or daily starvation. Harold Dent delineated Charles' experience with words, "he came near enough to it, to be able, with his keen senses, to appreciate what it meant, [...] the fact that in the London of the 1820's poverty, hopeless, filthy, and frightful, with its dreadful concomitants of disease and drunkenness walked openly through streets, beholden by all."<sup>46</sup> The realistic picture of horrible living conditions of the poor in London became an integral part of many Dickens' novels.

#### 3.1 OLIVER TWIST

The novel *Oliver Twist*, or *The Parish Boy's Progress*, was and (even today) still is considered to be ground-breaking in the English literature in the way of depicting the main protagonist, a child to be precise. The child-hero stories were featured in many books back then as Peter Ackroyd asserted "orphan tales were quite common in that period,"<sup>47</sup> but the new thing was noticed in a strong connection between the author's penetrating observations on deprived and abused children; Dickens in this context consequently created a child protagonist reflecting the aspects of contemporary plight of London paupers and author's own experience from childhood.

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<sup>46</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 149.

<sup>47</sup> Ackroyd, *Dickens*, 121.

Charles Dickens toyed with the idea of writing an orphan story while he had been publishing *The Pickwick Papers* in monthly instalments of Bentley's Miscellany magazine. Once the notion of new story enrooted in his mind he became completely enthusiastic about it, it exceeded all his expectation and soon, the story of a small boy who "wanted some more" came into existence. It was published in monthly instalments along with *The Pickwick Papers* from 1837 to 1839.

Dickens intentionally wrote a novel about sad-looking orphan facing everyday mistreatment of any sort to make general public to stop and think about the image of charity child. The beginning of the novel outlines the setting of the workhouse where Oliver was brought up with many other orphans by self-seeking and malicious old woman (the workhouse superintendent) Mrs Mann who with an easy conscience abused halve-starving children, because "she was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; especially she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself."<sup>48</sup> Dickens depicted Oliver's unhealthy appearance as a result of inadequate diet and harsh living conditions. The protagonist is described as "a pale thin child diminutive in stature, and with small breast discovering the plenty of room to expand thank to the spare diet of the establishment."<sup>49</sup> In fact, the author applied Oliver's miserable existence as an example of the real state of appalling living and health conditions of many oppressed orphans and members of poor families in Britain.

His direct concern pointed to the Poor Law 1834, which the main purpose was to reduce unemployment and mortality figures and bring bearable living conditions for all. But this law had several flaws. Charles saw the hypocrisy and bribery, and he never came to terms with it. He remarked on the image of the sharp practice of those "merciful" institutions in a sarcastic way:

"Oho!" said the board, looking very knowing; "we are the fellows to set this to rights; we'll stop it all in no time". 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.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Adventure of Oliver Twist* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1866), 4, <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=NexLAAAACAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=cs&pg=GBS.PR3>.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

The principal concept lay on sorting the paupers into the workhouses situated within towns and villages. People were assigned to the same-sex quarters and children were sent to “baby farms” under the leadership of the officials with no sympathy or interest. I have to agree with the opinion of Uma Pope-Hennessy who asserted that “however justifiable in theory, in practice they created hardship; in so far as able-bodied persons needing relief were obliged to leave home and go to live inside the Union.”<sup>51</sup> Following example taken from the novel reflects the sorrowful fate of a man whose family lived rather in grinding poverty than being separated in the workhouse, but it cost his wife life:

“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...She couldn't even see her children's faces. I begged for her in the streets, and they sent me to prison. When I came back, she was dying [...] they starved her to death.”<sup>52</sup>

This was a real image of the inefficient social policy. People were forced to struggle with their miserable lives trying to secure themselves against total starvation. It is obvious from the example that the family lacked food insufficiency and they were apparently living in the dark and cold place left to their fate. On the contrary, the parish authorities were satisfied with reducing numbers of the homeless, beggars and poor families often seen roving the streets, because most of them were hidden behind the walls of those workhouses.

As for Oliver, a frightened small boy at the age of nine was brought before the parish authorities who were liable for the subsequent emplacement. Based on their decision he was then transferred into the workhouse for the adult orphans, where he was supposed to pick oakum. There comes another paradoxical passage of the book in which Dickens wanted to emphasise the absurdity of those authorities representing themselves as an institution of Church and performing charities for the poor Oliver. I would rather denominate it as the irony of Christianity because their attitude towards the poor and the oppressed was far from the precepts of the real Christianity. We may perceive Dickens' observation about this religious-like belief in the following excerpt:

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<sup>51</sup> Pope-Hennessy, *Charles Dickens*, 134.

<sup>52</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 41.

“I hope you say your prayers every night,” said another gentleman in a gruff voice, “and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you, like a Christian”. [...] “Well, you have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade, said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair.”<sup>53</sup>

In my opinion, Dickens laid his head on the block, when he was forthcoming about dishonest official practices. They were presented as generous and humane, but the reverse was true.

Child labour was abundant in the various industrial fields during the Victorian period. The most common occupations were Coal Miner, Factory or Mill Worker or Chimney Sweeper. I would assume that any child was fond of working at any particular industry field as being mistreated by their masters, but it was evident that Chimney Sweeper ranked among the least popular occupations. I have concluded my statement from the evidence referring to the third chapter where Dickens described Mr Gamfield, chimney sweeper, as a cruel, aggressive and unsympathetic person, who was searching for an apprentice, as the author noted, “Gamfield’s villainous countenance was a regular stamped receipt for cruelty.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore there is no surprise that Oliver grew pale and burst into tears asking the authorities for mercy. He would rather return to the “dark room where they would starve him, beat him or kill him”<sup>55</sup> than being sold to this master sweep. There is a wide range of evidence that apprentice chimney sweeps were treated almost as slaves before several laws were passed, many children at an early age were frequently hired because of their exiguous physical proportions so that they were able to go down through the narrow chimney and carry out their task. The masters were obliged to provide the children proper food and clothing, but in real they underfed the apprentices for one particular reason and that was to keep those children thin enough to be permanently suitable for their job. Severe injuries, body deformations even death were on a regular daily basis.<sup>56</sup> I believe that many employed children fall victim to unscrupulous and corrupt society no matter which industrial field they were assigned to. Unfortunately, some child labourers found a different way to break free from a

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<sup>53</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>56</sup> “Victorian Child Labor and the Conditions They Worked In,” *Victorian Children*, <http://www.victorianchildren.org/victorian-child-labor/> (accessed December 10, 2016).

domination of their masters, either orphans or the paupers who successfully managed to escape from being kept in the workhouse must have found another option to survive and so they joined London's underworld.

The novel *Oliver Twist* provides the intimate knowledge of the depth of London's crime. Dickens held the opinion that the state of poverty and the appalling living conditions drove many people into theft, prostitution or murder. As Julian Hanson stated, "the crime may be observed as the author's sophisticated intention to enrich the novel with many contrasts: sentimentality vs. brutality, good vs. evil, innocence vs. corruption."<sup>57</sup> Charles Dickens chiefly encountered moral conflict, both public and personal, firmly convinced that any human virtue can be corrupted by an oppressive society. Additionally to the previous claim, William Lankford supported Dickens' statement, "Dickens' attempt was to dim the false glitter surrounding something which really did exist, by showing it in all its unattractive and repulsive truth."<sup>58</sup> In my opinion, the novel comprised all contrary aspects mentioned by both Hanson and Lankford. On one hand, we may notice that *Oliver Twist*, the orphan, represented the perfect example of the embodiment of purity and innocence facing the corrupted and wicked individuals. On the other hand, *The Artful Dodger* (pickpocket), *Betsy* and *Nancy* (prostitutes) were described as the orphans who proved to be criminals either voluntarily or not. The Jew *Fagin*, central evil character, symbolised the imaginary refuge for the wretched orphans. They fulfilled *Fagin's* requirements in exchange for enough food, sufficient clothing and decent housing.

Charles produced the novel inspired by the topical issues with the main purpose, he pointed to the inner fight of each individual affected by the surroundings in which these characters occurred. I would like to support my statement with the following example of *Fagin's* attempt to gain control over *Oliver*:

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<sup>57</sup> Julienne Hanson, "Presentiment, Contrast and Ambiguity in Fictional Space: The London Novels of Charles Dickens and Peter Ackroyd," <http://joss.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/journal/index.php/joss/article/download/130/pdf> (accessed December 5, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> William T Lankford, "The Parish Boy's Progress: The Evolving Form of *Oliver Twist*," *PMLA* 93, no. 1 (1978): 20-32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/461817> (accessed December 2, 2016).

“In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils, and having prepared his mind by solitude and gloom to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it and change its hue forever.”<sup>59</sup>

In my opinion, the author’s aim was to outline the image of the vulnerable and wronged person who might have become a criminal because of his unendurable solitude, poor prospects, and no family background. As a result of the uneasy conditions the character would probably yield to criminals’ pressure and his soul would be irretrievably poisoned.

Dickens, a master of ingeniously constructed narratives, created the initial illusion of the notorious criminals, but as the story was gradually developing, it was revealed that not all of them concurred with Fagin’s intrigues, but they had no other option. Under a constant psychological pressure, they resigned themselves to their fate. I have drawn upon the statement of Nancy, who was persuaded by Rose Maylie to leave the criminal gang and start over, but her response to that pleading was contrary to what readers might have expected. According to Nancy, it was too late to “turn from a life of sin and sorrow.”<sup>60</sup> After that, she justified her claim, “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.”<sup>61</sup> I believe that Nancy represented one out of many desperate individuals who were aware of their no-win situation, probably somewhere deeply in their consciousness they hoped for the release, but outwardly they reconciled themselves to the fact that they got beyond the point of no return.

Charles Dickens was the author of “feelings”; his singularity was rooted in transferring those inner feelings, opinions or attitudes into the breathtaking novels each specifically focusing on the particular issue. *Oliver Twist*, as well as other Dickens’ works, represented in certain extent message to all his readers, his aim was to speak up for those who remained in the silent and dark corners of the shabby buildings. Harold Dent exactly delineated the situation, “whenever one went, whenever one lived, in London at any rate, barefooted, hungry, and vicious poverty leaned against the street

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<sup>59</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 156.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 406.



lamp, hawked and thieved on the pavement, and lived just round the corner.”<sup>62</sup> Charles cherished these observations in his bitter memories when he was wandering the street as a young boy employed at Warren’s Blacking Factory. Even though the author is regarded as a sentimental writer with a tendency to exaggerate things, this book gradually won the hearts of the public readers.

### 3.2 DAVID COPPERFIELD

Charles Dickens once declared, “... no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have believed it in the writing. [...] Of all my books, I like this the best. 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.”<sup>63</sup> This statement became author’s introductory speech to his eighth novel published in 1850.

Like most of other Dickens’ novels, *David Copperfield* at first appeared in monthly instalments in 1849. Many devoted readers acquainted with the story of Charles’ life considered the book to be a true autobiography. I believe the author intended to push his unique writing skills a little bit further so that he created the story of the boy with a certain degree of the resemblance of himself, but it should not be mistaken for his autobiography because he never wrote any. He was said to be prone to interfuse his own unforgettable emotional experience with fictional story components. Dent remarked that “few great men have ever revealed themselves more fully to the world than did Dickens,”<sup>64</sup> and I cannot but agree with this claim because Dickens belonged among those remarkable writers who managed to remove the imaginary wall between reality and world of fiction to let his memories and observations come alive.

While the story of *Oliver Twist* dealt with the orphan boy, who had to face the sorrows of everyday life among the paupers and working class, the story of *David Copperfield* was written from a different perspective, as he was born into the middle class financially secure family. Despite his social stratum he had to likewise experience sadness and suffering as well as *Oliver* suffered the life full of hardship. Dickens’ intent

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<sup>62</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 150.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Dickens, preface to *David Copperfield* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1994).

<sup>64</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 344.

was to rebut the illusion of the perfect life of the wealthy. He seemed committed to the idea that the moral sense of each person was more valuable than any tangible property. The reflections on child mistreatment were to be seen as a result of the supremacy of the morally corrupted individuals over the poor and innocent.

Such attitude may be spotted for example in David's family. Mrs Copperfield got married to an unscrupulous manipulator and tyrant Mr Murdstone, who immediately took control over Mrs Copperfield's and David's lives. The first passing reference is noticed when David returned home after visiting Peggotty's relatives to find out his mother under a supervision of her new husband, David's new step-father:

"The door opened, and I looked, half laughing and half crying in my pleasant agitation, for my mother. It was not she, but a strange servant. [...] On one side of the fire, sat my mother; on the other, Mr. Murdstone. My mother dropped her work, and rose hurriedly, but timidly I thought. "Now, Clara my dear," said Mr. Murdstone. "Recollect! Control yourself, always control yourself!" [...] She kissed me, patted me gently on the shoulder, and sat down again to her work."<sup>65</sup>

Dickens' created an image of a weak and easily manipulated woman to show readers that along with the abused children, the mentally fragile women might as well have been victims of the Victorian society. As evidenced by Mrs Copperfield's behaviour, Mr Murdstone together with his unsympathetic sister Miss Murdstone begun to reshape the model of the loving family into strictly controlled one. His attitude towards David's upbringing was not any better as may be seen in the following example. Mr Murdstone gave his first private speech to David to emphasise who was the man of the house:

"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", replied David. "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."<sup>66</sup>

This initial dialogue revealed Mr Murdstone's inhumane, gloomy and arrogant character. Every day, the young boy was exposed to constant surveillance of either Miss

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<sup>65</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 45-46.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

Murdstone or his tyrannical stepfather. David, in his later retrospection, recalled the absurdity of being punished for nothing. “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.”<sup>67</sup> The explicit image of “proper” way of the child upbringing became the presage of a more violent act. One day, when David was studying with his mother Mr Murdstone found the boy insufficiently assiduous and decided to give him the cane:

“Mr. Murdstone! Sir”! I cried to him. “Don’t! Pray don’t beat me! I have tried to learn, sir, but I can’t learn while you and Miss Murdstone are by. I can’t indeed”! [...] I stopped him, for he cut me heavily an instant afterwards, and in the same instant I caught the hand with which he held me in my mouth. He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death. [...] Then he was gone; and I was lying, fevered and hot, and torn, and sore, and raging in my puny way, upon the floor. [...] I became quite, what an unnatural stillness seemed to reign through the whole house! How well I remember, when my smart and passion began to cool, how wicked I began to feel!<sup>68</sup>

There is no need to recount David’s torment as Dickens described the violent act so vividly. The story is narrated in the first person, through David’s lens so that we may easily empathise with this poor defenceless child. David in the role of the story narrator helped to draw the reader’s attention and shape their perception of the enormity Mr Murdstone had committed. Moreover, we may notice the sudden change in boy’s mind when he started to consider himself truly “wicked” as if it was the only way how to justify the cruel and gratuitous act.

Unfortunately, the concept of beating children for their sake predominated throughout David’s childhood. Mr Murdstone persistently appealed to David’ mother for boy’s better education and so the young David began to attend school at Salem House. He was separated from his mother and loving nurse Peggotty, for the first time, he had to struggle with family abandonment. Besides loneliness, he suffered from Mr Creackle’s (the school principal) abusive behaviour. The students, as well as David, were desperately hopeless as they had no recourse against the cruel treatment. We may

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<sup>67</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 54.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

again witness the superiority complex here, as the main protagonist set forth his opinion:

“I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite. I am confident that he couldn’t resist a chubby boy (to be precise, Tommy Traddles), especially; that there was a fascination in such a subject, which made him restless in his mind, until he had scored and marked him for the day. I was chubby myself, and ought to know.”<sup>69</sup>

We may notice another tyrant or sadist let’s say, who relished whipping boys for no meaningful reason. Dickens also emphasised a disquieting report on a school bullying, but it is surprising that the students were both the victims of bullying and those who bullied. It is said that children are capable of imitating any particular adult’s behaviour once they experienced it. Mr Mell is a teacher who came from a poor family, but he successfully managed to hide his secret to avoid being dismissed, because the poverty is perceived as an image of moral degeneracy. As soon as James Steerforth, an egoistic and spoilt student representing the upper class, revealed that Mr Mell was a man of low birth, the teacher immediately became the object of student’s derision:

“The boys whirled about him, grinning, making faces, mimicking him behind his back and before his eyes; mimicking his poverty, his boots, his coat, his mother, everything belonging to him that they should have had consideration for.”<sup>70</sup>

It is horrifying how easily the children may become a “weapon” of human cruelty and hostility. Dickens always argued that children were a soft target that any wicked person might have taken the advantage of their simplicity and innocence. I would like to point out another absurd side of the schooling. The character of Uriah Heep was developed in direct response to the corrupt educational institutions. Dickens created this figure with split personality outwardly featured as the most “umblest person”, but Uriah was, in fact, conniving person with evil intentions, which reader may perceive as a result of the humiliations he experienced as a young boy at Charity school. Again, Dickens referred to the exploitation of the poor people performed by the Victorian authorities. It might be observed from Uriah’s claim stated in the following excerpt:

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 83.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

“Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys; and mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness - not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that; and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there; and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. And we had such a lot of betters!”<sup>71</sup>

On the basis of the example, we may visualise the image of Victorian society. The people from the low social class had to be always aware of their “origin” as if they were worthless outcasts banished from the society. It is no wonder that Uriah suffered the consequences of the hypocritical upper class. He also recalled the contradictory moral lessons he was taught at school, “... from nine o’clock to eleven, that labour was a curse; and from eleven o’clock to one, that it was a blessing and a cheerfulness, and a dignity.”<sup>72</sup> Dickens seemed committed to the idea that the Victorian authorities were the main cause of woes and poverty. Instead of promoting a precise alternative to these institutions he rather satirised them.

Regarding the institutions, Dickens’ own experience of working at Warren’s Blacking Factory was likewise interpreted in this novel. David, orphaned at the age of ten, was a mere puppet in Mr Murdstone’s hands. As unwanted step-son, he was sent to London to work at Murdstone and Grinby’s factory. The chapter titled “I Begin Life on My Own Account, and Don’t Like It”<sup>73</sup> speaks volumes. David, as well as Charles, had the first-hand experience of being deprived of the family background, both of them had to be self-sufficient from day to day, and above all, they suffered humiliation and personal deterioration. Dickens placed a great emphasis on the feelings of working child so that David in his retrospection remembered the images indelibly imprinted on his brain:

“I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is a 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

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<sup>71</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 471.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 621.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

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.”<sup>74</sup>

David further mentioned he was placed in “old house overrun with rats, discoloured rooms and decaying floors and staircase with dirt and rottenness all around.”<sup>75</sup> We may observe with ease certain similarities between Charles’ childhood memory and his fictional character burden. Both of them were employed at factories almost at the same age, and their daily task consisted in labelling the bottles. The image of a lonely boy insufficiently fed struggling with the adversity haunted Charles for the rest of his life.

The book *David Copperfield* brings the evidence of child abuse, family betrayal, and means manipulations of the evil characters. We may notice that the novel conveys its universal significance by various literary means. The author created the real-life story with extraordinary complex characters that represented the contrast between upper and middle class. Dickens strived to achieve his goal by depicting the real portrayal of Victorian society. It is based upon the fact that he intentionally did not offer his own opinion on each individual character instead he let the readers shape their own opinion. He represented the interest of the weak and helpless. It is believed that the book conveys the significant fragments of the author’s life as Dent named it “a true spiritual autobiography.”<sup>76</sup> This novel of moral development helps readers to realise that human values should not be measured in money or social stratum.

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<sup>74</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 135.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 351.

### 3.3 LITTLE DORRIT

Up to this point, I have been revealing the miserable life of the orphans and paupers, injustice of working class, corruption of British institutions, and supremacy of devilish and wicked villains. The previously selected novels depicted the stories of the male protagonists, who were exposed to child abuse, trust betrayal, and outrageous manipulations of family members and deceitful acquaintances. Now, I would like to examine the remaining significant novel related to the theme of cursed Victorian children, this time with the female protagonist.

*Little Dorrit* was published in 1857 at the height of Dickens' immense fame, but at the same time, the author was undergoing a midlife crisis both in his personal and professional life. Lionel Trilling in his review supported my conjecture providing the example of Dickens' letter addressed to author's friend Macready:

“However strange it is never to be at rest, and never satisfied and ever trying after something that is never reached, and to be always laden with plot and plan and care and worry, how clear it is that it must be, and that one is driven by an irresistible might until the journey is worked out. [...] Why is it, that a sense always comes crushing upon me now, when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have never made?”<sup>77</sup>

We may notice of Dickens that he was mentally and physically fatigued, as he had to deal with the break-up of marriage with Catherine Hogarth that together with topical issues and his painful boyhood memories initiated to the new concept of the novel. According to Hennessy, “Dickens planned to write a satire on bureaucracy discovering the methods of the Government offices in which no one took responsibility, but always pushed decision off on to someone else.”<sup>78</sup> However, this “dark novel”, as often called, included more than just insightful observations about political practices, it explored interpersonal relationships, psychological aspects of each character fettered by bureaucracy, and theme of incarceration. It is popularly held belief that besides orphans

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<sup>77</sup> Lionel Trilling, “Little Dorrit,” *The Kenyon Review* 15, no. 4 (1953): 577-90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4333447> (accessed December 15, 2016).

<sup>78</sup> Una Pope-Hennessy, *Charles Dickens*, 352.

and poverty Dickens had a lifelong interest in themes such as prisons, executions, criminals and villains.

The novel is divided into two books: “Poverty” and “Riches” both reflect the life of the Dorrit family. The first book described the arduous life of self-sacrificing daughter Amy Dorrit and her father William Dorrit, who presented himself as a ruined gentleman living in the Marshalsea, whereas the second part studied how sudden wealth and the upper-class status recast the personal character, primarily the Dorrits. The image of the Marshalsea prison was deeply rooted in Dickens’ memories because his family suffered the same fate as the Dorrits. It is based upon the fact that Dickens’ father incapable of repaying his debt made his son, Charles, work to support the family. The main protagonist Amy endured a similar fate. Whereas author’s whole family lived in the prison for debtors for about four months, Mr Dorrit and his children had to withstand miserable life behind the walls of Marshalsea for decades. Arlene Andrews commented on that issue, “Dickens used satire to communicate how ridiculously ineffective debtor’s prison was as public policy.”<sup>79</sup> Like much else that might be pointed to the life of prisoners, Dickens wanted readers to show a different perspective of poverty compared with the other novels he had written so far, therefore he formed the portrayal of an innocent motherless child, who had to face the consequences of father’s lapse.

Amy Dorrit was born in the Marshalsea as the third child of William Dorrit. Mrs Dorrit died after giving her birth. The baby girl was nicknamed the “Child of the Marshalsea” since she was literally raised by local residents. The beginning of the chapter revealed that the poor girl at her early age “began to perceive that it was not the habit of the entire world to live locked up in narrow yards surrounded by high walls with spikes at the top.”<sup>80</sup> We may notice child’s simple and innocent perception of living conditions inside the Marshalsea and outside the prison when she was questioning the turnkey relentlessly about the things and places occurring behind the high walls. Dickens depicted the female protagonist as “small creature with a pitiful and plaintive look for her wayward sister; for her idle brother; for the high blank walls; for

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<sup>79</sup> Arlene Bowers Andrews, “Charles Dickens, Social Worker in His Time,” *Social Work* 57:4 (January 2011): 300, [http://sw.oxfordjournals.org/content/57/4/297.full.pdf+html%3E%20\[accessed%20on%2016th%20February%202014](http://sw.oxfordjournals.org/content/57/4/297.full.pdf+html%3E%20[accessed%20on%2016th%20February%202014) (accessed October 20, 2016).

<sup>80</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 68.



the faded crowd they shut in; for the games of the prison children as they whooped and ran, and played at hide-and-seek, and made the iron bars of the inner gateway “Home”.<sup>81</sup> The childhood experiences and her self-sacrificing attitude to her father were influenced by the environment she was surrounded by.

The author inclined to portrait an image of “Victorian ideal womanhood” adapted to the painful life in the Marshalsea. As soon as she reached the age of maturity, responsibility and reasonableness, she began to take care of her family. She became an utterly devoted daughter and sister who sacrificed her personal life for family welfare. Despite the fact that she was the youngest of three siblings, she was the only person trying to earn a living; her all-day service was taken for granted and they (father and her older siblings) became completely accustomed to her. Dickens represented the image of Little Dorrit in the following example:

“No matter through what mistakes and discouragements, what ridicule of her youth and little figure, what humble consciousness of her own babyhood and want of strength, even in the matter of lifting and carrying; through how much weariness and hopelessness, and how many secret tears; she trudged on, until recognised as useful, even indispensable. That time came. She took the place of the eldest of the three, in all things but precedence; was the head of the fallen family; and bore, in her own heart, its anxieties and shames.”<sup>82</sup>

It has been observed of Little Dorrit that she unknowingly became a victim of the family burden which affected her feelings throughout the novel. Amy in the figurative sense embodied hope, purity and intactness of soul, and resolution not to succumb to the miserable life. On the contrary, William Dorrit, the father of Marshalsea, seemed resigned to the unfortunate standard of living. Arlene Andrews referred to the book *Learned helplessness: A theory for the age of personal control* written by Peterson and Maier, on the basis of the psychological theory she described the state of William Dorrit’s mind as “learned helplessness”<sup>83</sup> which characterised a person who either accepted his misfortune or utterly remained passive in negative situation even though

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<sup>81</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 68.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

<sup>83</sup> Arlene Bowers Andrews, “Charles Dickens,” 299.

there could be a solution to that. Instead of occupying with William, Dickens focused main concern on Little Dorrit's mental incarceration.

The theme of imprisonment either physical or mental accompanied many characters throughout the whole novel. For example, the beginning of the book delineated a dialogue between two prisoners John Baptist Cavalletto and Rigaud, alias Blandois, who openly disclosed details about murdering his wife. Arthur Clennam, the Meagles and Miss Wade became temporary prisoners, in quarantine, when they land in England after a long journey abroad. One may notice a frank exchange of Meagles' and Miss Wade's views on the topic of released prisoners, whether they would be capable of living a normal life:

“But I bear those monotonous walls no ill-will now,” said Mr. Meagles. “One always begins to forgive a place as soon as it's left behind; I dare say a prisoner begins to relent towards his prison, after he is let out.”<sup>84</sup> Miss Wade responded on this argument, “Do you mean that a prisoner forgives his prison? [...] If I had been shut up in any place to pine and suffer, I should always hate that place and wish to burn it down, or raze it to the ground. I know no more.”<sup>85</sup>

There is some truth in Miss Wade's opinion. Perhaps so, but in the case of the Dorrits, it was not hatred or anger that haunted them, instead, the stigma of failure became their torment. There is an exception of Tip's actions. “Wherever he went, this foredoomed Tip appeared to take the prison walls with him, [...] until the real immovable Marshalsea walls asserted their fascination over him, and brought him back.”<sup>86</sup> William and his son Tim were literally inmates in the Marshalsea, but when they were released the physical state of imprisonment was replaced by mental incarceration.

Those who were not sentenced to the Marshalsea by the law were trapped by their arrogance, stubbornness, social conventions, or lack of dignity and sanity. I think the first exemplary character would be Mrs Clennam confined to her wheelchair, which symbolised her physical prison, as she could not leave her room, she withered away bodily and mentally because she intentionally subjected herself to psychological abuse and the feeling of guilt overcame her. “I endure without murmuring because it is

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<sup>84</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 22.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

appointed that I shall so make reparation for my sins. Reparation! Has there been none here this fifteen years?”<sup>87</sup> Dickens created the image of the mental purgatory, reparation in this case, in order to assimilate her inner agony. Arthur likewise could be observed as a deprived child in prisonlike captivity when he had to live with his father in China far away from his birthplace. Another “cursed” child would be sad young Tattycoram. Despite the fact, she was taken from an orphanage to become a “sister and mistress” to Pet, Meagles’ spoilt daughter, Tattycoram was treated like her servant rather than an equal sibling, therefore she could be regarded as the prisoner in her “family”.

The theme of the metaphorical imprisonment was designed for all social classes even the institutions. Dickens created the Circumlocution Office as a mirror of an incompetent institution alluding to contemporary political issues. He satirised the indolence and incompetence of the most important “Department under Government,”<sup>88</sup> for it was originally supposed to intervene in social life and help socially needy people. The example below provides with gentle irony the description of such institution:

“This glorious establishment had been early in the field, when the one sublime principle involving the difficult art of governing a country, was first distinctly revealed to statesmen. [...] Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving - HOW NOT TO DO IT.”<sup>89</sup>

In other words, the running of the Circumlocution Office succumbed to the powerful state of procrastination. Dickens established the image of the ruling oligarchy system of Barnacles’ family members and relatives who intentionally avoid solving any applied requests. The author also depicted the world of the parvenus. The upper class was represented by Mr Merdle who was found to be imprisoned by his reputation of a successful banker. One would apprehend that he was under the constant surveillance of the society. He hardly took delight in social events. Despite his high social rank, he came over as an asocial and reserved man who finally committed suicide, as he could not bear the bankruptcy.

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<sup>87</sup> Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, 50.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

Ronald Meldrum took notice of the fact that besides the themes of imprisonments, criminals and intrigues, Dickens' novels were full of "loneliness, disgrace and outlawry."<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, Charles Dickens argued that suffering of any kind might strengthen all positive characters' qualities, which would be appropriately rewarded in the course of time.

Dickens was quite often recognised as a sentimental author, however, I think he intended to generalise his conviction that no matter what social class we represent, any of us (even the author himself) may be a prisoner of the general discontent, dark thoughts or unremitting desire for money, personal ambitions or better social standard. He believed that only true love, kindness, and soul purity would lead to consummate happiness. We may observe his notion in all previously examined novels, as each of the main protagonists finally lived in peace and tranquillity. Dent remarked that "every scene in every detail was vividly present to him (Charles) as he wrote, every incident acted itself before the eyes of his mind; frequently indeed, he physically acted, before a looking glass, what he was about to set down. His characters were absolutely alive to him, and he bore the weight of all their emotions."<sup>91</sup> I believe that Dickens' literary outputs emboldened him to disclose his secret sorrows or rather these fictional characters helped him ease the burden resulted from his childhood experiences.

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<sup>90</sup> Ronald M. Meldrum, "Charles Dickens as Artist and Reformer," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 3, no. 2 (1971): 92-98, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4048417> (Accessed November 29, 2016).

<sup>91</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 350.

#### 4. IMPACT OF HIS BOOKS ON THE ISSUES

As the previous sections stated, the Victorian period brought along the infinite variety of changes in agricultural, industrial, and especially social development. Likewise, the development of science and technology had its moment of glory, but it noticeably contributed to apparent differentiation of social classes. Charles Dickens noticed principal advantages and disadvantages of Industrial revolution - namely, its inauspicious effect on children's rights. He devoted his entire artistic life to right the wrongs inflicted on the poor and defenceless. His literary outputs represented a moral mirror of profligacy and hypocrisy of ruthless parvenus, conceited upper classes, and callous institutions. Dickens committed these turpitudes to memory and through his fictional works he took necessary steps to approach the general public in order to improve undignified living conditions of orphans, deprived families, and also frequently unheeded outcasts.

The following section of the thesis intends to explore to what considerable extent Dickens instigated his readers and constituency to act in the interest of the underprivileged. Charles Dickens was said to be a social reformer, whose outspoken criticism and public speeches aroused outrage and multifarious debates among many contemporaneous critics and novelists. Nevertheless, he set clear objectives and he was undaunted by his opponents. He strongly pressed for public awareness of social commitment as we may notice it in the subsequent example. The excerpt is taken from the letter addressed to author's friend Wilkie Collins:

“Everything that happens everybody [...] shows beyond mistake that you can't shut out the world, that you are in it, to be of it; that you get yourself into a false position the moment you try to sever yourself from it; that you must mingle with it, and make the best of it, and make the best of yourself into the bargain.”<sup>92</sup>

Based on Dickens' boyhood memories, the author developed a close connection with abused child labourers and desperately poor families. He perceived a moral obligation to advocate those who had been facing social and economic injustices.

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<sup>92</sup> James Marlow, *Charles Dickens: The Uses of Time* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994) 132, <https://books.google.cz/books?id=p7wvLUBMt1wC&lpg=PA31&hl=cs&pg=PA35#v=onepage&q&f=false> (Accessed December 25, 2016).

As was mentioned in the third chapter, Dickens dealt explicitly with 1834 amendment of the Poor Law. He expressly disagreed with appalling living conditions in the workhouses, not to mention local dietary habits, lack of sanitation, physical punishments, and humiliation. The author's overriding concerns were overtly exposed in the story of orphan boy Oliver Twist:

“The parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be despatched to a branch-workhouse, 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. [...] Occasionally, there was some more than usually interesting inquest upon a parish child who had been overlooked in turning up a bedstead, or inadvertently scalded to death when there happened to be a washing , though the latter accident was very scarce,— anything approaching to a washing being of rare occurrence in the farm.”<sup>93</sup>

Charles Dickens was a prime mover in promoting public health and better medical care. He even delivered a speech on that issue based on the knowledge of government reports concerning insufficient sanitation conditions in London. Charles Dickens was proposed to give a speech to members of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association (The Board of Health) in 1851. Here is a fragment of his heartfelt address:

“I can honestly declare that the use I have since that time made of my eyes and nose have only strengthened the conviction that certain sanitary reforms must precede all other social remedies, and that neither education nor religion can do anything useful until the way has been paved for their ministrations by cleanliness and decency.”<sup>94</sup>

It is apparent that Dickens was keen observer utterly notified of the real image of sanitary conditions in workhouses, orphanages and slums. He believed that it was necessary to find an echo with supporters in order to shorten the odds on better hygienic working and living conditions. Therefore he strove hard to gain a favour of the authorities using his marvellous rhetorical techniques to achieve his objective.

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<sup>93</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 9-11.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Dickens, “Sanitary reform. London, May 10, 1851,” In *Speeches: Literary and Social* (Australia: The University of Adelaide, 2014), <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/d/dickens/charles/d54sls/complete.html>.

Besides mistreated orphans, exploited child labourers and deprived families, Dickens also aimed his attention to miserable and neglected outcasts, in other words, criminals. I have already outlined in the previous chapter author's unwavering conviction that poor and desperate people had a tendency to end up among criminals. However, I would like to refer particularly to "cursed" individuals associated with the "oldest profession". We may encounter a repetitive pattern of "fallen women" in an array of Dickens' works, for example, Nancy in *Oliver Twist* or Martha and Emily in *David Copperfield*. Dickens formed an intention to depict a theme of prostitution as a result of the no-win situation rather than a social evil. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, Nancy in pursuit of Oliver's freedom risked her own life. She knew she was condemned to eternal reprobation so that she refused to accept deliverance and was finally murdered in cold blood by villain Sikes. The striking resemblance with the issue of damnation was also apparent in *David Copperfield* as Martha was determined to commit suicide because there was no other way out. We may observe Dickens' attempt to represent disconsolate actions of those poor women:

"Oh, the river!" she cried passionately. [...] "I know that I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from the country places, where there was once no harm in it — and it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable — and it goes away' like my life to a great sea, that is always troubled — and I feel that I must go with it!"<sup>95</sup>

It is said that death of such characters symbolised a deliverance from their sins. Jane Rogers stated in this context that those women were supposed to be "abandoned, shunned and painfully aware of their own culpability; Victorians expected such women to behave as if ashamed and deeply unhappy."<sup>96</sup> Instead, Dickens prompted the readers to look at those ladies of easy virtues from a different perspective. He created an image of fallen woman, a victim of debauched society, who should evoke in readers' minds sincere regret and empathy instead of aloofness and indifference. Rogers further stated that Dickens was addressed by Ms Angela Burdett-Coutts to establish a "home for the

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<sup>95</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 556.

<sup>96</sup> Jane Rogers, "What was the message about prostitution in *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*," *Victorian web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/rogers/7.html> (Last modified May 27, 2003).

redemption of prostitutes.”<sup>97</sup> Reportedly Dickens vacillated on the investment but finally consented so that Urania Cottage was founded in 1846. Dickens and Ms Coutts were of a particular interest to create a safety environment for indigent abused women and prostitutes. The principal idea was to create a “shelter” for them, offer a moral support, and subsequently help them revert into a normal life.<sup>98</sup> I think such attitude was rarely seen among author’s peers in the Victorian period.

It has been observed of Charles Dickens that he was quite often preoccupied with the world of criminals in a broad sense of the word. Dickens’ entire life was accompanied with the theme of mental or physical incarceration and his fictional characters endured similar fate as well. As Meldrum stated, “in the 40’s Dickens advocated the abolition of capital punishment. He visited nearly all the London prisons and in later years visited many more in Britain, Europe and America. His pamphlets on prison abuses caused much consternation in penological circles.”<sup>99</sup> Charles was known to have a keen intellect. Once, he was engrossed in his work, he devoted all his efforts to the only task. The real image of prison may be seen in all selected novels examined in the thesis. In *Oliver Twist*, the features of Newgate prison might be observed in connection with last night of Fagin’s existence before the execution. Debtor’s prisons were to be depicted in both *David Copperfield* (the King’s Bench) and *Little Dorrit* (Marshalsea). Dickens utilised the fragments of his boyhood memories connected with family financial straits and subsequent movement into the Marshalsea to provide the readers credible testimony of the real life of prisoners.

Besides the criminal issues, Charles Dickens developed lifelong concern for improvement in the standard of educational system and facilities. According to Meldrum, Dickens was “the most prominent literary supporter of the Ragged Schools during their early years.”<sup>100</sup> Dickens through his novels overtly expressed his social indignation with dishonest practices of all sorts of the public schools. Either low-class schools, in other words, charity schools, middle-class schools or boarding schools; this wide range of educational institutions was full of imperfections. Dickens conveyed his

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<sup>97</sup> Jane Rogers, “Dickens and his involvement in Urania Cottage,” *Victorian web*, <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/rogers/8.html> (Last modified May 27, 2003).

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Ronald M. Meldrum, “Charles Dickens as Artist and Reformer,” 95.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.



worries that the educational institutions were primarily responsible for reshaping children' character traits. We may observe such attitude in certain passages of *David Copperfield*. A first apparent indication of the powerful influence of educational practices is to be seen in Uriah Heep's evil nature as a result of being "umble". The second occasion of the wicked school system which had a detrimental effect on children' behaviour may be noticed at Salem House chapter where children were exposed to daily physical abuse which affected their attitudes towards Mr Mell as they began to bully the teacher. Charles intentionally formulated a range of possible scenarios to show his readers what the debauched institutions were capable of doing with the vulnerable and easily influenced children's personality.

At the occasion of anniversary dinner of the Warehousemen and Clerks Schools in London 1857, Dickens gave a speech to promote his unconcealed concern about inappropriate educational practices and uncertain future of young generations:

"I once went myself — the respected proprietor of which was by far the most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know; one of the worst-tempered men perhaps that ever lived, whose business it was to make as much out of us and put as little into us as possible" [...] In fact, and short, I do not like that sort of school, which is a pernicious and abominable humbug, altogether [...] which was established ages ago by worthy scholars and good men long deceased, whose munificent endowments have been monstrously perverted from their original purpose. [...] "I don't like that sort of school where the bright childish imagination is utterly discouraged, and where those bright childish faces, which it is so very good for the wisest among us to remember in after life — are gloomily and grimly scared out of countenance; where I have never seen among the pupils, whether boys or girls, anything but little parrots and small calculating machine."<sup>101</sup>

Charles Dickens was indisputably one of those highly respectable men whose firm conviction and persisting interest in the oppressed and disadvantaged social classes influenced many other people to continue in the same spirit. The profundity of his sophisticated speeches and thoughts aroused among the general public awareness of the

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<sup>101</sup> Charles Dickens, "November 5, 1857," In *Speeches: Literary and Social, London* (Australia: The University of Adelaide, 2014), <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/d/dickens/charles/d54sls/chapter49.html>.

seriousness of the issues. The last example of Dickens' statement in this bachelor thesis stresses the importance of the sense of togetherness and unyieldingness:

“With shame and indignation lowering among all classes of society, and this new element of discord piled on the heaving basis of ignorance, poverty and crime, which is always below us [...] I did and do believe that the only wholesome turn affairs so menacing could possibly take, was, the awaking of the people, the outspokening of the people, the uniting of the people in all patriotism and loyalty to effect a great peaceful constitutional change in the administration of their own affairs.”<sup>102</sup>

To conclude, it is obvious that Charles Dickens was a man of action who did not hesitate to make good use of his knowledge. He was an incredible person, a man of letters, and a human rights defender, whose thought-provoking lifework still suits the purpose, namely it urges people of all generations to revere their personal uniqueness, to avoid being blend into the crowd, they should better stand up for the socially disadvantaged and weak.

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<sup>102</sup> Charles Dickens, “Administrative Reform. Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Wednesday, June 27, 1855,” In *Speeches: Literary and Social* (Australia: The University of Adelaide, 2014), <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/d/dickens/charles/d54sls/chapter15.html>.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the bachelor thesis was to remark upon child labour and appalling conditions of poor and oppressed townsmen during the British industrial expansion recorded in the selection of Charles Dickens' novels. The thesis was about to take into consideration interconnection between author's childhood experiences and his later remarkable observations on stated issues, which laid the foundations for writing world-famous novels *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Little Dorrit*.

Charles Dickens was justly said to be one of the most prominent novelists of the Victorian period. Author's singularity consisted in his excellent observational abilities, conversational writing style, the firm social awareness and empathy for ordinary people, and the outspoken criticism directed at the appropriate authorities. Dickens through his fictional characters intentionally castigated superficiality of bourgeois society, exploitative methods of contemporary institutions, and indifference and hypocrisy of London burgesses. The author endeavoured to evoke in readers' cognizance a considerable extent of discomposure and empathy as well because he maintained his opinion that the most vulnerable and easily exploited targets would be defenceless orphans and children from destitute families of London slums. He simultaneously suggested that people who were in a cleft stick often inclined to a criminal underworld. In order to create as much realistic image as possible, he often identified himself with his fictional characters. Dent commented on that "wherever he went, or for whatever purpose, he always devoted a large part of his time to enlarging his experience of matters intimately connected with his books. Few men can ever have explored so comprehensively or so minutely the prisons, hospitals, schools, asylums, and the common life of two continents."<sup>103</sup> The concept of each book was developed down to the last detail including complex and intricately woven themes, intimate knowledge of plot settings, and vivid descriptions of individual characters.

The author was endowed with a significant moral vision. Besides being highly regarded novelist and editor, he was likewise a social commentator who repeatedly spoke out in favour of poor workers of a British exploitative economic system and drew attention to moral abuses in the Victorian era. He gave countless addresses to the

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<sup>103</sup> Dent, *Life and Characters*, 349.

general public in which he urged all people to step out from their comfort zones to behold a real truth of English society and inconvenient living conditions of the poor struggling with utter destitution. Dickens' dexterity in depicting workhouses, orphanages, and slums was thought-provoking. Regardless what the author had experienced at his early age and later recorded in his novels, he never ceased to advocate rights of ordinary people for the rest of his life. He believed that every mistreated person could be released from his burden if the society lent support to him. Dickens stated on that issue, "For our path in life is stony and rugged now, and it rests with us to smooth it. We must fight our way onward. We must be brave. There are obstacles to be met, and we must meet and crush them!"<sup>104</sup> To conclude, I think Dickens aimed to set forth a true essence of life that no matter what social class we belong to or what we have experienced, we should always step out from the line of an apathetic crowd and support those who needs our help the most.

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<sup>104</sup> Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 444.

## RESUME

V této bakalářské práci, jak již samotný název napovídá “Prokletí viktoriánských dětí: Vyobrazení práce dětí v románech Charlese Dickense,” se primární střed zájmu ubírá k analýze tří románů anglického spisovatele a představitele kritického realismu Charlese Dickense, jehož tvorba přináší reálný obraz o skutečném dění soudobé anglické společnosti v devatenáctém století, konkrétně řečeno přináší svědectví o zneužívání dětské práce ve prospěch ekonomického růstu Viktoriánské Anglie. Ke zpracování této práce byly vybrány následující romány *Oliver Twist* (1838), *David Copperfield* (1850), *Malá Dorritka*<sup>105</sup> (1857).

Charles Dickens je po právu označován za nejvýznamnějšího prozaika Viktoriánské doby. Svou jedinečností vynikal především díky svým pozorovacím schopnostem, smyslem pro sociální citění a otevřeným projevem, jenž zakomponoval do řady svých děl a skrze fiktivní příběhy ostře kritizoval povrchnost buržoasní společnosti, vykořisťovatelské metody soudobých institucí a lhostejnost a pokrytectví měšťanů. Ve svých dílech usiloval o to, aby ve čtenářích evokoval jistou míru znepokojení a zároveň vlnu empatií, neboť v jeho očích největší pocit bezpráví vzbuzovali především bezbranní sirotci a děti z chudých rodinných kruhů Londýnských slumů.

Práce se pomyslně člení do dvou primárních bloků, a to na část všeobecnou a část analytickou. Úvod bakalářské práce věnuje pozornost především všeobecným historickým faktům v krátkosti popisující změny v jednotlivých sektorech, v nichž mohutný rozmach vědy a techniky přispěl ke zrodu strojové velkovýroby zboží. Výrobky se začaly v hojné míře vyrábět v továrnách a zpracovatelských závodech, což na úkor zemědělství a tradiční řemeslné výroby vedlo k výrazným změnám v oblasti hospodářství a sociálního vývoje společnosti. Anglie, často označována jako kolébka průmyslové revoluce, tak napomohla ke zrodu nechvalně proslulé levné pracovní síly, kterou v naprosté většině zastávaly děti v útlém věku. Hlavním cílem této práce je reálně přiblížit skutečné, velmi často nevyhovující pracovní podmínky dětí. Pro bližší seznámení s danou problematikou je uvedeno několik příkladných výpovědí dětských dělníků zaměstnaných nejen ve zpracovatelském průmyslu ale i v průmyslu těžebním. K doplnění daného tématu a ucelení celistvé myšlenky je taktéž uvedeno několik

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<sup>105</sup> V originále *Little Dorrit*, v češtině vydal Odeon v r. 1970.

statistických údajů včetně zjednodušeného shrnutí výskytu nejčastějších příčin úmrtnosti v době rozmachu průmyslové revoluce.

Posléze se práce zaměřuje především na Dickensův osobní život. V této autobiografické části je v krátkosti zmíněno autorovo dětství až do jeho dvanácti let, kdy dochází k zásadnímu převratu autorovy percepce o soudobé společnosti, mění se jeho osobní postoj k rodině a vlivem silného emočního prožitku, dochází k vnitřnímu úpadku autorovy umělecké identity. V této práci můžeme rovněž spatřit selekci jednotlivých zlomků autorových silně inspirativních prožitků z raného dětství, jež se později staly primární předlohou k jeho jedinečné tvorbě mezinárodně uznávaných děl. V této části se rovněž poukazuje na zásadní příčiny autorových hlubokých empatií k tragickým osudům chudých dětí. Charles Dickens se odvážil riskovat své postavení a vybudovanou prestiž, když otevřeně vystoupil proti tehdejší zkorumpované společnosti. Získal na svou stranu zástupy příznivců nejen z řad umělců a intelektuálů, ale především z řad prostého lidu, dělnické třídy a těch, kterých se daná problematika osobně dotýkala.

V následující části této bakalářské práce byly analyzovány tři vybrané romány, jež mají napomoci poodhalit pevné vazby mezi autorovým osobním prožitkem a jeho fiktivním tvorbou s několika autobiografickými prvky. Zvolené romány nesou společnou myšlenku a to duševní a fyzické strádání dětí, jež autor vyobrazuje jako následek zlaté éry Viktoriánského rozmachu. Každý z následujících titulů poukazuje na přímé souvislosti s autorovým postojem ke skutečné problematice, která bezesporu reprezentuje autorovy osobní zájmy, a to nezůstat nečinně stát a přihlížet dennodenní útrapám a bezprávím bezbranných a křehkých sirotků, stejně tak jako i sociálně znevýhodněných rodin. Charles Dickens je často označován za sociálního reformátora, který skrze svou tvorbu promlouvá do nejširšího podvědomí všech svých čtenářů. V jednotlivých románech tak můžeme vyzorovat kontextuálně specifické vlastnosti hlavních protagonistů, jež mají za úkol připodobnit své strasti ke skutečným cílovým skupinám.

Závěrečná kapitola klade důraz na skutečnost, do jaké míry, jednotlivé tituly ovlivnily soudobou společnost. Zda na základě autorovy tvorby došlo k viditelnému progresu v problematických oblastech. Charles Dickens svým bezesporu výstředním postojem a kritickým realismem položil základy pro pozdější generace kritiků a reformátorů hájící práva nejen dětí, ale i chudého a utiskovaného lidu. Na základě analýzy tří zvolených titulů se v této kapitole poukazuje na nejčastější autorovy postřehy, jimiž se v daných dílech zabýval. Zcela bez nadsázky můžeme o autorovi prohlásit, že se jedná o muže, jehož kontroverzní názory a silné empatie k bezpráví slabých a utiskovaných ve své době neměly obdoby. Na jedné straně můžeme spatřit umělce, který svým ojedinělým písemným projevem dokázal vyobrazit reálné dění viktoriánské Anglie. Na druhé straně Charles Dickens představuje vášnivého sociálního a politického kritika, který skrze fiktivní postavy reprezentující jednotlivé společenské třídy kritizuje ekonomické, sociální a morální pochybení anglické společnosti.

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## ANOTACE

Jméno autora: Lenka Špoková

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Prokletí viktoriánských dětí: Vyobrazení práce dětí v románech Charlese Dickense

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, PhD.

Počet znaků: 16 044

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### Abstrakt:

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá problematikou dětské práce v období Britské průmyslové revoluce a nelehkým údělem chudých a utlačovaných hlavních hrdinů vyobrazeným ve třech světově známých románech anglického spisovatele Charlese Dickense. Mezi analyzovaná díla patří Oliver Twist, David Copperfield a Malá Dorritka. Hlavním záměrem této práce je prozkoumat vzájemná propojení mezi danými romány, konkrétně do jak značné míry autorovy osobní prožitky z dětství a zkušenosti s danou problematikou ovlivnily jeho pozdější tvorbu.

Klíčová slova: Literatura, Anglická literatura, Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, Malá Dorritka, David Copperfield, Viktoriánská doba, Britská průmyslová revoluce, Urbanizace, Dětská práce, Chudoba, Tovární zákony

## ANNOTATION

Author: Lenka Špoková

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title: Cursed Victorian Children: Portrayals of Child Labour in the Novels of Charles Dickens

Supervisor: Mgr. David Livingstone, PhD.

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### Abstract:

The bachelor thesis is concerned with the issue of child labour in the era of the British industrial revolution and the plight of the poor and oppressed main protagonists depicted in three renowned novels written by the English writer Charles Dickens. Analysed novels are *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*. The aim of the thesis is to explore the interconnection between those novels, particularly to what extent the author's experience as a child and his involvement with the issue influenced him in the later writing career.

Key words: Literature, English literature, Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, Little Dorrit, David Copperfield, Victorian Era, British Industrialization, Urbanisation, Child Labour, Poverty, Factory Acts