

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI

FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA

Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Eliška Dostálová

**Forlorn and Vulnerable: Portrayals of Children in Selected
Novels by Charles Dickens**

Bakalářská práce

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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Jméno a příjmení: Eliška DOSTÁLOVÁ
Osobní číslo: F18674
Adresa: Luhy 152, Horní Benešov – Luhy, 79312 Horní Benešov, Česká republika
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2. Social background and context
3. Charles Dickens' biography
4. Analysis of the selected novels
5. Conclusion

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Foster, John. *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, complete*. Project Gutenberg, 2008.
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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci na téma “Forlorn and Vulnerable: Portrayals of Children in Selected Novels by Charles Dickens” vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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1 Introduction

Charles Dickens is considered one of the greatest English novelists, whose work is known for social criticism and the use of children as the main characters. His social criticism expresses concerns mainly for the poor and working-class children as he was among the first people to do so. It may come as a surprise, that his novels not only express the social critique but also tend to incline toward the promotion of Victorian ideals. The background information will provide a description of the Victorian period as an era of rapid changes and will include the main changes as well as their impact on the common people. The idea of a stable family which stands as a counterpart to changing society and as something people could hold on to will be presented as well. The ideal of an innocent and pure child which was the most significant part of the family and became the object of fascination for Victorian society will also be described. Furthermore, the criminal and working-class children and the child labour respectively will be examined as they are the object of the analysis itself.

To give a full background to Dickens' work and his perception of children, his life will be described as well. The major part will concentrate on his traumatic childhood in a blacking factory since this experience influenced his perception of childhood the most and was the cause of his compassion for the poor and vulnerable members of Victorian society. To complete his perception of childhood, the relationship with his own children will be mentioned in this chapter as well.

The major part of the thesis will deal with the analysis of two selected novels by Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* with the main focus on the two contrasting themes that are guilt and innocence and their use in child portrayals. The criminal children as a source of moral tension will be included in the analysis alongside the different aspects of their portrayal such as the moral resolution. The findings of the analysis will be also linked to the Victorian ideals considering the pure innocent child and the ideal family. Apart from the analysis of the two themes in child portrayal, the thesis will also examine the reason why Dickens uses the particular portrayals the way he does.

2 Social background and context

2.1 Victorian England

The beginning of the Victorian period usually dates back to the year 1837, when Queen Victoria began her reign, although according to historian Sally Mitchell “most people’s mental image of the Victorian period is based on the years between 1850 and the mid-1870s,”¹ the times when the British Empire was on the rise and was emerging out of the economic crisis of the 1840s. The Victorian period is named after Queen Victoria who became the longest-reigning monarch in 1896. This crucial period of English history was marked by the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the century, which helped to establish the national identity of that time and shaped the appearance of the country many years beforehand, and significantly influenced all aspects of people’s lives.

As a consequence of the Revolution, an increasing number of people were migrating from the countryside to the big industrial cities in search of better lives and job opportunities. Jeannie Duckworth in *Fagin’s Children* mentions there was a significant increase in population “the population in industrial cities such as Birmingham or Leeds increased by 40 per cent in the 1820s.”² Soon, it became clear that neither cities, nor their authorities could maintain such a number of newcomers. Living space was suddenly lacking due to the influx of people. Often, the newcomers and the members of the working class “lived in communities known as rookeries - no-go areas - where poverty was paramount.”³ Rookeries were avoided even by the police and there was no one to prevent the crime there. These slums crowded with people were the place where epidemics occurred frequently. This was caused by the poor hygienic and sanitary conditions because the living quarters had neither water nor sewerage.

With the growing population, there were not enough job opportunities, which caused immense unemployment. Even the ones who had a job were unsatisfied because of the low wages and insufficient working conditions, therefore the first movements and organizations supporting and advocating for their rights originated at this time such as the

¹ Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 2nd ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2009), 7.

² Jeannie Duckworth, *Fagin’s Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002), 1.

³ Duckworth, *Fagin’s Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*, 2.

Chartist movement. The period of social unrest and poverty is generally known as the Hungry Forties, because of the Great Famine which occurred mainly in Ireland, but also in England. The famine was caused by the disease which had destroyed several potato crops and many people from Ireland migrated to Europe and England as a consequence. Apart from the Great Famine, one of the factors which contributed to the hunger and worsened already existing poverty were the Corn Laws. It resulted in rising prices of bread, the most basic food of working-class people, by putting high taxes on imported corn. Simon Heffer points out that the government itself did not know how to solve the situation “The government was still at a loss to know how to solve the problems that had, during 1842, brought the country to the verge of anarchy,”⁴ and that is why it had taken another five years for the Corn Laws to be terminated.

The living conditions had improved significantly after massive technical advancement that arose from the fairly rapid development of railways, with its peak called “railway mania”⁵ during the 1840s. Heffer explains that the expansion of the railway caused the increase in job positions: “a capital outlay of around an extra £10 million a year provided work for many more labourers.”⁶ This improvement was reflected in the crime rate as it significantly decreased. Considering the sanitary and hygienic conditions, university professor Claudia Nelson mentions that there were three main factors that contributed to the gradual improvement “turning points here were the cholera epidemic of 1853–1854, the London “Summer of the Great Stink” in 1858, and the Prince Consort’s death in 1861 from typhoid fever, a disease caused by contaminated water.”⁷ The improved situation in Britain was celebrated during the Exhibition held in 1851, where the famous Crystal Palace was introduced and became the symbol of the triumph of the British Empire. After the previous decade full of hunger and the threat of revolution, Paterson states that the exhibition was “seen as ushering in the long middle period – the ‘mid-Victorian calm.’”⁸

⁴ Simon Heffer, *High Minds: The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain* (London: Random House Books, 2013), 60.

⁵ Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 73.

⁶ Heffer, *High Minds: The Victorians and the Birth of Modern Britain*, 135.

⁷ Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 1.

⁸ Michael Paterson, *Brief History of Life in Victorian Britain* (London: Robinson, 2008), 18.

2.2 The Victorian family and the child's role within it

The family and the relationship between the children and their parents were strongly idealized during the Victorian times because the family represented the centre of an individual's life and was seen as the major moralistic principle of a dissolute Victorian society. During the period of the Industrial revolution, technical advancement and increase in population, Nelson argues that people were in need of something permanent that they could hold on to "Faced with a rapidly changing world, English society clung to the idea that family might provide stability and access to eternal values,"⁹ because for them it was not possible to reach those values by their own supposed moral behaviour and earthly life.

The universal and most appropriate model was middle-class families, Nelson accounts this was mainly "because it was the middle class that controlled the presses, /.../ that voiced and shaped public opinion."¹⁰ This model of the family assumed the daughter to be the most crucial part of it. Alongside family life, the parent-child bond was also stressed, yet it was almost non-existent in most cases regardless of social class. Parents from well-to-do families spent only a little time with their children, because they did not consider as Nelson points out the child's upbringing as their duty and rather saw "childrearing as a matter for specialists."¹¹ The children had their own space, usually, the nursery, separated from one of their parents. It was only an hour or two a day when a child could spend the time with its parents.

Compared to the women from higher social classes, working-class women had to work, and therefore were criticized for not being able to secure a well-established household and raise their children properly. People from higher social classes were often shocked and even offended by the state of working-class households. The family played a key role considering the social stability, thus it was necessary to preserve this ideal which was threatened mainly by the working class mothers but also by the single women or widows. Karl Ittmann describes the danger they were to the society as they "represented a threat to the solidity of marriage, and by extension society, and must be

⁹ Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 6.

¹⁰ Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 6.

¹¹ Herbert F. Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2014), 70.

controlled.”¹² Not having enough resources, it was hard for working-class families to live up to this established ideal of a perfect family.

Daughters in higher classes were valued for their innocence and the main aim was to preserve it by living in their father’s house till the time they were about to get married. They only had a little freedom, because they were controlled their whole lives, first by their parents and then by their husbands. Middle-class girls had according to Nelson one major role: “to connect themselves primarily with the home, which dominant middle-class ideology saw as the antithesis of the marketplace.”¹³ By keeping the daughters protected and clean out of any bad influences they “would also retain a purity so refreshing that it would help to cleanse their fathers and brothers.”¹⁴ The daughters spent most of the time home improving their skills such as embroidery or playing the piano.

Sons, on the other hand, did not have as significant position as daughters did because it was daughters who preserved the morality of the whole family. Upper-class boys were taught to be able to handle family property when being old enough which was their main obligation. The school was probably one of the very few places, where upper-class boys could meet with higher middle-class boys and they were sent there from the age of seven or eight. At the age of twelve, they usually started to attend public schools. Boys from the middle class were supposed to find a respectable job as soon as possible in order to prove they were capable to fulfil the same duties as their fathers. It was common for the middle-class young men to stay in their family house till they had enough money to provide for themselves and their potential families.

2.3 Criminal and working-class children

From an early age, children from poor backgrounds had to work out of necessity to support their families, often in debt. Working-class boys had limited job opportunities so they often ended up continuing the family business, but in the case of the extremely poor families, there was usually no business they could continue to lead. Older boys could find a job by themselves oftentimes on the verge of crime. In contrast, with the girls from higher classes, working-class and poor girls had to be self-dependent from an early age

¹² Karl Ittmann, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995), 153.

¹³ Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 81.

¹⁴ Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England*, 85.

when they started running errands up till the time they were able to work properly. In this sense children were viewed as what Nelson calls “commodity to be marketed”¹⁵ and their value was measured by the amount of money they brought to their parents. Duckworth describes that as a consequence of this harsh life and necessity to work when being so young “The children /.../suffered physical degradation as well as an unwholesome moral condition induced by the vices of their parents.”¹⁶

In other cases, as the number of inhabitants increased and the poor lived in unsatisfactory conditions, many children must live on the streets and had to take care of themselves. It was observed that the children living on the streets oftentimes gathered and formed what Duckworth calls “a class of juvenile delinquents.”¹⁷ The paid or honest jobs for children were only little so they had to turn to stealing. Begging and stealing soon became a business as children were often hired by older criminals or even trained by them and formed gangs of child thieves. The young thieves probably had no desire to stop their activities within the gang, even though when committing a crime, they were sentenced as adults since there were no separate laws for children. Furthermore, they had probably never before lived better “For the first time in their lives they found themselves with enough food to eat, a roof over their heads, companions /.../.”¹⁸ Because of the harsh life on the streets and the necessity of a quick adaptation to the world of criminals and the poor, the children behaved like adults even though they could have been around ten years old. According to Duckworth, it was criminal children who threatened the idea of the ideal child “behaviour and familiarity with the adult world and its pleasures among street children contradicted all middle-class standards of childhood, morality and propriety,”¹⁹ and stood in contrast with the pure and innocent middle-class children as well.

2.3.1 Child labour

Poverty was the main cause of child labour, even though some families from slightly better financial backgrounds deliberately sent their children to work in order to improve the family earnings. In the case of the poorest families, they did not have any other option. The major reason for the increasing demand for child labour was the

¹⁵ Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, 70.

¹⁶ Duckworth, *Fagin's Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*, 11.

¹⁷ Duckworth, *Fagin's Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*, 4.

¹⁸ Duckworth, *Fagin's Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*, 25.

¹⁹ Duckworth, *Fagin's Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*, 33.

Industrial Revolution. The children represented a cheap labour force, therefore young workers tended to concentrate in the factories, however, the vast majority were still working in agricultural jobs. Orphans or abandoned children under the care of the parish were often apprenticed at low age. The youngest children from poor families run errands or worked as porters. Another major area of child labour was workshops and coal mines. According to Peter Kirby in his book *Child Labour in Britain*, the government lacked any system when it came to child labour regulation “improvements in children’s working conditions were equally unsystematic,”²⁰ and thus the majority of places with child labour were still unobserved. The involvement of the Parliament was gradual and started in 1833 by introducing the Factory Act which prohibited children under the age of nine from working. Another Factory Act of 1844 regulated the minimal age of child workers and established that children should attend school every day for a few hours. Then in 1842, the Mines Act was passed and set the minimum age of ten for child mine workers. Jobs which threatened children’s health such as bleaching were not under control till 1864 and steel mills until 1867. The unified set of laws regarding child labour was passed in 1878 as the Factory and Workshop Act.

2.4 The ideal of an innocent child

Till the Romantic period, children were perceived only as means of how to expand the family and ensure its continuation. They even had the same clothes as adults only smaller. This perception changed during the Romantic period when William Wordsworth in his two poems *Lucy Gray* and *The Pet-lamb* introduced a new portrayal of the child. From that time, the children, presumably the most innocent beings, were the focus of the attention and what is more, Nelson stresses that “never before had childhood become an obsession within the culture at large.”²¹ This fascination was supported by the fact that since 1851 children made up about 35 per cent of the population and were present almost everywhere. The Victorians influenced by the Romantic view of children saw them as a symbol of innocence and implicitly as a kind of a moralistic tool for the adults. According to John Locke, an English 17th century philosopher, all people were born as a tabula rasa or a blank slate which is clean and unwritten and different experiences and influences will

²⁰ Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 94.

²¹ Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, 69.

leave their mark on it: “All ideas come from sensation or reflection. Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas”²² Children became the symbol of innocence exactly for this reason. They were all born as innocent human beings not yet spoiled by their parents or deprived by society. It was not until they were older and exposed to the harsh life among the poor or to moral schooling by their parents, that their innocence slowly disappeared.

It is necessary to mention that the idea of an innocent child was formed by society. Linda Austin in her article calls this innocent child “a social entity.”²³ According to some, the children and their innocence could potentially be the basis of a better society. Victorian education manuals assumed, that “the careful parent can both enlighten children’s ignorance and preserve their virtue, helping to create a culture of social purity.”²⁴ Nelson claims that a better society should also be built upon men who underwent a moral purification: “the man who forms loving bonds with children is establishing for himself an emotional life centred on innocence, purifying his own existence retroactively.”²⁵ Following this, children represented the innocence that was long lost to the adults.

The fascination and infatuation with the children prevailed and the idea of their innocence was spread even more as the printing press was modernized and different books or magazines became accessible and more affordable. Surprisingly, the majority of books about children were not intended for child readers, on the contrary, the books presented the “children for adult consumption.”²⁶ Similarly, as in the case with the father-child bond, which was supposed to awaken men’s morality and thus help them to purify through the child’s innocence, the books were intended to expose adults to children’s innocence as well. From the Romantic perception, children in literature were portrayed as a source of nostalgia. Austin offers the following explanation for that: “The nostalgic representation of childhood paradoxically seeks through memory to slough off the burden of memory.”²⁷ As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, children were the source of nostalgia, because they evoke in adults their own childhood. By going back to the time, they

²² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Penguin Classics, 1998), 117.

²³ Linda M. Austin, “Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy” (*Studies in Romanticism* (vol. 42, no. 1): pp. 75-98. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 77.

²⁴ Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, 79.

²⁵ Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, 79.

²⁶ Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, 75.

²⁷ Austin, “Children of Childhood: Nostalgia and the Romantic Legacy”, 86.

were innocent, they were able to purify the sins of their adult life. The literature and the portrayals of fictional innocent children were intended to do the same.

3 Charles Dickens' biography

Charles Dickens is widely known as a writer of the so-called Condition of England novels. His fascination with the children as the main characters, their particular portrayals as well as social criticism became the main characteristics of his works. The major part of this chapter will describe his childhood with the focus on his time in a blacking factory. This period of his life became a source of compassion he felt towards the poorest when being an adult and which also projected into the social criticism in his novels. The relationship between Charles Dickens and his children will be mentioned as well.

3.1 Early years, London life and the blacking factory

Charles John Huffman Dickens was born in Landport in the year 1812, on the 7th of February to John and Elizabeth Dickens as their second oldest child. John Dickens worked in the Navy Pay Office and because of his irresponsible behaviour which Claire Tomalin in *Charles Dickens: A Life* describes as “expansive nature and easy way with money,”²⁸ the family had to move a lot during Dickens’ childhood. The place he remembered most vividly and dearly, and which he went back to in his memories as well as in his novels was Chatham in Kent. Dickens’ family lived there for around four years and for Dickens, Kent represented a happy childhood. Kent of Dickens’ youth is described by Fred Kaplan in *Dickens: A Biography* as “radiant landscape became forever associated with the time in which he felt young and loved.”²⁹ In his biography of Dickens, one of his closest friends John Forster describes him at the age of five or six as “a very little and a very sickly boy”³⁰ because he suffered from spasms that prevented him from participating in children’s activities, thus he did not come in contact with other children. Not being able to play with other boys from the neighbourhood he had to find something to occupy himself with. It was at this time he discovered his love for reading. He was able to improve his skills in preparatory day school which he attended with his older sister. After the family moved to the less prominent address, Dickens started attending more classical school under the guidance of Mr Giles, who “had pronounced him to be a boy of

²⁸ Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (New York: Viking, 2011), 56.

²⁹ Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2013), 20.

³⁰ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete* (Chapel Hill: Project Gutenberg, 2008), 42.

capacity.”³¹ Dickens enjoyed his time at school and was seen as a promising student, so when the family had to move again to London this time, Dickens stayed with the family of Mr Giles till the end of the school term. In 1822 at the age of ten, he left Kent alone for good, and Tomalin accounts that “he remembered it as a damp and sorrowful journey.”³²

The beginnings in London were marked by the financial difficulties which John Dickens brought upon the family. They lived in Bayham Street which was located at that time in one of the poor parts of the city. There were no children in the neighbourhood and no sense of society as it was in Kent. Young Dickens remembered Chatham vividly and when became older he mentioned to Forster the longing for escape from London: “As I thought,” he said on one occasion very bitterly, “in the little back-garret in Bayham Street, of all I had lost in losing Chatham.”³³ In this sense, London of that time became for Dickens the symbol of solitude and the loss of his childhood. What is more, whereas his sister Fanny was sent to the Royal Academy of Music, Dickens stayed home helping with his four siblings, and his feeling of neglect only deepened. His child’s mind “could not understand why he was not sent to school, but kept at home with nothing to do.”³⁴

This arrangement was suddenly disrupted by the arrest of John Dickens in 1824 because he was not able to pay his debts. With John arrested, the family need every possible relief they could get. So, when the job offer came for Dickens it was eagerly accepted by both his parents. He would label the blacking pots in a shoe blacking factory in a warehouse. Much later when Dickens talked about or remembered those times he was still in shock and agitated that this could happen to a child with the approval of its parents: “It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age.”³⁵ However, what struck him the most was the calmness of his parents: “My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar-school, and going to Cambridge.”³⁶ This account made by him suggests that he never forgot that his schooling was sacrificed in order to earn six shillings a week and confirms the importance education had for him.

³¹ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 46.

³² Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 64.

³³ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 49.

³⁴ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 68.

³⁵ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 59.

³⁶ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 59.

Those times spent in the blacking factory warehouse marked the turning point in his life which influenced his writing as well. He told Foster: “No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship.”³⁷ The whole family was living in Marshalsea Prison for debtors with John Dickens, because they were not able to keep their house. Charles at that time was living far away from his family which he visited only on Sundays, thus he felt forlorn and “utterly neglected and hopeless.”³⁸ In May 1824 John Dickens was released from prison and the family moved to a house in Somers Town. Dickens was still working in the blacking factory and to his surprise and disappointment, his parents did not suggest he leave the job.

It was not until the time when his father quarrelled with James Lamert, who offered the job to Dickens before, presumably about Dickens’ position in the workhouse, that he was able to leave the business for good. Dickens described to Forster that he left the warehouse “with a relief so strange that it was like oppression /.../.”³⁹ Nevertheless, Dickens felt bitter toward his mother after she went to the blacking factory asking there to take her son back: “I do not write resentfully or angrily; for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am; but I never afterward forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back.”⁴⁰ After John Dickens decided that his son should be educated, Dickens started to attend Wellington House Academy. After all the suffering he must have endured it is quite surprising that his schoolmates “described him as a cheerful and mischievous boy, joining in pranks.”⁴¹ His year spent in the blacking warehouse was never mentioned by any of his parents and they acted as it had never happened and so did Dickens even though the horrors, he experienced never let him forget.

3.2 Becoming an adult and establishing himself as a writer

Dickens’ education ended as soon as he reached the age of fifteen in February 1827, because his father again not being able to pay the debts could not afford Dickens to go to school. He bore this fact with a surprising acceptance and even agreed that his mother would help him find the job. Soon, Dickens started to work as a clerk in an office of a

³⁷ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 60.

³⁸ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 60.

³⁹ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 71.

⁴⁰ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 71.

⁴¹ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 78.

law firm. After some time, he found life in the office boring but enjoyed his life outside it discovering the possibilities it offered. Among the other things, he learned the shorthand taking inspiration from his father. After he quit work in a law office, he was a reporter for courts at Doctors' Commons and then worked as a reporter for various newspapers.

Eventually, he realized that politics was not for him and that he would be more beneficial to society as a writer. He always looked around himself and paid attention to every detail and recorded all his memories and experiences and from this, he would take inspiration to write his earliest sketches and papers. With his first published sketch, the jobs in different magazines and periodicals followed soon. His first job which secured him stable earnings was the one in the *Morning Chronicle*. Shortly after, he was invited to write to the *Chronicle* and the *Evening Chronicle*, whose co-editor George Hogarth saw him as a promising journalist. Hogarth maintained a great relationship with Dickens and invited him to his home in Kensington. There he met Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of George who he married in April 1836. Despite the fact his family was not of those perfect ones, he was looking for an attachment and was ready to invest in it, and Tomalin stresses that “the idea of the large family as a force for good, convivial and energizing, remained powerful for him.”⁴² It is therefore not surprising that Catherine got pregnant after one month of marriage. During the wedding preparation and honeymoon, Dickens was involved in his new project with stories about the character Pickwick and after publishing only a few episodes it became a huge success, and “the names of his characters became common currency.”⁴³

After the birth of their first child in January, Catherine suffered from depression while Dickens had to keep to his schedule to maintain the work on *Pickwick* as well as his new project *Oliver Twist*. At this time, Dickens began a life-long friendship with a young critic John Forster, who he later considered as close as his family and who according to Tomalin “was the only man to whom he confided his most private experiences and feelings.”⁴⁴ In the following years one of his finest works, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Oliver Twist*, was published. During the years 1840-1841, his fame grew and so did his family as his second son and two daughters were born. Therefore, the expenses became so high that Dickens was unable to cover them. In 1842 Dickens

⁴² Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 85.

⁴³ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 112.

⁴⁴ Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 124.

travelled with his wife to America to take a break from writing, draw new inspiration, and discuss the copyright among other things. When back in London he invested time in charitable works and he even helped to set up the Home for Homeless Women in 1847. However, it seems like he was not able to stay in one place for a long time. He spent some time in Italy, Switzerland, and Paris as well. His time in Switzerland was marked by his writing crisis after his failure as an editor of the magazine *Daily News* after which he lost belief in his writing. Everything turned out well when he completed *Dombey and Son*, and for the first time in his life, he did not have to worry about money, because the sales were massive.

3.3 Life of a writer and personal crises

After completing *Dombey and Son*, Dickens gave himself a break from writing which lasted nine months, during which his friendship with Forster developed even more, and Dickens appointed Forster as his biographer. As Dickens confessed to Forster the true accounts of his childhood, he started working on the partially autobiographical novel *David Copperfield* in 1849. In February he established his periodical *Household Words* which dealt with social issues and ran till 1859. After the publication of *David Copperfield* Dickens became a great public figure. Meanwhile, Catherine got pregnant with the tenth child and he became worried how to provide for so many children and ensure good education for each of them.

During the years 1852 – 1857 three of Dickens' greatest novels were published, that being *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, and *Hard Times*. During this time, Dickens felt that his marriage was not as he expected it to be and he sought any kind of an escape, thus he left with his friends to Switzerland and Italy and then travelled to Boulogne as well. He was so frustrated with his marriage that he did not even attend the wedding of his dearest friend Forster in September 1856. In a letter to Forster, he declared that his marriage is over: "Poor Catherine and I are not made for each other, and there is no help for it. It is not only that she makes me uneasy and unhappy, but that I make her so too /.../."⁴⁵

During the time of his separation from Catherine, he finally realized his own goal and took a path of paid public readings because of which he had to travel quite often.

⁴⁵ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I-III, Complete*, 771.

Another important event that accompanied the break-up of the marriage was the meeting with Ternan family in the summer of 1857, and shortly Dickens became infatuated with one of their daughters Nelly. In order to prove he is worth her attention, he was determined to be pure for her, which was of course not possible since he and Catherine had ten children. Since he came to this realization as well, all his anger turned to Catherine and he expressed it through his letters and in the conversations with his friends. What is more, Dickens made it a public affair when he released the statement about their separation in the press. During 1862-1863 he made regular trips to France probably to Nelly who was staying there with her sisters and all the expenses were covered by him. It is highly probable, that Nelly, Dickens' mistress at that time, got pregnant, but there is no direct proof since the child would be illegitimate. In 1866 he met George Dolby who was to be in charge of all future Dickens' reading tours. The shows had a strong effect on Dickens as he felt the power he had over the audience, furthermore, Malcolm Andrews in *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves* states that "the Readings were the final and most extravagant effort of his life to touch his devoted public."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the readings had a dark side as well and that was Dickens' worsened health. His very last reading took place in St James's Hall in March 1870. Dickens died of a stroke on 9 June 1870 in his house in Gad's Hill.

3.4 Relationship with his own children

Initially, Dickens wanted a large family, which he eventually had. In the beginning, he was a loving father, but as the children were getting older and other were born, he started getting cold and detached. This was also partially because he was worried and stressed about how to financially secure his growing family. He mentioned a few times that he did not want any more children and blamed his wife for being so fertile.

From an early age, the children were under the care of nurses and younger boys were educated in boarding schools visiting the family only for the summer. Dickens' oldest son Charley was his favourite and he put great expectations on him and thus sent him to Eaton, from which he removed his son after two years, because it did not meet his expectations. Charley like his other siblings had only little to say when it came to his

⁴⁶ Malcolm Andrews, *Charles Dickens and His Performing Selves: Dickens and the Public Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 177.

future occupation and was sent to Germany by his father to learn business, in which he was never successful. As was usual at that time Dickens put all his expectations on the sons. It was partially justifiable, because he himself did achieve success by his own talent and writing. In 1858 he decided, that the best solution would be to send his sons abroad. The main factor which contributed to this decision was according to Kaplan “his need /.../ to force on them the model of his own success, to distance himself from their likely failures, and to decrease his daily responsibilities as a parent.”⁴⁷ Considering his two daughters Katie and Mammie, they represented ideal Victorian ladies, who would bend to their father’s will. To this extent, Dickens could be satisfied with them. The last straw when it came to his sons was Charley’s bankruptcy and there is no doubt that Dickens recollected the memories of his father in prison for debtors. His disappointment was empowered by the fact he ensured a good education for his children which might offer many opportunities that Dickens in his youth could not have, but his children did not use them. It seems as Dickens spent more time with his fictional children than his own, because he knew they would never disappoint him.

⁴⁷ Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography*, 412.

4 Analysis of the selected novels

In this chapter, I will analyse two novels by Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* in terms of child portrayal. The portrayal of children will be analysed from two different perspectives. The first will be the theme of guilt, which prevents the children to be seen as innocent and burdens them from their birth. I will compare the guilt both *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* must bear and I will try to find a possible resolution to it. Secondly, I will analyse the child characters in terms of innocence which was a highly valued and idealised quality of a perfect Victorian child. In this section, the criminal children as a counterpart to *Oliver Twist*'s innocence will be also closely observed. Both perspectives will be linked to the Victorian ideals considering the pure child and the possible intended effect on the Victorian readers will be included as well.

4.1 The burden of guilt

It was believed that there was nothing purer than a new-born child. As I mentioned in the second chapter on children's innocence and purity, children were not yet burdened by the experiences and actions of life, and thus their innocence was unquestionable. This among other things was the object of fascination in Victorian society. In the selected novels by Dickens two main characters, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* are, however, proven guilty, because they were born. They must bear the sense of guilt and injustice because adults treat them like that, and the children are not able to recognize whether the guilt put on them is justifiable or not. This sense of guilt is only emphasized when the boys are punished, and this makes them question their part of the blame. In the course of their lives, they are driven by the constant feeling of need to repay any act of kindness to redeem themselves. Furthermore, they cannot be considered innocent because the guilt was put on them when they were born. Gwen Watkins in *Dickens in Search of Himself* calls it "primal guilt,"⁴⁸ which arises in the children as a consequence of the adult behaviour that hurts them and causes them to think of themselves as flawed and not worthy of love. Watkins adds that the child "will begin to feel guilt - not because he has done something wrong, but because he is the wrong kind of person,"⁴⁹ and the general thinking was that the wrong people should not even be born.

⁴⁸ Gwen Watkins, *Dickens in Search of Himself* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1987), 109.

⁴⁹ Watkins, *Dickens in Search of Himself*, 109.

4.1.1 Oliver Twist

As soon as Oliver Twist is born, he becomes an orphan and because of this, the responsibility for him is put on the local parish. The birth of a child is oftentimes a great event worth celebrating, whereas in *Oliver Twist* it is described as something unpleasant that will cause many problems for the parish and his birth only means that there is “a new burden having been imposed upon the parish.”⁵⁰ From the first day, Oliver is perceived as a child who should not have been born. His purity and innocence were never even considered since he was marked from the birth as a pauper by being clothed in parish clothes, which is never worn by an ideal child “ he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once— a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none.”⁵¹ This status is accompanied by the prejudices and rejection by the society that only assumes the worst from this kind of children and never considers them to be innocent.

A sense of guilt accompanies Oliver throughout his life in the workhouse, because he is treated with other paupers as if they did something unspeakable and this was their punishment. The parish system establishes that each pauper should have one small bowl of gruel during the mealtime, which is naturally insufficient and the result is that Oliver and other paupers were starving “Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months”⁵² till one day when Oliver dares to ask: “Please, sir, I want some more.”⁵³ This seemingly innocent question while significant for the paupers is taken as a serious offense if not a crime by the board. Watkins describes this moment as a starting point of “a continual guilt-inducing process.”⁵⁴ It is taken as such an immense offense that the next day the parish offers money to everyone who would take Oliver from them. During the following days, Oliver is treated like the worst criminal having been put into a dark lonely room. Eventually, parish beadle Mr Bumble offers Oliver to an undertaker Mr Sowerberry and stresses what a terrible burden for the parish Oliver is and calls him “a dead-weight”⁵⁵ and “a millstone round the parochial throat.”⁵⁶ Mr Bumble is

⁵⁰ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 2.

⁵¹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 4.

⁵² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 14.

⁵³ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 15.

⁵⁴ Watkins, *Dickens in Search of Himself*, 108.

⁵⁵ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 31.

⁵⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 31.

very delighted later when Mr Sowerberry takes Oliver, and the parish has one less hungry pauper to take care of.

Oliver subconsciously confirms his guilt after he gets acquainted with London criminals under the lead of Jew Fagin, when he runs away from the Sowerberrys. In this case, hardly anyone would believe he is innocent, because being associated with criminals was a sufficient proof for most people, except the two philanthropists who see his innocence in him and decide to give him a chance of better life. A repetitive pattern can be seen in the story that includes alternating scenes in which Oliver lives with the thieves, and then is found by a philanthropist Mr Brownlow, taken back to the thieves again, and saved, this time by Mrs Maylie. It looks like there is a constant fight over Oliver's innocence or his conviction of being guilty. Oliver is taken back to the thieves against his will while he is running errands for Mr Brownlow. This time, Oliver's guilt is multiplied, because he disappoints Mr Brownlow's trust as he has his money as well as clothes. What is worse by not coming back Oliver confirms to Brownlow that he is a criminal who runs away with his money. After having a chance to redeem his guilt by living with Brownlow, Oliver finds the thought of stealing unbearable and would do anything to preserve the small bit of innocence he has to win back Brownlow trust if he has the chance "Oh! for God's sake let me go!" cried Oliver; "let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London; never, never! Oh! pray have mercy on me, and do not make me steal."⁵⁷ Oliver knows once he would deliberately step into the world of crime, he would lose his chance to redeem himself for good.

During the planned robbery, Oliver is shot and left alone by the thieves in the kennel. He manages to go to a house that was supposed to be robbed. After some time, the inhabitants decide to believe his story and Mrs Maylie offers him her kindness and care and lets him stay in her house. As with Mr Brownlow Oliver feels overwhelming gratitude and wants to repay all the goodness he receives and strives to be useful in any possible way, because of the feeling, that he has to earn it. "He hoped /.../, he could do something to show his gratitude; only something, which would let them see the love and duty with which his breast was full."⁵⁸ He is well aware of the fact he is given another

⁵⁷ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 205.

⁵⁸ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 294.

chance to start a life free of the burden of guilt and because of that he “was eager to serve them with his whole heart and soul.”⁵⁹

4.1.2 David Copperfield

The same feeling of guilt since being born just like Oliver has also David Copperfield. His birth is awaited by his young mother Clara Copperfield and great-aunt Miss Betsey Trotwood. Betsy automatically anticipates the child would be a girl and, in this case, she claims, that she would be her godmother and take care of her upbringing, she says: “I must make that *my* care.”⁶⁰ What a disappointment it must be for her, when Clara gives birth to a boy, that she immediately leaves a newborn and his mother without a single word and intends to never be in contact with them again “She vanished like a discontented fairy; or like one of those supernatural beings, whom it was popularly supposed I was entitled to see; and never came back any more.”⁶¹ Her departure implies that David just like Oliver is also guilty because it is him who was born and not a girl. With his great-aunt’s departure, David loses the opportunity of promised great upbringing, and from this time he perceives her as some kind of myth that is often talked about but never seen.

Over the next years, David lives quite a comfortable life with his mother and nurse Peggotty, only till his mother finds a new husband, Mr Murdstone. Kate Puttock refers to his arrival in an article as “the disruption of childhood paradise,”⁶² which ends David’s ideal life and sometime later even the relationship with his mother. Together with his sister Mr Murdstone awakens the guilt in David by applying strict rules on him that he is unable to follow. David describes the presence of the Murdstones as “a monstrous load that I was obliged to bear, a daymare that there was no possibility of breaking in,”⁶³ which makes it impossible for him to breathe freely without thinking about them. Furthermore, he is well aware of the sense of the ever-present guilt, which he perceives as “a weight that brooded on my wits, and blunted them.”⁶⁴ The sense of guilt is supported by the

⁵⁹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 294.

⁶⁰ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 10.

⁶¹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 15.

⁶² Kay Puttock, “‘The Fault . . . Of Which I Confusedly Felt Guilty yet Innocent’: Charles Dickens’s Evolving Championship of the Child” (*Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* (vol. 17, no. 3): pp. 19–22. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 19.

⁶³ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 137.

⁶⁴ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 137.

alienation from his mother as well as Peggotty to such an extent that David is not able to stand even himself and he says: “I was not a favourite there with anybody, not even with myself.”⁶⁵

It comes as no surprise that David cannot focus during the lessons with the Murdstones since they have such an influence upon him. After one extremely unsuccessful lesson, David is beaten by Mr Murdstone and in the heat of the beating, David bites Mr Murdstone’s hand. As punishment, David is kept isolated in his room without being able to meet anyone, and later, he is sent to a boarding school. During those days the burden of guilt becomes the only thing he feels which is described by David as follows: “It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious criminal.”⁶⁶ David’s description implies that he started to think of himself as a bad person and believes the accusations of the Murdstones. Mr Murdstone’s punishment, however, reaches as far as the school. After the agreement with the proprietor, David has to wear as a constant reminder of his guilt a card that states the following: “Take care of him. He bites.”⁶⁷ What is more, he dreads the day everyone will come back to school after the break and that is the cause of his paranoia which only intensify his suffering that “nobody can imagine.”⁶⁸ During this suffering, David starts to believe that he is very dangerous and the thought of being a bad person further occupies his mind: “I positively began to have a dread of myself,”⁶⁹ However, the worst punishment is yet to come.

Shortly after the beginning of another half year in boarding school, David’s mother dies. The Murdstones do not know what to do with David at first but eventually decide that he is to be sent to a wine bottling factory to provide for himself. This is the worst punishment for David and he remembers “being utterly without hope.”⁷⁰ David finds the shame and guilt so unbearable that he decides to take his last chance to secure himself a better life and to find his great-aunt Betsy Trotwood, who was so disappointed with him the day he was born.

⁶⁵ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 133.

⁶⁶ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 66.

⁶⁷ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 89.

⁶⁸ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 90.

⁶⁹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 90.

⁷⁰ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 175.

4.1.3 Restoration of innocence

Both Oliver and David are freed from the guilt the moment they find out they are worthy of love and that Betsy Trotwood and Mr Brownlow are willing to believe that they are innocent despite the circumstances and provide them with a safe and loving home. The love and care the boys receive prove they can be saved. Betsy Trotwood adopts David and he even gets her surname and this new surname represents a new person not burdened by the injustices of the past. After he gets new clothes and becomes a member of Betsy Trotwood's family, David says: "Thus I began my new life, in a new name, and with everything new about me. Now that the state of doubt was over, I felt, for many days, like one in a dream."⁷¹ This suggests that family is a significant factor in children's life and confirms the Victorian ideal that the family was the centre of society. The importance of domesticity for middle-class society is stressed by Ittmann: "The home constituted a refuge from the larger world, a private haven from the pressures of the public marketplace."⁷² Generally, it was also agreed that a family can and should preserve children's innocence, furthermore as seen in the previous part of this subchapter it is possible that the child's innocence can be restored by the means of a family as well. Ittmann explains this as "the ability of the home to serve as a moral regulator,"⁷³ and adds that it is based on the ability to block outside influences on the family members.⁷⁴ David's great-aunt Betsy can block the influences of the Murdstones by sending them away from the house in the presence of David, and thus frees him from the guilt. The same can be applied to Oliver and Mr Brownlow and Mrs Maylie who are able to replace Oliver's guilt with hope, and thus restore his innocence.

4.2 Picture of children's innocence

In the previous subchapter 4.1, I have analysed the theme of a child's guilt which burdens them from their birth, and thus prevents them to be seen as innocent. In this subchapter, I will look at the contradictory theme that is previously mentioned innocence, which the characters still possess despite the guilt. I will look at how the children are described in terms of innocence and how they can be seen as innocent despite guilt.

⁷¹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 242.

⁷² Ittmann, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England*, 142.

⁷³ Ittmann, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England*, 142.

⁷⁴ Ittmann, *Work, Gender and Family in Victorian England*, 142.

Different aspects of innocence will be examined as well as their influence on the portrayals of child characters. The particular aspects and portrayals will be linked to the Victorian ideals associated with children and their innocence and purity, and the possible connection with the readers will be also included.

4.2.1 Innate innocence of Oliver Twist

Oliver Twist is the embodiment of innocence and has an innate sense of morality from birth, in the story, it is said that: “nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver’s breast.”⁷⁵ By his nature, he becomes resilient to all hardships from which he is saved by his innocence. When Fagin tries to make a thief from Oliver, he desires to turn Oliver into the bad side by “slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever.”⁷⁶ Since Oliver’s soul is pure and full of innocence, Fagin’s influence has no power over him. It is, however, Oliver’s innocence and naivety that get him into the situation in the first place. With his naturally pure character, he does not realize the actual danger and after all the hardships on the way is glad, he has a place in London to stay and is even assured of the hospitality of the gentleman who is responsible for the house “This unexpected offer of shelter was too tempting to be resisted, especially as it was immediately followed up, by the assurance that the old gentleman referred to, would doubtless provide Oliver with a comfortable place.”⁷⁷ Eventually, Fagin has to admit that Oliver is not suited for the business, even though Fagin tries as much as he can to make Oliver a young criminal and accounts that “he was not like other boys in the same circumstances.”⁷⁸ As with many other comparisons to the criminal children Oliver is stood above the others by simply not having the innate predispositions to do bad.

James R. Kincaid in *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Literature* claims that innocence is the only thing that makes the child valuable since it has no other qualities: “The child is endowed with blessed or natural innocence, its most valuable, perhaps its only, attribute, its only possession.”⁷⁹ This suggests that child characters who exhibit this rather ideal purity are in other ways flat and because of that they can only be

⁷⁵ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 7.

⁷⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 173.

⁷⁷ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 69.

⁷⁸ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 245.

⁷⁹ James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 77.

valued by their innocence. In many cases, this was a sufficient representation since innocence was the quality that society treasured the most. As it is stated, innocence is the only thing Oliver possesses, thus his purity has importance to him. So, whenever there is a possibility Oliver should lose the chance of honest life to which he is driven by his innate sense of morality, he is agitated and would do anything to secure this life for himself. He also expresses his wish with urgency to Mr Brownlow and says: “Don’t turn me out of doors to wander in the streets again. Let me stay here, and be a servant. Don’t send me back to the wretched place I came from. Have mercy upon a poor boy, sir!”⁸⁰ Brownlow believes Oliver is innocent and Oliver evokes even more compassion in him by referring to himself as “a poor boy”.⁸¹

4.2.2 The use of flat characters

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the ideal children depicted in literature have oftentimes only the quality of being innocent. This one-dimensional description shows the tendency of these characters to be passive participants, as can be seen in the case of Oliver who is merely an observer in his own story. It is explicitly expressed in the narrative as Oliver happens to participate in the storyline but not by his own doing “Oliver found himself, at three o’clock in the afternoon, in a travelling-carriage.”⁸² In the end, Oliver gets his happy ending with the adoptive father Mr Brownlow with the help of the Maylies, however, Oliver does only little to navigate his life in this direction, rather the others ensure this while Oliver is only “the poor boy whom their charity had rescued from misery, or death.”⁸³ He appears to be an object whose role is to be a kind of a moral presence throughout the story and to be the messenger of moral values that target the adult readers. He can also be seen as an embodiment of the conscience of adults which supposes to awaken compassion in them. As mentioned in chapter 2.2.4, children portrayed in novels were intended for the adults as their innocence should channel the former child of their youth which is long lost under what Nelson calls “the harshness of the modern world.”⁸⁴ Their own childhood memories are associated with sentiment and the adults then see the childhood in a nostalgic way. In real-life, children were with a great naivety

⁸⁰ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 122.

⁸¹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 122.

⁸² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 491.

⁸³ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 294.

⁸⁴ Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, 80.

seen as the ones who can have a positive influence on the adults by reviving their morality. Nelson describes that according to this ideal principle, children are “serving as the instrument rather than as the object of character change.”⁸⁵ This proves my theory that Oliver is in fact a flat character being only the moral presence.

In another instance, the child’s passivity can show it not as an inanimate object, but as an economic tool which earns money. For example when Oliver is offered to anyone who would take him and eventually is pledged to Mr Sowerberry as parish apprentice, therefore he is free to treat Oliver as he wants “it was arranged that Oliver should go to him that evening ‘upon liking’—a phrase which means /.../ that if the master find, upon a short trial, that he can get enough work out of a boy without putting too much food into him, he shall have him for a term of years, to do what he likes with.”⁸⁶ From this description, it is apparent that neither the parish nor the undertaker takes Oliver as being of its own will. Furthermore, it appears that Oliver has in this situation no other value than the economic one. This can be also seen when Oliver arrives in London and lives with the thieves. Fagin makes a good business while the boys are stealing for him and the same, he intends to do with Oliver. When it appears that Oliver is not suited for stealing, one of the child thieves Dodger points out that if Fagin does not succeed with Oliver, he will be the first of the gang, who will not be successfully trained as a thief and thus he will be the first “that turned out unprofitable.”⁸⁷ The representation of children based on their economic value reflects the double standards when it comes to the portrayal of children. Criminal or working children are described with detachment and lack of sentiment and are perceived as an economic tool as well.

Another purpose of the use of the flat character is to document the injustices committed to children. To be specific Dickens for example attacks the social institutions as he describes Oliver being a mere part of the system during the first months of his life in a workhouse: “For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception.”⁸⁸ This documents that the exploitation and child abuse were in a lot of cases institutionalized and covered by the particular authorities. Katharina Boehm claims in *Charles Dickens and the Sciences of Childhood* that in this case, Dickens uses Oliver, specifically his “fragile body as a seismograph that gives

⁸⁵ Tucker, ed., *A New Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, 80.

⁸⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 32.

⁸⁷ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 171.

⁸⁸ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 5.

evidence about social injustice.”⁸⁹ Therefore, Oliver can be seen as an inanimate object which is constantly hurt and mistreated in order to reveal and stress the problems to the reader and criticize the social situation of that time.

The examples mentioned in the previous subchapter show that Oliver as a flat character can be used as a significant and efficient tool for manipulating the narration. Boehm goes even further and calls Oliver a “versatile narrative vehicle.”⁹⁰ The readers perceive only what the author intends because Oliver as a one-dimensional character is easily approachable to them and thus produces the stronger desired effect, that is among the others compassion and the sentiment.

4.2.3 Vulnerability of the innocent child

The sentimental depiction of the child’s innocence and the child’s abuse, which supposes to evoke sensibility in adult readers, is also well portrayed in the character of Dick. During his runaway from the Sowerberrys Oliver says goodbye to his friend from the workhouse who must bear the same hardships as Oliver did. Oliver wishes Dick to be happy, however, Dick knows he is dying and he wishes the same, but knows this happens not until he will be dead, he says: “I hope so,” replied the child. ‘After I am dead, but not before.’⁹¹ This suggests that the happiness he did not experience on the earth waits for him in heaven where his innocence can be restored and where he will be free from the abuse he experiences in the workhouse. For this reason, he fully accepts his destiny and even looks forward to it as it represents his rescue from the wretched life on the earth. Heaven is calling him and he accounts that “I dream so much of heaven, and Angels, and kind faces that I never see when I am awake,”⁹² and dreams about the love he would receive there. Dickens links the child with heaven and thus the child can be seen as an angel who is considered an embodiment of innocence. In this instance, Dick is also glad that he should die when being so young and remain a child not yet being grown-up burdened by the consequences of the adult life. This will ensure that he will go to the heaven where he can reunite with his sister and live happily there “if I had lived to be a man, and grew old, my little sister who is in heaven, might forget me, or be unlike me;

⁸⁹ Katharina Boehm, *Charles Dickens and the Sciences of Childhood: Popular Medicine, Child Health and Victorian Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 27.

⁹⁰ Boehm, *Charles Dickens and the Sciences of Childhood: Popular Medicine, Child Health and Victorian Culture*, 33.

⁹¹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 62.

⁹² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 62.

and it would be so much happier if we were both children there together.”⁹³ What is more, Oliver learns about Dick’s death when he found his happiness, but at the same time, Dick is also happy except not in the same place as Oliver, but in heaven.

Similarly, just like Oliver, Dick only waits for death and is only an object of the abusive behaviour, which also makes him vulnerable, because he cannot protect himself. He is described as “the little being who stood trembling.”⁹⁴ This portrayal of a vulnerable child contributes to the phenomenon which Malcolm Andrews calls in his book *Dickens and the Grown-up Child* “the high commercial value of Innocent Childhood.”⁹⁵ The vulnerability goes hand in hand with the feeling of being alone, therefore, there are frequent scenes when the child is put into a state of utter isolation and loneliness. Oliver experiences this state many times throughout the story when he is punished for asking more, when he is taken back to the thieves or when he comes to the undertaker’s workshop and tries to fall asleep “He was alone in a strange place; and we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation. The boy had no friends to care for, or to care for him.”⁹⁶ To stress the sense of loneliness even more it is mentioned that Oliver had no one who would care for him and that makes him even more vulnerable. The vulnerability of the children was somewhat even more fascinating for the adult readers than the innocence and the purity alone. It reminds the readers of childhood nostalgia, because they once were too, young, innocent, and thus vulnerable.

Having described *Oliver Twist* as the embodiment of innate innocence, *David Copperfield* is also portrayed as an innocent child during his earlier years, however, his innocence is expressed and depicted in a different way. The first difference is that the story is narrated by the main hero David who accounts for the events of his life with a distance of a grown-up man. In this case, Dickens does not leave the child in its innocent state of childhood, but the novel depicts David’s whole life. He describes his younger self in an honest manner as “an innocent romantic boy, making his imaginative world out of such strange experiences and sordid things.”⁹⁷ David also describes his childhood as being the “slow agony of my youth,”⁹⁸ which refers to the exploitation he suffers by the

⁹³ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 158.

⁹⁴ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 157.

⁹⁵ Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994), 75.

⁹⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 37.

⁹⁷ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 191.

⁹⁸ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 191.

Murdstones and to the loss of his mother. While Oliver is innocent as a part of his being and has an innate attribute of being innocent, David's innocence is not presented in a straightforward way, instead, it is apparent mainly through the abuse and exploitation caused to him by the Murdstones. David himself feels that Mr Murdstone would disrupt his idyllic childhood which he does not want to lose and thus does not want another member in his small family. After his mother tells him the news that Mr Murdstone is his stepfather David says after that moment "I could not look at her, I could not look at him."⁹⁹ He cannot understand why would his mother need someone else, since the two of them and Peggotty are happy.

Mr Murdstone rejects the essence of childhood and wants to have an adult-like child instead, who is willing and conscious. He sees innocence as a weakness that children have and tries to restrain it by firmness and even violence. Following the abuse, David's innocence is exposed through his suffering and vulnerability which makes him defenceless against the influence of Mr Murdstone and his sister. Andrews explains that "If childish weakness is defined as inadequacy by the standards of the Murdstone creed, then in the early chapters the reader's sympathies are unavoidably with the child and the childlike."¹⁰⁰ In the previous paragraph, older David also stresses the ability to make an imaginative world, which serves David as a protection against the abuse and also the way how to preserve his innocence: "They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time."¹⁰¹ The child's imagination was another feature of the idyllic romantic child which was significant and which as one of the bases of a child's nature Mr Murdstone wants to destroy "in order to repress the child's individuality and self-awareness."¹⁰² Another link to his ideal innocent childhood is represented by his nurse Peggotty who reminds David of the times when he, his mother, and Peggotty were "the best friends in the world."¹⁰³ Unfortunately, Mr Murdstone isolates David from his loved ones and he is sentenced to suffer alone without any kind of support. The same sternness that Mr Murdstone possesses, he also demands it from David's mother and she succumbs without standing up for her son. "The natural result of this treatment /.../ was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged. I was not made the less so by my sense of being daily more and

⁹⁹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 50.

¹⁰⁰ Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child*, 139.

¹⁰¹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 63.

¹⁰² Peter Merchant and Catherine Waters, eds., *Dickens and the Imagined Child* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), 173.

¹⁰³ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 23.

more shut out and alienated from my mother.”¹⁰⁴ The function of the Murdstones in this case is to awaken compassion in the reader which is described by Frenk and Steveker as “the famous change of heart toward kindness and generosity, often brought about by suffering and compassion.”¹⁰⁵ At the same time, they represent a threat to the Victorian ideals, the ideal child, and specifically the conception of the family because they suppress the child in David and ruin the romantic family he once had.

4.2.4 Criminal children

In the previous part of the chapter, I have described *Oliver Twist* as an embodiment of innocence. Following this, his innocence and moral side are even more emphasized in the scenes with child thieves who stand in contradiction to his purity. Furthermore, they attack the ideal of an innocent child by exhibiting adult-like features which are a natural result of their criminal life. By behaving like adults, the imaginary age gap between Oliver and the thieves is created, even though Oliver is only two or three years younger than them and consequently, his childish naivety is emphasized, oftentimes creating a hint of a comic effect.

When Oliver starts to live with the thieves, they are trying to get him into the business from the very beginning. Oliver thinks they work in some kind of manufacturing industry and is himself curious “what branch of manufacture he would be instructed in, first.”¹⁰⁶ Oliver views Fagin as joyful and trusts him, because he thinks “/.../ that the Jew, being so much his senior, must know best.”¹⁰⁷ Fagin and the thieves want Oliver to feel comfortable around them and to be interested in what they are doing. Every day they play some kind of “a very curious and uncommon game,”¹⁰⁸ by which Oliver is amused, but in reality, Fagin with Charley Bates and Dodger are training their skills in thievery by picking handkerchiefs from Fagin’s pockets. Oliver’s naivety is a source of great humour for the thieves, and they deliberately make fun of him and his innocent unawareness. One day after the game, Fagin asks him if he wants to learn how to take out the handkerchiefs out of pockets and Oliver replies that he would be glad and his response is so funny that

¹⁰⁴ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 63.

¹⁰⁵ Joachim Frenk and Lena Steveker, eds., *Charles Dickens as an Agent of Change* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), xiii.

¹⁰⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 83.

¹⁰⁷ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 79.

one of the thieves Charley Bates almost chokes himself: “Very much, indeed, if you’ll teach me, sir,” replied Oliver. Master Bates saw something so exquisitely ludicrous in this reply, that he burst into another laugh.”¹⁰⁹ In most of these cases, Oliver cannot understand what makes them laugh so much, and oftentimes he “saw nothing to laugh at, in anything that had passed.”¹¹⁰ Oliver’s naive perception of the thieves is also blurred into the narrative as the story gives an impression of being narrated from Oliver’s point of view. This can be seen for example whenever there is a reference to Fagin. Firstly, he is referred to as “the amiable old Jew,”¹¹¹ or “the playful old gentleman,”¹¹² and later as “the wily old Jew,”¹¹³ and after his true nature is revealed and he does not have to pretend any longer, his appearance is described as follows: “he looked less like a man, than like some hideous phantom, moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit.”¹¹⁴ In the last example, the contrast between pure Oliver and devilish Fagin is most noticeable.

Oliver’s moral character, however, makes him morally more mature than the thieves. Once, he reminds them how they left him to take the blame for them when they wanted to rob Mr Brownlow: “You can leave your friends, though,” said Oliver with a half smile; ‘and let them be punished for what you did.’”¹¹⁵ In such cases Oliver functions also as a moral presence and reminder of the bad behaviour of the thieves. Oliver’s innocence is not only comic or reformatory, moreover, it is also considered a threat to the thieves. Firstly, his morality and inexperience may be the cause of their downfall as he can give them away when having the chance to do so. Fagin, however, anticipates it and knows they need to get Oliver back sooner than he turns them out after being taken to Mr Brownlow and says: “If he means to blab us among his new friends, we may stop his mouth yet.”¹¹⁶ Secondly, his innocence prevents Fagin to make him a thief and achieve his goal to doom his life.

From the interactions between Oliver and the child thieves, there is apparent deviance in the perception and portrayal of criminal children in comparison to the innocent Oliver. This also reflects the status of criminal and working-class children in society.

¹⁰⁹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 79.

¹¹⁰ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 79.

¹¹¹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 81.

¹¹² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 81.

¹¹³ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 173.

¹¹⁴ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 447.

¹¹⁵ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 170.

¹¹⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 118.

James Kincaid thinks it is caused by “the way we have idealized ‘the child’ that makes us indifferent to most children, even those whose misery and devastation strike our eyes.”¹¹⁷ People were so fascinated with the ideal imagined child that they did not want to see the ugly truth of children living on the streets and working at such a young age. Furthermore, criminal children are not perceived as children any longer and the fascination of adults over purity and innocence is lost. Kincaid also explains that children do not have only the quality of being innocent, but “other conceptions of children were still around, complicating the vacuously pure ideal.”¹¹⁸ He summarizes the conception as seeing the child as “primitive,” which was closely linked to the perception of a child as “noble savage.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, he adds that other associations are related to this conception such as “the idea of natural depravity, of a savagery altogether ignoble.”¹²⁰ These characteristics were reinforced in the case of criminal children because they exhibit more naturalistic features alongside the instinct of self-preservation and the need to adapt.

Considering Charley Bates and Dodger, William Lankford describes one of the causes of their behaviour in *‘The Parish Boy’s Progress’*: “The Dodger's intransigent truculence and Charley Bates's irrepressible glee override the moral judgment that would condemn them.”¹²¹ This theory can be further developed because these characteristics which prevent them from being moral also work as a protection which helps them to adapt and thus survive in the harsh criminal world without the burden of guilt. Charley Bates uses his exaggerated cheerfulness as a defence from feeling guilty. When Dodger is arrested for stealing a snuff box, he feels sorry for him and sits quietly for a moment. Only a few moments later he is merry as usual and is looking forward to Dodger ridiculing the officers in the court and is joyful about it: “Ha! ha! laughed Master Bates, ‘what a lark that would be, wouldn’t it /.../?”¹²² Considering the natural side of the thieves and their adaptation, young criminals who like Dodger were “smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men,”¹²³ were indifferent to the adults by their behaviour and could be found anywhere in the slums located in big cities. Duckworth

¹¹⁷ Wendy S. Jakobson, ed., *Dickens and the Children of Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 32.

¹¹⁸ Jakobson, ed., *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, 33.

¹¹⁹ Jakobson, ed., *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, 33.

¹²⁰ Jakobson, ed., *Dickens and the Children of Empire*, 33.

¹²¹ William T. Lankford, “‘The Parish Boy’s Progress’: The Evolving Form of *Oliver Twist*.” (*PMLA* (vol. 93, no. 1): pp. 20-32. New York: Modern Language Association, 1978), 22.

¹²² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 417.

¹²³ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 72.

indicates one of the causes of their behaviour: “their unchildlike behaviour being the result of the environment in which they lived.”¹²⁴ The child thieves have no moral authority since Fagin is a thief as well, besides they would not survive in the criminal world with honesty and fairness.

Dickens, however, uncovers a glimpse of the moral side of the thieves. For example, in the case of a young girl Nancy, who was taught by Fagin since being a child. To achieve this revelation, Dickens uses Oliver and his innocence to do so. Oliver evokes sudden compassion in Nancy who remembers her own unfortunate childhood with Fagin. She recalls the time she spent with him and blames him for who she is now, she says: “I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this! /.../ I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since.”¹²⁵ Nevertheless, she wants to help Oliver, but as she explains to him, she has no options on how to do it, Nancy adds: “If I could help you, I would; but I have not the power.”¹²⁶ The only thing she can do is to let Oliver know she is with him and ensure him of his innocence and that he does not do anything wrong despite the situation he is in, she says: “whatever they make you do, is no fault of yours.”¹²⁷ After the robbery when Oliver is lost she is glad that Oliver is freed from them even if it means that he should die. Eventually, it is her who helps to uncover Oliver’s true origin and to restore his innocence for good. By showing this glimpse of morality she distances herself further away from the thieves as she wants to do at least one right thing in her life. This moral resolution is eventually paid for by her life as she is killed by her partner, a thief named Sikes, who finds out about her betrayal.

Following the murder of Nancy, all the thieves are in shock from the horrifying act, however, it is Charley Bates who is struck the most. It seems that the sense of morality awakens in him as he condemns Sikes for what he has done. Charley finds it unbearable to even be in Sikes’s presence “Don’t come nearer me,’ answered the boy, still retreating, and looking, with horror in his eyes, upon the murderer’s face. ‘You monster!’”¹²⁸ His defences crumble as he finally sees the true reality of the criminal life. Desperate by losing the only thing he knew in his life, he surprisingly attacks much bigger and older Sikes. In the end, Sikes accidentally hangs himself during the escape. After this experience,

¹²⁴ Duckworth, *Fagin’s Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England*, 5.

¹²⁵ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 151.

¹²⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 189.

¹²⁷ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 190.

¹²⁸ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 484.

Charley realizes that after all stealing handkerchiefs or books is a wholly different thing than taking someone's life and that criminal life is not for him and he decides to try his luck somewhere else. He eventually succeeds mainly because of his good intentions and determination to secure a good life for himself "He struggled hard, and suffered much, for some time; but, having a contented disposition, and a good purpose, succeeded in the end."¹²⁹ This suggests that once he forms the moral resolution to give up the criminal life, he suddenly becomes worthy of a decent life which he earns by hard and honest work, and thus he becomes "the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire."¹³⁰

Whereas Charley's life has a surprisingly happy ending which is rather idyllic, Dodger, on the other hand, is arrested for stealing a snuff box. During the trial, Dodger "was doing full justice to his bringing-up,"¹³¹ and he makes fun of the jailer and the magistrate as well. Eventually, he leaves the room proudly and seems clearly comfortable with himself and his performance even though he is convicted. Apparently, he is to be transported to a penal colony, but he embraces his fate and also his life as a criminal and what is more, he is proud of it. On his way to the cell, his accomplishment and satisfaction are clearly visible, and he is "grinning in the officer's face, with great glee and self-approval."¹³² On the other hand, Dodger is acquainted with the world and knows where he stands and that may be the reason why he accepts his fate so easily. During the trial, Dodger asks as a provocation: "Where are my privileges?"¹³³ which is a part of his performance, however, it also touches on the real social issue of criminal children and the incompetence of the government to solve their situation. Dodger also knows there is hardly a fair trial considering young criminals since they have the same sentences as the adults and he says that a courtroom is a place of no fairness: "this ain't the shop for justice,"¹³⁴ and he has no other choice than to accept it.

From the portrayals of criminal children, it is apparent that Dickens attempted to highlight the fact that the child thieves are the victims as well, not the victims of individuals like Oliver, but of a society in general and its lack of interest and involvement in the issue. In this sense, criminal children can be seen as objects which live under the

¹²⁹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 519.

¹³⁰ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 519.

¹³¹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 423.

¹³² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 423.

¹³³ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 421.

¹³⁴ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 423.

conditions created by society and fight for survival. They are used just like Oliver as tools to document the social problems of the criminal children living in the slums. Lankford describes this portrayal of criminal children as the shift in the narration because the second part of the novel is more oriented toward the thieves themselves and the breakup of the Fagin's gang: "The change in narrative mode discovers depth of character in the thieves, and they finally become victims of the morality that represses knowledge of their humanity as they are victims of a social order that deprives them of food, love, and ultimately life."¹³⁵ By this shift, Dickens also navigates the reader towards the realization that the young criminals were once children as innocent as Oliver Twist, however, deprived of it by the circumstances that they have no control of.

¹³⁵ Lankford, "'The Parish Boy's Progress': The Evolving Form of Oliver Twist", 31.

5 Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to analyse the portrayals of children in *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* in the context of two contradictory themes, guilt and innocence and draw parallels between the particular portrayals and ideals of Victorian society considering a pure child and a family. In the first chapter, the changes in Victorian society after the Industrial Revolution and the causes of the crisis of the 1840s are mentioned since they highly influenced the situation of working-class children. The Victorian ideals of a family and an innocent child are presented as the basis for the analysis. Working-class and criminal children are introduced as well as they disrupt the ideal of a pure child. The second chapter summarizes Dickens' life with the main focus on his childhood which is significant for his perception of the children later in life as an adult. His experiences not only influenced his portrayal of children but were also one of the reasons why he started to defend the rights of children from poor social classes and use them in his novels. To give a full background of his life, his relationship with his own children is also discussed.

The first subchapter of the analysis deals with the feeling of guilt that was put on the characters Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. The feeling of guilt makes it impossible to see them as innocent despite the fact that they deliberately did not do anything to be blamed for. The guilt was constructed by society and individuals and in this case, both characters can be seen as the victims. With each punishment, the feeling they did something bad only deepens and it becomes harder to escape the blame. Despite the different circumstances in their stories, I found that they are eventually freed from the guilt by the means of family. Furthermore, the family was generally known as the centre of people's lives and the analysis proved that family has the power to restore child's innocence as well. This confirms the Victorian ideal of a perfect middle-class family as both David and Oliver were saved by the wealthy middle-class philanthropists Mr Brownlow, Mrs Maylie, and Betsy Trotwood.

The second theme which I have analysed is the complete opposite of the previous one and that is innocence. I analysed Oliver Twist as the embodiment of innate innocence which protects him from the harsh conditions in a workhouse and later from the harmful influence of the thieves. At the same time, this property of innate innocence makes him a

flat or one-dimensional character, because his only visible attribute is being innocent, thus in a number of cases, he appears to only be a passive object. This use of a flat character was intentional, and Dickens deliberately uses Oliver as a tool for conveying his ideas and criticism of society. Oliver is easily approachable by the readers as he is not such a complex character, and thus he can influence the readers strongly by awakening compassion and pity in them. In contrast, Dickens promotes the ideal of an innocent and pure child which can be seen for example in the character of Dick whom he closely links with heaven, and thus he can be seen as an angel, the most innocent entity. In contrary to the portrayal of Oliver, innocence in the case of David Copperfield is expressed through the exploitation and abuse he experiences from the Murdstones and his suffering is the object of compassion of the readers. Furthermore, Mr Murdstone can be considered a threat to the ideal of a pure child as he exploits David by trying to suppress the child in him and David's innocence is a source of annoyance and nervousness for him.

Another subchapter deals with the child thieves which are used as a tool to emphasize Oliver's innocence and to create a moral tension. By comparing the thieves and Oliver there is apparent deviance in their descriptions which reflects different perceptions of these children in the Victorian society. This perception was the cause of the ignorance and even fear of their naturalistic adult behaviour as they attack the ideal of an innocent child. Dickens, however, offers another perspective considering their portrayal and that is their moral resolution, which shows them in a better light and suggests they are the victims of society just like Oliver. Following this, child criminals can be viewed as tools for conveying social critique, and furthermore, they are used to emphasize Oliver's innate innocence.

The conclusion of the thesis is that despite being considered an author who is a social critic, the analysis proved that Dickens stresses and even promotes the Victorian ideals such as the ideal family or the innocent child. On the other hand, his portrayals and use of child characters not only have a celebratory function, but he uses them as tools for social criticism and tends to describe them in a way that awakens compassion or shock in the readers. This shows a certain duality in the child portrayals which can be objected to the further analysis. His portrayal of childhood does not seem so innocent any longer as he uses the fictional children for his own purpose of social criticism or for promoting Victorian ideals. In fact, Dickens uses the children the same way they were used by the adults in his novels, and even by society in real life. Nevertheless, Dickens' social

criticism is valuable even up to this day as he was one of the first writers who spread the awareness of the social issues considering the children. Rather than proposing solutions and contributing to the reforms directly, Dickens' novels revealed social issues to the public and underlined the need of social reforms. This provided the basis for the gradual change and encouraged the public to take action by awakening distress and agitation in them. By depicting particular issues in his novels, he indirectly contributed to the improvement of the conditions in workhouses and boarding schools which also became more controlled and on top of that, Dickens helped to open the first children's hospital in England. His critique is even more appreciated as he experienced all the hardships of being poor and living in slums was more than familiar to him. His main reason for expressing social critique was that he wanted to prevent other children from going through the same experience and he accomplishes this through his novels with unforgettable child characters.

6 Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce bylo analyzovat vyobrazení dětí v novelách *Oliver Twist* a *David Copperfield* od Charlese Dickense v kontextu dvou protikladných témat nevinnosti a viny. Práce rovněž hledá spojitost mezi konkrétními vyobrazeními a viktoriánskými ideály nevinného dítěte a dokonalé rodiny. Dále také rozebírá konkrétní charakteristiky dětí a jejich zamýšlený efekt na čtenáře.

První část se zabývá historickým a sociálním kontextem viktoriánské Anglie. Nejprve jsou popsány změny spojené s průmyslovou revolucí, která ovlivnila podobu Anglie na mnoho let dopředu a popsány jsou také příčiny krize ve 40. letech 19. století. Dále je zde zmíněna ideální viktoriánská rodina, která jakožto protiklad rozsáhlých změn ve společnosti představovala stabilitu a zároveň byla centrem života člověka. Zmíněna je také úloha dětí v těchto rodinách. Jako jejich protiklad je charakterizován život dětí z pracujících tříd a chudých poměrů a s tím také související výskyt dětských gangů a dětské práce. Jako poslední rozebírám ideál dokonalého viktoriánského dítěte a také jeho předpokládaný očištný vliv na dospělého člověka.

Další část popisuje život Dickense a zaměřuje se hlavně na jeho dětství, konkrétně na období, kdy opustil Kent, symbol jeho dětství, a poté musel v Londýně čelit problémům, které způsobilo zadlužení a následné uvěznění jeho otce. V důsledku toho nastoupil do továrny a musel se tak vypořádat s pocity osamění a křivdy, protože nedokázal pochopit, jak lehce jeho rodiče souhlasili s jeho zaměstnáním. Právě toto období představovalo důležitý milník v životě Dickense a do velké míry poté ovlivnilo jeho tvorbu, jež často vyjadřovala sociální kritiku, kterou se snažil obhajovat práva chudých a pracujících, protože si sám touto zkušeností prošel. Dále je zde stručně shrnut Dickensův život včetně jeho spisovatelských úspěchů i osobních krizí, například odloučení od manželky Catherine nebo jeho poblouznění mladou Nelly. Nakonec krátce zmiňuji vztah s jeho vlastními dětmi.

Hlavní část bakalářské práce tvoří analýza vyobrazení dětí v kontextu viny a nevinnosti. Nejdříve se zaměřuji na téma viny, které provází postavy Olivera Twista a Davida Copperfielda po dobu jejich dětství. Provinili se už jen tím, že se narodili a tuto neoprávněnou vinu, která je vytvořena společností, pak v sobě musí nést a ovlivňuje jejich život a zároveň zabraňuje tomu, aby mohli být považováni za nevinné a ideální děti. Zkoumám také, jak je v nich pocit viny vyvolán a prohlubován a jak se s ním

vyrovnávají. Zjistila jsem, že pocit viny a neoprávněné tresty v Davidovi a Oliverovi probouzí přesvědčení, že nejsou hodni lásky a že se vůbec neměli narodit, protože špatní lidé by se přece ani rodit neměli. Analýza ale ukázala, že jejich nevinnost může být obnovena, a to za pomoci rodiny, která je od viny osvobodí. Jako v případě pana Brownlowa a paní Maylieové, kteří se rozhodli věřit v Oliverovu nevinu a poskytli mu domov. Nebo Betsy Trotwoodové, která Davida uchránila před škodlivým vlivem Murdstonových a potom jej adoptovala.

Druhá část analýzy zkoumá vyobrazení dětí z pohledu nevinnosti. Oliver Twist je popsán jako zosobnění nevinnosti, kterou má již od narození a která jej chrání před újmou. Díky tomu má stále šanci na dobrý život a nechce o ni přijít. Dále popisují to, že Oliverovou hlavní a možná jedinou vlastností je právě nevinnost, kvůli které v příběhu vystupuje jako statická postava. Z vyobrazení Olivera jako statické a pasivní postavy vyvozují, že je vnímán pouze jako objekt, který plní několik funkcí. Nejdříve působí jako ztělesnění svědomí a připomínka morality, poté je brán pouze jako prostředek sloužící k vydělání peněz. Také slouží jako důkaz podněcující sociální kritiku, protože na něm bylo páčáno násilí. Ve všech těchto případech Oliver funguje jako důležitý prvek, který manipuluje narací a tím ovlivňuje vnímání čtenářů. Zmíněná je i postava Dicka, nemocného sirotka, jenž je přirovnán k andělovi a zároveň je také statickou postavou, která dokumentuje hrozné podmínky života v chudobinci. Dále v práci popisují nevinnost Davida Copperfielda a její zobrazení, které je odlišné od toho Oliverova. V souvislosti s Davidovou nevinností zmiňují pokusy pana Murdstona tuto nevinnost v Davidovi potlačit a tím popřít dítě v něm. Murdstonovy pokusy dělají Davida více zranitelným a potvrzují, že nevinné děti byly rovněž viděny jako zranitelné. Jejich zranitelnost měla za úkol v dospělých čtenářích vzbudit soucit a nostalgii způsobenou vzpomínáním na své vlastní dětství. Zranitelnost dětí byla patrná hlavně při násilí, kterému byly vystaveny, a zároveň sloužila jako prostředek sociální kritiky.

Jako poslední popisují vyobrazení kriminálních dětí, které jsou protikladem Oliverovy nevinnosti a zároveň slouží k tomu, aby ji ještě více zdůraznily. Popisují jejich vyspělé chování v kontrastu s Oliverovou nevinností, která často hraničí s naivitou. V situacích se zloději Oliver rovněž působí jako morální přítomnost, která ho mentálně staví nad zloděje a jejich chování bez zábran a jakékoliv morálky. Dále se pak zaměřují na způsob vyobrazení kriminálních dětí, které jsou na rozdíl od Olivera popsány s větším odstupem a bez jakékoliv stopy soucitu, což do určité míry reflektuje, jak byly vnímány

viktoriánskou společností. Zdůrazňuji také jejich vlastnosti, jako naturalistický pud sebezáchovy a sociální adaptace, díky kterým byly vnímány jako hrozba ideálu dítěte. Zároveň však analyzuji jejich morální rozřešení, kterým se zabývá skoro celá druhá polovina příběhu a je zde patrná snaha Dickense o zdůraznění jejich morální stránky a jejich vykreslení jako obětí společnosti. Morální rozřešení popisují na případech Nancy a Čódlu Batese, kteří se rozhodli odvrátit od kriminálního života. Nancy za to zaplatila životem, avšak Čódl Bates díky svému morálnímu odhodlání a snaživosti uspěje a najde si poctivou práci. Jako jejich protiklad uvádím Ferina Lišáka, který se rozhodl přijmout svůj osud zloděje, protože věděl, že se spravedlnosti nedočká, a svůj úděl nesl s pýchou a uspokojením.

Závěr bakalářské práce shrnuje, že sociální kritika je v novelách častým tématem. Dickens záměrně užívá vyobrazení dětí, které jsem analyzovala, aby pomocí nich dosáhl soucitu, ale i pobouření čtenářů a donutil je tak pochybovat o zaběhnutých pořádcích. Tohle je také základem jeho sociální kritiky, kterou sděluje právě pomocí dětí. Na druhou stranu však z analýzy zjišťujeme, že Dickens často zmiňuje, dokonce i hájí viktoriánské ideály dokonalé rodiny, která může obnovit dětskou nevinnost, a dokonalých dětí, jejichž nevinnost je v případech Olivera a Dicka někdy až oslavná. Je tedy patrné, že ve vyobrazení dětí panuje jistá dualita. Zároveň jsou děti zobrazeny s určitým záměrem buď sociální kritiky, nebo šíření viktoriánských ideálů, proto už jejich vyobrazení není tak nevinné a nezištné, jak se na počátku mohlo zdát. Dickens ve své podstatě fiktivní děti využívá stejně tak, jako byly děti využívány dospělými jak v jeho novelách, tak i v běžném životě. Pravdou ovšem zůstává, že jeho kritika napomohla k řešení sociálních problémů a jeho vyobrazení dětí v novelách změnilo pohled na děti v celé literatuře a ovlivnilo několik budoucích generací spisovatelů.

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8 Abstract

Author: Eliška Dostálová

Faculty and department: Faculty of Arts, Department of English and American Studies

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The aim of the thesis is to analyse portrayals of children in two novels by Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*. The first part concerns historical and social background and focuses on working-class and criminal children as well as the ideal of an innocent child. The second part gives a brief outlook of Dickens' life with the focus on his childhood and time spent working in a factory. The major part focuses on the analysis of child portrayals in the context of the two opposite themes, guilt and innocence, and links the particular portrayals with the Victorian ideals of a pure innocent child and a perfect family.

9 Anotace

Autor: Eliška Dostálová

Název fakulty a katedry: Filozofická fakulta, Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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Cílem bakalářské práce je analyzovat vyobrazení dětí v novelách *Oliver Twist* a *David Copperfield* Charlese Dickense. První část se týká historického a společenského kontextu a zaměřuje se na děti z pracujících tříd a na kriminální děti a dále na ideál nevinného dítěte. Druhá část stručně popisuje život Dickense s důrazem na jeho dětství a práci v továrně. Hlavní část práce se zaměřuje na analýzu vyobrazení dětí v kontextu dvou protikladných témat viny a nevinnosti a hledá spojitosti mezi konkrétními vyobrazeními a viktoriánskými ideály čistého nevinného dítěte a dokonalé rodiny.