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Notes of Woe: Depictions of Education and Child Labour in Selected Works by
Charles Dickens

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- 1) Introduction
- 2) Social situation during Dicken's lifetime
- 3) Dicken's own experience with child labour and education
- 4) Analysis
 - Oliver Twist
 - David Copperfield
 - Nicholas Nickleby
- 5) Social problems in other Victorian literature
- 6) Conclusion

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I declare that I wrote this bachelor thesis independently under supervision of Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D. and I used cited literature only.

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Signature

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1. Introduction

I would like to regard this paper as my opportunity to demonstrate through some of Dickens' celebrated works the scale of social problems afflicting England during the Victorian era. The educational system in England was abysmal and child labour, especially during the Industrial Revolution, was a basic fact of life. Charles Dickens was aware of the inherent inequality in these social problems, and therefore attempted to portray them without any embellishment or modification. He wrote about the reality he saw around him as well as the life traumas he experienced himself.

Another reason why I have chosen to write about Dickensian literature, apart from my interest in social problems, is because of this author's style, which I find highly attractive. Even though he wrote about tragic events, he was still capable of making people smile when reading his books. Charles Dickens is known for his satirical writing style, thus, features like mockery, irony and caricatures can be found in every page of his works.

In the following chapter of this paper I would like to provide some general overview on the social situation during Dickens' lifetime containing the division of social classes, the system of the education at that time and most importantly the problem of child labour, which with the beginning of the industrial revolution became more and more common. The next chapter is concerned with author's own experience with child labour and education, as it seems to have had a great influence on him, and consequently on his writing.

The body of this paper will deal with the analysis of selected Dickens' works. To begin with, I would like to look at the story of *Oliver Twist* (or *The Parish Boy's Progress*), where my main focus will concentrate on workhouses in England during the Victorian Era. Secondly, the semi-autobiographical novel *David Copperfield* (full title: *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to Publish on Any Account)*) will be the focal point. I have said semi-autobiographical due to the number of events in the story that prominently correspond with the experiences of Charles Dickens himself. The main conflict of interest in this work will be focused on the residential school, where David is sent,

and afterwards I would like to look at the time he spent in the Murdstone and Grinby's trade in London. Thereafter, the novel *Nicolas Nickleby* (or *The Life and Adventures of Nicolas Nickleby*) will be discussed. I would like to dedicate this part of my paper to the depiction of the terrible circumstances in Yorkshire schools. The Dotheboys Hall, which appears in this story, albeit a vivid demonstration, was a fairly typical example of what residential schools looked like in Yorkshire. The last work I will include will be *Hard Times*, where I will focus only on the first part of the work dealing with education. The point of view on education, however, is not as alarming as in the rest of the analysed books.

2. Social situation during Dickens' lifetime

2.1 The general overview

This work is focused on the Victorian times in England. To provide some specific dates, the Victorian era is considered to be the period of time when Queen Victoria was in power, that is from 20 June 1837 until 22 January 1901. In general, it was a time of a great change—there was a huge industrial, political, military and even scientific progress in the Great Britain. People felt everything was moving far too quickly and it was more difficult for them to keep pace. Therefore, it seemed like they were in between two stages—the “old world” and the “new world.”

The concept of great change and progress is interconnected with the Industrial Revolution. In Britain the Industrial Revolution began in the late 1700s and continued until the 19th century. Broadly speaking, it can be generally defined as a time of working machines invention; before the Industrial Revolution everything was made by hand. As the work of Katrina Honeyman indicates, “until late in the eighteenth century, most of England’s output of woollens, worsteds, linens, fustians and cottons was produced by families in their own homes or in communal workshops.”¹ Richard Arkwright is considered to be the pioneer of the modern machine industry thanks to his invention of the spinning machine; he is therefore said to be “one of the founders of the industrial revolution.”² This resulted in building a massive number of modern factories and speeding up the whole industry. Britain was converted into a “power house” as it was no longer dependent on suppliers from the abroad and started to produce itself instead. Consequently, plenty of new jobs caused a mass migration from countryside to cities with a dream of better life.³

Nevertheless, this dream was far from the drab reality of actual city life; the cities were polluted, salaries low and living conditions miserable. As Barbara Daniels points out, in the Great Britain there was a huge population increase,

¹ Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820* (Hampshire: Ashgate publishing limited, 2007), 1.

² “Richard Arkwright,” *History*, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.history.co.uk/biographies/richard-arkwright>.

³ “Industrial Revolution,” *History*, accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.history.com/topics/industrial-revolution>.

especially in London, which led to overcrowded houses converted into flats, where each family occupied only one room. Such rooms were known as “slums.”⁴ This example is given by Kellow Chesney: “Hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, make up a substantial part of the metropolis (...) In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more people of all ages may inhabit a single room.”⁵ The terrible housing conditions are brought into focus also by Laton Blacklands when stating that “in 1837 one-seventh of the population of Liverpool and one-tenth of that of Manchester dwelt in cellars.”⁶

People who did not have work, or somehow did not manage to support their family, had no other option but to go to what G. M. Young refers to as “the dreaded Workhouse.” Going to a workhouse was not a release, though, rather the opposite—G. M. Young adds, that it was “a cruel thing to decent people, who exchanged liberty and all that they knew of home and of loving companionship, for a harsh discipline, or worse, a brutal tyranny, squalor, and maybe semi-starvation, for although the diet when set out on paper.” One terrifying example also given by G. M. Young is from Andover, “where one of the tasks imposed on male paupers was to crush bones, and so hungry were they that they fought among themselves for the stinking gristle and marrow.”⁷

In summary, for Great Britain it was a period of time full of changes; “it was a time when England was suffering the birth pangs of Democracy, when aristocracy was putting up its last great fight, and the machine was marching on its progressive way, to become in the twentieth century both a miracle and a menace.”⁸ However, it was also a time when extreme poverty and child labour was nothing exceptional and the gaps between social classes were becoming more and more significant.

⁴ Barbara Daniels, “Poverty and Families in the Victorian Era,” *Hidden Lives Revealed*, last modified March 2003, <http://www.hiddenlives.org.uk/articles/poverty.html>.

⁵ Kellow Chesney, *The Victorian underworld* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 167.

⁶ Laton Blacklands, foreword to *The Life and Characters of Charles Dickens*, by H. C. Dent (London: Odhams Press Limited), 12.

⁷ G. M. Young, ed., “Home and Habits: The Poor,” in *Early Victorian England 1830 – 1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 140-141.

⁸ Blacklands, foreword, 14.

2.2 Social classes

People have always discriminated between the poor and rich. To be clear about this issue at the time of the Victorian era I am going to recall this classification first. As one might expect, wealth, power and connections were the most significant factors, and probably the only factors, for the division into social classes.

In general, there are three types of people being distinguished in the 19th century England. At the very top of the society one would find people with the greatest power, so-called Aristocrats, including The Royal Family, Spiritual Lords, Temporal Lords and Great Officers of the State. In the middle of the imaginary tree there was the Middle class divided into Upper Middle Class and Lower Middle Class. And finally, there is the Lower Class divided into The Working Class and The Poor—people at the very bottom of our division including the homeless with no work depending only on the charity and alms.⁹

When recalling any literary or cinematic works set in these places and period of time, one would suggest there are just two sorts of people: the very poor ones and the very rich ones and not many people are left in between. Especially, in works of Charles Dickens this problem seems to be emphasized. As a matter of fact, “workers in the new industries were little better than slaves at the mercy of their capitalist employers, suffering physical and psychological privations of the worst sort. Adherents of this view dwell upon the long working hours, the low wages, and the poor living conditions of the workers,” comments Charles Breunig.¹⁰

2.3 Child labour

There are several definitions of child labour to be found; one of them states that “the term ‘child labour’ is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical

⁹ “19th Century England Social Hierarchy,” *Hierarchy Structure*, accessed November 22, 2015, <http://www.hierarchystructure.com/19th-century-england-social-hierarchy/>.

¹⁰ Charles Breunig, “The Condition of the Working Classes,” in *The Age of Revolution and Reaction 1789-1850* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 168-170.

and mental development.”¹¹ Surprisingly, there are still people who do not even know this term exists, naively believing instead that, due it being highly immoral and wrong, child labour was abolished long ago. It is still a problem prevalent within the modern period however; it is a problem which has been here for centuries and it is not likely to just “disappear”.

Nevertheless, as I am focusing here on child labour in works of Charles Dickens, I will leave the current situation and look more closely at the social situation in England during the Industrial Revolution and simultaneously the Victorian era—the time, when child labour was probably the worst in the history of Great Britain. As stated by Jane Humphries, “the child worker was a central if pitiful figure in both contemporary and classic accounts of the British industrial revolution.”¹² Mentioning the Industrial Revolution is an important point for us. As stated above, with the new machine technology there arose also a plenty of jobs, however, not only adults were employed but an alarming number of children were forced to work in these new factories. To quote from Katrina Honeyman, “the new textile technology replaced heavy labour but required consistent minding to run effectively. Because of their nimble fingers and slight physique, children constituted ideal labour.”¹³ Apart from the work in factories, children could have any other kind of occupation; for young males sectors like mines and quarries, agriculture, fisheries, building, workshops and handcraft were typical, whereas girls were predominantly employed in domestic service.¹⁴

The picture given by Blacklands is appalling: “Clad only in scanty garments, boys and girls in an atmosphere often less wholesome than that of a sewer, harnessed to a truck by a chain fastened to a girdle round the waist, the links passing between legs.” Blacklands found that until 1833, which covers also the time of employment of young Charles Dickens, small children working in mills could work even twelve hours a day. He also adds, that later the working hours were restricted to nine hours a day or forty-eight per week for children

¹¹ “What Is Child Labour,” *International Labour Organization*, accessed November 10, 2015, <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm>.

¹² Jane Humphries, *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

¹³ Katrina Honeyman, *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 178.

¹⁴ Peter Kirby, *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 52-57.

under eleven, however, teen-agers under eighteen years of age still had to work those twelve hours a day or sixty-nine per week.¹⁵

2.4 Education

Unlike today, when the school attendance is compulsory, in the 19th century only those lucky enough to be incredibly wealthy received an education. Since most of the children in the Victorian period were forced to work to help their families survive, only children from the upper and upper-middle class had the opportunity to be educated.

Even when children could get the opportunity to be educated, there was still one essential problem remaining—a lack of schools; thanks to a report from 1816 it was found out that, even though two thirds of 12,000 examined parishes had schools, the quality was highly questionable. The one third left had no schools whatsoever. This discovery led to establishing of new types of schools, such as Sunday schools, Schools of industry, Monitorial schools, Infant schools, Elementary schools and Technical education.¹⁶ Nevertheless, not many families could afford to pay the school fees; therefore most of the children from the lower social classes remained without any education and from a very early age they were forced to work.

Blacklands indicates that despite the first national grant for education in 1833, which was the sum of £20,000, “in 1837 it was stated in House of commons that 79 per cent. of the boys of England and Wales and 57 per cent. of the girls of thirteen to fourteen years of age could not read, and 67 per cent. and 88 per cent. respectively could not write.” Thus, in 1839 the grant was increased to £39,000. Ever since that time, the educational grant was moving upwards every few years; in 1869 it reached £500,000.¹⁷

¹⁵ Blacklands, foreword, 10.

¹⁶ Derek Gillard, “Towards a state system of education,” *Education in England: a brief history*, last modified 2011, <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/history/chapter02.html>.

¹⁷ Blacklands, foreword, 11.

3. Dickens' own experience with child labour and education

Dickens' novels are known above all for their motive. The reason why he chooses mostly poor children with unfortunate fate as protagonists and his writing focuses above all on criticizing the social problems in the Victorian England is not accidental. It is a consequence of his personal experience which had left a great impact on him.

3.1 Warren's Blacking Warehouse

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born in Portsmouth as the second of eight children to John Dickens and Elizabeth Barrow. Until the age of twelve Charles had been living quite a normal family life, even though they moved around a lot. When he was nine years old, he was sent to a school, where, however, he could not stay as long as he would wish to because of some family difficulties: soon after Charles' twelfth birthday John Dickens, Charles' father, was sent to prison for a debt. At that time it was usual that the whole family went to prison along with the imprisoned person and Dickens family was not an exception. The only one who remained outside the prison walls was young Charles. He had to leave school and was sent to work in Warren's blacking factory to help support his family, as the eldest male child. As a result, he felt like "every one of his fantasies was suddenly crushed."¹⁸

This period may be described as the most difficult and unhappy one in the life of Charles Dickens. His friend John Forster wrote the very first biography named *Life of Charles Dickens*, where, besides other Dickens' life events, he depicts his experience in the shoe-polish factory. Apart from Forster's own memories and conversations between him and Charles Dickens, the book is based on letters written by Dickens himself, where he narrates all the hardships of that time of his life. The deepness of his suffering when working at Warren's factory he describes as follows:

"No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every-day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing

¹⁸ Biography.com Editors, "Charles Dickens Biography," *The Biography.com website*, accessed February 19, 2016, <http://www.biography.com/people/charles-dickens-9274087>.

up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless—of the shame I felt in my position—of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I have learned and thought and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more—cannot be written.”¹⁹

It follows that Charles’ mental suffering seemed much worse than the physical one. The fantasies he had had about his future life differed utterly from what he was experiencing. He worried he would never become anything more than just a factory worker. He also adds how utterly baffling it was for him, to be abandoned at such a young age; even his parents lacked empathy for his degraded situation. As Dickens points out, it seemed to him his parents were even satisfied with his new career as if he just had finished a high school and went to some distinguished university.²⁰ The belief, Dickens’ mental suffering prevailed over the material deficiency is supported also by Robert Lapidés’ observation; he states that “this crisis was traumatic because it badly threatened his identity; his expectations of becoming an artist and a gentleman seemed to be forever ruined.”²¹ One would notice that he felt deprived of his dignity and his own will.

The description of the shoe polish warehouse portrayed by Dickens in Forster’s *Life of Charles Dickens* prominently resembles with the one of Murdstone and Grinby’s factory given by David Copperfield:

“It was a crazy, tumbledown old house, abutting of course on the river, and literally overrun with rats. Its wainscotted rooms and its rotten floors and staircase, and the old gray rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming

¹⁹ John Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Chapman & Hall, LD), 18-19.

²⁰ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*.

²¹ Robert Lapidés, “Charles Dickens,” *Encounter* 20, no. 2 (Summer2007 2007): 10, accessed March 14, 2016, <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=47c47ed5-ab99-468e-8532-11ffec961eba%40sessionmgr120&vid=5&hid=122>.

up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place rise up visibly before me as if I were there again.”²²

As Dickens described it, it was not a pleasant place whatsoever. The dirt and the presence of rats is what the author stresses the most. The depressive quality of the house intensified his woeful inner feelings. He had to be in this miserable place every day covering “the pots of paste-blackening, first with a piece of oil-paper and then with a piece of blue paper, to tie them round with a string, and then to clip the paper close and neat all round, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary’s shop.”²³ Meanwhile in the lunch break, he was given private teaching lessons by his relative James Lamert. Incidentally, he was the person responsible for ensuring him this advantageous job. These sessions, however, did not last long.²⁴

It was a cruel time for Charles Dickens mainly because he was just a little boy with no knowledge of life left to himself; later he wrote, “I know that I worked, from morning to night, with common men and boys, a shabby child (...) I know that I have lounged about the streets insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.”²⁵ He had not a single friend in the world, which made his suffering even more unbearable; there was no one he could speak to or spend some time with. It was just him and his thoughts. As he admits, even though without his parents and siblings he felt utterly alone, he never confided to anyone about his family situation or about his internal suffering; he was so proud, that he preferred to keep it in secret than reveal the truth.²⁶

In addition, this experience left lifelong consequences. To quote from Forster,

“Until old Hungerford Market was pulled down, until old Hungerford Stairs were destroyed, and the very nature of the ground changed, I never had the courage to go back to the place where my servitude began. I never saw it. I could not endure to go

²² Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 18.

²³ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 18.

²⁴ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*.

²⁵ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 20-21.

²⁶ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*.

near it. For many years, when I came near to Robert Warren's in the Strand, I crossed over to the opposite side of the way to avoid a certain smell of the cement they put upon the blacking-corks, which reminded me of what I was once. (...) My old way home by the Borough made me cry, after my eldest child could speak."²⁷

As Dickens portrayed above, the time of his employment affected him a lot. He felt a deep abhorrence towards the house that stole from him a piece of his childhood and tried to avoid everything which was somehow connected with the Warren's factory and could remind him of what he experienced as a working boy. It was a trauma ingrained inside of him never likely to vanish.

Although a great part of Dickens' suffering is pictured in his novel *David Copperfield*, no one actually realised this book was partially autobiographical until the first release of Forster's biography *Life of Charles Dickens* in 1872 (two years after Dickens' death). As H. C. Dent perceptively pointed out, "the memory of his experiences haunted him all the more dreadfully in after life because, from the moment of his escape from the blacking warehouse to the moment of his death, he hugged his secret to himself, hiding it from even his nearest and dearest."²⁸

Despite all these obstacles Charles Dickens experienced, he eventually became a highly regarded writer, whose name is known namely because of the themes reflecting his own suffering which although did not last long, changed him forever. To conclude, his friend John Forster wrote: "The story of his childish misery has itself sufficiently shown that he never throughout it lost his precious gift of animal spirits, or his native capacity for humorous enjoyment; and there were positive gains to him from what he underwent, which were also rich and lasting."²⁹

3.2 Education

Someday after Charles' escape from the Warren's factory, his dream became reality and he received the opportunity to be educated—he was sent by

²⁷ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 26-27.

²⁸ H. C. Dent, *The Life and Characters of Charles Dickens* (London: Odhams Press Limited), 61.

²⁹ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 90.

his father to Wellington House Academy, where he studied for two years.”³⁰ The life he experienced at this school he outlined in the novel *David Copperfield* analysed hereafter, as well as in some other minor pieces of work. However, the most accurate depiction can be found in a paper from his weekly magazine *Household Words* dedicated exclusively to his school years.³¹ In an article entitled “Our School” Charles Dickens describes the tutors and pupils he met there.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Creakle, the schoolmaster of Salem House in *David Copperfield*, has a real predecessor in the proprietor of the Wellington House Academy, Mr. Jones. Charles Dickens wrote that “the only branches of education with which he showed the least acquaintance, were, ruling, and corporally punishing.” He continues that, “he was always ruling ciphering-books with a bloated mahogany ruler, or smiting the palms of offenders with the same diabolical instrument, or viciously drawing a pair of pantaloons tight with one of his large hands, and caning the wearer with the other.”³² That is all what Dickens states with regard to the description of the headmaster. He does not say much about the appearance of the school in his paper, but rather focuses on the teachers and his schoolfellows. For instance, there is one boy at the school that can be connected with Steerforth from *David Copperfield* thanks to the obvious privilege he has at the school; the Chief refers to him as “Mr.” Dickens describes this boy as “an idiotic goggle-eyed boy, with a big head and half-crowns without end.”³³

It seems Charles Dickens handled school quite well in contrast with the Warren’s blacking factory. Although the conditions at school might had been harsh for other boys, for Charles it was rather a relief; many times before he clarified how deeply he regrets that the possibility to be educated was taken away from him. To quote from Edgar Johnson, “This second schoolltime was a buoyant period of recovering from the anguish of the blacking warehouse.”³⁴ From the arguments given above, one would suppose Charles Dickens was actually happy at school; he had realised his dream of receiving a proper education.

³⁰ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1872).

³¹ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 91.

³² Charles Dickens, “Our School,” *Household Words*, October 11, 1851, 81.

³³ Charles Dickens, “Our School,” *Household Words*, October 11, 1851, 82.

³⁴ Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York: Simon and Schuster, inc., 1952), 48.

4. Analysis

4.1 Oliver Twist

One might consider *Oliver Twist* (along with the novel *David Copperfield* and the short story “Christmas Carol”) to be the most famous work of Charles Dickens. The novel has a great number of film adaptations as well as literary translations. Consequently, the figure of Oliver Twist is known all over the world.

As the author clarifies in the preface of the work, there were several reasons which had led him to write this novel. Mainly, it was the attempt to portray reality exactly as it was—without any of the embellishment he could see in works of other authors:

I had read of thieves by scores; seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in pocket choice in horse-flesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at a song, a bottle, pack of cards or dice-box, and fit companions for the bravest. But I had never met (except in Hogart) with the miserable reality.³⁵

It seemed to him that these characters were glorified rather than doomed. As a result, he felt the need “to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness; in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they really were, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great black ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they might.” He called his attempt to depict all these rogues in the true light “a service to society.”³⁶

In addition, Charles Dickens wanted to demonstrate through irony and mockery, which is so typical for his writing, the absurdity of the then legislations. As Michael Slater observed, “in *Oliver Twist* he determined to dramatize the harshness of the new legislation by showing its effects on a representative of its

³⁵ Dickens, author’s preface to *Oliver Twist* (London: David Campbell Publishers Ltd., 1992), xliii.

³⁶ Charles Dickens, author’s preface to *Oliver Twist*, xliii.

most helpless victims, an infant born (and immediately orphaned) in a workhouse.”³⁷

Oliver Twist, the protagonist of the same name novel, is a young boy born in a workhouse. From the very beginning of his life, nobody cared about him at all: “There being nobody by, however, but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer; and a parish surgeon who did such matters by contract; Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them.”³⁸ Because Oliver’s mother died just after his birth, and the father was never known, Oliver had no relative left and so he was sent to a branch-workhouse,

where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week.³⁹

If one thought this woman took care of the boys because of her “goo heart” he would be terribly wrong. She was a perfect example of carelessness and selfishness. The money they gave her to dress and feed the children she guarded for herself and the children were provided just enough food to stay alive, or not even that much. As Dickens ironically wrote:

Sevenpence-halfpenny’s worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny, quite enough to overload its stomach, and make it uncomfortable. The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself.⁴⁰

³⁷ Michael Slater, introduction to *Oliver Twist*, by Charles Dickens (London: David Campbell Publishers, Ltd., 1992), xv.

³⁸ Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: David Campbell Publishers Ltd., 1992), 1-2.

³⁹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 4.

⁴⁰ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 4.

It was absolutely normal when a child under this woman's care died of a hunger, ordinary cold, or some unfortunate accident. She did not care about these children at all: besides being dirty and totally neglected, they were egregiously starving:

For at the very moment when a child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered by accident; in any one of which cases, the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world, and there gathered to the fathers it had never known in this.⁴¹

Just a tiny hint of some maternal love, naturally, besides some more food and clothes, was all the children needed and all what Mrs. Mann was not capable to provide.

After this sorrowful life experience, Oliver Twist, at the age of nine, is taken to a workhouse, to be somehow useful to the society. Here his duty consists in picking oakum. Nevertheless, the board do not see Oliver as a new labour force, but rather as a bother; just another mouth to feed. Unfortunately for Oliver, he came to the workhouse just when the members of the board, described by Dickens with a great deal of exaggeration as a “very sage, deep, philosophical men,”⁴² came to a conclusion that poor people liked it in the workhouse, and so they must put an end to it. Who would not like it there, anyway? According to this board, “it was a tavern where there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar Elysium, where it was all play and no work.”⁴³ At this point I would like to provide a clear illustration of what life in the workhouse actually was. It was true that once you get there you were provided a free place to live, free food, children could even get a free education. But the price was questionable. As Mandy Barrow explains, the government tried very hard to make everybody want to stay out of the workhouse. Once you get there, the rules, summarized by Barrow, were set to make you leave as soon as you could: the families were separated from one another, furthermore it

⁴¹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 5.

⁴² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

⁴³ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

was even prohibited to speak to each other; even though children received an education, reading and writing as the two most important things were omitted; everyone from the workhouse had to wear a uniform so the people outside knew where they came from, in other words, that they are poor; the food was not restaurant-like either—it was tasteless and moreover it was the same a day after day; as it was a work house people in there had to work long hours to deserve all the free advantages they were provided, the work, however, was very hard and unpleasant; sometimes children could be even sold to work in factories or mines.⁴⁴ In summary, the life in a workhouse was not as comfortable as this wise board thought it was. Anyhow, they agreed on new rules which would make the life for the poor people even harsher than it already was by making the very small portions of meal measured for person per day even smaller, and so the paupers had two alternatives: to starve or to leave. The fare measured by the board consisted of “three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll on Sundays.”⁴⁵

Nonetheless, thanks to this “festive composition” as Dickens named it, the costs rather increased due to the higher expenses on funeral parlour.⁴⁶ For the board, this was a good sign though; as Charles Dickens wrote, “the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies.”⁴⁷ After three months of the new diet, the boys were so desperately starved, that one night they had decided to choose one boy, who would go to the master after supper and ask for more food—the lot fell to Oliver. The very next day when Oliver finished his portion of the gruel, he stood up and went to the master with a sentence, which one may consider as the most famous one from the story of *Oliver Twist*: “Please, sir, I want some more,”⁴⁸ said he. Startlingly, his demand aroused such an outrage from was immediately sent to the board. As it is generally known, each offence is followed by a punishment; in workhouses this rule applied twice that much, especially in the case of so “impious and profane”

⁴⁴ Mandy Barrow, “The Workhouse,” *Project Britain The Victorians*, last modified 2013, <http://resources.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/homework/victorians/workhouses.html>.

⁴⁵ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

⁴⁶ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

⁴⁷ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

⁴⁸ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 12.

one, as described by Dickens.⁴⁹ Consequently, they incarcerated Oliver in solitary confinement for a period of one week. During this time “he was allowed to perform his ablutions, every morning under the pump, in a stone yard, in the presence of Mr. Bumble, who prevented his catching cold, and caused a tingling sensation to pervade his frame, by repeated applications of the cane.”⁵⁰ As a warning to the others, he was beaten again during the dinner time in front of the eyes of all the boys in the hall.

In this house of misery, Oliver Twist did not stay for long though. First, they sold him to gravedigger Sowerberry, where he runs away from after several weeks. He gets to London where he meets a group of pickpockets headed by old cunning Jew Fagin, described by the narrator as “a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair.”⁵¹ Even though Oliver never had the opportunity to go to school, he gets a professional tuition in pickpocketing. In the beginning he had no idea they were teaching him how to thieve; in fact, he was happy someone was kind to him and he could learn something from the professionals. The other boys often laughed at him for such ignorance and called him “so jolly green.”⁵²

An education of another sort than thievery he received at Mr. Brownlow, an old gentleman, who selflessly (what cannot be said about Fagin) took care of Oliver. Partially it was because Mr. Brownlow pitied him, partially because Oliver reminded him of someone. For the first time in his life, Oliver Twist was happy. For the first time, there was someone who cared about him and who did not use him just for his personal profit.

In this novel, Charles Dickens intends mainly to emphasize the horrific life conditions in workhouses through the eyes of the young protagonist Oliver Twist. One would suppose it is a place where the paupers are taken care of when they have no other place to go. Sadly, the opposite is true; misery, hunger and hard work are the main features of English workhouse. It seems that in *Oliver Twist* the author meant to portray also the fact, how easy it can be to become a pickpocket or any other kind of a thief, when one is an orphaned child and have no one in the

⁴⁹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 14.

⁵⁰ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 14.

⁵¹ Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 56.

⁵² Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 61.

world who cares about him; to quote from Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* where Dickens speaks about his unhappy fate, "I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond."⁵³ Charles Dickens went deeper in his thoughts and actually did create a story about "little robbers" and "vagabonds" nobody is taking care of. He narrates how easily a little boy can be captured by London's underworld, where there is a job for anyone in the field of crime.

4.2 David Copperfield

From *Oliver Twist* I would like to move to a partially autobiographical novel *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery* or simply *David Copperfield*, where one may observe both issues I am analysing in this paper: child labour as well as education. First, I would like to look at the school, where young David Copperfield spent only a few months, and afterwards, I will focus on the period of his employment.

The residential school, where David Copperfield was sent to after a bad behaviour towards his stepfather, was "a square brick building with wings; of a bare and unfurnished appearance," called the Salem House. The interior was as unpleasant as the exterior of the building; David Copperfield describes the classroom where he is taken "as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen." It was "a long room with three long rows of desks, and six of forms, and bristling all round with pegs for hats and slates."⁵⁴

Mr. Creakle, the schoolmaster, was as cold and reserved as the whole Salem House. He was a person whose main characteristic was evoking fear in every single boy at the school, and maybe even teachers. His "face was fiery, and his eyes were small, and deep in his head; he had thick veins in his forehead, a little nose, and a large chin. He was bald on the top of his head; and had some thin wet-looking hair that was just turning grey, brushed across each temple, so that the two sides interlaced on his forehead." What was more interesting though

⁵³ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, 21.

⁵⁴ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Group, 1994), 74.

was his voice. Actually, “he had no voice, but spoke in whisper.”⁵⁵ He was a man of brutal manners—there was not a single day in the Salem House, when he did not beat some boy. Deservedly, he called himself a “Tartar”.⁵⁶

In the beginning, it was not easy for David at the school at all; the very first day he came to the Salem House he got a placard with “TAKE CARE OF HIM. HE BITES.” on it, which he had to wear on his back as a punishment for an accident that happened back at home. He was also beaten on the very first day of the school as some kind of a twisted integrational process, and many times afterwards. In defiance of the tough conditions at the residential school, David soon makes friends there and somehow gets used to the strict system.⁵⁷

Due to his mother’s death, David leaves school and is sent to London where he starts to work at Murdstone and Grinby’s company at the age of ten. The building where the warehouse was located was described as “a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats.” The narrator also adds: “Its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant.”⁵⁸ The description of the factory given by David Copperfield indicates how unsightly this place seemed.

David’s work in this factory consisted in sorting empty bottles; he had “to examine them against the light, and reject those that were flawed, and to rinse and wash them. When the empty bottles ran short, there were labels to be pasted on full ones, or corks to be fitted to them, or seals to be put upon the corks, or finished bottles to be packed in casks.”⁵⁹ Although, he did not say a word of complaint to anybody, young David suffered awfully in this employment. He had no friends there, no one even cared he was only a ten-year-old boy; they treated him like an adult and he had to acclimatize to it. He describes his sorrow when he states: “That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew

⁵⁵ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 77.

⁵⁶ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 78.

⁵⁷ Dickens, *David Copperfield*.

⁵⁸ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 136.

⁵⁹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 136.

but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell.”⁶⁰

From the very beginning David knew he must work as well as the rest of the employers, otherwise he would become a target of mockery and contempt. Despite all of his attempts to be equal to the others, he soon received the nickname “the little gent” or “the young Suffolk.”⁶¹ This was a consequence of the imaginary gap that was still remaining between him and the rest of the workers.

Even though, it is not directly stated by Charles Dickens, one can observe a great deal of autobiography in the story. A careful reader notices how some passages from Forster’s *Life of Charles Dickens*, where Dickens himself describes his suffering are nearly identical to David Copperfield’s depiction of his feelings described as follows:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; (...) and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position.⁶²

David describes his feelings as “if there were a flaw in my own breast, and it were in danger of bursting.”⁶³ “My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and abandoned, as such, altogether. I am solemnly convinced that I never for one hour was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy,”⁶⁴ he adds. Another fact relating David’s employment with the one of Dickens’, apart from the age of both David and Charles, is when he states the amount of money he was given. As he recalls, he worked hard every day for a salary of six or maybe seven shillings a week, which was very little.⁶⁵

During all this time, David is accommodated in the house of Micawbers family. He grew very close with all of the members and, actually, they became,

⁶⁰ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 142.

⁶¹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 142.

⁶² Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 136-137.

⁶³ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 137.

⁶⁴ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 142.

⁶⁵ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, 138.

along with Peggotty, his only friends. The reader can observe a great assimilation of Mr. Micawber with John Dickens, Charles' father. Mainly the fact that Mr. Micawber got to the King's Bench Prison for debt interconnects these two gentlemen.

As one may notice, unlike in the other Dickens' books, in this one, even though not directly stated, Charles Dickens intended to portrait some points of his life full of difficulties and obstacles he had to involuntarily undergo. Although, his life, or at least his childhood, was not easy, at the end of this journey he became a wildly appreciated and popular writer.

4.3 Nicholas Nickleby

In the novel *Nicholas Nickleby*, Charles Dickens attempted to depict mainly the problem of educational system, considering above all private schools, which I would like to analyse herein. In the preface of the novel the author explains his reasons for writing about such an issue; above all, he felt disgusted by "the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men." According to Dickens, everybody without any qualification or knowledge in the field could freely go and establish a school anywhere. These schoolmasters were labelled by the author as "blockheads and imposters" because they were "the lowest and most rotten round in the whole ladder." He also adds that these

traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog; they formed the worthy cornerstone of a structure, which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-minded *laissez-aller* neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world.⁶⁶

Through a fictional story of the unfortunate fate of a young man Nicholas Nickleby, Dickens wants to show the disastrous conditions of Yorkshire schools run by people like Wackford Squeers, the headmaster in the examined novel. In the original Preface, Charles Dickens mentions the reactions of such headmasters

⁶⁶ Charles Dickens, author's preface to *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., n.d.), 7.

who found themselves in the wicked and heartless character of Squeers, even though this person was truly fictional. To make it clear, the author states, that “Mr. Squeers and his school are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible.” He also adds that “there are, upon record, trials at law in which damages have been sought as a poor recompense for lasting agonies and disfigurements inflicted upon children by the treatment of the master in these places, involving such offensive and foul details of neglect, cruelty, and disease, as no writer of fiction would have the boldness to imagine.”⁶⁷

The school in this story was named Dotheboys Hall, but actually, they called it Dotheboys Hall only in London “because it sounds better,” explains Mr. Squeers. As observed by Nicholas, it was “a long, cold-looking house, one story high, with a few straggling outbuildings behind, and a barn stable adjoining.”⁶⁸ The role of the headmaster and the most negative character at the same time is fulfilled by already mentioned Wackford Squeers, who lives in Yorkshire together with his malicious wife and spoiled children. Dickens depicts them as the exact example of human greediness, selfishness, deceit and cruelty. Even though, Squeers claims with conviction, that his wife is “more than a mother to them; ten times more,” the narrator sets the record straight when stating:

Both Mr. and Mrs. Squeers viewed the boys in the light of their proper and natural enemies; or, in other words, they held and considered that their business and profession was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him. The only difference between them was, that Mrs. Squeers waged war against the enemy openly and fearlessly, and that Squeers covered his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit; as if he really had a notion of some day or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Dickens, Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*, 9-10.

⁶⁸ Charles Dickens, *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., n.d.), 77-78.

⁶⁹ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 85-86.

Unlike in the other works, in this book I would like to focus rather on a minor character Smike than on the protagonist Nicholas as Smike represents the most pitiful character in the whole story. Even though he looked much older than all of the boys in the school, he wore child's clothes, which naturally were overly small for him. The size and the condition of his dress signaled it was exactly the same clothes he wore when he came to Yorkshire for the first time. A bit later in the story it is revealed that he is a boy for whom had been paid just the first six years and after that no one took interest in him anymore. He, same as Mr. and Mrs. Squeers, had no idea who his parents or relatives were and so they kept him there as their personal servant, or more precisely expressed—a slave. They treated him like he was their property, for what it left its considerable consequences and instead of a young boy full of life he grew into “a timid, broken-spirited creature” as described by Dickens.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the other boys, ironically referred to as “the young noblemen,” were not of any better appearance than poor Smike described above. The picture given by Dickens is dreadful:

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect.⁷¹

Now I would like to expose what the tuition led by Squeers looked like. Even though, normally every student should have his own schoolbook or sometimes share it with his neighbour, at this school there was just one book for about eight pupils, which is precious few. Also Squeers' technique of teaching was quite unusual, not surprising though; basically, he used the boys for his own personal benefit, so instead of learning something, the boys were forced to work.

⁷⁰ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 93.

⁷¹ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 86.

He explains his theory as follows: “When he has learned that bottinney means knowledge of plants, he goes and knows ’em,” replying to the fact that one boy was cleaning a window and another one working in the garden. “When the boy knows this out of the book, he goes and does it,” says Squeers and sends another boy to go look after his horse accompanied by a threat to “rub him down well, or I’ll rub you down” after the boy had provided the correct answer to what a horse is. In this manner the subject “English spelling and philosophy” became “practical philosophy”, as labelled by Dickens.⁷²

What is more, corporal punishment in Yorkshire schools was on a daily basis. It seems that it made a special pleasure to Wackford Squeers every time he found any pretence to beat a boy up. For instance, even when a boy had “warts all over his hands,” the schoolmaster Squeers considered reasonable to punish him for such a lack of discipline. “Bolder, you are an incorrigible young scoundrel, and as the last thrashing did you no good, we must see what another will do towards beating it out of you,” said Squeers to the boy and “caned him soundly: not leaving off indeed, until his arm was tired out.”⁷³

Every time Mr. Squeers returned from London he called together all the boys from the Dotheboys Hall to give them gifts and news from their families. Nonetheless, no boy ever saw any of these material articles whether it was some small amount of pocket money, pieces of clothes or other little something, because all of them were confiscated by the Squeers family. The money was safely kept by Mrs. Squeers and all the clothes felt on the young Squeers; as the narrator describes, he “would appear indeed to have had most accommodating limbs, since everything that came into the school fitted him to a nicety. His head, in particular, must have been singularly elastic, for hats and caps of all dimensions were alike to him.”⁷⁴

Despite the fact that only the first half of the book is dedicated to the Yorkshire school, the picture of this frightful place given by Dickens will leave an unforgettable reflection in a mind of every reader. In summary, life in the Dotheboys Hall without suffering for anyone who was not named Squeers did not

⁷² Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 88-89.

⁷³ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 90-91.

⁷⁴ Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, 92.

exist. It was a school with poor living conditions run by a brutal man who used the young pupils just for his own profit—this comprised of beating the boys, using them as a personal workforce and even almost letting them starve. If one wanted to find at least a little bit of humanity in this character, he would have definitely not succeeded.

4.4 Hard Times

While in *Nicholas Nickleby* the main problem was bad social conditions for pupils, in *Hard Times* it is the radical approach of the school headmaster, Thomas Gradgrind, who is by Dickens referred to as “a man of realities, a man of fact and calculations.”⁷⁵ He explains his philosophy in the very first line of the novel: “Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else.” It is worth noticing that “Fact” in Thomas Gradgrind’s interpretation is written with a capital letter as it was a subject itself. For Mr. Gradgrind “Facts” were the most important thing in life; he considered everything else irrelevant. He argues, that “you can only form the mind of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them.” He also adds that “in this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!”⁷⁶

Mr. Gradgrind implemented this theory also into his family life; “he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away.” It was prohibited for his children to think about anything which was not purely practical. His children as well as his pupils could not have any dreams, desires, or even feelings. It seems like they were supposed to act like robots. Thomas Gradgrind was a man of practice; he thought that any imagination, even the most harmless one, could endanger rational thinking.

Even though the conditions of classrooms in Gradgrind’s school were not as lamentable as in Wackford Squeers’ school, it was not a place where one

⁷⁵ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: David Campbell Publishers Ltd., 1992), 2.

⁷⁶ Dickens, *Hard Times*, 1.

would like to spend most of his childhood. As described by Dickens, it was “a plain, bare, monotonous vault of schoolroom.” No painting, no pictures, nothing that would make this place to look at least a little bit nicer and cosier. It was a place where nothing was the most significant decoration, or rather the only decoration, since decorations were something utterly unpractical, and hence useless.

Mr. Gradgrind was not the only “man of facts” in this story, though. There appears also Mr. Josiah Bounderby, who “was as near being Mr Gradgrind’s bosom friend, as a man perfectly devoid of sentiment can approach that spiritual relationship towards another man perfectly devoid of sentiment. So near was Mr Bounderby—or, if the reader should prefer it, so far off.”⁷⁷ The priorities of Mr. Bounderby are quite similar to the ones of Mr. Gradgrind, who let himself to be influenced by his friend many times during the story. When Thomas Gradgrind is taking his children out of the circus he asks several times “What would Mr Bounderby say,”⁷⁸ as if Mr. Bounderby’s opinion was the only one that matters. The only difference between these two gentlemen is that Mr. Gradgrind truly believes in his philosophy and lives according to these principles sincerely while Mr. Bounderby is just a liar.

A very important element here is the concept of circus, which is for Mr. Gradgrind as well as for Mr. Bounderby a symbol of fantasizing, amusement and mainly impracticality. Mr. Gradgrind venomously refers to people from circus as to “vagabonds attracting the young rabble from a model school.”⁷⁹ As a consequence, it was prohibited for his children to go to circus performances, and so one day they went at least “to peep in at the hidden glories of the place.”⁸⁰ However, they are accidentally spotted by their father, who consequently got mad about such a betrayal from his own children. It follows, that circus was something absolutely inadmissible—it was the prohibited world, where, according to Gradgrind’s theory, only fools lived.

Despite the fact, that in this work Charles Dickens dedicates to the educational system only the first chapters of the book, I had decided to include

⁷⁷ Dickens, *Hard Times*, 13.

⁷⁸ Dickens, *Hard Times*, 12.

⁷⁹ Dickens, *Hard Times*, 11.

⁸⁰ Dickens, *Hard Times*, 10.

this work to my thesis, because I find very interesting the point of view on education here. As one can notice, in every piece of Dickens' work the portrayal of education is somehow different. While in *David Copperfield* and *Nicolas Nickleby* he depicts the headmasters as men of brutal manners without even a slight hint of compassion, in *Hard Times* he portrays Mr. Gradgrind as a person of intransigent methods, who, however, comes to an awareness his theories were probably not the best ones and he seeks a redress. Consequently, one would assert, *Hard Times* is a novel with the least tragic plot from the analysed works, even though, social problems play here its important role, too.

5. Conclusion

In my bachelor thesis, I investigated the social situation in Victorian England. The main target of my interest was child labour and education. As explained above, principally the Industrial Revolution was responsible for child labour in such staggering extent—children of all ages were forced to work either to support their families or because they became orphans, and so were sent to workhouses. As a consequence, these little workers were involuntarily deprived of their childhood. Charles Dickens in his works criticizes the English society for their ignorance towards these poor children and at the same time portrays the misery and poverty of those times. His reason for writing about the sorrow of working children is not accidental, though—he also experienced harsh times in a shoe polish factory when he was just a twelve-year old boy.

Dickens wrote not only about child labour but also deals with education quite frequently in his writings. He justifiably criticized the educational system which enabled anyone, even if they weren't educated, to open a school anywhere.⁸¹ Dickens depicts these headmasters as brutal men with no care for their charges, running the schools just for their own profit. Such a headmaster appears for instance in the novel *Nicholas Nickleby* examined above. Apparently, there was a gap in the legislation that allowed such practices.

I have divided this paper into three main parts. In the first section I provided the general overview of the social situation during the Victorian era covering the period of Charles Dickens' lifetime. Apart from the portrait of social situation in 19th century England, this chapter contains also the division of social classes in the Victorian society to provide the reader with a picture of the class this paper is dedicated to—the Poor. The outline of the situation of child labour and education in England is what follows. The second third of this work is dedicated to life of Charles Dickens with respect to his own experience with child labour containing also the period of his education. Subsequently, I will get to the body of this paper, which consists of the analysis of selected Dickens' works. For this purpose, I have decided to include *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Hard Times* respectively, as the primary literature. The novel *Oliver*

⁸¹ Dickens, author's preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Twist deals mainly with the issues of child labour in workhouses, while in *Nicholas Nickleby* I focused on the problem of education with regards to Yorkshire schools. Only in *David Copperfield* both these examined issues (child labour and education) can be found. At the very end I decided to add also some more observations from *Hard Times*, where the point of view on education is taken from a different perspective. Through these analysed books Charles Dickens tries to point out at the ignorant, greedy society of Victorian times. The stories are based on author's observations from the real life trying to not only attract the reader's attention just for the time he is reading the book but rather to force him to reflect after finishing reading.

Dickens' works were admired by a huge number of readers including the upper and upper-middle class—people he so vigorously criticized. One specific target group of people denounced in his stories were the capitalist owners of the factories in the industrial England. Children of all ages employed in these factories had to work in miserable conditions for ridiculously low salaries. They were provided with no social care and were treated like adults. It seems that no one actually thought of them as of children; for the factory owners they represented just a cheap labour force.

Dickens in his stories portrays also the darkest sides of London's underworld. It was a place where poverty and crime were hugely spread. The novel *Oliver Twist* analysed in this paper is a shining example of the extent of criminality during the nineteenth century; it shows the heartlessness and selfishness of the criminals, who are able to exploit even children to obtain some personal profit.

Despite the fact that Charles Dickens was not any reformer, he strived to change the appalling social situation at least through his writing. He portrayed the reality exactly as it was and exposed the main weaknesses of the English legislation, which affected primarily the lowest class of the society. He appealed to the common people to pay more attention to the social problems even if it did not concern them directly and the powerful people to mature into some improvement. Nevertheless, the question is whether he would be concerned with social problems so much if he hadn't experienced such misery himself.

6. Resumé

V této práci jsem se soustředila především na sociální situaci ve Viktoriánské Anglii se zaměřením na dětskou práci a školský systém. Jedním z významných anglických autorů zabývajícím se tímto tématem byl právě Charles Dickens, jenž ve svých dílech ostře kritizuje viktoriánskou společnost. Snažil se realisticky znázornit sociální problémy své doby bez jakéhokoli přikrášlování, jako to viděl u jiných autorů. Inspiraci čerpal jak z bídy, kterou viděl kolem sebe, tak ze svých vlastních zkušeností, kdy jako teprve desetiletý byl poslán pracovat do továrny na leštidla na boty.

Dětská práce nebyl v 19. století jev nijak neobvyklý. Děti všech věkových kategorií, chlapani i děvčata, byli posíláni do továren, kde museli pracovat v otřesných podmínkách za minimální mzdu. Za hlavní příčinu můžeme považovat Industriální Revoluci, kdy vzhledem k rapidnímu nárůstu továren vzniká také nedostatek pracovní síly. Dalším důvodem dětské práce v takovém měřítku je obrovská míra chudoby, především tedy ve velkých městech. Případy, proč byly děti posílány již od útlého věku pracovat, mohly nastat dva. V prvním případě se jednalo o sirotky, kteří rodiče ztratili a byli tedy posíláni do chudobinců, kde jim bylo poskytnuto ubytování a strava zdarma, což si však museli tvrdě odpracovat. V případě druhém děti rodiče, případně jiné příbuzenstvo, měly, ale vzhledem k bídě, v jaké většinou žily, byly nuceny pracovat, aby pomohly svým rodinám přežít.

Za účelem objektivního zhodnocení sociální situace v Anglii 19. století, konkrétně jsem se tedy soustředila na otázky dětské práce a školství, jsem se rozhodla aplikovat literární analýzu na vybraná Dickensova díla, jež se těmito problémy zabývají. Nejprve jsem se zaměřila na situaci chudobinců, což bylo místo nejen pro osiřelé děti, nýbrž i pro lidi z nejnižší sociální vrstvy, tedy chudinu. Jednalo se o lidi, jež nebyli schopni uživit sami sebe, a tudíž byli nuceni odejít do chudobince, kde se jim ovšem nevedlo o mnoho lépe. Touto problematikou se Charles Dickens zabývá ve své celosvětově známé novele *Oliver Twist*. Důraz na školství je však v tomto díle minimální. Druhým dílem, na nějž jsem se ve své práci zaměřila, je částečně autobiografický román *David Copperfield*. V tomto díle je kladen důraz především na mizerné pracovní

podmínky v továrnách, kam je po smrti své matky poslán také mladý David Copperfield. Nejvíce alarmující je však příběh ze soukromé školy v Yorkshiru v díle s názvem Mikuláš Nickleby. Na rozdíl od ostatních Dickensových novel podobného tématu není v tomto díle tou nejvíce politování hodnější osobou hlavní postava, nýbrž postava vedlejší, chlapec jménem Smike. Příběh líčí praktiky nelítostného ředitele školy, Wackoforda Squeerse, jenž si zřídil školu jen za účelem toho, aby mohl profitovat na rodičích platících za chlapce školné. Dickens se prostřednictvím tohoto díla snažil poukázat na mezery ve státní legislativě umožňující člověku bez jakéhokoli vzdělání založit si soukromou školu a stanovit si v ní pravidla, jaké jen sám chtěl. Posledním zmíněným dílem v této práci je sociální román Zlé časy, kde jsem se zaměřila jen na první část knihy vyobrazující příběh prostředí školství.

Prostřednictvím výše zmíněných děl se Charles Dickens snažil znázornit míru ignorantství sobecké viktoriánské společnosti, stejně tak jako nejtemnější stránky Londýnského podsvětí. Všechny tyto romány, stejně jako ostatní Dickensova díla, měly u čtenářů velký úspěch a jejich popularita přetrvává do dnes. Jsou to příběhy založeny na autorových postřezích ze života, kdy se Dickens snažil zaujmout čtenáře ne jen zajímavým dějem, ale chtěl jim především otevřít oči a donutit je k zamyšlení.

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Anotace

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Tato bakalářská práce seznamuje čtenáře se sociálními problémy v Anglii 19. století prostřednictvím vybraných děl Charlese Dickense. Účelem práce je objektivní zhodnocení sociální situace dané doby s důrazem na problematiku dětské práce a mezery ve školství. Zaměřuje se na hlavní aspekty, jež jsou příčinou zaměstnávání nezletilých, a poskytuje pohled na živobytí nejnižších sociálních vrstev viktoriánské společnosti.

Annotation

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This bachelor thesis acquaints the readers with social issues in 19th century England through an analysis of selected works by Charles Dickens. The aim is to objectively evaluate the social situation of the given period of time with respect to child labour and education. It focuses on the main aspects responsible for the employment of underage children and provides an overview of the living conditions of the lowest class in Victorian society.