

# Autobiographical elements in Charles Dickens' "David Copperfield"



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“ David Copperfield” is an autobiographical novel, a family chronicle, which is written from a child’s viewpoint rather than an adult’s. As all things seem to be larger in the eyes of a kid, children tend to be more sensitive to what is happening around them. The writer recollects his past memories and gives us the opportunity to grow with the main character while passing through different stages of his life.

Copperfield’s father died before his son’s birth and a few years later the mother married Mr. Murdstone, who was very cruel to his stepchild and wife. Murdstone’s sister, who is as harsh as her brother, also lives in Copperfield’s home. For the Murdstones the child is a burden and that is why David is sent to a boarding house. When David arrives at Salem House, Murdstone insists that they attach a sign to David’s back: “ Take care of him. He bites.” After the death of his mother, David is sent to the ink factory, and at the age of ten he begins to make a living.

“ David Copperfield” is the writer’s first and only autobiographical novel. And although Dickens invariably denied the autobiographical nature of the novel, “ David Copperfield” is a perfectly recreated biography of the writer from childhood to 1836, that is, until Charles Dickens became a famous writer. The character traits of the central figure in the novel are similar to the author’s. The painful experiences, through which Charles Dickens went in his childhood and which did much to form his attitude to life, were reflected in “ David Copperfield”. The other characters in the novel were also inspired by real people. For example, the comic Micawber is very much like Dickens’ father – John Dickens, while Dora is almost an accurate recreation of Maria Beadnell – the writer’s first love. Some of the scenes in the novel are very

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reminiscent of situations from Charles Dickens' own life. For example, the matchmaking and marriage resemble the story of Dickens' falling in love with Catherine Hogarth, who later became his wife. And yet the writer does not portray the specific individuals: the characters of his novel are very typical. The story of the main character in "David Copperfield" is not just realistic but absolutely true as well. And although Dickens does not directly address social concerns in this novel, it implicitly discloses social and moral abuses of the Victorian era. There is no fairy-tale element with an orphan boy, who miraculously inherits a large fortune that changes his life in an instant. But there is a skillfully recreated real life with many detailed household descriptions.

The composition of the novel and the writer's manner of writing are harmoniously combined to reveal the author's talent. The pages devoted to the main character's childhood and youth remain the best in the world literature, for they give a true insight into the inner world of the child. In his earlier works Dickens portrayed deprived children with different degrees of persuasiveness. Later, the psychological observations in "Dombey and Son" laid the basis for recreating the child's world at a completely different level in the novel "David Copperfield." At the same time, Dickens not only traces David Copperfield's life, but also makes ethical analysis of his experiences. Based on this analysis we form our own new understanding of the nature of good and evil. And that is a philosophical aspect of the novel. Thus, we have every reason to state that "David Copperfield" is an autobiographical, socio-psychological and philosophical novel.

Realistic typification involves deep psychological study, disclosure of complex inner world, thoughts and feelings. Dickens showed the development of David's character, which was formed by the interaction of his personality and society. David Copperfield struggles against injustice, meets friends and fellow-thinkers... While discovering life and other people, David discovers his own potentials and develops his individuality. David's main trait is his inexhaustible belief in people, in goodness and justice. This trait was an inherent quality of the author: despite having experienced adversity in his youth, (at the age of ten Charles had to leave school and make his own living because of his father's imprisonment for debt), Dickens always believed in the humanistic ideals and democratic values. " My faith in the people governed is, on the whole, illimitable," he said.

The novel reflects the essence of social and historical phenomena. Each character bears some collective features that are typical of a certain segment of English society. Dickens fairly described different sides of life while remaining faithful to the high ideals. Biographer Hesketh Pearson in " C. D. and D. C.: Charles Dickens and David Copperfield" writes, " Dickens possessed this power [...] of seeing and sensing people and places and episodes, every detail being photographed on his memory, so that he could recall at will the slightest expression in a face, the least intonation of a voice, the smallest detail in a room, the almost imperceptible variation of atmosphere in scene or conversation."

In " David Copperfield" Dickens analyzes the causes of moral corruption and ugliness. On the surface, Uriah Heep and Steerforth seem to have nothing in common. They belong to different segments of society, but finally they both

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fail, their fates are irrevocably broken, albeit for different reasons. Their lives illustrate the deep imperfection of the educational system and significant social inequalities.

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