
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Controlled Childhood and the Moulding of the Children's Characters; Critical Analysis of Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Hard Times, and Great Expectations

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| ABSTRACT

This study reads Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times*, and *Great Expectations* as "condition of England novels" by applying realism and naturalism theories, which focus on "parole". The term referred to by Ferdinand de Saussure in language acquisition to mean "performance". This paper addresses how Charles Dickens uses the term "parole" to refer to children's performance under social influences. Through his works, Dickens shows that the environment plays an elementary role in building children's characters as they grasp knowledge from their surroundings. They interact with the social environment, which fosters or hinders their development. Childhood is a crucial stage in the development of societies. Through the portrayal of children in *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times*, and *Great Expectations*, Dickens highlights the ordeals and suffering of children in the nineteenth century and shows the plight of the Industrial Revolution as it damaged the essential block of Victorian society. Accordingly, schools, factories, streets, workhouses, teachers, masters, and parents all of these take part in the formation of the child's character. Children during that time faced different types of social pressures that affected their characters and future lives. This study investigates Dickens' embedded message, showing how childhood is not only a stage of playing but is also important and influential in the performance and shaping of the child's character.

| KEYWORDS

Charles Dickens, Childhood, Children's Characters, Parole, Social Environment, Realism, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations*.

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1. Introduction

The nineteenth century witnessed a surpassing population growth due to many factors, such as immigration (Mikysková, 2011). Accordingly, people tried to enhance their situation by moving from the countryside and plantations to industrial cities. Among the most significant cities swarming with population were London, Manchester, Leeds, and Birmingham. Writers came up with a new type of writing which focused on the bad conditions of the working class, their illness and miserable suffering, and the conditions of the cruel and harsh environment in which they lived. All of these take part in the factors that made the rise of a new type of fiction named "Condition-of-England Novels," which could be defined as industrialised novels that examine the growing conflicts between the individual human will and society's determining factors. The society's determining factors include heredity, class, and environment. The concept of embedding hidden messages in nineteenth-century writings was emphasized by Marambaud, who indicates that the role of literature is not for art only but also to have a "significance" beyond its surface (Marambaud, 1971).

Charles Dickens's writing is characterized by his vivid imagination, social consciousness, and ability to create memorable, larger-than-life characters. His writing is known for its imaginative and descriptive power, as well as its skill to seize the richness and variety of human experience. He was a novelist of people, writing about real-life experiences. It also means to create content that

resonates with a broad audience, addressing their interest, concerns or needs. Dickens did his best in the novels to call public attention to slum conditions and miseries of low-class life and people. He was a reformer, humanitarian and a mild romantic. The four novels that have been discussed focus on the condition of England during Victorian times. Dickens was a good reporter, and many of his novels represent Victorian life as it was. He was an ideal Victorian blend of the romantic and realistic life.

Realism, as a literary artistic theory, focuses on representing things as they are in reality. Naturalism goes in the same direction as realism. In literature, realism seeks to depict everyday life. This movement emerged in the 19th century as a reaction against romanticism, aiming for a more objective portrayal of the world, its characters, and their situations. Realist works often explore social issues and human behaviour in a detailed and accurate manner.

Environment means space, which affects the behaviour of human beings (Erkan & Valipour Arehjan, 2022). Also, it could be defined as the circumstances that affect the development of a single life (Ding et al., 2022). It is on one side the place where they take basic needs of life, while on the other, it represents a collection of circumstances, some of which are natural, like land, plants, and even living creatures. The environment affects children's development, sharpens their characters, and allows them to be positive or negative forces in their social environment. Dickens is brilliant in making history talk through the depiction of children. He shows the readers the importance of children on a societal basis. This study shows how children are born with innocence and natural goodness. It is only when parents nurture them and interact with their social surroundings that they gain experience and gradually lose some innocence.

The objective of this article is to examine the dramatic influences of social environment on the formation of children's characters in *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839), *David Copperfield* (1849- 1850), *Hard Times* (1845), and *Great Expectations* (1860- 1861).

2. Literature Review

The Victorian period was the field for many researchers to study and investigate childhood. In (Georgieva, 2014), Margarita tackles the "dichotomy of childhood." The first side celebrates purity with its glorification, while the other side condemns the dark hole that consumes the goodness inside. Black and Wordsworth have investigated the theme of childhood in their writing (Martin, 1989). British and American novelists also have written about this crucial period in the development of one's life. Lewis Carol's *Alice in the Wonder Land* (1865), Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), and Charles Dickens employ children's characters in their novels from different angles.

M. H Abrams defines realism as "a literary movement of the nineteenth century, especially of prose fiction," and it is used to "present an accurate imitation of life as it is"(Abrams, 1971). This literary movement goes back to "Balzac in France, George Eliot in England, and William Dean Howells in America" (Abrams, 1971). Donald Pizer refers to naturalism in his book "since it seems to take literature in the same direction as realism". "The naturalist often describes his characters as though they are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, instinct, or chance". "The naturalist populates his novel primarily from the lower class. His characters are the poor, the uneducated, the unsophisticated" (Pizer, 1984).

Barnett and Casper emphasize that:

'Human social environment encompasses the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact. Components of the social environment include built infrastructure; industrial and occupational structure; labour markets; social, economic processes; wealth; social, human, and health services; power relations; government; race relations; social inequality; cultural practices; the arts; religious institutions and practices; and beliefs about place and community.' (Casper, 2001)

Richards targets both John Locke's and Rousseau's reactions against the Puritan belief in the idea of the "original sin" (Richards, 2014). The work concludes that Locke believed that "children were blank slates who could improve through experience and careful education," while Rousseau believed in "the innate goodness of children and in a commitment to cultivating their individual potential and creative spirit" (Richards, 2014).

In (Wheeler, 1994), an industrial novelist talks about the growing conflicts between human will and social factors such as the environment. He focuses on a certain period, which is the Victorian age. It was a rich and exclusive era in the history of English fiction. Novels became prominent in the Victorian period.

(Richards, 2014)investigates childhood and traces its history. The researcher spots three markers of childhood. The first one is the socioeconomic change. The second one is the moral and philosophical trend, while the last one is the influences of the spread of Christianity and its notions. (Richards, 2014) focuses on one novel, which is *David Copperfield*. Katerina Pekařová compared the

concepts of child and childhood. The author starts with the UNICEF definition of childhood. Pekařová sheds light on the concept of the "Romantic Child" and the idea of original innocence. The researcher focuses on the cornerstone within children: their purity (Pekařová, 2014).

Previous writers wrote about various issues relating to childhood. One of the subjects that received critical attention was child abuse. Brennan targeted the idea of childcare by both parents and society. Brennan enlisted different types of abuses that Dickens implied in *Oliver Twist*. The work addressed alcohol abuse and domestic violence, which are part of social life, as facts which children used to live and interact with (Brennan, 2001). Dickens draws the attention of readers to the bad influences, such as how abuses leave children with emotional pains greater than physical ones.

Nineteenth-century novels were rooted in realism and indulged in social reform. They "embody some kind of moral teaching" (Wheeler, 1994). In (Badinjki, 2016), T. Badinjki emphasizes through Nancy's character how she is a "victim of circumstances". Nancy, as a child, is innocent. It is the social surroundings and interaction with Fagin's gang that contaminates her character. The researcher shows that although the circumstances push her to a life of a prostitute, she still preserves some buried goodness which arises from her interaction with Oliver. Dickens, as a social reformer and critic, wants the readers to sympathize with Nancy as she realizes the evil she is indulged with. Badinjki emphasizes that Dickens only "condemns the sin and tries to redeem the sinner" (Badinjki, 2016).

Another article by Xiaohui Huang highlights the social evils which leave the poor with permanent struggles (Xiaohui Huang, 2016). Huang shows the ugly face of money in society and focuses on David's character. The author shows the terrible situations that children have endured. Childhood during the Victorian time has missed an important part of it as children were forced to work at an early age. Children interact with their social environment and take responsibility as adults.

The main contribution of this paper is summarised as follows:

- The paper sheds light on the critical effects of social and environmental influences on children's characters. The paper argues that children's behaviour reflects their social environment, and their character formation is shaped by societal ills. It emphasizes that children's characters are products of their surroundings, a message central to most of Dickens's novels.
- The paper targets four of Charles Dickens's relevant novels, namely *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times*, and *Great Expectations*. The study focuses on Dickens because he was a social reformer and realist writer who studied the social environment's impact on children's development. The novels analysed feature instances of physical, emotional, and institutional abuse.
- The paper analyses the effects of different factors on the social environment in which children grow and learn. The study shows how the social environment plays a crucial role in shaping children's characters. The responsibility for children's health and well-being rests with all parts of society, including parents, monarchies, churches, and schools. Each of these plays an integral role in shaping a child's character. This formula is one of the hallmarks of realism, and the study emphasizes it.

3. Methodology

This paper describes children's characters as conditioned or controlled by the environment. This study targets Dickens as a realist writer and social reformer, studying the social environment and showing its effect on children's "parole" as it moulds their way of life. There are many factors that affect the childhood stage, which are social life and work experience, school experience, industrial life, parents, and officials. All of these factors play a part in the melting pot of the child's character, parole" (Brown, 2000). This study will analyse the four novels of Charles Dickens by studying the three factors above and target Dickens as a realist writer. Childhood is the watery overflow that gives life to the construction of the hopeful tree of adulthood.

Oliver Twist focuses on orphaned children, criticizing the poor treatment inside workhouses and outside in the streets of London, where they are abused or mistreated. This work focuses, in particular, on how Dickens portrays the impact of the social life and work experience, represented by the city and the atrocities of the workhouse officials, on the characters of weak, helpless children, which quite often lead to their miserable suffering. For example, coffin making, chimney sweeping, pickpocketing, and burglary, which children are forced to acquire.

While *Oliver Twist* focuses on the impact of social life and work experience, *David Copperfield* describes how David has to study in an unhealthy school environment and during holidays. He also draws his reader's attention to the physical and psychological pressures and the bullying he suffers. This work discusses how David's character is built upon experiences that are derived from work experience, school experience, and social life experience.

Hard Times highlights the shortcomings of Industrial life and its impact on children. The discussion in this paper gives precise descriptions of the condition of working-class families and children, showing the impact of pushing children to work from an early age and the impact of the Utilitarian philosophy of facts and materialism, which denies them any kind of amusement or imagination on children's education.

Charles Dickens continues his interest in the lives and experiences of children in his novel *Great Expectations*, which was published in 1861. *Great Expectations* highlights the theme of poor education. Children are forced to bear duties and work with different experiences and circumstances. Dickens records children's suffering and their first experiences, as in the case of Pip and Estella in *Great Expectations*. This study shows the effect of parents and officials as a part of society and the social environment on shaping children's characters and building their future personalities. Also, it shows the wrong upbringing, which causes children to grow up with permanent loss and pain.

4. Results and Discussion

Dickens' novels reflect his early experience, which was full of hardships and obstacles. He lived under pressure after his father's imprisonment and worked at Warren's Blacking Factory at the age of twelve. Charles Dickens is the cornerstone of this study. He was a famous writer and well-known for his style of writing, reflecting the real life of Victorian Britain. Dickens portrays how orphaned and low economic-class children suffer. These children are stigmatized by their background and are apprenticed to jobs that are not suitable for their physical capacity. Consequently, there has been a lack of love and care, weak family ties, hunger and punishment that pushed poor children to take the road of degradation in the slums of London. This created children with low self-esteem and psychological problems all their lives. It is evident that the social environment is the soil that provides children with experiences, lessons, achievements, fears, and beliefs. It can produce either good characters and hard workers or criminals, thieves, pickpockets, and burglars. Dickens shows the readers the importance of children as a societal basis upon whom society would later depend, grow strong, and develop or deteriorate.

Oliver Twist's novel was subtitled as "The Parish Boy's Progress," and shows how the majority of children struggled with the harmful surrounding environment. It shows the shortcomings of the workhouses' system at that time, which hindered their development and corrupted them. There are three demanding environmental factors that play a vital role in the process of moulding Oliver's character. First, the workhouse environment. The trial and the prison environment. Third, the city environment. Naturalism tends to focus on poor and working-class characters, which is one of the characteristics of it. Society is the fertile soil that makes the buildings of life. However, if this soil is polluted, the plants will wither, and their life will be killed. Charles Dickens focused in his writing on drawing people's attention to the deterioration of English society. He focused on the abuses and social conditions of England at that time. Naturalism presents characters as being influenced by nature, as well as the social and economic conditions of their lives. As a well-known social reformer, he paid a lot of attention to the social evils that surrounded children and wrote about them in his various novels. Dickens launches a harsh criticism of Victorian society. Children are like little windows if one leaves them homeless, and without protection, it is natural to be drawn to corruption.

Utilitarian society measures everything with the amount of money in one's pocket. In *Oliver Twist*, children learn to be great men by performing pickpocketing. The system of wrong teachings is also evident in *Hard Times*, where children are not allowed to dream or have fun. As one of those children of the army of pickpocketing, Charley Bates tries to satisfy Fagin's endless appetite for money. While realism often suggests that society could improve, naturalism does not take this view. He has been the second hand to Dodger and one of the pivotal characters through the development of the actions. He participates in the pickpocketing expedition. Although he is a boy like Oliver, he mocks Oliver's innocence. Dickens endows the names of the places and characters "symbolically" with glimmers that go beyond the ink of paper. For example, the small window, which is unprotected like Oliver's, is Oliver's entrance to be a legal burglar. "It was a little lattice window," and "the aperture was so small that the inmates had probably not thought it worthwhile to defend it more securely" (Dickens, 2008). Dickens mentions a pub to which Oliver and Sikes go. "The Coach and Horses" has a significance, which is a reference to the motionless Oliver. Oliver is forced to drink alcohol, to eat and to sleep like Sikes and his friends. It is not a good experience for a child at his age to be declared of the children in the underlying world of criminality. Toby announces in a loud voice the victory of criminality, "Down with it, innocence" (Dickens, 2008). Oliver's body rejects such a filthy injection and starts coughing. The interaction between Oliver and the surroundings accompanies the moment of recognition. When he interacts, he realizes the goal of Sikes expedition as his body rejects such use. Oliver is "mad with grief and terror, saw the housebreaking and robbery, if nor murder, were the objects of the expedition" (Dickens, 2008). His innocence shakes like a ringing bell that alarms his soul of threatening wants to enter and take control. "He clasped his hands together and involuntarily uttered a subdued exclamation of horror. A mist came before his eyes; the cold sweat stood upon his ashy face; his limbs failed him; and he sank upon his knees" (Dickens, 2008). Fagin assures Sikes that Oliver "can't help himself. That is, if you frightened him enough" (Dickens, 2008). It is evident that in such careers, there is no mercy. The triangle of planning agrees to use Nancy as a green light to allure Oliver to the targeted site. "You will not see him alive again" (Dickens, 2008). Fagin replies, "[He's] ours! Ours for his life" (Dickens, 2008). Fagin's control seems to reach children's souls when

he responds in such a manner. He wants to slip Oliver into the world of criminality. Nancy believes that Oliver is safe if his job in the burglary game is only to let the door open for Sikes and Bates. Burglar is the umbrella term that is enlisted under the crime of theft since it includes house-breaking and stealing valuable things (Maguire et al., 2010).

Dickens wants to shed light on the hot, hesitant step that the workhouses and poor boys have to take. The bruises on their feet and bodies are indelible marks of offences of society. It is a direct criticism of the managers of workhouses, who either starve the children or directly send them to death as chimney sweeps. Ned, In *Oliver Twist*, is another boy who becomes thin due to the necessities of the job demands. His father gains some amount of money out of this, but he is sentenced to hard labour. The boy is taken by "the Juvenile Delinquent Society" (Dickens, 2008), where he is subjected to a good education and gains the right amount of reading and writing. Then, he is left to society to work for his own sake. "Society itself is seen as a paper-thin veneer, barely covering man's basic desires of greed, lust and self-interest" (Selby, 1989). It is clear from the reaction of Sikes and Fagin that they are not happy with such adoption. The stream of desolate children will retreat, which affects their trade. Selby comments that Victorian society is grounded on an official basis. The economy, which is the primary source of production, sets its production on different branches of exploitation. The mainstream of this trade is poor children. Dickens wants to show the effect of different social environments on children. Ned is placed into different types of situations; this leads to his blossom and to be a powerful aid in society. The other one is the dark side of the chimney sweep environment, which leads to physical and psychological illness and, therefore, to social collapses.

Characters in naturalistic fiction are shaped by their biology and their environments, and the fight for survival is a recurring theme. Jack Dawkins, better known as "the artful Dodger" (Dickens, 2008), is a bad character. He is Oliver's closest friend and one of the members of Fagin's pickpocket gang. Unlike Oliver, Dawkins indulges in the illness of the slums by leaving a part of his childhood traits and feelings. He tries to look like a man and behaves like them; his outside looks do not fit his age as well as his physical building. "The struggle of innocence and experience within the body's mind is reduced to the external machination of thieves " (Lankford W. T., 1978).

Rose Maylie is set up as a dramatic foil to Nancy, who is around the same age. She is an orphan who is portrayed as pure, innocent, and beautiful. Lankford comments, " Nancy differs from Rose not in "nature" but in the background, in where and how she has lived" (Lankford W. T., 1978). A clear comparison between Nancy and Rose is drawn. Both of them are the products of their environment. This environment of purity diverges them into two different branches. Rose grows up in a healthy atmosphere while Nancy goes down the road of prostitution. Rose's character is developed with good morality and respect. She is like a rose that blooms from the seed. The idea of illegitimacy frightened her peace of heart and mind. However, the caring hand of Mrs. Maylie and her marriage to Harry comforted her down. Her fragrance spreads at the end of the novel when the truth of her birth is revealed.

The next novel is *David Copperfield*, which offers the readers some pictures of the early life of its writer (Dickens, 1917). Dickens faced in his childhood experience such as cruelty; therefore, he makes childhood and children the main topic of his writing. Dickens reflected on his childhood experience in his novel, as he lived under pressure after his father's imprisonment and worked at Warren's Blacking Factory at the age of twelve. The book is filled with children who are put under the analytical eye of Dickens. He recorded his childhood experiences on paper, criticizing the defects in his social environment, which turned children into easy victims for the black intentions of adults' "parole". David believes that he will be distinguished by the number of books he reads. He thinks that books will give him the experience which helps him to deal with life and its problems. This reflects Dickens's life since it is an autobiographical novel. The idea is that adults who are in charge of children try to fill the gaps they make in children at surface levels, leaving aside the inner holes they have made "parole". Once David is not allowed to say or express his feelings, they are turned into action as he bites Mr Murdstone. This incident recalls the story of *Oliver Twist* when the beadle feeds him before sending him to apprentice as a coffin maker.

David Copperfield's novel shows that people must be free to decide their own lives. It provides a make-believe world in which the children make the dolls perform social roles over which lifeless dolls have no control. A parallel is suggested by the title and several speeches in *David Copperfield's* novel between the life that is represented in the house or stage and the false life of a doll's house. Wealth and high status do not plant or supply a child's morality. Steerforth is spoilt with his desires to be always fulfilled at any cost. He grows to be snobbish and arrogant. However, his feeling of superiority, his wealth, and his education could not buy him happiness, which can be found in David and Traddles as grown-ups. The novel reflects immature and childlike actions through the characters of both Clara and Dora. To start with, Clara, although she is an adult, is treated like a child in the hands of Mr Murdstone. He believes that Clara is too emotional and not able to teach David how to live. Mr Murdstone finds her naivety a force that pushes him to insult her repeatedly. He gives her no role in the house. He allows her to watch him beat her son and send him to a broadening school without a word of complaint. All repression has turned to tears, which led to her death. Another character is

Dora. Although she is married to David, she is still stuck in the world of childhood. There is a conflict between what she pretends to be and what she is. Throughout her life, she hides her true feelings to please her husband. This is shown in both trivial and important matters. She is not able to cope with the strict seriousness of the adult world. Dora's lavish life has a significant influence on her character. She is not able to manage the domestic issues of her house as a wife since she has never borne responsibilities in her father's house. David treats her the way she treats her dog, "Jip" (Dickens, 1993). She is also raised as a "pet child". David tries to rebuild her character. Dora knows that she cannot please David with such traits. She is haunted by pain, leading to the deterioration of her health, which ends in her death. Both Clara and Dora possess the spontaneity of childhood. Both of them live in a fancy world which is devoid of responsibilities. Their excessive emotions are a permanent sort of pain. As the world clashes with that of adults, they end up with problems.

The substantial judgments of the surroundings lead to their death. Before Dora's death, she addresses David, speaking naturally with a different voice and says:

I am afraid I was too young. I don't mean in years only but in experience, and thoughts, and everything. I was such a silly little creature! I am afraid it would have been better if we had only loved each other as a boy and a girl and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife. (Dickens, 1993)

David can make decisions separately from Steerforth. As David grows up, he starts to distinguish what is suitable for him and what is not. His reactions draw his morality growth. Now he can defend his friend Traddles, advise him and take his hand. He is faithful to his friends, unlike Steerforth. David can see goodness beyond wealth. His reaction toward the man, who wants to steal his aunt's money, seems to be filled with agitation. It resembles that in *Oliver Twist*. Both Oliver and David revolt against the crimes that occur in front of their eyes. Goodness never correlates with evil acts. That pushes children to interact with their surroundings to change what happens in front of their eyes. Moreover, in the two novels, towns force children to connect with their interface, which moulds their moralities in a wild range.

Dickens draws a clear comparison between the schools that David enters and how they affect his character. In the first school, David is indulged in a place where the teachers do not function well. The result is destruction in building up the learners' characters "parole". In the second school, the atmosphere and the teachers play a vital role. They enhance the development of students' character toward maturity. The result is successful leaders of the future. Also, the barrier between the teacher and the students is a crucial point. In Murdstone School, it seems that learning is based on frightening students. No one in the school likes Mr Murdstone. On the other hand, all students love Dr Strong and respect him. Accordingly, the learning process is based on a successful integration between the cornerstones of the learning triangle. Overall, Dickens wants to shed light on the importance of such institutions by drawing a clear comparison between schools. Readers witness a school which develops the child's character and leads to his maturity. The role of the school here is as a guard, making children grow and discover the correct path that suits their abilities. It nourishes the child's mental, emotional, and psychological needs. On the other side, readers also see the consequences of the other school, which represses the avid child from emotions. Inquiry is not allowed, and grasping the correct knowledge seems like a maze. Such a school leads children to grow with psychological illness. It forces children to flee and become criminals, thieves, and so on. Schools did not function as they ought to during the Industrial Revolution. Schools should be the shelter that produces the builders of society and holders of its morality to coming generations. Childhood is the watery overflow that gives life to the construction of the hopeful tree of adulthood. David is sent to Dr Strong School, where he grows as a "promising young scholar" under the support of Doctor Strong, Mr Dick, and his aunt. The pieces of the daily lessons he gets, love, and encouragement build his unique character with gracious "leaves," David says,

MY SCHOOL-DAYS! The silent gliding of my existence -the unseen, unfelt process of my life- from childhood up to youth! Let me think, as I look back upon the flowing water, now a dry channel overgrown with leaves, whether there are any marks along its course by which I can remember how it ran (Dickens, 1993).

As David goes outside the boundaries of his house, he faces a bigger circle of people and places and interacts with them. This is one of the characteristics of naturalism. The child grows and matures in his environment. Thus, there should be a correspondence between the house and the parent's injection and that of the surrounding sphere. In *David Copperfield's* novel, David goes to school and faces cruel treatment, prejudice, and discrimination. He grows up by taking responsibility one after another. Dickens describes the situation as "town seems to sharpen a man's appetite" (Dickens, 1993). At school, the "circle of acquaintance" (Dickens, 1993) accompanies David with new faces. David can adapt and contact them, though they seem to be different in status, their psychology, and even their characters' "parole". He finds peace in dealing with boys of his age rather than his cruel old stepfather. The moment of peace and establishing his net of friends does not last long with his mother's death. He is forced to work under hard conditions and circumstances. Aunt Betsy rebukes Mr Murdstone and gives David the confidence to choose

between going back with Murdstone or staying with her. David has got a new name, "Trot" (Dickens, 1993), and new clothes. David describes his happiness with such kindness and says,

Thus, I began my new life in a new name, and with everything new about me. Now the state of doubt was over, I felt, for many days, like one in a dream (Dickens, 1993).

Steerforth disturbing emotions do not allow him to manage the track of his life, putting guilt on the circumstances which deprived him of his father. He seduces Emily and convinces her to elope with him. As a result, this relationship turns into pain and failure. Steerforth abandons Emily, leaving unforgettable scars on her by planning to make her marry his servant. As his name suggests, he stirs the emotions of others, whether David, Little Emily, or Traddles, and fills them with the black ashes of his heart and mind. Dickens shows the readers how parents' wrong teachings lead to their children's endless pain. Marcus asserts that "[being] a child, he is naturally helpless; everything seems done to him, and almost nothing is done by him" (Dickens, 1993). David is led blindly to his new school. He faces two types of school environments, which have different impacts on him. The first school, which he is obliged to enter, is under the commandments of his stepfather, who sent him during a time that was not study time.

Mr Murdstone passes the cane punishment method to David's schoolmaster. Children in this school are not looked at as blank slates to be filled with knowledge but as complete history upon which the masters draw the headlines of treatment. David is treated like an animal. His inner suffering increases with the "placard," which is forced upon him to wear on his back. It became his stigmatized slogan: "Take care of him. He bites" (Dickens, 1993). Gilmour asserts that "the world in which the Victorians grew up was in many ways a violent, anarchic place" (Dickens, 1993). The psychology of the child deteriorates with such negative surroundings. David's fragile character makes him an easy victim of bullying. The other boys enjoy the game of teasing him since the hanging bell of "he bites" (Dickens, 1993) spreads all over the school. David admits that the school is "carried on by a sheer cruelty" (Dickens, 1993), and he says it is "the hardest school that ever was kept!" (Dickens, 1993). In Doctor Strong's school, students are seen as the core of this institution. They are part of the educational process, which is built upon three elements: students, teachers, and the place in which the learning process occurs. If any of these elements do not function properly, the learning process will fail since it is an intermingled relation.

Despite the obstacles Traddles faces during his boyhood, he proves himself to be a successful judge even if his name is not famous. He leads a happy life in the end by marrying his true love "Sophy" (Dickens, 1993). Readers can observe the development from only a "table" and a "flower-pot" (Dickens, 1993) to a "little room in the roof," which he is very pleased with its simplicity as it joins him with his loved one. Traddles describes his room as "It's a capital little gipsy sort of place" (Dickens, 1993), and he sees Sophy as "an extraordinary manager" (Dickens, 1993). Sophy and Traddles show how the poor can struggle to achieve a simple life in a family. The readers can notice how childhood features can be transferred to another stage, as in the example of Traddles and Steerforth.

Life of fancy in *Hard Times* is displayed through the world of circus. Children there do not go to school to learn the facts of life. Their lives do not seem to correspond to the precise world of numbers and calculations. Despite the imperfection of the world of fancy, they grow to have the best qualities ever. The workers and their children, even the master of the circus, are one hand. They cooperate to make their work a success. Respect for them is at a high level. They fancy and grasp whatever life teaches them. These children are borne to fancy nature, and they wander and define the world as they see it. The schoolmaster is not a particular person but the social environment with its wholeness. Moreover, their interaction with it and all its elements let them have plenty of answers to their questions. In this world, there are no rules and no limitations to the capacity of imagination. The contradiction between the small worlds of the circus and the massive life of Industrialization creates gaps inside many children. When the hearts and the minds of children clash with the outside world, they have to pay the cost. Overall, the social environment can foster the development of children's characters if it appropriately directs them. A bit of fancy seems to be the medicine that many children lacked during that time.

Both Stephen and Sleary have no chance to develop in a social environment that encourages the rich while stigmatizing the poor by their childhood roots. There is clear evidence in the novel of how suffering can accompany the child and leave him to face greater ones during his maturity. Poor children need to grow up in an environment that takes their hand and encourages their hesitant walking sides. Children dream of leading a better future where they can work and establish their small institutions that lead to a prosperous nation. It is apparent in the novel how a child oppressed by social orders of facts ends up as a weak grown-up. It is not justice to expose children to isolated numbers and mere facts in books while depriving them of excellent books that widen their capacity and allow them to swallow the fractions of facts in front of their eyes.

Children can think, and parents should enable them from early childhood to make simple decisions to make bigger ones when they grow up. There is a clear message in the novel that small, forgettable mistakes in youth are better than painful ones in the future. In the novel, Louisa can't decide whether to marry Bounderby or not since, in her childhood, her father is the manager of her business, whether personal, educational, or emotional. The idea behind the lines of the book is to let children learn by practice and even with mistakes.

The vital core in the process of the child's growth is to let them be part of the social building of society. Nature is part of the environment in which children practice, act, and learn. Children are going to grow as teachers of the younger generations. They are going to be the force that makes society blossom with goodness and morality. After children discover their inner needs and the things they lack, they turn up to the utmost world of their feelings and try to make prints of change in their world. Pip's character in *Great Expectations* emphasizes the idea. The younger children will also give the environment around them the beats of life to arise again with the philosophy of accepting change.

The effect of the Industrial Revolution was not only restricted to hierarchy and relations among different classes of society. But it also controlled the relationship between the members of low-income families, thus adjusting the working-class life. The inner sphere of the houses changed following the factory system. On the contrary to *Sissy*, Louisa and Tom are destroyed with the machine of facts. Their inner innocence seems to be burned with such machines. They move from the father's hands to the hands of a similar mechanized schoolmaster. They end up leading unhappy lives. Louisa marries a man for her father's pleasure and her brother's advantage. She does not know what love is. When her genuine emotions stir with the love of Hairthouse, she cries and blames her father for such a life. Also, Tom grows up to have a selfish character, robbing money and drinking, and his life ends in an exile where the ghosts of guilt haunt him. These characters highlight the role of the social environment in either developing happy individuals leading a happy life or unfortunate, corrupted individuals leading a disastrous experience. In *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*, Dickens highlights that low-income families can hold high morality despite their harsh life and rough skin. He believes that schools do not always implant morality in children. Steerforth, for example, in *David Copperfield*, despite his high status, lacks the true meaning of love, family, friendship, and cooperation. He grows up without knowing what childhood means. He lacks the spontaneity of children, while David in *David Copperfield* and Louisa in *Hard Times* preserve it, and it accompanies them till maturity. The social environment fails to kill this buried seed inside them.

Maturity is the mirror of one's childhood. Mr Bounderby seems to be a cruel man who cares for his wealth and pleasure. His egocentricity deprives him of sympathizing with others. His character retreats to the viciousness of his childhood. Bounderby retells his childhood story. Accordingly, it appears that his mother has abandoned him. He says,

My grandmother was the wickedest and the worst old woman that ever lived. If I goit a little pair of shoes by my chance, she would thake 'em off and ell 'em for drink. Why, I have known that grandmother of mine lie innher bed and drink her bfour-teen glasses of liquor before breakfast! " (Dickens, 2008)

The environment in which Bounderby was raised encourages him to imitate bad behaviours and morals blindly. As a child with no care and with the oppression he feels, he flees to the mass cruelty of life. He goes from the close, narrow spot of their house to the open, vast, and more complicated places of external social life. Mr Bounderby says, "Instead of one woman knocking me about and starving me, everybody of all ages knocked me about and starved me." (Dickens, 2008)

Children in the novels of Charles Dickens face many problems. One of them is poor education. For example, In *Great Expectations*, Pip is brought up by the cane. His sister performs the role of the teacher. Her difficult way of teaching him morals is far away from the real ones. After that, he experiences learning at Mrs Wopsle's school. Pip describes the idea of teaching at this school as "reading aloud in a most dignified and terrific manner" (Dickens C, 1993). There he gains a new friend who is Biddy. His character is compounded now with a new company. Pip moves from his insulting sister and illiterate Joe to a nearby place for reading and writing. The turning point in his life starts with the introduction of Pumblechock to play at Miss Havisham. Dickens portrays children who are forced to bear duties and work in his novel, reflecting some pieces of his own childhood experience. He paints children's characters with different experiences and circumstances. Estella is raised by Miss Havisham to feel superior to the male sex and has no compassion for others. This has been implanted in her since early childhood. The moment she sees Pip, she starts mocking his appearance and his class. Miss Havisham encourages her by saying, " Break their hearts, my pride and hope, break their hearts and have no mercy!" (Dickens C, 1993). She applies Miss Havisham's rules to a wide sphere. Estella grows with a cold heart to the surroundings, even Miss Havisham herself. She teaches her to deal with others cruelly, and the result expands to her. Miss Havisham calls her " stock and stone! You cold, cold heart!" (Dickens C, 1993).

All children in the novels of Dickens lack proper education due to their miserable life. They are pushed to work at an early age. The work experiences seem to be harsh on them. They are hunted and sometimes abused or seduced. Family, social surroundings and

environment leave children with experiences, lessons, achievements, fears, and beliefs; some pass from their minds and hearts as memories, some become fixed print, and some go with the winds.

In *Great Expectations*, Dickens continues to deal with the theme of oppressed childhood, portraying the wrong upbringings that cause children to grow up with permanent pain and loss (Roulstone, 1969). Dickens's novels reflect his life; at the age of twelve, his father had financial problems, which pushed Charles to work. He was not able to attend school regularly as David in *David Copperfield*. The loneliness he felt at work was an important influence on his writing, especially in his books *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*. Dickens uses both Estella and Pip to show how adults can victimize children. Miss Havisham uses Estella as a tool for her anger and revenge against men. This is due to her past story in which her lover deserted her on their wedding day. *Great Expectations* offers the readers a view of the great dreams of its major characters. First, the narrator, through whom the readers enter his world and see the reflection of the surrounding environment on his character as he grows up and through Estella, who is also an orphan. The book shows the readers the consequences of a controlled childhood. She grows up heartlessly, adopted by Miss Havisham when she was three, and raised in a way that deprives her of emotions. The way she is raised affects her way of comprehending life. The novel shows the readers how children are born with high expectations towards life, but once they grow and interact with the social environment, the great expectations minimize and disappear. The portrayal of Pip's and Estella's great expectations manifests the above statement. Pip's emotions are vulnerable, as he has no parents to give him the love or attention that he needs. He finds Estella a promising way to climb the social hierarchy, but such climbing has a wage to pay. He becomes socially isolated. Besides, his childhood sentiments conflict with the atrocity of gaining money. His vision of Jo changes as he becomes ashamed of such degrading belonging. Pip falls an easy victim in the hands of Miss Havisham. His development from an arrogant, selfish one emphasizes the role of the social sphere in children's characters. Pip gets rid of everything that connects him with his roots, his remaining family, and his real social standing. The moment Pip comes into a sudden fortune, his attitude, as well as his morals, change. He becomes snobbish. Pip passes the same places to the church, the graveyard and his sister's house and looks at them with disdain and superiority.

Dickens highlights the right of every child to live an honest life and to have a proper education (Scholz, 2010). Through his characters, Dickens draws different endings; Compeyson, for instance, has his death as a punishment. Magwitch also ends his life in death, but he repents and works hard in the last years of experience. Pip, as a child, can teach Magwitch what he lacks. His kindness and his proper way of dealing with a convict turn Magwitch's life upside-down. Although Magwitch mends his path, he is sentenced to death and pays the wage of his guilt. His strong and miserable childhood life shows that society is responsible for him and for many children who die out of hard work, mistreatment, and hunger. Overall, children are seen as victims.

5. Conclusion

Being true to oneself depends on what an individual believes in or wants. Some people need responsibility or security or a family; others feel the need for achievement or new experiences or to be independent. In Dickens's novels, children try to learn or acquire knowledge naturally through the artificial atmosphere of society, which leads to a change in their behaviour. Learning here involves an active, conscious focus on and acting upon events outside or inside the organism. Also, it is seen as a change in the behaviour. We can notice that Dickens tries to focus on the performance of children, their language, and their attitude, so he focuses on the parole. He let them go into society in an attempt to witness the results of their characters. Dickens tries to make children live in the doll house of society, where children are merely dolls, and their interaction with such house affects children as well as their ability to grow as separate individuals with basic rights. This study shows the effect of the social environment on shaping the characters of children in Charles Dickens's novels. In *Great Expectations*, Pip moves from the hands of the illiterate Joe to the pure teachings of Mrs Wopsle and to the side of Miss Havisham, where he struggles to improve his education, hoping to achieve a better social standing. In *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*'s *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*, Dickens shows how childhood is a period that can be easily twisted by the invisible hands of society. Instead of being a period of nurturing good moral ideals inside children and planting more goodness, it turns into a period of cultivating bad deeds and planting evil. In other words, the social environment is the soil that can produce either good characters and hard workers or criminals, thieves, pickpockets, and burglars.

The analysis in this study covers only four main novels by Charles Dickens. While this paper discussed in detail the impact of the social environment elements that were mentioned in the four novels, the quality of work might rather benefit from the analysis of other children's characters in other Charles Dickens novels. An example is the character of Sam Weller in the *Pickwick Papers*. Also, the molding of childhood characters are analysed in this paper from two perspectives: the social environment and parole. Considering aspects other than social environment and parole would enrich the conclusion. The investigation could be extended using different critical methodologies such as psychoanalysis criticism.

Several directions would be considered for further expansion of the work in this paper. The conducted discussion could be extended by means of making a comparative study based on how the two novels tackle the social environment effect not only on children

but also on industrial life. Also, this study highlights the role of the social environment in moulding children's characters; a future study could be conducted to highlight the effects of the children on their social environment, in particular on adults.

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