

# The Representation of Family in Charles Dickens' "David Copperfield" and "Hard Times"

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**Babić, Mirela**

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Mirela Babić

**THE REPRESENTATION OF FAMILY IN CHARLES DICKENS' *DAVID  
COPPERFIELD AND HARD TIMES***

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Literature and Pedagogy at the University of Rijeka

Supervisor:  
Sintija Čuljat, PhD

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## **ABSTRACT**

*David Copperfield* and *Hard Times* are Victorian-era novels written by Charles Dickens. This paper sets out to juxtapose the representation of family in the two novels with the real-life situation in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain and to discover whether Dickens presents us with the family as the nucleus of one's life, or as the possible cause of one's problems. Firstly, the historical background is provided, followed by the depiction of family in historical sources, representation of author's life and overview of domestic matters in his work. Dickens' private life, or more precisely, his familial affairs, may have prompted him to render certain families in these novels, such as the Micawbers. The central part of the paper refers to exploring specific family structures present in the two novels. The conclusion of this paper is that family patterns were multifarious and influenced by the Industrial Revolution. The ideology of separate spheres is brought into question in both novels. The definition of family does not necessarily include blood-relatedness since adoptive parenting is presented as more successful than the one of biological parents. The matter of divorce has proved that legal separation was difficult to obtain in this period, especially for women and the poor. Dickens seems to be arguing that family very often defines who we are and that we need to acknowledge familial dynamics. Successful relations within families depend on individuals and external factors.

Key words: 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, Charles Dickens, divorce, family, separate spheres

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## INTRODUCTION

*“My dear friend Copperfield, said Mr. Micawber, accidents will occur in the best-regulated families;”*(Dickens, 1850: 431).

As Mr. Micawber stated in Charles Dickens’ famous novel, there is no family that has a perfect or trouble-free life. Throughout history, family’s role in society, as well as its definition, has been changing. Many people are acquainted with the fact that Victorian families strove to achieve a certain ideal. However, it is arguable whether such ideal was achieved in reality. Prudishness, rigidity, restraint and firmness would be most highly valued amongst characteristics used to describe people who lived in Victorian Britain. Taking that into account, it highly contradicts with the image of true domestic values. Claudia Nelson (Nelson, 2007) demonstrates that for the Victorians, as for ourselves, the way we conceptualize the ideal family has an important influence on individual psychology and the internal workings of actual families as well as on public and political debates. On the other hand, many factors influence the role of family, such as the social, political and economic situation in a country.

While some praise Charles Dickens as the pre-eminent novelist of the family, others deem that his depictions offer distorted family relationships. In this thesis I will explore the representation of family in the two novels by Dickens. The narratives that I have chosen are *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*. Although there are many different families in these novels, I will focus on three families from each novel. Each of these families is different and plays significant role in understanding the meaning of the novel. However, some other characters and families may be mentioned in order to thoroughly explain certain aspects relating to the ‘central’ families. The aims of this paper are: to delve into family representations in *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times* in order to find out whether Charles

Dickens presents us with the family as the core of individual's life, or as the probable reason for individual's predicaments; and do these novels reflect the social situation of England in nineteenth-century Britain's society. One of the reasons for setting out on this project is a book by Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, in which she explores family matters in major novels by Dickens, but leaves out *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times* (Waters, 1997: 27). Exploring the portrayal of family in these novels will provide further insight into the Victorian family, as well as the social situation at that time. Furthermore, since *David Copperfield* is regarded as Dickens' autobiography, exploring the theme of family may reveal and justify his attitudes toward family life. Many history books and articles have been written on the subject of family and studying them could be useful to understand particular situations from the novels, hence the methodology used will be comparing and evaluating this information. In other words, I will consult the novels' characters, plots, family structures and other scholarly literature on this subject in order to find out how families are represented and to what extent Dickens' fiction represents the real-life Victorian family.

Firstly, I will give a brief overview of the historical background because it helps us understand the factors which influenced family life. After that, I will outline the definitions of family during this period, followed by Charles Dickens' portrait, with the emphasis on his own family and domesticity in his work.

In the second section, I will explore families in *David Copperfield*. In this novel, we get acquainted with diverse families and family ties that affect the protagonist's life. The major topic is marriage in which spouses are condemned to complex lives and death is a way of escape or relief from an oppressive marriage for spouses in the novel (Günaydin, 2014). Also, I will tackle the question of stepparents and untraditional families.

In the third section, I will provide a depiction of families in *Hard Times*. In this narrative, we are presented with the Industrial Revolution's significant impact on families and their suffering due to its cruelty. Family, deemed the nucleus of English society, is therefore represented as the key to bettering of that society (Abuzahra and Imraish, 2017). Further, I elucidate the question of divorce and failure of social paternalism.

Lastly, I account for my premises in a conclusion. I am hopeful that this work may contribute to understanding of an important aspect of social life in the age of change and, once more, validate the significance of Dickens' works.

## 1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To understand the Victorian daily life, it is important to get acquainted with the nineteenth-century historical circumstances that framed ordinary people's thoughts and experiences. Victorian Britain was a nation that encompassed four smaller nations: Britain, which was in turn made up of England, Scotland, and Wales, and Ireland, which had a more separate history and a troubled relationship with Britain. For the purposes of this work, the focus will be put on the family life in England since Dickens offers an exhaustive depiction of contemporary life in this part of Great Britain.

The Victorian era refers to the period of Queen Victoria's reign between 1837 and 1901 (Carter and McRae, 2016). Victoria's reign was a time of truly breathtaking change, even though many historians and reviewers portray it as peaceful, comfortable and traditional. The term *Victorian* is itself ambiguous and often used to describe values of hard work and self-help, sexual repression, exploitation and class division, hypocrisy, moral certainties about family life, and a wide variety of arrangements intended to solve public problems. Historian G.M. Young, who was himself a Victorian, was most interested in Victorians' mindsets and beliefs and argued that the Victorians shared certain key assumptions, beliefs, and habits of mind, such as curiosity, a willingness to question assumptions, and a vigorous but "disinterested intelligence" (Steinbach, 2017). Such mindsets may have helped Britain to progress, making it the most powerful nation at a time.

Social, technological and commercial developments fundamentally changed English life, replacing the world into which Victoria was born with one that looks much more similar to the one we know today. When she became queen as an eighteen-year-old in 1837, little more than half the population could read and write, children as young as five worked in factories and mines, and political power was entirely in the hands of a small minority of men who held



property (Nelson, 2007). By the time of Queen Victoria's death in 1901, railways provided fast and cheap transportation for both goods and people, telegraph enabled speeding of messages through the British Empire in minutes, education was compulsory, religion (or lack of it) no longer barred people from sitting in Parliament, and women became more educated (Nelson, 2007). In short, every aspect of life had been transformed either by technology or by the massive political and legal reforms.

Another thing important to mention regarding the English Society in the 19th century is that it consisted of hierarchical structure containing the upper class, the middle class and the working class. This difference in social classes could be distinguished by inequalities in wealth, education, working and living conditions, including relations within family (Mitchell, 2009). Thus, the basic quality of daily life for people in Victorian England rested on an underlying structure determined by social class and shaped by traditional ways of life in country, town, and city. Each class had its own standards and people were expected to conform to the rules of their class.

### **1.1. Family in 19th-century Britain**

The definition of family has been changing throughout history and remains problematic. In former times, the word 'family' more often referred to a set of kinsfolk who did not live together, while it also designated an assemblage of co-residents who were not necessarily linked by ties of blood or marriage (Waters, 2005). The elements of co-residence and kinship were united in the concept of the family in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An early nineteenth-century definition by James Mill states that 'the group which consists of a Father, Mother and Children is called a Family' (Williams 1977, according to Waters, 2005). In the 1851 Census Report, the term 'family' was used to describe the small kin-group occupying a single house.

As such, it is evidence of the hegemonic definition of the family established by the middle classes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Victorian family is often idealized as a model of parental authority, loving relationships, inner harmony, and secure values untroubled by pressures from the public world (Nelson, 2007). As Hall (Hall, 1992) argues, family became ‘the fulcrum of a complex set of social values which comprised middle-class respectability’. England’s queen at a time was a married woman who bore nine children and served as a role model to her nation.

Family seems to have been a unifying norm to the Victorians and a symbol of social stability and progress, with marriage as its starting point. However, Thompson (Thompson, 1988: 85) states that many early Victorians felt that they were witnessing a ‘crisis of the family’ that threatened to undermine society. Despite other grave social problems, the disintegration of the family was considered the most serious and it was assumed that it was caused by the factory system, city living, irreligion and weakening traditional moral and social bonds.

At least 85 percent of the population was working-class, however, it was middle-class ideology that was dominant in Victorian society (Nelson, 2007). The middle class felt that they had to protect family ideals by guarding morality, modesty, reticence, sexual segregation, parental discipline and authority and male dominance. This class was in control of the presses, writing and producing most of the books and periodicals that voiced and shaped public opinion. Thus it was the middle-class model, in which work was generally divorced from home, that gave rise to an idea crucial to the era’s construction of family, namely the concept of separate spheres. Lower-class families depended on two incomes for survival so they clearly could not conform to this construction. Nevertheless, Hall argues (Hall, 1992) that they accepted many of the ideals of middle-class domesticity. The notion that the home

provided a moral center and a place of comfort for the husband was particularly popular with the working-class family (Hall, 1992).

Steinbach (Steinbach, 2017) writes that domestic ideology positioned home as a refuge from public life, with its anonymity and rejection of the spiritual and moral concerns. As such it facilitated a growing notion of privacy and of the home as a private space. This patriarchal ideology of separate spheres was based primarily on notions of biologically determined gender roles and/or patriarchal religious doctrine. According to this ideology, women should avoid the public sphere – the domain of politics, paid work, commerce and law and stick to the realm of domestic life, focusing on childcare, housekeeping, and religion (Kuersten, 2003).

Susan Kent argues that the most significant reasoning for the theory of separate spheres came due to the Industrial Revolution during the Victorian period (Kent, 2002). The Industrial Revolution made a considerable readjustment of family life. Men left the house, leaving their wives to look after the children and the home. They controlled, by their intellectual strength, the society and became the governing sex, while women were dominated by their sexuality.

Nelson (2007) posits that, despite our sentimental belief that Victorians worshipped motherhood and family values, most mothers did not do much child care. The idealized loving mother probably spent only an hour or two with her children each day. Women who had no household duties desperately wished for some purpose in life but social expectations and family pressure absolutely prohibited their presence in the workplace (Nelson, 2007). According to Rena-Dozier (2010), Dickens was against the ideology of separate spheres, which can be seen in *David Copperfield* where domesticity is not necessarily linked to femininity because the pivotal character writes domestic fiction. The ideal family integrates the domestic and the professional.

According to middle-class values, the family was a 'natural' and stable unit which should ideally be located in a rural setting, or at least a suburban version of the rural (Nead, *Women and Urban Life in Victorian Britain*, 2004, n.pag.). For the most part, nineteenth-century families were large and patriarchal. They encouraged hard work, respectability, social deference and religious conformity (Shepherd, 2001). While this view of nineteenth century life was valid, it was frequently challenged by contemporaries. This can often be seen in literary works since the main attempt of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century authors was to show the Victorian reader the trouble behind the beautiful scene of their society (Carter, McRae, 2016). Families in this period were in many ways as varied and as complicated as those of the present day and examples from both literature and social investigations can uncover some of the fears and difficulties that lay beneath the surface of family life (Nelson, 2007).

## **1.2. Domestic Life Setting in the Work of Charles Dickens**

Charles Dickens is certainly one of the names that come to mind of the reader when thinking of Victorian literature. Even though he is well-known for writing about different social topics, in several works, Dickens shed light on the subject of family relationships. His novels are delightful and profound depictions of society life and reflect the importance of family in human affairs.

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born at Land Port in Port Sea near Portsmouth in England on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February in 1812 (Forster, 2008: 21). His parents, Elizabeth Barrow and John Dickens, had eight children, two of whom died (Forster, 2008: 22). The family moved frequently and because of his father's money involvements and debt imprisonment, Charles was forced to work in a blacking factory at the age of eleven (Forster, 2008:47). This experience is pictured in David Copperfield's experience in the Murdstone's and Grinby's

wine warehouse. After his father's release from a debtor's prison, Dickens was allowed to study at Wellington House Academy in Hampstead Road, London, from 1824 to 1827 ("Charles Dickens Biography: The Life of Dickens", n.d.). He worked as a solicitor's clerk and after that became a journalist specializing in the reporting of parliamentary affairs. When he was seventeen, Charles fell in love with a girl from a rich family, Maria Beadnell (Slater, 2014). However, because of his background, job and lack of social position, the relationship was ended and she was sent to Paris. In 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of his friend, the editor George Hogarth. Catherine was four years younger than Dickens and bore him ten children (Slater, 2014).

Their marriage is known for a domestic scandal that may have been the reason for his interest in troubled marriages. After 20 years, he fell out of love with his wife Catherine and wrote a baffling statement - an early form of Victorian damage control/press release - about the situation. In one letter Dickens wrote:

*"I believe my marriage has been for years and years as miserable a one as ever was made ... I believe that no two people were ever created with such an impossibility of interest, sympathy, confidence, sentiment, tender union of any kind between them as there is between my wife and me [...]"* ("Dickens Troubled Marriage: A Victorian Scandal, n.d.).

In another letter, he described her as an incompetent mother and possibly afflicted with some mental disorder. He banished her to a single bedroom and there were rumors that he had an affair with her younger sister Mary. However, shortly after, Mary died unexpectedly in Dickens' arms and he was inconsolable. As Slater (2014) asserts, later on Dickens was involved with an actress Ellen Ternan whom he met in January of 1858. In spite of Victorian conventions, he made the decision to separate from his wife and despite inequitable

matrimonial laws which gave Catherine no claim to Dickens' assets or income, he offered to provide for her financially. Catherine's sister Georgina stayed at Dickens' estate to raise their children and there were some rumors that Dickens had an affair with her. Reeling from these accusations, Dickens issued a statement denying the affair with Georgina or Ellen, although he did not name them. He refused to further provide for Catherine unless she publicly announced in writing that there was no affair between Dickens and his sister or the actress, to which she complied.

After becoming a successful writer, Dickens travelled throughout Europe and America. In 1870, he died from the bursting of a blood vessel in the brain. He was buried privately in Westminster Abbey (Forster, 2008).

Rose and Hudson (Rose and Hudson, 1983) propose that it was probably because of the problems Dickens had with his own family that he often described scenes of family happiness in his novels. He valued highly the kind of family in which the father worked and provided, the mother took care of the house and children, and the children had nothing to do but enjoy themselves. However, despite his reputation as the prophet of domestic bliss, any close examination of Dickens's novels reveals very few portraits of happy and harmonious families. According to George Newlin (Newlin, 1995, according to Jordan, 2006), a statistical analysis of the novels yields 149 full orphans, 82 with no father, and 87 with no mother, making a total of 318 full or partial orphans. Furthermore, only fifteen named characters we deem significant in the major works (novels and Christmas Books) had or have two parents, and in nearly half of these cases their families today would be considered dysfunctional. Familial relations, which he often represented in transposed forms, were used to explore the social, political, and economic tensions of the age. In the process, his fiction participated in a larger cultural discourse about the family and made it easier to form gender and class differences which were fundamental to the workings of Victorian domestic ideology (Jordan, 2006: 120-121).

The theme of family is often regarded as Dickens' specialty, and he is considered an icon of Victorian respectability and of, in particular, so-called Victorian family values (Furieux, 2010). In an 1855 review for Blackwood's, Dickens was praised by Margaret Oliphant as the pre-eminent novelist of the middle-class family:

*“The middle class in itself is a realm of infinite gradations. But nowhere does the household hearth burn brighter - nowhere is the family love so warm - the natural bonds so strong; and this is the ground which Mr. Dickens occupies par excellence - the field of his triumphs, from which he may defy all his rivals without fear.”* (Waters, 2005: 15).

## **2 DAVID COPPERFIELD**

The aim of this chapter is to explore the representation of family in *David Copperfield* on the example of the Murdstone family, the Micawber family and the Pegotty household. These families are quite different since David's family provides an example of a fractured one with a stepparent, the Micawbers represent a typical, though troubled family with parents and children, while the Pegotty household has an unconventional family structure.

*David Copperfield* is the novel which is often regarded as the most famous one written by Dickens and as his semi-autobiography. Dickens wrote in the Preface to the 1869 edition of the novel:

*“Of all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And*

*his name is David Copperfield.*” (“David Copperfield by Charles Dickens: Prefaces, n.d.).

The complexity of the novel is reflected in many characters, many relationships and many families depicted in a wide variety of forms and throughout a significant part of the social spectrum. For example, it is apparent that there are many orphan children. Most of them did not experience a “normal” family life. David, Emily, Dora and Ham had not experienced a satisfactory place within a family or society and lost both parents by the end of the book. However, even though their upbringing was not primarily influenced by their biological parents, they are depicted as naturally good. This only records a historical shift in notions of the family - stress is transferred from the importance of lineage and blood to a new ideal of domesticity as a natural form of the family (Waters, 2005: 27).

*David Copperfield* shows how the hero's quest to establish his social and sexual identity is bound up with the formation of a suitable family by engaging with a range of topics related to the family (Waters, 2005: 89).

## **2.1. The Murdstones**

David Copperfield was born six months after the death of his father. After the relatively happy early years, which he spends with his mother Clara and their housekeeper Pegotty, his mother remarries another man, Edward Murdstone. David describes him and his sister, Jane Murdstone:

*“Firmness, I may observe, was the grand quality on which both Mr. and Miss Murdstone took their stand. (...) Mr. Murdstone was firm; nobody in his world was to be so firm as Mr. Murdstone; nobody else in his world was to be firm at all, for*



*everybody was to be bent to his firmness. Miss Murdstone was an exception. She might be firm, but only by relationship, and in an inferior and tributary degree.*“ (Dickens, 1850: 54-55)

The reason for this negative side of the stepparent’s role may be the lack of blood ties that may encourage sympathy and understanding between parent and child. Furthermore, qualities like firmness and mastery, which Mr. Murdstone prides himself on, are those that many Victorians deemed essential to the good father. However, from the standpoint of the child in his power, these apparently promising qualities are disastrous. As Nelson points out:

“For many readers, Mr. Murdstone in Dickens’s *David Copperfield* (1849–1850) is the archetype of the nasty Victorian stepfather. He is cold, domineering, and entirely without sympathy; he overawes his childlike wife and refuses to do his duty by his stepson. His first step is to oust David from the family by exiling him to a dreary boarding school, away from his mother’s love.” (2007: 166-167)

David Copperfield’s mother Clara represents the sacrificial woman figure oppressed by patriarchy. She is too weak to protect hers and her son’s interests and needs someone to lean on in her widowhood. A disastrous choice of second husband leads to her death, leaving David at his stepfather’s mercy. Many Victorian texts condemn individual mothers, who are pilloried as weak and childlike (Nelson, 2007).

Furthermore, Mr. and Miss Murdstone are so horrific because they demonstrate the failure of the biological father and mother to fulfill their parental duties, a failure that Dickens blamed in his own parents as well (Nelson, 2007). In literature, stepparents may embody flaws of inattention, lack of sympathy, or outright cruelty, identifying for the reader in a noncontroversial fashion flaws that might also mark biological parenting (Nelson, 2007).

Thus, they provide us with a further insight into the complexity of unconventional Victorian family.

Another thing to mention are women who did not marry. After the death of their parents, they went to stay with their brothers, if they had them, as unwanted and permanent guests. The only paid occupation open to them was to become a governess under despised conditions and a miserable salary (“Marriage in the 19th century”, n.d.). Close bonds between such spinster aunts and nephews occur in a number of Victorian family novels (Nelson, 2007). Even though Miss Jane Murdstone is David’s spinster aunt, she is cruel to him and considers it her duty to look to his moral training. Another example are Mr. Wickfield’s sisters who take care of Dora after his death.

As seen in these Dickens’ novels, family’s treatment of children was sometimes undoubtedly harsh. Murdstones’ treatment of David when he could not learn what they taught him is reminiscent of Gradgrind’s system of education in *Hard Times*, David recalls: [...] *I learnt lessons at home. Shall I ever forget those lessons! [...] They were very long, very numerous, very hard - perfectly unintelligible, some of them, to me [...]* (Dickens, 1850: 58).

Despite the difficult conditions of many children’s lives, the sentimental idealization of childhood is a striking characteristic of Victorianism. In books by Charles Dickens, as well as in thousands of other novels, poems, magazines, and illustrations, children are depicted as innocent, spontaneous, appealing, and naturally good (Mitchell, 2009: 152).

## **2.2. The Micawbers**

The Micawber family consists of a father, mother and four children, i.e. five by the end of the book. Because of the debts incurred upon them, they cannot lead a secure and comfortable

life. Although they are poor and live from day to day, they are depicted as optimistic and, at first glance, their family bonds seem quite strong.

Wilkins and Emma Micawber's marriage is representative of absolute loyalty, patience and submission between spouses. But, under the effect of conditions fraught with helplessness, misery, anxiety and destitution, the feeling of separation invades their family life (Günaydin, 2014). Wilkins Micawber lives according to the motto that 'something will turn up', while his wife, Emma, often repeats that 'she will never desert Mr. Micawber!' (Dickens, 1850: 652). She even reads over her marriage vows to remind herself of the limitations and restrictions that the sacrament of marriage imposes on her. Hager (Hager, 1996, according to Moore, 2011) defines this as a pathetic, repetitive bleat of despair which was, surprisingly, not an uncommon thing for Victorian wives to do. Women, such as Emma Micawber, had no choice but to stay with their husbands and Dickens' creation of such characters was to alert the readers to the inequity of marriage (Hager, 1996, according to Moore, 2011). Mrs. Micawber dreams of reuniting with her family which did not entirely approve of her marriage with Wilkins Micawber. However, even if she pursued a separation from Mr. Micawber, it would not be possible. Once married, it was extremely difficult for women to obtain a divorce. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave men the right to divorce their wives on the grounds of adultery ("Marriage in the 19th century", n.d.). Once men got a divorce, the children became the man's property and the mother could be prevented from seeing her children. This was certainly not what Emma Micawber would want since her primary role is that of a loving mother and a caring housewife.

Despite their marital problems, Hornback sees them as "*the only unbroken family unit in the novel (...) which struggle against its own chaotic social incompetence and chronic moral ineptitude to stay whole*" (Hornback, 1968: 654, according to Günaydin, 2014).

The importance of their family is seen in the fact that they were the temporary ‘refuge’ for David Copperfield: “I had grown to be so accustomed to the Micawbers, and had been so intimate with them in their distresses, and was so utterly friendless without them” (Dickens, 1850: 185). For him, they were an example of a family that stays together no matter what difficulties they face.

After the troubles that Mr. Micawber had with Uriah Heep, the non-conformist Micawber family was shipped off to Australia. Emigration was at a time seen as a suitable solution to a range of social problems (Furieux, 2010: 153). Similarly, individuals who betrayed the trust of their nearest by rejecting their assigned roles, or failing to establish a harmonious domestic atmosphere were often perceived as a significant social threat and sent abroad. For example, after Miss Betsy Trotwood pays off her abusive husband, ‘and effect[s] a separation by mutual consent’, he emigrates to India (Dickens, 1850, p. 7). In *Hard Times*, Tom Gradgrind was shipped abroad to escape justice, as well as Mrs. Sparsit’s husband.

David Copperfield’s surrogate parenting by the Micawbers and later by Aunt Betsy and Mr. Dick represent the alternative domestic units that offset and offer refuge from ‘the broken and dysfunctional families which litter the pages of Dickens’s fiction.’ (Schlicke, 1999, according to Furieux, 2010: 53).

### **2.3. The Peggottys**

The Peggoty family has an unconventional structure. According to Munford, they represent an adoptive family which tended to be more successful in nurturing than the ‘nuclear’ ones (Munford, 2006). When young David Copperfield visits them for the first time, he is perplexed by the design of both Peggotty’s home and his adoptive family. He is finally

brought to comprehend that Dan Peggotty is a bachelor who has adopted the orphaned and destitute around him. Peggotty provides a home for Ham and Emily, ‘an orphan nephew and niece’ and for Mrs. Gummidge, ‘the widow of his partner in a boat, who had died very poor’ (Dickens, p. 40). As David grows up, he understands Mr. Peggotty’s form of parenting, and by this, Dickens models a way in which children may come to appreciate non-reproductive forms of bonding (Furieux, 2010, p. 50-51).

In Victorian fiction, a broad range of stepparenting and adoptive situations was present and it often functioned as a way of critiquing other sorts of family relationships. According to Nelson (2007), literary adoptive parents may prove preferable to a child’s blood kin, thus emphasizing that good parenting cannot be taken for granted.

### **3 *HARD TIMES***

This chapter explores the Gradgrind, Bounderby and Blackpool family, emphasizing the impact of the Industrial Revolution on ordinary people’s lives. Published in 1854, *Hard Times* is the tenth novel by Charles Dickens (“Charles Dickens Info: Hard Times”, n.d.). One reason among many for writing the story that would be known as *Hard Times for These Times* (which is the full title) was an attempt to increase the sales of *Household Words*, which indeed proved to be the case. It shows the worst side of the new industrial society of England and gives consideration to the lives of the poor.

The Industrial Revolution primarily affected the economy and other areas as class and family life. Abuzahra and Imraish (2017) conclude that this revolution is powerful enough to make the relationship among parents and their children, and among husbands and wives cold,

uncomfortable, and lacking the usual warm familiar atmosphere. This will be exemplified in the following sections.

### **3.1. The Gradgrinds**

The Gradgrind family is nuclear and not particularly loving and affectionate one. By examining the fragmented state of the Gradgrind family, we can also understand the state of society as well. Dickens perhaps wanted to warn against the dangers of an education that stifles the imagination and does not encourage independent thought. The children of Thomas Gradgrind, Louisa and Tom, are unhappy because they are constantly forced to do “something logical” (Gallagher, 2009: 63). They learn facts, but they are not able to apply them to real life situations. For example, Tom robs a bank instead of finding a decent job. Louisa is forced to marry Bounderby because he has money and he will be able to provide for her. The atmosphere within this family is suffocating. This strict rigid relationship between the father and his children weakens the cooperative familiar link that should be between the two sides (Abuzahra and Imraish, 2017).

Mr. Gradgrind wants to represent himself as practical and strict father, not emotionally close to his children because he neglects imagination:

*“Their father walked on in a hopeful and satisfied frame of mind. He was an affectionate father, after his manner; but he would probably have described himself (if he had been put, like Sissy Jupe, upon a definition) as ‘an eminently practical’ father. He had a particular pride in the phrase eminently practical, which was considered to have a special application to him.”* (Dickens, 1854: 13).

When it comes to Mrs. Gradgrind, her role seems insignificant and she is marginalized. She complies with everything her husband says because he is the one who manages the household:

*“Mrs. Gradgrind, a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily; who was always taking physic without any effect, and who, whenever she showed a symptom of coming to life, was invariably stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her;”* (Dickens, 1854: 18).

Her passivity and ill health remind of Dora Spenlow from *David Copperfield*. However, the difference lies in Dora being spoiled by her father and hence always having others to take care of her, while Mrs. Gradgrind became like this because of her husband’s rigidity and lack of emotional support. Eventually, this leads to her disdaining her own family: *“yes, I really do wish that I had never had a family, and then you would have known what it was to do without me!”* (Dickens, 1854: 55). Her sad fate serves as a sort of warning to her daughter should she follow the same path (Oshima, 2015).

The relationship between the siblings Tom and Louisa Gradgrind shows to what extent family relations are warped by Gradgrind’s style of education. They are portrayed as having a very close relationship, perhaps unnaturally so (Oshima, 2015). Louisa sacrifices for her brother by marrying a man thirty years her senior. In Victorian age sisters helped their brothers make their way in the world or provided them with domestic comforts to offset their professional struggles (Nelson, 2007). Middle-class girls were taught behaviors expected of them within Victorian society by sacrificing in sibling relationships. Sacrifice was a manifestation of selflessness, a virtue greatly prized within the middle-class cult of domesticity (Nelson, 2007). Conversely, Tom does not sacrifice for his sister, but instead he uses her as a means for saving himself. Sanders (2004: 54) suggests that Dickens evidently saw siblings as an integral part of

one's identity, but this is not present in Tom's case. He is egotistic and entirely unable to understand his sister's point of view (Sanders, 2004: 116).

### **3.2. The Bounderbys**

Josiah Bounderby is a character who does not appreciate family life. He pays his mother, Mrs. Pegler, to stay away from him even though she is a devoted parent and loves him. His own interests are more important to him and he wants to present himself as a self-made man. According to Jordan (2006: 131), through the character of Josiah Bounderby, Dickens explores the failure of social paternalism. Early nineteenth-century social paternalist ideology saw the family's benevolent hierarchy as providing a model for social reform (Jordan, 2006). 'Paternalism' describes a form of social organization that works by way of analogy to the father's governance within the family (Waters, 1997: 101). Dickens traces fractures in the social fabric to imperfections in, or the absence of, proper familial relations (Guy, 1996: 131). Therefore, Bounderby is an example for this. His family is destroyed by his economic self-interest. Guy (1996: 131) also points out that it is the constitution of the individual which determines the nature of the society rather than the constitution of the family as a whole. The social change will be possible only when individuals change, i.e. start having better relations within families.

As previously mentioned, Louisa married Bounderby to sacrifice for her brother. The fact that he is thirty years her senior is likewise of little importance, according to Mr. Gradgrind, when considering the factual statistics that show marriages with unequal ages to be very common. Bounderby is unable to meet his wife's needs, nor emotions and he neglects Louisa, but finds her a good source for much historical and political information (Abuzahra and Imraish, 2017).



His role in the novel is to represent the upper class family. He marries only because it makes him appear more prestigious.

The opposite of Bounderby's family, where family relations are distorted, is the Jupe family, which proves that fathers who teach their children true values earn more respect. Even though Cecilia Jupe attends the same school as Tom and Louisa Gradgrind, she remains uncorrupted because she embodies the moral virtues which her father had taught her. She is not afraid to show how much she loves and cares for her father even though he left her, she is aware it is for her own sake:

*“O my dear father, my good kind father, where are you gone? You are gone to try to do me some good, I know! You are gone away for my sake, I am sure! And how miserable and helpless you will be without me, poor, poor father, until you come back!”* (Dickens, 1854: 38).

A single-parent household, such as the Jupes, demonstrates that fathering can go beyond gender. Signor Jupe occupies the place of both father and mother. This encourages the readers to ask how distinct these roles really are (Nelson, 2007: 13). The home environment of the Jupe family is warm and Cecilia and her father have a supportive kind of father-daughter relationship. When Louisa asks Sissy whether her father loved her mother, Cecilia's confident response is: *“Oh yes! As dearly as he loves me. Father loved me first, for her sake. He carried me about with him when I was quite a baby. We have never been asunder from that time.”* (Dickens, 1854: 59).

### **3.3. The Blackpools**

The disastrous consequences for poor men of choosing the wrong wife are also highlighted in this novel. Stephen Blackpool wants to divorce his wife because she is an alcoholic. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence witnessed the effects that alcohol had on the poor in London in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Foy, 2014). It seemed for many the only refuge from depression and misery. The effect of drunkenness upon the ordinary relationship of husband and wife, parents and children, was disastrous, hence divorce was sometimes a solution. However, it was extremely difficult for poor people. When Stephen asks Mr. Bounderby about the procedure, he realizes it is considerably beyond his means and station. While Dickens's novels contain many failed marriages (a preoccupation that reflects the author's own marital unhappiness), Stephen's situation seems more dire because he is the working-class man (Nelson, 2007: 17-18) and his marriage plot with an upstanding woman, Rachael, is suppressed.

While this proves Dickens' concern with addressing the double standard of class in his novel, he does not criticize the double standard of gender because there is no mention of Louisa's divorce from Bounderby (Hager, 1996: 173).

Stephen's family represents the working-class family which was built on love and passion, but eventually destroyed because of money and the hard conditions of life which are highly related to the Industrial Revolution. It is no wonder since monotonous factory work by itself makes people unhappy. Not only is his family destroyed, but Stephen, the loyal husband, becomes humiliated because he does not speak loudly.

## CONCLUSION

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain experienced a time of change. Every aspect of life, including familial relations, had been transformed. The society had a hierarchical structure consisting of upper, middle and working-class. The family became the center of middle-class Victorian life and a symbol of social stability, even though some advocate for ‘crisis of the family’ in this period (Thompson, 1985). This ‘crisis’ may have been caused by the Industrial Revolution. The middle-class domestic ideology became dominant and gave rise to the concept of separate spheres. The private sphere was viewed as a female domain concerned with home and family, while the man was responsible for paid work in the public sphere. Dickens is said to be arguing against the construction of separate spheres in *David Copperfield*. His life was marked by a domestic scandal with his wife and that may have prompted him to describe scenes of family happiness in his novels - because he yearned for that. On the other hand, his frequent usage of distorted familial relations witnesses his worry about the social, political and economic tensions of the age.

Dickens’ novels demonstrate the linkage between family and society. *David Copperfield* depicts a search for a family in people who are not blood-related. His nasty step-father’s firmness is disastrous for David and his mother represents a sacrificial and weak women figure. This proves that qualities which Victorians often assigned to the role of father and mother had awful consequences for children. Furthermore, this novel warns us that surrogate parenting cannot be taken for granted. David forms close bonds with his aunt Betsey Trotwood and the Peggotys. Wilkins and Emma Micawber’s family is the only unbroken family unit in this novel. Despite difficulties they face, they stay together and find a solution in emigrating to Australia.

In *Hard Times*, we are presented with the negative effects of the Industrial Revolution on family. The flatness of everyday work in factories and strict education result in weakening the cooperative familiar link between parents and children and husbands and wives, which is seen in the Gradgrind family. Mrs. Gradgrind wishes she never had a family because of the unhappiness she faces in marriage, being marginalized and subordinate. This is another proof of Dickens being an opponent of separate spheres. Louisa's sacrifice for her brother seemed justified at that time since that was expected of sisters in real life, too. In *Josiah Bounderby*, we witness a failure of social paternalism and an upper-class family. His economic interests did not serve his family relations, and likewise, society cannot function in the interest of one authoritative person. On the contrary, the Jupe family nurtures close and compassionate relations, remaining morally uncorrupted and exemplifying good single-parenting. Furthermore, the character of Stephen Blackpool acquaints us with the bad effects of alcohol that the poor faced. One way of escape from problems was also a divorce. However, it was pretty difficult to obtain, especially for women and paupers.

To conclude, this thesis resulted in many proofs that Dickens represented the society as it was. In these novels, he paints a realistic picture of his age. Although, the primary role of family was to provide stability, it was actually very often the generator of difficulties, which is apparent in Dickens' own familial affairs. Nevertheless, social circumstances certainly influenced family relationships. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, English society was changing due to Industrial Revolution. Therefore, family patterns were themselves in flux. Literature and identification with certain characters enables us to engage with the past. In this paper I endeavoured to show that family very often defines who we are, and that in order to enhance our awareness of it we need to recognize the forms of familial dynamic. Every family is a unique social group susceptible to change and maintaining successful relations within it depends on individuals and external factors.

Even though the central characters and families were touched upon in this work, and I provided a general overview, there is still room for discussing family-related topics in *David Copperfield* and *Hard Times*. For instance, a more thorough study on marriage in the novels or the differences between families of different social class. Unfortunately, including these topics would be beyond the scope of this paper.

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