THE TREATMENT OF CHILDREN IN FOUR VICTORIAN NOVELS

by

Eva Wiseman

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

While Victorian society sentimentalized the idea of childhood, many children toiled under inhumane conditions in the factories and mines of nineteenth century Britain. Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë expose the hypocrisy of Victorian society in their novels as they often recount the adventures of orphaned children, as their innocent protagonists are physically and emotionally abused by contemporary society. Dickens in Oliver Twist condemns the physical mistreatment of children and in Dombey and Son he emphasizes the horrors of psychological abuse. In David Copperfield, a highly autobiographical novel, the flawed child hero suffers both psychological and physical abuse. Dickens's chief concern is the relationship of his child heroes to their fellow men and the attainment of personal happiness by his young protagonists. While Brontë is also concerned with the attainment of happiness by her young heroine in Jane Eyre, Jane Eyre is a more complex and flawed character than most of Dickens's protagonists. Like many of Dickens's young heroes, Jane Eyre is both physically and emotionally abused. However, unlike Dickens's characters, Jane Eyre consciously asserts her own will to attain happiness in life and love. Jane must also reconcile her conflicting secular beliefs with Christian dogma.

The thesis which follows examines how Dickens in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son, and David Copperfield, and Brontë in Jane Eyre depict their fictional children, and in the process what they reveal about the

inequities of the Victorian Age. The following study also examines the differences in the two authors' philosophical and stylistic treatment of their subject matter, with a special focus upon the depiction of the Victorian girl and the use of fairy-tales in the novels.

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INTRODUCTION

Civilized man professes to be appalled and angered when he is confronted by the exploitation and abuse of defenceless children. Members of nineteenth century British society shared these sentiments in theory, but in practice many of the Victorians miserably exploited and mistreated their children. Charles Dickens in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son, and David Copperfield, and Charlotte Brontë in Jane Eyre expose the hypocrisy of their fellow Victorians' sentimentalizing of childhood, and in the process reveal the falsity of Victorian society. Dickens and Bronte achieve this formidable task through the creation of a fictional world inhabited by orphaned protagonists who must withstand the corrupting influences of their world in order to survive physically or emotionally.

Dickens's and Brontë's obsession with the fate of their child heroes or heroines is made all the more remarkable by the realization that the belief that children were precious beings to be protected and cherished was merely a century old. It was only in the sixteenth century that most people clearly recognized that children were not merely little adults. During medieval times most middle-class families sent their sons away from home to train as apprentices, and kept their daughters, except for a few in convent schools, at home to learn housewifery. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries society was realizing the importance of the family and changing its attitudes towards children.[1] In the seventeenth century schools replaced the apprentice system and middle class children remained with their parents.

Thus children became involved in the daily activities of family life.[2] In the seventeenth century the church was gaining more influence and firmly established the idea that children's souls were immortal.[3] Children were no longer casually buried anywhere if they happened to die. Children also began to represent actual children, instead of some abstract idea, like the soul, in the art of the era.

In the eighteenth century the privatization of the family began. Philippe Ariès explains that in the eighteenth century "the family began to hold society at a distance, to push it back beyond a steadily extending zone of private life."[4]

In England, with the spread of the Romantic movement in the eighteenth century, such Romantic poets as Blake,[5] Wordsworth[6] and Coleridge[7] considered children innocents blessed with intuitive feelings, wisdom and imaginative insight. Rousseau's concept of original innocence gained wide acceptance by mid-eighteenth century. Mark Spilka claims that Rousseau "believed in the uncorrupted child of Nature born in a state of innocence and threatened by the corruption of the adult social world." Rousseau believed in the benevolent quality of childhood offsetting social ills. He saw the child as a "self-active soul endowed with natural tendencies to virtue which needed careful nourishment."[8]

The idea of original innocence is diametrically opposed to the Christian doctrine of original sin which holds that children are born into sin, and from sin they must be "rescued by rational virtue."[9] These two opposing philosophies flourished side by side in the nineteenth century. Science and growing materialism accompanying

industrial capitalism created a moral and religious crisis in nineteenth-century culture. The Evangelical movement was a response to this crisis, but it confused respectability and diligence with spiritual grace, and thus gave sanction to the new commercial ethics.[10] Dickens in David Copperfield and Brontë in Jane Eyre both condemn the unkindness and lack of joy in the Evangelical temper. They also examine how the materialistic values of the era often corrupt the innate innocence of children.

The rapid social and economic changes of the times were responsible for tensions in the Victorian culture. Deborah Gorham claims that the Victorians dealt with the seemingly incompatible philosophies of the commercial world and of Christianity by the "creation of a sharp division between the private world of home and the public world of commerce, professional life and politics."[11] The home became idealized into a haven from the "spirit of competition" of the world of commerce.[12] The Victorians excused "the world of commerce" from the necessity of "acting on Christian principles" by idealizing the home and defining it as a shelter for Christian values.[13] Man's sphere was the business world, while woman's was the home. Woman's main role was to provide "a place of renewal for men, after their rigorous activities in the harsh, competitive public sphere."[14] An ideal woman would be "innocent, pure, gentle, self-sacrificing" and submissive to men.[15] Most importantly, she should also possess a "majestic childishness."[16] It is evident that such a pure, innocent, child-like figure as the ideal woman is "implicitly asexual," and somehow this asexuality had to be reconciled with the obvious active sexuality of a wife and mother.

Gorham explains that:

> These contradictions could be resolved by focusing on the femininity of the daughter rather than on the adult woman. Much more successfully than her mother, a young girl could represent the quintessential angel in the house. Unlike an adult woman, a girl could be perceived as a wholly unambiguous model of feminine dependence, childlike simplicity, and sexual purity. While it might be believed that an adult woman should retain a childlike simplicity, clearly a real child could be conceived of as more childlike than could an adult woman.[17]

It was the duty of the Victorian male to protect and cherish the perfect daughter inhabiting the haven that was supposed to be the Victorian home. And there, in perfect happiness surrounded by her devoted male siblings the ideal daughter was to dwell. Unfortunately, reality was very different from the Victorians' idealized conceptions of home life. Many actual nineteenth-century homes had an atmosphere of "rigid piety"[18] and were ruled over by totally authoritarian fathers who demanded nothing less than complete "filial submission."[19] Dickens expresses a sharp condemnation of the emotional abuse practiced by many fathers through the persona of Paul Dombey who cannot love his children and is obsessed with the concept of "generational continuity and discontinuity."[20]

Abusive and neglecting parents were not the only problems facing Victorian children. Poverty threatened the very existence of the working-class child. The nineteenth century was a time of rapid social and economic change. By the end of the eighteenth century the industrial revolution attracted workers by the thousands into towns,[21] resulting in the creation of horrible slums with no sense of community.[22] Richard D. Altick says that only "tenuous and sterile"

economic bonds "held society together."[23]

The Victorian world of commerce was ruled by the tenets of Malthusian political economy.[24] From 1795, individual parishes were responsible for the care of their indigent, providing in effect a primitive guaranteed income to supplement low wages according to family size.[25] Many people complained that no distinction was made between legitimate and illegitimate children, resulting in unwed mothers with many children receiving more funds than their respectably married counterparts with fewer children. In response, Parliament passed the Poor Law Act of 1834 limiting outdoor relief to those who were unable to work because of age or infirmity, and directed all able-bodied paupers and their families into workhouses.[26] Many of these family members were children. The horrors of the workhouse system were eloquently described by Dickens in Oliver Twist. Contrary to popular belief, shared by contemporary writers like Dickens, the government never had any intention of totally eliminating outdoor relief. For example, in 1839 there were ninety-eight thousand inmates in workhouses, while 560,000 still received the dole in their homes.[27] The middle class assumed "that poverty was the result of laziness alone, not of misfortune or other circumstances beyond the individual's control."[28] The goal of the harsh philosophy of the workhouse was to make the alternative to work so unattractive to paupers that the undeserving poor would be encouraged to work.[29] The Victorian middle class commonly assumed that only the idle poor would enter workhouses, while the industrious deserving poor would somehow cope.[30]

The factory system was responsible for much of the Victorian

child's misery. According to the old system of cottage labour, entire families did piecework with materials supplied by the employer.[31] This system was supplanted by small-town workshops or manufactories with employers and employees often working side by side using the power loom, flying shuttle, and spinning jenny in the all important textile industry. Wagonloads of orphans from London and Edinburgh were imported to tend these machines. The children's parishes were happy to be rid of these hungry young mouths to feed. In addition, employers were often willing to accept one idiot or crippled child for every healthy twenty sent to work.[32]

The adoption of the steam engine at the turn of the century changed the manufactories into great mills and factories[33] that needed cheap child labour. The degrading and unhealthy conditions of these factories, especially in the textile industry, became widely publicized in the "blue books" of select-committees of parliamentary and royal commissions.[34] The working class laboured fourteen to sixteen hours daily for a mere pittance in salary. Some of the blue books documented with "graphic text and pictures the conditions children and women worked under in England's mines." Richard D. Altick says:

> A shocked England learned, among other things, that tiny children worked side by side with adults in the narrow corridors of coal mines; that five-year-old boys and girls were kept in solitary darkness, twelve hours a day, opening and shutting the doors upon which the miners' safety depended; and that in those same stifling mines other children and half-naked women, some in the last stages of pregnancy, worked on all fours, straps between legs, hauling loaded carts to the surface. Other human beasts of burden, male and female, climbed steep ladders, with heavy bags of coal on their backs.[35]

Lord Ashley's Act of 1842, forbidding the employment of women in the

mines and restricting the employment of children to those ten years of age or older, was the direct result of the wide publicity received by the publication about the condition of women and children in the mines. Nevertheless, some mine owners still smuggled women and children underground.[36]

Altick outlines nineteenth-century legislation controlling child labour. The first effective Factory Act was introduced in 1833. It concerned the textile industry, and called for enforcement through inspection. Children under nine years of age were forbidden in the mills, and children nine to thirteen years of age were restricted to eight hours of daily labour, six times a week. Also, children younger than thirteen were obliged to attend two hours of school daily in the factory. In practice, however, this often meant that the stoker or some other illiterate worker taught children in the boiler room. Many factory owners forged certificates about school attendance and the children did not attend school at all. Other legislation involving women and children included the Factory Act of 1844, a reactionary step that lowered the working age to eight and allowed children to labour a maximum six-and-a-half hours and women twelve hours daily. Next came the Ten Hours Act in 1847 which limited children and women to ten hours daily labour. (In reality, the Ten Hour Act also limited men's working day to ten hours, for the men could not do their jobs without the assistance of child and female labour.)[37]

The horrors of the chimney-sweep trade were well known by the Victorian public. Dickens comments on this topic in Oliver Twist.[38] No effective law was passed until 1875 regarding the plight of the climbing

boys. Altick explains that this was the result of "a tacit conspiracy of householders and local officials, concerned more with clean flues than with such humane motives as eradicating the disease peculiar to the occupation (cancer of the scrotum)."[39]

It is clear, therefore, that the working class child was often trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and ignorance. Nor was education a means of escape for him. In the eighteenth century, charity schools were sponsored by various philanthropic bodies, but after 1833 some government grants were provided for education.[40] Charlotte Brontë most eloquently describes the inhumanity of such an institution through the creation of Lowood School, which was partly a charity school, in Jane Eyre. Dickens also describes the harm done by charity schools to various students in Dombey and Son and David Copperfield. The officials operating such schools argued that the "ideal products of their minstrations . . . should grow up to be pious, non-trouble-making members of the 'inferior orders' who knew and accepted their station in life, rejected radical politics with horrified aversion" and observed the teachings of the Bible.[41] Many Victorians were opposed to the idea of popular education, for children were a source of cheap labour on the farm, in the potteries, in the textile industry, and in the brickyards.

Nor were the children who were fortunate enough to attend school pampered little beings. Altick claims that:

> Practices in the working class schools bore distinct tinges of Benthamism. The resemblance between the typical elementary schoolroom and a factory was not fanciful; the atmosphere of drill hall-cum-production line was the same in both cases.[42]

Dickens describes the inhumanity of such a school in Hard Times. By the

1840's selected older pupils who were trained to pass on information they had learned were replaced by apprentice teachers. Students were crammed full of "prepackaged facts."[43] The political economists of the era saw the goal of education as the production of a "steady flow of productive, sober, and docile recruits into the labor force. They did not aim to create a nation of readers, concertgoers, or gallery visitors."[44] "Few working-class children had more than two or three years of desultory schooling,"[45] while the lowest strata of the working class received none. Among these children were the hundreds of thousands of homeless waifs living on the streets like Jo in Dickens's Bleak House. "In 1870, Forster's Education Act empowered local authorities to make school attendance compulsory up the age of thirteen," but this was not extended to become a national requirement until 1880.[46]

Nor did the children of the higher classes participate in an enlightened educational system, since the system had not changed since Tudor times. Dickens attacks the inadequacies of certain British schools for children of the wealthier classes in David Copperfield. Boys and girls started their educations together by being taught at home or in small private elementary schools. Older girls were sent to small private schools or kept at home to be sporadically taught by governesses social rather than intellectual skills.[47] Boys were sent off to one of nine public schools to study the classics. The only major innovation was the introduction of some science, modern history, and French or German by Dr. Thomas Arnold at Rugby.[48] Arnold stressed character building as the main goal of education. In the later half of the

nineteenth century a cult of games and team sports with the accompanying regimentation and discipline to shape character became more important in British public schools than the shaping of children's minds. The public schools suppressed the originality of the children of the wealthier class and produced a team player, a "standardized product," just as much as did the factories and people's elementary schools.[49]

It is clear that the idealized vision of the Victorian child living a pampered and sheltered life without any privations was largely a hypocritical rationalization on the part of a society trying to reconcile the opposing forces produced by the intense competition of the commercial world with Christian morality. In reality, most Victorian children were surrounded by poverty and ignorance, and their individuality and spirits were often extinguished by the conformist and ignorant attitudes of their society. Both Charles Dickens and Charlotte Brontë recognized the evils of nineteenth-century society and through the personae of their child protagonists exposed the hypocrisy of Victorian society's value system.

This study will examine how Dickens in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son and David Copperfield, and Bronte in Jane Eyre depicted their fictional children and what each writer revealed about the inequities of the Victorian age. Although both authors have many common concerns about their society's abuse of childhood innocence, each of the two writer's treatment of the subject matter is unique. In the case of Dickens it will be noted how the increasing complexity of the author's portrayal of children's characters and of the problems facing them reflect the maturing artistry of the author. David Copperfield, published twelve

years after Oliver Twist, is a much more complex and realistic work than Dickens's earlier efforts. This thesis will also emphasize the differences in the depiction of the Victorian girl by Dickens and Brontë. In addition, the cultural significance of these two very different methods of portraying girls will be discussed. The method of this study can best be described as eclectic, for the analysis of the subject matter relies upon biographical data of Dickens and Brontë, recent critical studies and psychological interpretations. Much emphasis will be placed upon the differences in the two authors' use of the fairy-tale, and the cultural implications of these differences which are much more than mere variations in technique.

NOTES

[1] Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), p. 365.

[2] Ariès, p. 403.

[3] Ariès, p. 43.

[4] Ariès, p. 398.

[5] Peter Coveney, Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature (London: Rockliff, 1957), p. 12.

[6] Coveney, p. 30.

[7] Coveney, p. 48.

[8] Mark Spilka, "On the Enrichment of Poor Monkeys by Myth and Dream; or, How Dickens Rousseauisticized and Pre-Freudianized Victorian Views of Childhood," Tennessee, Studies in Literature, 27 (1984), 163-164.

[9] Spilka, 164.

[10] Spilka, 167.

[11] Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 4.

[12] Gorham, p. 4.

[13] Gorham, p. 4.

[14] Gorham, p. 4.

[15] Gorham, p. 4.

[16] John Ruskin, "Of Queens' Gardens," in Sesame and Lilies: The Two Paths and The King of the Golden River (London: J. M. Dent and Sons,

1907), p. 60.

[17] Gorham, p. 7.

[18] Steven Mintz, A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 60.

[19] Mintz, p. 35.

[20] Mintz, p. 88.

[21] Spilka, 162.

[22] Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: N. W. Norton and Co., 1973), p. 77.

[23] Altick, p. 77.

[24] Altick, p. 121.

[25] Altick, p. 121.

[26] Altick, p. 122.

[27] Altick, p. 121.

[28] Altick, p. 123.

[29] Altick, p. 13.

[30] Altick, p. 124.

[31] Altick, p. 38.

[32] Altick, p. 39.

[33] Altick, p. 40.

[34] Altick, pp. 39-40.

[35] Altick, p. 46.

[36] Altick, p. 46.

[37] Altick, pp. 46-47.

[38] Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 62.

[39] Altick, pp. 132-133.

[40] Altick, p. 248.

[41] Altick, pp. 248-249.

[42] Altick, p. 249.

[43] Altick, p. 249.

[44] Altick, p. 250.

[45] Altick, p. 250.

[46] Altick, p. 250.

[47] Joan N. Burstyn, Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 22.

[48] Altick, p. 252.

[49] Altick, p. 253.

CHAPTER 1

CHARLES DICKENS'S ORPHANED CHILDREN

Charles Dickens in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son and David Copperfield is obsessed with the fate of a young orphan lost in the Victorian city. The predator preying upon and, indeed, often ready to destroy the innocent child-hero is contemporary nineteenth-century society. This corrupt world is pitted against the child whose innocence is his sole defence against the wickedness around him. And the victimization of a child is an unpardonable sin in the world of Dickens's novels.[1] The city is the great corruptor of the child, and its ordinary inhabitants often show a remarkable viciousness towards him. How a character in a novel treats a child is indicative of the degree of goodness or evil in his soul. All three novels, however, are remarkable for their insight in portraying how the child sees his world and how the child is seen by his world. In the case of David Copperfield another point of view is examined, because it is the adult narrator who is looking back and evaluating his own childhood. Without doubt, Dickens's own insecurities and memories of being abandoned by his parents as a child influence both his characterizations and machinations of plot. The destiny of the child-heroes often seems to be wish fulfillment on the part of the author. It is a heart-wrenching experience to read Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son and David Copperfield, for the world of these novels abounds with homeless children, unloved children, children used to satisfy the egos of bad parents, and children taken advantage of for the financial benefit of their parents. The

novels also abound with missing or bad parents, who, together with society, rob the child of his innocence. And sadly enough, there are besides the invincible, innocent child-heroes, certain other children in the novels who are morally destroyed by their society. Dickens is quick to emphasize that the school system of the era plays a large role in destroying spontaneity and decency in some children. In addition, the novels also describe children who cannot withstand, physically or emotionally, the hypocrisy of contemporary society. Such children die or fail to attain emotional maturity.

Despite common themes and concerns, there are differences in the treatment of children in each of these novels. In Oliver Twist, the foundling Oliver is incapable of action to save himself. He is essentially helpless, an innocent victim whose pure incorruptible moral fiber is unchanging throughout the entire novel. Oliver lives in a nightmare world described through the use of fairy-tale imagery. He is a child fallen out of grace and condemned to inhabit a Satanic world until he finds haven in a private little world at the conclusion of the novel. Paul Dombey, who is not a typical child hero, is one of the protagonists in Dombey and Son. Unlike his sister Florence, Paul does not triumph at the end of the novel. Instead, Paul is robbed of his childhood and dies. Florence Dombey is just the sister Paul needs. Equally as good and pure as Oliver Twist, she is a typically perfect Victorian daughter. She is the only one among Dickens's virginal heroines whose torturer is her father.[2] Florence must grow up before she finds her haven in a fraternal relationship that has turned sexual, that has become marriage. Dombey and Son is the creation of a more

mature Dickens than is Oliver Twist. Paul and Florence inhabit a much more realistic world than does Oliver, for in Dombey and Son the use of fairy-tale motifs is subordinated to a larger panoramic social exploration. It is society as a whole that is being judged and found wanting because of its materialistic values and lack of humanity towards innocent children. David Copperfield is the work of a still more mature Dickens. David is a more complex and psychologically real character, with more character flaws, than either Oliver Twist or Florence Dombey. David must learn from his mistakes and overcome his character weaknesses before he can achieve the kind of happiness that rewards Oliver and Florence for merely being pure in heart. David must grow and mature before he becomes deserving of marriage to sisterly Agnes Wickfield. In David Copperfield the reader sees the child hero grow up and become a mature adult, unlike in Oliver Twist where Oliver is still a child at the conclusion of the novel, and in Dombey and Son where Dickens sums up Florence's adult life in a few sentences at the end of the book. In accord with Dickens's use of increased realism in David Copperfield, the adult David is an important character in the novel. In David Copperfield, Dickens emphasizes that life is a continuum, and that childhood experiences influence and help determine the kind of adult person a character becomes. Also in David Copperfield, Dickens introduces the idea of general responsibility on the part of society whose members mistreat emotionally and physically defenceless, innocent children. The rest of this chapter will provide a detailed analysis of Dickens's treatment of his orphan heroes in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son and David Copperfield. It will also examine the similarities and

differences in Dickens's depiction of children in each of these novels.

I

Oliver Twist, first published 1837-1839 in serialized form, was the second successful novel of the young Charles Dickens. The book chronicles the adventures and fate of a foundling, Oliver Twist, as he is exploited and wickedly treated by contemporary society in general and the workhouse system in particular. Dickens examines how Oliver's persecutors looked upon him as a "hardened young rascal,"[3] when his only sin was his unknown parentage. Dickens indicts the unfairness of the workhouse system and the Poor Law of 1834 that created it.[4] He describes the cruelty and blindness of the workhouse board that held Oliver's fate in its hands. This is obvious in the episode where the "gentlemen" inform Oliver that he will be apprenticed to the undertaker Sowerberry:

> When little Oliver was taken before "the gentlemen" that evening and informed that he was to go, that night, as general house-lad to a coffin-maker's; and that if he complained of his situation, or ever came back to the parish again, he would be sent to sea, there to be drowned, or knocked on the head, as the case might be, he evinced so little emotion, that they by common consent pronounced him a hardened young rascal, and ordered Mr. Bumble to remove him forthwith.
>
> Now, although it was very natural that the board, of all people in the world, should feel in a great state of virtuous astonishment and horror at the smallest tokens of want of feeling on the part of anybody, they were rather out, in this particular instance. The simple fact was, that Oliver, instead of possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much; and was in a fair way of being reduced for life to a state of stupidity and sullenness by the ill-usage he had received.[5]

Dickens is emphasizing here that the harsh treatment dealt to the innocent Oliver was destroying the young boy's natural brightness and joy of life, while making him stupid and sullen. Society brutalizes Oliver. This can be seen during the incident when the board advertises a five pound reward "to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish."[6] In this case, Oliver was seen by his society as a thing to be bartered, instead of the very human little boy he really was. Fortunately, the innocence of his character saves Oliver's spirits from total destruction, and the child is able to flee from his horrible environment, and obtains his deserved rewards by the end of the novel.

Oliver's innocence withstands the corruption of the overwhelming evil surrounding him. He inhabits a dark Satanic world in which men live like animals, yet he remains immaculate in a world of black labyrinths, dark rooms, and thieves' dens.[7] That Oliver inhabits a nightmare world becomes evident when he spends his ninth birthday in the coal cellar at Mrs. Mann's baby farm after he is beaten.[8] Similarly, when Sowerberry and Oliver pay a visit to the home of the woman who starved to death and died in the dark, the house is described as a "kennel."[9] After Oliver runs away, he meets the artful Dodger, Jack Dawkins, who leads him through a veritable labyrinth of mean streets to reach Fagin's thieves' den whose walls "were perfectly black with age and dirt." Oliver meets Fagin, who is cooking dinner over the fire in the squalid room.[10] The symbolism of the scene is evident. The unbelieving Jew with the toasting fork in his hand is Dickens's secularized version of Satan with his pitchfork presiding over the fires of hell. Oliver, in fact, is a child fallen out of grace through no

fault of his own, into the hands of the ultimate corruptor, Satan himself. Fortunately, even the Devil is powerless in the face of Oliver's innocence and natural goodness, and not even Fagin can destroy the child's innocence. Nothing can corrupt Oliver. Despite his lack of education and his miserable surroundings, Oliver speaks in a refined way with the educated accents of a gentleman, and his well-bred speech indicates his inborn virtue.[11] Oliver represents "ideal and incorruptible innocence."[12] His moral character and disposition are unlike anything he has ever known and apart from all external influences.[13] Oliver's incorruptible quality is most evident in the scene where he risks his life rather than participate in robbing Mrs. Maylie's house with Sikes. Sikes lifts Oliver through the window and commands him to open the door for the gang. However Oliver decides to "alarm the family" even at the possible cost of his life.[14] Mrs. Maylie's servants surprise him darting up the stairs and mistakenly shoot him.[15] Steven Marcus claims that; "In effect, Oliver is the vessel of Grace, but a grace that has been secularized and transformed into a principle of character."[16] Marcus says that Oliver is "lusus naturae," a Christian boy.[17] Dickens, through the character of Oliver, is implying "a connection between grace and the ascent into a better social class."[18] The reader realizes by the end of the novel that Oliver is in fact a middle-class boy fallen from his proper social milieu. Mark Spilka suggests that, by making Oliver a member of the middle-class with an appropriately middle-class accent, Dickens "seduced" his class-conscious readers into putting their own children, if not themselves, into Oliver's place.[19]

Dickens is unforgiving to the characters in the novel who victimize the innocent Oliver. No evil character can escape the hands of moral retribution. Consequently, Mr. and Mrs. Bumble end their days as paupers in the same workhouse they ruled over; Noah Claypole becomes a despicable informer;[20] Monks dies in prison,[21] and Fagin is executed.[22] Sikes's murder of Nancy,[23] an outcome of her loyalty to Oliver, results in his accidentally hanging himself.[24]

Although it would be simplistic to suggest that Dickens created Oliver's tribulations and eventual rewards merely in response to the psychological scars he suffered as a result of feeling abandoned by his family, who stopped educating him and sent him to work in a blacking warehouse at the age of twelve, it is evident that Oliver's fate is wish fulfillment for the young author. Oliver is provided by his benefactors with an education, money, and social position at the end of the novel. The neglected child Dickens was desperately unhappy about the stopping of his education and his bleak future.[25] Yet, despite the preponderance of such obvious biographical data in the novel, it is obvious that the world of Oliver Twist is a rich fictional world full of imaginative details.

Many of these imaginative details are expressed through fairy-tale symbolism in the novel. The symbolism is true to the psychological reality of a young child in whose frightened eyes his enemies "assume strange distorted shapes."[26] Oliver's nemesis is that corruptor of innocence, the "devil Jew," the "Satanic Father" Fagin, a creature typical of chapbooks and stage plays of the era.[27] Fagin represents pure evil, just as Oliver represents pure innocence. Oliver is a prince

in disguise[28] even from himself, reduced to "humble station" and threatened to the core of his existence by the forces of evil.[29] But in true fairy-tale tradition, Oliver is immune to devastating evil. Harry Stone explains that; "Menace, suffocation and entrappment overwhelm Oliver. He seems to be under some spell or enchantment."[30] And like a true fairy-tale hero, he does succeed in escaping the horrors of his surroundings "to assume his true identity and destiny."[31] After his enslaver Fagin and evil half-brother Monks are destroyed, Oliver attains the rewards of his virtue and lives with his benefactor, his fairy-godfather Mr. Brownlow, with the Maylies included in their little circle. Such a happy ending is appropriate for most fairy-tales.

Not only the characters, but also many of the events in the book have a magical nightmarish aura redolent of fairy-tales. Such scenes occur when Oliver, half asleep over his books, sees Monks and Fagin peering at him through the window.[32] When he calls for help and a search is carried out, no trace of the villains can be found. They have disappeared in a magical manner. At the end of the novel Dickens reiterates that Oliver did indeed see his persecutors at the window of the Maylies' summer house, and that the incident is rooted in reality even though its presentation is in a fantastical manner.[33] Another puzzling incident occurs when Oliver identifies the thieves' den to Mr. Losberne, but fails to find a trace of Fagin and his band. The reader never discovers whether Oliver was mistaken or, as was more likely, the thieves had moved to a new hovel.[34] Also truly nightmarish in quality is the scene where Fagin brandishes a knife over Oliver when he realizes that the child is not asleep and is witnessing his gloating over his

hidden, stolen booty.[35] This brandishing of a weapon denotes mortal danger to Oliver. Fagin exchanges "an instantaneous look of recognition" with the child, and such an exchange of looks between pure evil and pure innocence, is typical in Dickens's works.[36] The threats to Oliver's safety seem overwhelming. The only person kind to the poor child in Fagin's underworld is his unlikely rescuer Nancy, who among all the degradation of her world still retains a spark of moral decency as shown by her betrayal of Fagin and Monks to Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow.[37] Thus the reader becomes aware that Dickens's use of fairy-tale imagery in connection with his orphan child is totally appropriate, for it describes accurately the surrealistic vision of inexperienced children surveying their puzzling world.

Despite the fairy-tale atmosphere of the novel, Dickens never forgets that his fictional child is supposed to be a real little boy living in a cruel society full of injustices and privations. He surrounds Oliver, therefore, with children who are most cruelly treated by their society. The artful Dodger and the rest of Fagin's band of young thieves are true victims of the social system. These children do not attend school nor have any other means of improving their lot in life. They must turn to a life of crime to survive. The children in Fagin's greedy clutch have been robbed of all of their childhood spontaneity and innocence, and Dickens describes them as possessing "the air of middle-aged men."[38] Obviously parentless, these children have no one to love them or spiritually guide them. Instead, their self-appointed guardian Fagin corrupts them and morally destroys them. Another child victim in Oliver Twist is Oliver's friend the poor

sentimentalized little orphaned Dick, who perishes under the harsh treatment doled out to him by contemporary society. Another less obvious example of a child victim is the charity boy Noah Claypole, who grows up to become a sniveling coward. Although Noah has an obviously despicable nature, contemporary schooling in charity schools is shown to be at least partially responsible for his unsavoury character development.

In contrast, Oliver is distinguished from the other children in the novel by his pure, unconquerable moral fiber. He is invincible in the face of moral evil because of his purity of heart. No truly vigorous, condemning blame is attributed to his parents, although their illicit love was responsible for Oliver becoming a foundling. Oliver's unshakable innocence in the face of the ultimate evil proves that he is a child hero of Dickens's and worthy of the happiness and social position with which he is rewarded at the end of the novel.

II

A very different child hero from Oliver Twist is young Paul Dombey, one of the major child protagonists in the more mature novel Dombey and Son, first published in serial form from 1846 to 1848. This is a more realistic novel than Oliver Twist. In Dombey and Son Dickens explores the manner in which a society embracing materialistic values and devaluing natural love and affection emotionally maims and often physically destroys innocent children. Although fairy-tale elements exist in Dombey and Son, they are subordinated to the author's social

vision. Unlike Oliver Twist, Paul Dombey does not triumph at the end of the lengthy novel, for society, in the representation of his own father, robs him of his childhood and contributes to his destruction. Paul is a victim of his culture. Dombey does not love Paul for the child's own sake, but for his potential in perpetuating the glory and wealth of the Dombey firm. Paul is fated to die. It is significant that the young child begins to speak of death and of the sea speaking to him during his stay at Mrs. Pipchin's.[39] The author constantly emphasizes that there is something strange and old about Paul. Paul has a child's frankness of vision but not a child's naivete.[40] This is emphasized when Paul, in one of his "old, old moods,"[41] disconcerts Mrs. Pipchin by pointing out that she is rude "to eat all the mutton-chops and toast."[42] Another episode demonstrating Paul's lack of childish credulity occurs when he refuses to believe Mrs. Pipchin's threat that he will be gored to death by a mad bull if he asks too many questions.[43] Paul's curious mixture of childishness and knowledge is emphasized when he asks his father about the nature of money.[44] When told that money can do almost anything, Paul points out to Dombey, who should have realized by himself, that money could not save his mother[45] or make him "strong and quite well."[46] The reader finds it most disconcerting that Paul speaks in the manner of a child he is supposed to be, but expresses ideas that should be foreign to someone of his youth. Dickens constantly repeats and emphasizes Paul's old and strange quality. For example, when Paul is five years old he is described thus:

> He was childish and sportive enough at times, and not of a sullen disposition; but he had a strange, old-fashioned, thoughtful way, at other times, of sitting brooding in his miniature armchair, when he

> looked (and talked) like one of those terrible little Beings in the Fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted. He would frequently be stricken with this precocious mood upstairs in the nursery; and would sometimes lapse into it suddenly, exclaiming that he was tired: even while playing with Florence, or driving Miss Tox in single harness.[47]

Paul is presented in this passage as "strange," unusual, not quite of the world of reality, but with connections to the supernatural. The same idea is refined when Mrs. Wickham states that the case of the child Betsey Jane, who brought death to anyone she liked, is analogous to Paul's situation. Betsey Jane, and Paul, are described thus:

> I have seen her sit, often and often, think, think, thinking, like him. I have seen her look, often and often, old, old, old, like him. I have heard her, many a time, talk just like him. I consider that child and Betsey Jane on the same footing entirely, Miss Berry.[48]

Thus a connection is made between Paul and age and experience. Usually, age is connected to death. Despite his youth, Paul has an affinity to death. This idea is further amplified when Wickham explains to Miss Berry that all the people loved by Betsey Jane, Paul's female equivalent, die:

> She took fancies to people; whimsical fancies, some of them; others, affections that one might expect to see- only stronger than common. They all died.[49]

The reader cannot but comprehend that Paul is not only old and strange, but that he is also directly connected to death. Paul's problematic precocious character and affinity to death predisposes him to die. Because he is "old fashioned"[50] and has an affinity to death, Paul's decisions are often inappropriate for a young child. For example, he chooses old Glubb, rather than Glubb's grandson, to push his carriage.[51]

Only with his sister Florence is Paul a spontaneous child, and not a precocious "enfant terrible."[52] This can be seen when Florence carries him up the staircase singing to him while he holds her neck and rests his head on her shoulder,[53] a behaviour appropriate to a little boy of his age. The circumstances in which Paul lives do not allow him to retain any of his childish character traits. In addition, fate is unkind to Paul. He twice loses a mother, firstly through the death of Mrs. Dombey, and secondly through Dombey's firing Richards, Paul's wet-nurse and substitute mother. With a mother's influence removed, the child develops more and more old-fashioned habits. At Dr. Blimber's stultifying school no allowance is made for Paul's young six years of age. When Dr. Blimber asks Paul whether he should make a man of him, Paul replies that he would rather be a child.[54] Unfortunately, Blimber's question proves prophetic, and in Blimber's establishment Paul loses his childish traits and begins to speak of death in a serious way.[55]

By depriving his son of a normal childhood and of the love that should be given to the child for his own sake, Dombey is ultimately responsible for Paul's death. This is most ironic, since Dombey believes that Paul is his key to immortality. Steven Marcus expresses this idea:

> For Dombey, Paul is a destiny, Dombey's own destiny perpetuated, his very immortality. He wants his son to be a continuation of his own will, a reincarnation of himself.[56]

Dombey is, indeed, so obsessed with Paul's future, Paul's growing up to increase the glory and wealth of the family firm, that he misses Paul's present.[57] Paul's childish innocence is tainted by his precociousness.

The child dies because he has an affinity to death and because his father loves him not for his own sake but because of his potential in maintaining continuity between geneations. Dombey's values reflect those of his society that places a greater emphasis on financial success than on human love. Paul cannot withstand the emotional barrenness of the Victorian age.

Much of the symbolism in Dombey and Son is related to Paul's painful childhood experiences, and many of the symbols are incorporated into the child's experiences and comprehension. Such symbolism occurs when Paul believes that the clock in the hall at Blimber's speaks to him directly: "how, is my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?"[58] This is a question that his father, obsessed with his own pride and ego and his visions of Paul as a perpetuator of the Dombey glory, does not usually ask of him. A second major symbol in the novel related to Paul's tragedy is the railroad, representing change, a shift to a more industrial society whose values are espoused by Dombey. These same values are responsible for Paul's death. Steven Marcus explains this concept:

> As Paul lies dying, the railroad is brought into the novel for the second time and the collocation is powerfully ironic. . . . Paul is dying of a metaphysical and moral disease: middle-class culture.[59]

Not only the railroad, but also the sea is a major symbol in the novel. Paul constantly dreams of waves and wonders what they are saying to him.[60] He dreams of a "boat with a sail" in the full light of the moon.[61] The "sail like an arm, all silver" was beckoning to him.[62] Through the use of such lovely imagery Dickens enters the mind of the

young boy, and expresses his premonition of his own death in terms understandable by his intellect and emotions. And when death does arrive, the reader discovers what the child is feeling:

> Presently he told her (Florence) the motion of the boat upon the stream was lulling him to rest. How green the banks were now, how bright the flowers growing on them, and how tall the rushes! Now the boat was out at sea, but gliding smoothly on. And now there was a shore before him. Who stood on the bank![63]

It is most comforting to the reader, who pities poor little Paul by this point, that the child experiences his own death as a pleasant journey and reunification with his mother.

In addition to its complex imagery, one of the major strengths of Dombey and Son lies in its realistic depiction of children, including Paul. Paul is a superbly portrayed child whose fictional persona the reader sees from different points of view. We see Paul as he sees himself--a lonely little boy. We see him as Florence looks upon him--a beloved, delicate younger brother. We realize how his father regards him--as a key to immortality. Paul dies because he lives in a society that suffocates childhood. Indeed, Paul's death is the strongest possible indictment of a society with pervading materialistic values.

Unlike Paul, other children in the novel do survive the inhumanity and lack of love in their world. One of these children is Paul's sister Florence Dombey who, like Oliver Twist, triumphs at the end of the novel despite her traumatic childhood. Florence's situation is very different from that of Oliver. She lives her life in a wealthy home, but her emotional need to be loved is totally neglected by her father, and she

lacks love just as much as Oliver. Dombey considers that he is childless, although Florence is six years old when Paul is born. Dombey and Son emphasizes the theme that "not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is an outcast from a living parent's love."[64] In a different way from Oliver, Florence is as much a victim of her culture as Oliver, for the materialistic ethics and beliefs embraced by her father do not value the female child. Only a male child who can perpetuate Dombey's firm and thus immortalize the Dombey name has any importance in the materialistic contemporary society represented by Florence's father. Early in the novel, Dickens sets forth this idea through the use of thoroughly biting satire:

> They had been married ten years, and until this present day on which Mr. Dombey sat jingling and jingling his heavy gold watch-chain in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed, had had no issue.
>
> -To speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before, and the child, who had stolen into the chamber unobserved, was now crouching timidly, in a corner whence she could see her mother's face. But what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested- a bad Boy- nothing more.[65]

In this passage Dombey is shown to be totally embracing the materialism of contemporary society. He denies the existence of his own child because she cannot bring him financial glory and increased status. The reader clearly sees that he is a cold monster with an incredible pride and ego which negate natural parental affections.

Florence's loving sweetness is juxtaposed with Dombey's cold rebuffs. Pathetically, Florence dreams of affection but receives none. Early in the novel, Dickens explains that Florence is unloved and

secures the reader's total sympathy for her. This occurs in the scene when Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox observe the young Florence asleep beside her young brother and wonder whether the young girl is dreaming. The narrator muses about Florence's dreams:

> Dreaming, perhaps of loving tones for ever silent, of loving eyes for ever closed, of loving arms again wound round her, and relaxing in that dream within the dreams which no tongue can relate. Seeking, perhaps--in dreams--some natural comfort for a heart, deeply and sorely wounded, though so young a child's: and finding it, perhaps, in dreams, if not in waking, cold, substantial truth.[66]

The poor little girl is so unloved that only dreaming of her dead mother's affection for her provides her with comfort and consolation. At this point in the novel, the reader can only pity Florence and feel amazement at Dombey's treatment of his victimized little daughter. But Florence sees the world from her childish point of view, with her center of the world being her father, to whom she devotes herself. With great psychological realism Dickens shows that she blames herself for Dombey being unable to love her. Florence's quest to gain her father's love is portrayed in the scene where the girl is visiting Sir Barnet's estate and observes some of her fellow child guests:

> There were some children staying in the house. Children who were as frank and happy with fathers and with mothers as those rosy faces opposite home. Children who had no restraint upon their love, and freely showed it. Florence sought to learn their secret; sought to find out what it was she had missed; what simple art they knew, and she knew not; how she could be taught by them to show her father that she had loved him, and to win his love again.[67]

On another occasion, Florence goes into the absent Dombey's room to discover the key to his love.[68] She leaves him little gifts of nosegays she has made.[69] Not satisfied with merely securing the reader's

sympathy for Florence, Dickens elevates and sanctifies the child's quest for her father's love:

> Florence held her sacred purpose, unsuspected and unaided: and studied only how to bring her father to the understanding that she loved him, and made no appeal against him in any wandering thought.[70]

Juxtaposed with this "sacred purpose" is Dombey's coldness and lack of affection for his lonely child. For no matter what Florence does, no matter what devotion she expresses for her father, Dombey hates her as a rival for his son's affections and as a "successful rival of Paul in health and life."[71] Dickens elucidates this idea early in the novel. After Paul dies, the grieving Florence tries to approach her grieving father. When she looks into his face, instead of affection answering the "glowing love"[72] in her breast, Florence sees that:

> The old indifference and cold constraint had given place to something: what, she never thought and did not dare to think, and yet she felt it in its force, and knew it well without a name: that as it looked upon her, seemed to cast a shadow on her head.[73]

The narrator finds Dombey's hate for his innocent young daughter too vile and unnatural to name directly, and merely implies it:

> Did he see before him the successful rival of his son, in health and life? Did he look upon his own successful rival in that son's affection? Did a mad jealousy and withered pride, poison sweet remembrances that should have endeared and made her precious to him? Could it be possible that it was gall to him to look upon her in her beauty and her promise: thinking of his infant boy!
>
> Florence had no such thoughts. But love is quick to know when it is spurned and hopeless: and hope died out of hers, as she stood looking in her father's face.[74]

Dombey is jealous of Florence because he sees her able to inspire love and affection where he is unable to do so. This is best seen after

Dombey returns from his honeymoon with Edith and Florence sits with him in the drawing room believing him to be asleep. Dombey, however, is actually surreptitiously watching her. He momentarily softens towards her until Edith enters the room, her face aglow with love for the child. The expression on Edith's face was not one she ever bore for Dombey.[75] Dombey realizes this, and his jealous heart is once again hardened against his unfortunate daughter.[76] Florence has become Dombey's "nemesis, a reminder of the insufficiency of his money and mastery."[77]

Dombey's unnatural attitude towards his daughter is magnified and made all the more culpable by his culture's acceptance of the eldest daughter in the role of a "hearth angel."[78] Most middle-class Victorians believed in the "positive value of upward mobility."[79] The rapid social and economic changes of the Victorian era were a source of pride and tension for the middle class. Materialism of the work place had to be somehow reconciled with the Christian morality of the home and hearth. The Victorians attempted this reconcilliation in a unique way. Deborah Gorham explains that:

> A cult of domesticity, an idealized vision of the home and family, a vision that perceived the family as both enfolding its members and excluding the outside world, is a major recurring image in Victorian literature, art and social commentary. The cult of domesticity helped to relieve the tensions that existed between the moral values of Christianity, with its emphasis on love and charity, and the values of capitalism, which asserted that the world of commerce should be pervaded by a spirit of competition and a recognition that only the fittest should survive.[80]

By sanctifying the home, therefore, the Victorians were able to feel that they had achieved a moral balance between the Christian values of the home and the capitalist values of the world of commerce.[81] Just as

they had developed the idea of a sanctified home, the Victorians also developed the idea of a "perfect daughter; an image of girlhood that represented the quintessence of Victorian femininity."[82] The good daughter was a "hearth angel,"[83] "gentle, loving, self-sacrificing and innocent,"[84] just like Florence Dombey. A good daughter's role was to provide her father with "gentleness and cheerfulness" and amuse him with her accomplishments in music.[85] The good daughter always considered obligations to home and father first, before her own entertainment and enjoyment.[86] Not surprisingly, therefore, Florence always considers her father's interests before her own and wants to fulfill her societally prescribed role in the family. The appropriateness of her desire is emphasized in the novel by the narrator's description of a motherless family of little girls living across the street from the neglected Florence.[87] Florence observes that the eldest child is her father's little companion, her father's "little sunbeam."[88] Florence craves a similar place for herself in Dombey's heart. And Florence thoroughly deserves to be loved by and relied upon by her father. She is a perfect, idealized Victorian daughter, innocent of heart, of mind, and of body.

A good Victorian daughter had a still greater role in the family than merely being her father's favourite companion. Not only was she to give "moral and emotional support to her father as well as practical assistance,"[89] she also possessed a redeeming quality that could help her father if he had "moral failings."[90] She exerted her benign influence through "her helplessness, innocence, and immaturity," which unfailingly touched the heart of the "selfish" father.[91] Florence is

the "quintessential redeeming daughter."[92] By having Dombey deny his daughter her proper role as his companion, Dickens emphasizes the hypocritical duality of Victorian culture which exalted the Christian virtues of home and hearth while accepting the pervasive materialism of the work place. Dombey's refusal of Florence's love and devotion shows, according to Deborah Gorham, that:

> The novel's main theme is the clash between cold, barren masculine values represented by the world of commerce, which are the only values that the hero, Dombey, is able to appreciate at the beginning of the novel, and the soft, loving feminine values represented by Dombey's neglected daughter Florence.[93]

Although the ideal daughter occupies the role of her father's companion within the family, her virtue remains spotless. The Victorians observed a sexual taboo where the daughter of a family was concerned. Dickens, for example, usually removes the mother of a family and replaces her by the daughter. At the same time he desexualizes the father figure, thus effectively eliminating any carnal connotations that might be attached to the father-daughter relationship. By rejecting Florence's aspirations to become the "little mother" of the family and a companion to himself, Dombey places her in "a very threatening place."[94] Florence eventually becomes a sign of Dombey's "imminent impotence and decay," while a son helps him overcome impotence and death.[95] A son, Dombey believes, is his ticket to immortality, while a daughter is of no use to him. He rejects, therefore, Florence's love. Dombey must learn the error to his ways and suffer a symbolic death in the form of a terrible illness,[96] before he can be reunited with Florence and redeem himself through his loving treatment of the reincarnated Florence and

Paul in the persons of his grandchildren.[97]

Although Dombey and Son is too great an artistic triumph to reduce it to mere biographical data, it must be admitted that Dickens's childhood pain at his parents' neglect adds an extra resonance and pathos to his emotional treatment of Florence by her uncaring, unloving father. Nor can it be said that Florence's loyalty and role as a "little mother" to Paul is mere wish fulfillment on the part of the author, who felt deserted by his family when he was sent to work in a blacking warehouse while his sister Fanny continued her musical studies. In her devotion to Paul, Florence was merely exercising another role of the idealized "little woman" of the Victorian era. In the eyes of nineteenth-century society, the brother-sister relationship was the ideal male-female relationship with the sister taking on a self-sacrificing role.[98] Thus Florence, in the evenings, upon completion of her own studies, spends long hours learning Paul's lessons at Dr. Blimber's in order to help Paul and make his life a little easier.[99] As Steven Mintz suggests, the sibling bond and sibling loyalty counteracted "the problems of generational anarchy and individualism"[100] for the Victorians. Since a brother-sister relationship is ostensibly asexual while being the most ideal male-female relationship possible in Victorian eyes, Dickens rewards his ideal heroine Florence with a marriage which many Victorians would have seen as the best possible, one to a man who seems her brother in all but blood, Walter.

Dombey and Son's child heroine, Florence, is presented in a much more realistic manner than that of Oliver Twist. The emotional abuse of

Florence by her father demonstrates the perverse cruelty of a society that places more value on material things than on human love and devotion. Dombey is a representative member of this society. But despite the realism of the novel, Dombey and Son is full of fairy-tale symbolism, although it is always subordinated to Dickens's broader social vision. On this level, however, Dombey and Son is a thrilling fairy-tale, and on many occasions Florence is presented in almost magical terms. The fairy-tale aspects of Florence's story are simple--an innocent child is thrust by an unfeeling parent into the dark threatening streets. Basically, this is an "elaborate urban version of Hop o'My Thumb or Hansel and Gretel or The Children in the Wood."[101] However, Dombey and Son is also a reworking of the Cinderella story.[102] The poor dispossessed daughter, neglected and abused, in this case by her own father, emerges victorious at the end as the beloved bride of her immaculate prince, Walter. In addition to being Cinderella, Florence is also Sleeping Beauty living in her enchanted castle or Dombey's neglected house, described thus:

> The grass began to grow upon the roof, and in the crevices of the basement paving. A scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills. Fragments of mortar lost their hold upon the insides of the unused chimneys, and came dropping down. The two trees with the smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves. Through the whole building white had turned yellow, yellow nearly black; . . .
>
> But Florence bloomed there, like the king's fair daughter in the story.[103]

The description of Dombey's neglected house could as easily apply to Sleeping Beauty's castle. Indeed, a direct connection is made between "the king's fair daughter" and Dombey's daughter. In such

fairy-tale-like surroundings must Sleeping Beauty, that is Florence, await the arrival of her prince to rescue her from the evil enchantment of her father's hate and to reward her for her virtue with the implied eternal happiness found only in fairy-tales. In true fairy-tale tradition Florence is tested and must retain her innocence and goodness in face of her Father's rejection and Carker's perfidy. Carker is destroyed for his sins and Dombey is punished for his lack of love in true fairy-tale type retribution. In most fairy-tales, the distressed heroine is given aid or is rescued from her unhappy situation by a fairy-godfather or fairy-godmother, just as Florence is rescued by Dickens's version of such a magical figure, Captain Cuttle. And again in true fairy-tale tradition, Captain Cuttle's fondest wishes come true when Florence and Walter are united. The episode when Florence is lost in the wicked city and is kidnapped by the witch-like Mrs. Brown is full of fairy-tale implications. This entire incident is full of childhood terror at innocence meeting unspeakable horrors and corruption. For Florence, her innocence is her only defence. The reader can feel Florence's horror and desperation when Mrs. Brown brandishes a knife over her head[104] in much the same way that Fagin had brandished a knife over Oliver Twist. Naturally, it is her future prince Walter who restores the lost little girl to the safety of her unloving home. The reader at this point has an idea of the eventual ending to come. In true fairy-tale tradition, Florence and Walter are fated for each other.

Yet, despite the fairy-tale elements in the novel, Dickens never forgets that his heroine is a real child living in a supposedly real world of nineteenth-century society. Unlike the realm of the

fairy-tale, the real world is one where innocence is not always a sufficient defence. In keeping with his desire to portray a realistic social vision in the novel, Dickens surrounds his triumphant heroine with children who are destroyed or maimed by contemporary society. One of the chief destroyers of children's spirits and souls is the educational system of the era. The victims of the school system include the sly, perverted Rob the Grinder whose spirit could not withstand the humiliation of the Charitable Grinders. Another casualty of an inhuman school system, in addition to Paul Dombey, is the kind but simple Toots, who can never attain emotional and intellectual maturity because his mind was suffocated with useless information at Dr. Blimber's. Nor are many of Dickens's fictional children protected and spiritually nourished by their natural protectors--their parents. The novel abounds with missing parents. They include the parents of Walter, and the mother of Paul and Florence. Polly Toodle leaves her family for financial gain, and thereby seals the spiritual doom of her son Rob. There are many bad parents in the novel besides Dombey. They include Mrs. Chick, who neglects her family for the sake of her wealthy brother's son, and the terrible Mrs. MacStinger, who tortures everyone around her. There are parents, including Dombey, who victimize their children. They are Mrs. Skewton and Mrs. Brown, who sell their daughters for financial gain. Fortunately, however, the reader is edified with a happy ending despite the often dark vision in the novel. The marriage of Florence and Walter and the purification and rebirth of Dombey as a good father not only satisfied Victorian audiences, but also emphasized both the author's views on the redeeming qualities of human love and devotion, and his

indictment of the nineteenth century's materialistic values.

III

David Copperfield, the child hero of the novel that bears his name, is a much more fully realized character than Oliver Twist or Paul and Florence Dombey. Unlike Oliver and Florence, David is a complex character who must overcome his own shortcomings and rectify his character faults before he is rewarded by marriage to the sisterly Agnes Wickfield. In Oliver Twist Dickens condemns the physical maltreatment of children, while in Dombey and Son he condemns the emotional deprivation of children by the withholding of love and affection. In David Copperfield these themes are expanded and David suffers not only physical hardships but also psychological abuse at the hands of the Murdstones in particular, and society in general. According to Harry Stone, David "is not a primary focus of righteousness who either by bold action or spiritual example defeats the forces of evil and succors the forces of good"[105] as do Oliver Twist, Florence Dombey, or Agnes Wickfield. David's romanticism, his lack of insight, and his refusal to accept reality lead him to the edge of disaster. Despite his being a flawed character, it is still possible to designate David as the hero of the novel because he is essentially good, and through suffering he "learns to chasten himself and change."[106] In David Copperfield Dickens thus takes another step toward a full psychological realism as he embodies the theme of the victimized child in a story in which the protagonist's own character is of complex and problematic quality.

David must not merely survive in the face of evil, but he must learn to differentiate between good and evil. He must experience emotional growth before he can find happiness. In addition, in David Copperfield Dickens sheds the protection of the fantasies of fairy-tales for the realism of his own thinly disguised experience.

David's life story is proof that childhood experiences and memories influence a child's future and help determine the kind of adult he becomes. David inhabits a complex and ambiguous world where things are often not what they seem to be.[107] For example, Murdstone, considered to be by his fellow Victorians a fine upstanding evangelical gentleman, is actually a sadistic villain; witch-like Betsey Trotwood turns out to be David's fairy-godmother, and the heroic Steerforth is a selfish hedonist. Fortunately, the young David is surrounded by the love of his mother Clara and the devotion of his nurse Peggotty. He becomes the man of the household in place of his dead father, and is terribly unhappy when Murdstone marries Clara and usurps his position. Jerome N. Buckley claims that it is not important whether David suffers from an Oedipus complex, since he is able to love a woman in later life.[108] Without doubt, however, David's early devotion to his mother predisposes him to be enslaved by her equivalent, Dora Spenlow, in adulthood. When Murdstone begins to abuse David both psychologically and physically, the child's natural innocent spirit is broken. The adult narrator describes his younger self's pathetic condition:

> The natural result of this treatment, continued, I suppose for some six months or more, was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged. I was not made the less so by my sense of being daily more shut out and alienated from my mother.[109]

Dickens emphasizes in this passage that the way adults treat an innocent child is instrumental in the shaping of his self-image and character. David becomes not only "sullen" and "dull," but he also begins to feel "wicked"[110] and full of "guilt"[111] when he bites Murdstone's hand to prevent him from beating him.[112] With tremendous insight about the dynamics of psychological realism, Dickens ascribes feelings of guilt and self-blame to his victimized child hero. The persecution and abuse he is suffering is destroying the necessary confidence David needs to grow up to become a stable adult. David is spiritually saved only through the fortunate discovery of a little library of imaginative literature. This early reading develops the child's imagination, and he becomes an author when he grows up. David's imagination serves him well on many occasions. When he is sent to Salem House wearing a placard warning the world to "Take care of him. He bites.",[113] David recalls the stories he has read, recounts them for his schoolmates, and establishes himself in Steerforth's favour.[114]

The charismatic James Steerforth is a most important character in the novel, for his persona is a subtle warning to David.[115] David, hampered by his childhood innocence, is blinded by Steerforth's sophistication and cannot see his character faults. Nor is he able to remain loyal to Mr. Mell when Steerforth reveals to the class that Mr. Mell's mother lives in a workhouse.[116] David's unworldliness and innocence is emphasized by Steerforth's giving him the nickname Daisy, for David is fresh as a daisy in a meadow.[117] David's unwise admiration of Steerforth leads to his complete enslavement by the older boy. Steerforth becomes David's bad angel just as Agnes will be his good

angel.[118] In addition to Steerforth, Uriah Heep also provides a subtle warning to David. Just as Steerforth is David's darker self, his double,[119] Urish Heep is what David might have become without Miss Betsey's guidance and money, and his good birth.[120] Harry Stone emphasizes that "Uriah, . . . is not only the devil, but the devil in David."[121] Uriah is intermittently David's double,[122] thus emphasizing that David's romanticism and refusal to see reality are weaknesses that, without the intervention of Aunt Betsey, may have led to a destruction of his moral character. Nowhere is this weakness more apparent than in David's refusal to see his past in realistic terms. Indeed, Harry Stone claims that "David is enslaved by the past and by his distortions of the past."[123] When Clara Copperfield is buried, David sees his mother as the mother of his youth:

> The mother who lay in the grave, was the mother of my infancy; the little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom.[124]

David erases from his memory his mother's betrayal of him for Murdstone's sake, and how her moral weakness allowed her to be dominated by Murdstone. This same moral weakness prevented her from protecting David against Murdstone's sadism. By burying the "little creature," his newborn brother, alongside Clara, David is actually burying his own childhood self.

Once his mother dies, the wicked Murdstones send David to work in Murdstone and Grinby's wine warehouse. The adult narrator recalls with incredulity and a lingering sense of deep hurt how badly the adults in his life treated him. He expresses his thoughts in a most touching passage:

> I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, and delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby.[125]

The key words in this passage are "even now," and they express the psychological trauma and permanent psychological scarring experienced by the young David. The adult narrator, later in the novel, explains that he rarely raises the "curtain" that has fallen over this painful period of his early life, for the memory is so full of "mental suffering and want of hope," that he blocked out of his mind how long his childhood degradation lasted.[126] The adult narrator is still deeply affected by his painful childhood experience. Dickens is emphasizing how the past can influence and intrude upon the present.[127] Indeed, the entire passage describing David's degradation at Murdstone and Grinby's bears a close resemblance to a passage Dickens wrote about his own childhood experiences, at the age of twelve, at Warren's blacking warehouse:

> It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me, that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me- a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally- to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. . . . No one made any sign.[128]

In other words, an uncaring and cruel world abandoned both the innocent, helpless, fictional child David and the real child Charles Dickens. It is evident that his painful childhood experiences had permanently

scarred Dickens's soul, and his amazement at the world's neglect of David's potential is a lament for his own abandoned child self. At this point, fact and fiction have blended to become one and the same in the novel. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dickens in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son, and David Copperfield is obsessed with the theme of a child who is abandoned in the physical or mental sense by uncaring parents or an uncaring society. When David feels his "hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man" destroyed and forever gone,[129] the reader comprehends that the child David (and the child Dickens) realizes that an uncaring society destroyed not only his present but also his future.[130] By having the adult narrator recount and pity the condition of his pathetic younger self, the author adds an extra dimension of pathos to David's wretched early circumstances. The reader sees David as he sees himself, as he is seen by the adult narrator, and as he is seen by the omniscient author who created David's world in the first place. The first person narration in the novel adds an air of authenticity to David's history. The air of reality is increased when the reader realizes that the initials of the name of David Copperfield are an inversion of the initials of the name of Charles Dickens. The full title of the novel, The Personal History of David Copperfield, also convinces the reader that the adult narrator is speaking from accurately recalled personal memories of his own childhood abandonment. Poor David is totally neglected. With a few exceptions, society is merciless with the child who is living a life of endless toil. Dickens, through his condemnation of this neglect and abandonment, raises the idea of a more general social responsibility. Society, after all, consists of

individuals, very few of whom attempted to help David. Dickens is implying that something is very wrong, very corrupt in a world where no one tries to save an innocent child.

Because society abandons and ignores him, David's only protection against evil during his days in London is his innocence, natural nobility of character, and good birth. David, therefore, does not fall into moral degradation, even though his only friends are the totally irresponsible Micawbers. David's natural gentility is recognized by his colleagues at work, just as Oliver Twist's natural gentility was recognized by Nancy, Mr. Brownlow, and the Maylies. Consequently, the other workers call David "'the little gent'" and the "'young Suffolker'."[131] Life is difficult and lonely for the young middle-class boy prematurely and unjustly forced into a life of adult lower-class toil. Among the very few to show him compassion are the proprietors of a public house who offer him free beer and pity his desolate condition.[132] David has become a little adult in the eyes of the world around him. Mrs. Micawber seems to realize that David is an unprotected little boy only when the Micawber family is ready to leave London.[133]

With the Micawbers gone, David's true nobility of spirit and deep desperation propels him to run away to Dover to seek Aunt Betsey. On his way, he encounters the true viciousness of society around him. For example, the young man he hires to transport his trunk robs him of all his earthly belongings;[134] Dolloby, the strange storekeeper, cheats and terrorizes him,[135] and the violent tinker he meets on the road steals his handkerchief.[136]

Fortunately, however, David reaches Betsey Trotwood's house and

finds a haven there. At first Betsey, who is gardening, greets David by brandishing a gardening knife in his direction,[137] a ritualistic action denoting danger to the orphan reminiscent of Fagin's knife over Oliver Twist and Mrs. Brown's scissors over Florence Dombey's head. Aunt Betsey, however, turns out to be David's fairy-godmother, swaddles him like a newborn,[138] sends the Murdstones on their way,[139] and renames him Trotwood Copperfield.[140] In effect, David has been reborn as a new person who embraces Aunt Betsey's moral values.[141] Alan Shelston claims that David's understanding of the morally flawed characters, such as Steerforth and Wickfield, is ambiguous.[142] David's moral flaw, his refusal to accept reality and his romanticism allows him to identify with the morally flawed in the world. But David cannot be held entirely responsible for his character flaws, since Dickens emphasizes that heredity is responsible for his character. This is obvious when Mr. Dick calls David "David's son,"[143] and Miss Betsey says that: "He would be as like his father as it's possible to be, if he was not so like his mother, too."[144] It is also significant that at the beginning of the novel Miss Betsey calls Clara Copperfield a "Baby."[145] It is also noted that David's father married a young, incompetent woman, a marriage that foreshadows David's marriage to Dora Spenlow. It is evident, therefore, that his parents' lack of moral strength is at least partially responsible for David's character flaws. Dickens is exhibiting a very different attitude here from that he exhibited in Oliver Twist, where Oliver's parents were held virtually blameless despite begetting a child out of wedlock, a mortal sin in prudish Victorian eyes.

David's world is so tainted that it is difficult to recognize the

identity of his fairy-godmother, the most eccentric Miss Betsey. Fortunately, despite the corruption of his world, Betsey is able to vanquish David's arch-enemies, the Murdstones, educate the orphaned boy, and help him attain his rightful place in society. Paradoxically, fairy-godmother Betsey does not help David to escape reality but forces him back into life to discover himself.[146] As a result, Dickens's vision in David Copperfield is much darker than in Oliver Twist or in Dombey and Son. Consequently, the miraculous, fairy-tale type of retribution doled out to the enemies of Oliver and Florence is missing from David Copperfield. While Fagin, Monks, and Carker are destroyed, and Dombey dies symbolically, the Murdstones reappear at the conclusion of the novel. The reader discovers that Mr. Murdstone marries again, and together with his sister proceeds to destroy his new wife, just as he destroyed Clara Copperfield.

As in the worlds of Oliver Twist and Dombey and Son, the orphan hero in David Copperfield is surrounded by unloved and homeless children. Among these neglected young people is the unfortunate, kind-hearted Tommy Traddles. The fates of the other children in the novel are shaped by their parents' inadequacies. David is such a child. His morally weak mother cannot protect him from the Murdstones. Coupled with heredity and Clara's foolish way of raising him, David's terribly difficult childhood determines the kind of adult he becomes. Clara, however, is not the only bad parent in David Copperfield. Outstanding, of course, even among the wicked, is David's stepfather Murdstone, who becomes the child's chief persecutor. Some parents profit at their children's expense, as did the Old Soldier when she sold Annie to Dr.

Strong. Other parents ruin their children's characters through over-indulgence and a foolish kind of doting love. Such are Uriah Heep's and James Steerforth's mothers. Steerforth realizes that he was a victim of parental indulgence, and he tells David that he wishes that he "had had a judicious father these last twenty years!"[147] Dickens is showing through the examples of Uriah and Steerforth that only a disciplined and unselfish love is good for the development of a child's character. Even stepparents like the well intentioned Mr. Peggotty can err the same way. Peggotty's over-indulgence and limitless admiration of Emily's charms shape her character in such a way that she becomes susceptible to Steerforth's seduction. And the over-indulged Dora Spenlow becomes a child bride who cannot grow up. Other parents in the novel express their love in different but equally unhealthy ways. A case in point is Mr. Wickfield, whose obsessive love for Agnes turns her into a wifely figure, which is correct according to cultural expectations, but is unnatural, bordering on perversion, in the modern reader's eyes. Wickfield robs his daughter of her childhood. Agnes is described as "placid," "quiet," a "calm spirit," and a "little housekeeper,"[148] descriptions more suitable for a mature woman than a little girl, although in total accord with Victorian expectations for a virtuous female child. Not surprisingly, Agnes redeems her father through her goodness, just as Florence Dombey saved Dombey. Another prominent set of parents in the novel are the Micawbers, who, according to many critics, are modelled on Dickens's own parents. They mock the idea of "parental responsibility"[149] and allow the reader to speculate on the lack of stability in the life of the child Charles Dickens.

Unfortunately, having foolish or irresponsible parents like the Micawbers is not the only deprivation children in David Copperfield experience, for many children are missing one or both parents. They include Agnes Wickfield and Dora Spenlow whose mothers are dead, Uriah Heep and Steerforth who are missing fathers, and David, Traddles, Ham, and Little Emily who are orphans. Since the parents in the novel who are living exert such a negative influence, the reader has difficulty deciding who is more unfortunate--the parentless child or the child with the bad parent.

In addition to parents, schools play an important role in the perverse development of children in the novel. Charity schools destroy the moral values of Uriah Heep by teaching him that hypocritical humility is the key to getting ahead in the world. Uriah is a psychologically more corrupt and sophisticated depiction of Noah Claypole in Oliver Twist, or Rob the Grinder in Dombey and Son. Even the children of those able to pay the fees for schooling may not fare much better, as indicated by the sadistic treatment of the boys at Salem House by Creakle and Tungay. Only Dr. Strong's school is beneficial to its students.

The darkness and unfairness of the world around them proves to be too great an obstacle to overcome for some young characters in the novel. These people never attain emotional maturity, and remain children forever. They include the kind simpleton, Mr. Dick. Fortunately, such is not the case of the novel's child hero, David Copperfield, who matures into a responsible human being. David learns from his mistakes, corrects his character faults, and is finally

rewarded by marriage to the sisterly Agnes Wickfield. David Copperfield is a bildungsroman because the focus of the work is the development of David's character from childhood innocence to adult maturity. Agnes and David, like Oliver Twist and Florence Dombey, form their own, morally decent little society, excluding a larger more vicious society surrounding them. However, in Oliver Twist and Dombey and Son Dickens indicts the entire contemporary culture that mistreats his child hero, while in David Copperfield he merely questions it.[150] Villains like Uriah and Littimer may be punished but are not totally destroyed in the world of the novel. Others like the Murdstones continue to flourish despite their hypocritical and evil ways.

As can be seen, in the novels Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son, and David Copperfield, Dickens is obsessed with the fate of orphan children whose innocence is their only protection against the viciousness of nineteenth-century society. A young Dickens depicts Oliver Twist in the novel bearing his name as an unrealistically pure and passive figure, a child fallen out of grace through no fault of his own. Oliver inhabits a nightmare, fairy-tale world. The major emphasis in the novel is upon the physical hardships and deprivations of Oliver as Monks and Fagin try to turn him into a criminal by corrupting his fortunately incorruptible soul. In his first mature novel, Dombey and Son, Dickens condemns society for its materialism and withholding of love and affection from innocent children. Dickens's child heroes Florence and Paul Dombey inhabit a cruel world that robs Paul of his childhood and emotionally abuses Florence. Paul dies, but Florence, an archetypical perfect Victorian daughter, triumphs at the end of the novel. In David

Copperfield, David is a flawed multidimensional character who, unlike Oliver Twist and Florence Dombey, must experience some growth of character before he can find happiness. In all three novels Dickens raises doubts about the values of a social system which degrades the innocent child, and he indicts and questions the moral validity of a social system which does not value innocent children. He does this in a very different way from Charlotte Brontë whose treatment of children, especially of Jane Eyre in the novel Jane Eyre, is the topic of the next chapter.

NOTES

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[3] Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 71.

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[6] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 58.

[7] Stone, "Fairy-Tales and the Apprentice Novels," in his Dickens and the Invisible World (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 102.

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[9] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 81.

[10] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 105.

[11] Marcus, "The Wise Child," p. 80.

[12] Marcus, "The Wise Child," p. 79.

[13] Marcus, "The Wise Child," p. 80.

[14] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 213.

[15] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 215.

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[17] Marcus, "The Wise Child," p. 82.

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[22] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 475.

[23] Dickens, Oliver Twist, pp. 421-423.

[24] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 453.

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[27] Stone, "Fairy-Tales and the Apprentice Novels," p. 99.

[28] Stone, "Fairy-Tales and the Apprentice Novels," p. 103.

[29] Stone, "Fairy-Tales and the Apprentice Novels," p. 103.

[30] Stone, "Fairy-Tales and the Apprentice Novels," p. 102.

[31] Stone, "Fairy-Tales and the Apprentice Novels," p. 102.

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[33] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 456.

[34] Dickens, Oliver Twist, pp. 286-287.

[35] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 108.

[36] Stone, "Fairy-Tales and the Apprentice Novels," p. 100.

[37] Dickens, Oliver Twist, pp. 406-415.

[38] Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 105.

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1970), p. 171.

[40] Stone, "Dombey and Son: The New Fairy-Tale Method," in his Dickens and the Invisible World (London and Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 160.

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[42] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 164.

[43] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 164.

[44] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 153.

[45] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 153.

[46] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 154.

[47] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 151.

[48] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 168.

[49] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 169.

[50] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 254.

[51] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 170.

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[56] Steven Marcus, "The Changing World," in his Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey" (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 322.

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[62] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 235.

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[66] Dickens, Dombey and Son, pp. 106-107.

[67] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 419.

[68] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 396.

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[73] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 328.

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[80] Gorham, p. 4.

[81] Gorham, p. 4.

[82] Gorham, p. 37.

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[84] Gorham, p. 37.

[85] Gorham, p. 38.

[86] Gorham, p. 38.

[87] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 318.

[88] Gorham, p. 39.

[89] Gorham, p. 39.

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[92] Gorham, p. 43.

[93] Gorham, p. 43.

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[99] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 231.

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[104] Dickens, Dombey and Son, p. 131.

[105] Stone, "David Copperfield: The Fairy-Tale Method Perfected," p. 194.

[106] Stone, "David Copperfield: The Fairy-Tale Method Perfected," p. 194.

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[108] Jerome N. Buckley, "The Identity of David Copperfield," in Victorian Literature and Society: Essays Presented to Richard D. Altick, James R. Kincaid and Albert J. Kuhn eds. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), p. 229.

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[111] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 108.

[112] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 108.

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[115] Wendy S. Jacobson, "Brothers and Sisters in David Copperfield," English Studies in Africa: A Journal of the Humanities, 25, No. 1 (1982), 18.

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[121] Stone, "David Copperfield: The Fairy-Tale Method Perfected," p. 222.

[122] Stone, "David Copperfield: The Fairy-Tale Method Perfected," pp. 222-223.

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[125] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 208.

[126] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 272.

[127] Stone, "David Copperfield: The Fairy-Tale Method Perfected," p. 207.

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[129] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 210.

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[131] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 218.

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[133] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 231.

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[135] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 236.

[136] Dickens, David Copperfield, pp. 242-243.

[137] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 247.

[138] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 251.

[139] Dickens, David Copperfield, pp. 270-271.

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[142] Alan Shelston, "Past and Present in David Copperfield," Critical Quarterly, 27, No. 3 (1985), 25.

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[147] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 380.

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CHAPTER 2

CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S PASSIONATE FICTIONAL CHILD

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre is a complex novel with a multitude of themes. On the surface, it appears to be a simple Gothic romance that recounts the story of the orphaned Jane Eyre as she matures from a neglected passionate child into the beloved wife of Edward Rochester. Perusal of the text reveals, however, that in addition to telling a love story, Jane Eyre concerns itself with many social issues important in nineteenth-century society.

In Jane Eyre, Brontë's main concern is the struggle of an individual asserting her will to attain happiness in life and love. And this theme of the struggle of "an individual consciousness towards self-fulfillment"[1] links Charlotte Brontë to the secular romance tradition in literature. As David Lodge suggests, however, the Romantic impulse in the novel "is held in check by an allegiance to the ethical precepts of the Christian code and an acknowledgement of the necessity of exercising reason in human affairs."[2] Jane Eyre, therefore, not only exerts her passion and judgement in her own defence much more fully than do the orphaned fictional child heroes of Charles Dickens, but she must also attempt to reconcile her secular beliefs with Christian dogma. Brontë's goals are thus more complex than those of Charles Dickens in Dombey and Son and David Copperfield. Dickens's chief concern is the relationship of Florence Dombey and David Copperfield to their fellow men. And although a battle was waged for Oliver Twist's soul by the forces of evil, Oliver was a mere spectator on the battlefield, a

character who was primarily acted upon and who did not make any active choices in his own defence. Although David Copperfield does exert his will to correct his character flaws, the process is less active and takes place at a later age than in Jane Eyre, except in the episode where he runs away to Aunt Betsey's house in Dover.[3] However, Jane Eyre not only consciously attempts to eliminate her character faults, she also embraces explicit Christian values. And while Jane Eyre is an enchanting fairy-tale abounding with fairy-tale imagery, rather like the novels of Charles Dickens, by being concerned with Jane's moral and ethical choices, Jane Eyre becomes a stinging indictment of a society, represented by the Reed family, that mistreats innocent orphaned children.

One of the most striking stylistic characteristics of Jane Eyre is that it contains the elements of a Gothic romance. In accordance with Gothic elements, the object of Jane's affections, Edward Rochester, can be seen as a "Byronic hero with a mad wife in the attic."[4] In addition, the novel is full of mysteriously threatening sights and sounds, and "injurious acts that reveal the presence of some malevolent force."[5] Robert Heilman claims that Brontë in Jane Eyre created a "new Gothic" by:

> finding and giving dramatic form to impulses and feelings which, because of their depth and mysteriousness or intensity or ambiguity, or of their ignoring or transcending everyday norms of propriety or reason, increase wonderfully the sense of reality in the novel.[6]

Thus, what appear to be the literary conventions of the work reinforce its psychological realism.

Brontë's chief protagonist in the novel is Jane Eyre, a passionate

child whose feelings place her in constant conflict with those who seem to embody the values of society, for example, the Reed family who adopted her when her parents died. Jane's situation is very much like Florence Dombey's. Like Florence, Jane is unloved and neglected even though she is good of heart. Unlike Florence, she is not a typical beautiful Victorian heroine. Jane is a plain child in a world that places a high value upon female beauty. This attitude is evident in a conversation between Abbot and Bessie, when Abbot recounts how Jane's parents died. Bessie pities Jane:

> "Poor Miss Jane is to be pitied, too, Abbot."
>
> "Yes," responded Abbot, "if she were a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one cannot really care for such a little toad as that."
>
> "Not a great deal, to be sure," agreed Bessie: "at any rate, a beauty like Miss Georgianna would be more moving in the same condition."[7]

In addition to lacking beauty, Jane is not placid, passive, and sweet-natured like Florence. Although Florence does try actively to gain her father's love, she is incapable of asserting her will. Jane does not have this problem. Instead, the young Jane is ruled by her passions and lacks self-control.

In the Gateshead portion of the novel, despite her sympathy for the child's plight, Brontë emphasizes that uncontrolled passion can have dire consequences. This is seen in the scene where Jane rebels against John Reed's tyranny when the older boy throws a heavy book at her.[8] The imaginative child sees John as a "tyrant," similar to the historical figures she had read about. She calls him an evil Roman emperor, a "slave driver," and a murderer.[9] In the heat of her passion, Jane

attacks John who fulfills in the novel the role of the patriarchial figure of a male-dominated society which is unfair to women. His mother, his sisters, and the servants all follow John's bidding. Jane must rebel against John to retain her identity and to develop her feminine consciousness.[10] Jane is a weak, defenceless child, however, and she is no match for John's tyranny. Consequently, she is locked up in the red room, where she experiences much terror.

In the red-room episode Brontë symbolically depicts the ambivalence in Jane's character, the struggle between her self-assertive passion and the acceptable morality of society which Mrs. Reed is trying to impose upon her. The Gothic elements of the room are initially responsible for Jane's terror. The red-room is a mysterious chamber, rarely entered by any members of the family. Jane knows that her uncle Mr. Reed died in the massive bed that "stood out like a tabernacle"[11] in the center of the room. The word "tabernacle" elevates the bed above ordinary, every day objects, since it has holy connotations. The "white" colour of the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed[12] denote purity and innocence, including the purity of Jane's virginal state.[13] The bed has associations not only with the mystery of sexuality, but also with the mystery of death for the child. The room is entirely red, the colour of blood, and the colour denoting love and passion. The bed represents a bed of love, a bed of marriage, and a bed of death. Passion and death are interrelated and linked in the child's subconscious mind. The white bed of innocence was transformed into a bed of death in Jane's mind. Thus Brontë introduces the idea into the young girl's mind, that uncontrolled passion will be punished by society; after all, Mrs. Reed

ordered her locked up in the red room. Similarly, sexual passion will be punished by the ultimate judgement, death, since the white bed of purity was transformed into a bed of passion, which in turn became a bed of death. However, the white bed of innocence is hung with "curtains of deep red damask"[14] denoting the dual nature of the bed. Not only does Jane behold a bed of innocence and purity, but she also faces a bed of passion represented by the red drapery around the bed. The child Jane realizes that her uncle Reed died in this particular bed.[15] The red colour of the room and of the curtains around the bed is the colour of hell fire. The reader realizes therefore, that in the novel passion, in fact sexual passion that is usually associated with a bed, is punishable by death and by the fires of hell, by eternal damnation. The red colour emphasizes that the red room is Jane's hell on earth. The red room scene is very reminiscent of Oliver Twist's experiences in Fagin's squalid den with Fagin cooking supper over a fire symbolically representing the fires of hell.[16] Jane during the red room episode of Jane Eyre is like Oliver Twist, a child fallen from grace and confined to a secular hell.

Jane is not only concerned with the problems of eternal damnation in the red room, but she also undergoes simultaneously an identity crisis. She looks into the mirror, and sees a "half fairy," "half imp" figure.[17] The descriptions "fairy" and "imp" set Jane apart from conventional society with its hypocritical morality, and she enters, unknowingly, a freer realm. Jane is confused. She does not really know who she is. Is she a passionate creature unjustly treated by her relatives? Or is she perhaps "wicked," as everyone around her claims

her to be?[18] Jane's attributing to herself the characteristics that others attribute to her brings to mind David Copperfield feeling "wicked" when he bites Murdstones's hand and is locked up as a result.[19] Jane's indignation and sense of injustice sustain her for a while in the red room, but the child feels so bereft and alone, that she is able to feel kinship only to her dead uncle and imagines him rising from the grave to rescue her, just as David Copperfield imagines his dead father rising from his grave in the cemetery.[20] Suddenly, Jane sees an unearthly beam of white light on the wall and ceiling,[21] a typically Gothic manifestation. In utter horror, she begs to be released from her terrible prison. When refused, she falls into a fit and faints.[22] Margaret Foulton explains that the child does not realize that the light represents a great change in her consciousness, a shift from the lowest level of consciousness symbolized by the red colour, to the highest level of "spiritual awareness and cosmic love," symbolized by the white light.[23]

Jane's terrible trauma in the red room exemplifies the way in which childhood experiences can influence adult lives. The young girl scarred by childhood trauma grows into an adult woman who dreams of her experiences in the red room,[24] just as David Copperfield can never forget being cast aside by his stepfather Murdstone and Murdstone's sister Jane during the wine warehouse episode of his life.[25] Brontë is emphasizing that childhood experiences mold a child into the character of the adult he or she becomes. The reader's judgement of Jane, however, is partially shaped by the commentary of the adult Jane, the narrator who discusses and tries to justify the mistreatment of her

younger self by her relatives:

> I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs. Reed or her children, or her chosen vassalage. If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgement. I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child--though equally dependent and friendless--Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scapegoat of the nursery.[26]

The adult narrator shifts some of the blame for the abusive treatment she received at the Reeds' mansion unto her younger self's shoulders. The narrator holds her childhood self's prickly character at least partially responsible for her relatives' cruel behaviour towards her. The adult Jane calls the child Jane "a discord," "a heterogeneous thing," "a noxious thing," and "a useless thing," all derogatory terms. The adult narrator's outspoken poor opinion of her younger self weakens in the reader's eyes the strength of the young Jane's claims of injustice at the hands of the Reeds. The same kind of rationalization occurs when the adult narrator even tries to justify Mrs. Reed's refusal to allow her to leave the red room. The adult Jane insists that Mrs. Reed behaved in such a way because the child Jane was a "precocious actress in her eyes . . . a compound of virulent passion, mean spirit, and dangerous duplicity."[27] The first-person commentary provides the novel with an air of veracity. The narrator's calm rationality emphasizes that the child Jane's grievances were recounted by a

passionate child who lacks self-control and sufficient experience of life to make her a reliable witness for the reader. Brontë's technique at this point resembles Dickens's method in Great Expectations where the adult narrator Pip undermines the testimony of his younger self. Bronte does not want her readers to discount Jane's opinions as untrue, but she does want the readers to comprehend other points of view and to assimilate this assurance of Jane's eventual maturity. The commentary of the adult narrator creates a dichotomy of tone and attitude in the novel, for the reader's initial sympathies lie with the victimized child. This emotional response is modified, however, by the discovery that the adult heroine holds her childhood self partially responsible for the terrible treatment she had received. Richard Benvenuto claims that the "socialized" adult Jane accepts as a sufficient reason that she was punished by the Reeds because she was different.[28]

Brontë very effectively portrays the ambivalence in attitude in Jane between passion and reason. The adult Jane comments:

> A child cannot quarrel with its elders, as I had done; cannot give its furious feelings uncontrolled play, as I had given mine, without experiencing afterwards the pang of remorse and the chill of reaction. A ridge of lighted heath, alive, glancing, devouring, would have been a meet emblem of my mind when I accused and menaced Mrs. Reed: the same ridge, black and blasted after the flames are dead, would have represented as meetly my subsequent condition, when half an hour's silence and reflection had shown me the madness of my conduct, and the dreariness of my hatred and hating position.[29]

Jane's passion consumes her until her soul is reminiscent of a burned, dead heath. In addition, the narrator explains that any child will undoubtedly be remorseful if he or she has passionate outbursts against elders.

Brontë's ultimate sympathy is with the child Jane, despite the adult narrator's attempting to discredit the young Jane's reliability as a truthful witness and despite her discourse upon the dangers of uncontrolled passion in a child. It is significant that Brontë ultimately destroys the entire Reed family, Jane's chief abusers. John Reed[30] and Mrs. Reed die;[31] Georgianna makes an empty marriage, and Eliza "is walled up alive in a French convent."[32] The inability of the Reeds, with their middle-class morality, to appreciate a child with Jane's passion and intelligence, invalidates the values of their culture. In the same way, Dombey's cruelty to Florence condemned the culture whose values he embraced.

Not surprisingly, after she becomes an adult, Jane is ambivalent about the merits of the social establishment. Benvenuto claims that Jane is "both a rebel against the cultural establishment and its apologist."[33] The adult Jane praises an English education that corrects Adèle's "French defects," and helps Adèle become "a pleasing companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled."[34] This is a rather strange remark from the adult narrator whose childhood "spirit of independence and self-assertion" saved her soul at Gateshead.[35] Benvenuto recognizes Jane's duality of attitude towards being a free woman with an independent spirit and being a child of God. The free woman claims her right to passion and earthly love, and she has trouble reconciling this claim with "religious duty and social convention."[36]

Jane's ambivalence between her passion and her reason is emphasized in the Lowood section of the book where she is introduced to Helen Burns's Christian philosophy. This section of the novel has an air of

veracity, since Brontë modelled Lowood School on Cowan Bridge, which was the school the Brontë sisters attended after their mother's death.[37] And Helen Burns's character reflects the character of Maria Brontë, who died at the school of consumption at the age of eleven.[38] The idea that a person should completely base his attitudes and choices in life upon a Christian morality is new to Jane, for she had received very little religious training at Gateshead. When Brocklehurst asks her about the nature of hell, and how to avoid it, Jane replies; "I must keep in good health and not die."[39] Jane's answer suggests a pragmatic attitude to life. R. B. Martin claims that Jane's reply defines Brontë's attitude towards the war between passion and reason:

> The answer is meant as a childish defeat of Mr. Brocklehurst's narrow theology, but it might stand as Miss Brontë's general position that man's hell and heaven are sufficient on earth without looking unnecessarily for them elsewhere. Religion is essential, but it is largely concerned with man's position in this world.[40]

When Jane goes to Lowood School, she becomes acquainted with Helen Burns's philosophy of Christian love and resignation, and with her beliefs in pre-determination by a higher power. Helen accepts unquestioningly her position as the will of her Christian God. When Jane tells Helen that she herself could not bear constantly being flogged and humiliated by Miss Scatcherd, Helen replies that Jane must bear whatever is pre-destined for her. Jane has trouble accepting this morality based upon resignation.

Jane's difficulty in accepting such a morality is evident in the following conversation between the two girls. Helen tells Jane:

> "Yet it would be your duty to bear it, if you could not avoid it. It is weak and silly to say you cannot bear what it is your fate to bear."[41]

And Jane, the narrator, comments:

> I heard her with wonder: I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still less could I understand or sympathise with the forbearance she expressed for her chastiser. Still I felt that Helen Burns considered things by a light invisible to my eyes. I suspected she might be right and I wrong;[42]

It is significant that Helen is reading Rasselas[43] with its philosophy of "philosophic acceptance."[44] Jane also has difficulty in accepting the Christian philosophy of forgiving and loving one's enemies. She tells Helen that if she is struck unfairly, she wants to strike back. In addition, she dislikes those who dislike her, and she feels that she must resist if she is punished unjustly.[45] Helen responds by counselling Jane to read the New Testament and to love her enemies.[46] Helen also chides Jane's vehemence and recommends Christian love, a love of Christ, in place of mortal love. She expresses the Christian belief that life is a "way station" en route to death and everlasting life.[47] Jane does not totally accept and embrace Helen's traditional Christian philosophy.

Jane's resistance can be seen when she returns from the woods to a Lowood stricken by typhus. She wonders about death and dying:

> "How sad to be lying now on a sick bed, and to be in danger of dying! This world is pleasant- it would be dreary to be called from it, and to have to go who knows where?"[48]

In the quoted passage Jane admits that she prefers earthly pleasures to an uncertain after-life. She begins to muse about the nature of heaven and hell:

> And then my mind made its first earnest effort to comprehend what had been infused into it concerning heaven and hell: and for the first time it recoiled,

> baffled; and for the first time glancing behind, on each side, and before it, it saw all round an unfathomed gulf: it felt the one point where it stood- the present; all the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth: and it shuddered at the thought of tottering, and plunging amid that chaos.[49]

This passage shows that Jane lacks the total faith recommended by Helen. She is uncertain about the nature of heaven and hell, and can only comprehend the nature of every day reality. Jane again expresses her doubts about heaven and even about God, as she lies beside Helen in the little crib. She asks Helen where the dying girl's soul will go:

> "But where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?"
>
> ...
>
> "Where is God? What is God?"
>
> ...
>
> "You are sure, then, Helen, that there is such a place as heaven; and that our souls can get to it when we die?"
>
> ...
>
> And shall I see you again, Helen, when I die?"[50]

Despite Helen's assurances about the existence of heaven and God, Jane remains a skeptic:

> Again I questioned; but this time only in thought. "Where is that region? Does it exist?"[51]

Jane lacks Helen's faith, and cannot rid herself of her doubts. Her only reality seems to be in material secular life. She expresses this feeling when she clasps the dying Helen in her arms:

> And I clasped my arms closer around Helen; she seemed dearer to me than ever; I felt as if I could not let her go;[52]

Because of her lack of faith and her doubts, Jane feels only that she is losing Helen not that Helen is embarking on the ultimate most joyous journey that a Christian can take--a journey to God. M. A. Blom's assessment that Jane Eyre is an "anti-Christian" novel[53] is therefore

correct. Brontë also expresses her dislike of extreme Calvinism and Evangelicalism through the characterization of Brocklehurst,[54] who hypocritically objects to Julia Severn's curls and orders all the students to cut their hair, while his own wife and daughters have curls themselves.[55]

Although Jane may not have totally embraced Helen Burns's altruistic Christian philosophy, Helen's example of grace under pressure influences Jane. Helen's example is coupled with the influence of the Lowood principal, Miss Temple, whose piety is enhanced by her temperance and practicality in earthly matters. Brontë, however, is not content with merely showing such a partial conversion in the character of the adult Jane. She shows Jane as having become totally converted to Helen's Christian morality by the time Jane leaves Lowood for Thornfield Hall. Nowhere in the novel is the process of his conversion shown taking place. The author merely takes it for granted that such a conversion did occur and she expects the reader to accept this premise. Therefore Barbara Hardy's judgement that Jane's conversion to Helen's Christian values is "cursorily treated" in the novel is correct.[56] Regardless of the superficial treatment of her conversion, the adult Jane lives her life in total accordance with Christian dogma, and refuses to become Rochester's mistress on the grounds that an illicit liaison with Rochester would break the rules of Christian morality.[57] Of course, as Rochester's mistress Jane would lose her independence and become totally dependent upon her lover both for her emotional and physical needs. So, paradoxically, the Christian morality which originally seemed to be in opposition to Jane's passionate self, now

comes to serve and sustain her assertive, independent identity. Therefore, Jane's steadfastness in holding onto and obeying the laws of Christian morality seems to be a rationalization rather than genuine commitment to social morality and respectability.

Brontë expands and clarifies her major theme--the struggle in Jane between passion and reason through the use of rich imagery in Jane Eyre. The imagery in the novel is directly associated with the emotional struggle of the child. Dickens uses a similar technique in Dombey and Son in describing the death of little Paul Dombey.[58] Not surprisingly, in Jane Eyre fire is a metaphor that is the image used to express "Jane's rebellious temperament," which makes it difficult for her to control her anger "in face of injustice."[59] For example, when Jane awakens in the nursery after fainting in the red room, she sees "a terrible red glare,"[60] or fire, symbolizing her anger at the injustice she had suffered. The metaphor of fire can be also associated with the "awakening spirit"[61] of a character, as in the case of Helen Burns, when Helen and Jane have tea in Miss Temple's quarters. The stimulation of Miss Temple's company, "the refreshing meal," and the "brilliant fire" cause Helen's spirit and intellect to soar until her spirit "kindled and glowed," descriptions appropriate to firewood.[62] Rather obviously, Brontë gave Helen "Burns" as a last name. Fire also represents the invigorating inner life of Jane's passionate self.[63] The heat of the fire can also be associated with human vitality.[64] (The association of fire with the colour red and with hell during the red room episode has already been discussed.) Significantly, Jane is excluded from the life-affirming hearth fire at Gateshead, but enjoys sitting by the

hearth fire in Miss Temple's room.[65] Another occasion when Jane literally and figuratively encounters fire occurs during the scene when she saves Rochester from being burned alive in his bed by Bertha, his mad wife. Jane successfully douses "the tongues of flame" that "darted round the bed" with water from Rochester's basin and saves his life.[66] It is fortunate for Rochester that Jane was so easily able to douse the flames of the bed "curtains" that "were on fire."[67] She is less successful in putting out the fire in her personality and the fire of her desire for Rochester. It is significant that the flames signifying Jane's sexual passion surround Rochester's bed. This image harkens back to the red-room scene where another bed was hung with red damask draperies,[68] the red colour of the curtains signifying the fire of possible sexual passion. Jane's dousing the flames around Rochester's bed, is in effect the dousing of the fires of her own passion in a symbolic anticipation of her ultimate moral decision in refusing to become Rochester's mistress. The fire imagery emerges in the novel again when Jane returns to the humbled Rochester at Ferndean. Rochester is symbolically marked by the "scar of fire"[69] on his forehead in punishment for trying to trick Jane into a false marriage while his mad wife was still alive. Rochester loses Jane as a result of his perfidy, atones for his sins, but never douses the fire of his passion for Jane. This passion lurks beneath Rochester's burned-out facade, ready to burst into full and vigorous flame once it is tended. Therefore when Jane is tending the fires of Ferndean, she is actually fanning the fires of Rochester's passion. The analogy between the literal and the figurative is complete. When Jane asks Rochester whether he can "tell when there

is a good fire,"[70] she is actually asking him whether he can sense her passion for him. Thus the reader can accurately predict the final outcome of the love story of these two people, after Rochester assures Jane that he is indeed capable of seeing fire.[71]

Opposite to the heat of the fire is the cold of ice, representing death.[72] Immediately at the commencement of the novel, Jane is sitting in the window seat, midway between the heat of the room and the icy coldness of the outside world. She is reading Bewick's History of British Birds, with its descriptions of the cold barren shores of Siberia, Iceland and Greenland. Jane is at the threshold of a life full of warmth and vitality, represented by the warmth of the room, or a life of cold and death, represented by the barrenness and ice outside. And she enters this life of cold and death when she enters Lowood School. She leaves warmth and the vital life behind her and begins to exist under terrible hardships. The conditions of Lowood School parallel the state of the outside world Jane was seeing from her window-seat. Students at Lowood School are chronically cold during the winter. The frigidity of the place mirrors the frigidity of the students' deprived emotional and physical existence.

The narrative of Jane Eyre has a magical quality as a result of Charlotte Brontë's extensive use of fairy-tale imagery, but these fairy-tale elements of the novel are subordinate to Brontë's emphasis of Jane's psychological ambivalence and moral dilemma. However, Brontë's frequent use of the fairy-tale shows that, like Dickens, she places a high value on the power of the imagination. Paula Sullivan claims that "because Jane Eyre is a wish-fulfillment fantasy about the most

significant emotional relationships in the author's circumscribed life of concentrated feeling, this success story functions similarly to both a dream and fairy-tale."[73] The use of fairy-tales and fairy-tale imagery helps to create a "child's eye view of the world" in the novel.[74] Jane Eyre's obsession with the world of the imagination is quickly established. For example, the reader is introduced to Jane sitting in a window seat reading a book right at the beginning of the story.[75] Jane's fancy is thrilled by Bessie's stories and songs.[76] Bessie is a nurse-story-teller figure popular in traditional fairy-tales.[77]

The story of Jane Eyre is the tale of every reader who has ever dreamt of returning triumphantly to childhood roots. In accordance with fairy-tale conventions, Jane returns victoriously to Gateshead to make her peace with the dying Mrs. Reed. In addition, by the end of the novel, Jane inherits a fortune and marries well, thus becoming the social equal of her wicked relatives. These are the kinds of events of which dreams and fairy-tales consist.

More specifically, if the novel is examined according to fairy-tale conventions, the story of Jane Eyre is the story of Cinderella. Jane is the Cinderella figure, and Mrs. Reed takes the role of the wicked step-mother who deprives Jane of her legacy. Georgianna and Eliza take on the role of the wicked step-sisters.[78] A second set of wicked relatives is introduced for the adult Jane. Blanche Ingram and her sister Mary become the second set of wicked step-sisters, while their mother fulfills the role of the unkind step-mother. Thus the Cinderella theme is repeated in the novel even after Jane grows up. Rochester is

undoubtedly the prince of this particular fairy-tale. He is a man above the heroine in fortune and social class. As in the fairy-tale, Jane overcomes the "social competition" of the wicked step-sisters and wins the heart of her prince.[79] Jane's circumstances are just like Cinderella's. She helps Bessie with the cleaning, as if she were an under-nurserymaid,[80] just as Cinderella swept the cinders in her step-mother's house. And during the scene at Lowood when Jane is unfairly condemned by Brocklehurst in front of the whole school, his richly dressed wife and daughters act as a "chorus of reproof" by whispering "How shocking!"[81] in a parody of the Cinderella situation.[82] The association of Jane with Cinderella not only secures the reader's sympathy for her, but it also gives Jane's story universal connotations. Jane is every woman, plain and ordinary, struggling to achieve her goals and dreams in life and love.

Through the use of the fairy-tale, Brontë lifts Jane's problems out of the realm of the ordinary. Jane has definite connections to the magical and the unexplainable, an important part of the land of the imagination. In the red room, when Jane looks into the mirror and sees "half fairy, half imp,"[83] and notices the mysterious white light on the wall and on the ceiling,[84] she forges bonds with the unknown and supernatural, and gives her problems wider significance.

As Sullivan points out, Brontë creates a child's eye view in Jane Eyre by her frequent references to Jonathan Swift's Gulliver's Travels. For example, the author's description of Jane's first meeting with Brocklehurst is expressed in Brobdingnagian terms.[85] The frightened child looks up at the tall man who appears to be "a black pillar."[86]

Further references to other stories besides Gulliver's Travels heighten the feeling that the world of the novel is seen through the eyes of a child. This occurs when Brocklehurst accuses Jane of being a liar at Lowood, and punishes her by displaying her on a high stool. This brings the child's face very close to Brocklehurst's visage, magnifying his features in the child's eyes. Such must have been the experience of Little Red Riding Hood upon first encountering the Big Bad Wolf disguised as her grandmother.[87] Sullivan states that "through allusion to fairy-tale, Brontë creates a child's subjective perception of a world largely unknown and perilous, controlled by huge grownups."[88] The reader thus comprehends the terror and fear of children when confronted by the strange and the unusual, through Brontë's use of fairy-tales.

By associating the love story of Jane and Rochester with fairy-tales, Brontë makes their eventual marriage inevitable at the end of the novel. Happy endings are usual in fairy-tales, although the ending here is modified by Rochester's physical punishment. The maiming and blinding of Rochester is his punishment for trying to deceive Jane. Brontë is more true to the violence of the original fairy-tale sources than the sanitized modern English translations indicate.[89] The entire relationship between Rochester and Jane is associated with the superstition of fairy-tales. The first time Jane sees Edward, she believes that he is a mythical Gytrash, "a lion like creature with long hair and a huge head"[90] denoting the animal in Rochester. Rochester is a Bluebeard figure,[91] and his dash and swagger, not to mention his mad wife locked in the attic, is typical of fairy-tales or romances. Rochester is also the Beast of the story "Beauty and the Beast." Like

the ugly toad of fairy-tales, the ugly Rochester is transformed in his love's eyes into the handsome prince of her dreams. And it is usually only in fairy-tales or romances that a man of Rochester's class and wealth falls in love with a plain, poor governess like Jane Eyre.[92] The terminology used by the lovers for each other in place of endearments confirms and emphasizes the fantastical nature of their relationship. Rochester calls Jane a "provoking puppet," "malicious elf," "sprite," and "changelling,"[93] while she says that he is a "brownie."[94]

According to the fairy-tale tradition of happy endings, the two lovers overcome seemingly insurmountable odds and are married to each other. The story of Jane and Rochester is a feminist fairy-tale, for it is not the prince but the beggar girl who saves herself through her high Christian principles, and redeems her lover by the example she creates for him to emulate through her strict adherence to Christian morality.

Charlotte Brontë's depiction of her orphan heroine Jane Eyre has a lot in common with Charles Dickens's depiction of his orphaned protagonists in Oliver Twist and David Copperfield, and the emotionally orphaned Florence in Dombey and Son. Both authors are deeply concerned with the fate of innocent children inhabiting a cruel and hostile world. Society, represented by the Reed family in Jane Eyre, mistreats and emotionally abuses the innocent little girl. Jane is emotionally abused like Oliver Twist, Florence Dombey, and David Copperfield. She is also physically abused like Oliver and David. Both Brontë and Dickens vigorously indict such mistreatment of innocent children. Bronte is deeply concerned with Jane's relationship with society around her, with her secular happiness. Dickens too was concerned with the relationship

of his fictional children with the people around them, and the degree of happiness achieved by his orphan heroes. All the protagonists in the Dickens novels and in Jane Eyre end up happily married to the mates of their choice in a small, ideal social circle of their own, separate from the larger, more threatening society around them. Jane Eyre is a flawed character, and like David Copperfield, she must overcome her character faults before she can triumph at the end of the novel. In addition, both Brontë and Dickens make extensive use of fairy-tales and fairy-tale imagery in the novels.

There are of course major differences in Brontë's and Dickens's treatment of their fictional children. Jane Eyre is more of a real child than Florence Dombey. She is not a typically beautiful, self-sacrificing Victorian heroine like Florence. Jane is small and plain, and full of passion. And most importantly, Jane struggles to achieve self-fulfillment in life, while at the same time she tries to reconcile her secular and religious principles, passion with reason. Dickens's child heroes do not exert their wills as passionately in striving for happiness as does Jane. The two authors' use of the fairy-tale also differs. Dickens uses the fairy-tale to create a social allegory, while Brontë uses Gothic and fairy-tale elements to strengthen the psychological realism of her heroine. Brontë through the use of Gothic elements and the fairy-tale incorporates into the subconscious of her heroine hidden desires, particularly her sexual aggressive powers, which were beyond both the fictional and real constraints imposed upon the characters of respectable women in the nineteenth century.[95] Brontë ultimately subverts the "ideal" of the Victorian girl where Dickens never does.

NOTES

[1] David Lodge, "Fire and Eyre: Charlotte Brontë's War of Earthly Elements," in his The Language of Fiction: Essays in Criticism and Verbal Analysis of the English Novel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 114-143.

[2] Lodge, p. 114.

[3] Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 232.

[4] Lodge, p. 114.

[5] Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë's New Gothic," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 120.

[6] Heilman, pp. 131-132.

[7] Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, Norton Critical ed. (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971), p. 21.

[8] Brontë, p. 8.

[9] Brontë, p. 8.

[10] Margaret Foulton, "Jane Eyre: The Development of a Female Consciousness," English Studies in Canada, 5, No. 4 (1979), 432-447.

[11] Brontë, p. 10.

[12] Brontë, p. 11.

[13] Robert K. Martin, "Jane Eyre and the World of the Faery," Mosaic, 10, No. 4 (1977), 89.

[14] Brontë, p. 10.

[15] Brontë, p. 11.

[16] Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 105.

[17] Brontë, p. 11.

[18] Brontë, p. 13.

[19] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 108.

[20] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 62.

[21] Brontë, p. 14.

[22] Brontë, p. 15.

[23] Foulton, p. 435.

[24] Brontë, p. 281.

[25] Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 208.

[26] Brontë, pp. 12-13.

[27] Brontë, p. 14.

[28] Richard Benvenuto, "The Child of Nature, the Child of Grace and the Unresolved Conflict in Jane Eyre," ELH, 39, No. 4 (1972), 626.

[29] Brontë, p. 32.

[30] Brontë, p. 194.

[31] Brontë, p. 211.

[32] Brontë, p. 212.

[33] Benvenuto, p. 623.

[34] Brontë, p. 396.

[35] Benvenuto, p. 620.

[36] Benvenuto, p. 623.

[37] Elizabeth C. Gaskell, The Life of Charlotte Brontë (Oxford

University Press, 1924), p. 47.

[38] Gaskell, p. 60.

[39] Brontë, p. 27.

[40] Robert Bernard Martin, "Jane Eyre", in his Charlotte Bronte's Novels (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 63-64.

[41] Brontë, p. 48.

[42] Brontë, p. 48.

[43] Brontë, p. 42.

[44] Robert Bernard Martin, p. 70.

[45] Brontë, p. 50.

[46] Brontë, p. 50.

[47] Brontë, pp. 60-61.

[48] Brontë, p. 69.

[49] Brontë, p. 69.

[50] Brontë, p. 71.

[51] Brontë, p. 71.

[52] Brontë, p. 71.

[53] Margaret Blom, "Jane Eyre: Mind as Law unto Itself," Criticism, 15, No. 4 (1973), 350.

[54] Robert Bernard Martin, p. 68.

[55] Brontë, p. 50.

[56] Barbara Hardy, "Dogmatic Form: Daniel Defoe, Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, and E. M. Forster," in her The Appropriate Form: An Essay on the Novel (London: The Athlone Press, 1964), p. 62.

[57] Brontë, p. 279.

[58] Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 297.

[59] Lodge, p. 131.

[60] Brontë, p. 15.

[61] Lodge, p. 125.

[62] Brontë, p. 63.

[63] Lodge, pp. 121-122.

[64] Lodge, p. 124.

[65] Brontë, p. 63.

[66] Brontë, p. 131.

[67] Brontë, p. 131.

[68] Brontë, p. 10.

[69] Brontë, p. 384.

[70] Brontë, p. 384.

[71] Brontë, p. 384.

[72] Lodge, p. 124.

[73] Paula Sullivan, "Fairy-Tale Elements in Jane Eyre," Journal of Popular Culture, 12, No. 1 (1978), 61.

[74] Sullivan, 61.

[75] Brontë, p. 5.

[76] Brontë, p. 18.

[77] Robert K. Martin, 86.

[78] Sullivan, 61.

[79] Sullivan, 61.

[80] Brontë, p. 25.

[81] Brontë, p. 58.

[82] Robert K. Martin, 88.

[83] Brontë, p. 11.

[84] Brontë, p. 14.

[85] Sullivan, 62.

[86] Brontë, p. 26.

[87] Sullivan, 62.

[88] Sullivan, 63.

[89] Robert K. Martin, 86.

[90] Brontë, p. 98.

[91] Sullivan, 63.

[92] M. Jeanne Peterson, "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society", in Suffer and Be Still, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 16.

[93] Brontë, p. 241.

[94] Brontë, p. 385.

[95] Heilman, p. 131.

CONCLUSION

Charles Dickens in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son, and David Copperfield and Charlotte Brontë in Jane Eyre describe the plight of their orphaned heroes and heroines as these children are threatened by and, in most cases, triumph over the evils of society around them. At the same time, both Dickens and Brontë reveal the many complexities and contradictions of the Victorian culture. The two authors also expose the Victorians' hypocrisy in sentimentalizing and idealizing childhood. Both Dickens and Brontë emphasize how the innocence of children was constantly threatened by a society which preferred the monetary values of the commercial world over the Christian virtues of love and charity. Interestingly, both Dickens's and Brontë's protagonists are orphans, or have lost one parent, although most children in the nineteenth century had two parents. (Florence Dombey has a father in name only. His emotional neglect of his daughter allows Florence to be categorized as an orphan.) The child-heroes' orphaned state adds an extra poignancy to the tone of these novels. Although all little children are defenceless and need adult protection, an orphan child seems somehow more pathetic and unprotected than his peers with parents. The reader therefore tends to pity an orphan more than he would another child in the same predicament. Both Dickens and Brontë are deeply concerned with the relationship of their orphaned protagonists to their fellow men.

Each of the two authors draws upon autobiographical data, and Dickens is especially obsessed with memories of being abandoned by his parents as a child during the blacking warehouse period of his life.

Both Brontë in Jane Eyre and Dickens in David Copperfield emphasize that life is a continuum with heredity and early experiences in a child's life determining the shape of his adult character. For example, David Copperfield inherits his parents' romanticism. In addition, he is over-indulged at a very young age by his weak mother. His genetic inheritance and his early experiences turn David into a flawed character who lacks insight, refuses to face reality, and sees the past not as it had really happened but as he would have liked it to have been. Similarly, Jane Eyre inherits the passion of her parents. The reader is told that Jane's mother sacrificed everything for the love of Jane's father. When Jane is a young child she does not receive from Mrs. Reed the guidance necessary for her to learn how to curb her passions. Consequently, Jane grows into a passionate adult who is attracted to Rochester.

The happy endings of the four novels emphasize both of the authors' belief in the redeeming qualities of human love and devotion. All the major "good" characters, with the exceptions of Oliver Twist (who is a child at the conclusion of the novel) and of little Paul Dombey, are rewarded by happy marriages to loving mates of their choice. All the characters come to inhabit private little havens with their loved ones surrounding them. These little havens, these idealized little societies of perfect happiness, are surrounded by a larger and more hostile society. In Jane Eyre Rochester becomes temporarily blinded and permanently maimed in punishment for trying to marry Jane while his wife Bertha was still alive. However, eventually he does find a haven in marriage with Jane. Paul Dombey is one exception of a child protagonist

who does not grow up to achieve some kind of idealized happiness. Instead, little Paul dies. Paul's character is problematic in nature. Dickens emphasizes that there is something old and strange about Paul. The little boy is innocent of the ways of the world and yet he exhibits an unsettling precociousness. Little Paul constantly speaks of death, and demonstrates a marked affinity to death. He seems fated to die. The corruptions of his society, combined with his personal affinity to death, are responsible for Paul's dying. The prematurely-old quality of Paul's character, coupled with Dombey's inability to love the child for his own sake instead of valuing his potential in maintaining continuity between generations, results in the young boy's destruction.

The educational system of the era also played a major role in destroying Paul. The young child's spontaneity and vitality were annihilated by the indiscriminate cramming of facts into his unformed mind. The same system made the kindhearted Toots into an imbecile. Dr. Blimber's establishment was by no means unique. Dickens emphasizes in David Copperfield how the students at Salem House suffered brutal treatment. The charity school system claimed its own victims. Dickens shows how such institutions twisted and perverted the characters of the sly Noah Claypole in Oliver Twist and of the obsequious Uriah Heep in David Copperfield. Similarly, privations and cruel conditions at Lowood School contribute to the death of the saint-like Helen Burns in Jane Eyre.

In the case of Dickens, there are definite correlations between the author's depiction of children and the chronology of the novels. Dicken's characterization of his child heroes becomes more sophisticated

and his descriptions of the problems they encounter becomes more complex as he matures as an artist. Oliver Twist, the hero of the novel bearing his name and published 1837-1839, is an unrealistically pure and passive figure, a child fallen out of grace through no fault of his own. Oliver inhabits a nightmare fairy-tale world. He is mainly acted upon and is incapable of independent action to defend himself. The reader does not learn much about Oliver's character, only that he is pure and innocent despite the physical deprivations he suffers at the hands of society. Oliver's innocence protects him from evil manifested in the form of Monks and Fagin, who attempt to turn him into a criminal. Dicken's first mature novel is Dombey and Son, published 1846-48. In Dombey and Son Dickens's approach is more psychological, and he condemns society for its materialism and withholding of love and affection from innocent children. As already discussed, Paul with his affinity to death cannot withstand the emotional barrenness of his society and dies. His sister Florence is an idealized, typical, perfect and passive Victorian daughter and sister. She is pure of body, pure of heart, and pure of thought. Her innocence is her armour in her struggle to retain her emotional wholeness in face of her father's coldness. Like Oliver and Paul, Florence is incapable of any concentrated action on her own behalf, although she does demonstrate some initiative in actively seeking her father's love. However, she never breaks out of the societally prescribed role for a perfect Victorian daughter. Since an asexual brother-sister relationship was the ideal male-female relationship in the eyes of many Victorians, Florence is rewarded for her faithfulness to the cultural stereotype by marriage to Walter, who

seems like a brother in all but blood. The last Dickens novel this study is concerned with is David Copperfield, published 1849-1850. In Oliver Twist Dickens condemns the physical mistreatment of children, and in Dombey and Son he condemns the withholding love and affection from children. David Copperfield suffers not only physical but also emotional abuse from society in general and the Murdstones in particular. Although born innocent, David is a personality with realistic character flaws. David's flawed character is far more psychologically complex and realistic than the perfection of Oliver Twist and Florence Dombey. David strives to overcome his character faults, and he experiences emotional growth until he becomes deserving of marriage to the sisterly Agnes Wickfield at the conclusion of the novel. But despite the happy ending in the novel, Dickens is exhibiting a much darker vision in David Copperfield. It is significant that while the arch-enemies of Oliver Twist and Florence and Paul Dombey are physically or symbolically destroyed, David's enemies do not die, and in the case of the Murdstones continue to flourish. The idea of general responsibility on the part of society for the welfare of innocent children emerges in David Copperfield. It is evident, therefore, that Dickens's depiction of his child heroes undergoes a great change in the twelve years between the publication of Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. With the passage of time, Dickens's characterization of his child heroes becomes more mature and his presentation of the wickedness of society trying to destroy these children more realistic.

Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre is in many ways a more complex work than the three Dickens novels already discussed. Jane Eyre's chief

concern is the struggle of an individual asserting her will to attain happiness. Jane Eyre exerts her passion and judgement in her own defense much more fully than does Dickens's most complex character, David Copperfield. At the same time, Jane faces a dilemma unknown to any of Dickens's child heroes--the problem of reconciling her secular beliefs with Christian dogma, her passion with reason. Both Dickens and Brontë are concerned with the relation of their child heroes to their fellow men, but Brontë has the additional problem of having to resolve Jane's complex dilemma in order to arrive at a philosophy compatible both with her heroine's happiness and conscience. Jane is not a typically beautiful, self-sacrificing, placid Victorian heroine like Florence Dombey. She is small, plain, and passionate. Jane consciously exerts her will to reconcile her passion with her reason.

Both Dickens and Brontë make extensive use of fairy-tales and fairy-tale imagery in chronicling the adventures of their orphan heroes. Both authors use the fairy-tale to create a child's eye view of the world to establish and to legitimize a child's perspective. In Oliver Twist the fairy-tale elements create a nightmare world of hell on earth until Oliver becomes a child fallen from grace into an earthly hell. Although in Dombey and Son Dickens's social vision has clearly emerged, Florence is still an enchanted princess ultimately rescued by her prince in the guise of Walter. The use of fairy-tale elements enhance Florence's helplessness and purity which is in the mold of Sleeping Beauty and other fairy-tale heroines. In David Copperfield the fairy-tale elements are still strong and emphasize David's plight, but they have become thematically subordinated to thinly disguised

autobiographical events in the author's life.

Brontë's use of the fairy-tale is very different from Dickens's. In Jane Eyre Brontë uses the fairy-tale and Gothic elements to lift the love story of Jane and Rochester out of the ordinary to give it magical connotations that emphasize that the two lovers are fated for each other. In addition, Jane Eyre is a feminist fairy-tale, for it is the heroine who saves the hero from loneliness and despondency. Most importantly, Dickens uses the fairy-tale to create a social allegory, while Brontë employs Gothic and fairy-tale elements to strenghten Jane's psychological realism. As already discussed, Brontë, by means of the Gothic and the fairy-tale elements in her story, introduces into the subconscious of her heroine the hidden sexual desires that went beyond both the fictional and real constraints imposed upon the characters of respectable women in the nineteenth century.[1] Thus Brontë subverts the "ideal" of the Victorian girl while Dickens never does.

This study has explored Charles Dickens's treatment of children in Oliver Twist, Dombey and Son and David Copperfield, and Charlotte Brontë's portrayal of Jane Eyre, in the novel bearing her heroine's name. It discussed the physical and emotional hostility and dangers threatening the very existence of these child heroes. And it examined the Victorians' idealized and sentimentalized view of children. Most importantly, this study emphasized how these novels expose the fallacy and hypocrisy of these idealized conceptions which are totally opposite to Victorian children in real life situations.

NOTES

[1] Robert B. Heilman, "Charlotte Brontë's New Gothic," in From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: Essays Collected in Memory of James T. Hillhouse, ed. Robert C. Rathburn and Martin Steinmann Jr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), p. 131.

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