

**Child Agency in Nineteenth Century Literary Fiction: The Contemporary Physical  
and Emotional Struggle in Dickens, Carroll, and Brontë**

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Abstrakt: <p>This thesis revolves around childhood as perceived in the Victorian period and the ways this perception of childhood is visible in the contemporary works of fiction written during the nineteenth century, as well as the opportunities children of the time had to act in accord with their own wishes. By looking at the contemporary views of childhood and putting the contemporary literature into that context, one can see how the literature of the time and the views of childhood portrayed within were shaped by the reality the authors lived. The works covered in this thesis are Charlotte Brontë's <i>Jane Eyre</i>, Lewis Carroll's <i>Alice Adventure in Wonderland</i> and <i>Through the Looking-Glass</i>, and Charles Dicken's <i>David Copperfield</i> and <i>Great Expectations</i>.</p> <p>The Dickens novels are deeply rooted in the Victorian class system, which shows how much a child's ability to act in the world was predicated on which family circumstances a child was born into, as well as how children might be of higher status and authority than certain adults if they are born into the upper classes. Likewise, if a child was born into a lower-class family, their ability to act and realise themselves in the world would be very limited, as they might have to sacrifice any form of education to work and support the family. The novels by Dickens also present a question of identity in relation to class and economic circumstances. Figuring out one's identity and place in the world is also a key part of childhood. In <i>Alice Adventures in Wonderland</i> and its sequel <i>Through the Looking-Glass</i>, Alice goes through worlds in which she only interacts with adults while constantly questioning her own identity. Her adventures in the nonsensical Wonderland is an allegory of the child traversing the unknown adult world with its own set of rules which may seem nonsensical to a child.</p> <p>Another factor to consider is the child as an agent in the society he or she lives in. The school can be viewed as a microcosm of society and both Dickens and Brontë mention several aspects of school life in their novels, based upon the memories of school from their own lives. Both authors had several awful school experiences in their lives that they mirrored in their works of fiction. Much like Dickens initially went to a school filled with horrible teachers, so too did David Copperfield initially go to a school with physically dominating teachers which showed the powerlessness of a child in society compared to adults. It is, however, during David's time at school he is introduced to the character of Steerforth, an upper-class child who illustrates the monetary and class aspect of the power dynamics of their contemporary world, which makes the structures of power between children and adults, as well as the power dynamics between children, more complex.</p>	
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## 1. Introduction

Life is one long diabolic game of bingo, the first numbers mercilessly picked before a person is even born. Before even being conceived, a child's parents must firstly successfully meet and attract one another. As the child begins to develop, a genetic lottery takes place in which the child has no say, being imbued with features that will stay with the child for life, before even leaving the womb. Assuming there are no complications at birth, the child is then brought into a world with social structures already in place with mostly the parents to protect and guide the child throughout his or her earliest years. Assuming the children survive the gamble up to a certain age, they can then start developing an identity of their own, which will inevitably be influenced by the society they grow up in.

Then, when considering what is the most important part of a human's life, the answer might vary from person to person. Perhaps the most important decision a human makes in life is made in their twenties, or maybe even thirties. Maybe someone even makes their life-defining move in their fifties. Whatever the case, life moves forward, and only forward, without merciful rerolls of the dice. The life-defining action made in a person's thirties is the result of a build-up of over thirty years. Even if people make the decision that will define them for the rest of their lives when they are twenty-five, the actions and aspirations of their childhood is what has led them to that point. The question is, how much can children affect their own lives up to that point? Born as helpless babies, predisposed to certain talents and faults, raised as infants by parents with certain values, resources, and competences, in a society of various values. It is impossible for a child to not be affected in some way by these factors.

In the nineteenth century, childhood was slowly redefined and living conditions and daily life was vastly different depending on whichever class a child was born into. A girl born into the upper classes would have quite different aspirations and ability to achieve those goals in comparison to a working-class boy born into a family where the father had already passed away.

The aim of this thesis is to look at child agency within literary fiction of the nineteenth century, children's ability to affect the outcome of their own lives, while looking at factors that affect the children's odds in life, what affects their outlook on life, their driving forces, and in which ways the authors' views on childhood affects the texts. The literary works used are Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice Adventures in Wonderland*, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. To limit the scope of the thesis, focus has been put on the United Kingdom, as involving the Americas and the colonies would paint too broad strokes for a thesis of this size. In the sections related to the works by Dickens, class mobility/relations, the individual's drive, and parenting is the focus. The Carroll section contains discussions regarding societal values and the child's encounter and interpretation of culture. Finally, there is a section regarding the child's power in social spaces, such as the home, or at school, which focus on the writings of Dickens and Brontë.

## 1.2 Secondary Sources and Theory

As this is a thesis which regards the agency of children in literary fiction, one needs to consider the following: What is it that forms the initial agency within a child, i.e. where does the child's motivations and ambitions stem from, and how is the child's personality formed? Furthermore, a child in a literary work is never acting alone. Behind the child is an adult author, whose own biases and views on childhood might cloud the author's judgement and steer the child in the adult's ideal view on how a child should act. It is also important to set the study in the context of the times the literary works were written, to consider the views on childhood at the time.

As the keywords of the thesis are childhood and agency, much focus has been placed on theory regarding these points. Regarding childhood, much of the framework in the perception of studying childhood will be based on the work by James, Jenks, and Prout as presented in their book *Theorizing Childhood*. Furthermore, some texts on childhood

psychology by the likes of Sigmund Freud have also been taken into consideration in writing of certain childhood events in the literary works used.

Since children inhabit a world ruled by adults, the child's ability to act upon their own wishes is thus proportionally related to what adults let them, and as such this creates a power dynamic between children and their environments, based on their situation and lot in life. As aid in understanding theory on such power structures and ways of interpreting them, the thesis has been influenced by childhood theory presented in James et. al., such as how society influences the view on childhood, children's place in social structures, children as actors, and biological factors in children. *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault, while not as important, nor as visible within the content of this thesis, has also been consulted in attempts to better understand power structures and their factors. Also taking into consideration the medium which the characters inhabit, Clémentine Beauvais' book *Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature* has been consulted to better understand children's portrayal in the medium of literature.

### **1.3 Defining Childhood**

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *childhood* as "The state of being a child; the stage of life or period during which one is a child; the time from birth to puberty." The OED defines an *adult* as "a person who is fully grown or developed; one who has reached maturity," further defining *youth* as "The time when one is young; the early part or period of life; more specifically, the period from puberty till the attainment of full growth, between childhood and adult age." As this is a thesis which regards childhood, the definition and purpose must be clear.

Childhood and its definition carry different meanings depending on the society in which one wishes to observe it. There is both a biological and socially constructed aspect of it. Biologically, it is usual that children's childhood is split into several categories depending on their physical development, starting with the helpless infant and ending with

the fully developed adult at the end of adolescence. Most people have a distinct point where they have fully developed physically and can be distinguished from children.

As for the distinction between child and adult and at what point a child crosses over into adulthood as perceived by society, it all becomes more complicated and a person might be at the mercy of the societies which they inhabit. The standards for what constitutes an adult is different between communities, whether it be the law of the country or definition by religious tradition, and in some cases different between male and female. Society defines when a person is old enough to smoke, drink alcohol, drive a car, marry, may leave school, what age group can have sex with whom, who is eligible to vote, and so on. Are people only truly adults when their age qualifies for all of these? Certainly not on a biological level, as these can vary heavily between countries, yet these are laws in place, defining legal age of adulthood and age which certain rights are granted upon people, based on decisions manifested from the wills of the people in the societies they inhabit.

Defining an actual concrete point at which an adolescent enters the world of adulthood may therefore be a close to impossible task. In the case of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* there is no problem with this, as the novels about her end prior to the central character even fully reaching puberty. The same cannot be said about *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, and *Jane Eyre*, as *David Copperfield* goes through several decades of the hero's life, while *Great Expectations* final parts show Pip in his early 20s, with a similar situation with *Jane Eyre*. On top of that, as the concept of teenagers and teenage culture was not a thing in the nineteenth century, the lines between childhood and adulthood are even more blurred in this Victorian context. As such, the thesis will consider the characters' teenage and formative years within to be a part of the duo's childhood, and events from later parts of the characters' lives will also be referred to when relevant to demonstrate effects of factors from the characters' childhoods.

## 2. Victorian Childhood

When considering to what degrees children in Victorian England could affect their own lives and act upon their own interests, several factors must be considered. Into which class were they born? In what ways did their parents affect their lives? What sort of education did the children get and how did their own ability to act influence their lives?

Childhood underwent a tremendous change throughout the nineteenth century with key influencers being the eighteenth century book *Émile, or on Education* by Rousseau, followed by Romantic views on childhood and child innocence. *Émile*, which might be considered a philosophical work detailing education and the individual man's relation to society dressed up as a *bildungsroman* caused quite the stir when it released in 1762. Divided into five Books, it details Rousseau's raising of a child in such a way that the child keeps his natural innocence without being corrupted by society. Most importantly, the notion of the Innocent Child devoid of Original Sin, resonated broadly, and was further cemented as an established view of childhood through Romantic poets into the nineteenth century. (Reynolds, 2014) Romantic poets such as Blake and Wordsworth showcased a view of childhood in their works *Songs of Innocence* (Blake, 1789) and *We are Seven* (Wordsworth, 1798) where for Blake, childhood represented innocence, and for Wordsworth, children showcased natural piety and wisdom. (Georgieva, 2009)

Romanticized or not, children were still cheap labour, and as such, children from lower classes often found themselves working from an early age if they hadn't died within their first few years in life, as child mortality was quite high at the time. According to Goose and Honeyman, in their work *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914* there a lot of misrepresentation regarding child labour in nineteenth century England, exaggerated not only by middle-class contemporaries but also by modern middle-class historians influenced by such accounts as the Sadler report from 1832 which according to Goose and Honeyman was filled with biased testimony and built upon "extremely narrow evidential basis" in its portrayal of the living and working conditions of the children employed at factories. The rights of children were becoming a bigger talking point throughout the decades of the nineteenth century, their hopelessness and helplessness being romanticised more and more in the contemporary literature.

Children had historically until that point always had to work to help support their families, often due to poverty. Factory work was but a new dimension for child labour in an established lower-class childhood reality. As Goose and Honeyman point out, child labour was surely the norm in a country where 39 per cent of the population was aged under fourteen. They do, however, note that boys had some opportunity to steer their future in certain directions and share their opinions when it came to employment, but ultimately their scope for securing a future of their liking was limited and they had to rely on support from a more powerful adult.

As for children of wealthy families, they certainly lived more comfortable lives, but often their relationship with their parents would be affectionless in comparison to the lives of the lower-class children. Time spent with adults was often spent with a nanny who raised them from birth, the nanny would then impart basic education, dress code, and proper behaviour into them in accord to the wishes of the children's parents. Since they also lived in much larger spaces with more rooms, the family ended up less intimate as they didn't spend time together in what for lower-class families could have been the only room in the house.

Concerning education, that too varied completely depending on which class the child was born into. The upper-class children were of course reared by their nannies or tutors, and the upper/middle-class children also had the option to attend "public" school, but lower-class families could afford no such luxuries. One option for the lower-class child would be to become an apprentice. For a fixed term of usually seven years, a master would train a young person in their craft, while keeping them lodged, fed, and clothed. (Picard, 2009) As for school education, the state had avoided involving itself, as any school open to the lower classes at the time was usually religiously motivated and, as such, the state did not want to support any school that showed bias towards the Anglican or Catholic teachings. Government involvement got its start in 1833 as the state started to vote sums of money towards the creation of schools for lower-class children, and in 1837 it was proposed that non-denominational schools should be funded through local taxes. Yet, many children remained highly uneducated due to lack of access to schooling.

By 1841, London had almost reached two million inhabitants. Since only a fraction of the population had received any kind of formal education, this contributed to an illiterate workforce and increased prison population. Dickens stated that without more schools, the capital city of the world would become a “vast hopeless nursery of ignorance, misery and vice; a breeding place for hulks and jails.” (Lee, 2014) An attempted solution to this problem came in the form of Ragged Schools, an educational movement, which was willing to teach children for free, showing “sympathy” for children and adults who “could gain admission into no charity school, and who would be driven from any church door.” These ragged schools not only taught people reading, writing, counting, and the Bible, they also fed and clothed their students. The schools were, however, religiously motivated, evangelical Christianity being at its heart. In the end, these schools were not enough for solving the problems of educating the future generations of Victorian London.

It would take until 1870 before the Parliament finally passed an Elementary Education Act, which was to be the foundation for the English educational system. It addressed the religious nature of schooling, making certain that no school would give religious education to children if it was against the wishes of the parents. At first the decision regarding compulsion of education was left to local education authorities, but from 1880, education was made compulsory throughout England and Wales, and in 1891, fees were abolished in almost every elementary school. Still, even in 1900, only one child in seventy was expected to enter any sort of secondary school, with only the intellectual and social elite able to attend. (Bowen et. al. 2018)

### 3. Autobiography, opportunities, and class mobility in Dickens's *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*

#### 3.1 Dickens's youth and Inspirations

When discussing the ways *David Copperfield* was influenced by the times it was written in, it would be quite the catastrophe not to talk about Charles Dickens's own life. After all, its autobiographic nature reflects Dickens's own life to the degree that the titular character and his initials are mirrored. If Dickens is to be believed, this reflective naming convention was but a coincidence: "It is singular that it should never have occurred to him, while the name was thus strangely as by accident bringing itself together, that the initials were but his own reversed; but he was much startled when I pointed this out, and protested it was just in keeping with the fates and chances which were always befalling him." (Forster, 2008)

Nevertheless, it is hard to overstate how much the story within *David Copperfield* reflects the life of Dickens. When Dickens started writing *David Copperfield*, autobiographies and books which regarded memory were very much in vogue. Such works included William Thackeray's semiautobiographical *Pendennis*, John Ruskin's *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, the sixth lamp of which revolved around memory, and even Dickens himself had already written a work himself which regarded memory, with his Christmas story *The Haunted Man*, which was his last work of fiction prior to him starting to work on *David Copperfield*. *The Haunted Man* related the story of a man who got the choice to forget his bitter past, which would allow him to live in the present, but caused problems with his relations. As such, the novella ends with the hero of the story choosing to retain his memories, where in the ending, Dickens evokes Hamlet: "Lord keep my Memory green." These contemporaries and Dickens's own Christmas novella might therefore be what sparked the inspiration for *David Copperfield*. Curiously, *David Copperfield* is an autobiography within an autobiography, as the full title of the novel is *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He Never Meant to Publish on Any Account)*, written from David Copperfield's own autobiographic perspective. The story concludes:

“My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company. O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me, like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!” (p. 882)

According to Tambling, Dickens used to imagine himself as each of his characters. To decipher these closing words of the novel, one may consider this a true melding between Copperfield and Dickens, the sentences and words doubling as words spoken both by Copperfield and Dickens himself. “Close my life” is on one hand Copperfield himself talking about his death, but at the same time very much Dickens “closing” the book so close to his own life, this past “reality” at end “melting” from him, the “shadows” which he now dismisses being the dark memories of the past, as if chronicling it all in this novel has purged him from the traumas caused in childhood.

The defining moment of Dickens’s childhood struggles would be in the year 1824. His father, John Dickens, had managed to accumulate a rather large debt and was eventually forced into the Marshalsea debtors’ prison. As the family economy grew problematic, Dickens’s parents forced/highly encouraged him to take a job at a blacking-warehouse, where he spent his days putting labels on said blacking products. In several of his accounts regarding the whole ordeal, Dickens paints it as a soul-crushing experience which deeply traumatised him. He would spend ten hours per day working at the factory, with little time for dinner breaks and all his money earned went into food necessities. According to Dickens, he had no exact recollection regarding how long his working experience lasted, but it lasted long enough for him to approximate it being a year, with a few months margin of error.

As Charles’ traumatic working experience ended, another event related to its conclusion would forever scar his mind. As his parents were discussing his return to school and freedom from the horrible workdays, his mother thought it better to let Charles remain employed. As Charles himself recollects: “I do not write resentfully or angrily; for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am; but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back.” (Forster)

Later events would further lend credence to the autobiographic nature of *David Copperfield* being based upon Charles Dickens's own life. What followed was that Dickens's entered school at Wellington House Academy, where he would remain for just over two years before entering the workforce as a clerk at a Mr. Edward Blackmore's law office, thanks to his father's connections. He would learn short-hand for his journalistic endeavours and he would fall in love with a young woman named Maria Beadnell who was to be the mould for Dora Spenlow in *David Copperfield*.

### **3.2 Parents in David Copperfield**

When a child enters the world, the child's agency and lifelong endeavours will be determined in large part by the parents' means and abilities to raise the child. *David Copperfield* is very much a story of substitutes in the absence of biological parents. As the story begins, David is born after his father has already been dead for half a year. At age seven, he got a stepfather in the cruel Edward Murdstone, and at the age of ten, after the death of his mother, he befriended Wilkins Micawber, a man based on Charles Dickens's own father. David is later adopted by his aunt, Betsey Trotwood, who lives together with the somewhat deranged Mr. Dick.

If one were to compare how Dickens's own life was modified into the childhood of David Copperfield, it falls quite in line with Freud's research regarding family romance. According to Freud, a child who has been slighted, or feels slighted, feeling as if he's not received the full love of his parents, feeling regret having to share it with his brothers and sisters, finds himself venting the idea "consciously recollected later from early childhood, of being a step-child or an adopted child," responding to what children interprets as hostile behaviour from their parents, in such a fashion. Dickens certainly felt abandoned, as he slaved away at the blacking warehouse, later finding its way into *David Copperfield* as Copperfield laments his own situation, working at Murdstone and Grinby, his equivalent to the blacking warehouse:

“My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and abandoned, as such, altogether. I am solemnly convinced that I never for one hour was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy; but I bore it; and even to Peggotty, partly for the love of her and partly for shame, never in any letter (though many passed between us) revealed the truth.” (p. 173)

Not only does this passage reveal Copperfield’s frustration, it also mirrors Dickens’s own feelings in the matter, being ashamed of his conditions, not revealing them until several years later. The frustration and shame Dickens felt, when he worked at a blacking-warehouse, while his sister had been admitted to the Royal Academy of Music, is mentioned in Forster’s *The Life of Charles Dickens*, and this might very well be what gave birth to the idea of Copperfield’s aunt wanting a niece in place of David. Freud also mentions that a son is far more likely to feel hostile impulses towards the father rather than the mother and has a more intense desire to free himself from his father than his mother. While Dickens himself seemingly felt more hostile towards his mother due to her aversion of him leaving the blacking-warehouse business, the situation once again is quite different in *David Copperfield*. David’s infant days contains no father, as he was dead and buried prior to David’s birth. David also has memories of his mother being a compassionate woman prior to Mr Murdstone’s arrival, the man who turns her passive and unhappy.

It is Mr Murdstone who prompts David’s initial separation from his mother, David being sent to school, and, after his mother’s death, he sends him to work at Murdstone and Grinby, removing blame from the mother, Mr Murdstone substituting as target for David’s ire. It can also be argued that Mr Murdstone, working in tandem with his sister, becomes a genderless force of misery, bound to repeat through history, as they never get a resolution in the novel. The final mention of the Murdstones in the novel is simply that they have moved on to the next woman to make miserable. Freud mentions that the effort of trying to replace one’s parents with seemingly superior models is only an expression of children’s longing for days long gone “when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the dearest and loveliest of women” which once again matches Copperfield’s narration regarding his mother after she had died: “In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest. 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.” (p. 144)

Due to the novel’s autobiographic nature having to match up with Dickens’s own life, David needed the same agency, he needed the same or similar experiences. The plot could not grow organically. The defining moments of David’s life and agency turned into a series of connecting the dots where Dickens used the experiences of his own life, since he stated, regarding the blacking-warehouse experience: “I do not write resentfully or angrily; for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am.” By using the Murdstones as a malevolent force, he could insert his own parents, without them becoming characters with guilt regarding the events that made David Copperfield into David Copperfield, the avatar of Dickens. Copperfield got to have an innocent early life with his mother, he later met the representation of his father in Mr Micawber, followed by his aunt ultimately adopting him. One could consider David’s aunt a woman who was the amalgamation of everything the young Copperfield needed in a parent. Much like Copperfield would be her substitute for a niece, she herself would show features which could be associated with a masculine independence, as well as taking over the duties for David which Dickens’s father did for him, such as when he sent him to school and introduced him to his initial employer after his studies.

### **3.3 Class migration and the middle-class hero**

David Copperfield is very much an ideal product of his time, and why wouldn’t he be, when his life is based upon that of one of the most celebrated authors of the period? He is a man, who through his own will and strength, made it from awful circumstances to the top of the middle-class. Much like the American Dream, the same spirit is shown in David Copperfield regarding middle-class success. The champion of hard work and tenacity, everything in *David Copperfield* seems to prescribe diligence.

Of course, there is also the question of class and ability. David Copperfield was not born into poverty, and he did, much like Dickens, read a lot as a child. He also got to

attend school prior to Mr. Murdstone sending him to work at Murdstone and Grimsby. In those dark times, he got to see the suffering of the lower-class, becoming the sympathising hero who thrived in the higher echelon of society, while still being able to relate to the common working man. As Copperfield, the child, possessed the ability to do something about the situation he resented; he undertook a trial to be reborn, which he called his “great Resolution.” (p. 181)

Copperfield’s walk to Dover would be the defining choice of his childhood. After someone steals most of David’s resources over a misunderstanding, David starts walking towards Dover, selling his clothes along the way, in a gruelling effort to reach his aunt’s house. Finally, arriving in nothing but the ragged remains of what little clothing he had left he presents himself to his aunt and shows off what state he is in: “with a movement of my hands, intended to show her my ragged state, and call it to witness that I had suffered something, I broke into a passion of crying.” (p. 201) In other words, without the need for words, clothing represents a state, and the rags Copperfield wore represented the childhood injustices he had endured. In an essay by Wynne, in which she explores rags in Victorian England, it is stated that Dickens himself drew from the idea of recycling, the transformation of rags into clean paper; the street children in his books were capable of purification and transformation into beings who would be of use in society. A social discourse arose, where the ragged children were considered legitimate objects of charity, a report from the Poor Law Commission stating: “A child cannot be a pauper’ because he or she is ‘dependent not as a consequence of their errors, but their misfortunes.’” (Wynne)

In the same fashion, David Copperfield was put by adults, outside of his own volition, into a situation of neglect and poverty. Even after his attempt at rising from poverty, he still must rely on his aunt, an adult, to do so. While David himself is washed and cleaned, the same cannot be said about his rags, which are burned, as David is provided with new clothing. In a way, his new benefactors not only provide him with just a brighter future, but also a removal of that shameful past. He is reborn. David Copperfield, after this point, never again falls into such neglect, and to further the new beginning, he also takes on the additional name of Trotwood from his aunt. His ambitions and hard work, in collaboration with the guiding and well providing hand of his aunt,

would result in the adult David Copperfield, moulded by his childhood experiences to never again fall back into the dark times he experienced as a ten-year-old.

### **3.4 The insecure youth - Masculinity and male role models**

Going back to Freud, he states that a (male) child will at first see his parents as his role models, wanting to replicate their behaviour and to be big like them. As time goes on, he will start to notice flaws in them, especially the father, as he is in direct competition to the mother's affection. Children also usually encounter parents of other children with time, getting to compare them to their own, and thus the child starts doubting the "incomparable and unique quality" which he has previously only attributed to his parents.

In the case of David Copperfield, his father dying prior to his birth and as Mr. Murdstone displeases David from the moment he marries David's mother, David never truly finds a male role model in his own home.

"God help me, I might have been improved for my whole life, I might have been made another creature perhaps, for life, by a kind word at that season. A word of encouragement and explanation, of pity for my childish ignorance, of welcome home, of reassurance to me that it was home, might have made me dutiful to [Mr. Murdstone] in my heart henceforth, instead of in my hypocritical outside, and might have made me respect instead of hate him." (p. 57-58)

The abuse David receives from Mr. Murdstone turns David away from ever wanting to see him as a role model which forces him to look elsewhere. The first male who would come close to being something of a role model would be Mr. Peggotty, the lower-class father with an honest and kind heart, much like Joe Gargery to Pip in *Great Expectations*. David, however, is distinguished from all of these by being born into a middle-class household and as such would need a male from the same class to look up to. David never truly finds a male role model from his own class that is much older than him. All adults in the novel have cartoonish quirks to them, and all of them have flaws to a degree that David ends up helping them more than they help him.

Instead, David has to look within his own generation to find role models. According to MacDonald (2015), the three most important characters who affect David in

this sense are the characters of James Steerforth, Uriah Heep, and Tom Traddles, with David's "privileged position as narrator" allowing for a view into a striking example of a "Victorian male's meditation on marriage, homosociality and 'proper' male sexuality." Steerforth serves as David's early role model in the first half of the book, while Uriah "teaches him how to become middle class." Finally, Dickens presents Traddles as the key model of masculinity which David moves towards in the final half of the novel, shifting from Steerforth's "brand of robust, careless masculinity to Traddles's moral sensitivity and self-discipline, a revaluation of masculinity which also implies a transition from aristocratic to middle-class values." The model of David's relation to Traddles would later be somewhat re-visited with the character of Herbert Pocket in *Great Expectations*, Pip's room-mate and best friend who taught him the middle-class ways after his lower-class upbringing.

MacDonald also cites Goodlad pointing out that while Dickens "admired the industry, enterprise, and self-reliance of entrepreneurial Englishness", he still refused to identify "material status as the basis of identity of character," arguing that Dickens resisted writing positive representations of "acquisitive men." She identifies the Dickensian gentleman as someone who is a "professional, middle-class man." She then goes on to mention that Dickens's approach to masculinity exposes the environments of clubs, schools and colleges as fostering brutal, more destructive forms of masculinity. This is further substantiated when considering Dickens's negative opinions of universities as presented in Collins (1964). Dickens, having never attended university himself, due to it being outside what society expected of his class situation, as well as his ambitions and his negative opinions of them, seldom put his characters in a university setting. These opinions are brought to light in *David Copperfield* through Steerforth, who tells David about his time at Oxford and when David asks him about him taking a degree, his response is "'I take a degree!' cried Steerforth. 'Not I!'" (p. 300), with the character of Rosa Dartle later calling it a life of "wastefulness and profligacy." (p. 301) Collins also points out that it is by no means a coincidence that Dickens sent Steerforth to Oxford, as this was one of the universities towards which Dickens felt most hostile, having sent his own son and one of his characters to Cambridge, further cementing the perceived incorrectness of the masculinity which Steerforth represents.

The theme of role models and the need to grow up permeates the whole novel. David, who never had a male role model inside his family sphere, is instead forced to substitute the inadequate Murdstone with people outside of the immediate family. David first finds a model in Steerforth, a boy about five years his senior, whom David sees much greatness in, as he observes after their first day of meeting:

“I thought of him very much after I went to bed, and raised myself, I recollect, to look at him where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm. He was a person of great power in my eyes; that was, of course, the reason of my mind running on him.” (p. 99)

However, the novel reveals that Steerforth is also a flawed character himself, perhaps mostly due to his own lack of a role model. David therefore has to overlook Steerforth’s flaws and meanspirited attitude towards other “weaker” individuals, such as his rude comments towards Ham and Traddles, along with the incident in which Steerforth gets Mr. Mell fired, while looking up to him. It is also during the firing of Mr. Mell that attributes of Traddles and Steerforth comes to a head, Traddles in tears over Steerforth’s actions causing Mr. Mell to lose his job. Steerforth, however, manages to justify his actions in the eyes of the other children, including David, whose opinion on the whole thing being:

“we gave three cheers—I did not quite know what for, but I supposed for Steerforth, and so joined in them ardently, though I felt miserable. [...] I felt so much self-reproach and contrition for my part in what had happened, that nothing would have enabled me to keep back my tears but the fear that Steerforth, who often looked at me, I saw, might think it unfriendly—or, I should rather say, considering our relative ages, and the feeling with which I regarded him, undutiful—if I showed the emotion which distressed me.” (p. 111-112)

Steerforth is able to charm every character around him, and David, seeing the powerful male force Steerforth represents, cannot help but be charmed as well, despite his uneasiness over some of Steerforth’s actions throughout the novel, and despite the warnings from people around him. It is not until a much later, during the part where Steerforth wrongs Little Emily, and in his later death, where David truly starts to understand Steerforth’s personality to a larger degree. In chapter XXII, David comes upon Steerforth reflecting at a fireplace, proclaiming: “David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years! [...] I wish with all my soul I had been better

guided!” (p. 329) Both Steerforth and the character of Uriah Heep suffer from the lack of a father in their life to discipline them, along with having overindulgent mothers, both characters ending up in tragic circumstances, Steerforth dying for his sins, and Uriah Heep being put into prison for his. In fact, most reoccurring youths in the novel with tragic ends are orphaned in one way or another, other examples being Ham and Dora, Ham dying in the same accident as Steerforth. While Steerforth might represent a form of extreme masculinity which David is mistaken in idolizing, Dora represent the other extreme, for femininity, their marriage being the other unfortunate business David pursues in his life, while idolizing her for her feminine features.

Much as David and Agnes are some of the few orphans in the novel who make it out of the story alive in good circumstances, due to them pursuing an honest and hard-working lifestyle, Dora is another character doomed in her inability to grow up in a healthy manner and accept adulthood responsibilities. After their marriage, David is unable to get her to do what he perceives as her part of the housework, as the mere mention of it brings her to tears. She even goes as far as telling David to think of her as his “child-wife.” Furthermore, it is only after Dora’s father dies that David is able to marry her, he in a sense becoming her new caretaker, more like a father than a husband. To further cement Dora’s role as an eternal child, her death comes in the form of an illness following a miscarriage, so she is never able to become a mother.

Throughout his youth, David is often shown to be embarrassed about his youth and inexperience, and his lack of certain physical features, which to him signified a mature man, such as facial hair. His sense of identity comes into question at several points, and throughout the novel, characters attach several different nicknames to him, seldom calling him David. Furthermore, the most masculine characters of their genders, Steerforth and David’s aunt Betsy Trotwood, both attach feminine nicknames to him, Steerforth calling him Daisy, most likely for the perceived innocence in David, and his aunt calling him Trotwood, a name she had associated with the female niece she had hoped David to be born as. David’s femininity and inexperience in relation to Steerforth is further solidified during their first encounter where Steerforth easily imagines what David’s sister would have looked like, if he ever had one. David’s lack of a more extreme masculinity is also

seen in his childhood, when he takes on a young butcher in a fight, the butcher both representing a form of masculine lower-class and in a way a reaper, harvesting David's masculinity in his victory. Even at the end of his adolescence, David is shown to be painfully aware of his lack of perceived masculinity as he describes a scene from his stay at an inn as follows: "When the chambermaid tapped at my door at eight o'clock, and informed me that my shaving-water was outside, I felt severely the having no occasion for it, and blushed in my bed. The suspicion that she laughed too, when she said it, preyed upon my mind" (p. 298)

It is perhaps no wonder then that David felt such strong reverence towards the ever self-confident Steerforth and his kind of masculinity. Steerforth and his careless masculinity, however, were destined for death, and he dies along with Ham at around the same period of time in which Dora does, but it is not until David sees the corpse of Steerforth that he truly starts to reflect upon his situation. Drowning in narrative functions as a symbol of retrospect and lets David reflect upon his first role model. "his false friend Steerforth was a myth generated out of the moral sleep, that suspension of critical consciousness, into which David was betrayed by his adolescent identification with his idol." (Stewart, 1984) David's self-reflection can be seen as him purging himself of certain childhood naïveté. With the death of his masculine idol who represented a careless masculinity doomed to fail, and the death of his first wife, so childish and irresponsible in nature, David sheds himself of what could be considered childhood fancies and matures into a more responsible masculine adulthood, as presented by his friend Traddles.

### **3.5 Class Identity and Purpose in *Great Expectations***

Ten years after the conception of *David Copperfield*, Dickens would once again write a story about a child, written in the same first-person autobiographic manner, titled *Great Expectations*. Its content in many ways mirrors that of *David Copperfield*, as it follows a young boy's rise from the lower classes on a quest to become a gentleman. The story, in many ways, echoes that of *David Copperfield*, not surprising, as the author states "I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read *David Copperfield* again the other day, and

was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe.” (Forster) Despite its autobiographic nature, it is however not based on the life of Dickens to any as close of a degree as *David Copperfield* was. Much like how Dickens gave *David Copperfield* another reading prior to writing *Great Expectations*, a difference between the two novels is also the way revelations from the past within the novel changes how the characters and the reader view the past.

The protagonist, Pip, starts out as a simple orphaned lower-class child, raised by his sister and her husband, the blacksmith Joe Gargery. One of the key differences to bring up between Pip and David Copperfield is that David grew up in a more well-off family and only later had a fall from grace, which made his suffering worse, as he was aware of how shameful the manual labour he performed was from a higher-class perspective. Pip on the other hand, was mostly content with his lot in life, as far as his future employment was concerned. Only after visiting Miss Havisham and her adopted daughter Estella at Satis House would Pip come to feel shame regarding his base nature.

Dickens makes it a point to shed light on the origin of the name Satis House as when Pip asks the name of the house from Estella she points out “Its other name was Satis; which is Greek, or Latin, or Hebrew, or all three—or all one to me—for enough. [...] It meant, when it was given, that whoever had this house could want nothing else. They must have been easily satisfied in those days.” The name, in many ways, takes on an ironic meaning, as its owner, Miss Havisham, suffers within in discontent, frozen in time since the betrayal by her husband to be, while it also is the location which gives birth to Pip’s desire to become a gentleman, after the house’s inhabitants ridiculed all his lower-class behaviour. Upon leaving Satis House for the first time Pip recalls:

“I set off on the four-mile walk to our forge; pondering, as I went along, on all I had seen, and deeply revolving that I was a common labouring-boy; that my hands were coarse; that my boots were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I had considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way.”  
(p. 65)

The visits to Satis House trigger a sense of self-loathing and shame in Pip, which leads to him seeking out ways of self-improvement, in what limited ways he can, mainly

educational, which is taught through Biddy, the granddaughter of the woman running the village evening school. While one may consider Estella to be a representation of the irrational desire within Pip, Biddy on the other hand is the rational voice of reason which tries to persuade Pip to be content with what he has, however unsuccessful. During his conversations with Biddy, it is made very clear that he knows what she says is true, but he is ever tormented by the thoughts put into his head during his visits to Satis House and he describes how he tries to convince himself that his low standing and honest work are nothing to be ashamed of, “when all in a moment some confounding remembrance of the Havisham days would fall upon me like a destructive missile, and scatter my wits again.”

The shame Pip feels about his standing and place in the social hierarchy also begins to envelop those around him, and he starts seeing his guardian, Joe, in a new, less flattering light, as he observes Joe’s simple behaviour. Joe, much like Biddy, is one of the few people during Pip’s childhood who treats Pip with kindness, and while Biddy serves as the early educator and voice of reason for Pip, Joe is his moral compass. During his childhood, the adults who surround Pip often mistreat him, and Joe is his “fellow sufferer” from the abuse delivered from his sister. Joe as such becomes the only adult Pip can truly confide in. Joe is presented in an almost archetypical fashion, moulded in the same mould as Mr. Peggotty, with an almost exaggerated level of kindness, representing the pure-hearted, humble working-class man, who Pip becomes increasingly embarrassed about, at first in childhood, which is culminated in their joint visit to Miss Havisham. Joe, being too embarrassed to speak directly to Miss Havisham with Pip present in the room, causes Pip to be ashamed of Joe, especially after he observes that Estella reacts to the situation by the description that “her eyes laughed mischievously”. In the showcase of the powerlessness in Joe’s station and behaviour, Pip once again in one of his many echoes of the sentiment he has regarding his lower-class situation declares: “I was truly wretched, and had a strong conviction on me that I should never like Joe's trade. I had liked it once, but once was not now.” (p. 106). Pip, who at this point feels empty, with a lack of passion for his work, dedicates the chapter that follows to lament the change that has occurred. He sums up his feelings about the matter with the first line of the chapter: “It is a most miserable thing to feel ashamed of home.” Pip is a changed being, his outlook on life and

of his goals completely uprooted and replaced due to the shame the Satis House experience made him imbibe.

Pip's childhood trauma and shame about his lower-class acquaintances is later represented in Pip's early adulthood as he is to be visited by Joe, Pip proclaiming "If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money." (p. 218) Pip goes on to mention that he wouldn't mind if his close friend Herbert or Herbert's father, Mr. Pocket, would know about his relations to Joe, since he respects them, but that he would hate it if his genteel enemy Drummle were to see him, Pip motivating his thoughts by saying "So, throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise." With this comment, Pip once again, in a sense, echoes his childhood, where Bidley had asked him if he wants to become a gentleman to spite or gain Estella over.

Pip, throughout the story, is very much lacking in ambitions of his own accord. Had Miss Havisham never invited him to and shamed him at Satis House, he would perhaps not have been made aware of his own weaknesses and low status. Even after that, he does not even try to escape his fate of becoming a blacksmith, but states that he is staying out of loyalty to Joe and what he represents. It is not until an unknown benefactor sets him up for his great expectations that he acts upon the opportunity to become a gentleman, believing it to be the will of Miss Havisham to make him a gentleman worthy of Estella. Even Pip's education is mostly aimless, described with "[Mr. Pocket] knew more of my intended career than I knew myself, [...] I was not designed for any profession" (p.197) Furthermore, Pip also talks about his free time in a hollow fashion:

"We spent as much money as we could, and got as little for it as people could make up their minds to give us. We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition. There was a gay fiction among us that we were constantly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did. To the best of my belief, our case was in the last aspect a rather common one." (p. 274)

Pip is, as such, an individual without purpose in life, as far as his ambitions go, aside from his desire to wed Estella, considering that his destined future, due to believing Miss

Havisham being his benefactor, and to a much smaller degree, prove himself superior to Drummle. Estella, however, ends up marrying Drummle, the two motivators thus combined, leading to a loss of purpose for Pip.

### **3.5 Adults, money, and guilt**

The story of *Great Expectations* heavily features the themes of money, class, and the power relations between adults, children, and how money and class play into these relations. The novel establishes very early on that Pip, as a young boy with no great fortune, does not have much say or power. The introductory scene in the graveyard, where he visits his parents' graves, quickly turns into a situation beyond Pip's own control, as the escaped convict and Pip's future benefactor Magwitch arrives on the scene and turns Pip upside down to search him for his possessions, reflecting their later relation where Pip's fortune and life as a gentleman was in Magwitch's hands. Pip is essentially ordered around and made to suffer by every person of larger stature he is surrounded by, from the adults, like his sister, Uncle Pumblechook, Miss Havisham, and even Estella, due to her upper-class status. It is only Joe, his "fellow sufferer", and Biddy, a girl of similar age and social standing as Pip, who treat him in a respectable manner.

It is not until Pip receives the news from Mr. Jaggers that he has come into a great fortune that people's attitudes toward him start to change, something Pip is quick to notice. Prior to this, the adults around him often silence Pip, telling him to be quiet, not allowed a voice in the adult space. In the introductory graveyard scene, the first line of spoken dialogue in the book is Magwitch telling Pip "Hold your noise!" (p.4) Mrs. Gargery later commands Pip to "ask no questions" (p.14) when Pip is being too talkative in the evening, and command to "speak no word" (p. 34) while hunting the convicts in the marshes. Woloch (2003), points out that in these early chapters, while Pip is at the centre of the narrative universe, the centrality of his being only serves to bring him together with minor characters, much his superiors, who often silence or overwhelm him in aggressive manners.

All of this does however change once Mr. Jaggers makes Pip and the people in his local community aware of his fortunes. Much like how David Copperfield's change in clothing at the initial visit to his aunt was a part of his metamorphosis, so too does Pip go into town to acquire new clothing before he leaves for London. As he enters the shop of the tailor, Trabb, Pip makes a point of noting a sharp increase in speed and quality of customer service after he mentions his new fortunes. This is also the part where Trabb's helper, only ever referred to as 'Mr. Trabb's boy' is introduced. Much like the first words uttered towards Pip in the novel asked for his silence, Pip only has time to write an introduction of the boy's character before the first piece of dialogue uttered towards Mr. Trabb's boy by Mr. Trabb is "Hold that noise!" Even though Pip gets the opportunity to move on in the world from such verbal abuse, thanks to his expectations, this echoes back to Pip's initial scene in the graveyard where Pip as a helpless boy was made to follow the orders of an overpowering adult. Mr. Trabb's boy has no such expectations. Dickens does not even consider him important enough to give him a full name and identity within the story. Woloch proposes that Trabb's boy in a sense represents all the anonymous labour behind one gentleman's clothes, further noting that Trabb's boy isn't even the main seller of the clothing, but just the boy doing the peripheral work, a unit of labour for the store.

Pip, throughout the novel, at all points in his life, feels guilty. The novel first portrays Pip's guilt as that of a criminal; he feels guilty about assisting Magwitch in the initial chapters, having to steal from his home. As he asks question regarding the convict ships of his sister, she responds: "People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob [...] and they always start by asking questions," Pip thus internally logically thinking "I was clearly on my way there. I had begun by asking questions, and I was going to rob Mrs. Joe." Later in the novel, when Orlick attempts to murder his sister, Pip feels as if it somehow was his own fault, the weapon used for the assault being the leg-iron he assisted Magwitch in removing. During a later part of his life, having to wait for Estella's arrival in London, Wemmick prompts Pip to accompany him to Newgate and once the visit is over, Pip feels contaminated, feeling as if he has Newgate in his breath and on his clothes, somehow imagining that the people around him could smell it. Pip, in other words, feels that mere association with crimes can somehow contaminate a person. In an earlier scene, as he is leaving London for his hometown, Circumstances also force

Pip to ride in a coach together with some convicts. Here too, Pip feels crime envelop him. “It is impossible to express with what acuteness I felt the convict's breathing, not only on the back of my head, but all along my spine.” (p.228) The events of his life connect Pip to crime and these events force him into a sort of intimacy with crime, whether he likes it or not. (Mullan, 2017) Not only is Pip surrounded by immediate symbols of crime, but he also learns that both his great expectations and Estella, the love of his life, have roots in the convict Magwitch, the money coming from his work at the penal colony of New South Wales, and Estella being his daughter.

In an article by Levine and Levine (2011) they see Pip and Miss Havisham as two opposite extremes on the spectrum of shame and guilt. They differentiate guilt and shame as shame being about the *self* in focus of evaluation, while guilt is the self being negatively evaluated in connection with something else, but the self is not in itself the focus. They go on to mention that these emotions manifest themselves in adults, to a certain degree based upon childhood experiences in relation to what degree of attention the person received from their caretakers. They thus conclude that since Pip constantly received excessive criticism for his behaviour during his childhood, he developed a guilt complex. Likewise, Miss Havisham suffers, ashamed of herself, since she received excessive praise during her childhood which distorted her image of herself, making her vulnerable to criticism and failure. The theme of guilt and taint also seeps into the economic side of *Great Expectations*. When Pip initially receives two one-pound notes from his benefactor, Dickens makes sure to describe their appearance as “Nothing less than two fat sweltering one-pound notes that seemed to have been on terms of the warmest intimacy with all the cattle-markets in the county.” (p.78-79) Likewise when Pip later wants to pay Magwitch back for the two one-pound notes they by contrast are described as “They were clean and new, and I spread them out and handed them over to him. Still watching me, he laid them one upon the other, folded them long-wise, gave them a twist, set fire to them at the lamp, and dropped the ashes into the tray.” (p. 318) The notes from the earlier scene, given to Pip, in their description tells of the hard work by the convict Magwitch. Magwitch’s circumstances and his unclean background do however taint the money. In Pip’s attempt to erase this background and rid himself of the criminal guilt, he tries to offer Magwitch clean money. According to Trotter (1996), the scene with Magwitch burning the notes, is

him showing Pip that it's not that simple to detach the world of guilt from the world of desire; the scene is Pip's awakening to the reality of his situation and the nature of wealth, that there is no such thing as clean money.

When Pip arrives in London, he describes the city as filthy, despite its great size, and immediately when he arrives, as one of the first actions he has to take in the city, Pip has to discuss the fare price of the coach he took to reach Mr. Jagger's office. While waiting for Mr. Jaggers, Pip decides to get some fresh air and heads outside for a walk, and as he reaches Smithfield, he notes it being a "shameful place, being all asmeared with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me." Trotter interprets this as an expansion of the one-pound notes given to Pip as a kid, now contaminating his person. It could also be argued that London as a whole is a city ruled by money, clean or not. To further solidify Pip's relationship to both crime and money, his guardian, Mr. Jagger, is a famous lawyer, and in his introductory London scene, it is made clear that he demands the proper payment for his services; he is made into a grim reaper, whom clients must pay to stave off death and guilty verdicts.

### **3.6 Lower-class in Dickens**

The lower-class people of the Victorian era were mostly invisible when it came to the role of protagonist in the novels of the nineteenth century. Books were most often written by the middle-class authors for the middle- and upper-class people, although there of course were certain works which appealed across the classes, such as some of Dickens's novels. Still, since the rate of literacy was low amongst the lower classes up to the 1880s, and due to general high prices on books and library subscriptions at the time, the people of the lower classes read to a far lesser extent than those in the middle- and upper-class. As a result, most of the main characters in the books written were of middle-class or higher, and even if they were in poor circumstances during some early parts of the novel, they still had claim to ambitions as a sort of birth right, such as the case of the impoverished and orphaned Copperfield. The titular orphan protagonist Oliver Twist in another of Dickens's novels, is raised in the poorest of conditions found in Victorian England but is

revealed to be of upper-class towards the novel's end. Even Pip, in his lower-class upbringing, thinks himself of gentlemanly status, as soon as Mr. Jaggers reveals that an unknown benefactor is going to grant Pip money, which Pip assumes comes from Miss Havisham, giving Pip a clean and dignified way to join the middle-class society in London. A lower-class youth in the role of protagonist was rare, and if authors discussed the lower-class at all as the central theme of a text, it was more likely to be a generalisation of the whole lower-class' situation, such as in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'The Cry of the Children,' (1842) in its worries about working conditions of the lower-class children at the time.

Dickens, in his sympathies with the lower-class, being aware of their working conditions from his own experiences, as well as through his walks in the slums of London, was familiar with their situation and put several lower-class characters in his novels, bringing their lives to light, despite them often not being the focus of the novels. In his works discussed in this thesis, mainly *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the main characters have close interactions with several lower-class people, such as the Peggotty family, Mr. and Mrs. Gargery, Orlick, Uriah Heep, Magwitch, and Martha.

Joe Gargery and Mr. Peggotty represent a purer form of benevolent patriarch within the lower-class. While Joe is a kind-hearted father figure for Pip, Mr. Peggotty takes on the role of adoptive parent to his niece and nephew, Emily and Ham. Their extraordinary acts of kindness throughout the novels paint a picture of what might be Dickens's ideal lower-class father, and like many characters in the stories, they eventually find their ways to London, the city of progress, representing the future of Britain. Their visits are not very pleasant, however, as Joe finds himself nervous and out of place during his stay and Mr. Peggotty is only passing through on his desperate quest to bring back Emily after Steerforth seduced her.

It is perhaps little wonder that most of the lower-class characters that visit London in the novels have a negative experience of the city. Between 1800 and 1850, the population of England doubled, with a large part of the population moving to the cities due to industrialisation. The dynamic between rich and poor living changed completely, as the two classes used to live in the same districts, but with the new developments of the

city, the rich moved to the suburbs and much of the housing for the poor was demolished for the sake of commercial spaces and railway stations. The homes of the poor were prioritised in the removal process when room had to be made for development. While the richer parts of the population saw and referred to the reshaping of London as “improvements,” these circumstances forced the poorer part of the population to move to already cramped neighbourhoods, and some who could not even afford that, became drifters without homes. The upper classes would consider these slums to be homes of mere drunkards and thieves, making it easier to ignore the struggles of the lower-classes. Dickens was known to take walks in these slums, so he would have been aware of these filthy, disease-ridden areas which the lower classes of his time were forced into for the sake of progress, Dickens thus being aware that they were not home for just the morally bankrupt of the population, but also the general population who had nowhere else to go. (Flanders, 2014)

Mr. Peggotty and Joe do however know their places on the social hierarchy and are content with their lives, not letting the vices of London taint them. While Mr. Peggotty may be a wanderer without a clear destination, going from place to place through Europe in search of Emily, thus representing the uncertainty of the lower-class’ future, his life does not end in misery and Dickens rewards him for his honest work in the end. The same cannot be said for the characters who overstepped the class boundaries with their ambitions to join the middle-class. Uriah Heep and Magwitch are two characters who through criminal acts end up imprisoned in London and both have in some way tried to set in motion a class migration. Magwitch, being a convict, tried to turn Pip into a gentleman and came to London to see the results of his efforts, got caught, and his death and the removal of Pip’s remaining expectations cleansed the transaction, making Pip a true gentleman who managed to reach the middle-class in a modest stature, due to Magwitch’s transgression and hard work. Uriah Heep, on the other hand, is a scheming youth who hides behind false modesty and attempts to reach higher social stature through illegal means. Dickens, however, shows that it is not so easy to move up in the world and David finds Uriah imprisoned for his crimes at a later stage of the novel.

Another child character in *David Copperfield* who desperately tries to climb the social ladder is Little Emily, Mr. Peggotty's niece whom David becomes acquainted with in his childhood. In one of their first conversations, while David and Emily walk together on the beach, Emily reveals her wishes to be a lady and her worries about the lower class. Much like David, she too is an orphan, but while David comes from a well-off middle-class family, her circumstances are different. "Your father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is a fisherman" (p. 47) Emily proclaims, aware of their differences, her parentage making her wish to climb the social ladder unrealistic. While David is a gentleman of the poorer kind at his lowest points in life, he is still a gentleman and male, so he can improve his situation in life through hard work. Emily, being a girl established as lower-class, is realistically unable to make any solid push towards higher social standing.

Dickens, in his social commentary is making a plea through Emily; he wants people to consider the struggles and unsafe working conditions of the lower-class population. Emily, orphan that she is, is afraid of the ocean and the constant worry for her life that it represents. Her father died at sea, as did Ham's. Towards the end of the novel her fears get substantiated, as Ham, the man she was bound to marry, prior to her abandoning Yarmouth, drowns in a storm. However, as has been established, the world which Dickens writes in is not one kind to those who want to transgress the social boundaries. During their walk on the beach, David sees Emily going towards the water and remarks "The incident is so impressed on my remembrance, that if I were a draughtsman I could draw its form here, I daresay, accurately as it was that day, and little Em'ly springing forward to her destruction (as it appeared to me), with a look that I have never forgotten, directed far out to sea." (p. 48) and he further alludes in his contemplation on her fate from his adult perspective, as she indeed had to pay a price for her attempt to become a lady.

After Steerforth seduces her, Emily travels with him for some time before he abandons her, and he leaves her which results in that she becomes a disgraced and fallen woman, and like most fallen lower-class people in these Dickens novels, she ends up in

London, unwilling to contact her family out of shame of what she has done. Towards the end of the novel, Martha, another fallen woman from Yarmouth, who tried to make a life for herself in London, finally finds Emily, and in attempting to redeem herself for possibly having influenced Emily's decision to abandon Yarmouth, guides David and Mr. Peggotty to her location which David described: "She laid her hand on my arm, and hurried me on to one of the sombre streets, of which there are several in that part, where the houses were once fair dwellings in the occupation of single families, but have, and had, long degenerated into poor lodgings let off in rooms." (p. 721) Much like the fair family homes which have decayed, so too has Martha, the relationship between Steerforth and Emily, and Emily's chance to reach a higher social standing. They, the discontented lower-class people of Yarmouth are forced to the slums and are only redeemed with the arrival of Mr. Peggotty, Martha having redeemed herself of any prior misbehaviour, and Emily, finally accepting her place in the world, working in earnest with gratitude for what she has. Through the act of crossing the fearful oceans to reach it, they then get a better life in Australia.

By using the locations of London and Australia as a representation of the chains and freedom of the lower-class, Dickens shows the struggles of lower-class people in the Victorian world. While Australia initially represented a prison for the criminals and low-life of the Victorian world, leaving England clean for the inevitable progress of the upper classes, Australia would later come to represent the chance of a new beginning for the lower classes once London became a decaying prison for them. By the time Dickens had written *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, both had come to show Australia as the place of new beginnings and a way to get ahead in life. In *David Copperfield*, Mr. Peggotty and his family emigrates to Australia to become thriving farmers, Emily can start anew as no one knows her, unable to reproach her for her failed attempt to climb the social ladder. Likewise, due to the lack of women in Australia, Martha is able to marry, despite the husband learning of her past as the fallen woman she was in London.

#### **4. Culture, emotion and otherness in Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass**

In the same decade as Charles Dickens published *Great Expectations*, another Charles with an infatuation for childhood by the name of Charles Dodgson had his work *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* published, under the name of Lewis Carroll. Much like how people have put a lot of focus on childhood in Dickens, so too have people discussed the novels about Alice's adventures at great lengths regarding the same topic. A childhood friend of his described Carroll as "the man who above all others has understood childhood" and Virginia Woolf thought "childhood remained in him entire" throughout his life, while Carroll himself stated that children were three-fourths of his life. (Haughton, 1998) Much like most writers of the time, he was brought up in a middle-class household, his father a talented mathematician who became a parish priest, Lewis Carroll himself following closely in his father's footsteps with very similar career choices. Described as a man who was a stickler for detail who loved puzzles and logic, it is little wonder that he constructed the seemingly nonsensical Wonderland in the ways that he did. There have been several arguments made both for and against there being any deeper meaning in the nonsense of Carroll's tales about Alice, with perhaps no concrete answer. Important for this thesis, however, is interpreting the child's interaction with said nonsense and how it mirrors the child's interaction with the real world.

In discussing Victorian literature and the contemporary society surrounding it, it can perhaps seem odd to select such a fantastical work to illustrate Victorian childhood, but it provides a contrast to the reality seen in the other works presented in this thesis, as well as the following important observations. Firstly, it brings to light interactions between a Victorian girl and an unknown culture with its own logic, showcasing the biases and cultural heritage people inherit through growing up in a certain society. Secondly, one can argue that one can see Alice's experiences in Wonderland in the same manner or as a recreation of a person seeing the world through the lens of a child, children and their world view being different to that of adults, here shown through Alice's interactions with seemingly nonsensical adults. Finally, one can view the novels themselves as a response

to other child literature at the time, doing away or twisting contemporary foundations of child literature.

## **4.2 Victorian Alice, nonsensical Wonderland:**

The Alice featured in Carroll's novels has often been thought of, and almost certainly was, based on Alice Liddell, a young girl whom Carroll was familiar with. Much like Alice Liddell, Alice seems to be a well-off child of a Victorian middle-class household. As she grew up in such an environment, parents and other family members would, of course, expose her to typical middle-class behaviour of the time from parents and other family members, as well as being raised and educated in the ways which middle-class girls of the time were expected to be. Cultivated by her contemporary culture, she then enters the foreign world of Wonderland, and the contrast between cultures shows how her cultural background affects her arguments and logical ability to think.

Alice's status as a Victorian child of the upper middle-class is something which both Alice and the narrator constantly remind the reader of as both make the reader aware of Alice's attempt to constantly speak "good English" and behave appropriately in the situations she finds herself in, Alice characteristically conscious of her manners at almost all times. Throughout the novel, her education and that of her peers enters her mind, and she often tries to apply such knowledge to the world around her in Wonderland, often to little success, her logic not applicable to the foreign rules of Wonderland.

Juxtaposing Alice's own rules of life, and quite likely the contemporary reader, is Wonderland, as well as the world of the Looking-Glass in the sequel. Adding to the bizarre logic of the worlds, and to the feeling of otherness, Carroll also decided upon making several of the worlds' inhabitants anthropomorphic animals, leading to further puns, which created further tensions between the proper English and logic of Victorian England and the fantastical world of Wonderland. This dichotomy allows for exploring how children perceive not only other cultures but also the relationship between children and

adults, children perplexed by the sometimes seemingly contradictory societal rules created by the adults with whom they share their social spaces.

Woolf (via Haughton, 1998) stated that the two books about Alice were not books for children; they were books in which the adult reader once more returned to childhood, able to once more see the world through the eyes of a child, and it is perhaps due to this that the world of Wonderland seems so nonsensical. Carroll, the author with a childish heart, and a fondness for puzzles, managed to create two stories in which a child's puzzling experiences navigating the adult world are captured on pages, relaying not only the author's view on childhood, but also the child's view of adulthood. Throughout her adventures in Wonderland, Alice never interacts with any other children, save for a baby which turns into a pig, with whom she shares no dialogue. Likewise, in *Through the Looking-Glass*, most of the interactions are once again with adult characters.

By the time Lewis Carroll conceived *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, children's literature was already a flourishing industry. Writing for children had begun to crop up in the late seventeenth century. Books published for children prior to the mid-eighteenth century were almost always either highly educational or moral in nature. The most celebrated of the early childhood writers was John Newbery, whose first book meant for child entertainment *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly* (c.1744) was an embodiment of John Locke's educational theories, which advocated education through entertaining means. Newbery became known as the "father of children's literature" through proving that the publishing of children's books could lead to financial success. While the success and rapid increase in children's literature has never been fully explained, factors other than the success of people like Newbery would include the growth of the middle class, technical developments in book productions, influence of newer educational theories, and the changing attitudes towards childhood. (Grenby, 2014)

As the moral tales rose in prevalence throughout the years, so too did the criticism towards them. Especially the romantic writers of the early nineteenth century would take to complaining about the moral tale as they saw it as society taking an increasingly utilitarian direction, suppressing imagination and true morality. Among these critics were

such names as Samuel Coleridge and Walter Scott. (Grenby, 2014) Despite the complaints made by the romantic scholars, moral children's tales would continue to flourish throughout the centuries.

The stories about Alice can, in a sense, be a direct response to moral tales, their nonsensical logic and weird educational tone contrasted with tropes of the genre which they in so many ways parody. While moral stories were by no means stranger to such things as talking animals, most moral tales were usually set in environments which the reader was familiar with, such as middle-class homes, well-kept gardens, as well as villages and cities, Alice is thrown into a fantastical unknown world in each adventure, her goal in the first novel to reach a well-kept garden, perhaps out of desire to stick to the familiar. But the moral tale of Wonderland denies her entry, as she at first must reach the proper size, a symbolic maturation to go along with the narrative.

The author makes the reader aware of Alice's naïve and careless nature at the start of the story, as she haphazardly follows a rabbit down a seemingly bottomless hole, after which she almost immediately finds a bottle labelled "DRINK ME." This is one of the first instances in the story where Carroll both pokes fun at moral literature as well as shows the innocence which dulls a child's logic:

"It was all very well to say 'Drink me,' but the wise little Alice was not going to do *that* in a hurry. 'No, I'll look first,' she said, 'and see whether it's marked "*poison*" or not'; for she had read several nice little histories about children who had got burnt, and eaten up by wild beasts and other unpleasant things, all because they *would* not remember the simple rules their friends had taught them [...] and she had never forgotten that, if you drink much from a bottle marked 'poison,' it is almost certain to disagree with you, sooner or later." (Carroll, p. 13)

In the paragraph, Carroll is poking fun at moral literature, the *several nice little histories* probably being such tales that a contemporary child like Alice would be familiar with, such as Elizabeth Turner's *Cautionary Tales* as well as the child's inability to think critically a step ahead of what they have read, Alice merely assuming that since the bottle has no poison label, it cannot possibly be poisoned. After drinking the bottle's contents, Alice starts shrinking, and as if she has not learned from her mistake, when she immediately afterwards finds a cake marked with the words "EAT ME," she starts eating it without much thought and once again finds herself changing in size, all of which runs

contrary to the usual moral tales where the heroes and heroines at the end learned from their mistakes.

There are several instances where Carroll seemingly evokes Rousseau's thoughts on childhood education as presented in *Émile*. Rousseau essentially argued that children would be best off by learning naturally and critically think about what they learned as they grew organically, unlike the seemingly inferior education where a child is merely taught what to do, without much context or critical thinking regarding why they do what they do. Neither did he recommend children learning random facts from books which they could not apply to their reality, i.e. learning about geographic locations they would never visit as they would only be represented as a spot on a map or globe, the child having no idea about the actual features of the location. Alice barely has time to fall into the rabbit-hole when Carroll comments on the contemporary state of child education:

‘I wonder how many miles I’ve fallen by this time?’ she said aloud. ‘I must be getting somewhere near the centre of the earth. Let me see: that would be four thousand miles down, I think—’ (for, you see, Alice had learnt several things of this sort in her lessons in the schoolroom, and though this was not a *very* good opportunity for showing off her knowledge, as there was no one to listen to her, still it was good practice to say it over) ‘—yes, that’s about the right distance—but then I wonder what Latitude or Longitude I’ve got to?’ (Alice had no idea what Latitude was, or Longitude either, but thought they were nice grand words to say.) (Carroll, p. 11)

Alice, being part of an enlightened world, applies so much value to education and her own ability to seem educated, the she does not care about comprehending the facts she utters, prioritising that the words she used “were nice grand words to say.” Carroll further emphasises the ease with which children can confuse the facts relayed to them, or facts they read, in the chapter that follows where Alice encounters a mouse:

‘O Mouse, do you know the way out of this pool? I am very tired of swimming about here, O Mouse!’ (Alice thought this must be the right way of speaking to a mouse: she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen in her brother’s Latin Grammar, ‘A mouse—of a mouse—to a mouse—a mouse—O mouse!’) (Carroll, p. 21)

Here Alice is once again showing how easy it is for children to misinterpret or misuse information which one acquires through no use of proper thinking or guidance. When the mouse doesn’t respond to Alice’s greeting she thinks the following:

‘Perhaps it doesn’t understand English,’ thought Alice; ‘I daresay it’s a French mouse, come over with William the Conqueror.’ (For, with all her knowledge of history, Alice had no very clear notion how long ago anything had happened.) So she began again: ‘Ou est ma chatte?’ which was the first sentence in her French lesson-book. The Mouse gave a sudden leap out of the water, and seemed to quiver all over with fright. ‘Oh, I beg your pardon!’ cried Alice hastily, afraid that she had hurt the poor animal’s feelings. ‘I quite forgot you didn’t like cats.’ (Carroll, p. 21)

This exchange once again presents issues with education and childhood perception of reality regarding knowledge. To a child, a year might only be a number not representing anything but a past in their uncertainty of temporal movement and as a child might not even have lived for a decade, the mere thought of ten years can seem like an eternity. It also reveals how far children can bend facts when missing essential information, Alice here eager to show her knowledge of history, associating one of the few historical things regarding the French language she knew. To further show the hardships of applying knowledge from textbooks in real-life scenarios, Alice then starts speaking French, using the first sentence found in the book *La Bagatelle: Intended to introduce children of three or four years old to some knowledge of the French Language* (1804) to show the difficulty children may find in applying language taught from text-books in real-life scenarios.

### 4.3 Etiquette, Growth and Identity

Aside from tackling or poking fun at education and contemporary children’s didactic environments, the stories about Alice also show what it is like for a child to grow up and navigate the adult world on her way to her own adulthood. The worlds Alice explore seem nonsensical in some sense, yet there is some logic in the worlds, especially in *Through the Looking-Glass*, which follows Alice through her journey across a chess-board, with all the rules that entails, such as squares and the movement speed for the pieces on the board.

Logic also takes its toll in the many scenes related to food and eating during Alice’s adventures. Etiquette for meals is another matter which children must learn during their childhood. The same held true during the Victorian period, during which the gastronomic ruleset was such a strict matter, perhaps even absurdly so, that it inspired several authors, Carroll included, to write parodical pieces regarding etiquette, in Carroll’s case the 1855

text 'Hints for Etiquette; Or, Dining Out Made Easy.' He would later throw the Victorian dinner-table into chaos once again during the Mad Hatter's tea party in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, where several rules of the contemporary dinner-table were broken as the chapter both begins with Alice and the party guests present arguing over whom among them is being the rudest, while it ends with Alice storming off after a rude remark which was "more than Alice could bear." (p. 67) Aside from showing the efforts by the parties present to feel more offended by each other's actions than the rudeness caused, and the guests confusing Alice with nonsensical riddles, this section also illustrates the confusion and frustration of children in trying to understand such a seemingly weirdly strict adult world.

Carroll generally uses food in contexts of confusion in Alice's first adventure, which is emphasised by the tea party and the final mystery presented in the novel being a court case regarding who stole some tarts. For Alice to grow or shrink in Wonderland, she must perform the act of eating, in most cases. A child's body can feel confusing in many ways, such as the physical act of growing and phenomena occurring during puberty turning the body into an alien entity which the child does not fully understand, and similarly Alice goes through several cases of identity crisis throughout both stories, her first crisis starting just after her first meal in Wonderland and she ponders:

"How queer everything is to-day! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is, Who in the world am I? Ah, *that's* the great puzzle!" And she began thinking over all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself, to see if she could have been changed for any of them."  
(Carroll, p. 17-18)

The sudden changes in her environments and body makes her re-think the world and as she ponders who she is due to her life being so much different than anything she had ever experienced before, she starts wondering "who in the world" she is, calling it "the great puzzle." (p. 18) On a surface level, this question serves to make Alice ponder her identity, but going deeper, it could be seen as Carroll showing the reader the uncertainties of

childhood regarding identity and one's future, the child's quest to figure out where she belongs in the world, as a part of her growing up. Doing this also means having to compare oneself to others, seeing oneself as someone with certain attributes other people lack. Alice, in a somewhat silly manner, finds that her situation is so different to what could possibly happen in her own life that she starts comparing her attributes to those of her classmates, and when she finds her perceived knowledge lacking, assumes she is one of her less capable friends. This also showcases the competitive nature of childhood where a child is not just trying to please the people around them but may also be incentivised to try to outperform the people around them.

Reynolds (2014) states that “. One of the great sources of frustration for children is the way they are defined and redefined by their size and age in ways that constrain them. One minute they are too big to sit on a lap; the next they are too little to stay up late. They are frequently enjoined to ‘act their age’, then accused of ‘behaving like a child’.” Carroll manages to capture the “arbitrary and confusing nature” of adult expectations when it comes to children and their age, further showing the confusion a child can feel when it comes to the adult world and their own bodies. One instance of Alice's body transformation grows her neck to an extreme disproportionate degree and since Alice's body is the shape that it is, an adult pigeon mother comes by and declares that because she looks the way she does, she must be a serpent. It is only after having a conversation with a caterpillar that Alice learns to control her body, her eating from two sides of a mushroom to become her proper size, symbolising her growth as a character, and a sense of being a complete being, as the original Alice story, *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*, immediately follows this part up with Alice being able to enter the garden she wished to reach as her journey through Wonderland started. It is there she finally encounters the royal family at the heart of Wonderland, and grows to her full size, finally brave enough to fully defy the will of the nonsensical world, before waking up.

Another sign of maturation over the course of Alice's adventures is the escalation of creatures and topics with whom Alice interact. As her journey begins, the first being she interacts with is a seemingly harmless mouse and other creatures of similar perceived threat levels, who get scared by the mere mention of Alice's cat. Similar light-hearted

events ensue up to the point in Chapter V where Alice starts talking to the Caterpillar about her rapid and often reoccurring size changes, and her anxiousness from not fully knowing who she is. The Caterpillar encourages her to repeat '*You are old, Father William,*' a parody of Robert Southey's 'The Old Man's Comforts and How He Gained Them' from 1799. Carroll's parody differs from Southey's religious original, Carroll instead opting to focus on aging, reflecting the worries in the conversation between Alice and the Caterpillar on the topic of growing up as well as growing old. During the conversation, as the Caterpillar asks which size she would like to be, Alice says she is not particular about size and that it is "only one doesn't like changing so often, you know," reflecting the constant changes children must accept in their lives. This is not only biologically, but also the social sphere which they inhabit introduces new elements in their daily lives, introduced as they grow older and more responsible, capable to handle the expectations of the world around them.

As this is the point in the story where Alice reaches a new level of maturity, symbolised by the halves of the mushroom putting her at a balanced size, and the right size to enter the royal garden, there is a shift in topics discussed and the manners of creatures Alice meet on her journey. After her discussion with the Caterpillar, her encounters mostly change from harmless animals to those of humans and anthropomorphic animals of more human-like proportions and similarly, the topics of discussion become more mature as well. The topics of conversation which precede Alice entering the garden, after her talk with the Caterpillar, include moral dilemmas regarding death and nursing at the Duchess' house, where Alice is made to nurse a baby whom she worries is going to die from abuse if she does not take him with her, but as the baby turns into a pig, those worries immediately leave her thoughts, presumably to show that even children generally value human lives more than those of animals. She is later made aware of bizarre table manners and proper behaviour at the Mad Hatter's tea party, as well as discussing the topic of her own sanity during a talk with the Cheshire Cat. When Alice finally reaches the gardens and the royal family, the topics shift to further education, the death penalty and conclude with a trial. Alice's journey reflects that of a child growing up, the initial innocence, followed by light education, responsibilities gained from having to look after another living being, the birth of an inner moral within the child, the child

having to figure out what is 'right' or 'wrong' in a loss of innocence, when learning about the grim parts of reality, and finally slowly being moulded into a respectable adult through the needs of the society which surrounds her.

#### **4.4 Alice and the Question of Meaning**

Another question that may enter the mind of a child is that of meaning, a philosophical pondering of reality and our place in it. The question of meaning is highly ingrained into the stories of Alice. Towards the end of her journey, during the trial, after having heard a piece of testimony, Alice argues that "*I don't believe there's an atom of meaning in it*" to which the King replies "'If there's no meaning in it,' said the King, 'that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn't try to find any. And yet I don't know,' he went on, spreading out the verses on his knee, and looking at them with one eye; 'I seem to see some meaning in them, after all.'" (Carroll, p. 106) According to Haughton (1998) the act of reading the stories of Alice's adventures is to "plunge into a world of narrative distortions and nonsensical explanations" and the readers are caught in a situation where they have to decide if they adopt the narrative position of Alice, where there is no meaning to the nonsense, or adopting the stance of the King, where some meaning can be decoded from the text.

In *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice has grown older and more mature. As opposed to the story starting out with the older sister looking after Alice, it instead starts with Alice in a maternal role, looking after her kittens; instead of Alice accidentally entering another world, she conjures it on her own. She once again finds herself in a weak position, though, as she enters a game of chess in the role of a pawn, with the ambition of becoming queen, which she eventually does near the end of the story, and once again ends her dreamlike fantasy in the presence of royalty. Alice's road to becoming a queen is here the symbolic maturation, an allegory to the child maturing. Unlike her adventures in Wonderland, however, this adventure is bleaker and more mature topics enter the story at an earlier juncture than the previous story.

In its wintry opening, Alice enters a mirror world and after watching the behaviour of some chess pieces and leaving the reflected house, she finds the poem Jabberwocky, to which her reaction is: “‘It seems very pretty,’ she said when she had finished it, ‘but it’s *rather* hard to understand!’ (You see she didn’t like to confess, ever to herself, that she couldn’t make it out at all.) ‘Somehow it seems to fill my head with ideas—only I don’t exactly know what they are!’” Carroll starts Alice’s new journey of maturation with the question that ended her last one, the question of meaning, a question arising as part of an interaction with the royalty of the world, as if royalty represented the deepest thoughts Alice could contemplate, on her journey to a new maturity, which in this case ends with her becoming royalty herself.

As if an existential crisis from the search for meaning, a mere few pages later, during a conversation with the flowers of the garden, Alice’s existence and unavoidable fate becomes a part of the discussion:

“‘But that’s not *your* fault’ the Rose added kindly: ‘you’re beginning to fade, you know—and then one can’t help one’s petals getting a little untidy.’ Alice didn’t like this idea at all: so, to change the subject, she asked ‘Does she ever come out here?’ [...] Alice looked round eagerly, and found that it was the Red Queen. ‘She’s grown a good deal!’ was her first remark. She had indeed: when Alice first found her in the ashes, she had been only three inches high—and here she was, half a head taller than Alice herself! ‘It’s the fresh air that does it,’ said the Rose: ‘wonderfully fine air it is, out here.’” (Carroll, p. 138-139)

The Rose, despite talking to a young girl under the age of ten, still sees Alice as something fading, a grim reminder that despite Alice being young, she’ll eventually grow old and die. As this is not something Alice likes to hear about at all, the topic quickly changes to the Red Queen, who Alice is surprised to see having grown from three inches in the ashes, to a size even taller than Alice. Like a phoenix being reborn from its ashes, the Red Queen has gone from the exact size Alice did not like being, as she discussed it with the Caterpillar during her previous journey, and is now even taller than Alice, both physically and as a higher status, being a queen, as opposed to Alice who only starts her adventure off as a pawn. The Rose states that it is the fresh air of the Looking-Glass world that does it, perhaps as a metaphor for the air filled with ideas that Alice exposes herself to during her maturation over the course of her journey through the world.

Her existence once again comes into question at one of her next encounters with royalty, as she finds the sleeping Red King. In a conversation with Tweedledee and Tweedledum, they argue that he is dreaming of Alice and if he was to wake up, she would cease to exist since she is only a part of his dream. As Alice begins crying after uttering the words “I am real!” she applies the logic that “If I wasn’t real,’ Alice said—half-laughing through her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous—‘I shouldn’t be able to cry.’” (p. 165) This haunting question of her existence stays with her even when she wakes from her dream of the Looking-Glass world and she starts discussing with her cats:

“Now, Kitty, let’s consider who it was that dreamed it all. This is a serious question, my dear [...] You see, Kitty, it *must* have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too! Oh, Kitty, *do* help to settle it! I’m sure your paw can wait!’ But the provoking kitten only began on the other paw, and pretended it hadn’t heard the question.” (Carroll, p. 250)

Alice, having once again been exposed to a world beyond her understanding, is desperate to find the answer to the question, but as reflecting her own prior ignorance and carefree nature, not caring about such topics, her discussion ends in failure as she tries to get answers from a mere kitten, an infantile being not caring about the ways of the world or its rules, living in naïve innocence which Alice has lost over her latest journey.

## 5. The Biological Child and the Adult Space

### 5.1 The Biological Child

Being a child in society presents a large challenge from a biological perspective. Not only do children have to be categorised by adults depending on their size and age, as well as being constantly aware of their own changing bodies. Children up to their late teens are also constantly reminded that they are significantly smaller than adults and therefore vulnerable to the overpowering physical violence adults can dish out due to disagreeable child behaviour. This was especially true in prior centuries, when children did not have the same rights granted to them as today. Nineteenth-century industrialisation was especially bad for lower-class children who were put to work as soon as possible where there was need for them, and despite their whole days being spent working, due to the work's menial nature, manageable by child bodies, the payment they received was poor.

It was of course not only the poor children who were exploited or made to suffer, helpless due to their size. Mr. Murdstone physically abused David due to his actions and inability to learn at Murdstone's preferred rate, and when remembering his time at Salem House, his first school, he also mentions several cases of physical abuse. In *Great Expectations*, the novel makes the reader immediately aware of Pip's powerlessness as a child in the book's opening chapters, Magwitch lifts and turns Pip upside-down, Pip's life thus being in Magwitch's hand in the most literal sense, and Magwitch further threatens Pip into performing the act of stealing against his will. Pip's life at home is not much better, as he, in the story, reveals himself to be quite physically powerless there as well, where in the introductory scene with his sister, in charge of the household, sees her first action towards Pip in the novel being throwing him, as he "often served her as a connubial missile," (p.9) at Joe. In contrast to Pip's powerlessness as a child, the adult Orlick, a journeyman, shows up to work for Joe, and he is ready to yell back at Pip's sister without fear of repercussion, and in later killing her, he shows his physical superiority to both Pip's sister, and Pip the child.

Alice, in her trip through Wonderland, remains the same age throughout the novel, but her size is in a state of change several times throughout the story. This further explores

the restrictive nature size has on individuals and their ability or determination to act in the world. There is an early example of this in the story, found in Chapter 4, where the rabbit mistakes Alice for his servant, sending her on an errand. Alice, being “so much frightened” in her vulnerable form, panics and immediately does as the rabbit tells her. It does not take long, however, before she once again finds a drink, which she immediately decides to drink knowing that “*something* interesting is sure to happen” and she also hints at frustration of her vulnerability by continuing: “I do hope it’ll make me grow large again, for really I’m quite tired of being such a tiny little thing.” (p.32) As it turns out that she is indeed correct, she grows several times over and as the rabbit comes looking for her, it is pointed out that Alice “trembled till she shook the house, quite forgetting that she was now about a thousand times as large as the Rabbit, and had no reason to be afraid of it.” (p.33) Alice, being a child, is not used to be in the position of power that comes from a superior physical size and takes a moment to register that she is now able to resist the influence of forceful adults, which she indeed also does. The final statement on childhood and perception of size during Alice’s adventures in Wonderland can be seen in her last scene in Wonderland during the trial where it is stated: “‘Who cares for you?’ said Alice, (she had grown to her full size by this time.) ‘You’re nothing but a pack of cards!’” (p. 108) In having grown to her full size, she is no longer afraid of the world’s authority, since they are only a deck of cards in size, showcasing a perceivable relation between size and power.

## **5.2 The Adult Space - Home**

Children, being so biologically and psychologically different from adults, find themselves inhabiting a world of rules, which to them, might seem both strange and almost incompatible with their situation. They must adapt to the adult world they inhabit, one step at a time, both as they themselves develop mentally and can understand more complex concepts, and as their biological bodies grow to be more in line with those of the adults around them, and the social world, created by adults. In time, they no longer have to

desperately use their entire bodies to climb the steps, but are able to, just like the adults, easily walk up them using their own two feet.

Even at home, a child experiences a world ruled by the adults of the space, a power structure generally consisting of at least one of the usual adults featured in a household: a mother, a father, and perhaps an older sibling. Even people outside of the core family, like acquaintances or siblings of the parents, can be shown to have more control over the home space than a child, and thus, to some degree, even the child, restricting the space children can inhabit in their own homes.

Two similar examples of child powerlessness at home are the case of David in *David Copperfield* after Mr. Murdstone marries his mother and the case of the orphaned Jane Eyre, the titular girl in the work by Charlotte Brontë. David's childhood starts with an idyllic time together with his mother in their house, without much restriction. This changes after his mother meets Mr. Murdstone, whom she eventually marries. David foreshadows the struggles at home the marriage would bring for him by, after their first meeting, commenting that "At this minute I see him turn round in the garden, and give us a last look with his ill-omened black eyes, before the door was shut." (p. 31)

Despite initially being an outsider, Mr. Murdstone and his sister quickly take control of the household after he marries David's mother, quickly established by the dialogue "'It's very hard,' said my mother, 'that in my own house—' 'My own house?'" repeated Mr. Murdstone. 'Clara!' 'Our own house, I mean,' faltered my mother, evidently frightened" (p.60) The ever-looming presence of the Murdstones makes David feel uneasy in his own home, having initially been indirectly threatened by Murdstone that he would be beaten if he did not obey. Ultimately, the Murdstones trigger a nervousness in David, which causes him to fall behind in his studies, giving Murdstone an excuse to manifest his physical dominance, by giving David a beating before deciding upon sending him to a school. This essentially takes away a space David could be perceived to have more right to be in than Murdstone himself, yet Murdstone's physical and argumentative dominance has given him the right to decide upon the laws of the home space, disempowering David to the degree that he ultimately must give up on it.

As David returns home over the holidays, the Murdstones further alienate David from his own home. Upon returning home, his mother is holding an infant, his brother, whom the Murdstones may consider a superior replacement to David, as Miss Murdstone does not like David's mother comparing the infant to David or David interacting with him. Perhaps to them, the baby represents something untainted they can mould in whichever fashion they want to replace the disobedient David, then making sure to let David know that they do not desire for him to be at home by keeping a calendar, Miss Murdstone growing more jovial with each passing day, as it gets closer to the time David must return to school. By further controlling which actions David could perform, which spaces he could inhabit, which people in the household he was allowed to talk to, David finally starts feeling truly miserable and unwelcome in his own home, stating "What meals I had in silence and embarrassment, always feeling that there were a knife and fork too many, and that mine; an appetite too many, and that mine; a plate and chair too many, and those mine; a somebody too many, and that I!" (p.132) concluding "I was not sorry to go" upon leaving for school again.

*Jane Eyre*, written by Charlotte Brontë and published in the year 1847, three years prior to *David Copperfield*, follows a narrative which closely resembles that which has also been discussed in the sections regarding *David Copperfield*. *Jane Eyre*, much like *David Copperfield*, is an orphan who finds herself on the precipice of gentility, too poor to take care of herself, no money to her name. *Jane Eyre* is one of the earliest examples of a novel which takes the childhood experience into consideration from a child's perspective, showing the systematic oppression of children in nineteenth century England. While it was published after Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, which showed the struggles of children living in poverty, *Jane Eyre* is one of the earliest examples of childhood experiences told in the first person, adding a layer of authenticity and sympathy to the pleads and lament of the children.

Much like the later adventures of Alice, *Jane Eyre* breaks literary tradition by having a child protagonist who rebels against the adult world she finds herself in. While *David Copperfield* is put into a miserable situation after Mr. Murdstone intrudes on his home space, *Jane Eyre* is orphaned from birth and becomes the alien element in the home

of her new family at Gateshead Hall. Jane establishes early on that the relationship between her and Mrs. Reed, as well as her cousins, Eliza, Georgiana, and John, is one where her rebellious nature and her position as an unwanted orphan sours the relationship between her and her benefactors.

The said Eliza, John, and Georgiana were now clustered round their mama in the drawing-room: she lay reclined on a sofa by the fireside, and with her darlings about her (for the time neither quarrelling nor crying) looked perfectly happy. Me, she had dispensed from joining the group; saying, “She regretted to be under the necessity of keeping me at a distance; but that until she heard from Bessie, and could discover by her own observation, that I was endeavouring in good earnest to acquire a more sociable and childlike disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner—something lighter, franker, more natural, as it were—she really must exclude me from privileges intended only for contented, happy, little children.” “What does Bessie say I have done?” I asked. “Jane, I don’t like cavillers or questioners; besides, there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner. Be seated somewhere; and until you can speak pleasantly, remain silent.” (Brontë, p. 9-10)

While *Jane Eyre* in its entirety can be considered as a form of feminist manifesto for the rights of women and women’s right to pursue careers, the early parts of the novel gives a loud voice to children, exploring the ways in which they are mistreated and their powerlessness in the world, all from their own child perspective. Jane is “dispensed from” the warmth of the family and the fireplace due to her lacking a “more sociable and childlike disposition.” Jane is acting outside of her social boundaries; according to Mrs. Reed, and Victorian society at large, children are not supposed to question authority or in any way bother the adults. Their existence seems meant to be “pleasant.” Jane merely asking what it is she has done wrong is taken as her challenging authority, her aunt responding: “there is something truly forbidding in a child taking up her elders in that manner.”

Jane is also seen as inferior to her cousins, John remarking “You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense” (p. 13) showing how early concepts of class and the competitive nature amongst each other is instilled in children. Even the servants regard Jane as someone inferior to the other children, remarking “you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep.” (p. 15) When she finally gets the opportunity to speak her mind regarding her childhood experiences as

she experiences them, she narrates “How much I wished to reply fully to this question! How difficult it was to frame any answer! Children can feel, but they cannot analyse their feelings; and if the analysis is partially effected in thought, they know not how to express the result of the process in words.” (p. 29) After a fight with her cousin, and further exchanges with her aunt, Jane becomes further alienated from her family and forced into a further isolated existence. Her childhood loneliness and question of class identity is further paralleled in her adult life, as she initially, upon leaving school, becomes a governess. A governess serves as a surrogate mother, usually without children of her own. Socially, she is of almost equal class to her employer, yet she is a working woman, which puts her below the girls of the same class in the family, who are raised to be ‘ladies,’ unless the family in question only recently managed to climb the social ladder. She is seen as superior to the servants of the house, yet at dinner, she is rarely invited to eat with her employers, and is most likely served dinner after the ladies of the house. Furthermore, they would often spend their evenings alone, adding to the lonely and isolated lifestyle. (Hughes, 2014)

### **5.3 The Child and the Adult World – Society**

A child’s safety upon leaving home is completely predicated upon the laws put in place and the decency of other human beings in the social space the child travels through. A child leaving home without adult supervision is completely at the mercy of the people surrounding him or her and, without proper funding or resources, the ability to travel might be minimal.

*David Copperfield* is a story with many double occurrences. David marries twice, he goes to two different schools, and most relevant for this section of the thesis, he has two first experiences of London, one as a child and one in his late adolescence. Dickens makes the reader aware of David’s vulnerability and inability to work as an independent agent in his childhood as he leaves for school for the first time. As David is unaware of how transportation works, the carrier must instruct him how he is to reach his destination, and once David reaches his first stop, a waiter immediately swindles him out of his dinner,

as well as some money, as the waiter takes advantage of David's trust and inexperience. The adult David, retroactively narrating the story speaks of the situation thus: "I am inclined to believe that with the simple confidence of a child, and the natural reliance of a child upon superior years (qualities I am very sorry any children should prematurely change for worldly wisdom), I had no serious mistrust of him on the whole, even then." (p. 81) further emphasising the vulnerabilities of children and the need of adults to take proper care of them.

David's initial stay in London, following the death of his mother and him being put in Mr. Murdstone's care, varies greatly from the experience of London as lived by the adult David. The London experienced by David Copperfield, the child, is marked by uncertainty and poverty, David's future unknown, and any ambition to become a learned gentleman slowly drifting away, as well as by the genteel bond of poverty he forms with Mr. Micawber. David spends his whole days working for a small amount of money, due to his age, letting the adults take advantage of him, as he initially has nowhere else to turn. David thus struggles to keep himself fed, and London is shown to be a place of suffering for the poor. As if one summarising allegory for his childhood in London, his attempt to reach his aunt in Dover is initialised by David in his inexperience failing to make a proper transaction, getting his money and property stolen, and as such, the natural workings of his world forces him to walk the entire way, while he constantly remains under a looming threat from the predatory adults on his travels.

The late adolescent youth David Copperfield, by contrast, leaves for London under far more pleasant conditions. For him, it is not about survival, but quite the opposite, as he leaves for London as "breathing-time" to widen his perspective. To mirror his past naïve self's first journey to Salem House, a building he at this point passes by on his journey to London, one of his first encounters on this journey is that of another waiter. While the first encounter David had with a waiter showed David's inexperience and how easily fooled children can be, his second encounter with a waiter is an example of inexperience amongst the adolescent. Having obtained some "worldly wisdom," David tries to act mature, but is unable to fully control the situation in his bashfulness.

Much unlike his childhood experience in London, David's first order of business after his meal is to go to the theatre and much unlike his childhood stay in London, where his primary acquaintance was Mr. Micawber, a man representing the struggles of the poor genteel, David upon leaving the theatre and returning to hotel encounters Steerforth, his upper-class idol, who shows David his inexperience, by getting him a better room at the hotel, showing that those who can be taken advantage of or provided a lesser service, will be.

While London for the young David represented a dead end, his deteriorating expectations being represented through the ever more economically struggling Mr. Micawber, the adult David found London to be a place of opportunity. The young David had to move into a depressingly cramped space as a lodger at the Micawbers, while the adult David's first residence in London was a set of chambers, to which David believed "was a wonderfully fine thing to have that lofty castle to myself." The young uneducated David had no means to become more financially secure in London, but the adult David had the means to develop skills in shorthand and get his works published in his attempts to better his financial situation, all while mingling with society's elite.

## **5.4 The Child in the World - Schools**

Victorian schools could be described as a microcosm of society, a world in which children are at the mercy of the absolute will of the adults, the teachers. Schools were not meant to just educate, but also discipline. Adults were to teach children the proper adult-child power relation, where children were not to question the adults and the adults were to tell children to do as told, at the risk of verbal and physical torment for the children as punishment if disagreeable behaviour occurred.

Dickens, social critic as he was, of course had much to say about the conditions children lived in within certain schools. Dickens clearly disliked how a large amount of the country's schools were being run and during his only audience with Queen Victoria, he was quoted as saying "our system of education was a wrong one" and in one of his

speeches, he was quoted as saying “The word ‘Schools...’ set me thinking [...] what are the sorts of schools I don’t like [...] I found them, on consideration to be rather numerous. [...] I don’t like the sort of school to which I once went myself.” (Collins, p. 7) His thoughts on schools left their fingerprints in his novels as over his career as a writer, the child characters he wrote were sent to roughly thirty different schools; most of these schools were portrayed in a negative light.

While *Great Expectation* does not go deeply into the topic of education, perhaps mostly being a showcase of the limited means for a lower-class child to get an education through the early chapters of Pip’s youth through the poorly run by Mr Wopsle’s great aunt and through the character of Joe who struggles with literacy due to childhood circumstances forcing him to work from an early age. Pip himself does not get any proper education until he moves up the social ladder, Dickens perhaps showing the contrast to plead for more reliable education for the lower classes. Dickens pulls far more inspiration from his own life in the writing of *David Copperfield* and the creation of Salem House. Much like Dickens, David went to two schools, Salem House, inspired by Mr Jones’s Wellington House Classical and Commercial Academy in Hampstead Road, followed by Dr Strong’s school, inspired by a school run by the Reverend William Giles Junior.

Dickens describes his old headmaster William Jones as “the most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know [and] one of the worst-tempered men perhaps that ever lived” and that his business was “to make as much out of us and to put as little into us as possible.” Other accounts from former students called him “A most ignorant fellow, and a mere tyrant” as well as “an ignoramus, as he demonstrated daily by taking the lowest class.” His staff was of meeker nature, underpaid ill-nourished men whose “very appearance was an implicit daily warning to the boys never to take up the life of learning.” (Collins)

Despite Charles Dickens’s father taking great interest in his son’s studies, it seemed like the great reputation of the school was deceiving him, and as Matthew Arnold is quoted by Collins as saying, regarding its fictional representation as Salem House: “Mr Creakle’s school... is the type of our ordinary middle class schools, and our middle class is satisfied that so it should be.” With his representation of Salem House in *David*

*Copperfield*, Dickens thus managed to create a contemporary realistic representation of the worst among the educational establishments available to the middle-class.

In the novel, Mr. Murdstone sends David to Salem House after David rebels against Mr Murdstone, as David does not live up to Mr Murdstones educational standards. Upon his arrival, David once again makes the reader aware of David's ignorance and the general place of Victorian children in the social hierarchy, as Dickens comically narrates David's meeting with Mr Mell: "I made him a bow and felt very much overawed. I was so ashamed to allude to a common-place thing like my box, to a scholar and a master at Salem House, that we had gone some little distance from the yard before I had the hardihood to mention it" (p. 84) Despite the rest of the middle-class world recognising Mr Mell being on the lower end of the social hierarchy, to a mere child like David, he is still a master at the establishment, deserving of all respect.

Through fragmented conversations and rumours, David and the reader are made aware of the hierarchy of the establishment early on in his school days. Mr Creakle, the headmaster of the establishment, sits at the top, reaping all the benefits from the unknowing parents, sending their children to a "reputable" school. Further down, the hierarchy takes a more complex turn as the teachers are technically Steerforth's superiors, yet he, as a far more economically stable person of wealth, and Mr Creakle's favourite student, seems to command more authority than the actual teachers. As Steerforth's mother puts it:

"It was not a fit school generally for my son," said she; "far from it; but there were particular circumstances to be considered at the time, of more importance even than that selection. My son's high spirit made it desirable that he should be placed with some man who felt its superiority, and would be content to bow himself before it; and we found such a man there." (Dickens, p. 305)

Thus, showcasing the ways children could utilise their family ties in combination with their own strong willpower, Steerforth transcends the adult-child power structure where the child is subjugated to the will of the adults. Further down the hierarchy are the teachers Mr. Sharp and Mr. Mell, Mr. Sharp being slightly above Mr. Mell in the hierarchy, as both Mr. Creakle and the other students treat Mr. Mell worse and with less respect, especially in the later stages of his stay at Salem House as its inhabitants find out that he is worse off

economically. Dickens makes sure to make the reader aware of the economic inferiority and poor conditions the staff live through, as David points out that Mr. Mell is dressed in boots of very poor condition, as well as Mr. Sharp using a second-hand wig. Mr. Mell's economic situation later strips him of all power within the establishment, the students disrespecting him and the headmaster firing him after they learn that his mother is in a poor house, further showcasing the strong class-centric views at the time, affecting one's standing in society.

Mirroring the sadistic behaviour of the real world Mr. Jones, Mr. Creakle is of a sadistic nature to an extreme degree, as retold by David:

“Half the establishment was writhing and crying, before the day's work began; and how much of it had writhed and cried before the day's work was over, I am really afraid to recollect, lest I should seem to exaggerate. I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite.[...] I am sure when I think of the fellow now, my blood rises against him with the disinterested indignation I should feel if I could have known all about him without having ever been in his power; but it rises hotly, because I know him to have been an incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held.” (Dickens, p. 100)

As the first term of David's studies at Salem House start, David presents Mr. Creakle as a man “standing in the doorway looking round upon us like a giant in a story-book surveying his captives.” David paints the beatings and sadistic nature of Mr. Creakle as something out of a tale of fiction as it is almost unbelievable that a man would want to cause such pain towards children. Yet, as stated in Collins, the comparisons to Mr. Jones are far more apt than perhaps expected from reality, as Mr. Jones showed several traits that he described as “Dickensian,” perhaps leaving an impression on the young Dickens in the way he would later create some of his characters. Not only is there Dickens's own words for these traits, but two of his schoolmates also stated that Jones would “stroke our heads and call us his dear boys' when loving mammas were around, but on ordinary days would charge down the schoolroom, striking right and left with his cane with an indiscriminate slash here and there” as well as their shared sadistic joy in tormenting “plump boys.”

Going back to Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, there are once again several similarities between the story of Jane and the story of David. Much like David seems to be sent away alone for school because he was deemed a nuisance at home by the family patriarch, so

too is Jane sent away in a similar manner by the matriarch of her home. While Jane's headmaster brands Jane as a liar when she arrives, David gets humiliated, his headmaster forcing him to wear a placate claiming he is a biter, showing how the words of the adults who sent them to the schools carried more weight than the words of the children. Jane, however, is redeemed from this situation thanks to the kindness of her teacher, Miss Temple. Much like how Dickens took inspiration from his own life when writing about David Copperfield and Salem House, so too did Brontë in her writing of Jane Eyre's time at the school of Lowood.

Charlotte Brontë grew up in a family of six children, her being the third oldest. Her father was an Anglican clergyman and the family lived in modest gentility. A few of the children would not survive into adulthood, however, and Charlotte found herself the oldest of the siblings after her two older siblings, Maria and Elizabeth, both died of consumption. These deaths were attributed to the poor living conditions at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge which Charlotte also cited as a factor in permanently stifling her growth and general health. These health issues and poor living conditions would come to form her main points of critique against schools in *Jane Eyre*.

The power dynamic and teacher characters in *Jane Eyre* are quite like those of *David Copperfield*, the headmaster being the powerful entity on top whose word is law, with teachers, well-meaning or not, being further down in the hierarchy, powerless to make any real decisions, but still having power over the pupils at the bottom. The head of Lowood in *Jane Eyre* is less of a sadist and more of a hypocrite. Partly based on the evangelical clergyman Carus Wilson who ran Cowan Bridge, Mr. Brocklehurst, the man who ran Lowood, ran it with similarly poor conditions for the children; by using harsh educational methods, punishing the body, one could save the soul of the sinful children.

Based on her own experience at the middle-class Cowan Bridge, Brontë transforms that experience into the institute for orphans and unwanted children known as Lowood in her novel. Jane, during her first day at Lowood, gets to experience similar things to that of the Brontë sisters, including humble, sloppily made meals like burnt porridge, as well as the teachers forcing the students outside in cold weather for outdoors exercise, the students poorly equipped to handle the weather in the cold winter months. Much like the

Brontë, Jane also experiences the cold affecting her indoor living, as cold winds penetrate the building, even freezing their washing water. This all culminates with the spread of typhus in the spring months, which “transformed the seminary into an hospital.” This is one of the few instances where the novel ever takes family relations into consideration, within the context of Lowood in *Jane Eyre*, as Jane says:

“The teachers were fully occupied with packing up and making other necessary preparations for the departure of those girls who were fortunate enough to have friends and relations able and willing to remove them from the seat of contagion. Many, already smitten, went home only to die: some died at the school, and were buried quietly and quickly, the nature of the malady forbidding delay.” (Brontë, p. 91-92)

This epidemic also results in the death of Helen Burns, one of Jane’s few friends, thought to be based on Charlotte’s sister Maria.

While in many ways similar, Brontë and Dickens present the issues of their contemporary education in different lights. While Dickens shows off the powerlessness of children in the face of cruel adults of corrupt character, con artists who manage to fool the middle-class parents, Brontë attacks the dogma imbued in the education system and brings up several questions regarding Christianity throughout the novel, as its religious themes are ever prevalent. While the views on childhood within Christianity had been challenged before by the likes of Rousseau, *Jane Eyre* was one of the first first-person narratives about a rebellious child who showed the religious educational experience from a child’s point of view. In placing her rebellious character in a highly religious educational establishment, contrasting Jane Eyre with the modest, tolerant Helena Burns, who is resigned to the educational system. Brontë further tries to drive a point home as she makes Mr. Brocklehurst into a constant hypocrite, who preaches suffering for the body for the salvation of the soul, while not seemingly practicing any of the values himself, only quoting the Bible in fragments, manipulating the Lord’s words to suit his needs, further trying to persuade the audience about how people can manipulate laws for injustice. A visual representation of the hypocrisy comes in the form of clothing, as the students of Lowood wear the humblest of attires:

“they appeared, all with plain locks combed from their faces, not a curl visible; in brown dresses, made high and surrounded by a narrow tucker about the throat, with little pockets [...] to serve the purpose of a work-bag: all, too, wearing woollen stockings and country-made shoes, fastened with brass buckles. Above twenty of those clad in this costume were full-grown girls, or rather young women; it suited them ill, and gave an air of oddity even to the prettiest.” (Brontë, p. 56)

Mr. Brocklehurst protests any kind of alteration to the clothing and hairstyles, saying: ““I have a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shame-facedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel” his hypocrisy contrasted against the backdrop of his daughters in the room, all dressed in the latest fashion. As for the children’s poor diet and suffering from hunger, he demonstrates selective reading of the Bible, declaring “If ye suffer hunger or thirst for my sake, happy are ye” (p. 75) paraphrasing Peter 3:14 but neglecting his own duties to feed the poor as they would have been presented in Matthew 25:40-46. (Davies, 2006)

Brontë and Dickens also both partake in some wish fulfilment on their parts, as after their child characters have suffered through similar experiences to their own, they set up improvements for the characters involved in the school world. While David has long left Salem House behind after meeting his aunt, as he goes to Dr Strong’s school thence, which reflects the second educational experience Dickens himself had, under Giles, where Giles encouraged Dickens in his work. Dickens’s sympathies for the teaching staff also shine through in the ending, where Mr. Peggotty informs David that Mr. Mell, then Dr Mell, has taken up teaching in Australia, the land of opportunity for so many of his characters, in a school he named Salem House, as if to illustrate not only the restoration of his own character, but the educational system. Likewise, after the epidemic in Lowood, Brontë finds a remedy for the mismanaged school by having public attention drawn to the school and as if listing how Brontë would have fixed her own childhood school, perhaps pleading for people to investigate schools in her contemporary, she states:

“Several wealthy and benevolent individuals in the county subscribed largely for the erection of a more convenient building in a better situation; new regulations were made; improvements in diet and clothing introduced; the funds of the school were intrusted to the management of a committee. Mr. Brocklehurst, who, from his wealth and family connections, could not be overlooked, still retained the post of treasurer; but he was aided in the discharge of his duties by gentlemen of rather more enlarged and sympathising minds: his office of inspector, too, was shared by those who knew how to combine reason with strictness,

comfort with economy, compassion with uprightness. The school, thus improved, became in time a truly useful and noble institution.” (Brontë, p. 99-100)

Brontë and Dickens thus managed to weave their grievances and thoughts on the middle-class school system into their books, based on their own experiences, offering some suggestions on how to improve the quality of both life and education for the children, as well as breeding sympathy for the middle-class English school-child.

## 6. Conclusion

The nineteenth century saw a rise in the middle class which led to the birth of authors with childhood experiences not before seen in literary fiction. Using their own childhood as references, the remnants of their memories from bitter experiences and injustices gave birth to several classics in literature still read to this day. While their memories were printed on pages, transformed by the author from a childhood memory, into the childhood that would form the spine of their characters, they were just that, memories. The question is if adults can ever fully understand a child, despite having been children themselves. The child characters of the novels live their reality, but despite being in the first person, narrated from the children's own perspective, the words are still written by the adult author from an adult perspective, carrying with it all the biases that entails for the childhood experience of the characters.

What were the factors in deciding a child's chance at success in Victorian England then? There are certain things present in all the novels analysed within this thesis. Aside from Alice, whose parents are irrelevant for her fantastical journeys, all the protagonists in the novels are orphans. A child that comes into the world is extremely vulnerable to the dangers of the world and must rely heavily on their parents to survive. By removing the parent characters, the authors show the readers a world in which the vulnerable child characters must rely on the society they live in to survive, all abused to some degree by the world's adults. Jane Eyre, due to her nature becomes undesired and sent to a school for unwanted children, where she and the other girls are mistreated by corrupt ruling prior to several children having to be sacrificed in an epidemic to garner the attention of helpful individuals. David, likewise, is seen as a nuisance who is also sent to school just to get him away from the house, and later, when his mother passes away, he becomes nothing more than cheap labour for Mr. Murdstone, who rules with the same uncompassionate dogma as Mr. Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre*. Finally, Pip, the lower-class boy, seemingly has no will of his own, but is swept along in life, to the tune of the adults around him. As a lower-class boy without any rights or expectations, he has no power to call upon to fulfil his own desires and could be the most helpless of these three children. Instead he is forced down the path laid down for him, to become Joe's apprentice and finally a blacksmith,

until he becomes a plaything of the upper-class Miss Havisham, making him desire for a future he cannot have. Magwitch later turns Pip into what is essentially his tool in his attempt to create a gentleman, which he of course agrees to, as the people of Satis House have already motivated him to pursue the path of a gentleman. Pip becomes a tragic character who's devoid of his own motivations, strung along due to the will of the adults in his life who pushes him along.

In the power dynamic of the novels, another factor that was constant throughout the novels was economic struggles and class relations. Pip throughout his journey is made aware of the power money carries and the services it provides, most of the problems in the novel and what Pip considered his only good deed during his time with expectations all being resolved by money. On the other hand, Pip also found that money caused a lot of problems for his emotional well-being. Class relations made it less desirable for Pip to show his lower-class roots, as he becomes more and more estranged from Joe and it is only towards the end of the novel when he loses his fortune and starts working for an honest living that he finds happiness. Likewise, Jane manages to rise to the role of governess thanks to her schooling, paid for by her disavowed relations, but as is shown, this is a role of peculiar nature in the class-based society, as she is technically an equal to the middle-class for whom she works, yet seen as an inferior due to her unladylike occupation of working. David too, channelling Dickens, feels ashamed at his working background, the lowest part of his life, as he works for Murdstone, being denied his middle-class birthright, not even considering the emotions of the lower-class children working in said factories, as if David's degradation is the only tragedy. Despite their best efforts, the three children are bound to the class-structures in their attempts to make it in the world, David having to seek help from his well-off aunt, Jane in a twist of fate having relations from whom she inherits money when they pass away, and Pip, being lured into a class-migration by an unknown benefactor, otherwise having no means to pursue his ambitions due to the limited means of the lower-class at the time.

Finally, there is also the matter of a child's own ability to make it in the world and the child's emotional stability. Dickens here presents two sharp contrasts with David and Pip. David, as a middle-class boy, fallen from grace, manages to get his life back on track

thanks to his aunt and manages to go to a good school, without much conflict in his developing years. Meanwhile, Pip, the helpless lower-class child, written into existence more than a decade after David, is cast not into a tale of a hero who succeeds in his class, but a tale of moral redemption. Starting with the guilt from when Magwitch forces him to steal a pie, to the snobbishness he develops during his visits to Satis House, Pip is emotionally tormented throughout the novel, his great expectations coming to an end when he learns that even his fortune was born from a criminal mind, his class migration being a crime against the societal rules. Throughout the novel, Dickens shows in Pip's first-person narrative the sense of guilt in the actions Pip takes. Only after his redemption at the back end of the novel can he fill the emptiness of his soul.

The adventures of Alice are two other cases of the emotional struggles of children, as it in two stories goes through the emotional and intellectual awakening of a child. Alice also shares several traits with Jane Eyre, as they are both rebellious children, speaking out against the injustice and silencing of children in their respective worlds. This might also explain why the two show an ambitious side of women, where Alice tries to become a queen and Jane is shown advertising for work after her education, as well as running a school. Despite Alice's adventures showing little reflection on her emotional state and its application in the Victorian reality she lived in, it instead shows the impact her contemporary culture has on her own mind. Children, starting from nothing, must adapt to the culture they are born into, or else, like in Jane's case, being treated as if they are behaving improperly, losing the favour of the adults in their society.

When it comes to the question of agency, a child's ability to act in the world, they are not only limited by their social status and economic power inherited from their parents, they are also motivated and shaped by their surroundings. Throughout their lives, children are told by their parents, teacher, and other adults in their lives what is proper, what occupations are worth pursuing, what values to hold in life; even when children consume media, such as books, they are most likely books written by adults, through the lens of adult life, injected with values created by the adults in the society they were written in. Child culture thus comes to a head with the adult world it must wrestle, represented in its chaotic nature through Alice's journeys, the rules and the adult world seemingly

incomprehensible from a child's point of view. The child cannot, however, fully be a product of his or her environment, as aspects of culture and certain values change over time within communities. Likewise, as seen in the novels covered within the thesis, the children possess the ability to criticise and go against adults, the children later entering adulthood, reflecting upon what they consider incorrect adult behaviour, much as how parts of the writing by Brontë and Dickens could be seen as a result of poor treatment of children they initially observed during their own childhoods, them trying to change the education system for future generations of children.

There is also the matter of power structures within the child space as well, perhaps most visible in *David Copperfield*. As David enters school he becomes acquainted with Steerforth who, several years his elder, still technically a child, commands authority on a higher level than David, taking on qualities of a leader none of the other children truly can challenge. Furthermore, due to Steerforth's nature and upper-class background, he is even able to challenge the adults around him. Contrasted against David's comparatively helpless situation, one can observe a stark contrast between their ability to act in the world. Likewise, as David grows older, his relationship with the adult world changes, and he has an easier time to interact with it. As the child draws closer to adulthood, so too does the child's agency start to resemble that of an adult. After all, a youth at the age of sixteen is most likely more capable to interact and navigate the adult world than a child at the age of five, while also having a better understanding of the power structures of the world. The question that remains is: when does a child truly become an adult?

Considering the impact of the culture and the values of the people which surround the child have on shaping the child's will to act, and the social structures the child must work through from within in navigating the world, further research on the subject would be a comparison of children's ability to act in other contemporary cultures and to look at what those cultures say about childhood and child rights. In the English-speaking world, one could look at such authors as Mark Twain and Rudyard Kipling, and their works to get a sense for the perception of childhood in other parts of the world and a child's ability to act in the colonies at the time, different power structures in play, with other views on the class systems, race, money, and so on.

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## **Svensk sammanfattning – Swedish summary:**

I denna avhandling behandlas barndom i 1800-talets England. De attityder och värderingar man hade i relation till barndom formade den verklighet det dåtida barnet upplevde. Målet med denna avhandling är att se hur dessa attityder gentemot barndom och den barndom och de värderingar de författare som behandlas i avhandlingen upplevde format deras verk, samt hur den verklighet romanernas karaktärer upplevde reflekterar den samtida världen och den barndom. Tyngd har även lagts på barnens möjlighet och förmåga att agera i enlighet med deras egen vilja. De böcker som huvudsakligen analyserats i denna avhandling är *Jane Eyre* av Charlotte Brontë, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* och *Through the Looking-Glass* av Lewis Carroll, samt *David Copperfield* och *Great Expectations* av Charles Dickens.

Bägge av Charles Dickens verk innehåller barnkaraktärer som blivit vuxna vid romanens slut. Således ser man deras utveckling från barn till vuxna och det är möjligt att se hur barnens möjligheter att agera utvecklas med deras ålder. En aspekt som genomsyrar bägge böckerna är det brittiska klassamhället som präglade den viktorska världssynen. David Copperfield i verket av samma namn växer upp i en medelklassfamilj men blir borttvingad från sin skolgång när hans mor dör, varpå hans styvfar tvingar honom till fysiskt arbete i en fabrik i London. Vid detta tillfälle märks element av klasskillnad, eftersom David med sin medelklassbakgrund känner sig berättigad att ta sig ut ur den situation han hamnat i, medan det är mer naturligt att de barn som var del av fattigare familjer arbetade. Tack vare sin faster lyckas dock David ta sig ut ur denna situation och kan åter satsa på en utbildning, vilket visar hur stor del av ett barns liv påverkas av de vuxna i deras omkrets. Likaledes uppmärksammas klassdynamiken i *Great Expectations* när dess huvudperson, Pip, som uppfostrats av sin fattiga syster får reda på att han kommer skänkas en förmögenhet av en anonym välgörare. Under romanens tidiga skeden blir Pip bekant med Miss Havisham, en gammal dam som ständigt plågar Pip genom att göra honom medveten om hans låga ställning i samhället och Pip blir med det självmedveten och känner sig otillräcklig. Den klassmigration som Pip sedan upplever skapar en identitetskris som gör att han ständigt ifrågasätter sig själv och sina handlingar. Hans osäkerhet och oförmåga att agera efter

sina egna begär blir ett centralt tema i boken. Hans öde och tankar styrs och manipuleras konstant av andra människor i hans liv.

Frågor om identitet och ens plats i världen blir även en central del av Alices äventyr. I bägge av Carrolls verk är äventyren allegoriska och det nonsens Alice stöter på från de karaktärer hon möter blir en reflektion av den ologiska vuxenvärld barn upplever under sin uppväxt, med otaliga regler att lära sig och allvarigare verklighetskoncept i takt med att man växer upp. Alice ifrågasätter ständigt sin identitet som i samband med övriga teman i boken visar barns osäkerhet och deras kamp att hitta sin plats i världen.

Barns förmåga att agera enligt egen vilja var mycket begränsat i det viktorianska samhället, speciellt bland barn från de lägre klasserna, som ofta tvingades arbeta redan från en tidig ålder för att hushållets ekonomi skulle gå ihop. Barnet hade mindre makt i sitt eget hem än föräldrarna och även nära släktingar eller övriga vuxna kunde ha mer rättigheter i hushållet än barnen. Ett barn som rör sig i samhället utanför sitt eget hem är även relativt hjälplöst och sårbart och överlever nästan enbart tack vare de sociala regler som skyddar barn.

Skolan är i princip samhället i miniatyrformat i och med att barnen med sina begränsade rättigheter tvingas förlita sig på att de lärare som styr gör så rättfärdigt. Både Charles Dickens och Charlotte Brontë hade negativa erfarenheter av skolgång och bägge uttryckte detta i sina böcker. I *Jane Eyre* kritiserade Brontë skenhelighet och tolkningar av dogmer som ledde till barns lidande och även dödsfall i skolor baserade på hennes egna erfarenheter av dåliga levnadsvillkor för elever på skolor, där hon även fick erfara sin egna systers död. För Charles Dickens representerade den första skolan han gick i allt som var fel med skolor för medelklassen i form av en skola fylld med inkompetenta och sadistiska lärare som plågade barnen. Detta fick uttryck i *David Copperfield* där David skickades till skolan *Salem House*. Precis som för Dickens utsattes även David och hans klasskamrater för obefogade straff och vilket illustrerar den maktlöshet som barn upplever när de ställs mot vuxen auktoritet. Dock är det även under Davids skoltid som karaktären Steerforth introduceras. Till skillnad från David och de övriga barnen på skolan har han en viss auktoritet eftersom han är flera år äldre

än David och han kommer även från en överklassfamilj. Steerforth som karaktär illustrerar således vikten av ett barns bakgrund, ekonomiska situation och ålder vad gäller barnets förmåga att agera och utöva makt, både mellan barn och vuxna samt barn emellan.

Den barndom som presenterades i de verk som behandlats i denna avhandling har visat en värld av ovisshet och delvis hjälplöshet bland de barnkaraktärer som där finns. Den klasskillnad som syns i Dickens verk visar att ett barn inte bara till stor del redan vid sin födsel hade olika förutsättningar att lyckas i livet, utan även att ett barn i det viktorianska samhället stämplats som del av den klass barnet tillhör sedan födseln. Som medle av underklassen fick man antagligen aldrig en bra utbildning och läskunnigheten var därför mycket låg bland denna grupp. Detta reflekteras också i de böcker om barndom som skrevs under den viktorianska perioden och om ett barn stod i fokus så var det antagligen ett barn från medel- eller överklassen. Underklassbarn hade således inte bara svårt att uppnå en högre klassposition i samhället, utan de blev även nästintill osynliga i viktiga roller inom romaner.