



POTRAYAL OF EMPOWERMENT AND PATERNAL INFLUENCE IN CHARLES DICKENS DAVID COPPER FIELD.

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Abstract

This paper examines Charles Dickens David Copperfield through the lenses of children's literature, female empowerment, and the role of the father, employing various literary theories to explore these themes. Dickens' narrative, often celebrated for its vivid characters and social critique, provides fertile ground for analyzing the empowerment of female characters and the paternal influences that shape their destinies.

In David Copperfield, the portrayal of women such as Clara Peggotty and Dora Spenlow reveals Dickens' nuanced approach to female empowerment. Though traditionally limited by societal expectations, these characters exhibit resilience and autonomy in subtle but significant ways. The paper explores how these representations align with or diverge from contemporary notions of female empowerment, offering insights into Dickens' perspective on women's roles within the family and society.

Additionally, the novel's paternal figures, including Mr. Micawber and Mr. Peggotty, serve as critical agents in the development of both male and female characters. Their influence extends beyond biological parentage, highlighting the varying degrees of positive and negative paternal impact, contributing to the moral and emotional growth of the protagonists.

Employing literary theories such as feminist criticism and psychoanalytic theory, this analysis delves into the complexities of gender dynamics and paternal authority in "David Copperfield." By examining the intersection of

empowerment, gender, and fatherhood, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Dickens' work, illuminating its relevance to both historical and contemporary discussions on gender and familial roles in literature.

Keywords: social critique, Tertile ground, societal Expectations, Emotional growth, Gender Dyamnlic.

The novel is about the life of the eponymous David Copperfield from his childhood. It is a coming-of-age story that follows David's journey to maturity and is modeled after 18th century personal histories. The novel tracks themes of growth and change as well as social commentary on the rights of prostitutes, the class structure, the criminal justice system, schooling, and child labour. It also satirizes various aspects of Victorian life. The major conflict in *David Copperfield* is the titular character's struggle to become a man in a cruel world with little money and few people to guide him.

Mr. Mudstone abuses both David and his mother, sends David away to school, and forces him to work in a wine bottling factory. The moment David runs away from his difficult life in London and is adopted by his great aunt Betsey Trotwood is pivotal. David is unable to see through the thinly veiled villainy of his classmate Steerforth. David's foray into the adult world is marked by poverty after his aunt loses her money. David is also constantly worried that Uriah Heep will use his power over Mr. Wickfields to both assume control of his legal practice and marry Agnes against her will. David's journey is marked by struggles, setbacks, and triumphs. He faces adversity head-on, learning valuable lessons about life, relationships, and himself. Through his experiences, he develops a stronger sense of self identity and purpose.

David's relationships with others play a significant role in his growth and development. He learns to navigate complex webs of relationships, including friendships, romantic relationships, and family dynamics. He develops empathy, understanding, and compassion, becoming a better person and a more effective communicator. David's writing career also plays a crucial role in his evolution; his writing becomes a source of comfort, strength, and inspiration, helping him make sense of his life and the world around him.

The conclusion of *David Copperfield* is poignant and satisfying. David's story comes full circle with him reflecting on his life journey and the lessons he has learned. He realizes that his experiences, both good and bad, have shaped him into the person he is today. The conclusion is marked by a sense of closure, resolution, and new beginnings. He has come to terms with his past, forgiven those who have wronged him, and looks forward to the future. He is grateful for the people who have helped him along the way, including his great aunt Betsey, Mr. Micawber, and Agnes.

This research paper deals with *David Copperfield* through the dual lenses of feminist and psychoanalytic theories, focusing particularly on themes of female empowerment and fatherhood. Feminist theory examines how the literature perpetuates or challenges gender inequalities and stereotypes. Dora Spenlow represents the Victorian ideal of the "Angel in the House," a term coined by Coventry Patmore in his poem of the same name. Dora's character is infantilized and lacks agency, highlighting the restrictive expectations placed on women during this era. Her inability to manage household affairs or provide intellectual companionship for David underscores the limitations imposed on women. Her premature death can be interpreted as a critique of the unrealistic and damaging expectations of female perfection and passivity.

Agnes serves as a stabilizing force in David's life, offering emotional support and guidance. Through Agnes, Dickens presents a vision of female empowerment that challenges traditional gender roles and underscores the value of women's intellectual and emotional contributions. Agnes's empowerment lies in her intellectual and emotional strength. She effectively manages her father's business affairs, demonstrating competence and reliability. Agnes's empowerment is also evident in her role as David's confidante and advisor. By portraying Agnes as a source of strength and wisdom, Dickens challenges the notion that women are inherently weaker or less capable than men.

Betsey Trotwood is another figure of female empowerment, defying traditional gender roles with her strong will. Her decision to care for David after his mother's death demonstrates her independence and compassion. She maintains her autonomy and assertiveness, embodying a form of empowerment that rejects conformity and embraces self-determination. Betsey's financial independence and her ability to protect David from the Mudstones' future illustrate her empowerment. Her actions challenge traditional gender roles and highlight the potential for women to assert control over their lives and those they care about.

For example, when Mr. Wickfield's financial troubles escalate due to his association with Uriah Heep, Agnes takes charge of their household and supports her father emotionally. Her role extends beyond typical domestic duties, showcasing her competence in financial matters and her ability to maintain stability during crises. Agnes's strength lies not only in practical skills but also in her emotional intelligence, which influences David's growth and underscores her as a model of empowered femininity.

Betsey's confrontation with Mr. Mudstone, David's stepfather, illustrates her assertiveness and willingness to stand up against oppressive figures. Betsey's financial independence, inherited from her late husband, allows her to live independently and make decisions without relying on male approval or support. She takes on a maternal role in David's life after his mother's death, overseeing his upbringing. Betsey's financial independence and maternal authority challenge Victorian notions of women's dependence on male guardianship. Her decision to take charge of David's upbringing demonstrates that women can provide nurturing and authoritative guidance traditionally associated with paternal figures, subverting expectations of passive femininity.

Mr. Mudstone exercises strict control over David and his mother, imposing his will through emotional manipulation and physical punishment. Agnes actively shapes her own decisions and makes choices that align with her principles and values. Despite her love for David, she prioritizes her own well-being and refuses to compromise her integrity. Agnes's autonomy challenges the Victorian ideal of women as submissive and passive in romantic relationships. Her refusal to conform to traditional gender roles emphasizes her determination to live according to her own terms.

In this research paper, we explore how psychoanalytic theory elucidates the themes of female empowerment and fatherhood in *David Copperfield*. The part of the mind that houses thoughts, memories, and desires not readily available to conscious awareness but that significantly influence behaviour is a key concept in psychoanalytic theory. This theory also includes the idea of a child's unconscious sexual desire for the opposite-sex parent and

various strategies used to cope with reality and maintain self-image. Betsey Trotwood's strength and independence can be seen as a reaction to repressed experiences and desires. Her assertiveness and autonomy may stem from a need to assert control and power, compensating for past traumas. Agnes's role as a moral compass and caretaker may be driven by an unconscious need to find stability and approval, perhaps rooted in her relationship with her father, Mr. Wickfields. Her virtuous and self-sacrificing nature could be interpreted as a defence mechanism to cope with familial instability and her father's alcoholism. Clara's submissiveness and dependency on men might be understood as manifestations of repressed desires and fears. Her passivity and tragic fate highlight the psychoanalytic impact of living in a repressive and patriarchal environment.

David's relationship with various father figures reflects his unconscious attempts to resolve his Oedipal conflict and find a stable paternal presence. His interactions with figures like Mr. Mudstone, Mr. Micawber, and Mr. Peggotty can be seen as manifestations of his internal struggle with authority and identity. Mr. Peggotty's role as a father figure to both his niece Emily and nephew Ham after Emily's elopement can be seen as a manifestation of his unconscious desire to provide the stability and love that he may have lacked in his own life. Mr. Wickfield's struggle with alcoholism and his relationship with his daughter Agnes reveal the complexities of fatherhood and the impact of personal demons on familial relationships.

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Examples of psychoanalytic theory in the novel include Agnes consistently supporting David emotionally and intellectually throughout the novel, acting as a stabilizing force in his tumultuous life. Her calm demeanor and wisdom contrast with the more emotionally volatile characters, suggesting a mature integration of feminine qualities with a broader understanding of empowerment. Betsey's decision to raise David on her own after the death of his mother demonstrates her rejection of conventional female roles. Her strength and resilience are driven by her unconscious need to assert control over her life and protect those she cares about. Mr. Murdstone's harsh treatment of David stems from his rigid adherence to societal expectations of masculinity, and his authoritarian parenting style mirrors his own internal conflicts and unresolved traumas, influencing David's early perception of paternal authority. Mr. Micawber's unwavering support for David during difficult times reflects his own psychoanalytic journey towards self-discovery and personal growth. His ability to maintain hope and optimism in the face of financial hardship underscores the importance of emotional resilience in shaping paternal roles. David's fear and submission to Mr. Murdstone are early manifestations of his unconscious desire for paternal approval and acceptance; conversely, his affinity for Mr. Peggotty and Mr. Micawber can be seen as a solution to his need for positive paternal influences. Agnes Wickfield's nurturing qualities and emotional strength serve as a guiding force in David's life, providing him with stability and support. Mr. Murdstone's authoritarian behavior towards David can be interpreted as a reflection of his own unresolved psychological tensions and traumas. Mr. Murdstone's oppressive treatment of David highlights the destructive impact of authoritarian paternal figures, reflecting broader societal expectations and psychological dynamics. Mr. Micawber's resilience and optimism in the face of adversity provide David with emotional guidance and support, demonstrating Freud's concept of positive paternal influence and its role in identity formation. Agnes Wickfield's ability to transcend traditional gender roles through her intelligence and emotional strength challenges Victorian norms of femininity. Betsey Trotwood's financial independence and assertiveness challenge patriarchal norms, reflecting Freudian theories on

unconscious desires for autonomy and self-fulfillment.

Reference book:

Here are some reference books for David Copperfield:

1. "The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens" (Cambridge University Press, 2001)
2. "The Oxford Handbook of Charles Dickens" (Oxford University Press,)
3. "David Copperfield: A Sourcebook" (Routledge, 2004)
4. "The Dickens Encyclopedia" (Arthuriana, 2013).

