



COURSE CODE: MAEGD 104

COURSE NAME: FICTION I (EARLY TO  
JANE AUSTIN)

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND  
ONLINE EDUCATION  
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

**MASTER OF ARTS  
ENGLISH-BLOCK II**



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## **MAEGD-104 FICTION I (EARLY TO JANE AUSTIN)**

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Published by **The Director** on behalf of Centre for Distance and Online Education, Tezpur University, Assam.

# BLOCK II

**MODULE IV: CHARLES DICKENS**

**UNIT 8: TRENDS OF VICTORIAN NOVEL**

**UNIT 9: READING *DAVID COPPERFIELD***

**UNIT 10: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT**

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## **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

**MEG-104 Block II: Fiction I (Early to Jane Austin)** will make you familiar with another two trend setting novelists of Victorian Age, Jane Austen and Charles Dickens. This Block is consisted of Module III and Module IV, each of which contains the detail of the works of the abovementioned authors respectively.

**Module IV: Charles Dickens** will introduce you to yet another pioneer novelist of the time Charles Dickens. ***Unit 8: Trends of Victorian Novel*** will acquaint with an age that was marked by pressing social, political, religious and intellectual issues, an Age that also witnessed the rise of England as an Imperial power. Industrialization was at its height, but it was unregulated and unequal, which made the rich richer and the poor poorer. As literature is not isolated from its social set up, the study of this unit will help you to understand the conditions that accelerate to the creation of great novels like *David Copperfield*. ***Unit 9: Reading David Copperfield*** will help you to understand the novel by means of a detail summery of the book. Regarding this novel Dickens had written, "Like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child and his name is *David Copperfield*" in the preface to the 1867 edition, which makes the selected reading "David Copperfield" a much more interesting and valuable read. After reading of this unit a through reading of the text will be more fruitful for the learners. ***Unit 10: Critical Analysis of the text*** will allow you to understand why and how *David Copperfield* marks a turning point in the career of Charles Dickens as a novelist. This work is often considered as a "veiled autobiography" depicting the

reality of life during the times and is thematically and structurally contrasting to his later works.

To understand any work of literature a critical and analytical capability is much desired. Reading of fiction helps you to acquire such capability and our effort is to achieve that through these carefully structured study materials.

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## MODULE IV: CHARLES DICKENS

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## ***UNIT 8: TRENDS OF VICTORIAN NOVEL***

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Learning Objectives
- 8.2 The Victorian Age
- 8.3 Growth of the Victorian Novel
- 8.4 Trends of Victorian Novel
- 8.5 Summing Up
- 8.6 Assessment Questions
- 8.7 References and Recommended Readings

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### ***8.0 INTRODUCTION***

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The Victorian Age, stretched from 1837 till 1901, crediting England with much dramatic changes than the preceding Ages. Historians often divide this rather long period into three phases: Early Victorian (up to 1884), Mid Victorian (1884-70) and Late Victorian (1870-1901). An age of pressing social, political, religious and intellectual issues, this Age also witnessed the rise of England as an Imperial power. Industrialization was at its height, but it was unregulated and unequal, which made the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The writers of this Age were given the freedom to express, hence they showed quite mix reactions to industrialization in their works. While some celebrated the new changes, others questioned the benefits it reaped. However, wide range of literary figures came out with varied works during this period. Poets like Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Mathew

Arnold, Cristina Rossetti; essayists like Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Walter Peter etc. One of the most prolific periods of English literature, Victorian Age witnessed the unprecedented growth of the novel. This unit will particularly discuss the Novel as a new genre of literature.

### ***8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES***

After the reading of this unit, you will be able to learn,

- nature of Victorian Age.
- position of novels in the Victorian Age.
- identify the reasons that motivated the novelists in the Victorian Age.
- identify the trends of Victorian Novel.

### ***8.2 THE VICTORIAN AGE***

The period extending from 1832 to 1887 was essentially an age of stability and prosperity. The few wars that broke out, did not affect the material and industrial progress, and the people led a life free from the consequences of these wars. The effect of The French Revolution was also felt but that too dwindled, and England was safe from any kind of disturbance. It was during the Victorian period that Britain developed and evolved. Charles Dickens spent most of his active life during the reign of Queen Victoria.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, wealth in Britain was based on the profits from Industrial Revolution. Machine production was introduced, and factory was made the center of work. The expanding economic situation saw a rapid increase in the population. Life centered in the towns and cities which developed around the factories. The old, leisurely country ways of life declined, especially after the development of the railways in 1840. The growth of cities created many social

problems such as poor housing, crime, bad sanitation, poor education, disease, poverty and so on. Daily life in the mid-nineteenth century was often very hard for large sections of the people living in the city. Wages were low, families were large and houses often overcrowded. Even women and children were compelled to work in factories for long hours.

The Industrial Revolution created a division between the elite class comprising the capitalists and the mill- owners, and the working class comprising the dissatisfied labourers and workers of the factories. A wave of social unrest swept over England and desperation struck the lives of the poor.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **Industrial Revolution**

The Industrial Revolution was the transition to new manufacturing processes in the period from about 1740 to about 1850 in Britain and from 1815 to the end of the nineteenth century in Europe. The term “Industrial Revolution” was coined by Auguste Blanqui, a French economist, in 1837 to denote the economic and social changes arising out of the transition from industries carried in the homes with simple instruments, to industries in factories with power-driven machinery in Britain, but it came into vogue when Arnold Toynbee, the great historian, used it in 1882.

However certain political changes brought in a ray of hope. The Great Reform Act of 1832 allowed more people to vote, and this considerably altered the Parliament, when Dickens began work there as a reporter. Dickens was deeply concerned with the social conditions of his time. This is evident in his journalism and charitable works as well as in his novels. One of the main reasons for Dickens’ popularity was his serious and compassionate interest in the welfare of the masses. He was always determined to attack any social evil which made their lives unhappy. As a result most of

his novels deal with social issues. The deplorable state of the prison for debtors, the despicable condition of elementary education and the abuse of children are the various aspects of England, highlighted by Dickens in his novels.

This age therefore, witnessed vigorous social reforms which brought in a consciousness that was democratic among the Victorian people. England witnessed expansion in the field of education. The passing of the Education Act was a landmark in the history of education in the country. A large reading public was prepared to welcome the outpourings of novelists, poets and social reformers. An unprecedented intellectual and scientific advancement was witnessed during this age. But the general tenor of life was still governed by religious and moral considerations. The Victorians were moralists at heart, and religion was the anchor of their lives.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **The Great Reform Act 1832**

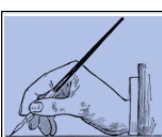
This is the first Reform Bill in England that primarily served to transfer voting privileges from the small boroughs controlled by the nobility and gentry to the heavily populated industrial towns. The Bill aimed to make a balance in representation between traditionally enfranchised rural areas and the rapidly growing cities of newly industrial England. For example, the sparsely populated county of Cornwall returned 44 members, while the City of London, with a population exceeding 100,000, elected only 4 members.

#### **The Oxford Movement**

Oxford movement, 19th-century movement initiated and developed at the University of Oxford that sought a renewal of “catholic,” or Roman Catholic, thought and practice within the Church of England in opposition to the Protestant tendencies of the church with this argument that the Anglican Church is historically the true catholic church. Subsequently, a law was passed that removed most of the restrictions formerly imposed on Roman Catholics.

John Henry Newman (1801–90), Richard Hurrell Froude (1803–36), John Keble (1792–1866), and Edward Pusey (1800–82) were main exponents of this movement.

The Oxford movement represents the revival of the old Roman Catholic religion and the authority of the church, at a time when science was challenging the religious thought of the time. Victorians laid emphasis on order, decorum and decency. To talk of duty and honour, the obligation of being a gentleman, the responsibilities of matrimony and the sacredness of religious belief was to be Victorian. They sought a happy compromise when they were faced with radical problems, which would not hurt their reason and intellect, but would restore their faith and belief in some ultimate purpose. In spite of many a negative social changes, this age was a glorious epoch in the history of England.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Write three features of Victorian Social System

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### **8.3 GROWTH OF THE VICTORIAN NOVEL**

The English novel entered a new phase in its history in the Victorian age. It became a popular medium for expressing and at

the same time subverting the rapid progress witnessed in various fields. There was expansion in commerce, industry and finance. In contrast to this picture of commercial expansion, was the mushroom growth of the new industrial cities, the dirty and unhygienic slums, the abuse of labourer, often of women and children. These evils of Industrial Revolution were highlighted by writers such as Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Dickens and Mrs. Elizabeth Gaskell.

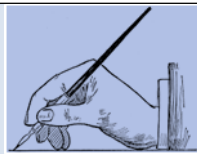
Benjamin Disraeli was concerned with social issues. His famous novel *Sybil* (1845) exposes abuses inherent in the relations between capital and labour, and presents a horrifying picture of the lives of the working class.

Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell was also deeply interested in exposing the social problems of the age. Being the wife of a Unitarian clergy, she came into direct contact with industrial and social difficulties growing out of the struggle between employer and employee. *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) give a realistic picture of the tribulations caused by Industrial Revolution as seen from the employee's point of view.

The novels of Charles Dickens belong to the humanitarian movement, and he set out to attack abuses in society with the aim of bringing in reformation in the existing system of things. Dickens was an advocate of the weak and the exploited. In his *David Copperfield* (1850), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39) and *Great Expectations* (1860-61), he describes the painful experiences of his life in London. As a painter of individual portraits he is only next to Shakespeare, and his novels are portraits of sympathy and pathos for human nature.

William Makepeace Thackeray was regarded as a rival of Dickens. He was essentially a social satirist and a realist. His world is the world of London society. Thackeray writes 'novel of ideas',

donning the role of a preacher, moralizing over the foibles of English society. Irony was his chief weapon, and even if he had to interrupt a story, he always found time to drive home a lesson. His important novels are *Vanity Fair* (1847) and *Henry Esmond* (1852). George Eliot a keen observer of man and society caused further development in the English novel by including philosophical dissertations on current topics. Eliot dealt with religion, politics and social conventions and provided pictures of the provincial life she experienced as a girl. Her important novels are *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861) and *Middlemarch* (1871-72).



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name the important novelists of Victorian period.

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2. Mention three negative impacts of Industrial Revolution.

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3. What is the primary theme of Thackeray's novels?

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#### **8.4 TRENDS OF VICTORIAN NOVEL**

The Victorian novelists can be divided into (a) Early Victorian Novelists, and (b) the Later Victorian Novelists based on their style of writing and the time they wrote. The novelists of the first half were in tune with the common masses. Their novels portrayed the lives of the common man with unfailing diligence. These novelists identified themselves with their age and were the spokesmen of their times. The works were not just praise but also corrective criticism of the period. Works of Dickens and Thackeray are perfect examples of the criticism and a mirror of the times.

The later Victorian novelists were extremely critical in their view of the time and their works were also hostile to the dominant assumptions of the period. Works of Hardy are seen to attack the notion of Victorian morality and the institution of marriage; Samuel Butler's works bring forth Victorian taboos and conventions, and as for the works of Henry James, they were pieces of art that went against conventions. But it is an undeniable fact that the works of the Victorian novelists were far more related to the reading public than their predecessors and even their successors.

The trends that are quite common in the Victorian Novel are

##### ***The Conventional Plot***

The plots in the Victorian novels are generally not gripping and are ill-constructed. The main outline of the Victorian novel is more or less the same, with a large array of characters and incidents clustering round the figure of the hero along with the wedding

bells at the end of the plot. The Victorian novelists though stand out in regards to their imagination that can transform the dullest of settings into the most colourful and vibrant location. The Victorian novelists also love the blend of sentiments and melodrama. These elements make the plot stand low and fail to connect each incident and character as an integral part of the whole.

### ***Entertainment Value***

Victorian novels are always an interesting read as the novelists are great story-tellers. They infuse entertainment into every element of the novel which appeals to the wide spectrum of readers.

### ***Panoramic Nature***

The Victorian Novels are about society. The novelists are not satisfied by just concentrating upon the life of a principle few but rather provide a wide angle shot of the society at large.

### ***Immense Variety***

David Cecil commented on the Victorian novelists, “They write equally for the train journey and for all time; they crowd realism and fantasy, thrills and theories, knock-out farce and effects of pure aesthetic beauty, cheek by jowl on the same page; they are Mr. Galsworthy and Mr. Huxley and Mrs. Woolf, Mrs. Christie and Mr. Woodhouse, all in one.” The novelists express the variety of human emotions and provide a holistic view.

### ***Humour***

Humour is an essential element of the Victorian novel and is used by each novelist in their own creative way. Each Victorian character has a comic bent, unique in its own that helps the characters to become immortal like Mr.

Micawber and Mrs. Payser shall forever be the immortal figures of fun.

### ***Characterisation***

Characterisation is used as an expression in the Victorian novel. The Victorians have created characters that live. Each character is an individual, living their own existence, and dwelling in the memory of the reader forever.

### ***Creative Imagination***

The Victorian Novelist reaps from their personal experiences and transforms each situation into a creative piece of literature. “Their renderings of the real world are not photographs, but pictures, coloured by their individual idiosyncrasies, vivid and vital. Often the picture is fanciful and romantic. At other times, it sticks close to the facts of actual existence, but these facts are always fired and coloured by the writer’s individuality. The act of creation is always performed. Dickens is, “the romance of London streets” and Thackeray, too, transports us to an entirely new world, call it *Vanity Fair* or Thackeray land or what you will. The creative imagination of the Victorian novelists works on the setting of his story and transforms it.” (Anand Mundra, 2012) The creative imagination of the Victorian writer touches the hearts of the readers and lingers long in the memory.

#### Salient features of Victorian Novel

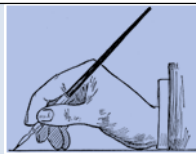
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### ***Technical Weakness***

The Victorian novels lack uniformity as it was mainly considered as a medium of light entertainment. *David Cecil* observes, “Because it was in its first stage, it was bound to be technically faulty. It had not yet evolved its own laws; it was still bound to the conventions of the comic stage and heroic romance from which it took its origin, with their artificial intrigues and stock situations and forced happy endings. Because it was looked on as light reading, its readers did not expect a high standard of craft nor did they mind it if it had occasional lapses; especially as they themselves had no traditions of taste by which to estimate it.”

### ***One-sided View of Life***

A partial, one-sided view of life is what the Victorian novels provide. They are literal manifestations of the Victorian prudery and “Drawing the blinds and lowering the voice” atmosphere.



#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. What is a conventional plot?

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2. What do you understand by ‘panoramic nature’ of Victorian fiction?

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### **8.5 SUMMING UP**

This Unit provides a non-partisan yet focused view of the Victorian Age (1830-1901). The Victorian Age in many ways reflected values that Queen Victoria herself espoused: moral responsibility and domestic propriety along with the rise of Britain as an Imperial power. Industrialization was at its zenith during the period and art did flourish. The unit progresses from introducing the Victorian Age to the learners which helps to understand the times, the customs, the traditions and mindset of people of the given age to the growth of the English novel. This section looks into the importance of the novel and how it became a popular medium of expression. It then focuses its attention on the writers and their area of expertise which further helps to understand the importance of the novel as the most popular genre. The novel suited the authors who wanted to capture the wide diversity of industrial life and the class conflict and divisions that industrialism created and depict its effect on normal functioning of life.

The section is followed by the trends of Victorian novels that try to briefly encapsulate the most common trends used by the novelists in order to portray their thoughts into words. The trends depict the imperfections of the novelists and their work but at the same time touch upon their creativity and imagination. The plots were melodramatic and conventional, construction was loose and there were quite a number of technical lapses. The novels also lacked high artistic standards but had merits, which made the Victorian novel stand out and reach out without the limitation of time and space. The entertainment it provided, creative imagination, and incomparable gift of humour make the Victorian novel timeless and priceless.

**LET US STOP AND THINK**



Much Victorian nonfiction prose is marked by a sense of urgency, which reflects the pace of change of the age: many authors felt that society would, at some point, be overwhelmed by change and descend into some form of what Matthew Arnold called simply "anarchy".



The Victorian period saw enormous growth in periodicals of many kinds. Many famous novelists, like Charles Dickens, for example, published their work not in book form at first but in serial instalments in magazines.

Nonfiction prose writing gained wide readership during the Victorian period (due again to the vibrant periodical culture). No less, authors were attracted to nonfiction prose as the best vehicle for addressing—in a direct and specific way—the problems of industrial England and, in some cases, for proposing solutions to these problems.

Nonfiction prose authors (who were often writers of fiction and poetry as well) tackled subjects that were as diverse as the age itself, including politics, religion, art, economics, and education.

Gothic novels were at their peak. Some of the best were written in this era, think of *Dracula* and the works of Edgar Allan Poe.

## 8.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. What are the reasons for the popularity of the Victorian Novel?
2. Sketch the growth of the Victorian novel.
3. Discuss the trends of the Victorian Novel and how they define the novel at large.
4. Trace the extent to which the Industrial Revolution marked a difference in the Victorian Age.



## 8.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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## **UNIT 9: READING *DAVID COPPERFIELD***

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Learning Objectives
- 9.2 Charles Dickens: Life and Works
- 9.3 Reading the novel *David Copperfield*
- 9.4 Themes of the Novel
- 9.5 Summing Up
- 9.6 Assessment Questions
- 9.7 References and Recommended Readings

### **9.0 INTRODUCTION**

*David Copperfield* marks a turning point in the career of Charles Dickens as a novelist. This work is often considered as a “veiled autobiography” depicting the reality of life during the times and is thematically and structurally contrasting to his later works. Dickens had written, “Like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is David Copperfield” in the preface to the 1867 edition, which makes the selected reading “David Copperfield” a much more interesting and valuable read.

### **9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After reading of this unit you will be able to

- learn about the life and works of Charles Dickens and Dickens as a novelist.
- analyse the novel as a representative of the social, economic and cultural ethos of the period.



- know the major themes of and other critical approaches to *David Copperfield*.

## **9.2 CHARLES DICKENS: LIFE AND WORKS**

Charles Dickens was born on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1812 at Port Sea. His father John Dickens, a clerk, was affectionate and generous, but lacked in thrift and foresight. Charles was the second of six children and was the eldest among the sons. Ill- health prevented him from participating in the usual children games, and he spent his time reading novels. In 1822 John Dickens was transferred to London, where he faced acute financial crisis and was sent to prison for debt. His family joined him but Charles however remained outside, and was forced to accept work in a blacking factory on the Thames waterfront. His job was to wrap and label the pots of blacking *i.e.* boot polish. He was deeply affected by the double shock of shame and misery of his family, and his own disgust and loneliness in the factory. Charles was just twelve, and he felt uncomfortable in the company of boys who spoke foul language throughout the day. He was not keeping good health and had to remain hungry four to five times a week. This was the most miserable period of his life. He worked for only five months, but could never recover from the humiliation of this episode, nor could he ever forgive his parents for forcing him to work in the rat-infested factory. He developed sympathy for deprived children like himself who were condemned by circumstances to work in inhuman conditions. This attitude became a dominant subject in Dickens' novels in later stage of his life.

Dickens began his career at the age of fifteen in 1827, as a lawyer's clerk. It was a modest beginning. In 1832, Dickens left law and embarked upon a career on journalism. He gained reputation as an efficient parliamentary reporter, but was disillusioned with the proceedings of that august house. A man of

divergent interests, Dickens frequented theatres and also learnt acting. He went to the British Museum Library and furthered his self- education. By the age of twenty- one, he acquired knowledge of those subjects that are found in his novels.

In 1833, Dickens published his first sketch in the *Old Monthly Magazine*; other sketches followed, and in 1836 he published them in a book- form under the pen name of Boz. *Sketches by Boz* was followed by *Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), Dickens' full length work which brought him resounding success. This was followed by four novels in quick succession: *Oliver Twist* (1837-38), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41), and a historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* (1841).

In 1842 Dickens went on a tour with his wife to America and Canada. He based his next two novels *American Tour* (1842) and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) on his impressions gathered during this tour. This was followed by *A Christmas Carol* (1843), the most famous of his five 'Christmas Books', *Dombey and Son* (1846-47) and *David Copperfield* (1849-50). Novels written before 1842 were episodic, and loose in construction. As he grew older he started paying more attention to the form of his novels. The later novels *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57) have been received favorably by modern readers. On account of domestic troubles, Dickens went through a comparatively unproductive period following *Little Dorrit*. But very soon he wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) which was his last completed novel.

On finishing his last novel, Dickens devoted his attention to preparing new readings for public. The scene of murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes in *Oliver Twist* was the most powerful reading in his repertory. In 1867, he went to America on a reading tour. After his

return, Dickens started working on *Edwin Droon* which he had begun in 1869. On 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1870 he wrote a fresh chapter for the novel and was suddenly taken ill. Shortly afterwards he passed away without recovering consciousness. Dickens was buried at Westminster Abbey.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name five important novels of Dickens

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2. What is *Sketches by Boz*?

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3 which fictions did Dickens write after his tour in America?

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### ***9.3 READING THE NOVEL DAVID COPPERFIELD***

David Copperfield is born six months after the death of his father. His great aunt Miss Betsey Trotwood an eccentric lady, is present at the time of his birth. She leaves suddenly on coming to know that the child is a boy and not a girl, whom she wanted to bear her name. David's mother is now quiet alone in the world, with only Peggotty, her friend and devoted maid servant. Clara Copperfield, David's mother, is pretty and youthful, and she soon marries the stern Mr. Murdstone. Her second husband proves to be hard and cruel. On the occasion of his mother's second marriage, David is sent with Peggotty to visit her brother at Yarmouth. There Mr. Peggotty lives in a house-boat with his niece Emily, nephew Ham and his late partner's widow, Mrs Gummidge David is impressed by all the members of the family of Mr. Peggotty. On his return home, David finds himself in the mercy of his step-father. Mr. Murdstone and his sister are very strict, and they take full control of the house. David is hated by his step- father, and after a few days it is decided that David would be sent to a boarding school. The most difficult period of David's life starts in Salim House. There his misery and sorrows are prolonged under a cruel master called Mr. Creakle. It seemed that Mr. Creakle enjoyed causing unnecessary pain to his students. It is here that David gets introduced to Steerforth and Traddles, who provide him with joy and relief. As David settles down in Salem House, news of Clara Copperfield's death comes, and his studies are suddenly cut short. Her death is caused by the tyranny inflicted by Mr. Murdstone and his sister. Peggotty is dismissed and she marries Barkis.

After remaining neglected for many months David is sent to London where, at the age of ten, he becomes a labourer in an old warehouse. David is half- starved and overworked, and is

compelled to live with companions like Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes. He lives in a house already occupied by Mr and Mrs Micawber, and their numerous children. Mr Micawber is always in financial difficulties, but is optimistic that fortune will one day shine upon him. David develops a genuine liking for the couple. Mr Micawber is ultimately sent to the Debtors' Prison, and David decides to go to his aunt Betsy Trotwood who lives in Dover. Penniless he walks all the way to Dover where he finds his aunt caring for Mr. Dick. She is eccentric as ever, but decides to adopt him. She dismisses the Murdstone's from their responsibility for him, and arranges to send him to a school at Canterbury. There he resides with Mr. Wickfield, his aunt's lawyer, and attends Dr Strong's excellent school. David becomes good friends with Mr Wickfield's daughter Agnes, who remains a source of inspiration throughout his life. It is here that David meets Mr. Wickfield's sinister clerk, Uriah Heep, who poses to be a very humble person. However Heep's pretensions of humility and cold hand-shake fill David with disgust and distrust.

After graduating with honours David decides to travel to London. He happens to meet Steerforth his friend from Salem House. Steerforth takes him to meet his mother and her companion Rosa Dartle. David then decides to take Steerforth to Yarmouth to meet Mr Peggotty's family. David observes many changes in the Peggoty family. Little Emily has grown up and is engaged to Ham and Peggotty has married Barkis the carrier. On his return from Yarmouth, David joins Spenlow & Jorkins as an apprentice. It is here that he meets Dora the charming daughter of Mr. Spenlow and falls in love with her.

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**



1. Who is Peggotty ?

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2. Who is David's Step father?

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3. What is the name of the boarding school where David was sent?

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4. Who are Mr. & Mrs. Micawber?

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5. Who is Dora? Where did David meet Dora?

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In the meantime David comes to know that Barkis is on his death-bed and he hurriedly goes to Yarmouth to help his old nurse Peggotty. Emily is about to marry Ham but suddenly disappears with David's old school friend Steerforth. She is carried away by Steerforth's gallantry, but later when humiliated, seeks the forgiveness of her uncle Mr. Peggoty. David is disturbed by the fact that he was responsible for introducing Steerforth to the

Peggotty family. On his return to London he finds that his aunt has lost a great part of her fortune. In order to help his aunt for this

loss, David becomes an assistant to Doctor Strong, and spends all his free time in literary and clerical work. Mr Spenlow does not approve the relationship of Dora and David, but his sudden death leaves Dora penniless.

After his marriage, David soon discovers the irresponsible behaviour of his wife Dora, and all his efforts to develop her childish nature prove in vain. Meanwhile Uriah Heep who pretends to be humble, has managed to enter into a partnership with Mr. Wickfield. He hopes to take full control of the business and marry his beautiful daughter Agnes. Heep considers Mr. Micawber to be a useful tool and he engages him as a clerk in Mr. Wickfield's office. He takes advantage of Micawber's indebtedness, and forces him to help him in deceitful and dishonest practices. Miss Betsey Trotwood suddenly loses all her money, and David struggles hard to help her overcome this crisis. Littimer informs David that Steerforth has abandoned Emily.

At the end of the year Mr. Micawber meets David and his aunt. They discover that he is full of contempt for Heep, who has been plotting against the interest of others. They also come to know that Uriah Heep was responsible for the ruin of Miss Betsey Trotwood. Mr. Micawber is now ready to expose Heep and along with Traddles chalks out a plan to ruin him. Consequently Miss Betsey Trotwood's money is recovered and Mr. Wickfield regains his original position. David has now become a successful author. In spite of the care taken by David, his tender wife Dora falls ill and dies. It is the sympathy and advice of Agnes that enables David to overcome this tragedy. At her advice he goes abroad and Miss Betsy Trotwood decides to help Mr. Micawber out of gratitude.

She arranges for a new start in Australia, and the Micawber family sail to a new life that awaits them. Peggotty and Emily are also on board this ship. Before bidding them goodbye David goes to

Yarmouth, and witnesses the tragedy of Emily. A ship is involved in a raging storm, and a youth is seen clinging to the mast. The irony of fate sends Ham to help him. While rescuing him, Ham loses his life and the bodies are washed ashore. Steerforth and Ham lie dead on the shore. After three years in foreign countries, David Copperfield comes back to England. He realises that Agnes had always loved him and her future happiness will be his as well. They get married within a fortnight. Agnes remains David's inspiration for the rest of his life.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Whom did David marry after Dora's death?

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2. How did Ham die?

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3. What did David do in his later life?

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### **9.4 THEMES OF THE NOVEL**

In this novel the life and the happenings of David from childhood till maturity is central to the plot. All the characters and



other incidents develop around David but in doing so we witness many other digressions in the plot that constitute a large number of other stories and themes.

### ***Evil and Suffering***

The most striking is the theme of evil and suffering which runs throughout the novel. Dickens explores the manifestations of evil in human life. Nature shows its hostility in the form of storms and tempests, and human beings accept that the evil and the benevolence of Nature, co –exist. The evil lurking in human minds is responsible for the misery and suffering that takes place. It is evil that makes one callous, stern, calculating and murderous. Mr Murdstone's cold and evil behaviour brings out the worst in David. Evil is present throughout the novel, but Dickens brings about poetic justice in the end. All evil characters are punished and the good ones are rewarded.

### ***Money***

The lust for money and power is a strong element in the evil characters. This theme runs parallel to the theme of evil. Dickens associated status and respectability with money, but he makes it clear that money alone is not sufficient unless accompanied by hard work.

### ***Discipline***

Discipline is emphasized as a virtue that should be cultivated to achieve success. Miss Betsey Trotwood tries her best to inculcate discipline and self- reliance in David. She instils in him the importance of discipline in the journey of life. Mr Murdstone and Mr Creakle on the other hand misuse discipline. They are cruel and harsh to David on the pretext of teaching him discipline.

Dickens also reveals that emotional discipline is necessary in the development of one's personality.

### ***Marriage***

*David Copperfield* presents us with a number of marriages. Some are successful and some are not. David the protagonist marries twice and discovers that marriage and domestic happiness do not always come together. Another theme interlinked with marriage is the power struggle within marriages. The love and understanding shared by Agnes and David appears more permanent and true than his love for his child-wife Dora. Through the theme of marriage Dickens presents before us the portrait of the Victorian family.

### ***Romance and Reality***

In the novel Dickens appears to jostle between romance and reality. There is a intermixing of the two, and this leads to a balance in the life of David. The novel has both romantic and realistic characters. Mrs Copperfield, Dora, Emily, Steerforth, Mr Wickfield, and the Micawbers can be categorised as romantics. Mrs Copperfield and Dora are both unaware about the harsh realities of life. They find it very difficult to adjust with the rapid changes in their lives. They thus meet their ends early in life. Emily and Steerforth are both very whimsical and irresponsible. They fall victims to the rash decisions they take. They imagine a life away from reality, and this leads to their ruin. Mr Micawber loves to advice David about finance, but he never follows the rules he preaches. He is perennially in debt and is optimistic that things will turn for the better. On the other hand, Miss Trotwood, Uriah Heep, Agnes and the Stronges are realists. Miss Trotwood's bitter experience in marriage has turned her against this institution, and she has very strong views about the male members of society.

Uriah Heep is a cunning, calculative and evil man, who is out to cheat Mr Wickfield in his business. His very appearance makes him appear inhuman. Agnes is a realist when compared to Dora. She lacks the warmth and grace that Dora has, but is more practical. Dickens has represented both sides of society in this novel. Through his characters he tries to draw a realistic picture of the society of the Victorian age.

### ***Family Relationships***

Family relationship is a significant theme in the novel. Dickens insists on the importance of the family to generate happy individuals. Happy families in *David Copperfield* have a primary leader to provide discipline and guidance, to the members of the family. David is saved from desolation and poverty on the streets of London by the family ties, to his aunt Miss Betsey Trotwood. Dickens has portrayed a number of families in the novel, but most of the families are not complete. He has also portrayed many orphans and children with single parents. These children are ruined by the excessive love that single parents have for them. Mr Wickfield ruins himself, due to his love for his daughter Agnes. Steerforth is spoilt with the love of his mother who fails to correct him at the right time. Dickens here demonstrates the moral importance of moderation in family affection. He emphasizes on the loneliness and fragility of the family by depicting broken homes. The importance of the family in the Victorian society is highlighted. He also tries to suggest that other relationships should be cultivated to overcome this state of loneliness. Dickens also tries to show that relationships outside the family played an important role in overcoming the tragedy of broken homes.

### ***Childhood and Youth***

Dickens is regarded as the only true delineator of a child's mind. He brings them into the centre of the action. The central character of his novels is a terrified, unwanted, persecuted and helpless child. David in *David Copperfield* is an excellent example of a persecuted child. In the first half of the novel Dickens enters into the child's point of view and achieves great success. Dickens describes children not from the point of view of an adult but from the point of view a child. He lives his boyhood days once more and delineates his childhood experiences with the zeal, curiosity and energy of a child. With his imagination, he transforms his child-like vision of the world into something rich, strange and unique.

The major issues discussed in the novel are....

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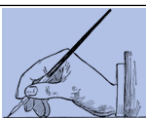
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Like David he remembers the poignant sense of vanity in the disasters of boyhood, the feeling that what is done cannot be undone and a joy missed or a pleasure ruined is irretrievable. Dickens succeeds in this because he possesses a child-like vision of the world and is a profound creative artist. The novel is also a story of a youth struggling to find his identity in a changing middle class society. All the experience that he goes through in the course of the novel, gives him the maturity that he needs to succeed in the world. Dickens celebrates the virtues of the young, and criticizes spoilt adult women characters like Dora, who depend on others to protect themselves as though they were children.

### ***Society and Class***

Class system in *David Copperfield* is rigid with two kinds of society. First is the society of human community that rejects

Emily for leaving her family to live with Steerforth. It also bars David from contentment when he is a worker in the factory. This society shelters those who obey its rules, and is cruel to those that don't and has a practical positive side. A constant striving for social status can be seen in members of this class. The second society is the restricted aristocratic class. Steerforth belongs to this class where everything is inherited. There is no labour involved and members of this class do not need to work at anything to belong to it. Dickens strongly criticizes this society as it is destructive, inhuman and very mechanical in comparison to the other class. The middle class characters enjoy a mobility that is not found in these two classes. David and Traddles move on in a smooth manner inspite of tragedy striking them. The working class also does not upset the social order. They are poor but they are happy because they are expected to remain so. Poverty in the novel is linked to isolation without a future. Charitable institutions are responsible for creating manipulative people like Uriah Heep. The desire for wealth often makes people selfish and unfeeling like Steerforth. Dickens feels that the only way of overcoming poverty is to choose an honest profession and work hard with dedication and loyalty.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Give one example of unified family and broken family from the novel.

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2. What are the two distinct social classes that the novel depicts? Name two characters representing these two classes.

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### ***Gender***

Women in *David Copperfield* are portrayed either as weak or selfish. Mrs Clara Copperfield is a woman who is dominated by her husband and is unable to enjoy life. She surrenders everything to Mr Murdstone her second husband and bears all indignities heaped on her without any complaint. Mrs Heep and Mrs Steerforth are both obsessed with their sons. They are preoccupied with the happiness of their sons and are ready to do anything to achieve it. Both are selfish and mean and very proud of their sons. Dora is also weak, childish and impractical. The only one with self-determination is Miss Betsy Trotwood, but this is due to the independent life she leads after her broken marriage. There is a kind of grandeur and magnanimity in her character which is not very easy to match. Agnes is depicted as a self-sacrificing woman, possessing strength of character. She stands by David in times of trouble. Emily symbolises the predicament of the working-class women, who are struggling to rise in the social ladder. They try to raise their status by marrying into upper class families, but are often neglected due to their working class origins. Mrs Gummidge and Peggotty are within the safe contours of the home, and there is no disturbance in their lives. Emily moves out of this safe contour and has to bear the effects of social infringement in her later life.

### ***Education***

Education is another important theme in *David Copperfield*. Dickens presents this theme through different pictures of schools. Mr Creakle's school highlights the practice of physical punishment prevalent during the Victorian period. Dickens attacks this system with a wider perspective of the true meaning of learning and the way to achieve it outside the classroom. He is clear that punishment and beating does not help children to learn. The school of Dr. Strong is an example of an ideal school raised on the pillars of self-discipline and self-determination. Through these models, Dickens puts forward his own observations on the education system. Dickens believed that education is better derived through experiences in life, rather than through books. It is this education that goes into the moulding of a human being.

### 9.5 SUMMING UP

This unit brings forth the life and works of the author Charles Dickens and how he is a major representative of the Victorian Age. The author's celebrated novel "*David Copperfield*" has been paraphrased and the major themes discussed which highlights the prevalent themes present in the society during the given time. This novel also brings forth major elements of the author's own life and you may have noticed, after reading of the life of Dickens, a strong autobiographical note in the story of David. The novel is a

#### DID YOU KNOW?

- The full title of the novel was originally '*The Personal History and Experience of David Copperfield, the Younger*'
- In January of 1849 Dickens son Henry Fielding Dickens is born and begins to write *David Copperfield*.
- In August of 1850 daughter, Dora Annie Dickens is born. Dora is named after her in *David Copperfield*.



panorama of human life and actions, foils and follies and a beautiful amalgamation of the beauty and ugliness of society. As we have found in the previous unit how the evils of industrial revolution polluted the Victorian society to a many extent and reading of the novel gives ample evidence to this.

### 9.6 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Dickens' treatment of children with particular reference to *David Copperfield*.
2. How does Dickens treat the theme of evil and suffering in his novel *David Copperfield*? How has this theme been related to the theme money as a force in human affairs?
3. Write a note on the treatment of female characters in *David Copperfield*.
4. Discuss the major themes of the novel. How do these topics throw light on the social system of its time?



### 9.7 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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## ***UNIT 10: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT***

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### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

10.0 Introduction

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Main Characters

10.3 Autobiographical Element in *David Copperfield*

10.4 Humour and Pathos in *David Copperfield*

10.5 Plot Construction in *David Copperfield*

10.6 Summing Up

10.7 Assessment Questions

10.8 References and Recommended Readings

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### ***10.0 INTRODUCTION***

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A work of fiction has many layers of meanings. Mere reading of the text and the storyline is not enough to know what the author tries to depict or what message the fiction writer tries to convey through his/her work of art. The ‘point of view’, the mode established by the author by means of which a reader is presented the characters, dialogue, actions, setting and events which constitute what we call the narrative of a work of fiction. Thus, without knowing the point of view of a novel, the study of fiction cannot be completed. As you have been told earlier, literature and society are integrally related to one another. In this unit, we shall try to see what aspects of the time and society Dickens lived in are reflected in the novel. Dickens presented a wide variety of characters and the warm concern for humanity made his characters a central interest of his work.

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### 10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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The reading of this unit shall enable you to know

- characters and their role in developing the story in *David Copperfield*
- autobiographical element of *David Copperfield*
- illustration of humour and pathos that runs through the novel
- narrative technique and plot construction of *David Copperfield*.

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### 10.2 MAIN CHARACTERS

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Dickens broadly categorizes his characters into 4 main types. He has created a number of innocent little children like Oliver, Joe, Paul, Tiny Tim and Little Nell who have a powerful appeal to the child-love in every human heart. Then there are the horrible and grotesque type like Heep, Squeers, Fagin, Quilp and Bill Sikes who are exposed in the end and duly accorded punishment.

Next, there are the broadly humorous type like Micawber and Sam Weller, and finally, there is the powerfully drawn figure like that of Lady Deadlock and Sydney Carton who rise to the dignity of true characters. It has been alleged that Dickens' characters are conceived as caricatures rather than living human beings. This is due to the fact that he exaggerates the oddities of his characters, and lays emphasis on their individuality.

However his characters are not only individuals, but also type. Their traits have been universalized, and they are invested with peculiar modes of speech and mannerisms. He also had a knack for 'tagging' his characters. The successful characters

belong to the low or middle classes. Dickens fails to portray characters drawn from the aristocratic or upper circles of society for his knowledge about them was not sufficient. Such characters seem to be theatrical rather than real. He was also not very successful in portraying serious characters in which spirituality and chivalry were embodied. Psychologically complex characters were beyond his range and scope. He however excelled in portraying humorous, eccentric and whimsical characters. They are in fact his masterpieces. Female characters of Dickens have been regarded as feeble or artificial. Those women who have eccentricity about them are powerfully drawn, but ordinary women fail to convince. In his women characters one finds Dickens very shrewd in observation, rather than in psychological analysis. David Cecil points out, that even in his memorable characters, Dickens realizes personality with unparalleled vividness; but does not understand the organic principles that underlie that personality. According to him Dickens often fails in his characters.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **Individual and Type Character**

Individual character in a novel is presented with much individual details and attributes that differentiates such a character from other characters of the work. On the other hand, a type character, also called a flat character or two-dimensional character is just opposite to that of an individual character, without any individualistic attribute. These are called flat characters as we do not witness much growth in them throughout the action of the novel. Contrary to that, Round characters always develop, generally from bad to good in the course of the action. Micawber is a good example of round character.

## **DAVID COPPERFIELD**

David Copperfield a posthumous child is brought up under the affectionate care of his mother and his nurse Peggotty. But his mother's marriage to Mr. Murdstone brings in misery and unhappiness into his life. This misery continues when he is sent to school. It is in Salem House that David is introduced to the world outside his home. Mr. Creakle the headmaster believes in the rule of the rod, and he treats the boys very harshly. David experiences the most wretched period of his life in this school. However, all this ends when David goes to live with his aunt Miss Betsy Trotwood. Despite the ill- treatment meted out to him, David is warm and affectionate and he preserves his essential humanity carrying with him an atmosphere of cheerfulness and goodwill wherever he goes. In his childhood his nurse Peggotty looks after him with love and affection. At school he develops everlasting friendships with Traddles and Steerforth. Ham, Emily and Mr. Peggotty love him too. He earns the goodwill of Mr. Micawber, Mr. Wickfield and Agnes and remains sincere to them till the end. His aunt Miss Betsy Trotwood, who is disappointed at his birth, develops confidence in his innate goodness and ability. David sensitively reacts to appreciation as well as insult and humiliation. He has a great deal of patience and usually remains quiet, but when he finds it hard to bear he lashes out. Unable to stand Mr. Murdstone's inhumanity he reacts by biting him. At one stage his aunt advises him never to be vulgar or cruel. David never forgets this advice. There is no meanness or pettiness about his conduct. He is kind, honest and conscientious. He is grateful to his aunt for the love and kindness she showers on him, and deems it his duty to look after her, and provide her with moral support when she loses her money. He feels it a great pleasure to be of service to others. When Dr. Strong offers him a job but cannot pay him much he

accepts the job without any hesitation. During his stay with the Micawber's he tries his best to help them. Thus one finds David upright, courageous and persevering at all stages of his life. His devotion to his wife Dora is also very commendable. Dora is young and inexperienced, but David does not lose patience, nor does he ever repent having married her. He helps her in the work and tries to make her comfortable. During her illness he looks after her with a rare kind of sincerity. However David is unworldly and sometimes fails to understand people. He has met Steerforth many times but he fails to realise that Steerforth is capable of great cruelty and meanness. He lacks firmness and self-discipline. He is easily cheated by Mr. Micawber in spite of helping him during crises. But David is a gifted child, and he is self-disciplined and resolute in his work. He is fond of reading and has a keen sense of observation and these qualities help him to become a great writer. David learns in the course of the novel, that love, generosity and trust must be mixed with discipline and self-control.

### **MR. MICAWBER**

Mr Micawber is a remarkable and interesting character in *David Copperfield*. David is introduced to Mr Micawber when he starts working for Murdstone & Grinby. Mr Micawber's flaw is that he has a large family to look after, but is always in perennial debt. He takes David as his tenant only to relieve his financial strain. Micawber cannot find a way out of his financial commitments, and this keeps him always in a state of perpetual tension and anxiety. But in spite of this, he is always, optimistic and never allows depression to overwhelm him. His moods keep on changing rapidly, and he is able to overcome his misery and depression very quickly. He is optimistic and has a wonderful capacity to remain cheerful and always keeps up an impressive appearance. Mr Micawber is a great comic character. There are quite a few comic aspects, which contribute to this comic effect.

His appearance is comic and he has a volatile temperament. The ease with which he could jump from deepest despair to the highest pinnacle of optimistic contentment, also gives him a comic touch. He is grandiloquent and he gives eloquent speeches in a high – flown style. His powerful oratory and his expertise in writing letters, helps him to defeat all his other problems, even the dismal reality of his own life of poverty. Notwithstanding his financial difficulties, Mr Micawber is always willing to help others. He makes the best possible arrangements when David comes to stay with him. He is the one who comes to the rescue of Miss Betsy Trotwood, when she loses her money due to the treacherous act of Uriah Heep. His honesty is also commendable. He is not the type to cheat anyone or join hands with Uriah Heep to make money. Though he is irresponsible about money he is a doting father and a supportive husband. His careful, determined and selfless exposure of Heep, shows that he is an intelligent and courageous man. His optimism is rewarded in the end, when he sets sail to Australia, where a new life awaits him.

### **URIAH HEEP**

Uriah Heep is Mr Wickfield's "humble" clerk, who aspires to become his partner. He designs a treacherous plan to accomplish his purpose. Uriah hates society and is a sneaking villain who pretends that he is humble. He is greedy, very dishonest and thoroughly nasty. He is merciless and does not hesitate to hurt anyone, who stands in the way of his ambitions. Uriah is made to seem very unpleasant by Dickens' frequent comparison of his disagreeable appearance to damp, slimy creatures like fishes, snakes, eels and snails. Heep's duplicity brings a lot of suffering to others. Miss Trotwood loses her money for him, and when Mr. Wickfield realizes that he is responsible for the loss, he undergoes a lot of tension. Agnes is worried to see her father suffering. David is forced to discontinue his studies and take a job to help his aunt

overcome this loss. Thus everyone around Heep is a victim of his villainy. Uriah Heep's ambitions are much beyond his merit. He has a deep desire for wealth, high social status and love, though he deserves none of these. He uses evil means like deception, fraud and conspiracy to achieve his ambitions. He very cleverly gets information about Mr. Wickfield's business from David. Although David is reluctant to give the information, Uriah and his mother trick him into revealing important business matters. When Heep discovers that Mr. Wickfield had a weakness for wine, he exploits this weakness and gains full control over his business. He forges signatures and draws up certain documents, which give him huge financial benefits. To a certain extent, the contemporary social system is also responsible for making Heep what he is. Throughout his childhood he was constantly made aware that he belonged to the lower strata of the society. The narration of his childhood experiences creates a feeling of sympathy, but his manner of overcoming these difficulties is not proper. He derives the power he had craved since childhood by entering into a partnership with Mr. Wickfield. He exploits this power to realize his dreams, using devious methods that ultimately lead to his downfall.

### **MISS BETSEY TROTWOOD**

Miss Betsey Trotwood is one of the most fascinating characters portrayed by Dickens in *David Copperfield*. Disillusioned and disappointed by an unhappy marriage, she adopts a firm, independent manner of self – reliance, determination and individuality. Her unhappy marriage and a lonely life, hardens her attitude towards life. She stops trusting men, teaches her maids to avoid marriage and is determined that the baby born to Clara Copperfield will be a girl. Disappointed at the birth of a boy, she decides to take the responsibility of Mr Dick instead. Her appreciation of his innocent and amiable nature, prepares her for the acceptance of David in future. Through her generous, loving



attachment to him she eventually accepts Dora and Peggotty. She is eccentric like Mr Micawber, and her behaviour is full of apparent inconsistencies that accentuate the feeling of being eccentric. She chases donkeys, seeks the advice of Mr Dick and is resolved to do what she wants. Miss Trotwood feels that discipline is helpful in regulating emotions, and although she appears to be stern, she is an understanding and sympathetic woman. She adopts David when he narrates his miserable tale, and decides to settle matters with the Murdstones. She not only makes David comfortable in her house, but also arranges for his studies at a decent academy run by Dr Strong. The way she administers all kind of restorative measures to smoothen David's life, makes it clear that she is very kind and affectionate at heart. She helps him get married to Dora and stands by him when she dies. It is Miss Trotwood who makes David realise his love for Agnes. She has the virtue of loyalty also. She has faith in Mr Wickfield and is constant in her opinion of him. Miss Trotwood is grateful to Mr Micawber for his help and makes arrangements for a new life in Australia. The courage with which she faces her financial loss is commendable. She is optimistic and is prepared to fight with patience and perseverance. She is determined not to lose hope, and this becomes more transparent as she goes on finding excuses for her tears and affection. Miss Trotwood is convinced about Mr Wickfield's innocence and she is very happy when the real culprit Uriah Heep is exposed in the end. Miss Trotwood is an interesting character and there is a grandeur and magnanimity about her character that is not very easy to match.

## **STEERFORTH**

Steerforth is a charming and confident senior student whom David meets in Salem House. He has the capacity to adapt himself

to any situation and can be very friendly, amiable and kind if he chooses. He belongs to an affluent family and is not very sympathetic to poor people. He insults his teacher Mr Mell simply because the latter is poor and ultimately gets him dismissed. Steerforth gives delight wherever he goes, but leaves disasters behind him. He is selfish, unscrupulous, reckless and callous. It is difficult for David to see through the reality of Steerforth. When he goes with David to Yarmouth, Steerforth uses his charm to trap Emily, and persuades her to run away with him. He does this to satisfy a momentary whim, but is cruel enough to desert her, and even suggest that she marry his servant Littimer. This shows that he is not concerned with the feelings and sentiments of other people. His proud mother spoiled him and he realises how badly he lacked the guidance of a father. Just like Uriah Heep, he suffers from a bad upbringing, and his end is perhaps a befitting culmination to the kind of life he leads. While coming from England by sea, he is drowned in a storm near Yarmouth. Ironically it is the very place where he had brought tragedy to the Peggotty family.

### **DORA COPPERFIELD**

Dora is one of the greatest triumphs of characterisation in the novel. She is first introduced to David when Mr Spenlow invites him to spend a day with his family. She is accustomed to a life of luxury, surrounded by servants who fulfill her needs. Having lost her mother very early in life, Dora has missed the controlling and correcting influences of a mother, and she grows up into an impractical and irresponsible girl. She is immature and inexperienced when she marries David, and is unable to take charge of the housework. Servants take advantage of this situation and often cheat her, but when David advises her to supervise the work she takes offence. Dora is ignorant about the realities of life, and is also incapable of learning them. She is used to a carefree,

happy life, and is not ready to adopt any advice for improvement in her life. Dora is aware that she is no better than a child and feels sorry to realise that she has been a useless wife to David. She is loving, innocent and trusting, but never quite the companion that David needs. She excuses herself from his demands by admitting that she is impractical. She can never understand or follow his advice. Dora is happy to call herself a child- wife, and avoids any attempt to think or act responsibly. There seems to be a dream like quality in Dora. She is so delicate and fragile that she does not seem to belong to this earth.

### **AGNES WICKFIELD**

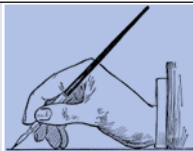
Agnes is the daughter of Mr. Wickfield. She is the portrait of the ideal womanhood. She possesses great strength of character and is a complete contrast to Dora. Calmness, reliability, and patience are her key attributes. Agnes is always there to advise and help David when crisis strikes him. The strongest quality of Agnes' character is her self –sacrificing and responsible nature. After her mother's death, she leaves school to look after her father. She is aware about her father's weakness for drinking and is afraid that this habit would lead to his undoing. Agnes discovers the cunning and craftiness of Uriah Heep, and guards her father from him. She is also aware of the power that Heep exercises on her father, and bears all his vulgarity with patience. Agnes is a good example of virtue's triumph over vice. Her ennobling presence influences all the other characters. Critics have often criticized the characterization of Agnes, as she seems too good to be true. She is so mature that she has no need to develop, and this makes her static and uninteresting. Agnes has every virtue, no obvious faults and never does anything wrong. She seems to be the culmination of Dickens' imagined ideal woman.

### 10.3 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENT IN DAVID COPPERFIELD

The five months that Dickens spent at the blacking factory labelling blacking bottles, when he was twelve years old, remained a sad and sensitive period in his life. However, he could never think of making his private suffering public, so he looked for an adequate correlative and the result was *David Copperfield*. This is the very reason why Dickens regards *David Copperfield* as his favourite novel. Most of the events included in the novel are incidents experienced by Dickens himself. The story is narrated from the first person and this also emphasises the autobiographical nature of the novel. All the details of the early life of the novelist have been faithfully recorded in the novel with few minor changes. In the novel David is sent to Salem House and then to work at Murdstone & Grinby. He goes to London to work in a warehouse when he is eight years old. Dickens was twelve when he went to work at Warren's blacking factory. This lowering of age has been done to intensify the pathos of David's story. The humiliation suffered is Dickens' own. Mr and Mrs Micawber are the representations of Dickens' own parents. Both John Dickens and Micawber have large families to support and both fail in their responsibilities. They are unable to repay debts and are haunted by unmitigated poverty. They are ultimately sent to prison. Micawber shares the same kind of optimism that John Dickens had. The ardent hope that things will turn for the better is a common factor that inspires them to struggle in life. An unflinching loyalty and sincerity to others, along with the capacity to do hard labour are traits shared by them. There is also a striking similarity in the careers of Dickens and David. They both start their careers as lawyers and then move on to become Parliamentary Reporters. The love between David and Dora is the love that was there between Dickens and Maria Beadnell. Although Dickens did not marry

Maria, David is allowed to marry Dora which could be a case of wish- fulfilment. Dickens made a few factual changes in the novel to achieve what he could not in real life.

The novel is not an autobiography and is thus not an exact record of the novelist's actual personal life. There is a mingling of fact and fiction. In the novel David's father dies even before David is born. His mother too dies after her second marriage. The Murdstone's have no parallels in real life. Dickens did not have the protection of a fairy godmother like Miss Trotwood, and it will be very difficult to find originals of Peggotty's circle, Steerforth, Uriah Heep and Mr Dick. Dickens could never forget the neglect shown by his parents and developed resentment against them. Thus in the novel David has no father, and the role of the mother is very ineffective. Peggotty and Miss Trotwood are extended mother surrogates. The qualities of the parents are divided between the Murdstones and the Micawbers. It can therefore be accepted that in spite of deviations, *David Copperfield* is to some extent an autobiographical novel.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. What is autobiographical element in relation to a work of art ?

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2. Identify at least two characters that resemble the real life presentation of Dickens.

3 which important part of Dickens' own life is also portrayed in the novel?

#### ***10.4 HUMOUR AND PATHOS IN DAVID COPPERFIELD***

As a humorist, Dickens stands supreme among English novelists and occupies a place next to Shakespeare. Humour is the essence and soul of Dickens' art. His comic characters unveil the fact that Dickens' humour is broad, humane and creative. His humour creates vivacious and rocking laughter. The humour of Dickens is the humour inherent in his comic characters. These characters cannot be dismissed as caricatures, because they have real life and vitality in them. It is through their oddities, that Dickens exposes the true spirit of human nature.

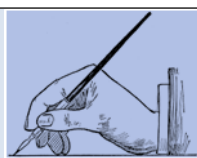
There are essentially two types of humour in Dickens --- satiric as well as sympathetic. He despised hypocrisy, vanity, greed, insolence of men and women, and he satirized and exposed those characters, who practiced unfair means. Uriah Heep, Squeers, Mr. Murdstone, Creakle are some of his satirical characters. He makes his satirical characters very interesting and endows them with a vivid life. Satire can be cruel, but Dickens gains the attention of the readers when he makes them laugh with him. This quality of humour sets him apart from other satirists.

His sympathetic humour is creative and original. Characters like Micawber, Sam Weller, and Pickwick are characters, in whose company readers feel light- hearted. Humour is derived from some eccentricity in their behaviour or some idiosyncrasy in their speech. Dickens' gift of humour is inseparable from his pathos. Humour with Dickens is never far from tragedy. There are certain things that make one laugh while one's heart aches and these are the things around which Dickens often weaves his novels. Pathos in his novels is created either by the presentation of the unhappy and miserable lot of children and their death or by the portrayal of the heart- rending conditions of the factory workers and prisoners. Pip in *Great Expectations*, David in *David Copperfield* and Paul in *Dombey and Sons* are involved in quite a few pathetic situations. He was able to move a large audience with his pathos.

The novel portrays two of the greatest comic characters, Miss Betsey Trotwood and Mr Micawber. Miss Trotwood appears in the opening chapter and sets the whole tone of the novel. She comes visiting Clara Copperfield hoping that she would give birth to a girl whom she would adopt and bring up. She is annoyed when she learns that it is a boy and vows never to return. Her anger and the doctor's meek response, makes the situation extremely funny Mr Micawber is humour personified. His behaviour and mannerisms make him look very comic. In addition to this he speaks in a bombastic style and makes eloquent speeches. Mr Dick is another character who is busy writing a memoir, worrying about King Charles's head and cheerfully flying kites. The carrier Mr Barkis has been immortalised by his words "Barkis is willing". Being comic, the characters of Dickens have the capacity of turning any situation into a comic situation. When David is taken to Salem House he stops at an inn at Yarmouth. There William the waiter cheats him by drinking his ale and eating the food ordered for him giving the impression that it is David who has eaten them. Humour

arises out of the conflict between the innocence of a neglected child and the callous adult world around him. Since most of the characters have their own distinct manner of speech, the dialogues are a source of humour. Mr Micawber is pompous, Miss Trotwood is blunt and Mr Dick is whimsical. When all three talk together the situation becomes very comic.

Dickens had the capacity to create pathetic situations as spontaneously as comical situations and blend them inseparably. The condition of Mr Dick is pathetic, but his eccentric behaviour makes him very humorous. The pitiable condition and ultimate death of Mrs. Copperfield, the suffering meted out to David by the Murdstone's, the humiliation he has to suffer in school and in the blacking factory and the miserable experiences of the Peggotty family are genuinely pathetic scenes. Dickens has been criticised for his practice of exaggeration. The death of Dora is pathetic but the death of her dog Jip at the same moment spoils the effect. The washing of Steerforth's body to the shore to lie at David's feet serves no purpose, and the pathetic impression is lost. Wherever Dickens has exercised restraint he has succeeded, but when he attempts to play with the emotions of readers and exaggerates, he spoils the effect.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Name the two types of humour you find in David Copperfield

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2. Name two comic characters of the novel.

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3. Give one example of pathos mingling with humour in David Copperfield

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### ***10.5 PLOT CONSTRUCTION IN DAVID COPPERFIELD***

Critics of Dickens agree with the fact that he has remarkable sense of character portrayal and is an admirable story- teller. However, they find his plots often defective and loose. But we must not forget that Dickens wrote in the tradition of Fielding and Smollett and the kind of plot he inherited was picaresque and melodramatic, abounding in incidents around a central character. Much importance was not given to plots. Critics remark that Dickens' novels are full of detachable episodes that have no

organic unity. *David Copperfield* too has often been criticised as being a little unrealistic but it is not incoherent or formless like his other novels.

### **LET US STOP AND THINK**



#### **Picaresque Novel**

The word picaresque comes from the Spanish word 'pícaro' meaning a 'rogue'. This kind of novel centres round a single protagonist whose long succession of actions are recorded. The protagonist is generally a person

without much social status. Picaresque novels are realistic in manner and episodic in structure where sequence of events are tied together. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is one of the finest examples of this type of novel

The structure is determined by the autobiographical form of the novel. The story of David's life is central and is woven around three parts of his life. The first part deals with the birth of David and ends with his stay at Dr Strong's Academy. The second part describes David's later youth and early adulthood and the third part begins with David's mourning for Dora, Steerforth and Ham and ends with his marriage to Agnes. It is noticed that each part of the story ends with one of 'Retrospect' chapters (18, 53, and 64) which sum up the events taking place over a long period of time.

There are several secondary stories woven around the central story. The Peggotty family at Yarmouth and the Wickfield family with Uriah Heep and Micawber are two major sub-plots. David is directly involved with them at every stage. Without his involvement his life would have been uneventful and incomplete. These sub-plots are relevant to David's story. The other stories include the story of Dr Strong, the story of Aunt Betsey and the adventures of the Micawbers. The plot of *David Copperfield* is characterised by a large number of coincidences that seem very unrealistic. It is rather strange that Steerforth's ship is sailing past

Yarmouth when it is wrecked, Ham dies trying to save him, David happens to be present on the shore and Steerforth's body is washed to his feet. Miss Murdstone suddenly reappears as Dora's companion, Dora's father is opposed to the marriage of David and Dora, so he conveniently dies, and later Dora dies to make room for Agnes. Of all the people it is Mr Micawber who finds proof of the evil plans of Heep and exposes him in a dramatic manner. It is also very odd that both Peggotty and the Micawber's decide to go to Australia where they achieve success. Despite all its flaws *David Copperfield* has a strong plot construction. It is not episodic and its sub-plots are interwoven intricately with the plot. The story flows in a smooth manner without any obstructions.



### 10.6 SUMMING UP

This unit in a very cohesive manner provides a critical analysis of the text –“David Copperfield”. It gives a detailed character description of the main characters in the novel, along with the reason for their destined future and the reason for their creation. The characterisation is followed by the elements which make David Copperfield a much speculated autobiographical piece. The deviations are quite pronounced but the novel has major elements that prove its autobiographical elements. Humour and pathos in David Copperfield is discussed which highlights Dickens' use of Satiric and Sympathetic humour. The unit concludes with the plot construction used by Dickens. He was

writing in the tradition of Fielding and Smollett and the kind of plot he inherited was picaresque and melodramatic, abounding in incidents around a central character but failing to be gripping when made to stand alone.

### 10.7 ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the view that the strength of Dickens' artistry lies in the creation of his characters.
2. "*David Copperfield* is an autobiographical novel to a large extent". Discuss with illustrations from the text.
3. "In Dickens humour and pathos are inseparable". Examine the truth of this statement with reference to *David Copperfield*.
4. Discuss the chief characteristics of Dickens as a novelist.
5. Choose a character that changes in the course of the novel and show how he or she changes.
6. Give an account of David's relationship with Dora.
7. Do you think *David Copperfield* has a well- knit plot or a loose, disjointed one?

### 10.8 REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED READINGS

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**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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**JOT DOWN IMPORTANT POINTS**

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