

الواقعية في رواية (ديفيد كوبرفيلد) للكاتب تشارلز ديكنز
أ. أسامة مفتاح أبوبكر - كلية الآداب - فرع السواني - جامعة طرابلس

الملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل وشرح الواقعية التي تعتبر حركة أدبية في منتصف القرن التاسع عشر في رواية الكاتب " تشارلز ديكنز", " ديفيد كوبرفيلد", والتي تعتبر من أهم أعماله شرحا موجزا. ويعتبر " تشارلز ديكنز" من أفضل الكتاب في تاريخ الأدب الإنجليزي عموما و أفضل الكُتّاب اللذين استعملوا الواقعية على الإطلاق ، وتعتبر رواية "ديفيد كوبرفيلد" من أفضل الروايات لهذا الكاتب والمفضلة له شخصيا. تعطى هذه الرواية أمثلة عظيمة في استخدام الواقعية في الأدب الروائي الإنجليزي. وتحتوى الدراسة على مقدمة فيها عرض مبسط عن الدراسة بصفة عامة، والمنهجية المتبعة خلالها، بالإضافة إلى عرض لبعض الدراسات السابقة التي اهتمت باستعمال الواقعية في روايات "تشارلز ديكنز" بصفة عامة، واستعمالها في "ديفيد كوبرفيلد" بشكل خاص ، وتحتوى الدراسة - أيضا - على شرح موجز للواقعية، تاريخها و بداية ظهورها، علاقتها ببعض الحركات الأدبية الأخرى، تحليلا موجزا للواقعية في "ديفيد كوبرفيلد" مرفقا ببعض الأمثلة، وتنتهى الدراسة أخيرا باستنتاجات لهذه الدراسة.

Realism in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*

Usama Moftah Abubaker, Faculty of Arts, University of Tripoli,
English Language Department

Abstract

This study analyzes and illustrates the use of realism in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* which is one of the best known novels.

Dickens is one of the greatest writers in the 19th century. He is a realistic writer. His realism is embodied in most of his literary works. His novels are also the reflection of his life experience and the real world around him.

The study contains an introduction, and a short representation of what it is about. It offers also the methodology of the study. The literature review



sheds light on the previous studies which dealt with the use of realism in Dickens' novels in general, and its use in *David Copperfield* in particular. The study ends with a conclusion of it.

Key Words: Charles Dickens, realism, *David Copperfield*, the English society, Victorian age.

Introduction

This study deals with realism in Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* which is considered as one of this novelist's best works. *Realism* began as a movement in art and literature in the mid 19th century. It began first in France before it extended to many other countries. *Realism* focused on the real and ordinary rather than the imaginary and romantic actions. Therefore, *Realism* had an opposed attitude towards such movements as *Romanticism* and *Idealism*.

Charles Dickens is one of the greatest writers in English literature. The use of realism was a dominant feature in his works. Natarajan (2020:1) claims that "Dickens's realism has had nearly as long a history as 'realism' itself." Dickens exposed the negative aspects of middle class in the English society of Victorian age.

David Copperfield is one of the best novels of Dickens and his favourite. In this novel, Dickens introduces an orphan poor boy who suffers a lot from poverty, being isolated from his mother, and being oppressed by his stepfather, before he becomes rich and happy. He also uses some personal details of his own experience in life to describe the boy exposing the corruption of the capitalists in the English society at that time. All these points will be analyzed in details in this study.

Methodology

Studying, explicating, and analyzing Dickens' *David Copperfield*, highlighting his way of using it in the selected novel, is the method employed in this study.

Literature Review

Dickens' *David Copperfield* has been analyzed and interpreted by a number of writers and critics. They present specific details and general qualities of Dickens' novels in support of realism.

Huang (2016:1250) declares that "Charles Dickens was the first author

who had written of the poor of fidelity and sympathy and particularly famous for his vivid comic characterization and social criticism. His works were also famous during Victorian age and among the great classics in all fictions".

He(ibid) adds that:

He wrote many works about the society in the 19th century, among which *David Copperfield* was one of the most important novels and his favorite. The novel implied the author's unusual life experience. Meanwhile *David Copperfield* destiny symbolized the middle-class intelligentsia questing for development in the 19th century in British society(1250).

Tucker (2009:2) states that " the 'poetic' and the 'realist' mode, then, are antithetical in approach. All fiction uses elements of both to various degrees, but I believe that, at his best, Dickens achieves the perfect balance. *David Copperfield* is one of his greatest achievements in this respect"

Concerning Dickens' style of mixing realism and fantasy in his novels, Cox (1969: 268) points out that: "Indeed, the mixture of realism and fantasy is a major characteristic of his style, part of its essential flavour, and deeply involved with his characteristic adult vision of life".

From the above citations, one can see that *David Copperfield* deals with real conditions of the English society in the 19th century and real characters represented in that time. The world of the novel is very close to the reader who is familiar with actions of the novel; they are reflections of the real life of these characters.

Realism has been discussed and studied by literary critics and linguists. Realism is used in literature to describe such story elements as setting, characters, themes...etc, without resorting to imagery or figurative figures such as similes, metaphors, symbols...etc. The words which are used in this type of writing are not decorative or sugarcoated because realism focused rather on the real and ordinary form.

The realist movement is thoroughly opposite to the movements of



Romanticism and Idealism. The realists used commonplace people and extraordinary events in their works. These people belong to the middle class.

Some of the most prominent realists are: Fielding, Jane Austen, Balzac, George Eliot, Tolstoy. Some examples of works written by some realists are: *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) by William Dean Howells, Arnold Bennet's novels about the *Five Towns* (1902), and *Main Street* by Sinclair Lewis (1920), the extraordinary adventures of Robinson Crusoe, and the extraordinary misadventures of Moll Flanders by Daniel Defoe. Realism uses what is real and traditional, and describes the experiences and the aspects of human life as it is in contrast with the other movements which evoke emotions and describe what is imaginary or symbolized.

If we trace realism historically, we notice clearly that it has been a dominant feature in the arts at many periods. It was also considered as a technique and a means of training. It avoided artificiality and stylization, focusing on expressing subject matter truthfully.

Realism as a movement in literature appeared after 1848. It was established by the first theorist of this movement, Jules-Francais Champfleury. The purpose of this movement was to develop the so-called 'objective reality', focusing on the everyday life details of the lower and middle class society rejecting romanticism's dramatization. Watt (1957) states:

Modern realism begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through the senses and as such it has its origins in Descartes and Locke, and received its first full formulation by Thomas Reid in the middle of the eighteenth century(7).

The purpose of realism is to describe life without resorting to the subjectivity of romanticism and idealization. It also aims to show reality as it is excluding any fantastical or imaginary images and depicting the ordinary and everyday characters and phenomena.

Realism which extended as a dominant feature in literature and art in the mid 19th century had different relationships with some other movements.

It was the first modern movement in art. Of the several *Realism* movements in the arts, it is important to mention the ones of *the Opera Style of Verismo, Literary Realism, Theatrical Realism, and Italian Neorealist Cinema*.

Realism completely opposed some other movements such as *Romanticism* and *Idealism*. *Romanticism* arose as a reaction to the *Industrial Revolution*. *Romanticism* itself led to the rise of *Nineteenth-Century French Realism* which flourished in France from about 1840 until the late 19th century, and focused on painting and other arts.

Realism had another complex relationship with a movement called *Naturalism* which had some differences and similarities with it. Both of these movements revealed common subject matters, but *Naturalism* was more accurate than *Realism* in this respect. As a matter of fact, *Naturalism* was established by a group of writers who applied a particular philosophical thesis in the mid 19th century.

Realism completed the role of another movement, *Modernism*, which preceded it. *Realism* provided approaches to discover some truths with which *Modernism* dealt in details.

It is concluded that *Realism* was the leader of most of other movements, and it was truly distinctive from them. *Realism* contributed to the emergence of many other related movements. Authors were aware of the importance of using it in making their works more beautiful and expressive, in making them have a deeper meaning.

Analysis of Realism in *David Copperfield*

David Copperfield was published between 1849 and 1850 in monthly installments before being published completely in November 1850. In this novel, Dickens depicts the reality of the bad social conditions of the English society in Victorian England through the technique of dialogue and events that enhance its realism. It is the actual representation of the life of people of that time that Dickens himself experienced.

As a realistic novel, *David Copperfield* could make Dickens be remembered as a famous and influential writer in the 19th century. It also helped him to be praised for his keen portrait of Victorian era middle



class which helped, in turn, to make societal change. Moreover, this novel is full of images that reflect the use of realism.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens uses different characters representing different social classes. For example Emily's awareness of her differences of status and lifestyles from David when they were in the seaside though both of them are orphan. She refers to her family as poor, whereas David's family has inherited a great wealth. David feels very sad when he fails to join the middle class. He does not mingle with his colleagues in the warehouse thinking they are beneath him. However, when he becomes rich and earns a good fortune, he becomes a gentleman and tries in vain to make others ignore the fact that he was poor and a lower class person.

Another example is the distinction between the Steerforth family and the Peggotty family. While the Steerforth family is very wealthy, the Peggotty family is very poor and its members are simple fishermen. Dickens aims to show the differences between the classes and to reveal the unchangeable realism.

David suffered a lot in his experience with his stepfather. He spent a very happy life with his mother, Clara Copperfield, and Peggotty after his father's death. However, his life had changed to worse completely after his mother's marriage to his stepfather, Mr. Murdstone. David was humiliated by him physically and mentally. He was sent by Mr. Murdstone to a boarding school, and later on to his own warehouse, 'Murdstone and Grinby'. Forster (1875) refers to the injustice and humiliation that Dickens suffered from in his childhood and its effect on his life later:

What at once he brought out of the humiliation that had impressed him so deeply, though scarcely as yet quite consciously, was a natural dread of the hardships that might still be in store for him, sharpened by what he had gone through; and this, though in its effect for the present

imperfectly understood, became by degrees a passionate resolve, even

while he was by yielding to circumstances, -not to be-what circumstances

were conspiring to make him (88).

David was left at an early age away from school and without enough food or clothes. That was the status of most of children of the industrial revolution who had not enough education and were obliged to educate in factories away from their own houses. To sum up, they were submitted to physical and mental destruction at an early age.

Salem House, (the school in which David studied), was an example of the schools at that time in England. The condition was very bad. As David describes it after his arrival, there were scraps of old copy-books scattered in the dirty floor. There was also a strange and bad smell upon the room, like decayed corduroy, and rotten books. Mr. Creakle, the headmaster of this institution, profits from this institution but he does not try to improve it.

Another example is the boots and clothes of Mr. Mell, (one of the teachers of that school), which were thrown anyhow. Moreover, the example of the sign which read "Take care of him, He bites", and which David had to wear on his back, proves that the children at that time suffered from the teachers' bad ethics and were susceptible to have mental disorders. Therefore, the problem at that time was not only an educational problem, but it was also a social problem which hindered the progress of the inner world of the children and affected them mentally.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens uses several images which provide examples of his use of realism. He is assisted by some images in expressing his views as a radical person, and in conveying his ideas and thoughts to the audience. He uses the real images of 'emancipation', 'Take care of him, He bites', 'blood money', and 'the crocodile book', which are observed in some people.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, women were confined to their own classes. They were not allowed to think for themselves or to be free. Even the upper-classes women were humiliated and mistreated but they were



allowed to educate. Women in general were obliged to exhibit polite femininity and their attempts to be free and to be respected were suppressed. Moreover, in *David Copperfield*, there were attempts to reinforce women and to change this attitude towards them.

Three women in the novel were very important for David and were the main characters in it. They were Dora Spenlow, David's first wife, Agnes Wickfield, David's second wife and his childhood friend, and Betsey Trotwood, his aunt and his permanent companion from his childhood on. Although these women had some properties in common, they were different characters.

Once David arrived at Salem House, he was forced by Mr. Mell to wear a sign on his back which read "Take care of him, He bites". Mr. Mell did that on the orders from Mr. Murdstone who wanted to revenge from David who bit his hand when Mr. Murdstone was whipping him one day. "Take care of him" in this context did not mean "be nice to him", but it meant "be careful around him". This sign symbolizes David's being taken away from his mother and home.

David felt embarrassed that his colleagues mocked him when they saw this sign. He hated every first day of a new season in school. However, David received a good treatment from two nice colleagues of him who were Traddles and Steerforth.

Finally, this sign was taken off David's back but not for a good reason. In fact, the real reason was that Mr. Murdstone wanted to beat David's back more easily. Moreover, this vanishing of the sign symbolizes David's getting rid of his problems and the vanishing of his difficult circumstances.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens gives criticisms of the people who think about money and reputation and do not think about other poor people. He also gives examples of the power of money and the power of personal feeling and blood money. Some people are given money by other people in exchange of their services to make the status quo stand.

The best examples of blood money in *David Copperfield* are those of Mr. Micawber and Mr. Peggotty. Mr. Micawber is offered money by Uriah Heep so that he does not reveal his plots against David and the

Wickfields.

In the case of Mr. Peggotty, he receives an offer of money by Mrs. Steerforth to keep quiet about her son's kidnapping to Mr. Peggotty's adopted daughter, Emily. Emily herself offers him money twice as an apology for her running away.

However, these people do not agree to take these sums of money. Mr. Micawber refuses and exposes Uriah Heep to David, Miss Betsey, and Traddles. Mr. Peggotty also rejects Mrs. Steerforth's offer and holds onto Emily's payments until she is free and returns them to the Steerforth family.

The crocodile book was a book containing some stories about crocodiles. It is David's the most important book. When David recalls some old memories, he remembers reading to Peggotty from the crocodile book when was grown up and Peggotty was also adult. One day, David suddenly asks Peggotty if she thinks of marriage. Peggotty wonders why David asks this question, and changes the conversation to the crocodile book. David continues to remember other memories. He remembers that he used to read from the crocodile book at home before his mother is Mr. Murdstone's wife and on a specific day when Peggotty asked him to go for a trip for the first time to Yarmouth. He also remembers seeing the crocodile book put on the table in Yarmouth when he was on a visit to Peggotty. Finally, he calls back the memory of seeing Peggotty reading to his children from this book.

The crocodile book symbolizes the warmth and security that Peggotty gave to David until she looked after his kids later. It is the opposite of the sign of "Take care of him, He bites". The crocodile book also represents closeness to others and family contentment.

Dickens' *David Copperfield* is a realistic novel. It embodies autobiographical features of Dickens. It also depicts actual events that happened to him in the 19th century. Dickens' orphanage, poverty, and other hard circumstances he faced motivated him to make the character of David in *David Copperfield*. Dickens' characters in the novel are the same as those in reality, but with different names. Dickens achieves the task of revealing and depicting reality as it is.



Conclusion

Charles Dickens is the best English critical realism writer. He is admired and loved so much by his great public. Dickens has a very beautiful style in writing. He is an expressive writer full of passion and emotions.

Moreover, he is radical and has a good heart full of passion that motivated him to defend the humiliated characters especially children and women in middle classes. Dickens trends to reveal and expose the bad and negative phenomena in middle classes in the English society at the time by utilizing his perfect plots.

Finally, Dickens contributed to build a harmonious society and a socialist spiritual civilization by his immortal works. He influenced all generations who still read these works which have made him one of the immortal writers in the history of English literature.

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