**Dickens - David Copperfield**

**TheAuthor**

Charles Dickens was born at Portsmouth on 7February 1812, the second of eight children. Dickens’ childhoodexperiences were similar to those depicted in David Copperfield. His father, whowas a government clerk, was imprisoned for dept and Dickens was brieяy sent towork in a blacking warehouse at the age of twelve. He received little formaleducation, but taught himself shorthand and became a reporter of parliamentarydebates for the Morning Chronicle. He began to publish sketches in variousperiodicals, which were subsequently republished as Sketches by Boz, ThePickwick Papers were published in 1836-37 and after a slow start became apublishing phenomenon and Dickens’ characters the centre of popular cult.Part of the secret of his success was the method of cheap serial publicationwhich Dickens used for all his novels. He began Oliver Twist in 1837, followedby Nicholas Nickleby (1838) and The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41). Afterfinishing Barnaby Rudge (1841) Dickens set off for America; he went full ofenthusiasm for the young republic but, in spite of a triumphant reception, hereturned disillusioned. His experiences are recorded in American Notes (1842).Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-44) did not repeat its predecessors’ success butthis was quickly redressedby the huge popularity of the Christmas Books, ofwhich the first A Christmas Carol, appeared in 1843, During 1844-46 Dickenstravelled abroad and he began Dombey an Son while in Switzerland. This and DavidCopperfield (1849-50) were more serious in theme and more carefully planned thanhis early novels. In later works, such as Bleak House (1853) and Little Dorrit(1857), Dickens’ social criticism became more radical and his comedy moresavage. In 1850 Dickens started the weekly periodical Household Words, succeededin 1859 by All the Year Round; in these he published Hard Times (1854), A Taleof Two Cities (1859) and Great Expectations (1860-61). Dickens’ health wasfailing during the 1860s and the physical strain of the public readings which hebegan in 1858 hastened his decline, although Our Mutual Friend (1865) retainedsome of his best comedy. His last novel, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, was nevercompleted andhe died on 9 June 1870. Public grief at his death was considerableand he was buried in the Poets’ Corner of WestminsterAbbey.

**TheSummary**

David Copperfield is David’s narrationin his maturityof the events and incidents through which he remembers his lifeand character developing, and through which his maturity was reached.

Six months before David Copperfield’sbirth, his father died. His aunt, Betsey Trotwood, arrives in Blunderstone onthe night he is born, but immediately gives up all interest in him, as she hadfirmly expected a girl. With his gentle mother Clara Copperfield and his belovednurse Peggotty, David’s early childhood is very happy. Peggotty takes himon holiday to Yarmouth, where they stay in an old boat-house with her brother MrPeggotty, his nephew Ham and pretty niece little Emily, and the forlorn widowMrs Gummidge. David’s happiness ends when he returns home to find hismother has re-married. Her new husband, Murdstone, and his sister Jane, driveClara to an early grave with their cruel‘firmness’. David is sent away to Salem House, a schoolrun by a harsh, cruel headmaster, Creakle. He makes two friends there: theapparently charming Steerforth and the agreeable Traddles. But after hismother’s death, he is sent instead to work in Murdstone’s Londonwarehouse, where he miserably experiences poverty,despair, and loneliness. Helodges with the family of the extraordinary Mr Micawber, whose continualfinancial difficulties lead to his eventual imprisonment fordebt. David decides to run away to his Aunt Betseyin Dover. Penniless and alone, he has to walk all the way. He finds her caringfor Mr Dick, a pleasant simpleton. She is as eccentric as ever, but takes himin, as he had hoped, and dismisses the Murdstones from their responsibility forhim. She also arranges for him to live in Canterbury with her lawyer, MrWickfield, and his lovely daughter, Agnes, and to attend old DoctorStrong’s excellent school there. In Canterbury, David also meetsWickfield’s sinister clerk, the ‘umble’ Uriah Heep, and renewshis friendship with the Micawbers when they happen to pass throughtown. David grows up, successfully completes hiseducation, and is to spend some time ‘looking about’ for a career.Passing through London, he happens to meet Steerforth, who takes him tovisithis mother and her ardent companion, Rosa Dartle. David was on his way torevisit Mr Peggotty and his household at Yarmouth, and now takes Steerforth withhim. They find little Emily grown up and engaged to Ham. Peggotty has marriedBarkis the carrier: their courtship was aided by David occasionally acting asBarkis’s messenger to Peggotty. David is articled to Spenlow and Jorkins asan apprentice proctor in Doctors’ Commons. He takes rooms in London, wherehe entertains Steerforth, drunkenly; and later invites the Micawbers, stillshort of money, and their new lodger, Traddles. David meets Dora Spenlow andinstantly falls desperately in love with her. After her birthday picnic, theyare secretly engaged. David returns brieяy to Yarmouth, as Barkisis dying. While he is there, Mr Peggotty’s household is most unhappilyupset by Emily’s running away with Steerforth. Mr Peggotty resolves tofollow her, find her, and bring her back. He meets, unsatisfactorily, proud MrsSteerforth and the infuriated Rosa Dartle. Aunt Betsey arrives in London with Mr Dick,and announces that she is ruined. David starts work with great determination, asa part- time secretary to Doctor Strong. At the same time he teaches himselfshorthand. After many struggles, he becomes a parliamentary reporter. Mr Spenlowhas learned of his daughter’s secret engagement, through her companion,Jane Murdstone, and tells Davidhe forbids it. But he dies suddenly that night,and Dora moves to live with her aunts. David is allowed to visit her there.Eventually his hopes are fulfilled and he and Dora are married. Previously, Uriah Heep appeared in London,seeming to have Mr Wickfield in his power, and still hoping, as he has toldDavid, to marry Agnes. After David’s marriage, he returns, and, makesunpleasant suggestions concerning Doctor Strong’s young wife Annie and heridle cousinJack Maldon. Doctor Strong denies these, but a shadow falls betweenhim and Annie. With the sensitive help of Mr Dick, the truth is revealed, andthey are reconciled. From Steerforth’s servant, Littimer,David hears that Steerforth has abandoned Emily. He passes this news on to MrPeggotty, who occasionally returns to London during his quest for his niece.Together, they find her unfortunate friend, Martha Endell, and ask her to helpthem. When Emily returns to London, Martha finds her, and at last sheand MrPeggotty are happily re-united. They decide to emigrate to Australia, takingwith them Mrs Gummidge and, eventually, Martha as well. For some time, Micawber, now working as aclerk for Heep, behaves strangely. Then he calls David and his aunt toCanterbury, and, with his usual great eloquence, accuses Heep of many frauds andcrimes against Mr Wickfield. With the help of the reliable Traddles, Uriah Heepis crushed. Micawber is lent money to ease his financial difficulties; he andhis family accept the suggestion of emigrating. David has become a successful author, andgives up his job as a parliamentary reporter. His marriage to Dora, thoughhappy, is marred because she is so completely impractical. Realising that it isselfish totry to ‘form her mind’, David is reconciled and loves herfor herself, but still feels a sense of loss and incompleteness in theirrelationship. Dora loses a child and is afterwards very ill. Her illnesscontinues: she weakens slowly, and dies. David decides to take his grief abroad. Butfirst, he takes a message from Emily to Ham in Yarmouth. He arrives there duringa great storm, and witnesses the drowning of Steerforth in a wreck just off thecoast, and the death of Ham in attempting to rescue him. He breaks the news toMrs Steerforth and Rosa Dartle, but conceals it from Mr Peggotty and Emily. Hesays farewell to them, and to the Micawbers, before they all depart forAustralia. David wanders sadly abroad. His reputation asanovelist grows. He is consoled by a letter from Agnes, and returns to Britainwhere he finds Traddles now practising as a lawyer and happily married at lastto his Sophy. With Traddles, he visits a prison and finds that two of theconvicts are Heep and Littimer. David realises what he had long been blindto: that he has always loved Agnes Wickfield, and that she has always been thelight of his life. His ‘undisciplined heart’ had led him astray. Nowhe is sure that Agnes is involved with someone else, and decides he must notinterfere. At last this misunderstanding is cleared up. David and Agnes declaretheir mutual love, and are married. Agnes reveals that this was Dora’sdying wish. Ten years later, Mr Peggotty returnsfromAustralia, with news of the emigrants, who have all made a success of their newlives. Micawber has even become a magistrate. David remains very happily marriedto Agnes. Aunt Betsey and Peggotty help to look after their children. WithAgnes, David Copperfield has established himself and achieved hishappiness.

**Characterisation/Interpretation**

Charles Dickens’ novel DavidCopperfield is about his development as a man, and the lessons he has to learnbefore he can be completely happy. Some parts of this dramatic novel areautobiographical.

The central figure David Copperfield issensitive, honest and loving asa child, and remains so all his life. He is alsointelligent and observant, but he learns the harder facts of life very slowly.For example, it took him a long time to recognize the truth about Steerforth. Heis often too innocent, trusting and thoughtless.He also lacks firmness andself-discipline. Qualities, his aunt is very well aware. David falls in love with Dora at the firstsight, before she even speaks, and before he has any idea of what sort of personshe is. Later he recognises that she is the wrong companion for him. After herdeath, David begins to remember how many mistakes he has made. He notices thatall his life it has made sense for him to be with Agnes, although he was tooblind to see to see this. She is able to understandhim, and so the perfectwomen for him. Mr Micawber is a positive character of thisnovel. His weakness is that he has a large family but never has money. Hisstrength is that he never loses the hope that better times will come.Nevertheless his moods change from joy to misery often and also very quickly.Despite his difficulties, he keeps up an impressive appearance. His talent forspeaking and writing letters in elaborate, eloquent language, overcomes UriahHeep and helps to defeat all his other problems. All in all he is a good andloving husband and father.

Uriah Heep hates the society that has forcedthis pretence on him. He is greedy, very dishonest, and extremely nasty. Uriahwill use any means to get what he wants. But he is not only a negative person,some sympathy is saved for him when he describes his poor, difficultchildhood.

Steerforth is charming, handsome, and seemsfriendly, generous and noble. David greatly admires him because he seems to haveall the social strengths and graces David lacks. Later when Steerforth runs offwith Emily David recognises that his friend is also proud, irresponsible andselfish.

David’s aunt Betsy Trotwood has stoppedtrusting men because of many disappointments in past. She hopes that ClaraCopperfield’s child will be a girl. Disappointed again, she looks after MrDick instead. When David comes to her, she becomes a second mother to him. Shealways asks Mr Dick for his advice. Although she seems to be independent, she isreally unselfish: she shields Mr Wickfield, and allows David his own way evenwhen she knows he is wrong. She is a good judge of character and is delighted byhis marriage to Agnes. Dora Spenlow is beautiful, sweet, attractiveand happy, but also empty-headed and impractical. Her pretty sweetness impressesDavid from the moment he first sees her, but he learns, slowly and sadly, whyeveryone treats her like a child or a toy. When married to David, she iscompletely unable to look after their house, and unreasonably afraid of anyattempt to teach her to improve. He can never understand to follow his advice.When she is dying, she suggests that their marriage could not have continued tobe happy. Agnes Wickfield is beautiful and attractive,like Dora, but in many ways she is Dora’s opposite. Agnes is calm,reliable, responsible and patient, all qualities Dora lacks. David always asksher for a help and advice becauseshe is so sensible, reasonable and wise. Thesecret that Agnes has loved David all her life is only revealed in the end whenDavid realises how long she has been his guide and support, and now his life hasalways been directed towards her.She seems to be perfect, and so sometimes notvery realistic.

With the love-story between David and Agnes,Charles Dickens wants to show how love can be real, and how it can betrue.