The Influence of the Social Environment on Moulding the Child's Character: A Critical Analysis of *Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Hard Times,* and *Great Expectations*

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Abstract

Childhood is a crucial stage in the development of societies. It plays an essential role in building children's characters as they grasp knowledge from their surroundings. They interact with the social environment which fosters or hinders their development. This study applies the naturalistic and realistic approaches of criticism. Through the portrayal of children in *Oliver Twist*; *David Copperfield*; *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*, Dickens highlights the ordeals and suffering of children in the nineteenth century and shows the plight of the industrial revolution as it damaged the essential block of the Victorian society. Children, during that time, faced different types of social pressures which affected their characters and future lives. Dickens as a social reformer and critic emphasizes the basic rights of children and shows the influence of the social surroundings and environment on moulding their characters. This study investigates Dickens' embedded message showing how childhood is not only a stage of playing, but it is also important and influential in the moulding and shaping the child's character.

Keywords: Social Environment, Children's Characters, Dickens.