

# The 'Hollow Men' in Charles Dickens's Novels on Education: Critical Perspectives

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Charles Dickens was gravely concerned by the deliberate attempt of a section of 'intellectuals' of contemporary Victorian society to implement the precepts of a distorted Utilitarianism in the education system, thereby obliterating all traces of sentiment, imagination and fancy from the minds of the younger generation. This would, he believed, prove detrimental to society. He expressed his concern at the growing mechanization of his age that seemed to engulf the human mind, and he urged for social awareness regarding this silent malaise:

In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairytales should be respected ... a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun...<sup>1</sup>

One other, more personal reason for concerning himself with the prevalent mechanical system of education and its consequences on the human mind, the oppression of children and the hardships of the poor, was Dickens's own experience in his childhood as a worker in a blacking factory:

"No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship ...

[ I ] felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast...What would I have given, ... to have been sent back to any other school, to have been taught something anywhere!"<sup>2</sup>

As he grew up, he became determined that never again would he allow himself to be exposed to such degradation as he had faced when forced to earn his livelihood at the warehouse :

... the blacking warehouse that made him a man of insuperable resolve and deadly determination, also made him for life a sympathizer with all suffering and with all victims of injustice.<sup>3</sup>

The sustained and sincere efforts of Dickens to initiate social change regarding the suffering of the masses and their sadly neglected facilities of education find expression in the five hundred

letters that the novelist exchanged with Angela Burdett Coutts:

From these letters ... one may plainly infer how clearly Dickens realised the urgent need for popular education and what he thought the aims of that education should be; how important he realised art to be for the heart and the imagination; how vigorously he insisted

upon decent living conditions for the poor, ... how noble and all-embracing was his demand for social justice.<sup>4</sup>

These letters contain the account of his visits to the 'Ragged Schools' and his realisation of the social necessity for their existence. The Ragged Schools were volunteer organizations which provided free evening instruction to poor children in the slums. They were founded twenty years before by a shoe-maker of Portsmouth and a chimney sweep of Windsor, and gradually they spread all over England. The Field Lane School was guided by a young lawyer's clerk called Samuel Starey, who appealed to Miss Coutts for financial help. In 1843, Dickens, along with Lord Shaftesbury formed the Ragged School Union "to give permanence, regularity and vigour to existing Ragged Schools and to promote the formation of new ones throughout the metropolis."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, writing in *Household Words* from 1850 gave Dickens additional opportunities for bringing information about the Ragged Schools before the public. Particularly during its first few years, *Household Words* was very active in trying to strengthen broadly conceived support for preventive education, with a number of articles on ragged schools, industrial schools, ragged dormitories, emigration schemes and reformatory programmes, although the necessity of state intervention was increasingly emphasized. However, in spite of agreeing with Shaftesbury that had it not been for these schools, almost each of the students trained in them "would have been a vagabond or thief",<sup>6</sup> Dickens was keenly aware of the drawbacks of these schools supported by the Evangelicals.<sup>7</sup> His attention was first drawn to the Ragged Schools when he perceived the Field Lane School, that was "pitifully struggling for life, under every disadvantage. It had no means, ... no sizeable rooms, ... it attracted within its walls a fluctuating swarm of faces – young in years but youthful in nothing else – that scowled Hope out of countenance."<sup>8</sup> Regarding the teachers in this school, Dickens is often sympathetic, expressing his sincere admiration of their valiant efforts to continue to discharge their duties despite great odds :

The masters are extremely quiet, honest, good men. You may suppose they are, to be there at all. It is enough to break one's heart to get at the place : to say nothing of getting at the children's minds afterwards. The moral courage of the teachers is beyond all praise. They are surrounded by every possible adversity, and every disheartening circumstance that can be imagined. Their office is worthy of the apostles.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of his appreciation of the teachers, who often supported the school financially, and despite extending his co-operation initially to the Evangelicals in the running of these schools, Dickens strongly differed from Reverend G. J. Hall's belief that in the Ragged Schools, "our work is essentially missionary."<sup>10</sup> In his letter to Samuel R. Starey, treasurer of the Ragged School in Field Lane, Saffron Hill, Dickens stressed the importance of cleanliness in these schools, and expressed his displeasure at the religious education imparted to the students :

"It occurred to me, when I was there, as being of the most immense importance that if practicable, the boys should have an opportunity of washing themselves before beginning their task... will you ascertain at about what cost a washing place – a large trough or sink, ... with a good supply of running water, soap and towels could be put up ?...it seems to me of vital importance that no persons, however well intentioned, should perplex the minds of these unfortunate creatures with religious mysteries that [they] ...could but imperfectly understand" [ 24 September, 1843 ].<sup>11</sup>

Dickens had expressed his disapproval of this "missionary" tendency of the Evangelicals in a letter to Miss Coutts:

"To gain [the children's ] attention in any way, is a difficulty, quite gigantic. To impress them, even with the idea of a God, when their own condition is so desolate, becomes a monstrous task ... [They] know nothing of affection, care, or kindness of any sort ... And here it is that the viciousness of insisting on creeds and forms in educating such miserable beings, is most apparent."<sup>12</sup>

Their criticism of this over-emphasis on religion in the Ragged Schools was not without basis. The poorer sections of Victorian society were appallingly illiterate and ignorant, since, apart from catechism, there had been no endeavour on a national level, to introduce secular education, till

1833. The Sunday Schools, which were attended by large sections of the poor, usually concentrated on teaching from religious Scriptures. Ironically, even in this sphere , there was an extreme ignorance on the part of the children:

One child went to Sunday school regularly for five years; does not know who Jesus Christ was : he died on the Cross to save out Saviour; has never heard of St. Peter or St. Paul. [When asked who Christ was, some answered] 'He was Adam', 'He was an Apostle', 'He was a King of London long ago.'<sup>13</sup>

Dickens was equally vocal about the apparent indifference of the upper classes regarding the squalor and filth that were almost synonymous with the existence of these schools and the general apathy among the students. Many references in his novels echo the exact situation prevailing in London. For instance, of the Field Lane school, he confesses:

"I blush to quote Oliver Twist for an authority, but it stands on that ground, and is precisely such a place as the Jew lived in. The school is held in three most wretched rooms on the first floor of a rotten house : every plank, and timber, and brick and lath, and piece of plaster of which shakes as you walk. One room is devoted to the girls, two to the boys. The former are much the better looking – I cannot say better dressed for there is no such thing as dress among the seventy pupils; certainly not the elements of a whole suit of clothes, among them all."<sup>14</sup>

In sharp contrast to the state of Ragged schools in London was the account of the well-reputed Rauhe Haus (the Rough House) institution in Hamburg run by Pastor Wichern and his wife and seven young clergymen who took care of about a hundred children of which seventy were boys and thirty were girls, most of them being sent there instead of being sent to gaol. However, though they received religious instruction there, they were also given vocational training:

The thirty girls and five deaconesses ... cook, wash, and perform all the humble duties of a woman. The boys have a printing-press, and some are trained as printers; some learn bookbinding; some study ... tailoring; others make shoes; others bake; there are carpenters, there are boys learning to make lithographs and woodcuts. Gardening and agriculture is learned by them all. Half of the boys are at work always, while the others are at school. Each, when he leaves the institution, is bound apprentice to the trade that he has studied.

... Every boy has his plot of ground, but he is allowed only to grow flowers in it, for it is designed to make the outcast learn to love the beautiful. The children are not marshaled about, and set down like a regiment

before a mile of dinner... [ At ] the institution ... there is no wall, there are no locked gates to frown down at the home among the flowers.<sup>15</sup>

In Household Words as elsewhere, Dickens forcefully argued for the cause of the poor children and for reform in the education system, especially in the Ragged Schools:

“Umbrellas to mend, and chairs to mend, and clocks to mend, are called in our streets daily. Who shall count up the numbers of thousands of children [in the] streets, whose voice of ignorance cries aloud as the voice of wisdom once did, and is as little regarded; who go to pieces for want of mending and die unrepaired !”<sup>16</sup>

Through his novels dealing with education, Dickens attempted to expose the hollowness that lay within the contemporary education system, and the ineffectuality of the so-called “teachers” of the Victorian age. Indeed, we may say of them:

We are the hollow men/ We are the stuffed men Leaning together/  
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas ! Our dried voices, when/ We whisper  
together  
Are quiet and meaningless/ As wind in dry grass  
Remember us – if at all – not as lost/ Violent souls, but only  
As the hollow men/ The stuffed men.<sup>17</sup>

Dickens endeavoured to show how these “teachers”, instead of inspiring in their students the desire for knowledge, succeeded only in arousing in them a feeling of apathy and frustration. Dickens projects not only the students, but also their teachers as victims of a misdirected education system, the former being the recipients, and the latter, the exponents of what may be referred to as “non-education.” John Ruskin’s views on “non-education”, as compared to what he regards as education are noteworthy in this regard :

... you might read all the books in the British Museum ... and remain an utterly ‘illiterate’, uneducated person; but ... if you read ten pages of a good book letter by letter, ... with real accuracy, - you are forevermore in some measure an educated person. The entire difference between education and non-education (as regards the merely intellectual part of it) consists in this accuracy ... an uneducated person may know, by memory, many languages, and talk them all, and yet truly know not a word of any, - not a word even of his own.<sup>18</sup>

In many novels of Charles Dickens, we may see how the over-emphasis on facts and the tendency to attain mastery over as many subjects as possible, leads, ironically, not to education in the truest sense of the term, but to “non-education”- that is, knowledge which is both intellectually and morally unfulfilling.

Dickens was dismayed by the national apathy for undertaking what he felt was an appropriate education for children. He strongly believed that the distribution of knowledge among all sections of society would bring about social amity and progress :

“I have long been, in my sphere, a zealous advocate for the diffusion of knowledge among all classes and conditions of men; because I do believe ... that the more a man knows, the more humbly, and with a more faithful spirit he comes back to the fountain of all knowledge and takes to his heart the great sacred precept, ‘On earth peace, goodwill toward men.’  
... [I hope] that great precept ... will rise higher and higher above the beating of hammers, the roar of wheels, [and] the rattle of machinery ...”<sup>19</sup>

Dickens was the first important novelist, (though not the pioneer) in using literature for reformation of the education system. Wordsworth, in his Excursion, had already emphasized the responsibility of the state in conducting a regulated system of education

... this imperial Realm/ While she exacts all allegiance [must] admit an obligation, on her part, to teach/  
Them who are born to serve her and obey; Binding herself by statute to secure/ For all children whom her  
soil maintains the rudiments of letters.<sup>20</sup>

Dickens, likewise, was of the opinion that the state should ensure that all children received a minimum of schooling, should be prepared to pay for it, and should supervise the standard of teaching. “[He] was haunted by ghosts of children, who cried to him aloud for aid and for redress, saying that ... they too had known indifferences, lack of training, want of care and education, and had been balked thereby, even of a chance of a strong and happy manhood. Their suffering, and the tragedy of their neglect, obsessed Dickens.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, he insisted that true education should not consist of a meaningless memorizing of facts, figures and mathematical calculations.

Dickens strongly advocated the building up of a pleasant atmosphere in schools, where wholesome education could be imparted through adequate expression of fancy and imagination. He categorically comments on this in many of his letters and speeches :

I don't like that sort of school of which we have a notable example in Kent, ... where the childish imagination is utterly discouraged, and where those bright childish faces, ... are gloomily and grimly scared out of countenance; where I have never seen among the pupils, whether boys or girls, anything but little parrots and small calculating machines.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas Carlyle [1795-1881], also advocated that human values are not amenable to mathematical calculations as seen in his Characteristics with its attack on "system – makers and builders of logical card castles."<sup>23</sup> There was a considerable interaction between these two distinguished literary

figures and Dickens went so far as to admit that "I am always reading you faithfully and trying to go your way," and again, "... no man knows your books better than I."<sup>24</sup>

Carlyle's criticism of the "gerund-grinding" approach to Classics teaching reminds one of Dickens's criticism of Mr. Gradgrind's educational methods. The very similarity of the name Gradgrind to the term "gerund-grinding" seems significant. Herr Teufelsdröckh recalls his school days as a time having been "utterly wasted", crammed as he had been with "innumerable dead vocables", by teachers "without knowledge of man's nature or of boys":

"How can an inanimate, mechanical, Gerund-grinder ... foster the growth of anything; much more of the Mind, which grows, not like a vegetable (by having its roots littered with etymological compost) but like a spirit, thought kindling itself at the fire of living thought ? How shall he give kindling in whose inward man there is no live coal, but all is burnt out to a dead, grammatical cinder?"<sup>25</sup>

Three schools in Dickens's novels illustrate what he felt to be the principal drawbacks in the education system – namely, Dotheboy's Hall, Doctor Blimber's Academy and Mr. Gradgrind's School in Coketown.

In Dotheboy's Hall in Yorkshire, the proprietor and headmaster, Mr. Squeers aims at exploiting his students. This characterization is based on the one-eyed William Shaw whom Dickens had met on an incognito trip to Yorkshire, especially to see some of these notorious schools.<sup>26</sup> The portrayal of the atrocities of Dotheboy's Hall was perhaps the first effort of Dickens at exposing the monstrous indifference to education in England and the neglect of it by the state. In Nicholas Nickleby; the horror of these Yorkshire schools is diluted by some grotesque comedy – as when Nicholas is being shown by Squeers the unique methods of teaching followed by the school. The students are referred to as 'half-a-dozen scarecrows, out at knees and elbows.' One of them is 'cleaning the black parlour window' and Squeers approves of this one the grounds that :

"We go upon the practical mode of teaching, Nickleby. C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-i-n, Win, d-e-r, winder, a casement. When the Boy knows this out of the book, he goes out and does it ... bottiney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants. When he has learned [this] he goes and [weeds the garden.]"<sup>27</sup>

Here then, is the "non-education" that Ruskin warns against – for Mr. Squeers is surely an example of the uneducated person with pretensions to knowledge, but who does not possess accurate knowledge of the language that he speaks – and pretends to teach. Dickens, through his fiction, letters and speeches, continually stressed the necessity for a different atmosphere in the existing schools :

"... the sort of school that I do like ... is a school established by the members of an industrious and useful order, which supplies the comforts and graces of life at every familiar turning in the road of our existence; ... it is a place of education... a children's school, which is at the same time no less a children's home, a home not to be confided to the care

of cold or ignorant strangers, ... but to be from generation to generation administered by men living in precisely such homes as those poor children have lost."<sup>28</sup>

In stark contrast to these expectations is Dr. Blimber's Academy in Dombey and Son, where Dickens exposes the unsympathetic attitude of the teachers towards the young students. A deliberately oppressive atmosphere prevails here, and the children, burdened with a heavy syllabus, are expected to behave as adults. Paul Dombey, only six when he arrives at the school, wears a hat, while the other pupils wear 'the largest possible shirt collars and stiffest possible cravats.'<sup>29</sup>

The aim, here, is not to nurture the innocence of childhood but to deaden the very spirit of the children, and Mr. Blimber, the Headmaster, is Dickens's mouthpiece of a 'cold and ignorant stranger.' His interview of Paul is significant :

"Ha!" said Dr. Blimber. "Shall we make a man of him?" "I had rather be a child", replied Paul.



[The Headmaster's reply speaks volumes] : "Indeed !" said the Doctor, "Why ?"<sup>30</sup>

This marked indifference and deliberate callousness of the "teachers" towards their young "students", and the tendency to treat children as adults, regardless of the former's inability to comprehend what these adults say, is vividly portrayed in Chadband's speech to Jo in Bleak House.

"My young friend", says Chadband, "you are to us a pearl, you are to us a diamond, ... a gem, ... a jewel. And why, my young friend "" "I don't know, " replies Jo. "I don't know nothing." "My young friend" says Chadband, "it is because you know nothing that you are to us a gem and jewel. For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or rivers? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. A human boy. O glorious to be human boy! And why glorious, my young friend? Because you are capable of receiving the lessons of wisdom, because you are capable of profiting by this discourse which I now deliver for your good, because you are not a stick, or a staff, ... or a stone, or a post, or a pillar.

O running stream of sparkling joy  
To be a soaring human boy !"

At this ... state of the discourse, Jo, who seems to have been gradually going out of his mind, smears his right arm over his face, and gives a terrible yawn. Mrs. Snagsby indignantly expresses her belief that he is limb of the arch-fiend.<sup>31</sup>

The 'abominable nonsense'<sup>32</sup> of Chadband's discourses does little to impress or help Jo, while Chadband himself is a fair example of T.S. Eliot's 'hollow men', his 'headpiece filled with straw', his voice 'quiet and meaningless' to his penniless "student" who is concerned more with how to obtain his next meal, and is also too young to comprehend what he is forced to listen to. This tendency among many Victorian "teachers" of indulging in "non-education" is highlighted by a noted German educationist who commented in 1851 that children had little of:

[that] unrestrained joyousness, the poetry of boyhood and youth, which we see continually springing up afresh amongst us ... from as early a period as their twelfth year,[boys in England] were treated in all respects as men.<sup>33</sup>

Significantly, the stalwarts of Victorian society were fully aware of the revolutionary ideas of educationists such as Froebel, but they were unfortunately impervious to these new trends in education.<sup>34</sup> Thus Mrs. Pipchin states with distaste, "there is a great deal of nonsense – and worse – talked about young people not being pressed too hard at first, and being tempted on ... It never was thought of in my time, and it has no business to be thought of now. My opinion is 'keep' em at it." It is with her enthusiastic support that Paul proceeds to Blimber's, where, she hears, "there's nothing but learning going on from morning to night"<sup>35</sup> The books that Paul expected to study there :

comprised a little English, and a deal of Latin – names of things, declensions of articles and substantives, exercises thereon, and preliminary rules – a trifle of orthography, a glance of ancient history, ... a few tables, two or three weights and measures, and a little general information.<sup>36</sup>

Miss Blimber who takes his lessons, is looked upon by Paul 'as a kind of learned Guy Faux ... stuffed full of scholastic straw.'<sup>37</sup>

Dickens lashes out directly against such "teachers" and their attitudes in Hard Times when he presents M'choakumchild, doggedly engaged in 'Murdering the Innocents':

He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography etymology, syntax and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmology ... algebra, land surveying ... vocal music .. were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers.

He is a true example of Ruskin's "uneducated person." Dickens adds with irony this further comment on M'choakumchild's "learnedness" – 'If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more.'<sup>38</sup>

The "teachers" of Dickens' novels are, however, not the only projections of distorted minds and attitudes. Students too, as in Nicholas Nickelby, prove to be disappointing, as when Nicholas confronts his pupils for the first time :

... the last faint traces of hope, the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of Nicholas as he looked in dismay around! Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with countenance of old men, deformities ... , boys of stunted growth ... every ugliness or distortion that told of ... one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect.<sup>39</sup>

Dickens depicts this physical deformity and seemingly paves the way for more horrifying deformity of the spirit which he portrays so vividly in *Hard Times* and in *Our Mutual Friend*. The talk given by the unnamed “Government officer” about the “Principles of Taste” prepares the ground for such distortion of human spirit :

‘You are not to see anywhere, what you don’t see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don’t have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact. ... You are to be in all things regulated and governed,’ said the gentleman, ‘by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. ... This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is Taste.’<sup>40</sup>

This mechanical ‘gerund-grinding’ education provides an excellent example of a misapplied utilitarian system of education which had become popular in the Victorian age. It is little wonder then, that in such a school, the “educated” teachers would lay great emphasis on facts and definitions. When Sissy Jupe is asked to define a horse, the girl, who has spent her childhood amongst horses, fails to give a satisfactory answer, while Bitzer, the ideal pupil, mechanically rattles off the definition :

Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coats in the spring; in marshy countries sheds hoofs too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth...

Bitzer’s staccato, exact and unemotional definition recalls modern day computers that mechanically produce information at the push of a button and reinforces in contrast, the imaginative and delightful childhood Sissy Jupe spent amidst the circus acrobats. According to Dr. John Manning, the passion for such definitions seem to have originated from the ‘object lessons’ of the noted educationist Pestalozzi, who had devised this technique to encourage children to observe accurately, analyse, and correctly describe various natural phenomena. Needless to say, this original idea soon became distorted, and Dr. Manning notes that little children, not two weeks in school, were ‘taught that certain parts of a sheep are “principal” others “secondary” ... One hears from infant mouths such terms as graminivorous and chalybeats, iridescent and amorphous, serrated and foliaceous’<sup>41</sup> The distortion of the system devised by Pestalozzi<sup>42</sup> drew Dickens’s attention, and over a period of sixteen years he twice satirized such definitions, first in *Nicholas Nickelby*, where he presents it with a grotesque humour, and later, with biting satire, in *Hard Times*. By this time the “regular education system” so admired by Mr. Squeers and influencing the teaching methods of various schools in Victorian England, had developed glaring defects arising from the distortion of the Pestalozzian principle.

The climax of “non-education”, however, is found in *Our Mutual Friend*, which gives perhaps the fullest exposure to the level to which human nature will sink if misguided by a distorted Utilitarianism. Here, through the depiction of the teacher-turned-murderer, Bradley Headstone, Dickens presents a far more despicable and dangerous character than that of the other teacher-characters in his novels. Charley Hexam’s school presents a confusion of teaching methods :

Its atmosphere was oppressive and disagreeable ... it was crowded, noisy and confusing ... An exceedingly and confoundingly perplexing jumble of a school ... where black spirits and grey, red spirits and white, jumbled jumbled jumbled, jumbled every night ...

Headstone, the teacher in the school, similar to Mr. Squeers and M’choakumchild :

had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher’s knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, ... from his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage ... history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left – natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics and what not all in their several places...

Headstone’s “education” dehumanizes him and Dickens, through the depiction of the former’s degeneration warns the reader regarding the terrifying depths to which human nature may sink when unable to lead a well-balanced life. The ‘suppression’ of Headstone’s ‘animal’ instincts, of ‘what was fiery (though smouldering) in him’,<sup>43</sup> surfaces in a distorted manner through his hatred of Eugene Wrayburn and his passion for Lizzie Hexam. He gradually degenerates from the decent schoolmaster to the murderous villain. Confronted and challenged by his former pupil Charley Hexam, who suspects him of having a hand in the murder of Eugene Wrayburn, he:

shrank ... on the floor, and grovelled there, with the palms of his hand tight-clasping his hot temples, in unutterable misery, and unrelieved by a single tear.<sup>44</sup>

Headstone cannot arouse respect either as a teacher or as a human being, and his despicable act arouses unrestrained disgust in the mind of his pupil. His “education” has left him ill at ease, awkward, and finally obsessed and neurotic, a striking contrast to Lizzie who has a natural grace even without “education”.

Other instances of “non-education” by villainous teachers may be found in Oliver Twist in Fagin’s “education” of the young pick-pockets :

... the two boys followed [Fagin] closely about; getting out of his sight, so nimbly, ... that it was impossible to follow their motions ... If the old gentleman felt a hand in any one of his pockets, he cried out where it was; and then the game began all over again.

Later, when this “education” is put into practice, in real life, it only serves to evoke terror in Oliver’s young mind.<sup>45</sup>

A different kind of terror is aroused in young David Copperfield’s mind, too, subjected as he is to Mr. Murdstone’s cruel brutality when dealing with David’s lesson. As David himself confesses, ‘the influence of the Murdstone’s upon me was like the fascination of two snakes on a wretched young bird ... The natural result of this treatment was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged.’<sup>46</sup> When after being beaten by Mr. Murdstone, and having been driven, in his frustration to bite the latter’s hand, David is finally banished to Salem House, he has to suffer the indignity and humiliation of

carrying a board on his back inscribed, “take care of him. He bites”, according to Mr. Murdstone’s instructions.

Education at Salem House comes in the guise of lessons taken by Mr. Creakle, who :

Had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite.

... I know him to have been an incapable brute who had no ... right to be possessed of the great trust he held ... Miserable little propitiators of a remorseless idol, how abject we were to him! What a launch in life ... to be so mean and servile to a man of such parts and pretensions!<sup>47</sup>

Dickens condemned in unequivocal terms such cruelty towards children. At a dinner on behalf of a Children’s Hospital in Great Ormond Street, in 1858, he declared, “any heart which could toughen its affections and sympathies against those dear little people must be wanting in so many humanizing experiences of innocence and tenderness, as to be quite an unsafe monstrosity among men.”<sup>48</sup>

Alongside this realistic exposure of social trends, and “non-education” or ignorance, Dickens presents through his novels, what he upholds as true education – that is, the inculcation of the gentler emotions of love, understanding and sympathy in human nature. Dickens’s novels present a critical and realistic picture of the various trends of his age.

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13. The Heart of Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 52, note.
14. Dickens to Miss Coutts, in The Heart of Charles Dickens, op. cit., p. 50.
15. Household Words, “How Charity Begins At Home Near Hamburg”, Vol. 4, No. 95, Jan 17, 1852, pp. 401-02.
16. Household Words, “Boys to Mend”, Vol. V, No. 129, Sept. 11, 1852, p. 597.
17. T.S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men”, from Collected Poems, 1909-1962 (London : Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 89.
18. John Ruskin, Sesame and Lilies, Lecture I, “Sesame: Of King’s Treasuries”, Dec. 6, 1864, at Rusholme Town Hall, Manchester, Section 15.
19. K.J. Fielding, The Speeches of Charles Dickens, (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1960), Speech on the opening of the Free Library : Manchester, 2 Sep, 1852, p. 153.
20. William Wordsworth, Excursion, IX.
21. W. Walter Crotch, Charles Dickens : Social Reformer, (London : Chapman and Hall, 1913), pp. 65-6.
22. K.J. Fielding, Speeches, op. cit., Speech at the Fourth Anniversary Dinner at London Tavern, on Warehousemen and Clerks’ Schools, on 5 November, 1857, p. 241. Also see Household Words, “Health and Education”, Vol. XIV, No. 343, Oct. 18, 1856, pp. 313-17, on a detailed report on girls’ schools of these times.
23. Thomas Carlyle, Works (The Shilling Edition, 1889), “Chartism”, Vol. II: “Characteristics”, Critical Essays, Vol. IV, pp. 3-6.
24. A detailed study of the Carlyle – Dickens relationship is to be found in William Oddie, Dickens and Carlyle : the Question of Influence (Cambridge, 1972). Also see Michael Goldberg, Carlyle and Dickens (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1972).
25. Carlyle, Works, op. cit., Sartor Resartus I, X; “Signs of the Times”, Critical Essays, Vol.II, iii, 234.
26. Edgar Johnson provides us with some of the most gruesome details of William Shaw’s establishment in Yorkshire : “[in the school] two children became totally blind ... through infection and gross neglect ... the boys were given maggoty food ... they were often beaten, ... ten boys had lost their sight there and been given no medical treatment.” Charles Dickens : His Tragedy and Triumph, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 217.
27. Nicholas Nickelby, pp. 90-9
28. The Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K.j. Fielding, op. cit., p. 242.
29. Dickens, Letters, ed. W. Dexter, (London, 1938) Vol. I, pp. 824-25
30. Dombey and Son, p. 145.
31. Bleak House, pp. 269-70
32. Ibid., p. 270.
33. W.D. Arnold, trans. German Letters on English Education, by Leopold Weise, pp. 46-7.
34. Friedrich Froebel, the German founder of the “kindergarten” system was an eminent educational reformer in the nineteenth century. His first “garden of children” or “kindergarten” was opened in 1837 in Blankenburg, Thuringia, Here, children received psychological training by means of play and occupation.



His method gained enormous popularity, and in 1851, under the supervision of Bertha Range and her sister, both pupils of Froebel, the first Kindergarten in London was opened. Charles Dickens visited this school, and wrote of it in *Household Words*. Though English teachers were impressed by the practical ideas of Froebel's teaching methods, they at first failed to implement his theory. [Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. IX, pp. 50-51].

35. *Dombey and Son*, p. 139.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
38. *Hard Times*, p. 8.
39. *Nicholas Nickleby*, p. 88. An article in *Household Words* draws a similar picture of Dr. Blouse's Free School, where, "Pale as maggots, in unwholesome-looking clothes, the children swarm, heavily busy at their work, no look of joyous curiosity, no wide bright eyes of wonder rests upon us; we have interrupted no thing; have fallen on another dream. A tall, dirty youth, or man, dressed seedily, and garnished with moustaches, bends over a form covered with small weary-looking children; our entrance does not cause him to lift up his head. ... the little place grows large before us in the midst of sickliness which its rough walls enclose... We have yet to recover from the shock of an unexpected and oppressive picture." 'A Free (and Easy) School', Vol. IV, no. 86, Nov. 15, 1851, p. 171.
40. *Hard Times*, pp. 6-7.
41. John Manning, "Charles Dickens and the Oswego system", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XVIII, 1957, pp. 480-83.
42. Pestalozzi's educational principle was based on "sense impression": accuracy of observation will lead to accuracy of thought; thus words or ideas attain meaning when related to concrete objects. His curriculum emphasised student activities like drawing, writing, music, physical education and other such practical activities. [Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. XVII, p. 726.]
43. *Our Mutual Friend*, pp. 214-15, 217.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 713. A detailed study of the education received by Charlie Hexam from Bradley Headstone and its consequences may be found in Raina, op. cit., pp. 130-136. Also see Robert S. Baker, "Imagination and Literacy in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*", *Criticism* 18 (1976): 57-72, for a full analysis of the theme of education in the novel.
45. *Oliver Twist*, p. 62. Also see Philip Collins, *Dickens and Crime* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1962).
46. *David Copperfield*, p. 55.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90. Anderson Malvin Rearick III, in his study, *Loss and Reclamation in "David Copperfield"*, "depicts David's own process of creating order out of his chaotic and painful past ... the five different moments of his crisis in which his sense of self is in real peril." [Dissertation Abstracts International, op. cit., Vol. 53, No. 8, March 1993, p. 3219-A].
48. K.J. Fielding, *Speeches*, op. cit., p. 248. Also see J. Hillis Miller's view regarding the inhuman treatment given to children in workhouses – three meals of gruel a day, as Dickens so vividly portrays in *Oliver Twist*. [ J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens : The World of His Novels* (Bloomington Indiana University Press, 1958), pp 490-50.]

#### **Bio – Note:**

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