

David Copperfield as an autobiographical novel

Ans:- It is proverbially said--"It's in vain... to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present." Norrie Epstein, in *The Friendly Dickens*, notes that by writing about his parents and reliving his childhood, Dickens triumphed over his past and would never again need to make a neglected child the central focus of a novel. David Copperfield's life was a veiled image of the author's life, though the novel still maintains the potent themes that made Dickens legendary.

Dickens portrayed his parents and his attitude towards them in many of the characters in *David Copperfield*. Dickens's parents were high-spirited, airy people who were not, in Dickens's eyes, good parents. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens's mother, Elizabeth Dickens, was portrayed as the lovely widow, Clara Copperfield. Clara was the naive and girlish mother of David. Behind David's back, she married Edward Murdstone, a cruel, heartless man. David felt betrayed by his mother, just as Dickens felt betrayed by his own mother. After Dickens's father was arrested because of his debts, his mother sent Charles to work at the terrible Warren's Blacking Factory, a shoe-making factory. This experience scarred and alienated Dickens for life and was a theme in many of his books.

Dora Spenslow, David's first wife, was also another image of Elizabeth Dickens, Charles' mother. Like Mrs. Copperfield, Dora had a blithe personality and was beautiful, angelic but naive. She enchanted David and he instantaneously loved her. "I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora to distraction". David became obsessed upon knowing her and was even jealous when he saw her speaking to an elderly gentleman. When they got married, however, Dora was always preoccupied with her dog, Jip. When she died, David realized how childish she was. Both his mother and his wife's death left David with memories of their fatal innocence.

Mr. Edward Murdstone was the first incarnation of John to be met in the novel. Murdstone was considered a villain because of his cruel and vindictive manner towards the other characters. He, along with his equally wicked sister Jane, first enchanted and then ruined Mrs. Copperfield. Mr. Winkins Macawber was the second character that was portrayed as the Dickens's father, though far less evil as Dickens's father. Macawber may have been the well-intentioned but negligent side Dickens saw in his father.

His first love, Maria Beadnell, has an incredible resemblance to the pretty Dora in *David Copperfield*. David's failed marriage to the silly but

inefficient Dora was Dickens' idea of what might have happened to him, had he married Maria.

The use of reverse characters made it possible for Dickens to employ his 'evil' characters to show his hero's true virtues. For Uriah Heep, who served to thwart David, his bitterness and corruption was contrary to David's honorable kindness. Mr. Murdstone is another villain who could be contrasted to the hero David and benevolent Dr. Strong. Dickens employed the vivid use of description, just as he did for Uriah, to give this character an evil appearance. "He had that kind of shallow black eye ; I want a better word to express an eye that has no depth in it..." Dickens gave Edward and Jane Murdstone the stereotypical villainous appearance, black hair and eyes, a stern dark face, and brutal attitude.

Dickens combined his vivid imagination and the people he knew, and drew from his own life to complete David Copperfield. He used various images of those he knew to give his characters specific traits and meaning. Although Dickens never acknowledged David Copperfield as an autobiography, it was the only novel he wrote that came close to emulating his own life. The words of the great English critic G. K. Chesterton perhaps best summarize the experience of reading it: "In this book of David Copperfield, Dickens has created creatures who cling to us and tyrannise over us, creatures whom we would not forget if we could, creatures whom we could not forget if we would, creatures who are more actual than the man who made them."