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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 General Background:

This paper explores the representation of the powerful child as the protagonist develops throughout Dickens's *David Copperfield*, using the Foucauldian theory of disciplinary power and Derridean theory of *différance*. *David Copperfield*, published in the Victorian Era, saw the Cult of Childhood which was the celebration of childhood in texts and images. Before the 18th century, childhood under the Puritan belief was perceived to be a stage of correction. Another view arising in the 19th century was one of positivity, involving tropes such as innocence, freedom, creativity, emotion, spontaneity and malleability (Reynolds, 2014) through which childhood became the embodiment of creative imagination. However, while these two concepts of the child are in conflict, there remains an existing tendency to control and manipulate the child.

(Sattur, 2011, p.11). This conception is evident in this period of industrialization where children in reality were exploited and thus presented as tainted, contrary to the portrayal of them as angelic and pure in literature. Childhood was idealized to be the stage before inevitable and superior adulthood hence the child was regarded as the separate “other”. As such, there is a lack of discussion with regard to the agency of the child. The selected text is therefore a suitable piece to analyse this conceptual status of the child. *David Copperfield* centres on the coming of age of the protagonist, and is influenced by the innocent cult of the child, as well as by the horrors of child labour and abuse. It is a reflection of Dickens’s own childhood experiences, and thus contains an accurate representation of the Victorian Child. Interestingly, the works of Dickens also present the viewpoint of the child as intelligent and more sophisticated than the surrounding adults, something that is not given emphasis to. A primary topic of exploration would be whether the child is truly subjected to adult authority as the period seems to suggest, or whether the child possesses prowess and agency over his own life, in which he has a mind of his own. The disciplinary methods used in the schooling of the child will also be explored. The character development of the child and his transformation into a full-fledged adult, and the perceptions of his childhood in retrospect will also be considered.

1.2 Rationale:

While the power of the child has been often disregarded and overlooked in Victorian literature, recent current world events have shed light on child agency. The voice of the child has developed in the 1990s since the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Hence only until recent years, has the notion of the powerful child been acknowledged in society and even in various films and fictions. However, even these portrayals of children in literature are exaggerated and often superficial — such as the young superheroes

of the Marvel/DC universe, or Harry Potter and his magic powers — and these equip the child with extraordinary powers in the fantasy or Sci-Fi world. Therefore, the purpose of this research would be to analyse the Victorian Child in *David Copperfield* in relation to agency and power with respect to the real-life, whilst avoiding these imaginative powers present in today's movies and television series.

This conception of the child as powerful is critical in bringing out new perspectives challenging the traditional stereotypes of the child. While it is to be noted that the works of Charles Dickens, particular *Copperfield*, are novels targeted for the family and not written specifically for children per se, they have emerged as classics over the generations, and it is common for middle grade children to pick these up as reading materials. *David Copperfield* brings out a classic presentation of the Victorian Child through stereotypes of suffering and innocence. The bildungsroman element of the text coupled with the child protagonist possessing narrative authority makes it well suited to be explored in relation to power and agency, in which the voice of the child is regarded, contrasting the former view of them as being incapable of making their own decisions. Also, this is why Foucault's theory of the subject, and his study of the nature of power in various parts of society is very much applicable to the text, given the intricacy of *Copperfield's* key themes that explore the individual's interaction with society and the growth of the individual. In addition, with the "birth of prisons" in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, discipline transitioned from monarchical punishment to that in various disciplinary institutions (Foucault, 1975) which are the very settings in *Copperfield*.

1.3 Research Questions:

1. What are the characteristics of the child in 19th century literature, in relation to power?
2. What societal norms are constructed in the novel that confirm the agency of the child?
3. How does David's childhood impact his adult self?

1.4 Thesis Statement:

In addition to traditional views portraying the Victorian child as weak, suffering and submissive, the child is also represented to be powerful and able to resist and free himself from subjection to adult authority or control in *David Copperfield*.

1.5 Scope of Research / Delimitation(s):

This research will focus on analysing the agency and power of the child in the novel *David Copperfield*. The literature review would encompass a wider range of texts that broadens the perception of the child. The theories used include Foucauldian disciplinary power as well as Derridean *differance*. The object of analysis will be the novel. The paper will facilitate close analysis of the novel, particularly on David's childhood and the parts of his adult self reminiscing about his youth, as well as the presentation of Little Em'ly as the female counterpart of David, to ensure that both genders are represented in the research.

It is vital to consider the Victorian era, and its influence with regard to the novel. Dickens lived in a time where British social class was one of the central subjects of scrutiny of Victorian fiction. The middle class was increasingly powerful and prominent, as the power of aristocracy diminished; it was the age of the possibilities of self-improvement and social aspiration (Schlicke, 1999, p.107). *Copperfield* in this context could be viewed as the most middle-class of Dickens's mature novels (p.109) due to the portrayal of David becoming a middle-class young

man in comparison to other characters as other models of class (p.108). The upper class in *Copperfield* such as Steerforth, Miss Murdstone and Aunt Betsey seem to have overt or invert authority over David, yet, being the narrator of his story, David as the middle class has the power to decide how he writes out the novel, suggesting the hidden authority of the middle class. Drawing on the idea of the panopticon, this paper studies how David observes the other characters with his narrative authority. The child David is the definition of learning and development as he observes (chapter 2: I observe) his world change with the introduction of the Murdstones and the start of school.

1.6 Significance of Research / Usefulness:

This research is significant because it extends the theme of power in *Copperfield* to the child David. This research aims to provide a deeper meaning behind the archetypes of the Victorian Child, by deconstructing the power relations present in the novel. The oppression of children in the era is very obviously painted in the pages of Dickens' writings, yet there could be hidden layers revealing a different interpretation of their status. Foucault provides a framework to think about power and discipline as to how Victorian children seen powerless but actually powerful. At this point, it is necessary to consider significant works on power and discipline in Dickens' texts in relation to Foucault such as *the Novel of the Police* (Miller, 1988) and *Foucault, Dickens and David Copperfield* (Cordery, 1998) with the former focusing on the disciplining of David's emotions and the latter on his disciplining through social norms and rules and regulations. However, while these works use Foucauldian disciplinary power to target the disciplining of David particularly in the second half of the novel, this research extends the idea of overt and covert discipline to that of David's childhood. Academic research regarding Victorian adolescence power is greatly lacking hence by exploring the power situations of the child

protagonist in the novel, this research would be able to suggest alternative interpretations for the field of research to consider, as well as new perspectives to look at in the novel.

1.7 Limitations:

This paper is limited in a few ways. The end result of using a single text to analyse the notion of the powerful child would be limited to the context of that novel, and would restrict the diversity and alternative viewpoints from other texts, that could offer other perspectives of the powerful child. This can be minimised by the use of the literature review to explore a wider range of sources in relation to the thesis and compensate the lack of width and variety. Secondly, it is impossible to analyse every small detail of the novel, and this paper cannot fully analyse a large number of important parts, but only a selected crucial few. Even so, these carefully selected parts would suffice to bring out new interpretations from the novel. Also, the paper is focused on analyzing a novel in the Victorian Era, which might have decreasing relevance in relation to the current world. However, even if so, the notion of power, and the influence of Foucault's ideas in today's context remains an important part of literature, philosophy as well as daily life, as we continue to explore the various ways power is shaped and how it is exercised.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will explore the perception of the child in the 19th century, revealing the various assumptions associated with the child, and how it has evolved through the decades into something much more diverse and unrestricted, in order to provide width to the research as well as analyse the changing conceptions of the child in relation to power.

2.1 Perception of the child

This part of the literature review will take a look at the various conceptional statuses of the 19th century child and how these ideas are a response to the notion of power.

2.1.1 Didacticism in children's literature

With the perception of the child as “separate, special, unique and ‘other’ ” (Sattur, 2011, p.5) taking root in the Victorian 19th century, there was a need to create a genre of literature with the intention of instruction-giving that tailored to the child’s “otherness”. A structured foundation was hence developed for the literature for adolescents: children characters were placed in “black and white situations” for the child to articulate what is “good” and what is “evil” with the censorship of inappropriate content and introduction of fantastical elements, ending on a moralistic and saccharine note. These structures were aimed at “keeping the child innocent and imaginative” (p.6), giving rise to “moral regulation” in compliance to the Victorian values. The American counterparts were no different, viewing the child as a “rational but unfinished being” thus requiring “rational discipline” (Macleod, 1992). Such a didactic presentation implies that the child does not have the capability of learning moral values by themselves and thus depended on adults to educate them through the form of children books that tend to reiterate concepts of morality and correct judgement a typical child must possess in order to conform to proper

societal norms. These works suggest the notion of the child as powerless and lacking discernment. This research argues that children's literature is simply a reflection of the ideal child perceived by adults, not holding true the actual characteristics of the child. Children's literature has thus tainted the image of the real Victorian child, confusing it with parental expectations.

2.1.2 The archetype of the innocent child

The period of Romanticism gave rise to the notion of the innocent child by William Blake's poetry which "first coordinated utterance of the Romantic imaginative and spiritually sensitive child" (Coveney, 1967, p.51). This innocent and redemptive picture of the child can be found in many works of the Victorian period on top of *Copperfield*, including Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and George Eliot's *Silas Marner*. *Silas Marner* in particular is the story of the protagonist achieving redemption through the genuineness, innocence, and purity of a child. The novel contains various perceptions of the child, one in particular being the portrayal of Eppie's child innocence as powerful enough to convert Marner from a miser to a loving person again. Another idea is the Wordsworthian child represented by the central motto of "a child, more than all other gifts[...] brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts" (Wordsworth, 1800) adopted in the novel, foregrounding the positivity and purity aura of the child. Wordsworth was the embodiment of key Romantic ideas, and infusing his spirit into *Silas Marner* indicates the influence of romantic elements of the child in 18th and 19th century literature. "The child is the father of the man" (Wordsworth, 1807) is another popular idiom obtained from the poet that suggests that man is determined by his habits and behaviour developed in his childhood, highlighting the power and impact a child wields upon his future. Such a work empowers the idealised and Romantic child as a figure of significance and importance, hinting at the capabilities of the child.

In other later works, Frances Hodgson Burnett bestows upon young Cedric in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* with a happy ending by fulfilling his wish: with “so sweet a temper and ways so charming that he was a pleasure to everyone” (Ch.5), Cedric softens the heart of his grouchy, tyrannical British grandfather to inherit his title as Earl. The story is another example of the idealization of the child, which is also a theme in the selected text as well.

2.1.3 The archetype of the victimised child

However, another emerging view was that of the victimised child from “the weakening of the romantic image of the child in Dickens” which was “a major influence in the development of the child in nineteenth-century fiction” (Coveney, 1967, p.161). The introduction of factories, coupled with the heightened crime and poverty rates in the 19th century such as the Poor Law amendment act (1834) inspired the ideas in *Oliver Twist* and the creation of the orphan figure. Orphans have a status of being outcasts, subjected to discrimination and exclusion as Oliver is “distanced from the other characters, or being notably different in appearance”. Secondly, orphans are thrown into “the harsh [and violent] realities of the criminal world” as vulnerable and succumbed to adult superiority and control (Albertsson, 2017). The vulnerability is accentuated by Nancy and Sikes preying on Oliver, signalling his inability to free himself from the threat of vicious adult criminals. Bear in mind the previously mentioned Romantic child — Dickens combines this idealised idea of Oliver’s inherent goodness with the victimised child through which Oliver’s innocence makes him a “spotless looking glass in which the brutality of society can be mirrored” (Gibson, 2017; Albertsson, 2017). Thus this infusion of innocence and suffering constructed the ultimate victimization of the child.

However, the child figure was powerful in itself in terms of narrative authority, representing an important role in the novel by establishing a relatable, personal identification between reader and character, since everyone was once a child and a child “could be anyone and everyone”

(Richardson, 2012). Dickens (1837) gives an example of this by suggesting that the entrance to the world is similar for all: Oliver “might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar”, adding relevance and capturing the inherently powerful and influential position of the fictional character in the structure of the literary work.

2.2 Evolution of the child

While it is important to be mindful of the developments in the 19th century, this part of the Literature Review focuses on how the perception of the child has evolved into a more complex concept over the years.

The 20th century saw the introduction of various new conceptions of the child that dominated literature. One new idea was the association of childhood with nature and carefreeness in works such as *The wind in the willows* (1908) and the *Pooh* books (Milne, 1926, 1936) with nostalgic tones due to the toil of the world wars on the British empire and economy (Reynolds, 2011). The middle of the century saw the extension of schooling and education, causing the creation of teen culture: *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) as the first of many, and the development of technology allowing accessibility of information and entertainment for the young traditionally beyond the grasp of childhood; the conception of the child as lacking of experience was diminished. New media further exacerbates the new face of the child as rebellious and in the late 20th century, children’s literature has evolved into one encompassing sex, vulgarities, violence and depressive endings that once were considered taboo. As of the 21st century, one remains a child until he hits the age of 21, in contrast to the traditional victorian age of 16. The age transition from child to adult has thus been greatly extended, and the notion of the child has become problematic with this widened age gap. Recent children’s and teen literature present the young as the future generation and vital for earth’s advancement, and can be observed in

many Sci-Fi fiction such as *Ender's game* (1985) where children are trained in battle schools to defeat the alien buggers in the pending war, and *The Carbon Diaries* (2010) depicting the protagonist, a university student forming a youth culture connected by text messages and globalisation to combat the eco-tragedy and raise global awareness. The evolution of the child made a drastic shift from a rigid structure of moral uplifting to one encompassing values of responsibility, maturity and the ability to make a difference in the community, which endows the much more powerful perception of the child in the 21st century. Could this new conception and development of the child already been foreshadowed in the 19th century and the selected text?

Chapter 3

Methodology

This paper will utilise the literary theories of Foucauldian disciplinary power and Derridean *différance*.

The first is Foucault's theory of disciplinary power (1977), which provides a framework to think about power relations. The main ideas this research draws out from it is the conceptualisation of the Panopticon as well as the concept of biopower. In the novel, Cordery (1998) uses Foucault's theory to analyse *David Copperfield*. He describes David to be under overt and covert "disciplinary gaze" of others yet being at the centre of the panopticon, he also has power to subject other to his disciplinary gaze. The central concept to Foucauldian thought is that power subjugates, and makes subject to. Cordery elaborates that the "ultimate effect of the Panopticon" is entrapping David in his own Panoptic prison that is the novel. Therefore, while David is subjected to external surveillance, he exercises self-surveillance by self-imposing conformity to societal norms. The research will be exploring the various systems that taught David to conform to societal expectations. This reflects on a repressive nature of power and give rise to a sense of powerlessness of the child. However, Foucault also points out the interaction of power and resistance — when there is great repression, there is an intense desire to resist the system. When power meets resistance, it transforms itself, finding new avenues of expression and producing "knowledge and desire" (Pylypa, 1998). There are events in the novel that support this productive notion of power, as David resists the the system, power is represented in his desire to escape from it. Therefore this resistance to the effect of the Panopticon foregrounds the notion of the powerful child.

It is important to note the interchangeability of power: it creates repression, which transforms into resistance, and then readjusts itself back to a different form of repression. This cycle of

power shows that it is not static, and thus the notion of the powerful child depends on the context of the situation. Hence David is powerless (subjected to the system) in some parts of the novel, and powerful in others (subjects the system). The discussion section of the research will explore the examples in the novel that bring out the powerful child.

The second theory that will be used is Derrida's theory of *différance*. As the works of Dickens are portrayed in a structuralist light, the purpose of *différance* is then to displace signifying signifiers resulting in no original signified. This not only breaks down the binary oppositions present but allows for against-the-grain readings in the novel that this research seeks to uncover. This theory is useful due to how unconventional the research thesis is — the Victorian child as tends to be viewed as innocent and weak, yet the research attempts to highlight the powerful nature of the child which contradicts the former. The signifiers identified are mainly the different names of David, which would be further expounded on in the discussion section. The chosen signifiers serve to unveil David's response to the names used on him and bring out the power relations involved.

This research hopes to link the findings from both theories and come to a conclusion on the notion of the powerful child in *David Copperfield*.

Chapter 4

Discussion and Analysis

This chapter attempts to address the research questions by using the theories mentioned in the methodology to analyse the text and open up discussion on the notion of the powerful child in *David Copperfield*.

4.1 The influence of societal norms on childhood

The first part of the discussion presents the influence of societal norms on childhood. The argument of this research is that the ultimate effect of the Panopticon causes self-discipline, revealing the repressive nature of power. However, the system is ultimately resisted and power is transformed into desire to break free, foregrounding the productive and inspiring quality of power.

The panopticon creates an effect of that David is trapped under the novel, which is his panoptic prison which showcases the covert influence of power conforming David from the inside through self-surveillance rather than external overt forces. This can be seen through David's experiences when he is sent to Canterbury, his second school. It is a school of covert discipline that subjugates its students to subtle self-monitoring:

“[The school] was ... **decorously ordered and on a sound system**... appeal ... to **the honour and good faith** of the boys... We all felt that we had a part in the management of the place, and in sustaining its character and dignity... and **[David] learnt with a good will, desiring to do it credit ... had noble games out of hours** ... rarely did any disgrace ... to the reputation of Doctor Strong...” (ch.16, p.357)

The “decorously ordered and on a sound system” description of the school creates self-surveillance in the boys by appealing to the “honour and good faith of the boys”. This underlying surveillance, or “normalising judgement” in which power is exercised through

invisibility (Foucault, 1975) establishes a set of expectations such as good manners and good grades that the students are *supposed* to have. The boys are subconsciously conformed to the norms of the schooling system via the effect of the panopticon (Cordery, 1998), and unbeknownst to David, he is subjected to the norms of the school and attempts to abide by it. The impact of this conformity can be seen when David is inspired by the other students and “gained great commendation”.

“...**custom** would **improve me** in the [games played], I hoped, and **hard work** in [my studies]. Accordingly, I went to work very hard, both in play and in earnest, and **gained great commendation**” (ch. 16; p. 356)

The use of “great” suggest David’s humble bragging, and he is proud of himself for achieving what is expected of him. Unknowingly, he is being covertly controlled by the Panopticon (Canterbury) and societal surveillance, since he is self-disciplining to change himself in accordance to the system. This “great commendation” “gained” is actually superficial and it traps David in the panoptic prison of school norms. Although being obedient and “learn[ing] with a good will” is a beneficial thing and worthy of being praised for, these are actually expected of the student. The boys are not praised for conforming to the norms, but are feel guilty and out-of-place when they fail to live up to expectations. This is further seen from the word “custom” which connotes convention and tradition, suggesting that David is implicate to his *own* oppression to abide by such customs. The fact that the system inflicts covert discipline on David and he voluntarily conforms to the norms subconsciously without the need of external repression indicates the immense power of the system over David. Thus this example importantly highlights the repressive notion of power, and rather than strengthening the notion of the powerful child, the school system of Canterbury epitomizes the “ultimate effect of the panopticon” (Cordery, 1998), rendering David helpless and trapped in the panoptic prison of the

school. This showcases David's powerlessness to resist against the system.

However, there are other examples that reveal the rebellious streak in David to break free from the societal systems that he is confined in. Being repressed by the Murdstone and Grinby's wine-bottling factory (that he was forced to work in by Mr Murdstone) causes David to develop resistance to the system.

"But with **no intention** of passing many more **weary days** there. No. I had **resolved to run away**. - To go, by some means or other, down into the country, to the only relation I had in the world, and tell my story to my aunt, Miss Betsey ... my **mind was thoroughly made up** that [this idea] must be carried into execution" (ch. 12, p. 265)

We can see that he had "no intention" of continuing to work "wear[ily]". The use of "weary" suggests that he was tired of going through such labour and the "no" suggests that he had not the slightest bit of enjoyment and wanted to get out of it. This was the last straw of repressive control exerted on him by Mr. Murdstone that since his mother was married to the man. Such repression led to the intensification of his desire (Foucault, 1980) to escape so much so that he makes a resolution to run to his wealthy aunt, Miss Betsey, for refuge and help, to challenge Mr Murdstone's authority and break free from oppression. This shows how productive power can be, as it transforms from repressive control, into his desire to resist the control and break free from its grasp. The great extent of desire can be seen from how his mind had already been "thoroughly made up" in "resolv[ing] to run away". The use of past and past perfect tense suggests that the decision was made and there was no going back, indicating his uncontrollable longing to leave the place. This is reinforced by "I had borrowed the half-guinea, that I might not be without a fund for my travelling-expenses" (ch. 12, p.267) showing how careful David has become in that he had planned long ahead. His development into a more responsible and mature child resulting from the repression by Mr. Murdstone highlights the ability of power to

produce such intense desire in David to overcome the repression. This epitomizes the concept of biopower, foregrounding the notion of the powerful and influential child.

4.2 The influence of childhood on the adult self

The second part of the discussion presents the influence of childhood on the adult self. The argument of this research is that the child David plays an important role in establishing his adult self, as he assimilates new experiences to those of his old childhood as the novel progresses.

Andrews (1994) describes the older David as “an accumulation of of his [past] experiences” and there is “a pattern of departure-retreat-return-departure” (Lankford, 1979) throughout the story, where he is rooted in the memories of his past, and wary of new experiences. David tries to distance himself from his childhood as he matures, saying that he has “left behind” the “little fellow” which is “no part of [him]” (ch. 18). Yet, he remains attached and connected to his past, describing “gentleness” as “an inheritance” “preserved from childhood” (ch. 2), and claiming to have “a strong memory of [his] childhood” as a man (ch. 2). Nearing the end of the novel, he states that the “endurance” of childhood did its part to shape him (ch. 58). This connection to his past childhood suggests the immense impact it had to his adult life such that it was crucially important in shaping him to become the titular hero he is in the novel.

This impact of childhood can be seen in his relationship with Dora:

“There is no doubt whatever that I was a lackadaisical young spooney; but there was a **purity of heart** in all this, that prevents my having quite a contemptuous **recollection** of [my courtship of Dora]...” (ch.26)

David recalls that he possessed a “purity of heart” which left him with no regrets. “Prevents... contemptuous” suggests that his relationship with Dora was the opposite of scornful — it was valuable and to be treasured. This highlights the significance of his “pure heart” which he

developed from his childhood, thus revealing the power of his childhood. While being in love with Dora, he also recalls his first love Em'ly, in which he loved her with the same child-like purity: "I loved that baby [Em'ly] quite as truly, quite as tenderly, with **greater purity...**" (ch. 3). Hence there is evident innocence and gentleness in David that he treasures even in his adult self, suggesting that his character is established and rooted in his childhood.

Another example is David's interest in stories and adventures since young. He had "small collections of books (ch.4)" whose heroic adventures were "constantly enacting and re-enacting (ch. 5)" in his mind. At Salem House, David reads them to Steerforth every night (ch. 7). His love of reading in his childhood allowed him to transform it into the love of writing in adulthood as seen from how "tidings of [his] growing reputation [as a writer]" has reached many (ch.58) as he takes up the profession of a writer. This example of David becoming a successful writer from having interest and passion in stories and adventures signifies that actions of the child have the power to shape his future. Therefore, the role of the child David in establishing his adult self suggests its importance and significance that remains connected to David throughout his life as he assimilates new experiences gained to his old childhood ones as the novel progresses.

Moreover, David takes refuge in his collection of books and a desperate sort of reading - 'reading as if for life" (p.48). By reading them as a storyteller, David creates an "imaginative world" (p.145) to escape the Murdstones (Bottum, 1995). Therefore, his ability to make words come to life allows him to have power over the Murdstones, as he resists their repression by finding an alternative world to escape to. The fact that he is able to achieve this despite having limited knowledge as a child suggests the creativity of the child to use whatever he has to obtain freedom. This strengthens the notion of the powerful child.

4.3 Signifiers of the powerful child

Différance generates more meaning, and this can be seen in the text. The name David *Copperfield* is traditionally interpreted to signify the biblical David who eventually marries Bathesha in the novel, who is Agnes *Wickfield* (Bottum, 1995). Through comparison and contrast with the biblical king, Dickens attributed his hero to “several negative connotations” (Lettis, 2002). However, by applying the concept of différance, we can also see that the name has positive connotations and qualities of the biblical figure. It also signifies the younger biblical David, who killed Goliath at the age of 17, symbolising his victory over the Murdstones. Moreover, the hebrew origin of Goliath signifies exile, or captivity. Thus it ultimately represents the breaking away from the captivity of the Murdstones. The focus has shifted to the youthful lad rather than the mature king, and the research argues that the signifier “David” brings out the powerful child in *David Copperfield*.

Hence, by using différance, there are many other events that the signifier “David” can connote and it opens up the text to much more interpretations which can be used to strengthen the hidden notion of the powerful child.

The signifiers that the research has identified are David’s other names, as he is known to have a range of nicknames. The order of names represent social status. Throughout the novel Dickens uses the perversion of naming to “expose power and desire”, and David becomes “a victim of naming” (Bottum, 1995). In every new stage of life David receives a new name, which is a “forecast, symbol and example of the namer’s treatment”. As David grows, he has to overcome every attempt to name him:

Namer	Name used to address David	Signification
Peggotty	Master Davy	Loving, yet maintains social status
Mr. Murdstone	David	Cold, disinheriting, lack of personality or warmth
Steerforth	Daisy	Diminishing, belittling, like a little girl
Betsey	Trotwood	Sanctuary, protection from Mr. Murdstone

Each stage reflects David's status and power. From the table above (chronological order of the names used in his early childhood), we can see that David is showered with love and very much dependent on Peggotty. The nickname "Davy" connotes a deep level of affection and closeness. However, the exact opposite happens as he is treated harshly and cruelly by Mr. Murdstone, who perverts and dehumanises David's own given name into something devoid of emotions or personal touch. David was used and exploited by Steerforth, who underestimates him and sees him as an innocence girlish boy. When Ms. Betsey takes him in, she renames him "Trotwood", which protects him from the hurt from the Murdstones. In all of these names, David's status remains as being powerless to his circumstances.

However, while being subjected to naming by others, he is actively gaining over naming the mastery that will release him from his namers (Bottum, 1995), as he comes to realize his own identity (Lettis, 2002). This is observed from David learning from the order of naming at a young age, even though he might not be right. He asks Mr Peggotty if he had "[given his] son the name of Ham, because [he] lived in a sort of ark" (ch. 3, p.53). When he is older, he plays at calling Peggotty "Mrs. Barkis". Eventually, David becomes "the master of names" at the age of twenty-one (Bottum, 1995), and he thrives in the system of naming. Although he is conformed to the order of names through self-discipline, he is empowered by the knowledge of understanding

truth in names, and is able to regain confidence to adapt back to his given name "David" even after Mr. Murdstone had scarred the name.

Therefore, David's experiences in the past and being under the influence of the order of names allows him to become a master of naming. This conformity allows him to develop resistance against Murdstone and restore the hurt that was brought to his own name. This presents the Victorian child in *David Copperfield* as one of power, equipped the ability to ultimately break free from his oppressors who seemingly overpower him.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Power remains an abstract concept that tends to be oversimplified or misinterpreted. This ambiguity of power is vividly seen in Foucault's theory of discipline, which opens up two interpretations of power — power as repressive, as well as power as productive. Repressive power renders the child powerless, in which he is taught to conform to the norms of a community via disciplinary institutions such as schools. However, being under the repression of power can transform into intense desire to break free from it as the child develops resistance against the repression. In the novel *David Copperfield*, this resistance is seen from David developing the capacity to think for himself and resolving to escape to his aunt Betsey for refuge from Mr. Murdstone, David creating an alternative world of imagination to free himself from the abuse of the Murdstones, as well as from David overcoming the order of names to restore the truth of his given name that had been scarred by Mr. Murdstone.

Therefore, although not strikingly obvious nor observed on the surface, the notion of the powerful child is subtly present in the novel *David Copperfield* as well as in the Victorian period, indicating the undiscovered and overlooked potential, influence and importance of the child.

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