

Exploring The Mothers of David Copperfield

by Tin Cetic February 20, 2005.

In the great novel David Copperfield, by Charles Dickens, several "mothers" and "mother figures" affected David's personality, intelligence, or social position. To understand their attributes given to David, the definition of a mother figure must first be explored. Then, the five mothers of David Copperfield may be identified, prospected individually, and uniquely interpreted. Finally, an evaluation of David may be organized by the contributions of his mother figures.

What is a mother? Disregarding the common definition, it is someone who cares, nurtures, and provides for a weaker being. A mother may be male or female, rich or poor, and weak or strong. In David's case, there are five distinct mothers. Each is unique and influences him differently. Above all, the most essential component of motherhood is the ability to create change.

Who are David's mothers? First, there is David's real mother, Clara Copperfield. Then there is Clara Peggotty, James Steerforth, Betsey Trotwood, and Mr. Micawber. Wherever David goes, he has a mother. David is not only given mothers, but seeks them. For instance, David was given Peggotty since birth and traveled to obtain Ms. Trotwood. David Copperfield desires mothers primarily because he needs them to survive.

Clara Copperfield did more harm than good for David. She subconsciously taught David to become weak and naïve. Clara was strongly controlled by Mr. Murdstone and passed this trait of weakness to David. David was also tricked and taken advantage of by many adults because of his superficial lifestyle with Clara. Clara received a fortune from her dead husband, had no reason to work, and thus taught David laziness. She didn't prepare for him the real world – London.

Peggotty was perhaps the greatest role model for David. She worked constantly, was enthusiastic, and loyal. Although she shared numerous positive characteristics to David, some were negative. Being satisfied with a bad social position, strongly dependent, and content with a low wage are arguably some of her unhealthy traits, even though they didn't affect David significantly.

James Steerforth was by far the worst mother, yet he did teach David some fine points in life and open opportunities. Steerforth cancelled the personality that Clara taught David. David acquired the will to fight for himself, the desire to become or remain the best, and to stay in control of his life. James was also the most successful in improving David's social position. David was accepted by the other boys in the school and later granted endorsement into high-class London, first and foremost by James Steerforth.

Miss Betsey Trotwood, first a bad individual, became a positive mother for David. First she taught David to forgive, by letting David's birth out of her memory. Second, she taught him courtesy, by inviting David into her home. Then, by living with the eccentric Mr. Dick, she taught him tolerance. Lastly, by repelling donkeys out of her yard, she taught David to protect his property vigorously.

Mr. Micawber was not a great role model for David, yet some of his personality traits did improve David. Humor, understanding the effects of not managing money properly, and making the best out of a bad situation were some of these traits. While Mr. Micawber was slightly encouraging the acceptance of terrible acts such as suicide, David only remembered the optimistic qualities of Mr. Micawber.

A structured and rather complicated way of interpreting the effects of David's mothers is through Greek elements. Clara's given characteristics were water, because of their innocent and unsophisticated pureness. Peggotty's were Earth, for their natural joy and simplicity. James' were Fire, for their ferocity and power. Miss Betsey's were wind, for their quick change in direction and force. Lastly, although not a true Greek element, Mr. Micawber's were light, for their humor and optimism. The purpose of this elemental metaphor is the end of it: When the elements mix, they create perfection. Even with "perfection", David simply couldn't control life, for everything is in the hands of fate. *

Now, there is enough information to conclude the exploration. With the understanding of what a mothers are, who they are, what they've done, and how it compiles into genius perfection by the mind of Charles Dickens, David may be evaluated. By understanding his mothers, it is clear that David Copperfield is an average person living an extraordinary life.

* If this paragraph was confusing or irrelevant to you, I apologize. I feel that it shows connections with what we have learned in the past, bringing depth to the essay.

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