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David Copperfield (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

'The most perfect of all the Dickens novels' Virginia Woolf David Copperfield is the story of a young man's adventures on his journey from an unhappy and impoverished childhood to the discovery of his vocation as a successful novelist. Among the gloriously vivid cast of characters he encounters are his tyrannical stepfather, Mr Murdstone; his brilliant, but ultimately unworthy school-friend James Steerforth; his formidable aunt, Betsey Trotwood; the eternally humble, yet treacherous Uriah Heep; frivolous, enchanting Dora Spenlow; and the magnificently impecunious Wilkins Micawber, one of literature's great comic creations. In David Copperfield - the novel he described as his 'favourite child' - Dickens drew revealingly on his own experiences to create one of the most exuberant and enduringly popular works, filled with tragedy and comedy in equal measure. This edition uses the text of the first volume publication of 1850, and includes updated suggestions for further reading, original illustrations by 'Phiz', a revised chronology and expanded notes. In his new introduction, Jeremy Tambling discusses the novel's autobiographical elements, and its central themes of memory and identity. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Paperback: 1024 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Revised edition (December 28, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140439447

ISBN-13: 978-0140439441

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1.8 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Customer Reviews

Somehow, I'd graduated from college - with a degree in English, no less - and had never had to read a single thing ever written by Charles Dickens. I read quite a bit on my own, but still found David Copperfield to be the height of ambition - my copy was 1001 pages long, and I hadn't ventured into a book over a thousand pages since I'd read *The Stand* at age 12. I cannot imagine that I am alone in completing my education and sidestepping Dickens altogether, so I think it's important I share my experience. In truth, the only reason I chose David Copperfield over, say, *Great Expectations* or *Hard Times* was the passing comment made by Jeff Daniels in *The Squid And The Whale* - dismissing *A Tale of Two Cities* as "minor Dickens," saying David Copperfield was "much richer." It is rich. I tend towards modern fiction nowadays, fiction that, unexpectedly, takes you deep inside the heart of its characters sometimes bewildering behavior and humanity. What strikes me about the complex nature of the characters in Copperfield is the way it seems that no effort at all has been used to distinguish each of them, yet there is no doubt as to how vivid they are. Each character speaks in a tone that is a perfect elucidation of who they are - you can hear, just in the dialogue, the calm wisdom of Agnes, the parasitic obsequiousness of Uriah Heep, the punctilious rambling of Micawber, the pleasantries that barely mask the aggression of Miss Dartle, the rigid boredom of the Murdstones, the spoiled impishness when Dora speaks (so precise I heard her voice in cloying and nasal babytalk in my head). It's a delicate balancing act to keep this level of detail so hidden in his work, and it makes the plot machinations speedy and exciting.

David Copperfield uses the story of Copperfield's life from birth through middle life to introduce and explore some wonderful personalities. Look more for deep and penetrating character studies than a fast moving plot line. It is not character study alone, however. Again and again, through many characters and many instances, he seems to really explore "the first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart", and that "there can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose". Look for these themes to come in from the very beginning and continue until they are actually spelled out by one character and contemplated by another. When David is born, his father is already buried in the churchyard nearby. He, his mother, and their servant Pegotty live happily enough as a family until his mother remarries. The new husband does not like frivolity or friendly association with servants but more than that, he does not like David. David is sent off to boarding school and then sent out to work. Barred from his mother's affections by his stepfather, Pegotty becomes a full mother figure and his ties to her and her family only deepen with time. Through her, he meets her brother, Mr. Pegotty; her nephew?, Ham, the widow Mrs. Gummidge and Mr. Pegotty's niece, Emily. At school, he makes fast friends with many boys but most especially with the

privileged James Steerforth and the not so privileged Tommy Traddles, both of whom show up again in David's adulthood. In the bottling warehouse where he is sent to work as a child, he lodges with Mr. And Mrs. Micawber who are always in debt. They also show up again in his adulthood.

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