

**BEGINNINGS AND BIRTHS THROUGH DEATH:
A HEIDEGGERIAN READING OF THE CHILD'S
CONSCIOUSNESS OF TIME IN CHARLES DICKENS'S
DAVID COPPERFIELD**

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The following text aims to offer a reading of Charles Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* (1850) through the paradigm of thinking outlined by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) in his key work *Being and Time* (1927). Such an interpretation is mindful of certain signs indicating a possible phenomenology of the child's consciousness. The stress shall be laid upon the child's conception of time as presented in the novel viz. under two conditions within which it becomes activated – autobiographical and fairy tale elements.

Keywords: *David Copperfield*, Martin Heidegger, Dickens, time, child, phenomenology

David Copperfield's Beginnings

It could be said that *David Copperfield* has a few beginnings, and it would be quite deceptive if an analysis of David Copperfield's story were carried out from the place which he himself suggests as his own beginning, namely from the first chapter titled „I Am Born“ or from the fifteenth chapter bearing the name „I Make Another Beginning“. His very „birth“ commences with the preface in which we witness David Copperfield as a cherished brainchild of Dickens's imagination. The author divulges that David is the dearest child of his among his whole miscellaneous literary family: „Of all my books, I like this best. [...] I have in my heart of hearts a **favourite child**. And his name is David Copperfield“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 6, emphasis added). Dickens, in his letters, often moots this special bond between him and his character. Curiously enough, when he received a letter from Mrs Winter, Dickens's first love, he would not compare his feelings when opening the letter with the feelings of his younger self. Instead, he would imbue his memories with fictionality, disclosing in a letter: „Three or four and twenty years vanished like a dream, and I opened it with the touch of my young friend David Copperfield when he was in love“ (Paroissien/Пароассиен 1985: 107). It seems like David Copperfield took possession of his author's biography. The literary critic Harry Stone even claims that „David

Copperfield is so avowedly autobiographical“ (Stone/Стойн 1979: 196) and that David is „Dickens’ avatar“ (ibid.). The fact that Dickens’s fictional stories exercised a powerful influence on his life might be connected with the importance he gave to the faculty of imagination.

This intermingling of fact and fiction is further emphasized after the two prefaces are over, and the narrative begins. The multiplication happens because Dickens first fictionalises David in the realm of reality as his child. Afterwards, he fictionalises him in the realm of fiction as a hero – not as a hero of a novel but as a hero of a life story: „Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 7). This quotation showcases that it is not only the novelist who mixes fact and fiction. His hero also does so by stating that the criterion for his successfully proclaiming the title of a hero is in the pages that he is to write about his life.

While facts are connected to Dickens’s own life and experiences, fiction takes the form of different fairy tale elements that hover over the self-narration. We shall expand on the fictional elements by discussing the importance of fairy tales in the development of the child’s idea of time and self. The fictionalising of one’s self and one’s beginning will lead us to the main purpose of this text – reading *David Copperfield* through Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and the concepts he poses therein. This will help us understand crucial points in the novel regarding the function of the protagonist’s consciousness of time.

We shall first discuss the common ground between fairy tales and self-narrating. Bruno Bettelheim (1903 – 1990), an American psychologist of Austrian origin, analyses the uses of fairy tales. He claims that they act as a tool that conceptualises and puts in order the betiding chaos springing from the children’s own uncontrollable and sometimes unbound unconscious. He comments on the importance of building and experiencing fictional worlds through one of Dickens’s memorable sayings: „Little Red Riding Hood was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding Hood, I should have known perfect bliss“ (cf. Bettelheim/Бетелхайм 2010: 32; Ackroyd/Акройд 2002: 22). Fairy tales unavoidably shaped Dickens’s imagination from early childhood. Thanks to his nursemaid Mary Weller and his grandmother Elizabeth Ball Dickens, who was known as an „inimitable“ storyteller, fairy tales became part of little Charles’s world before he could read (cf. Stone/Стойн 1979: 33). When he was eleven years old, *Grimm’s Fairy Tales* made their way to England and were translated (ibid: cf. 27). He also had the opportunity to read *The Arabian Nights* (ibid: cf. 26) and Perrault’s tales (ibid: cf. 24). Thus, Dickens’s „faith in literature

as salvation“, which prevents him from „perishing“, developed (ibid: cf. 3). Peter Ackroyd suggests that, actually, Dickens’s powerful influence on literature might be connected with the idea that we all share almost a similar „imaginative climate“ (Ackroyd/Акроед 2002: 22) in our childhood. There are plenty of fairy-tale elements in David Copperfield – an orphaned child, some macabre prophecies befalling him due to the hour of his birth, an aunt leaving him like a „discontented fairy“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 18) because he was not a girl, the ignoble stepfather Mr. Murdstone and his maleficent sister Miss Murdstone, who are likened to „two snakes“ (ibid: 61) in David’s nest, and who alienate him from his mother and send him away from home. We can see that even the protagonist sees and defines the story of his life as a fairy tale: „I know that my juvenile experiences went for little or nothing then; and that life was **more like a great fairy story**, which I was just about to begin to read, than anything else“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 284, emphasis added). Besides, the fairy-tale elements include the relatives of David’s nurse Peggotty who live in an enchanting boat-house full of spellbinding people like the fairy-like little Em’ly. Although Mr and Mrs Murdstone have not made puddings¹ out of David’s body and dragooned his mother to eat it, they are akin to the archetype of the wicked stepmother in different fairy tales – a mother who wants her stepchildren to be killed, cooked, tormented, impoverished, lost or gone. David rebels against Murdstone, who is trying to „consume“ him and his position, and to destroy his character. That is why he bites his malevolent stepfather, that is to say, he manifests orally the power he possesses. After that, David is sent to Salem House, another bitter departure from home, during which too many changes take place. When he is back for the holidays, he realises his childhood home is already gone: „Ah, what a strange feeling it was to be going home when it was not home, and to find that every object I looked at reminded me of the happy old home, which was like a dream I could never dream again“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 116). This situation of consciousness is confusing because the consciousness of the child becomes alive once again in the consciousness of the adult while the consciousness of the adult sanctions the differences and indicates what is irretrievably lost. The consciousness of the adult suffers from what I shall call *the syndrome of the vase with flowers*. The flowers are the memories of our childhood and the vase with water is the consciousness of the adult. The freshness of the flowers is preserved for a short while, but their habitat is

¹ Such is the case in the tale collected by the brothers Grimm *The Juniper Tree*: „...she took the little boy and cut him up, made him into puddings, and put him in the pot [...] Presently the father came home and sat down to his dinner; he asked, 'Where is my son?' The mother said nothing, but gave him a large dish of black pudding“ (Grimm/Гримм 2009: 278).

tarnished. They are not connected with the soil and their vital juices will eventually evaporate. These flowers are not there to develop but to die slowly while bathing with their pale and perishing resplendence the nostalgic homes of adult minds.

As soon as the authenticity of the child's mind cannot be retrieved, the gaps in the memories should be filled with something vital. I suggest that this revitalising part is the fairy tale component. Stone says that Dickens „fuses fairy-tale transcendence with psychological realism, and both with autobiographical fact“ (Stone/Стойн 1979: 201). He is not doing so in order to undermine the realistic novel but in an attempt to make the reader's perception more multifaceted because reality does not consist of simple straightforward facts. We could say that fictionalizing autobiographical elements through fairy tales is the framework within which we could observe and investigate the child's consciousness of time. Sydney Dark writes about Dickens: „He determined to write a book with a scheme which would prevent him constantly dropping into fantasy. He would confine himself to real life. The incidents should be incidents that had actually happened. He would write his own story. And the result is another fairy tale. Every true biography is a fairy tale“ (Dark/Дарк 1919: 84). While one begins one's story from being a child one cannot prevent turning into a child once again and plunging into one's childhood consciousness of time once again. If our identity really depends on our memories, then we are more children than adults because childhood memories are the memories that people tend to bring oftener to their minds. Dark also says that „in David Copperfield Dickens contrived to judge exactly in the manner of a small boy“ (Dark/Дарк 1919: 86). It is not imitation of childhood, but a genuine presentation of the process of recovery of the child's consciousness. Although we can hear the voice of the adult who is recording down his appearances, we also can sense the weakness of this voice, the intentional belittlement of his position, the dysfunctionality of his „now“. A „now“ which is there for one reason – to show and give voice to the „before“. He is there but he is not willing to change anything from the child, just to contemplate and admire the child's innocence and ignorance, guilt, fright and mistakes, without the urge to correct them, or lessen them. The voice of the adult is there, but it is not reflective, protective, moralizing or wiser. It is there in order to put its lips next to the cold water splashing from the spring of childhood wisdom but without drinking from it and quenching its thirst.

Das Man² – on the ghosts and the fairy tales that accompany David's birth

After David's beginning or double birth – first as Dickens's child and then as a hero of his own life – we have yet another beginning from the beginning (one's birth) but this time it is anonymous. This lack of authorship will serve as a main point of interest: „To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously“ (Dickens/Диккенс 2006: 7). David Copperfield cannot begin his life from the beginning, trusting his memory alone, because he has not witnessed the event of his own birth. This part of his life is like a „dead“ ontology to him, a *hauntology*. This event comes back to David through the hero's absence in it, confirmed from the narratives of others. According to Derrida the logic of hauntology is that „the spirit comes by coming back“ (Derrida/Деррида 2006: 10). When someone tries to narrate one's childhood, they haunt their childhood, they cannot be present there but they can „spectralize“ about it. The *spectralizing element* (see Derrida/Деррида 2006: 63) is typical for the *public space* (news, the press...) (cf. *ibid.*) – something which Derrida's concept of hauntology and Heidegger's concept of *Das Man* quite share. It is something that everybody can hear and know as hearsay without actually being there when the event discussed had taken place. As long as „to haunt does not mean to be present“ (Derrida/Деррида 2006: 202) we can say that David's narration about his birth is something akin to Derrida's hauntology and Heidegger's *Das Man*. Other people possess the narrative of David's beginning. The „Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of 'the Others'“ (Heidegger/Хайдеггер 1962: 164) and sometimes [Dasein who has fallen into *Das Man*] finds comfort in this „dictatorship of the they“ (Heidegger/Хайдеггер 1962: 164). Occasionally, Dasein has to willingly accept this dictatorship inasmuch as the others are his only source of information about himself when he appears in the world. The most important event in David's life and in everybody's life, namely his birth, is narrated to him by others. He metaphorically has „read“ about the event on the „pages“ of his surroundings because this event is published in „public“³ time. The

² *Das Man* is a philosophical concept introduced by Martin Heidegger. It is used for describing such a condition in which *Dasein* can find itself when it is lost. The only sources of information become the voices of the others. Therefore, *Dasein* cannot speak with its own authentic voice.

³ According to Heidegger this is the time which is known to everyone: „One directs oneself according to it, so that it must somehow be the sort of thing which Everyman can come

„I“ begins his existence among others in a state of „thrownness“. David Copperfield first finds his Dasein as being understood through Das Man. Das Man manifests itself through phrases such as „as I have been informed“, „it was remarked“, „it was declared“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 7); all is what has been said and known and assumed about David before his getting rid of his „thrownness“ and claiming his place with and among others. Although Heidegger is not directly interested in theorising any phenomenology of childhood time-consciousness, for it is not only children who can find themselves in a state of *thrownness*, we could argue that this state is particularly characteristic of the child who comes into the world (presumably) for the first time. However, we have to maintain the idea that from the beginning David Copperfield’s childhood time-consciousness is constructed by an adult (by the author’s) time-consciousness and then it appears as an author-constructed reconstruction of the character who goes back in time to describe his childhood time-consciousness. He could do so because he was once a child. Narrating the child’s consciousness of time appears possible as a dialectical communion between the consciousness of the adult and the consciousness of the child which is still there, lacking authentic experiences, but preserving authentic memories.

David’s Dasein originally began to exist as a project, considered and imagined ahead in time by the other selves in the world. Because David was born on a Friday at midnight, the nurse and the neighbours who knew his birth as a *Dasein-with* (Mit-dasein)⁴ performed the first projections on his being. These „projects“ or possibilities first take a fictional or supernatural form. It is believed, said or thought that because of the time and day of his birth, David’s Dasein is characterized by two main attributes. The first is that he would be unlucky in life and the second is that he would be able to see ghosts and spirits (cf. Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 7). These words hint at one of the main characteristics of Das Man⁵ – the care of *averageness* and maintaining *idle talk*: „This care of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the „levelling down“ [Einebnung] of all

across“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 464). It is basically the time which „we know as astronomical and calendrical time-reckoning“ (ibid.). And one more important characteristic of public time is that one of the things necessitating its existence is Dasein’s thrownness: „Dasein’s thrownness is the reason why 'there is' time publicly“ (ibid.). The third volume of Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative* (1984) deals especially with the different types of time and their relation to narrative. Despite its unquestionable importance, it is excluded from the present paper for concision and will be covered in depth elsewhere.

⁴ See Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 155.

⁵ The other two main characteristics of *Das Man* and everydayness are curiosity and ambiguity (Cf. Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 213 – 214).

possibilities of Being“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 165). And with this the child’s novelty and incomprehensibility, its never-having-been-before, its mystery of being becomes seemingly comprehensible: „Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 165). With such a loss, David Copperfield becomes part of the public time or of publicness, synchronising and projecting his time onto the time of the clock, onto an already socialised, cyclical and painfully familiar time, and in doing so the child’s primordial foreignness is „domesticated“. The grown-up David Copperfield discredits the Das Man condition originally attributed to him by saying in the very next sentence that only *his* narrative could tell whether the first prediction could come true. In doing so, he speaks from the now self-conscious position of Dasein, which can question being and worldhood and thereby „care“ for it through a narrative not aimed at skin-deep understanding and curiosity or idle talk, but at contemplating the question of true understanding, and thereby, David’s Dasein bears responsibility for its own history through a certain kind of onto(haunto)-narratology. The second prophecy he also denies, stating that he had not had the honour of seeing spirits, as a consequence this possibility, this project, proved to be unfulfilled or was probably realised before he himself had the awareness of its realisation. Stone comments that: „The humorous deflation of the old wives’ tales and superstitions [...] serves to put David and the reader in a position of amused superiority when contemplating the superstitious and the gullible“ (Stone/Стойн 1979: 195). However, this controlling position is an illusory one because „both predictions are stunningly correct“ (ibid.). David may present these superstitions to us as if he was finding them nonsensical but the omniscience of Das Man and of its understanding remain unquestionable because they come before David’s Dasein, shape its projects, and are conditions of the boy’s own understanding of himself.

Selfhood, Care and Thinking Childhood Through Death

David’s way of proving the people, who prophesied his future, wrong, which is characterised by the privileged viewpoint of a being who can witness the present moment (which is present for the reader) through a moment which is future for the reader, is followed again by a privileged viewpoint, yet this viewpoint is not directed towards future but towards past. Dasein is again „coming towards itself“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 373) but the adopted direction is different. From the first sentences, we had a more futural direction and from the next few sentences we can uncover the child’s consciousness of time experiencing itself and defining its *is* as follows: „I-

am-as-having-been“ (ibid.), and by understanding it, Dasein comes back to itself and goes further at the same time: „I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or ‘there by’, as they say in Scotland. **I was a posthumous child.** My father’s eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it.“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 8). David’s self-definition here is of essential importance because it illustrates Heidegger’s concept of *care*. According to the philosopher, care becomes possible through different raptures of temporality: „The primordial unity of the structure of care lies in temporality“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 375) and care is being-towards-death (cf. Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 378). Darin Tenev explains care as being yourself in advance in a world that is already there, and being with the things at hand and the other Dasein which are also already there before you⁶ (cf. ТЕНЕВ/Tenev 2023: 101-102). Just like David finds himself looking at the tombstone of his father and bearing his father’s name before having a solid definition of his own identity. Therefore, human beings find themselves in a condition that could be likened to travelling on a vehicle. Dasein enters the narrative as a passenger on a journey that began long ago. The other passengers already exist in a narrative, but Dasein brings another narrative with itself. In the way in which David defines himself as a posthumous child, we can see something as an exemplification of the phenomenon that Heidegger calls „anticipatory resoluteness“ (Хайдегер/Heidegger 1962: 370). Only when one is conscious of one’s finitude through someone else’s finitude, of one’s impossibility, can one weigh the possibility of moving forward and consider one’s own existence. David sees himself not only as being-towards-death, but also as being-after the death of someone else (in this case, his father). This conjoins the idea of possibility with the idea of historicity. David Copperfield as Dasein can exist, develop, and live as such, provided that his time is capable of escaping from its everyday rootedness and becoming a temporality⁷. That temporality has the potential to temporalise simultaneously in both directions – past and future. When the consciousness of his Dasein as anticipatory resoluteness encounters its finitude, the Dasein as having-been also confronts it with the

⁶ „...грижата е да си себе си предварително, изпреварващо, но винаги вече в един свят, който заварваш, и да си в този свят като бъдеще при подръчните неща и другите Dasein“ (ТЕНЕВ/Tenev 2023: 101 – 102).

⁷ Heidegger provides the following definition of temporality: „This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been; we designate it as „temporality“, (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 374). Heidegger’s idea of temporality could be easily explained through the Greek myth of Cronus who ate his children because he was afraid of them succeeding him – he is the one producing the future and making it into having-been by consuming it and by such means, he reasserts his presence.

finitude (but the finitude of the other), and thus the circle of its time becomes complete with a beginning starting from the end and projecting itself upon a finitude. Thus, David achieves his „authentic potentiality-for-Being-a-whole“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 374). One of Heidegger’s main theses is that: „Temporality ‘is’ not an entity at all. It is not, but it temporalizes itself. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid saying, ‘Temporality ‘is’ [...] the meaning of care’“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 377). In what sense temporality is the meaning of care and also makes possible its shaping we can see in the following excerpt from David Copperfield in which he temporalizes in the direction towards the past the possibility of his father seeing him: „There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 8). The nonfulfillment of this possibility confronts David with his own powerlessness and his nothingness and with the unspoken desire to bring his father back from the dead so that he can accomplish this unrealised possibility, this unrealised eye-contact, or this unrealised hermeneutics. David endeavours to realise the meeting between the already present now presence with the now absent former presence, that is, something that is absent but something that is still present, albeit retrospectively in the act of remembrance. Then the moments of care are very intelligibly unlocked by the compassionately sensed finitude:

[...] and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were – almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes – bolted and locked against it. (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 8)

The narrator takes us back to his early childhood through recollection and describes his first impressions and observations. The baffling sympathy David feels for the tombstone is, of course, not directly related to the gravestone, but to what the gravestone signifies. The cold stone stands for his father and David feels guilt, compassion, and fear simply because he lives and outlives. A child’s mind that is brimming with curiosity and questions could easily fancy that the dead are jealous of the living and might want a revenge or at least understanding of what it is to be like them.

The process of this peculiar overlapping with otherness (with the death of another person) is expressed in an aporetic state connected with processes of metaphysical switching of temporal-ontological statuses, where we can observe how: „[...] the One and the Other, Survivor and Dead, Child and Parent, or Reader and Literary Hero, interact whilst being on two opposite sides of Being, though with no hope of a simultaneity of standing on the

same side at the same time“ (Rowland/Роуланд 2014: 112). Although such an encounter cannot happen in unison, it happens through diverse ecstasies of time, during which there is an interaction and mutual influence without there being an actual encounter. One participant comes to the encounter through his or her presence as a human-being-in-the-world (as Dasein), and the other participant comes to the encounter through his or her inhabiting-the-presence-of-the-present-absence. The tombstone is a reminder of finitude, of mortality, and in observing the finitude of the Other, David sees himself as a mortal human being through the three modes of care – conscience, guilt and resoluteness. David feels guilt and debt to the tombstone because it does not have the care that the living people have. They are tended and cared for in the world, their rooms are warmed, illuminated, and their „house“, in which the ever so guilty and caring being-towards-death, with its ready-to-hand(ness-es), resides comfortably, seems mercilessly locked up, for that being that no longer *is* and will not be. It is this that unlocks the being’s resoluteness to be and to persist with its narrative, tearing itself away from the ontological mists and ghosts that surround it and haunt it. The resoluteness to live with this guilt which is not a consequential guilt or guilt from making mistakes but a guilt of simply being a Self and acknowledging one’s thrownness (cf. Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 334 – 335). This resoluteness comes from the understanding which „temporalizes itself in terms of making present“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер, 1962: 388) and which „is grounded primarily in the future“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 401). With this, temporality no longer revolves around the tyrannical axis of the present, because understanding occurs first in the „making present“ of the past with an anticipation of the future. The present is no longer central to understanding, and the future and the past acquire greater epistemological value. Heidegger considers the past-present-future linear structure to be an „inauthentic“ conception of time (cf. Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 378). He offers an alternative by explaining that the temporal ecstasies actually flow into each other and they do so far from consistently. Therefore, time could be defined as a „temporality which temporalizes itself as a future in the process of having-been“ (Heidegger/Хайдегер 1962: 401). This mode of understanding time could actually prove a very befitting way of describing the narrative technique adopted by Dickens in *David Copperfield*. When we begin to read the book, ideas appear in front of us through words describing events that are passing away or have passed away, but are actualized through our consciousness and by such means are made present, and in being made-present are directed towards a certain future – we expect something reading the Bildungsroman

David Copperfield, but nothing in the novel happens in a sequential order because the thing we expect while reading is David's *having-been*. The Bildungsroman is a genre which naturally deals with temporality in that it traces the development of the child's consciousness of time. David visits his childhood by moving forward the ecstasies of his vague past as if to translate this part of his life to another part of his life, and through this translation to build a bridge between the two parts so as to prevent his identity from the natural entropy of memory caused by the process of unreflectively passing through experiences and advancing inertly.

In addition to a ghost of the ghostly past made present in the process of having been (the ghost of the father that we have already discussed), David is accompanied by a ghost of the unrealised future or something which, by modifying Heidegger's concept, while closely following them, we could define as a temporality which temporalizes itself as present in the process of *would have been* (his unborn sister, Betsey Trotwood). Now that we have the story of where David was born and what comments and projects accompanied his birth, the narrative goes back a little further in Das Man (first-person) narrative to provide us with another prophecy from David's great-aunt, Betsey Trotwood. She is sure that the child Clara will give birth to will be a girl. It would be a careless, shallow reading if we overlook the presence of the things not present in the novel, not present in the form of developed characters, but of characters developed by the characters themselves – characters made up, imagined, and constructed by other characters. Aunt Trotwood makes up this character (David's sister) as a means through which she would be able to connect with her childhood again through an Other who will not make the same mistakes. Prominent here is the idea of repeating one's life in someone else's. And bearing such an example in mind, the only way back in time seems to be through the future.

Although Betsey Trotwood (the child) was never born, she persists in David's life because his great-aunt never misses an opportunity to remind him that his sister Betsey Trotwood would never make a mistake, never run away from home, etc. And with that, this non-existent Betsey Trotwood turns out to be yet another unfulfilled possibility projected onto David Copperfield through Das Man. She also becomes a great example reaffirming Heidegger's theory of the ecstasies of time: „and he has done a pretty piece of business. He has run away. ‚Ah! His sister, Betsey Trotwood, never would have run away.‘ My aunt shook her head firmly, confident in the character and behaviour of the girl who never was born“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 202). In the quoted excerpt and in the image of Betsey Trotwood, the non-existent sister, a temporalization of

making the future's past present, or temporalization temporalizing in the process of would have been, is realized.

Das Man as the tailor of being, a secondary „thrownness“ and the way out – a second birth through death

One important conclusion to be drawn from a reading of David Copperfield's „birth“ is the importance of Das Man in his attempt to understand the ghost of birth, of this primordial absence. To see even more clearly what Heidegger means when he describes Das Man, we will go a little further into David Copperfield's story. Although Das Man is never one particular person, we can very well see how the processes indicating the presence of the pseudo-understanding and pseudo-interpreting being described at David's birth are repeated once more by the tailor, draper, haberdasher and funeral furnisher Mr. Omer who takes his measurements for mourning clothes. The tailor says to the grieving boy:

“I have been acquainted with you a long time, my young friend.”

“Have you, sir?”

“All your life,” said Mr. Omer. **„I may say before it. I knew your father before you. He was five foot nine and a half, and he lays in five and twen-ty foot of ground.“**

“Rat–tat–tat, Rat–tat–tat,–Rat–tat–tat,” across the yard.

“He lays in five and twen-ty foot of ground, if he lays in a fraction,” said Mr. Omer pleasantly. „It was either his request or her direction, I forget which.“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 134, emphasis added)

Das Man is precisely this being that „sews“ the clothes of Dasein and these are clothes for all occasions, events, as well as clothes whose fashion quickly passes when a new one comes, because Das Man is something that changes over time, something that is not interested in the essence, but in the measurements that also change. And so, Das Man can only claim to know everyone because he knows their measurements, and the measurements of the graves in which the former Dasein lies: „By publicness everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone“ (Heidegger/Хайдеггер 1962: 165). This claim to understanding the measurements and the surfaces of being is very clearly made in Omer's words: „But fashions are like human beings. They come in, nobody knows when, why, or how. Everything is like life, in my opinion, if you look at it in that point of view“ (Dickens/Дикенс 2006: 133). Thus, Omer disguises the most enigmatic thing in life, namely death, as something that could be described and understood easily through measurable worldly things.

Upon his mother's death, David is once again returned to his thrownness with double force. The news of her death befalls him on his birthday, which, due to the death of another of his parents, becomes a „memorable“ day. David's birth is now described through not just one, but two absences, and with this the spectre of his own absence is brought back into his life and confronts him again with the 'tailor' of being, Omer, confronts him with his own nothingness, and it is for this reason that he is doubly resolute to emerge from this thrownness once more, experiencing a strange sense of importance: „I felt distinguished, and looked more melancholy, and walked slower“ (Dickens/ДИКЕНС 2006: 132). David begins to feel a strange sense of pride in the deep grief that struck him at an early age. However, this is not pride in grief or in bearing grief, but pride in facing its occasion – death. The empathy David feels for his mother's death is so strong that he begins to feel a sense of complete identification with the dead, reliving in his imagination his own death through the death of his unborn baby brother, who is also dead and is buried in his mother's arms: „The mother who lay in the grave was the mother of my infancy; the little creature in her arms was myself, as I had once been, hushed forever on her bosom“ (Dickens/ДИКЕНС 2006: 142, emphasis added). David is selective in his memories. He chooses to remember not the mother who was sick and weakened by Murdstone's attempts to educate her into firmness, but rather the mother of his infancy, the mother who played with him, the child-mother. One of the reasons for him to imagine himself buried with her might be interpreted as a child's effort to remain connected with his parent and to make „the experience of loss“ part of his reality (cf. Silverman/СИЛВЪРМАН et. al. 1992: 496). Another reason might be to achieve a clear view of, and control over, this utmost possibility. The living man's encounter with death brings him back to the beginning, and thus his rebirth through death takes place. Through the ghost of absence, presence becomes somehow more visible and somehow more desirable.

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this paper was to suggest a way of reading *David Copperfield* through Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. The focus was on the child's consciousness of time, which turns out to be doubly alienated from the child and clothed in the adult's notion of the child's consciousness of time. We described two main conditions under which the child's consciousness of time in Dickens's novel could be observed, namely, autobiographical and fairy tale elements which enrich one's perception and interpretation of reality. A conclusion we might draw is that Heidegger's phenomenological program is adaptable to the analysis of Bildungsromane

because, although he nowhere mentions a phenomenology of childhood, the conditions he describes are particularly characteristic of the child emerging into the world for the first time, developing and beginning to question being through an understanding of its temporality and finitude.

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