***David Copperfield***

***Chapter 7 – My First Half at Salem House***

***Summary:***

* The next day after this evening gossip-fest, school starts.
* Mr. Creakle announces to the boys that they should "come fresh up to the lessons" (7.4) – that they should be fresh and ready for the semester – because *he's* going to be fresh and ready for punishment.
* After this little speech, Mr. Creakle comes to see David personally and shows him the stick he uses to beat the boys.
* Mr. Creakle tells David that, if David's well-known for biting, Mr. Creakle is, too: with his cane.
* The school master makes similar threats to most of the boys sitting in the schoolroom.
* Mr. Creakle is a terrible bully, and all of the children cower before him. When he mocks one of the students before beating him, the other boys are so terrorized that they laugh, too.
* Traddles is a particular target of Mr. Creakle because he is particularly plump, and Mr. Creakle likes whipping the fat kids.
* Traddles gets caned pretty much every day, but he's still pretty cheerful on the whole.
* Traddles is also not a snitch: when he gets in trouble for something Steerforth actually does, he never tells the teachers the truth of the matter, and takes what should be Steerforth's whipping for him. For this, Steerforth praises Traddles, and all the boys are in awe.
* Steerforth walks arm-in-arm with Miss Creakle quite often, which impresses the boys immensely.
* Even though Steerforth can't (or doesn't) protect David from Mr. Creakle, he does encourage him and compliment David's bravery.
* The one advantage of Mr. Creakle's cruelty is that David's sign gets in the way of his cane when he wants to clip the kid in passing, so he soon removes it.
* Steerforth finds out that David has done a lot of reading; he asks David to tell the adventures he's read every night in their dorm room.
* The one downside to this arrangement is that David is often tired when Steerforth wakes him to tell these stories. David does it anyway, though, because he admires Steerforth and wants his approval.
* Steerforth is also kind to David, in his way: when Peggotty sends David a care package with a cake, some oranges, and two bottles of cowslip wine, David hands them all over to Steerforth (as is expected of him).
* Steerforth offers David the wine to drink while he's telling his stories at night.
* In fact, Steerforth keeps the wine locked up for David, and feeds it to him the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning to keep him healthy.
* David is moved by Steerforth's attention to his health.
* These story-telling nights in David's dorm encourage David to survive and to learn – even in the middle of a school basically dedicated to cruelty.
* Mr. Mell helps David to learn, which David appreciates. It makes David feel bad that Steerforth spends a lot of his time mocking Mr. Mell more or less to his face.
* One day, Mr. Creakle is sick, and so the boys are more or less free to do what they like.
* Mr. Mell is supposed to keep order, but the boys are so excited that Mr. Creakle is out that they get a bit above themselves. They dance around him, singing and shouting and laughing at him for his poverty, his poor clothing, his mother – anything they can think of.
* Mr. Mell suddenly stands up and asks them *why* they are behaving this way?
* The boys all stop for a bit because they feel bad.
* Steerforth is sitting at the back of the room whistling.
* Mr. Mell tells him to be quiet.
* Steerforth tells Mr. Mell to shut up.
* Mr. Mell replies: "Sit down" (7.38).
* Steerforth answers, "Sit down yourself [...] and mind your business" (7.39).
* Some of the boys laugh and start clapping, but Mr. Mell looks so angry that they immediately shut up.
* Mr. Mell tells Steerforth that he's fully aware of the influence Steerforth exerts over everyone at Salem House, but it's still *shameful* of him to insult a good man for something he cannot help: poverty.
* Steerforth answers Mr. Mell that he has no right to call Steerforth shameful or mean, because he, Mr. Mell, is just a beggar.
* At this dramatic moment, when it looks like either Mr. Mell or Steerforth is going to hit the other, Mr. Creakle comes in with Tungay, Mrs. Creakle, and Miss Creakle.
* Mr. Creakle asks Mr. Mell if he has forgotten who he is addressing.
* Mr. Mell stutters that he has remembered himself.
* Mr. Creakle then asks Steerforth what is going on here.
* Steerforth claims that Mr. Mell has been talking about favorites.
* Mr. Mell clarifies that no student has the right to use his position as a favorite in the school to humiliate Mr. Mell.
* Mr. Creakle is outraged that anyone could claim that there is favoritism at Salem House.
* Steerforth jumps in to say that Mr. Mell has called Steerforth base and mean, and that Steerforth called Mr. Mell a beggar.
* The boys are all impressed that Steerforth has admitted to this.
* Mr. Creakle scolds Steerforth for implying that any employee of Salem House is a beggar.
* Steerforth replies that, even if Mr. Mell isn't a beggar himself, he's near relations with one, which is the same thing.
* Throughout all of this, David has been standing next to Mr. Mell (where he had been saying his lessons) and Mr. Mell has been patting him on the shoulder reassuringly.
* (Oh God, this next past is *so awful*).
* Steerforth tells the whole school what he finally heard from David: that Mr. Mell's mother lives in a house for poor beggar women.
* Mr. Creakle demands that Mr. Mell set the record straight in front of the whole school.
* Mr. Mell answers that, yes, Steerforth is telling the truth.
* Mr. Creakle wants Mr. Mell to swear that he, Mr. Creakle, never heard a word of Mr. Mell's mother's low social and economic status until this moment.
* Mr. Mell answers that Mr. Creakle has never asked too particularly, though he must have known Mr. Mell's poor position in the world.
* Mr. Creakle fires Mr. Mell on the spot.
* Mr. Mell takes off, but not before telling Steerforth that he can only hope that, one day, Steerforth will feel ashamed of what he has done today (by outing Mr. Mell as the son of a beggar and forcing him to leave the school).
* Mr. Mell collects all of his things and leaves.
* Mr. Creakle thanks Steerforth for protecting Salem House's reputation, and the boys applaud (though David feels miserable).
* Mr. Creakle canes Traddles for crying over Mr. Mell's departure.
* David feels hugely guilty for his role in Mr. Mell's firing, what with having told Steerforth about Mrs. Mell's poverty.
* David wants to cry, but he can't because Steerforth keeps looking at him, and he doesn't want to appear ungrateful.
* Steerforth is very angry at Traddles for crying at Mr. Mell's departure.
* Traddles says that Steerforth has behaved badly by making Mr. Mell lose his job.
* Steerforth retorts that he plans to write home and make sure that Mr. Mell gets some money – so there!
* The boys are all relieved to hear this, and praise Steerforth's actions.
* Still, late at night, David continues to feel lingering guilt.
* Eventually, Mr. Mell is replaced by another instructor who Steerforth likes, but who doesn't bother to look after David particularly, the way Mr. Mell used to.
* One day, David is utterly surprised to hear that he has visitors.
* He expects that it will be Mr. and Miss Murdstone, and is super nervous.
* But it isn't!
* It's Mr. Peggotty and his nephew, Ham.
* When he sees them, David bursts out laughing, he's so happy.
* David finally has to wipe his eyes from laughing so hard.
* The guys are concerned at David's emotional response to seeing them.
* To cheer him up, Ham tells David that he's grown a lot.
* David asks after his mother, Peggotty, little Emily, and Mrs. Gummidge.
* They're all well ("oncommon" (7.108) as Mr. Peggotty says – in other words, "uncommonly well").
* They bring David some boiled (or "biled" (7.112)) shrimp, lobster, and crab.
* Mr. Peggotty explains that his sister, Peggotty, wrote to him and told him that, if he's ever in David's neighborhood, he should visit and send her news of David's health.
* Mr. Peggotty can't write, so he has to have Emily do it for him, but he promises that he will let Peggotty know that David is doing well.
* David asks more particularly after Emily, who, Ham and Mr. Peggotty both agree, is growing into a woman.
* Steerforth happens past David and the Peggottys and greets David.
* David introduces the Peggottys to Steerforth.
* Steerforth seems very impressive and charismatic to the Peggottys, who are both pleased to meet him.
* David tells Steerforth that, if he is ever in Yarmouth, he must go and see the Peggotty house, which is built out of a boat.
* Steerforth approves of a boat-house for two boatmen.
* The two Peggottys continue to be charmed, and welcome Steerforth to their house if he is ever near their town.
* Steerforth and David split the shellfish the Peggottys brought among their classmates, but poor Traddles gets sick from the crab. That kid really cannot catch a break.
* Not much else happens during David's first term at school; the holidays grow closer and closer, and he worries that no one will send for him.
* Luckily, at last, David finds out that he will spend the winter holidays at home.

***Brief Summary:***

The school semester begins with the headmaster, Mr. Creakle, making many threats of violence against both David and the general school population. David learns more about his new friends. Traddles, hopelessly warmhearted and yet constantly in trouble, is seen as an honest, honorable, and loyal boy. David and Steerforth begin a friendship based on their individual strengths. They establish a nightly ritual in which David tells Steerforth stories from the books that he has read. Steerforth, in turn, helps David with difficult assignments.

One day, Steerforth and Mr. Mell have an argument in which Steerforth insults the poor teacher, who resigns and immediately leaves the school. The boys cheer Steerforth for some perceived gallantry, even though he has so cruelly insulted Mr. Mell. Steerforth's insults were based on the information that David had given him about Mr. Mell's mother.

The only other memorable moment from the semester is a visit from Peggotty's relatives. They come to see David and end up meeting Steerforth. They are all impressed by Steerforth and think he is great.

***Brief Analysis:***

This chapter provides a strong comparison between Traddles and Steerforth. Traddles' kind feelings and loyalty to Mr. Mell contrast sharply with Steerforth's elitist and privileged attitude. David, showing his own innocence, is completely entranced with Steerforth, despite having a few lingering feelings of sorrow about Mr. Mell, who had always been kind to him. David goes along with the crowd and praises Steerforth although Steerforth has been extremely mean and insulting to someone who was not deserving of such treatment. Steerforth also makes a strong impression on Peggotty's relatives, proving that everyone he meets is overwhelmed by his strength of personality and are eager to think that he is a good person. These opinions will serve Steerforth throughout his life as he continues to take advantage of those he considers beneath him.

***Critical Study:***

School begins, and Mr. Creakle warns the boys that he will punish them severely if they fail in their lessons. He beats David with a cane on the first day. David notices that Traddles gets beaten more than the other boys because he is fat. To cheer himself up, Traddles lays his head on his desk and draws little skeletons on his slate.

Steerforth and David become close when Steerforth, who suffers from insomnia, persuades David to stay up with him at night and tell him the stories David remembers from his father’s books. One day when Mr. Creakle is ill, Steerforth and Mr. Mell get into a fight, and Steerforth reveals that David has told him about visiting an old woman with Mr. Mell at the charity house. Steerforth figures out that the old woman is Mr. Mell’s mother. When Mr. Creakle comes to see what the commotion is, Steerforth tells him about Mr. Mell’s poverty. Mr. Creakle commends Steerforth and fires Mr. Mell, who, as he leaves, shows particular favor to David. Another day, Ham and Mr. Peggotty come to visit David at school. They meet Steerforth and are amused by him.

***Critical Analysis:***

Mr. Creakle flogs the students at Salem House every day. Tommy Traddles, described by [David Copperfield](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#David_Copperfield) as "very honorable," is a particular target. Traddles is mistakenly blamed and beaten for laughing in church, but [James Steerforth](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#James_Steerforth) is the real culprit. Steerforth doesn't protect David from Mr. Creakle's beatings. Instead, Steerforth tells David he "wouldn't have stood it himself" and advises him to have more pluck. David assumes Steerforth is offering encouragement. David is flattered when Steerforth asks him to tell stories every night based on the adventure novels David has read. As the youngest student in the school, David's storytelling gives him a kind of status. Steerforth has a habit of badgering and insulting Mr. Mell about his poverty, encouraging others to do so as well, and one day things get out of control. Mr. Creakle intervenes, and Steerforth says he called Mr. Mell a beggar because Mr. Mell's mother lives in an almshouse, a piece of information he got from David. On hearing this, Mr. Creakle fires Mr. Mell. Tommy Traddles is punished for defending Mr. Mell, and David feels conflicted, even after Steerforth says he'll have his mother send money to Mr. Mell. One afternoon, Mr. [Peggotty](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/David-Copperfield/character-analysis/#Peggotty) and Ham Peggotty surprise David with a visit, bringing him a gift of shellfish. David introduces them to Steerforth and says he'd like to take him to Yarmouth for a visit. At the end of the term, David travels home for the holidays.***Summary and analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

Classes begin the next day with Mr. Creakle barging into the classroom and threatening to beat any students who don't apply themselves in the new term. He then walks over to [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) and hits him a few times with his cane, which Creakle calls a "tooth." Creakle does the same to other boys in the room, and David remarks that the headmaster "had a delight in cutting at the boys." Even now, David says, he still cannot forget or forgive how frightened the boys were of Creakle, and he describes several instances in which he waited watchfully for Creakle to explode at him or someone else. [Traddles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/tommy-traddles) in particular, as the "merriest and most miserable of all the boys," experiences frequent beatings, and once even takes the blame for an offense committed by [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) (laughing in church).

***Analysis Part 1:***

David's deep animosity toward Creakle isn't simply the result of the beatings he personally received. Instead, it seems to stem from his beliefs about childhood education, and his sense that Creakle was uniquely unsuited to the task. In fact, David suggests that Creakle would have been able to do less "mischief" as head of the army or navy than he did as a schoolmaster. The implication, in other words, is that Creakle's actions have particularly harmful long-term effects on children, because they are uniquely impressionable.

***Summary Part 2:***

Meanwhile, [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) continues to act as a protector for [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield), though he does not intervene on his behalf with [Creakle](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-creakle). David, however, remains in awe of him, and Steerforth seems to feel some fondness in return. Steerforth is especially excited when David happens to mention the novels he has read, and asks him to recount what he remembers of the stories to Steerforth every night. Despite the downsides of the arrangement—David is often tired the next day—he appreciates the admiration it inspires in the other boys, and relishes the opportunity to indulge his "romantic and dreamy" side amidst the drudgery of life at school.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Although David's friendship with Steerforth is generally presented as a hindrance to David's growth, Steerforth does provide David with his first opportunity to exercise his skills as a "writer." Though he's technically recounting other people's narratives, David's storytelling sessions require him to draw on his memories in much the same way he does writing the memoir itself. Still, he's clearly not thinking of storytelling as a vocation yet, since he approaches it in a "dreamy" rather than disciplined manner.

***Summary Part 3:***

The students at Salem generally learn little because of their fear of [Mr. Creakle](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-creakle). [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield), however, does manage to pick up "some crumbs of knowledge" from [Mr. Mell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-mell), and is therefore disturbed by the fact that [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) consistently treats Mell with disdain. He also regrets telling Steerforth about the visit he and Mell paid to Mell's mother. This unfortunately comes back to haunt David one day when Mell scolds the classroom—and then Steerforth in particular—for being unusually rowdy. Steerforth refuses to listen to Mell, instead throwing the teacher's demand that he sit down and be quiet back at Mell. The argument escalates, and Steerforth eventually says he knows—from David—that Mell is a "beggar."

***Analysis Part 3:***

Although Dickens elsewhere suggests that some forms of hardship can build character, it's clear that some experiences simply can't be turned to good use: the students at Salem House, for instance, are in such a constant state of terror that learning is impossible. Furthermore, the one teacher who does seem able to accomplish something is vulnerable on account of his lower-class background. This becomes painfully obvious when he attempts to scold the upper-class Steerforth, who feels nothing but contempt for Mell. In fact, Mell remains a "beggar" to Steerforth, despite the position he's reached in life.

***Summary Part 4:***

Suddenly, [Mr. Creakle](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-creakle) enters, and scolds [Mr. Mell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-mell) for "forgetting himself" so far as to chastise [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) and to accuse Creakle himself of favoritism. He also mildly scolds Steerforth for insulting Mell, but Steerforth defends his words, and reveals that Mell's mother lives in an almshouse. Mell confirms that this is true, and Creakle fires him on the spot. As he leaves, however, Mell says he hopes Steerforth will one day be "ashamed" of his actions, and that he "would prefer to see [Steerforth as] anything rather than a friend […] to anyone in whom [Mell] feel[s] an interest." Creakle then thanks Steerforth, and most of the students cheer for him.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Like Steerforth, Creakle can't or won't separate Mell from his impoverished background; he claims that continuing to employ Mell would be the same as providing charity, despite the fact that nothing material about Mell's situation has changed. This hints that the mere act of "allowing" a lower-class man like Mell to rise in the world is viewed as a form of charity, over and apart from any actual assistance. Tellingly, Mell is ultimately able to achieve success only by immigrating to Australia, where social class was more fluid.

***Summary part 5:***

[Mr. Mell](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mr-mell)'s dismissal causes a rift between [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) and [Traddles](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/tommy-traddles), who had cried when he left (and been beaten for it). Traddles accuses Steerforth not only of getting Mell fired but also of hurting the man's feelings, but Steerforth rejects the idea that Mell has feelings in the same way that they do. He also says he will ensure that his family provides Mell with some money. [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) is pleased with the "nobility" of this speech but also feels uncomfortable with Mell's departure. This feeling fades, however, the more time David spends with Steerforth.

***Analysis Part 5:***

The events surrounding Mr. Mell's firing in many ways foreshadow Steerforth's eventual affair with little Em'ly: Steerforth doesn't really believe lower-class people have feelings, so he also doesn't worry about hurting them. He is, however, willing to recompense them, which suggests one way of thinking about the "logic" behind Steerforth's bias: perhaps the lives of the lower classes are so governed by financial necessity that there's no room left over for "higher" feelings. This is an idea that the novel as a whole consistently refutes, but that nevertheless recurs throughout it.

Summary Part 6:

Sometime later that term, [Tungay](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/tungay) announces that [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) has visitors. These turn out to be [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) and [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty), and the three share a joyful reunion, with David crying at the sight of his "old friends," and Ham remarking on how much David has grown. Mr. Peggotty confirms that [Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty), [little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily), and [Mrs. Gummidge](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/mrs-gummidge) are all well, and David asks whether Emily has changed much. Mr. Peggotty says that Emily is "getting to be a woman," and comments proudly on the progress she has made with her education.

Analysis Part 6:

Although David himself can't explain why he's crying, it's likely a reaction to the contrast between his circumstances the last time he saw the Peggottys and his circumstances now. Although David has, as Ham notes, begun to grow up since that first meeting, the experiences that have forced him to do so have mostly been painful.

Summary Part 7:

At this point, [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) accidentally stumbles into the room, and [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) takes the opportunity to introduce him to [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) and [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty). Steerforth is effortlessly charming with them, and David pauses in his narrative to comment on the charisma that made people want to "yield" to him. Back in the main storyline, David speaks glowingly of Steerforth's kindness to Mr. Peggotty, and says that the next time he visits Yarmouth, he will bring Steerforth with him. The group discusses Mr. Peggotty's house, Steerforth saying a boat is "the right sort of house for such a thorough-built boatman."

Analysis Part 7:

Steerforth is in many ways a commentary on the dangers posed by someone who learns to influence events and people but never to control himself. With very little conscious effort, Steerforth is able to bend those around him to his will. However, because he has no guiding light beyond his own impulses and emotions, his influence over others only results in dragging them into trouble alongside him. The fact that the Peggottys are working-class exacerbates this, because Steerforth sees them more as quaint abstractions than real people, as his remark about the appropriateness of their house suggests.

Summary Part 8:

After [Ham](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/ham-peggotty) and [Mr. Peggotty](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/peggotty) leave, [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) considers telling [Steerforth](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/james-steerforth) about [little Em'ly](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/little-em-ly-emily), but is afraid Steerforth will mock him for his infatuation. He is also "uneasy" about the idea of Emily becoming a woman. That evening, the boys feast on the lobsters, crabs, and shrimp Mr. Peggotty brought David.

Analysis Part 8:

David and Emily are approximately the same age, but where David seemed flattered by the suggestion that he is growing up, he reacts with discomfort to the idea that Emily is as well. On some level, this might simply be a reflection of his old wish to remain a child with her forever. In light of the novel's later events, however, it also perhaps points to David's (and the era's) discomfort with adult female sexuality. Emily is the most flirtatious of the novel's female characters, and she ultimately has an affair out of wedlock. David's anxiety about her becoming a woman possibly hints at her sexual "looseness."

Summary Part 9:Womanhood and Gender Roles Theme Icon

The rest of the term passes without incident, leaving [David](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/david-copperfield/characters/david-copperfield) only with a "jumble" of impressions of daily life. As the end of the term approaches, David begins to look forward to going home (though he fears he may not be allowed back). In the end, however, David winds up on a coach returning home by way of Yarmouth.

Analysis Part 9:

Murdstone's presence clearly hasn't entirely wiped out David's memories of home as a happy place. It's no longer a place he can count on for refuge, however, and therefore in some sense it is no longer home at all.

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

"If he is not a beggar himself, his near relation's one," said Steerforth. "It's all the same." (7.71)

***Explanation:***

From his lofty perspective as the son of an upper-class, wealthy woman, Steerforth can look down on Mr. Mell and his beggared "near relation" – Mrs. Mell. Steerforth's wealth and good birth give him an easy self-confidence and charisma that characters like David and Traddles can't draw on. At the same time, his social position prevents him from sympathizing with the poor. And his energetic nature gets twisted and stunted by having nothing to do or prove. Society destroys Steerforth's moral compass.

***Quotation 2:***

Steerforth evaded the question for a little while; looking in scorn and anger on his opponent, and remaining silent. I could not help thinking even in that interval, I remember, what a noble fellow he was in appearance, and how homely and plain Mr. Mell looked opposed to him. (7.53)

***Explanation 2:***

Even though Mr. Mell is morally right in this scene, his poor clothes distract David from the truth of his position. Mr. Mell is correct to demand that Steerforth, his student, treat him with respect. But the reality of the social structure Steerforth occupies means that Mr. Mell will always be Steerforth's social inferior, even if Steerforth is a pupil in Mr. Mell's classroom. The odd thing about David Copperfield is that Dickens seems to be acutely aware of the need to respect the poor – Steerforth's poor treatment of Mr. Mell and the Peggottys does not go without criticism from our narrator – but at the same time, the book constantly supports the importance of class difference. For example, David insists that he is different from the other factory boys because his father is a gentleman. Is there a contradiction in this logic, that Dickens wants respect for the poor, but he also believes that working class characters should stay in their social places? Can this logic be reconciled?

***Quotation 3:***

I should think there never can have been a man who enjoyed his profession more than Mr. Creakle did. He had a delight in cutting at the boys, which was like the satisfaction of a craving appetite. I am confident that he couldn't resist a chubby boy, especially; that there was a fascination in such a subject, which made him restless in his mind, until he had scored and marked him for the day. I was chubby myself, and ought to know. (7.7)

***Explanation 3:***

Mr. Creakle is obviously a sadist. He "had a delight in cutting at the boys." He loves whipping boys so much that he feels "restless in his mind" until he finds a new victim. But it's also worth noting that David remembers Mr. Creakle so vividly and fiercely because of the suffering he brings – the reason there's so much pain and sorrow in this book is because it's these things that we remember. And David Copperfield is supposed to be a memoir.

***Quotation 4:***

Poor Traddles! In a tight sky-blue suit that made his arms and legs like German sausages, or roly-poly puddings, he was the merriest and most miserable of all the boys. He was always being caned—I think he was caned every day that half-year, except one holiday Monday when he was only ruler'd on both hands—and was always going to write to his uncle about it, and never did. After laying his head on the desk for a little while, he would cheer up, somehow, begin to laugh again, and draw skeletons all over his slate, before his eyes were dry. I used at first to wonder what comfort Traddles found in drawing skeletons; and for some time looked upon him as a sort of hermit, who reminded himself by those symbols of mortality that caning couldn't last for ever. But I believe he only did it because they were easy, and didn't want any features. (7.12)

***Explanation 4:***

Poor Traddles gets the worst of Mr. Creakle's brutality because he's plump, and Mr. Creakle likes beating fat boys. (So horrible!) But he also has this interesting coping mechanism of drawing skeletons all the time. David thinks, at first, that these skeletons have a huge symbolic meaning: that Traddles seeks comfort in the fact that all of our suffering will eventually end (even if it's in death).

***Quotation 5:***

It was, properly, a half-holiday; being Saturday. [...] It was the day of the week on which Mr. Sharp went out to get his wig curled; so Mr. Mell, who always did the drudgery, whatever it was, kept school by himself. [...] I recall him bending his aching head, supported on his bony hand, over the book on his desk, and wretchedly endeavouring to get on with his tiresome work, amidst an uproar that might have made the Speaker of the House of Commons giddy. Boys started in and out of their places [...] boys whirled about him, grinning, making faces, mimicking him behind his back and before his eyes; mimicking his poverty, his boots, his coat, his mother, everything belonging to him that they should have had consideration for. (7.32)

***Explanation 5:***

The boys are so horribly treated by Mr. Creakle that they seize every opportunity to act out against other people when they have the chance. Suffering doesn't necessarily make you more sympathetic. In fact, the brief freedom that the kids get from Mr. Creakle make them torture poor Mr. Mell, mocking his poverty, clothes, and even his mom eventually.

***Quotation 6:***

In a school carried on by sheer cruelty, whether it is presided over by a dunce or not, there is not likely to be much learnt. I believe our boys were, generally, as ignorant a set as any schoolboys in existence; they were too much troubled and knocked about to learn; they could no more do that to advantage, than any one can do anything to advantage in a life of constant misfortune, torment, and worry. (7.26)

***Explanation 6:***

The lesson here is pretty direct: beat boys, and they won't learn anything. But David does manage to learn something at Mr. Creakle's school, so long as Mr. Mell is there and is willing to help him with extra lessons. Would this entire story have been different if Mr. Mell had not been there to encourage David through this dark period of his life? Even though this book is supposed to be a novel of education, how much of David Copperfield's rise in the world is thanks to chance?

***Quotation 7:***

Miserable little propitiators of a remorseless Idol, how abject we were to [Mr. Creakle]! What a launch in life I think it now, on looking back, to be so mean and servile to a man of such parts and pretensions! (7.8)

***Explanation 7:***

As a bully, Mr. Creakle manages to get all of the boys to behave in his own image. To try and avoid his punishments, they play along with him when he whips one of their schoolmates – they laugh at his awful jokes so that he won't turn his humor or punishment on them. Mr. Creakle's style of bad schooling is so dangerous because it influences the boys to become worse themselves.

***Quotation 8:***

We thought this intention [of finding the fired Mr. Mell a job] very noble in Steerforth, whose mother was a widow, and rich, and would do almost anything, it was said, that he asked her. [...] But I must say that when I was going on with a story in the dark that night, Mr. Mell's old flute seemed more than once to sound mournfully in my ears; and that when at last Steerforth was tired, and I lay down in my bed, I fancied it playing so sorrowfully somewhere, that I was quite wretched. (7.95)

***Explanation 8:***

After Steerforth gets Mr. Mell fired, he convinces the other boys that he plans to find Mr. Mell another job so they'll feel better about the whole thing. But at night, when David is alone, even this comfort can't make his sorrow for Mr. Mell go away. Being alone makes David's guilt and sadness worse, which is perhaps one reason why he values family life and community above all other achievements.