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<https://doi.org/10.61796/ejlhss.v1i6.659>**THE ROLE OF THE ORPHAN CHILD IN CHARLES
DICKENS' OLIVER TWIST****Assist. Lect. Riyadh Mohsen Huwail**

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Abstract: When Charles Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* in the 1830s, crime was a major problem in London. To shed light on this problem, Charles Dickens cared about the reader and used different literary methods to be more influential and more effective in conveying his literary message towards his society. He used literary symbolism to evoke a group of additional meanings that are essential in conveying the desired meaning. His primary aim was to draw the reader's attention to the perception of meaning of what he wanted to convey about the innocent or evil individuals in his novel *Oliver Twist*, and the symbolism had wide ability to motivate the reader to derive deeper meanings, which enriched the novel by providing hints about the development of the novel's events. Given the importance of these narrative methods, this study decided to conduct a literary analysis to determine the extent of the effect of the role played by literary symbolism in conveying meaning in the novel *Oliver Twist*

Keywords: Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, innocent, orphanage, burglary, horror and symbolism..

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Introduction

Britain witnessed significant social development in the 19th century in practically every aspect of life; in fact, by the time Queen Victoria passed away in 1901, there was a widespread belief that the modern world had taken shape (Mitchell, 2009). While the changes mostly affected fields like politics, economics, and technology, there was also a wide change in morality and ideologies. The Evangelical Movement (1), which started in the late 18th century, had a significant impact on this change, which led to a rise in social consciousness and moral obligation (Mitchell, 2009). Victorian literature, both fiction and non-fiction, had an influential social consciousness because of the effective connection between Victorian society and written speech.

Laura Berry (2) claims that children also became unquestionable public categories in the 19th century, which sparked a completely new social discussion regarding children and society's obligations to them. Orphans were the most vulnerable group of children, frequently facing harsh discrimination due to the fact that most of them were born outside of marriage (Banerjee, 2016). Apart

from the workhouse, there was no official system in place to care for these kids, so they were regularly left unattended and forced to live in appalling conditions(Pool, 1998) .

Victorian reader. Given how closely the social setting corresponded to the reality presented in the book and so served as a supplement to the text

itself, it appears plausible to believe that the readers' impression of the book was influenced by it.

- (1) is a worldwide interdenominational movement within Protestant Christianity that emphasizes the centrality of sharing the "good news" of Christianity, being "born again" in which an individual. (<https://wikipedia.org>)
- (2) Laura Berry was a juvenile when she was sentenced to life in prison, but in December of 2017, the Fair Sentencing of Minors Act gave her a second chance outside of prison.

1.1 Problem of this Study :

When Charles Dickens wrote Oliver Twist around 1830, he was engaged in social, behavioral and moral problems which were aspects of the life of the society that Oliver Twist lived. This research shows many kinds of social injustice like, poverty, social discrimination and child labor that are the most famous issues depicted by Charles Dickens in Oliver Twist.

1.2 Questions of this Study :

- 1- What were the social states that Charles Dickens revealed in Oliver Twist ?
- 2- How did Oliver Twist finish his voyage after he run away from the orphanage ?
- 3- Was Charles Dickens successful in embodying the role of Oliver Twist ?

1.3 Hypotheses of this Study

- 1- The orphan Oliver Twist would be affected by the negative social habits in the orphanage and with a gang when he was exploited by the leader of that gang when he was trained to be a thief.
- 2- After a long suffering and a hard journey Oliver Twist and his new family lived happily between the upper and lower classes in society of London.
- 3- The novelist Charles Dickens showed a high skillfulness in portraying the events of this book.

1.4 Procedures of this Study :

- 1- Reading children literature.
- 2- Documenting the references according to APA style.

Methods

Perspective as the third person omniscient, the narrator changes the perspectives of several characters. The narrator's tone is biased toward the protagonists and not at all toward the other characters in the novel, hence it is not objective.

Oliver, who lives with the vicious gang, introduces perfect virtue, morality, and strong devotion that show vice and immoral action such as stealing in the book. He was employed by author Charles Dickens to promise the public at his time that terrible people are not inherently bad people and that poor people are not originally corrupt.

1.6 Aims of this Paper

- 1- In this work, Oliver embodies absolute goodness, his belief in morality, and his commitment to virtue and good behavior by avoiding theft, even while living with the bad gang.
- 2- The novelist Charles Dickens used the orphan Oliver to confirm to society at that time that the corrupt atmosphere is what creates corrupt people, and the poor are not bad in themselves. Oliver's story teaches us to persist in the face of difficulties.
- 3- Showing the issues of treatment related to childhood oppression and child abuse in the Victorian reign.

1.7 Literature Review

The creation of the fictional orphan can be covered in the parts that follow. This state influences readers' ideas of the characters as well as exposing societal views about orphan children. The depiction of Oliver also shows how the orphan was viewed. "A modern literary critic observed the pictures' influence in the Quarterly Review in 1839, noting that it is difficult to explain [...] How much of the strong impression we are aware of what could have come from the pencil rather than the pen (Collins, 1995:27). This section begins by testing the vital literary role of children because generally children, especially the orphans, are prevalent in 19th-century literature.

This literary work uses the fictional children crucially because it allows the reader to treat the character on a personal level. Berry argues that since everyone has been a child in some point, children own a specific place in society because they help to bring people together. Accordingly, it can be assumed that using kids as literary characters worked to pique readers' interest as they could be anyone, including the reader. The author Dickens made the use of this condition depending on the beginning of *Oliver Twist*, emphasizing the readers' equality with the protagonist.

Section (Two)

2.1 Contextualizing of the Novel of *Oliver Twist*

Understanding *Oliver Twist* and how the orphan is depicted in fiction needs knowing of the historical background. This understanding imagines readers' observation of the characters by shining sources that are made skillfully throughout the novel.

As a result, the purpose of this part is to ground *Oliver Twist* in the modern world. Firstly, I will give some background information about Charles Dickens as a writer and the societal

context of Oliver Twist's publishing. In addition, the section will One of the most well-known authors of the 19th century, Charles Dickens enjoyed enormous popularity with readers. Organized charity and social concern increased significantly as a result of the tremendous socioeconomic challenges facing English society and the shifting moral atmosphere (Mitchell , 2009:10).

Along with the changing attitudes towards children, the child also became a more prominent literary figure, which was made possible by the close relationship between the social discourse and the discourse of fiction (Richardson , 2016:26) . As Oliver's mother's account shows, pregnant or recently delivered women frequently passed away from poor health or left their kids in the workhouses or "Foundling Hospital," because the stigma and discrimination associated with illegitimacy was so great. Naturally, the negative views surrounding illegitimacy had an impact on both mothers and children. (Jacqueline ,2017:42) asserts that as illegitimate children were exposed to the outside world, they were the group most in need of assistance and without the safeguard of adults . Jenny Taylor thinks that the novel underscored society's desire for such facilities in reference to Oliver Twist and the Foundling Hospital. Naturally, the hospital's impact is best understood in the context of its larger activity, which created a stark difference in a society where the majority of orphans were doomed to completely different outcomes." In order to discuss how Charles Dickens and his readers were influenced by the social situation, this essay will position Oliver Twist in its 19th century social context (Richardson , 2016:17).

Oliver and Mr. Sowerberry's visit to the impoverished family depicts the conditions of the workhouses in the book; despite the family's obviously bad living circumstances, their circumstances are better than those of the workhouse. Oliver Twist had a significant role in the public discourse opposing the New Poor Law, which faced opposition as will be covered in a later section (Taylor,2017:33) . Now that the work has been published, the discussion will center on how some modern readers responded to it and how Victorian readers saw Oliver Twist's orphan character. The novel was well received by readers from the start (Diniejkó , 2017:28) .

2.2 Criticism

It appears that Dickens' portrayal of criminals in the preface of the 1841 edition, where he states that it seemed, a coarse and shocking circumstance, that some of the characters in these pages are chosen from the most criminal and degraded in London's population," is the primary target of criticism (Dickens , 1853:45) . This critique was unsurprising given the blossoming literary scene during Oliver Twist's time; people associated its portrayal of criminality with the widely accepted romanticized accounts of London's criminal underworld known as the Newgate Novels(Collins ,1995:22). Dickens himself claims that some readers were expecting the somewhat glorified depiction of the criminal world typical of this genre and were therefore shocked to learn about Oliver Twist's brutally realistic criminals. This made them question the characters' reasonability and think they were exaggerated.

Thus, readers' understanding of Dickens' roles and the novel's plot appear to have shaped how readers viewed these characters and made it easier for them to understand the needs of the poor people. Similarly to this, an anonymous author seems to have acknowledged the abuse shown in Dickens' novel in a review published in the Literary Gazette in 1838.The author even thanks Dickens for showing the injustice and wickedness in society (Collins,1995:57) . Once more, this suggests that people were mindful of the social context and may have even been inclined to compare the fictional orphans to their real-life counterparts.

Appropriately raised the orphan is viewed as a clean slate, Hence, it makes sense to refer to a child without parents as an orphan; yet, in Victorian culture, the term also implied a child who was denied even one parent, a definition that left many children with the unstable social

status of orphans. It's true that a substantial percentage of the abandoned kids in Victorian fiction are from working-class families, and the writers' attention is mostly focused on their struggles to survive these circumstances and the plot. Well into the nineteenth century, the number of orphans and undocumented children continued to rise due to high death rates and cruel views. 'Given the severity of the scorn and isolation that followed wrongdoing, pregnant or recently begotten women frequently died of weak health—like Oliver's mother was portrayed as—or abandoned their babies to the Foundling Hospital or workhouse. The narrative of *Oliver Twist* portrays the terrifying reality of living on the streets.

Mr. Fang so rapidly assumes when *Oliver Twist* brought in on a suspicious of trying to steal from an old gentleman at a bookstall. Until 1898 the accused was not permitted to testify at all on his behalf (Pool, 1998:19).

Of course the fact above represents a state of the social injustice as it does not give the accused to defend himself before the law in the courts. Even though society as a whole was increasingly aware of the situation for children, few people wanted to think about their actual fates; but by portraying their lives in fiction Dickens invited society to do so (Richardson Dickens 2017:15).

2.3 Analysis

Charles Dickens' works indicate his extraordinary endowment of observance.

Many novelists cannot accomplish what the novelist has managed to achieve in his book. He has ability to design images of things and people in a way that the ordinary human being would not envisage.

Dickens' writings achieve what he notices with what he remembers and think. Rarely does one miss even the most simple of details in his writing, it is these trivialities that bring out his work. It may be these trivialities that bring out his most critical strength in literature.

The ability to describe vividly probably stemmed from Dickens' attention to detail even in his real life, in letter that he wrote to his colleagues.

The researchers have exploited a considerable time effort to discover what scholars wrote about the topic of the research, they did realize that a few researches treated the childhood theme from a different concepts such as Katerina Pekarova, in her thesis (*The Theme of Childhood in Oliver Twist*) to show cases differences in concept and attitudes toward children among societal and treatment they received in the novel. And because childhood is always a very special period of everyone's life

1.4 Previous studies

There are many studies on the subject of this paper, two of them are so relevant to it as mentioned down:

- 1- Lian (2018 :1050) says, "The author highlights the critical spirit to the dark society and benevolence spirit especially to the poor and lower class in this novel."
- 2- Hergie (2019:273). states, "The novel is about the life of Oliver, an orphan born in a workhouse, and Dickens uses his situation to criticize public policy toward the poor 1830s England."

By the two quotations above it is clearly there is similarity in the theme of what was mentioned in this paper and the two papers above that Dickens deals with the poverty and orphanage which England suffered from at that time, but this paper focused more on these two subjects explaining their reasons and results in the society.

Result and Discussion

Oliver Twist's novel concludes with him and his new family enjoying a happy country life. He finishes his arduous and drawn-out voyage through the classes, seeing the disparities between London's upper and lower classes.

The findings of this study showed that the social values found and discussed in Oliver Twist were love values, which include kinfolk, concern, mutual aid, love and affection, dedication, and loyalty.

It is clearly that the social situations influenced the author Dickens and his readers including the way the author chose to construct the characters and this led to that reading public responded to it.

Section (Three)

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to investigate how the social backdrop of the early 19th century affected both the author and his readers by focusing on Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens. The public's infatuation with orphans and the ubiquity of these characters in 19th-century literature appear to stem from both literary merit and moral concern. Victorian readers were interested in the imaginary orphan's connection to reality, and the orphan served as a model for the author's story and message. First of all, the Victorians could identify with and sympathize with the mistreated youngster, which made the story relevant and served as the basis for the novel's moral assertion. Oliver Twist's moral goal showed the author's intention and the reality that he was greatly affected by the social circumstances, as the discussion has demonstrated, but also influenced the framework of the story; Dickens encouraged readers to connect the events of the book with reality by developing a character who would resonate with Victorian readers. In summary, readers were assisted in reading the book by their comprehension of Dickens' purpose and the narrative's structure.

The social setting of Oliver Twist most likely served to cement the role of the orphan boy as Dickens both mirrored and utilized his background. Victorian readers were able to comprehend and interpret the novel's events in a way that current readers are unable to do since they had a more complete picture. Because there existed a tie between the fictional orphan and the real children, it appears logical to argue that Charles Dickens and his readers were influenced by their setting. This essay has demonstrated how literature and history can shed light on one another. The social backdrop broadened the perspective of fictitious orphans, while the orphans themselves raised awareness of the social predicament

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