

## The Representation of raising children during the industrial revolution in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*

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**Keywords:** Industrial Revolution, Child Labor, Greed, Workhouse, Orphan.

### Summary:

This paper deals with The Industrial Revolution and its effects on raising children in England as presented in *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. The aim of this study is to find out the negative impacts of industrial revolution towards children and how these impacts affected on children's life at that time. *Oliver Twist* reflects the children's life and how they lived and raised in a way that not supposed to be in which The empathy and concern for underprivileged children only arose following the exposure of various reports and novels discussing their experiences as child laborers. However, these children had not yet experienced the change in their life. The study found that children's well-being and quality of life during the industrial revolution were terrible in terms of nutrition, physical health, mental health, social interactions, and education, and *Oliver Twist* is used as the main character by Dickens to be the reflection and the representative of children at that time.

### 1. Introduction

Literature is a form of creative art expressed in lovely writing. Literature is the product of human culture, encompassing elements like beauty, kindness, and a reflection of life. On the flip side, literature can also serve as a reflection of an individual's life experiences, shaped by the society and time period in which they live, and incorporating values, beliefs, and philosophy. Literature plays a role as a form of social record-keeping, capturing the essence of a society at a specific point in time. For that reason, literature can at times aid readers in grasping the state of society. *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens is a literary work that offers insight into life

and society. The story offers a basic insight into the societal status of Victorian England. The tale of *Oliver Twist* is rather captivating. It takes place in 19th century London. The narrative recounts numerous details about London. It also portrays various criminal activities from the Victorian era in the 19th century, including house-breaking, minor theft, pickpocketing, and murder (Hastuti, 2019, p.123).

During the 19th century, crime and poverty were closely linked, with many young people who ended up in prison being products of poverty, rejected by their family, the church, and the state. In the era of the Industrial Revolution, a large population migrated from rural areas to urban centers, particularly London, with no guarantee of secure housing or shelter. Kids roamed freely in the streets, struggling to survive through various means, often resorting to criminal activities, with only the resilient and clever managing to survive. They had no schooling and freely pursued their own desires. They were only exposed to negative language from people in the streets, learning curses, shouting, and vulgar language. Young children, running in the streets, were never given guidance on right and wrong, such as stealing food from market tables would result in punishment if caught. Playing daily, it was mostly like a game for them (Duckworth, 2002 : 11).

At that time, many children lived in a poor living conditions, often on the streets. The majority of street children are either orphans or children who have been neglected. Poverty is the main reason for the presence of numerous street children. This scenario provides an opportunity for individuals in power to hire children as pickpockets or thieves (Laia Siregar and Silaban, 2022, p. 34).

Al Ghammaz et al. (2022) mentioned that during the Victorian age, children were susceptible to physical and psychological challenges and were entrusted with mature duties. During the late 1800s, the childhood of Victorian children differed significantly from that of modern children, with affluent children enjoying better living standards than their less fortunate counterparts. When it came to the lives of

impoverished Victorian children, they had no option but to labor in order to help their families stay alive. Every day, they had to toil diligently for extended periods from a very early age, possibly as young as 4 or 5 years old. Children were often forced to work in dirty environments without proper job safety measures. They had no option other than to agree to those terms. Moreover, parents required their children to work in order to help with covering household expenses. In the Victorian employment sector, children were valued for their low cost and were sought after for various roles such as factory workers, miners, clothing and hat makers, farm laborers, street cleaners, chimney sweeps, servants, textile workers, and, disturbingly, prostitutes. The influx of people during the Victorian gold rush of 1858 resulted in fast population growth and raised social concerns, especially concerning the well-being of children. (p. 3073).

Dickens contends that in order to have an excellent generation, there must be a positive society. First and foremost, the society must undergo reform. He believes it is his duty to identify the wickedness, to determine the sickness in order to propose the cure. Oliver was victimized by the societal surroundings in which he grew up. Due to the prevalent moral corruption, he is shunned by his community as they believe he is the product of sin and disgraceful adultery, despite this being proven false in the end. Nevertheless, his initial hardships can be attributed to the unfriendly community and life's inherent limitations, which he is not accountable for. The ones in positions of power, such as the administrative and religious authorities, do not fulfill their duties adequately. They need to be revamped and reshaped to be more attentive and empathetic towards the suffering of their citizens overall, especially children (Hamadamin and Ahmed, 2023, p. 1144).

## 2. Industrial Revolution

The shift from agriculture to machinery due to the industrial revolution led to negative impacts on lower class workers, resulting in an increase in crimes that

caused harm to themselves and others. Numerous significant changes have occurred in technology, manufacturing, mining, transportation, agriculture, etc., impacting social, economic, political, and cultural conditions globally both positively and negatively (Laia, Siregar and Silaban, 2022, p. 29).

The industrial revolution is the transition of society from a primarily agricultural economy to a mechanized industrial economy, marking a significant development in human civilization. During the Victorian era, the industrial revolution saw advancements in technology and economics, such as the rise of steam-powered transportation like ships and trains, as well as the later emergence of internal combustion engines and electric power (Laia, Siregar and Silaban, 2022, p. 29-30).

Charles Dickens describes himself and portrays the condition of children during the industrial revolution that he is:

a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none. (Dickens, 1994, p. 6).

This result is the product of various economic, social, and moral factors that worked together to harm a significant group of children.. With this, Dickens begins his book by highlighting the concept that:

The youngest and fairest are too often its chosen victims. (Dickens, 1994, p. 336).

Oliver also serves as a means to bring focus to the mistreatment of poor children by those who were meant to care for them.

Because their life was getting worse, the working people had to send their women and children to work in the factories and mines as apprentices. Industrialization ruthlessly exploited them. The amount of suffering and humiliation experienced by the children was significant. Numerous critics and historians have detailed the sufferings they witnessed, but none have captured the true extent of a child's misery as accurately as Dickens does in his novels (Hamdamin and Ahmed, 2023, p. 1137).

During the Victorian era in England, institutions were established to support and educate orphaned and abandoned children until they reached adulthood. Institutions like infant colleges and charity schools, surprisingly, turned into places that took advantage of child labor. Children were taken advantage of in both household industries and factories. They were required to labor for extended periods in terrible circumstances. Additionally, they worked in the mines and were treated in a brutal and cruel manner like animals. During the Industrial Revolution in England, English children endured a lengthy period of suffering, exploitation, and violence as they were forced to work in harsh conditions. Children were not only the initial casualties of industry and machinery, but also of the capitalists (Hamdamin and Ahmed, 2023, p. 1138).

In addition to the situation of Victorian age children, Pinchbeck and Hewilt (1969) stated that:

The children of England... were bound like slaves to the machine... orphaned, destitute, and friendless children were sent up in cartloads to the mill-owners from the slums and workhouses of London and other big cities by the Parish authorities. They were consigned to their employers at the age of seven and until they were twenty one they belonged to them and were completely at their mercy. (p. 227).

### 3. Oliver Twist the novel

Charles Dickens released his second novel, *Oliver Twist*, between 1837-1839. *Oliver Twist* is the initial novel in English to center on a young protagonist and provide a realistic depiction of criminals and their impoverished lifestyles. One of the first instances of the novel brings to light several present-day social concerns for the public to contemplate, including The Poor Law, workhouses, class distinctions, child labor, and using children for criminal matters. (Didelyté, 2008, p. 5).

In *Oliver Twist* The features of Oliver's face are repeatedly emphasized by Charles Dickens throughout the text. Oliver's appearance sets him apart from the rest of the crowd in some way:

I shall be glad to have him away from my eyes, and to know that the, worst is over. I can't bear to have him about me. The sight of him turns, me against myself, and all of you. (Dickens, 1994, p. 294).

*Oliver Twist*, a novel from late nineteenth century, primarily focuses on critiquing the social issues of Victorian England. The orphan serves as the focal point of the study, examining Oliver's innocence and protection even in a corrupt society, as a result of this critique. Dickens seeks to paint an authentic picture of a child similar to Oliver amidst the societal turmoil and cruelty towards children in that era. During the late nineteenth century in Victorian England, impoverished boys were sent to the workhouse. Oliver is one of those unfortunate boys who exemplify innocence enduring in the novel. The main focus of Dickens is to portray the ongoing battle to maintain purity in the face of external evil. As an unfortunate child, Oliver symbolizes the sense of hopelessness. He embodies pure innocence when interacting with others, particularly the thief, Fagin (Yaglidere, 2017, p. 385).

#### 4. Oliver Twist the Character

*Oliver Twist* is a young boy without parents who was delivered in a workhouse, a location linked to hardship and hunger rather than luxury. He is a parentless child reliant on the compassion of the parish authorities for survival. Dickens depicts Oliver as a naive young boy. At the age of nine, he possesses a petite, slender frame along with his ghostly complexion. In this day and age, kids are expected to be in good physical condition, yet Oliver is noticeably tiny, frail, and unwell (Ayuningtiyas, 2007, p. 44).

Ayuningtiyas (2007) also mentioned that Oliver is among the orphan boys raised in the workhouse by the parish authorities. In that place, the children frequently

endure hardships; they consume just a tiny amount of food and are required to work at the workhouse in return for their meals. Furthermore, the children from the workhouse are frequently dispatched to the factories. During that period, Oliver appears quite innocent; when he observes Fagin's gang members learning how to pick pockets with Fagin, Oliver perceives it as simply a game (p. 44).

'in such a very funny and natural manner,

'that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face . (*Oliver Twist*: 99).

'You're a clever boy, my dear. (Dickens, 1994, p. 101)

The old gentleman mentioned, giving Oliver an approving pat on the head:

I have never seen a cleverer boy. Here is a coin, for you. If you continue like this, you will become, the most outstanding man of the era. Now, come, over here and I will demonstrate how to remove, stains from the handkerchiefs. ( Dickens, 1994, p. 101 )

Oliver pondered how playfully picking the old man's pocket related to his potential for greatness. Believing that the older Jew must have more knowledge, he silently accompanied him to the table and quickly became engrossed in his latest area of learning.

#### 4. Discussion and Textual Analysis

##### 4.1 Poverty

Poverty is the state of lacking the means to fulfill basic needs like nourishment, garments, housing, education, and healthcare. As stated by the World Bank in 2000, poverty is described as severe lack in quality of life. Poverty is when someone cannot fulfill basic needs like food, housing, clothing, healthcare, education, and is often hungry, homeless, and uneducated. Being in poverty makes individuals highly susceptible to unforeseen events or disasters that are out of their hands. They frequently receive negative treatment from their environment, including state and community institutions, and are excluded from different communities (Laia Siregar and Silaban, 2022, p. 31).

Charles Dickens in his novel *Oliver Twist* demonstrates the impact of a community absence, poverty, and the poor's will to survive. Poverty follows the rise in unemployment. During the Victorian era, London was also well-known for its issue with poverty. Dickens has vividly portrayed the deteriorating living conditions and the fear of unexpected violence. It exposes the problems of poverty and homelessness that contribute to numerous societal ills in 19th century London. Unemployment and poverty are closely linked to the rise of crime during the Victorian era. The industrial revolution in the Victorian era, which brought changes to traditional factories, resulted in numerous individuals losing their jobs and facing unemployment. Difficult economic circumstances made it challenging to secure employment, leading to financial hardship. Therefore, a large number of individuals are becoming less wealthy. However, individuals who are impoverished and without a job need to find a way to sustain themselves and manage their daily existence. With poverty comes hunger, some would argue. In their challenging circumstances, they must find a way to survive and discover that engaging in criminal activities is the most convenient way to earn money. Furthermore, it is believed that individuals who are unemployed have increased time and chances to engage in criminal activities. Unemployed and impoverished individuals in 19th century London are frequently depicted as "idle hands devil" (Lea and Young, 1993, p. 103).

In "*Oliver Twist*", Charles Dickens highlights child labor as an additional distressing aspect of poverty. A lot of families were able to avoid homelessness by having their children work as well. Young children, aged four or five, were required to engage in some form of labor. Kids were employed in factories and mills. Certain kids were employed in coal mines, where they would pull coal carts through tunnels that were too narrow for an adult (Alhassan and Mohammed, 2018, p. 6500).



#### 4.2 Child Labor

Child Labor was a major scandal during the 19th century, expanding to different countries as they underwent industrialization. The issue occurred when factories and mines started hiring children, many of whom were under ten years old. Education was scarce, and children were anticipated to labor. Employers also appreciated the ability to pay children less than adults. They had to labor for extended periods in unsafe settings for minimal wages. The issue was further exacerbated by the growing immigration in the early 1900s and the South's belated and sluggish industrial growth (Ayuningtiyas, 2007, p. 33).

The fact that child labor was presented in mines and textile industries during the Industrial Revolution should come as no surprise. Moreover, child labor was seen as a profitable business in factories, gas work, shoemakers, construction, and chimney sweeping. From the seventeenth century onwards, the working classes who were displaced assumed that a family would struggle to sustain itself unless the children were working (Cody, 2008, p. 64).

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens portrays how industrial poverty negatively impacted both the poor and the country as a whole. Dickens suggests that child labor was another terrible aspect of poverty. Many families prevented homelessness by requiring their children to work as well. Young children, around the age of four or five, were required to perform certain tasks or chores. Children toiled in factories and mills. Certain kids would labor in the coal mines dragging the coal wagon in passages that are too cramped for raising (Alhassan and Mohammed, 2018, p. 6500).

Alhassan and Mohammed (2018) stated that Street children were enlisted to become thieves and burglars. Charles Dickens demonstrates this when Oliver encounters the Artful Dodger. If children did not belong to the middle or upper

classes of society in the 1800s, they were subjected to various forms of exploitation (p. 6500).

Dickens portrays the state of child labor during that era through the character of Oliver Twist in his novel Oliver Twist. The above description serves as evidence that Dickens has a deep understanding of the social circumstances present in 19th century England. And it serves as the inspiration for his creative endeavors. Dickens subtly aims to speak out against the exploitation of children as child labor and put an end to the harm inflicted upon them (Ayuningtiyas, 2007, p. 80).

Employing children as child laborers has a negative impact on their well-being, causing suffering and crushing their aspirations and goals. Children in the 19th century were deprived of the opportunity to enjoy themselves and acquire knowledge due to the harsh conditions brought about by the industrial revolution. They were obligated to work under the authority of powerful individuals, including their own parents who had no means to support themselves and were forced to sell their children to factories in order to avoid starvation (Ayuningtiyas, 2007, p. 80).

#### 4.3 Child Exploitation

It is clear that children during the industrial revolution are forced and exploited to work hard and this shows that people's mentality towards children is changed. Materialism is spread everywhere, it is happened against children under 18 years old, children are worked in many places and in multi types of works, Oliver's cries interrupted his speech for several minutes; just as he was about to start telling how he had been raised at the farm and taken to the workhouse by Mr. Bumble. Legally and illegally ways and this is one of the points that Dickens focuses in the novel. It's clear from the following quotes:

'There, my dear,' said Fagin. 'That's a pleasant life, isn't it?

'They have gone out for the day.'

'Have they done work, sir?' inquired Oliver.

'Yes,' said the Jew; 'that is, unless they should unexpectedly come, across any, when they are out; and they won't neglect it, if they do, my, dear, depend upon it. Make 'em your models, my dear. (Dickens, 1994, p. 101).

Oliver and the other children in the novel are representatives for the children life during the industrial revolution that reflected the contrasted image of the natural life of children should be. They lived a different life of raising children, instead of living and learning in schools or in some other institutions, they live in life of earning money exploited by some other people who are very interested in the materialism only. According to the following quotes from the novel, it is clear that children are step by step becoming robbers (thieves):

Well, said the Jew, glancing slyly at Oliver, and addressing himself to the Dodger,

'I hope you've been at work this morning, my dears?.

'Hard,' replied the Dodger.

'As nails,' added Charley Bates.

'Good boys, good boys!' said the Jew. 'What have you got, Dodger?

'A couple of pocket-books,' replied that young gentleman. (Dickens, 1994, p. 97).

#### Conclusions

*Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens covers the theme of crime, poverty, child labor, and the workhouse. It also provides a vivid portrayal of the social situation in 19th century London. It provides readers with valuable insights into the culture of Victorian England. It also indicates the presence of the industrial revolution during that period, causing challenges like joblessness, financial hardship, and a division of social classes between the wealthy and the less fortunate. The Victorians were characterized by the dehumanization of people into non-human objects due to the rise of machinery and materialism overshadowing feelings and emotions. Dickens blamed society for ruining childhood and killing their innocence. He used his books to caution his society that England's future would be bleak during the time the

children became harmed. satirically, England had become the one victimizing their own children. *Oliver Twist*, the protagonist of Charles Dickens's novel, serves as a clear representation of the child labor situation in 19th century England. Oliver faces certain hardships in the book which accurately mirror the circumstances of the time period.

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## تمثيل تربية الأطفال خلال الثورة الصناعية في رواية أوليفر تويست لتشارلز ديكنز

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الثورة الصناعية، عمالة الاطفال، الجشع، ورشة العمل، اليتيم  
الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث الثورة الصناعية وأثرها في تربية الاطفال في إنجلترا من خلال رواية أوليفر تويست لتشارلز ديكنز. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة الآثار السلبية للثورة الصناعية على الأطفال ومدى تأثير هذه الآثار على حياة الأطفال في ذلك الوقت. يعكس أوليفر تويست حياة الأطفال وكيف عاشوا ونشأوا بطريقة لم يكن من المفترض أن تكون بها، ولم ينشأ التعاطف والاهتمام بالأطفال المحرومين إلا بعد ظهور تقارير وروايات مختلفة تناقش تجاربهم كأطفال عمالة. ومع ذلك، فإن هؤلاء الأطفال لم يختبروا بعد التغيير في حياتهم. ووجدت الدراسة أن رفاهية الأطفال ونوعية حياتهم خلال الثورة الصناعية كانت فظيعة من حيث التغذية، والصحة البدنية، والصحة العقلية، والتفاعلات الاجتماعية، والتعليم، ويستخدم ديكنز أوليفر تويست كشخصية رئيسية ليكون الانعكاس. وممثل الأطفال في ذلك الوقت.