

Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist: From Children Victimization to Psychological Improvement

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Abstract

Charles Dickens is one of the novelists who have penned many novels and literary stories dealing with violence and abuse against innocent children as dramatic content for a work of fiction in an attempt to elucidate such crimes. The Parish Boy's Progress author's social activist reputation is always of great importance to critics. Many critics draw attention to the fact that Dickens always has the moral desire and the vital will to help these weak children and improve their psychological side and response to life in the Victorian age, planning to reform the modern system of life for the world of the family as a whole and the child in particular. Dickens shows that the Victorian era has witnessed a huge industrial revolution that brings with it the cruelest childhood abuse ever, impacting their psychology. Thus, Dickens wants to save some of the colorful childhood delights of these deprived children, as these flowers have physically and psychologically withered because they are deprived of the dew of goodness and happy life. So far, Dickens's narratives, and stories, alongside his novels reveal that he has supported the family as a big unit in general and the vulnerable children as a small important unit. By appropriating historical, sociological, and analytical research approaches of Dickens's work *Oliver Twist's* famous characters and themes, this paper provides evidence that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of exploitation and psychological abuse in the Victorian era. Additionally, the structure of the paper is constructed on an inclusive view of Dickens's *Oliver Twist* apropos of the adopted theme of children's victimization.

Keywords: Oliver Twist, Children Abuse, Charles Dickens, Victorian Era.

I. INTRODUCTION

Families, deprived children, and orphans together have experienced devastating violations of human rights since the existence of human existence. Human history is labeled with a huge amount of unfairness, injustice, discrimination, and psychological mistreatment endured by vulnerable children. As childhood is a vulnerable period of life, the children are completely helpless, weak, needy, and prone to psychological abuse and exploitation. Child

exploitation's horrific tales whose heroes and heroines are homeless, orphans, and poor children have been witnessed in human history. Unfortunately, though the rights of children and child protection laws are enacted, children and orphans are still at risk of psychological abuse and exploitation, especially those vulnerable ones.

In the Victorian era, children have experienced the typical responsibilities and hardships of an adult and early childhood life. Unlike today, the

Victorian lifestyle of children in the 1800s greatly differs from childhood in today's world. Life has always been different for poor Victorian children as they are required to work to assist their families to survive. In other words, they are forced to work at 4 or 5-year-old which is illegal and unhealthy age to work. They have daily worked very hard for long hours. Concerning the safe environment of the job, this health issue is not of high importance and is a major concern where they have been expected to work in filthy, risky, and unhealthy conditions. Children in the Victorian age have no choice in the matter at all as they shall work to provide for their families and pay the required bills at home.

In the Victorian labor market, employers have preferred children because they are considered low-cost labor on the one hand. On the other hand, the demand for these children is continually on the rise in several jobs such as farming, servants, factory work, clothing, street sweepers, mining, hat makers, chimney sweepers, textile mills, and more horrifyingly, prostitution. Notably, in this give-and-take discussion, killing and damaging the lives of innocent people, as with any form of a violent act against innocent children and orphans, are strongly prohibited in all values, traditions, and even religions. This prohibition is considered a strict order that even families of these innocent children, experiencing harsh life, are not allowed to harm and victimize their children by sending them to harsh, unsafe, and illegal jobs (Al-Ghalith & Shalabi, 2021). As put by Malik (2017), the population's rapid increase resulting from the 1858 gold rush has brought enormous social problems, affecting the happiness, psychological comfort, and welfare of these children. The substantial improvements in technology have boosted the wealth and prosperity in Britain, giving the middle-class people several novel opportunities. Due to the industries production, Britain has been made the first world workshop and the most elite trading country on the globe.

However, the industrial revolution's adverse influence also has awful social and psychological effects such as child labor, overcrowded dwellings, sexual exploitation, dirtiness, and abject poverty. Since the materialism age increased, money values have strongly prevailed in Victorian society. As a result, the movement of thousands of laborers to

industrial towns has started a new type of working-class families. As explained by Malik (2017), the administrations managing the factories and industrial institutions have brought countless physical and psychological injustices together with cruel child labor and harsh working conditions. For instance, hideous slums whether they are big or small miserable places make up an important part of a metropolitan area in handsome homes, where more than thirty people of different ages live in a single room. Though living and working conditions for the working-class family have increasingly grown harsh, the late 19th-century social reform acts have given a priority to improving the working poor's lives. Social reformers and philanthropists supported by their middle-class ideals and Christian values have played a substantial role in bringing about these new reform changes (Knaplund, 1941). The social distinction can only be attainable under the prevailing social standards that may lead to the excellence and achievement of the children and orphans, and thus the characters respond differently to the prevalent social norms and traditions (Abd-Rabbo, 2019).

As viewed by the reformers, unacceptable and inhuman living conditions have prevailed among the working-class children. Vulnerable children and orphans, as voiced by the reformers, shall have a healthy and psychological childhood and need to be completely protected from adult life's responsibilities, physical violence and psychological abuse, and moral corruption (Rooke & Schnell, 1983). Among these reforms is the establishment of orphanages designed to look after children taken from their unfit parents or orphaned ones. The reformers' intentions are sincere as they attempt to psychologically help these vulnerable children. As detailed by Rooke and Schnell (1983), the unfit children, as regarded by reformers, have been rescued from the family and social situations, alongside the fact that these social and family situations are institutionalized to protect these children from the harsh working and life conditions. Many studies show that Dickens always believes that there is a dire need to improve the common people's conditions in one go or another because, like other children in the entire world, children in the Victorian age deserve not to suffer from harsh living conditions and psychological problems.

Hence, this article aims to provide evidence that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of psychological exploitation and abuse in the Victorian era based on the analytical and historical research approaches used to show the great amount of discrimination and mistreatment endured by the vulnerable children in the Victorian age. This paper is, however, divided into four main sections apart from the introductory section and structured as follows. Section Two explores the Literature Review. Section Three examines the Methods. Section Four presents the Discussions and Analysis, and in Section Five, the Conclusion is presented.

2. Literature Review

Due to a great number of studies written on Dickens' own life, interests, and themes, several studies demonstrate that Dickens has always been the voice of the poor, helpless, and vulnerable children in the Victorian age. Any analytical work of Dickens' interests and themes is a fragment without a thorough study of his novels in general and *Oliver Twist* in particular. Several studies have tackled Dickens' lifestyle, individual, and social sides and twists through his literary works, i.e., novels. Persulesy & Acengrahmat (2018) have drawn their study on acquiring profound knowledge about social values presented through the generic structure of the Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist*. The findings revealed that love, responsible, and life harmony values were among the social values being described in the novel. Love values include dedication, kinship, love, loyalty, affection, mutual help, and concern. Responsible values include a sense of belonging and acceptance, discipline, and obligations. Life harmony values include cooperation, tolerance, justice, and democracy.

On the other hand, Sri Jumiati, Dewi Candraningrum, & Titis Setyabudi (2015) have reached another conclusion through the use of a sociological approach to show the reflected oppression in *Oliver Twist*. This research is mainly concerned with revealing the existence of such oppression. From a sociological perspective, the research analyzes the structural elements reflected in *Oliver Twist* and analyses the England society during the industrial revolution in the late 19th century. The research has drawn the following conclusions; firstly,

based on the novel's structural analysis, the social phenomena in England during the late 19th-century industrial revolution were created. Secondly, the social condition within the country is criticized by Dickens revealing the social injustice including the five-part oppression, namely cultural imperialism, marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, and violence. Finally, the research has also concluded the need for government to create justice to build peace and save children.

Focusing on some selected extracts from *Oliver Twist*, critics' opinions, and the abundantly focus on Dickens' descriptions of the gentleman of birth in *Oliver Twist*, Terzi (2015) has analyzed the main characters' attitudes concerning their gentle manners and noble origin. The study reveals that Dickens' selection of sentimental ways was mainly done for several reasons, (i) to touch the readers' hearts with the brutal incidents experienced by a pure-hearted child, (ii) to draw people's and government's attention to the metropolis' social problems, and (iii) to raise awareness on children's abuse and psychology. It is also found that Oliver represents a few images, including the person who suffers but does not lose his pure heart, the democratic gentleman, and the gentleman's essential attitude towards society. It is also noted that Oliver is the 19th-century Romantic gentleman, whose ancestor seems to be the "very parfit medieval knight" as described by Chaucer.

Apart from the themes and problems addressed in the previous studies, the feminist postcolonial viewpoints have been also examined in Dickens' novels, focusing on the representation of the marginal woman where her rejection and exile from her patriarchal community and culture are on the rise (Kaplan, 1988). According to Kaplan (1988), like other marginalized middle-class women in the Victorian age, Dickens' heroines cannot secure a safe place to escape the prevailing stereotypical descriptions, showing them as only weak and voiceless women chiefly victimized in a male-dominated world. Like other Victorian writers such as Charles Kingsley, Mrs. Gaskell, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, and Trollope in their perceptions of the characters' mentalities and behaviors, Dickens is always interested in explaining the social, psychological, and economic ills of the downtrodden people of his age (Cain, 2017). On

the other hand, Piggott (2016) explores the Ironies' post-colonial and teaching complexities of Dickens' novels during a teaching assignment between the years 2007 and 2011 in Tripoli. The article begins with the Lebanese students' engagement with Dickens's reception, considering their enthusiasm embraced in Dickens' novels, particularly *Oliver Twist*.

By examining Dickens from the perspective of the Victorian periods of his life, Miller claims that Dickens, throughout his life, has been greatly close to the voiceless, helpless, downtrodden people, trying to support them. His major concern is to establish a huge base of love, closeness, social acceptance, and psychological support among the middle-class people of his time. In terms of his fiction and nonfiction writing, Dickens is progressive as "His themes are restructured now and then addressing exploitation among the poor African countries, industrialization, child labor exploitation, and school, eastern and western education" (Miller, 1998, p.14).

Based on a brief literature review of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, it can be said that they lend themselves to numerous interpretations to acknowledge that Dickens has made all the required efforts to ensure that *Oliver Twist*'s famous themes and characters provide evidence that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of exploitation and abuse in the Victorian era. This article as a discourse analysis is a continuing effort to extend the analysis related to the fact that *Oliver Twist*'s famous themes and characters provide evidence that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of exploitation and abuse in the Victorian era.

3. METHODS

The analysis of Dickens's narratives, novels, and stories, alongside the issue of children's victimization in his *Oliver Twist*, necessitates this research paper to be a triangulation research paper, using and applying three research approaches with multiple data sets. The three adopted approaches in this paper are the historical approach, sociological approach, and analytical approach. The historical approach is conceivably one of the most widely-used (even the oldest) critical approaches to literary interpretation, analysis, and criticism. It involves understanding event experiences

surrounding the literary work composition, particularly the author's life, and using the research findings to interpret the raised phenomena and issues in such works (Tyson, 2006). Undoubtedly, the study of a literary work, particularly *Oliver Twist*, requires studying Dickens's life and experiences, which is seen as the only means to fully understand the child psychological victimization phenomena and examine the fact that *Oliver Twist*'s famous themes and characters provide evidence that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of psychological exploitation and abuse in the Victorian era. The second approach is the sociological approach (literary criticism) which involves understanding the author's literary work within its larger social context. Based on this, a literary work can only be understood properly through the examination of the society where such literature has been written. According to several other scholars, the sociological approach critically analyses the familial, social, economic, and political contexts where literary works have been produced. In other words, a sociological approach is an approach aiming at finding the meaning, scope, and magnitude of a social problem in literary works that teach about the issues related to children, family, society, social classes, and religion. The sociological approach can be used to give a deep insight into the social and psychological ills and problems that the author sees within society delivered in his/her style. For instance, an analysis based on a sociological perspective examines the social and psychological problems such children victimization addressed by Charles Dickens in his literary work *Oliver Twist*.

Concerning the third approach in this paper, it is the analytical research approach used to analyze the adopted novel, i.e. the phenomena of child psychological victimization. Based on this approach, the primary source of the research which is the novel itself, characters, and themes, and the secondary resources such as the relevant literature works and articles shall be analyzed to attain the full picture of the ill of child psychological victimization and provide evidence that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of psychological exploitation and abuse in the Victorian era. The reason behind the choice of the triangulation research paper is to conclude that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of exploitation and

abuse in the Victorian era. Hence, the three adopted approaches, alongside the child psychological victimization phenomena are in-depth outlined because their details are reflected in one way or another in the UK-born author Oliver Twist. In this paper, however, the scope of child psychological abuse and victimization is focused on the middle-class families and their victimized children and orphans in the UK where Dickens's novel is set. The next section highlights and discusses the five obvious areas concerning social illness (child psychological abuse and victimization) in the UK.

4. DISCUSSION AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

4.1 Oliver Twist

The novel begins with Oliver's birth in a workhouse of illegitimate children of destitute women who die shortly after giving birth. Being an orphan, a pauper, and an illegitimate child, Oliver's successive experience of cruelty and rejection is in line with the novel's beginning. Further, being constantly accused of stupidity and viciousness and constantly beaten and imprisoned, Oliver is relatively ignored. Until he meets Mr. Brownlow, the kindness Oliver experiences is either accidental or a consequence of adult exploitation (Roulstone, 1997). "A naughty orphan which nobody can't love" Mr. Bumble calls and sums Oliver up (Oliver Twist, Ch.3). In an orphanage in Victorian England, Oliver Twist survives among his companions in misfortune. Malnourished, and exploited, he is placed in an undertaker's home where, again, he knows only deprivations and ill-treatment. Oliver endures everything until he could tolerate no more then he fled to London. A gang of young thieves, who work for an old Jewish man called Fagin, found Oliver exhausted and hungry. Oliver among other characters like Bill, Dodger, and Nancy discovers a brutal world where only strength and cunning count.

4.2 Childhood in Victorian Age

Sociologically speaking, Diana Gittins stated that "childhood is a more general and abstract term used to refer to the status ascribed by adults to those who are defined as non-adults." Hence, childhood must be understood as a "construction of adults" but not a representation of children

themselves. Therefore, sociology contemporary trends stress the gradual emergence of children's narratives (Gittin, 2009). Moreover, it should, contrary to the belief adults have in forming an accurate definition based on their experience and memories, be considered that our memory is imperfect and different trustworthy recording mediums, and consequently, the childhood images might be full of myths, desires, and misinterpretations (Pekařová, 2014). In this respect, child and childhood are different terms. On one hand, Gittins clearly states that the term childhood "focuses more on the general state of being a child and suggests the existence of a distinct, separate and fundamentally different social group or category". On the other hand, the term child "concerns an embodied individual defined as non-adult" clarified as "immaturity, dependency, powerlessness, and inferiority". Concerning the difference between childhood and child lifespan, both are generally derived from the state's traditions and customs, and laws. It is nevertheless plausible to claim that having a childhood without being a child is impossible, but the other way is possible (Pekařová, 2014).

During the Victorian age, children were prone to physical and psychological hardship and were given adults responsibilities. In the late 1800s, Victorian children's life was unlike the life of today's world childhood, where wealthy children had good living conditions compared to poor children. Concerning the life of poor Victorian children, it was different, where they had no choice but to work in a way to support their families to survive. They were forced every day to work very hard and for long hours at a very young age, sometimes at the age of 4 or 5. Neglecting job safety, children many times were required to work in filthy conditions. They had no choice but to accept such conditions. Furthermore, parents forced their children to work to support paying home bills. In the Victorian labor market, children are preferred for being cheap labor, and they were in high demand for many types of jobs, including but not limited to factory work, mining, clothing and hat makers, farming, street sweepers, chimney sweepers, servants, textile mills, and more horrifically, prostitution. The rapid population growth in the Victorian gold rush of 1858 brought social issues including those involving the welfare of children.

Major advances in technology were the driving force behind Britain's wealth and prosperity, hence providing countless new opportunities for people of the middle class. Industrial production made Britain the world's largest and greatest trading nation (Malik, 2017). Nevertheless, in the Victorian era, the adverse industrial revolution effect has impacted social life, including child labor, abject poverty, sexual and psychological exploitation, dirt and drunkenness, and overcrowded dwellings. Owing to the growth of prevailed materialism monetary values, the migration of hundreds of thousands of workers to industrial towns had resulted in finding a new working class. The institutional factors have brought about multiple injustices, for instance, the ruthless exploitation of child labor and the harsh working conditions. Touching on the conditions in which many people of that age were living is described as "hideous slums, some of them acres wide, some no more than crannies of obscure misery, make up a substantial part of the metropolis ... In big, once handsome houses, thirty or more people of all ages may inhabit a single room" (Malik, 2017). While the working-class living conditions had grown increasingly harsh, the late 19th century Social Reform Acts improved the lives of poor workers, and the philanthropists and social reformers motivated by the middle-class ideals and Christian values played a major role in bringing about the change (Knaplund, 1941). The living conditions of many working-class children were viewed by reformers as unacceptable, believing that children should be protected from moral and psychological corruption, physical harm, and having adults' responsibilities and above all "every child should have a childhood" (Rooke & Schnell, 1983).

4.3 Child Labour

It is evident that the Victorian age was marked by hiring young children in different workplaces like mines, factories, and chimneys as sweepers. Though, being often involved in dangerous jobs for long hours and at low wages, children were expected to support the family budget (Daniels, 2009). During the Victorian era, child laboring was divided into various classes, including young children were hired to crawl under the machines to collect the cotton bobbins; active children were hired by chimney sweeps; hiring children to work in coal mines to creep through

too narrow tunnels, hiring children to work as crossing sweepers, errand boys, selling matches, shoe blacks, selling cheap goods and selling flowers (Daniels, 2009). Many children end up their life working in chimneys as sweepers. In factories, it was common for children to lose their limbs when crawling under machines to pick things up. Building on the previous actions toward child laboring, several factory acts were issued to prevent physical and psychological child exploitation in the workplace. Given that schools at that time were not free, poor children, at the age of eight, would leave school and be forced to work. The Victorian age is well-known for its social hierarchy. Strict society classification was the distinctive feature of this period. In the 20s of the 19th century, social classification was officially executed by members of ruling elites to be based on social status, experience, living conditions, and morality level. In the 80s of the 19th century, people who belonged to a specific social class were very well-known, but it was not possible for those who wanted to move from one class to another, particularly upward (Pekařová, 10).

4.4 Children Victimization

The theme of an unhappy childhood is deeply rooted in Dickens's works, his first three novels reflect miserable childhood represented in the adventures of his characters such as *Pickwick* (1836), *Oliver Twist* (1837), and *Nicolas Nickleby* (1838). This scheme is well noticed in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens' most famous character *Oliver Twist*. The young protagonist experienced hunger, isolation, and psychological abuse, in such a dramatic way that reflects the miseries of the Victorian era, uncovering the dilemma of children psychologically harmed and exploited by adults (Knaplund, 1941).

Dickens' personal experience as a child has produced unusual characters, in touch with social, psychological, and moral misery, which till today feed the imagination of children and adults. It was adapted several times to cinema in recent years, this social novel contributed greatly to Dickens's fame. His genuine feeling and powerful words inspired hundreds of filmmakers and musicians. In his novel *Oliver Twist*, Dickens wrote about the homeless and street children, condemning the industrialization's vicious effects on England 19th century, hence attracting people's attention

to different contemporary societal issues, including but not limited to child labor, recruitment of children as criminals and poor asylum (Devi, 2016). The psychological repression and exploitation of the poor are often depicted by Dickens who condemned the institutions and public officials for the existence of such abuses.

Oliver Twist is the main novel character that symbolizes childhood, innocence, and purity that resisted evil deeds and tightly adhered to this purity. The novel uncovers the devastating, inhuman conditions of poverty in the Industrial Victorian Age in ruthless openness. In his novel, Dickens describes how young Oliver fell into the hands of an older Jewish gang of thieves' director, who trained him and other boys to pickpockets, using the children to increase his wealth. Their individual development and personality are not important, but the profits that could be earned by them. The indescribable psychological misery and exploitation of children that Dickens showed at the beginning of the 19th century in England still exist today in many parts of the world. Child Labour, the use of children as child soldiers, and child prostitution are forms of exploitation of children that is still dominant practices in many countries and there can be no doubt about it. In many countries, children still live without protection, have to do the work of adults, and have no future prospects. With these fictional characters formulated by Dickens, the central basic questions for dealing with children in society are: are children there to help develop the society, the richness of adults? Or are children young citizens, who do not yet exercise their citizenship rights themselves and thus need special protection afforded by an adult? Dickens, however, does not stop at this gloomy scene, where the majority of the upper-class society mistreats poor children, nevertheless, he uses the characters of the bookseller Mr. Brownlow, his housekeeper, Mrs. Maylie, and her niece to demonstrate how they practice true charity. They care about the well-being of the child, Oliver, and not his labor power.

Here is a completely contrasting world full of security and philanthropy compared to the laws of the street - even when Oliver gets into further entanglements. Charles Dickens, illustrated his own troubled and traumatic childhood in his novel (*Oliver Twist*) which is a famously

compelling tale - Dickens had witnessed psychological hardship and poverty as a child, as his father was in debt due to rising costs, he was sent to prison for his failure to some debts. Dickens had to work in a warehouse to provide for the family's livelihood - these early experiences undoubtedly had a great deal of empathy in his work, through which he reflects the misery and suffering of children conveying their vulnerability, psychological mistreatment, and exploitation.

The novelist shows a great deal of sensitivity and concerns regarding childhood needs, children need caregivers who give them love and security, care for their health and well-being, and give them perspectives for free development. Dickens's social criticism of Victorian England at that time is relentlessly expressed. Anyone should be persuaded to act like that Mr. Brownlow. The novel was written in a straightforward form. The realistic portrayals of the living environment in England at that time, the dirty neighborhoods and slums, and the unhealthy atmosphere to raise a child in - all this is incredibly close to the reader. It is greatly relieving to see that few people mean well to Oliver and earnestly strive to help him, like Mrs. Maylie and her niece Rose, which Oliver, acknowledged with an alerted mind and astonishing thoughts that exceeds his age.

Furthermore, Dickens does not spare ironic comments or characterizations, as they are particularly expressed in the figure of the community servant Mr. Bumble who does not gain the sympathy of the reader because he is always negative about Oliver and sometimes hot-tempered, sometimes arrogant. The different characters of the novel bring plenty of variety and diversity into action. The novel is Dickens' first clear criticism of the Victorian educational system, as well as the situation of the lower classes in large cities, such as London. Dickens criticizes the functional system of educating the poorest children in orphanages, where children are forced to do difficult tasks without compensation. The "rebellion" by Oliver when he shows his need, the demand for more, is an example of the author's resistance to the cruel attitudes, psychological abuse, and endemic poverty, where the poor, deprived of any educational path, and are forced to survive as they can, often by committing dangerous tasks.

The following paragraph from the novel conveys a heartbreaking scene of cruelty against an orphan, that when *Oliver Twist* was to meet the Board members of the workhouse, cruel Mr. Bumble ordered him to bow to the board out of imposed respect: "Bow to the board," said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board but the table, fortunately, bowed to that. 'What's your name, boy?' said the gentleman in the high chair. Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which made him tremble: and the beadle gave him another tap behind, which made him cry. These two causes made him answer in a very low and hesitating voice; whereupon a gentleman in a white waistcoat said he was a fool, which was a capital way of raising his spirits and putting him quite at his ease. The boy said "the gentleman in the high chair, listen to me. You know you're an orphan, I suppose?" 'What's that, sir?' inquired poor Oliver. 'The boy is a fool - I thought he was,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. 'Hush!' said the gentleman who had spoken first. 'You know you've got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by the parish, don't you?' 'Yes, sir,' replied Oliver, weeping bitterly. 'What are you crying for?' inquired the gentleman in the white waistcoat. And to be sure it was very extraordinary. What could the boy be crying for?" (*Oliver Twist*, Ch. 2) Oliver's character embodies the values of a new child hero for Dickens: an outcast who manages to find his future through his means and the help of kind people. The boy Oliver follows a sort of purification making a pathway from the initial state of misery and poverty, to the happy end at Mr. Brownlow's Villa.

The miserable, hungry childhood that engulfed *Oliver Twist*'s very early childhood years is reflected in the author's earnest powerful words: "So they established the rule that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they) of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the waterworks to lay on an unlimited supply of water, and with a corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal, and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week and half a roll on Sundays. They made a great many otherwise and humane regulations . . . kindly undertook to divorce poor married people instead of compelling a man to

support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor! There is no saying how many applicants for relief, under these last two heads, might have started up in all classes of society, if it had not been coupled with the workhouse; but the board were long-headed men, and had provided for this difficulty. The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel, and that frightened people" (*Oliver Twist*, Ch. 2), that is the place - the workhouse - where they first send to Oliver. At that time, the British Parliament voted for a controversial amendment to the "poor-laws". The new amendment stipulated that "the poor could receive public assistance only if they took up residence in official workhouses and abided by their regulations". In these workhouses, wives were separated from their husbands, in very poor living conditions. The lawmakers justified their awful amendments that work led necessarily to success, that depending on other donations and charity lead to economic failure. Therefore, they concluded that poverty means immorality.

"Although Oliver had enough to occupy his attention in keeping sight of his leader, he could not help bestowing a few hasty glances on either side of the way, as he passed along. A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses; and in them, the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main" (*Oliver Twist*, Ch. 8).

The picture portrayed London when first seen by *Oliver Twist* after he fled the undertaker's service in the countryside, their dominant poverty, and crime. Dickens often describes his scenes at the night or on a rainy day or night, an atmosphere that magnifies the homeless child's loneliness and fear, there is barely anybody noticing him, or caring about him. The novel also portrayed a helpless child, Nancy who was driven to a very risky, gruesomeness and hopelessness, was trapped in *The Jewish Fagin*, who sends her into prostitution since her early childhood: "Stay another moment," interposed

Rose ... “Will you return to this gang of robbers, and to this man, when a word can save you? What fascination is it that can take you back, and make you cling to wickedness and misery?” “When ladies as young, and good, and beautiful as you are,” replied the girl [Nancy] steadily, “give away your hearts, love will carry you all lengths—even such as you, who have a home, friends, other admirers, everything, to fill them. When such as I, who have no certain roof but the coffin-lid, and no friend in sickness or death but the hospital nurse, set our rotten hearts on any man, and let him fill the place that has been a blank through all our wretched lives, who can hope to cure us? Pity us, lady—pity us for having only one feeling of the woman left and for having that turned, by a heavy judgment, from comfort and pride into a new means of violence and suffering” (Oliver Twist, Ch. 40). This is a conversation between Rose and Nancy. Where Rose tries to convince Nancy not to go back to that crime den, but the poor girl is deeply rooted in her atmosphere, for her reasons, she had to go back there, live there, and die alone there. And here, again a heart-wrenching scene, of Nancy the young poor child, who faced death alone after being murdered by her partner, it is a devastating moment: “She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief—Rose Maylie’s own—and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker” (Oliver Twist, Ch. 47).

As seen in the novel, depriving the children’s right to live an innocent and safe childhood is a pervasive phenomenon in the Victorian age. The novel, indeed, presents the children’s distressing situation where their needs, rights, identity, and opinions are being overlooked, hence leading to a never-ending cycle of physiological abuse and victimization. Undoubtedly, Dickens gives an insight into the fact that the British ordinary middle class of poor children and orphans are mainly victims of psychological exploitation and abuse in the Victorian era.

5. CONCLUSION

In a few words, the Victorian age is the era of the industrial revolution that leads to the

emergence of the working class that faced the terrible drawbacks of wealth and corruption, and childhood suffered the worst. Charles Dickens has described the other side of childhood in England; the unhappy childhood. In 1837, “Oliver Twist” came out, the story of that parentless, ever-hungry, neglected boy whose childhood took place between workhouses and criminal dens.

Importantly, the core of the success of Dickens’ Oliver Twist is that it awakens the human conscience. His suffering as a child has inspired him to draw attention to the suffering of those unfavorable children and that had violently shocked upper-class society. With the previous analysis, the children’s psychological misery is palpable and measurable as it can be powerfully felt and sensed through the novelist’s bold loud condemnation. This disgraceful situation had made scholars and policymakers rethink their role in alleviating such psychological misery and suffering. On the other hand, Oliver Twist has shown the bright side of morals despite being a victim of a cruel society. Not the entire upper-class society is guilty, within this darkened picture there is a shining human instance from within this cruel society, as Dickens has brilliantly depicted Mr. Brownlow, Mrs. Maylie, and her niece Rose who take good care of little poor Oliver. More importantly, as this paper provides evidence that poor children and orphans are mainly victims of psychological exploitation and abuse in the Victorian era, this goal is fulfilled by analyzing Oliver Twist and what other scholars have written about the topic as stated in the textual analysis of the research.

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