

## The Theme of Childhood in Charles Dickens Novel (Oliver Twist)

موضوع الطفولة في رواية (أوليفر تويست) لشارلس ديكنز

Author: Amal Rahil Ibrahim

M.Sc. Student

AL nilain University

**Abstract:** The objective of this paper is to analyze childhood theme in Charles Dickens' (Oliver Twist) novel. Its main aim is to study the theme of childhood in the Victorian era; an era that witnessed huge industrial revolution that brings with it the most cruel childhood abuse ever. The paper argues that orphans and poor children were generally subjected to abuse and exploitation in Victorian era. And intending to find an answer for some questions as to: How did the upper class society in Victorian era regards the poor and what was their attitude towards poor children in particular? And how Charles Dickens did handled the theme of childhood in his novel Oliver Twist. Multiple research approaches are adopted to analyze the novel theme. The results of the analysis of the written literature confirmed the paper's hypothesis, that indeed orphans and vulnerable children are prone to various types of abuse, starting with depriving them from basic education to training them as criminals or send to prostitution markets; paths that led them to either prison or murder.

**Key words:** Childhood, abuse, human rights, Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, Victorian Age.

**ملخص:** تسعى هذه الورقة لتحليل موضوع الطفولة في رواية (أوليفر تويست) للكاتب الإنجليزي تشارلس ديكنز. والهدف الرئيس هو دراسة موضوع الطفولة في العصر الفكتوري، الذي شهد ثورة صناعية كبرى كان استغلال الطفولة هو أحد أسوأ معالمها. تقوم الدراسة على فرضية أن العصر الفكتوري اتسم بصورة عامة باستغلال الأطفال الفقراء والأيتام، وعلى هذا الأساس فإن الورقة تسعى لإيجاد إجابات لأسئلة البحث، وهي: كيف ينظر المجتمع بالطبقة العليا في العصر الفكتوري للفقراء؟ وكيف يعاملون الأطفال الأيتام الفقراء بشكل خاص؟ وكيف تناول تشارلس ديكنز موضوع الطفولة في روايته (أوليفر تويست)؟. تبنت الورقة مناهج بحث متعددة لتحليل موضوع البحث. وقد أكدت نتائج تحليل ما كُتب عن هذا الموضوع فرضية البحث؛ وهي أن الأطفال الأيتام كانوا يتعرضون فعلاً لمختلف أنواع الاستغلال يبدأ بحرمانهم من فرص التعليم الأساسي، وإعدادهم وتدريبهم على ارتكاب الجرائم، أو الزج بهم في بؤر الرذيلة، وهي مسالك لا تقضي بصاحبها إلا إلى السجن أو القتل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الطفولة، استغلال، حقوق الإنسان، تشارلس ديكنز، أوليفر تويست، العصر الفكتوري.

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## 1. Introduction

Children in general, and the deprived and orphans in particular face devastating human rights violation since human existence; human history is full of mistreatment, unfairness and discrimination that vulnerable children endure. This paper focuses on childhood as a vulnerable stage of life, where the child is completely weak, helpless, dependent, and prone to exploitation and abuse.

No era proved otherwise; human history witnessed horrific tales of child exploitation, particularly orphans, homeless, and poor children.

Unfortunately, since ever, to our recent era; where children rights and child protection laws were enacted, children are still at risk of exploitation and abuse, especially those vulnerable.

The paper's main aim is to examine childhood in Charles Dickens's masterpiece novel (*Oliver Twist*), and focuses primarily on how the novelist handled childhood theme in his novel, during the Victorian era.

The novel reflects in a comic and most dramatic approach the situation of poor and homeless children during the Victorian era. And how they were negatively regarded and brutally treated by the upper class of that time.

In the Victorian era children had been exposed to the typical hardships and responsibilities of an adult life. Literature showed that life for Victorian Children at that time (1830 to 1900) varied greatly from childhood in today's world. For the poor Victorian Children life was much different. They had to work to help their families to survive. They would be made to go to work at a very young age, sometimes even 4 or 5 years old. They worked very hard and for long hours every day. The job safety was not a major concern and they were expected to work in filthy conditions. They had no choice in the matter. They had work to help pay the bills at home. ([www.victorian.org](http://www.victorian.org))

In Victorian labour market children are preferred because they were considered cheap labor, and they were in high demand for many types of jobs including mining, factory work, street sweepers, clothing and hat makers, chimney sweepers, farming, textile mills, servants, and more horrifically, prostitution. ([www.victorian.org](http://www.victorian.org))

The sudden increase in population from the gold rush of 1858 brought social problems including those involving child welfare. Huge technological improvements propelled Britain's wealth and prosperity and gave people, especially the middle class, so many new opportunities. Industrial production makes Britain the 'Workshop of the world' and the greatest trading nation on the globe. (Malik, 2017)

Nevertheless, the adverse effect of Industrial Revolution in Victorian Period also has terrible social effects: abject poverty, overcrowded dwellings, child labor, sexual exploitation, dirt and drunkenness. Money values prevailed as a result of increased materialism of the age. Hundreds of thousands of workers had migrated to industrial towns, where they made up a new kind of working class. The institution of the factories came with many injustices including harsh working conditions, and ruthless child labor. 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 working and living conditions for the working classes grew increasingly harsh, the social reform acts of the later 19th century attempted to improve the lives of the working poor, Philanthropists and social reformers, motivated by their Christian values and middle class ideals played a significant role in bringing about change. (Knaplund, 1941).

Reformers viewed the living conditions of many working class children as unacceptable. Children, they believed, should be protected from physical harm, moral corruption and the responsibilities of adult life and "every child should have a childhood". (Rooke & Schnell, 1983)

Orphanages were established to care for the children removed from unfit parents or those who had been abandoned or orphaned. All faiths were active in this process including the Protestant churches. The intentions of the reformers were sincere, but it is argued by Rooke and Schnell (1983) in their book *Discarding the Asylum* that these values were imposed upon the working class and that the reformers' understanding of the social structure was often compromised by their own simple view of

the world. Children were rescued from family situations deemed by the reformers to be unfit and were institutionalized for their own protection. (Rooke & Schnell, 1983)

## **2. The Objectives of the Research**

The paper states that orphans and poor children were usually subjected to abuse and exploitation in the Victorian era. It aims at:

1. Identifying the way the aristocratic society in Victorian era regard and treat the poor and their attitude towards poor children in particular.
2. Finding out how Charles Dickens portrayed childhood during the Victorian age.

## **3. The Methodology**

The paper adopted two research approaches by using multiple data sets, one approach is the historical research approach where the primary source of the research will be the novel itself, and the secondary resources will be the relevant literature works and articles written by scholars about the topic. The second approach is the analytical research approach will be adopted as well, to analyze the novel, i.e. childhood theme in Dickens' novel.

## **4. Point of Departure**

As stated earlier in this research paper, the aim of this research is to depict the childhood theme in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, where the paper argues that poor children in the Victorian era suffered and endured a lot of miseries and they were usually mistreated and exploited. And that the upper class society down looked the poor and orphan children.

### **4.1 Oliver Twist**

*Oliver Twist* opens with the birth in a workhouse of the illegitimate son of a destitute woman who dies shortly after her son is born. Thus Oliver is at once pauper, orphan and illegitimate, and his subsequent experience of cruelty and rejection is in keeping with this beginning. He is constantly accused of viciousness or stupidity, constantly beaten or imprisoned. At best, he is ignored. Until he meets Mr. Brownlow any kindness he experiences is either accidental or the result of the adult world's attempts to exploit him. (Roulstone, undated).

Mr. Bumble sums him up as "a naughty orphan which nobody can't love". (Oliver Twist, Ch3)

In an orphanage in Victorian England, Oliver Twist survives among his companions in misfortune. Malnourished, 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.

Exhausted, hungry, he is collected by a gang of young thieves who work for an old Jewish called Fagin. Between Dodger, Bill, Nancy and the others, Oliver discovers a cruel world where only cunning and strength count.

#### 4.2 Definition of Childhood

From a sociological standpoint, scholar Diana Gittins points out 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." It should be understood that what is seen as childhood is a "construction of adults" which does not represent the ideas children themselves might have, and therefore contemporary trends in sociology that are stressing the importance of children's narratives are slowly emerging. (Gittin, 2009) Moreover in contrast to the belief that adults are able to form the right definition based on their memories and experience, it should be taken into account that our memory is not a perfect and trustworthy recording medium and consequently, the images of childhood might be full of misinterpretations, our own desires and myths. (Pekařová, 2014)

It should also be noted that there is a difference between the terms child and childhood. According to Gittins "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." Whereas "a child concerns an embodied individual defined as non-adult" described by "immaturity, dependency, powerlessness and inferiority." The length of childhood and being a child is different, generally derived from the traditions and customs of the state and their laws. Nevertheless it appears to be acceptable to claim that one cannot have a childhood without being

a child. Meanwhile it is possible to be a child without having childhood. (Pekařová, 2014)

Childhood phase was defined by many other sources, without remarkable deviation, here are some definitions:

1. Cambridge Dictionary defines Childhood as the time when someone is a child (Cambridge Dictionary)
2. UNICEF defines Childhood as the time for children to be in school and play, to grow strong and confident with the love and encouragement of their families and an extended community of caring adults. It is a precious time in which children should live free from fear, safe from violence and protected from abuse and exploitation. (UNICEF).
3. Whereas the medical definition of Childhood is Childhood: (1) The time for a boy or girl from birth until he or she is an adult. (2) The more circumscribed period of time from infancy to the onset of puberty. (<https://www.medicinenet.com>)

### **5. Childhood in Victorian Age, Discussion**

In the Victorian era children had been exposed to the hardships and responsibilities of adult life. Life for Victorian Children in that time (1830 to 1900) was nothing like childhood in today's world. Wealthy children had a much better life than poor children. For the poor Victorian Children life was much different. The poor children had to work to help their families to survive. They would be made to go to work at a very young age, sometimes even 4 or 5 years old. They worked very hard and for long hours every day. The job safety was not a major concern and they were expected to work in filthy conditions many times. They really had no choice in the matter. Their parents made them work to help pay the bills at home. ([www.victorian.org](http://www.victorian.org))

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## 5.1 Child labor

The Victorian era became notorious for employing young children in factories and mines and as chimney sweeps. Children were expected to help towards the family budget, often working long hours in dangerous jobs and low wages. (Daniels, 2009). Agile boys were employed by the chimney sweeps; small children were employed to scramble under machinery to retrieve cotton bobbins; and children were also employed to work in coal mines to crawl through tunnels too narrow and low for adults. Children also worked as errand boys, crossing sweepers, shoe blacks, or selling matches, flowers and other cheap goods. (Daniels, 2009). Many children got stuck in the chimneys that they were sweeping and eventually died. In factories it was not uncommon for children to lose limbs crawling under machinery to pick things up.

Several Factory Acts were passed to prevent the exploitation of children in the workplace. Children of poor families would leave school at the age of eight and were then forced to go to work. School was not free at this time. ([www.newworldencyclopedia.org](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org))

The Victorian time period is known for its hierarchy based social order.

Typical feature of this period was strict classification of the society. In the 20s of the nineteenth century the members of ruling elites officially implemented the social classification based on the living conditions, social status as well as the level of morality and gained experience, which in the end spread around the whole country. By the 80s it was very well known who belonged to where and moving from class to class, especially upwards was almost impossible (Pekařová, 10).

## 6. Childhood theme in the novel, Analysis

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



Charles Dickens personal experience as a child has produced unusual characters, in touch with social 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 the Dickens fame. His genuine feeling and powerful words inspired hundreds of film makers, and musicians.

Charles Dickens wrote about the homeless and street children in his novel *Oliver Twist*. In this novel, Dickens condemns the bitter effects of industrialization on the 19th century's England. The book attracts people attention to various contemporary social evils, including the Poor's asylum where the poor have to work, child labor and the recruitment of children as criminals. (Devi, 2016)

Dickens often depicted the exploitation and repression of the poor and condemned public officials and institutions that not only allowed such abuses to exist, but flourished as a result.

*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 in the hands of an older Jewish gang of thieves' director, who trained him and other boys to pickpockets, using the children to increase his personal wealth. Their individual development and personality are not important, but the profits that could be earned by them.

The indescribable misery and exploitation of children that Charles Dickens showed at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century in England, are still existed today in many parts of the world. Child Labor, the use of children as child soldiers and child prostitution are forms of exploitation of children are 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 Charles Dickens, the central basic questions for dealing with children in the society are: are children

just 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 they need special protection afforded by adult?

Dickens, however, does not stop at this gloomy scene, where the majority of the upper class society mistreat 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) that is a famously compelling tale - Dickens had witnessed 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, mistreatment and exploitation.

The novelist shows 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 straight forward form. The realistic portrayals of the living environment in England at that time, the dirty neighborhoods and slums, an atmosphere that not healthy to raise a child in - all this is incredibly close to the reader. It is greatly relieving to see that there are few people who mean well with 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 .

Dickens also 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 of the cruel attitudes and the 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 work house, 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.*

*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?"*

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*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, Ch2)*

Oliver's character embodies the values of a new child hero for Dickens: an outcast who manages to find his future through his own 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 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 other wise 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 Oliver Twist to. At that time the British Parliament voted for a controversial amendment to the “poor-laws”. The new amendment stated that the poor could receive public assistance only if "they took up residence in official workhouses and abided by their regulations". In these workhouses, husbands were separated from wives, in a very poor living conditions. The lawmakers justified their awful amendments that work led necessarily to success, that

dependent 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, Ch8)

The picture portrayed London when first seen by Oliver Twist after he fled the undertaker's service in the countryside, there dominant poverty, and crime. Dickens often describe his scenes in the night or in a rainy day or night, an atmosphere that magnify a homeless child loneliness and fear, there is barely no body 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 send her to the 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 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 a comfort and a pride into a new means of violence and suffering."* (Oliver Twist, Ch 40)

This a conversation between Rose and Nancy. Where Rose trying to convince Nancy not to go back to that crime den, but the poor girl deeply rooted to her atmosphere, for her own 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)

## 7. Summary

*Oliver Twist* opens with the birth in a workhouse of the illegitimate son of a destitute woman who dies shortly after her son is born. Thus Oliver is at once pauper, orphan and illegitimate, and his subsequent experience of cruelty and rejection is in keeping with this beginning. He is constantly accused of viciousness or stupidity, constantly beaten or imprisoned. At best, he is ignored. Until he meets Mr. Brownlow any kindness he experiences is either accidental or the result of the adult world's attempts to exploit him. (Roulstone, undated).

Mr. Bumble sums him up as "a naughty orphan which nobody can't love". (*Oliver Twist*, Ch3)

With fragile health, little Oliver was placed in the poor asylum of the cruel Mr. Bumble where he dared to make his famous request: "Please, sir, I want some more." To get rid of this naughty child, Mr. Bumble entrusted him to the care of Mr. Sowerberry, the caretaker. Mistreated by the undertaker's apprentice Noah Claypole, Oliver decided to flee one evening to London.

Abandoned and malnourished, he met a certain Jack Dawkins known as "The Artful Dodger" who told him about a London gentleman who would house him without asking anything in return. Collected by the band of thieves of Fagin, the poor orphan fell into the slums of the English capital

where he discovered the world of crime. He was even arrested for an attempted robbery that he had not actually committed on Mr. Brownlow's person, but when his innocence was proved, this noble gentleman gave him refuge. Due to the intensive care of the latter which he lavished, he recovered quickly.

Helped reluctantly by Nancy, the dreaded Bill Sikes kidnapped poor Oliver, lest he report them to the police. They then forced him to rob the house of his rescuer in the company of Bill Sikes, the brutal partner of Fagin, but nothing went as planned because Oliver was shot with a gun from the start. He was picked and taken care of by young Rose Maylie who took pity for the orphan. It is then that a mysterious man named Monks enters the scene, trying to harm the reputation of Oliver. Nancy goes to Miss Maylie's house secretly to warn her that Monks and Fagin are both trying to bribe Oliver. In anger, Sikes murdered his beloved partner who betrayed him.

At the end of the story, we learn that Rose Maylie is actually Oliver's aunt and that Monks is his jealous half-brother. Fagin was hanged, while Oliver was adopted by his benefactor, Mr. Brownlow.

## 8. Recommendations

I have exerted a considerable time and effort to find what scholars wrote about the topic of this research paper, I did perceive that a few researches handled the childhood theme from a different scope such as Kateřina Pekařová, in her thesis (The Theme of Childhood in Oliver Twist) that showcases differences in perception and attitudes towards children among societal classes and treatment they received in the novel. Where both researches agreed upon the child abuse within that time.

And because childhood is always a very special phase of everyone's life, and based on the findings of this research, I would like to recommend that further studies and researches are needed to tackle the novel:

1. From the positive side of the story, i.e. those who positively and humanly react to the deprived childhood in Oliver Twist. Such as the attitudes of Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies family.

2. How trauma and misery can produce such gentle and passionate people such as Oliver Twist and Nancy, despite their being victims themselves.

## 9. The Results

After thorough researching in childhood theme in Oliver Twist novel, with an intent focus on the way of living that Oliver Twists and his mates in the workhouse, the orphanage, and investigating the traumatizing events those children had endured, the research had come to the following results:

1. It is apparent that poor and orphan children are definitely endured the worst type of exploitation during the Victorian era due to the industrial expansion and the greediness of business owners and landlords that makes life difficult and expensive for the poor families. This finding is consistent with Kateřina Pekařová (2014) who stated that (*Oliver is a child deprived of a quality of his childhood, especially after being taken to the workhouse. However, from the analysis it seems that he is not treated properly as a child until he encounters Mr. Brownlow*).

This finding confirmed the research argument that orphans and poor children were usually subjected to abuse and exploitation in Victorian era.

2. There have been an increasing numbers of homeless children, who lost their parents or have no body to care for them and protect them. This result confirmed by what Maria Eklund finds out in her research, where she stated that (Orphans made up a great deal of the population and it was estimated that sixty percent of the criminal population was made up of orphans at one point or another. These statistics bring to light the problems that England faced trying to find a place for these orphans, sadly many of them lived lives filled with hard work, poor living conditions, or unkind families) (Eklund, 2012). That was considered the major factor that prompted policy makers to create workhouses for the poor.

3. However, law makers make life ever harsher for those vulnerable children by introducing amendments to the law for the poor that worsen the situation of the poor, and subjected them to further sufferings and exploitation. This result is based on the following statement from the



British National Archives that reads: (In 1834 a new Poor Law was introduced. Some people welcomed it because they believed it would reduce the cost of looking after the poor, take beggars off the streets and encourage poor people to work hard to support themselves.

The new Poor Law ensured that the poor were housed in workhouses, clothed and fed. Children who entered the workhouse would receive some schooling. In return for this care, all workhouse paupers would have to work for several hours each day. However, not all Victorians shared this point of view. Some people, such as Richard Oastler, spoke out against the new Poor Law, calling the workhouses 'Prisons for the Poor'. The poor themselves hated and feared the threat of the workhouse so much that there were riots in northern towns. (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/education/poor-law.pdf>).

4. The paper findings also confirmed that Charles Dickens successfully portrayed the miserable childhood and the underprivileged living conditions of poor and orphan children in such a way that later, the scholars and those who are concerned with child welfare began to rethink the society's attitude towards vulnerable Children. And finally, Reformers viewed the living conditions of many working class children as unacceptable. Children, they believed, should be protected from physical harm, moral corruption and the responsibilities of adult life and "every child should have a childhood". This result is consistent with (Knaplund, 1941) who stated Philanthropists and social reformers, motivated by their Christian values and middle class ideals played a significant role in bringing about change.

5. And accordingly, In 1842 Charles Dickens supported a law that finally regulated night work for women and children.

And the following year he founded the Household Words newspaper, promoting his ideas for working-class housing, popular education, and most important, child protection.

## 10. Conclusion

Victorian age is the era of 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, the core of success of Dickens' novel is that it awakens human conscience. His own suffering as a child has inspired him to draw the attention to the suffering of those unfavorable children and that had violently shocked upper class society. That misery is palpable and measurable. It can be powerfully felt and sensed through the novelist bold loud condemnation. This disgraceful situation had made scholars and policy makers to rethink their role in alleviating such misery and suffering. On the other hand, Oliver Twist has shown the bright side of morals despite being a victim of cruel society. Not the entire upper class society are guilty, within this darkened picture there is a shining human instance form within this cruel society, Dickens has brilliantly depicting Mr. Brownlow and the Mrs. Maylie and her niece Rose who take good care of little poor Oliver.

The paper main goal is to convey how poor children are regarded and treated in the Victorian era and did Charles Dickens's tackled the theme of childhood in his novel. This goal is fulfilled through analyzing Oliver twist and what other scholars has written about the topic as stated in the results of the research.

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