

## Children no more than 'little adults' child labour as major consequence of the industrial revolution in Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist*



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### ABSTRACT

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This article has attempted to highlight the importance of child labor, child misery, and social and economic changes in the Age of Industrialization as depicted in the novel *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (1837–1839). The study utilizes the descriptive qualitative research method to analyze how Dickens portrays helpless children whose childhoods are taken away by harsh reality. “Industrial Revolution” refers to the change from rural and handcrafted lifestyles to an industrialized society built on manufacturing. Poor people moved from the countryside to the cities, where they lived in slums and crowded places due to the Industrial Revolution, negatively affecting their quality of life. During this time, children were excessively labored, working under challenging conditions for minimal pay. In this novel, Charles Dickens denounces how poor children were forced into labor, mistreated, exploited, and denied an education. He also criticized how the capitalist system, based on class distinctions, gave rise to villains who would do anything to stay at the top of their social level. Dickens has depicted the anguish of impoverished children in this novel, who were denied parental love and education while working long hours in unfavorable circumstances. The current study argued that child labor is the fundamental result of the industrial revolution with reference to previous literature and will be helpful for future researchers to get overall idea of later consequences.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study is innovative as it dissects the psychological condition of children under economic pressures during the Victorian era. Earlier studies on Dickens's works addressed upper-middle-class children living conditions, but the poor condition of children victims of child labor remained unaddressed. The advent of industrialization paced up urbanization and improved living standards of the middle class. However, this advancement proved havoc for children of the lower middle class. This advancement did not safeguard children's basic rights; they lost their innocence in pursuing their basic needs and fell prey to crimes and social materialism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the novel *Oliver Twist*, which depicts the misery and degradation of destitute children and adults by Charles Dickens concerning child labor. By highlighting the plight of children during the Industrial Revolution and exposing the flaws in the Poor Law of 1834, Dickens hopes to show how social system flaws have contributed to poverty and crime. Dickens observed how industrialization affected Victorian society because it led to significant urbanization and increased class division. He also portrays the brutal treatment of children at the workhouses. Dickens' work has been examined with a particular focus on his depiction of Victorian childhood to show that Oliver Twist experienced the same Victorian childhood as his contemporaries did. His writings

demonstrate great empathy, sympathy, and insight into Victorian households and underprivileged children. Essentially, Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* to reveal the ugliness of Victorian-era materials, and with this work, he emerged as a campaigner against socially disadvantaged situations. This study also aims to investigate the economic and social changes that followed the Industrial Revolution and persisted throughout the Victorian era, with a particular focus on children's circumstances at the time, especially their employment and daily lives, as well as how Dickens uses the subject of child labor as a social critique of Victorian society in his novel. It then moves forward to the analysis of the novel. The Victorian era is analyzed with particular attention paid to class inequalities and child labor since the Industrial Revolution influenced every aspect of social life in England, advancing to this period. The article's primary concern is child labor, which is also historically explained together with the condition of children. The final section of this article on child labor in *Oliver Twist* focuses on how Charles Dickens responds to the new events brought about by the Industrial Revolution, particularly how he exposes what the authorities took tremendous efforts to conceal to persuade them to implement reforms. The novel is also examined in this section in terms of child labor, with a particular emphasis on how the children are treated horribly and are stolen of their childhood, potential, education, and dignity, as well as how they are forced to feel and suffer. As a result, this study aims to demonstrate that Charles Dickens' works had a social goal, to make readers aware of the condition of the disadvantaged people in Victorian society so they could take action to change their situation.

### 1.1. Significance of the Study

Based on the industrial revolution, the study holds the central purpose of identifying child labor and social misery related directly or indirectly to children, including their education, food, fundamental rights, and healthy life. A part of the population considered less worthy of living a life with basic needs proved worthy enough to be used for developing social and industrial infrastructure. This article aims to highlight the foundation of law enforcement modifications in later 19th-century England caused by the industrial revolution.

### 1.2. Hypothesis of the Research

The current article undertakes that the industrial revolution caused child labor and was predicted as the foundation of social revolution by Dickens in his novel *Oliver Twist*.

### 1.3. Research Questions

1. What factors pushed industrial owners to hire children to work in industries?
2. What social injustice lightened the spark of awareness among the new generation in *Oliver Twist*?

### 1.4. Research Methodology

The data analysis in this study is conducted using qualitative research methods and previous literature. The information pertains to the description of the Industrial Revolution as well as how this Industrial Revolution affected children, as depicted in *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. This study concluded that the Industrial Revolution had two effects on the children in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*: the first was poverty, and the second was child labor.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Victorian era in Great Britain is widely regarded as the culmination of the British industrial revolution and the pinnacle of the British Empire. Many historians consider adopting the Reform Act of 1832 to begin a new cultural era. The Regency period came before the Victorian period, before the Edwardian period. They would discover that the Victorians needed to regard their generation as stable and secure. During the Victorian era in England, social class distinctions were a significant part of people's daily life. In many of his novels released during

the Victorian period, Charles Dickens described Victorian views on class and social division. Dickens's *Oliver Twist* is one of his best works that depict the social inequalities between the rich and the poor.

Victorian society was divided into various social classes. These social classes were based on income, power, culture, education, labor conditions, and political disparities. Lower-class members had no place, were exploited and treated like animals and helpless. Additionally, child labor was at its peak during this reign as the worst societal repercussion of the industrial revolution. Ventura and Hans (2015) showed that Britain's borrowing boom during the Industrial Revolution facilitated the country's agricultural advancements, textiles, and iron industries, which sped up the structural change in business and significant social transformation.

Agarwal and Agarwal (2017) discussed the technological shift and advancement of banking and financial enterprises during the First and Second Industrial Revolutions. They emphasized that the advent of the power loom and steam engine and advancements in iron-making technologies were the primary causes of the First Industrial Revolution. During the Industrial Revolution, the number of country banks rose, as did the network of joint and country banks, and the introduction of Bill-workers transformed banking and business financing.

O'Brien (2017) claims that the origins of the Industrial Revolution in England can be traced back to the country's productive and adaptable agriculture, its large and easily accessible endowments of coal and other minerals, international trade, and significant technological discovery and innovation. Grellet (2002) stated that during the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution positively and negatively affected British society. First, a positive impact is seen in the nation's railways, manufacturing capabilities, and wealth growth, making Britain the world's foremost imperial power and the first industrialized and financial nation.

Abrams (1999) asserts that the Victorian era saw swift, traumatic economic and social transformation unlike any other historical period. As a result, England became the world's leading industrial power in the nineteenth century, with an empire that covered more than a quarter of the globe's surface. The split of Britain into two nations—one for the rich and the other for the poor—starkly contrasts that, resulting in class tensions, social discontent, and strong demand for social reform. De Vries (1994) argues that the Renaissance is the only period in history that can be compared to the Industrial Revolution in terms of its historical significance because it is said to have begun modern history and defined its defining characteristics, just as the Industrial Revolution began industrial society. Moreover, it defined its development's fundamental mechanisms.

Burnette (1997) stated that the salary disparity between men and women was significantly larger even though the gap was twice as large during the Industrial Revolution. For Allen (1992), the Industrial Revolution resulted in higher wages whereas energy was cheaper in Britain compared to other continents uplifting the living standards of Britain.

Al Ghammaz, Al Khatib, and Hammouri (2022) claimed that Dickens demonstrates how the Victorian era experienced a significant industrial transformation that brought the cruellest childhood mistreatment ever, impacting their mentality. Dickens wishes to preserve some of these underprivileged children's vivid childhood delights because Dickens believes that these flowers have physically and psychologically faded without the dew of goodwill and happiness. Drawing on personal experiences, Dickens demonstrates the exploitation of laborers until they died without sympathy and how this great industrial revolution in Britain primarily benefited the middle and upper classes.

Asci (2019) asserts that Dickens claimed that employees of bourgeois or capitalist employers were not allowed to act like intelligent, rational human beings because of the norms that governed them. As a result, workers' skills, capabilities, and potential are overlooked by capitalists. Tasnim (2016) states that Dickens' novels exhibit great empathy, comprehension, and insight toward poor children and Victorian families. The circumstances of the children left by their family and the state and forced to fend for themselves from a young age are shown in vivid detail and with heart-breaking narratives in his novels, demonstrating the term "Coming of Age".

Charles Dickens condemned how poor children were exploited, abused, and denied an education. He also criticized how the capitalist system, based on class distinctions, gave rise to villains who would do anything to climb the social ladder. Dickens portrayed in his works the disorder, squalor, blight, degradation, and human sorrow that may be seen in a contemporary industrial city. Bernardi (2013) states that childhood in the works of Charles Dickens is associated with adversity, deformity, trauma, illness, neglect, hunger, cruel treatment, guilt, isolation, abandonment, orphanhood, marginalization, and even death.

Dickens had the desire to leave the old world of injustice, ignorance, and disease of the past with most of his contemporaries. However, he also shared his nostalgia and conviction that industrialization was destroying the globe. This contrast will characterize the social and political discussions of the nineteenth century. Casey (1999) states that Dickens' novels are both a symptom and a critique of the disciplined society; they represent the first appearance in English fiction of a large schematization of social discipline. Williams (1983) claims that Dickens was an example of a new way of viewing the world, and his works depicted urban life, the population, contemporary social structures, and the influence of industrialism.

### *2.1. The Industrial Revolution in Great Britain*

The term "Industrial Revolution" in Pat Hudson describes the shift from rural lifestyles to an industrialized society focused on industrial production and service employment, resulting in varied social relations. It paced swiftly a few industrial sectors, mainly cotton and iron, in a short time (Radja, 2007).

Great Britain had a significant transformation in its trajectory of growth throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, which sparked the nation's industrialization and, later, the rest of the world. Hetami (2009) notes that there was a significant alteration in every facet of the nation: the economy expanded, giving Great Britain and its colonies more influence; the cities and rural areas underwent a permanent change, and the social repercussions brought about new social and political reforms.

According to Yavuz (2010) England's geographic location was a significant factor in putting the country in a good position for industrialization:

"England of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by having the following particularities, had more chance in fulfilling the above conditions. Geographical situation of England was an advantage with regards to sea transport and this helped the growth of British overseas empire to expand its market. On the other hand, England had, in its territories, the necessary raw materials like coal and iron ore."

During the Industrial Revolution, it was preferable for children to work because there were few options for them to go to school. Children were paid significantly less than adults, so child labour was a necessary component of the economy. The majority of the children in the community carried the misguided belief that "working earned them money while school earned them nothing (Altick, 1974)." which resulted in a small percentage of students attending classes. They labored under horrible circumstances, including long hours, inadequate ventilation, bad lighting, and a lack of protective equipment. However, due to public outcry and child abuse claims, regulations against child labor and the factory acts in 1864 ordered that no children under the age of twelve be employed as factory workers. Regrettably, some of these reforms were put into place decades after individuals like Charles Dickens had already been compelled to engage in brutal and traumatic factory work at a young age.

Most children who worked in factories during the Industrial Revolution did so against their will, urging either their parents or the workhouse guardians who supervised them (Hammond & John, 1978). Regardless of age or gender, Britain's industrial development required a large-scale, inexpensive human labor force in order to advance the nation's production and development. Economic expansion ushered inhumane child labor in which "childhood was being sacrificed to the expansion of Britain's textile industries (Nardinelli, 1980)." Hammonds too contends the same as the employment of children on a massive scale became an important social aspect of English society, and

the wealth of the English manufacturers were predicated upon [children's] helpless misery (Hammond & John, 1978).

The Industrial Revolution undoubtedly had many good and light aspects but also many negative and unpleasant aspects. People moved significantly from the countryside to cities as a result of it. Family life underwent a significant transformation for the underprivileged and working class. The hard labor conditions forced workers and their families to live in slums and impoverished places. The standard of living for children was declining. After the 1730s, an increase in population compelled low-income families to dwell in overcrowded, unsanitary regions. Families from the upper classes made every effort to maintain their superior positions, which created a social hierarchy. The poor and working classes were compelled to look for new employment opportunities simultaneously, and the rising demand decreased salaries because so many people were looking for work (Yavuz, 2010).

The Industrial Revolution turned the middle class into a capitalist mode that crushed low-income people. Dickens' writings brutally expose the increased poverty in London and its surroundings as a degenerated society. Works by Charles Dickens and his contemporaries expose the havoc of the industrial revolution inspired, showing the need for empathy and social reform.

## 2.2. The Historical Background of Child Labor

*Child labor* is defined as the employment of children under eighteen in circumstances that could harm their physical, mental, and moral health and deny them the chance to go to school. However, not every work done by children qualifies as child labor.

The International Labor Organization defines "child labor" as the deprivation of children detrimental to their physical and mental development. For Faraaz Siddiqi and Harry Anthony Patrinos, child labor deprives children of the simple joys of childhood by putting them in conditions that include health hazards and potential abuse (Siddiqi & Patrinos, 1995).

There are, however, two divergent schools of thought regarding the medieval understanding of childhood and the actuality of child labor. Historical accounts from a distant past portray children as "little adults" with no place in society. On the other hand, modern interpretations of the Middle Ages dispute more traditional interpretations by arguing that medieval society had a separate concept of childhood and respected the rights of children to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment and be educated (Hindman, 2001).

Due to family economic hardships and the lack of a mandatory education system, child labor was prevalent during the Middle Ages, particularly in agriculture. Children may work in town, in wealthy homes, in the fields and even in the church. Furthermore, it is critical to note that child labor emerged gradually, whether in urban centres or rural areas and that it was accepted as a normal development that occurred without criticism or protest. Far worse than this, in the Middle Ages, children were entangled in daily affairs as what was referred to as "little adults" (Hindman, 2001).

In pre-Industrial society, children used to help their parents with various works, but Industrial Revolution engaged them in paid labor. Industrialization relocated the textile industries from house to factory in the late eighteenth century, resulting in children as cheap labor (Cunningham, 1995) and they were paid to work in factories and mines.

As previously mentioned, many families relied on their children's income; thus, many children had to start working as soon as possible and work many hours to make ends meet. Children commonly begin working before the age of ten, and the industrial revolution era is beginning to recover its previous reputation as a dark period in the history of childhood (Cunningham, 2011).

### 2.3. Child Labor in the Victorian Period

Although using children as laborers may be dated back to the Middle Ages, as mentioned before, the practice took off at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Children were forced to work in the Victorian era because they were the lowest available man labor, many devices did not require physical effort (such as pressing buttons), and the poor's economic conditions. In this era, people could see the results of industrialization. Child labor was characterized by long shifts, poor wages, and often dangerous environments. Humphries says that with sufficiently low adult salaries, many families would require children to work, and at these poor wages, employers might put a vast number of children and adults to work (Humphries, 2010).

Sally Mitchell's book "*Daily Life in Victorian England*" investigates and criticizes the working conditions of Victorian-era children and the changes enacted to address their needs, as well as those of other children, as well as neglect and abuse on the part of their parents:

"Twenty-first-century readers are shocked by accounts of the Victorian children, some of them very young-who worked long hours under terrible conditions. However, child labor was not invented by Victorians. Children in pre-industrial societies had always worked. Most took some part in their parents' labor, whether in agriculture or in producing goods at home (Mitchell, 2009)."

An essential part of Victorian culture was the large number of impoverished people. Children were forced to work as chimney sweeps since their families could not afford anything. Chimneys were usually clogged with forty gallons of soot every year, yet these children could crawl up the twelve-by-fourteen-inch chimneys (some of which were only seven inches square) and clean them out. Some children had jobs as rat catchers, and their job was to poison the rats with arsenic. However, since this could get expensive, they also had the option of using ferrets to flush out and kill the rats (Kelsey, 1997).

It is seen that different kinds of children work on the city streets, notably in London. A little boy or girl with a miniature sweeper would have cleared the path for a wealthy man and his wife in long gowns, hoping to receive gratuities, much like today's classroom helpers. Girls may be spotted peddling blossom gum and cigarettes. Taking care of horses and dogs and delivering parcels are other possible sources of income for boys. Boys used to wait outside of offices for people holding messages they wanted to send in exchange for money before the telephone was invented around the turn of the century. Although the work seen above was done when the children were little, it demonstrated children's responsibility by showing that they could carry out regular work as they grew older (Mitchell, 2009).

Child labor and its aftermaths provided an understanding of deplorable working conditions. The facts and figures quoted in history documented that little children would stand for ten hours on stools in the silk industry to perform their work. Crowded into suffocating spaces, with no ventilation, these work dens became the prison house of infants. The same was true of the textile mills where children as young as four and five, and incredibly even toddlers of three, were put to work. In abominable conditions, hundreds of thousands of children, half-ragged and half-washed, were literally worked to death in the shadow of the overseer.

"Factory workers conceived as non-entities do not deserve decent living conditions as mere means of increasing production. Slum areas around factories are only for the poor, where to live the poorest of the poor, the worst-paid workers and the victims of prostitution indiscriminately huddle together (Engels, 1987)."

Child labor's brutality was comparable to slavery, a system that oppressed its subjects. Children were used for labor, as evidenced by the following description: "chained, belted, harnessed like dogs...black, saturated with wet, and more than half-naked, crawling upon their hands and knees and dragging their heavy loads behind them (Yancey, 1999)."

Understanding the pains of child labor and its adverse effects on innocent souls throughout the Victorian era perturbed Dickens. He, through his stories, projects forth the harsh reality that in industrializing and urbanizing Britain, most children worked as many hours as their parents did or even more. Millions of children in the

nineteenth century had the experience of working in a grown-up world. At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign, children were still regarded as a source of cheap labor and worked in many unpleasant and dangerous places such as mills, factories, and coal mines.

In this regard, Richardson says,

“The only option for the destitute poor would be working in exchange for a thin subsistence, and only inside the workhouse...the system was austere and harsh, treating those seeking help—even if sick or old—as if their misfortune were morally reprehensible (Richardson, 2013).”

#### 2.4. Child Labor in *Oliver Twist*

Charles Dickens is best known for his masterpiece *Oliver Twist*. The story centers on the plight of children, especially orphans, in unfair and unjust societies. It is an early example of a novel that alerts readers to societal issues, such as class inequality, workhouses, child labor, and young children's involvement in criminal activity. Dickens presents these concerns compassionately and bitterly in this work, emphasizing genuine circumstances with dark humor (Didelyté, 2008).

Here, it seems important to note that many of *Oliver Twist's* chapters are devoted to mocking the charitable organizations that were then managed by church authorities, as well as the Poor Law of 1834, which required that the poor who desired to move into workhouses would get government aid. However, those already poor and forced to enter a workhouse saw no improvement in their circumstances.

This Act was confronted with strong resistance from many individuals, including workers, political and religious leaders. Many authors, notably Charles Dickens, condemned it and called for reforms. Due to this pressure and the Andover workhouse scandal in Andover, Hampshire, in which inmates were kept hungry because the unscrupulous workhouse master stole the food, the Act was eventually changed by deleting the most difficult clauses, especially those regulating workhouses.

*Oliver Twist's* adventures serve as a symbol of the condition of children living in workhouses. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens attempted to capture the conditions of the workhouses. Although the workhouses were designed to help the destitute, in practice, they served as centers for child abuse and occasionally even died. Dickens tried to expose the truth about the government's attempts to hide the appalling treatment through his work. He wanted to show how cruel and rotten the workhouses were. The speaker brought up the 1834 Poor Law Amendment and its disastrous effects as issues. He personified the self-centeredness and rudeness of those who work in the charitable sector, such as Mrs. Mann and Mr. Bumble. Dickens highlights that the workhouses were miserable rather than comfortable places. Dovilė Didelyté makes the following statement regarding this:

Charles Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* to portray the lives of individuals in need and going through difficult times. It also aims to raise the voice of the lower class, which is often ignored or just discarded as a disruptive noise. With a focus on the circumstances in the workhouses, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, and criminal life, I hope to illustrate what life was like for the general populace in 19th-century London, especially for the lower class and their children (Didelyté, 2008).

In Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, one of the central issues is the plight of orphans. Oliver was one of many children at that time who were orphans. During that period, orphans significantly increased due to widespread diseases and the lack of care for their parents. The term “orphan” was later used to refer to children who had lost both of their parents and children who had one surviving parent or children whom their own parents had neglected. Additionally, these unlucky children suffered from parental neglect, abuse, and maltreatment at school or in homes where they were supposedly adopted. Some were placed in workhouses, while others went out on the streets for work. They developed into repeat offenders or alcohol addicts on the streets. They suffered in the corrupt system since the government did nothing to assist them. Moreover, these children were adopted (Tekin & Janet, 2006).

During Dickens' time, child apprentices were common. The children of low-income families were unable to be supported. So, hoping they would have enough food and clothing, they placed them in nearby orphanages. "Pauper apprenticed" or "Pauper children" were the names given to these children. Under the English Poor Laws, they were required to find work as apprentices to gain trade or professional experience. The corrupt government was where they worked. Many children were orphans, while the rest may have fallen victim to negligent family members or parents who could not provide for their children's basic needs, such as food. Parish authorities had them all under their care.

These orphanages were not designed to provide comfort but meant to inflict agony. A minimal amount of food was provided to the children by the orphanage masters. In his novel *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens focuses on and illustrates the plight of children in workhouses in a highly picturesque manner.

Dickens reveals the self-centeredness of the baby farm's caretaker, who fails to feed the children enough and keeps the extra cash for herself. Dickens highlighted the alarming social reality of the church's potential involvement in abusing resources and authority.

Mrs. Mann knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them (Dickens, 1992).

The children at the workhouse are all slowly starving. They must also labor. At the workhouse, Oliver is tasked with picking oakum as his first assignment. In addition, he spends the night in a vast hall filled with children. The mattress on which he sleeps is hard and uncomfortable. The children are not allowed to object or beg for additional food, except for Oliver, who asks for more and is then flogged, tortured, and confined. "He remained a close prisoner in the dark and solitary room to which he had been consigned by the wisdom and mercy of the board" (Dickens, 1992).

Dickens depicts how the workhouse system treated innocent children born and nurtured there. He also demonstrates how the children were mistreated and neglected and suffered from starvation. One of the boys even threatens to devour the other children if he is not given better food. Oliver's audacity to ask for more food was only made possible because Oliver drew the short straw when the other starving boys cast lots to decide who would do it. George Cruikshank depicts "the poor orphan Oliver stands utterly alone with the threat of cannibalism right behind him, and facing him, the bully of a workhouse master preparing to unleash his powers of retribution. He in misery uttered famous phrase 'Please Sir, I want some more' (Richardson, 2014)." This statement demonstrates how impossible it is for hungry children to ask for more food in a workhouse because it has already been abandoned for them. If any child did, they would face the consequences following the workhouse's laws.

Dickens, however, wanted to demonstrate how the children in the workhouse are mistreated in *Oliver Twist* (Pasaribu, 2011). Since the Parish officials have ordered that each child have a little bowl of gruel, he illustrates how the children are gradually driven into slow starvation:

Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months: at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, ...that unless he had another basin of gruel (r) per diem, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age. He had a wild, hungry eye; and they implicitly believed him (Dickens, 1992).

In addition, the children were forced to work outside the workhouse between the ages of twelve and eighteen in factories, mills, or as chimney sweepers (Dumovska, 2005). Despite Oliver's insufficient age, he is assigned to be an apprentice when he wants more food. Oliver is offered training to become a chimney sweeper by the brutal chimney sweeper Mr. Gamfield. Numerous children have perished at the hands of Mr. Gamfield, a terrible person. He claims that the boys' actions led to their own misfortunes, which is why they ended up wounded or dead.

Then Oliver goes to work for Mr. Sowerberry, the undertaker. Oliver's situation is no better with Mr. Sowerberry than in the workhouse. He begins his work with coffins and dead bodies. Oliver is dissatisfied with his



work. This work is challenging for a young person physically. Working with corpses at such a young age impacts his psychology and emotions. As a result, he has a more challenging time getting by with Mr. Sowerberry. He is also mistreated by Mrs. Sowerberry, who once gave him a dog's food. Oliver devours the food because he is famished. He follows Mrs. Sowerberry to a pitch-black room, where he sleeps:

"Then come with me," said Mrs. Sowerberry: taking up a dim and dirty lamp, and leading the way upstairs; "your bed's under the counter. You don't mind sleeping among the coffins, I suppose? But it doesn't much matter whether you do or don't, for you can't sleep anywhere else. Come; don't keep me here all night!" Oliver lingered no longer but meekly followed his new mistress (Dickens, 1992).

Dickens also depicts the class divisions among the characters in *Oliver Twist* and the differences in living standards between the various social strata. Mr. Brownlow, who represents upper society, lives a luxurious lifestyle. The wealthy enjoy spacious homes with lights and heating, whereas the poor struggle and live in dark, ancient, and cold buildings since many migrate from the countryside to the city in search of a better life (Pasaribu, 2011). However, Oliver and other poor children in workhouses are only given a minimal amount to eat and are forced to labor. Workhouse children are given a survival diet because they are starving to death. Oliver gets locked in a dark space when he requests more food.

Oliver's next job is with Fagin. When Oliver's mother is called a "down nasty woman" and other derogatory terms by Noah, the charity boy. Noah's mocking of his mother is intolerable to Oliver. Oliver beats Noah after he loses control. Oliver suffers a penalty and is once more imprisoned in a tiny, dark room:

For the rest of the day, he was shut up in the back kitchen, in company with a pump and a slice of bread; and, at night, Mrs. Sowerberry, after making various remarks outside the door, by no means complimentary to the memory of his mother, looked into the room, and, amidst the jeers and pointings of Noah and Charlotte, ordered him up stairs to his dismal bed (Dickens, 1992).

Noah is the best illustration of how criminals are produced by their surroundings. He derogates his mother frequently and despises Oliver. Dickens criticizes not only Noah for his terrible behavior but also the society that transforms him into a selfish and evil child through the figure of Noah.

Dickens' figure Oliver represents the people's migration to London. Oliver is locked in the dark chamber after a fight with Noah over Noah's insulting of Oliver's dead mother. After that, Oliver flees to London. Oliver had no notion that London was crowded with low-level criminals, making him extremely vulnerable. His escape to London symbolizes the poor's movement to major cities such as London. Like many poor immigrant families in London, Oliver struggles to find a job. Dodger is the first person Oliver meets upon his arrival in London, and he is the one who introduces him to Fagin. Without a second thought, Oliver accepts Fagin's offer to work for him so that he will not starve to death.

However, people primarily move from rural to urban areas to find a job. While some people moved to huge industrial regions like London, others decided to move to another nation. They were forced to migrate due to poor job circumstances and cultural norms. They were drawn to technology and sophisticated places where they believed they could travel and live better. However, many people who work in rural regions are negatively affected by the quick change brought on by industry. Britain was still a rural nation in 1837. The vast majority of people continued to live in rural areas. Many of these employees lost their jobs when new machines substituted human labor. Therefore, they travelled to big cities and labored in horrible conditions. They were overworked, underpaid, and had to live in small spaces.

Therefore, many children moved to the streets to seek employment. On the streets, many of them turned into criminals. They were raised in a criminal world even if they did not intend to become criminals. To survive, they took part in a variety of crimes. They picked up illegal behavior by following what they observed happening around them. Before the middle of the seventeenth century, they had few school options. It was more challenging to find honest work for children. Few worked in 'honest' jobs like sweatshop labor, selling low-cost items, or street

sweeping. However, it was discovered that homeless children who lacked homes, caregivers, and food were committing crimes. For these children, prison might be a good location to find food and refuge (Duckworth, 2008).

Dickens' *Oliver Twist* depicts poor children forced circumstances to become criminals. Oliver's fleeing from Sowerberry's place due to mistreatment forces him to travel seventy kilometers to London, suffering from hunger, cold weather, and weariness, finally meeting Jack Dawkins, one of Fagin's pickpockets.

Dawkins brings him to Fagin, who gathers homeless children from the streets and has a group of them. Those children do not have a place to sleep or food to eat before working with Fagin. In order to obtain accommodation and food, they are therefore willing to do everything. These children, including Dodger, Charley, and even Oliver, become criminals (Didelyté, 2008). It is not their fault that they are criminals; however, their poor social and economic circumstances compelled them to be so.

In contrast to Oliver, Jack Dawkins, often known as the Artful Dodger, has a different personality and lifestyle. In addition to stealing handkerchiefs, he smokes and drinks alcohol. Dodger is used to stealing because he was denied his parents' love and is unwilling to change his way of life (Pasaribu, 2011). He is intelligent, but because of his involvement with Fagin, he becomes corrupted and becomes a criminal. He is not turning to crime because he is a wicked boy; instead, it is because of his surroundings and the negative influences of the flawed individuals he meets, like Fagin, who makes him a thief. He is also punished by Fagin when he returns home empty-handed, which forces and conditions him to steal in order to survive.

Nancy, like Jack Dawkins, becomes a member of Fagin as a child. She endures great suffering while working with Fagin and tells Oliver that dying would be preferable to working with Fagin. She can distinguish between good and evil, but since she spent so much time in the dark, she would get burned by the light if she emerged from the shadows and faced the sun. Although she desires light, she is helpless against the darkness, which alludes to Nancy's tragic conclusion. Even though Nancy is a prostitute and a member of Fagin's Gang, she is portrayed as having moral character. She is compelled to work as a prostitute. Oliver thinks she is a good girl as soon as he sees her. Bill Sikes is in love with her. She has no intention of working with Fagin or other criminals, but because of the environment in which she was raised and the circumstances surrounding it, she was forced to act in the way she did. She states,

"I won't stand by and see it done, Fagin," cried the girl. "You've got the boy, and what more would you have? - Let him be - let him - or I shall put that mark on some of you, that will bring me to the gallows before my time." The girl stamped her foot violently on the floor as she vented this threat; and with her lips compressed, and her hands clenched, looked alternately at the Jew and the other robber: her face quite colourless from the passion of rage into which she had gradually worked herself (Dickens, 1992).

Oliver is assigned to steal with Dodger after receiving training in theft. Dodger snatches a wealthy man's handkerchief when they notice him standing around. The police detain Oliver, whom they believe to be the boy who stole the handkerchief and bring him before a judge. The judge is brutal with Oliver; instead of anticipating Oliver's impending faint, he slaps him across the face and starts questioning him. This indicates that orphans and children in need do not receive any mercy. The judge is unaware of Oliver's situation and intimidates him saying, "Hold your tongue this instant, or I'll have you turned out of the office!" said Mr. Fang. "You're an insolent impertinent fellow. How dare you bully a magistrate! (Dickens, 1992)." The judge then imposes a sentence of hard labor on him. Fortunately, Oliver is later saved by the guy whose handkerchief is stolen as police is informed that Oliver was not a thief. However, Dickens refers to stealing a handkerchief because, at that time in British society, children were abused and punished for minor acts or misdeeds.

Oliver is once again compelled to assist Sikes in stealing as Sikes informs Fagin saying, "I want a boy... 'if I'd only got that young boy of Ned, the chimbley sweeper's (Dickens, 1992)." Oliver is shot at the crime spot, but the house owner saves him. Oliver is afraid since he is a young, innocent child. This incident symbolizes the suffering of children during the period and highlights their anguish and its impact on them. Dickens' intent in describing the

accident and the crime scene is to demonstrate how children turn out to be criminals despite their best efforts to prevent it. He criticizes and questions the then-existing British society. He makes a point in this novel about how homeless children like Oliver cannot survive in this corrupt world without becoming criminals (Pasaribu, 2011).

### 3. DISCUSSION

The revolution during the Victorian period was not just a single phenomenon; instead, it was a cycle of changes that went from the industrial revolution to child labor, and then from child labor to social awareness. In addition to the scientific and theoretical advancements made during the Industrial Revolution, industrialization also resulted in the rise of the contemporary environment by migrating people from the countryside to the cities in pursuit of work. Although the Industrial Revolution first received good attention, it ultimately harmed society because of the dramatic urban population growth it generated. This, in turn, led to the expansion of poor neighborhoods. The middle class lived in splendor, while the lower-class laborers lived in filth. Social analysts like Toynbee, the Webbs, the Hammonds, and novelists like Charles Dickens emphasized the rapid change and the dreadful impacts of the industrial revolution upon the living conditions of the masses (Hudson, 1992). Throughout his career as a novelist, Dickens has been preoccupied with the plight of society's downtrodden and how their lives may be improved. In order to demonstrate the injustice of laws like the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, he creates fictional victims to use as examples (Swifte, 2006).

We can state categorically that his works not only exposed the problems of the Victorian era but also contributed to establishing a brighter future for Great Britain: Dickens has a reputation as a reformer, both during his lifetime and after. Many people have given him credit for fostering the change in public opinion that allowed for criminal legislation, public health, and educational changes, all of which contributed to making Britain a more peaceful and prosperous nation (Cunningham, 1995).

Furthermore, Bayley's essay *Oliver Twist: Things as They Really Are*, argues that the story does not liberate us and that the impression of absolute reality in fiction could perhaps only be obtained by the author's possessing, and convincing his reader to share, a sense of distinct worlds, and the awareness of difference is the awareness of freedom (Bayley, 1987).

Reconsidering established morality and alternate realities other than our own, Dickens depicts the squalor in which the lower-class members of society live. For Blount, his writings primarily address society's downtrodden working class. Dickens had always been compassionate towards the poor, sick, destitute, and mistreated because he comprehended human misery, loneliness, sickness, and waste (Blount, 1965).

### 4. CONCLUSION

Dickens intends to show how terrible life was for children who had to work in factories and mines. He seeks to persuade parents that it is essential to spend quality time with their children like Oliver by demonstrating the importance of having fun. Dickens thinks Oliver and other children must have a safe place to grow up. Even though it is not what they want, raising criminal offspring destroys their children's futures. Nine-year-old Oliver is assigned to assist a funeral director, handling coffins and deceased individuals. Oliver and other children his age should not have to undertake manual labor like this (Dumovska, 2005). Dickens, a writer with a strong sense of social responsibility, portrays the environment in which he lives as a means of awakening his readers to the realities of the day and, ultimately, of bringing about positive social change. The workhouse system was severely criticized in his writings due to its abuse of the underprivileged. He utilized literature as a tool to reveal social injustices that subjected children to severe harm and even early death. His writings also played a crucial role in putting social changes into action, including revising the Poor Laws and the factory acts forbidding hiring children. He moved and surrounded himself with those who could assist him in making a change. His books first served as a wake-up call to the populace, making them aware of the events taking place at the time. As the story ends, Dickens seeks to

restore some semblance of social order by punishing and rewarding characters accordingly. The villains are revealed to get what they earned while the good guys live happily ever after in the country. The virtuous people are depicted living peacefully together in the country, while the wicked people eventually receive what they deserve. Eventually, it can be said that London is portrayed as a harsh and terrible city, but it can be escaped, as Oliver did.

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