

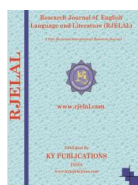


THE THEME OF SUFFERING IN CHARLES DICKENS'S LITERARY WORKS WITH REFERENCE TO HIS NOVEL "OLIVER TWIST"

Mohammed Ali Elsiddig¹, Dr. Abdalla Yassin Abdalla²

¹Sudan University of Science and Technology, College of languages

²Sudan University of Science and Technology, College of languages



Article Received:19/04/2021

Article Accepted: 06/05/2021

Published online:11/05/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.2.105](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.2.105)

Abstract

This study aims at analyzing the theme of suffering in Charles Dickens literary work. This suffering reflects the reality experienced by the writer, which was reflected in his writings. Charles Dickens was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world. This suffering was manifested through the hero of his novel, which were similar to personal experiences and reflections of the suffering he went through. The study followed thematic analytical method, the data collected from the selected English novel *Oliver Twist*, from other books and articles of Journals. The study concluded that the theme of suffering is part of Charles Dickens' life that he lived with, which he accurately portrayed, especially the harsh suffering children face in society.

Keywords: suffering, theme, poor, children, *Oliver Twist*, oppression, society.

Introduction

Charles Dickens was one of the greatest authors of his time because his writings were unlike any other. He used his own life experiences and conveyed them in his book. Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on February 7, 1812. Charles's early childhood was suffering, because his father was sent to jail for the money he had borrowed. After the father went to prison, his mother did not have enough money to send him go to school, and at the age of twelve, he began working in the factories. Most people believe that this is where the dark side of his writings comes from. This suffering influenced him to become one of the best authors of all time. Dickens finally got back to school because his family's legacy helped him. He returned to school at the Wellington House Academy. Shortly after returning to school, he got a job at the law firm of Ellis and Blackmore as a law clerk. He performed tasks every day such as keeping the cash box, managing the tasks, and delivering the documents.

1-1-Statement of the Problem

The study attempts to investigate the theme of suffering as one of the central problems that Charles Dickens focuses on and attempts to draw attention of his readers. The main purpose of this study is to confirm the theme of suffering in nineteenth century, using discussion and analysis of Dickens' novels, from selected novels *Oliver Twist*. The problem of suffering becomes a serious social and economic burden of the English society of the late 19th century; this is why Dickens chooses this theme as one of the central themes of his novels. This is a critical study of the theme of suffering in Dickens' novels "*Oliver Twist*"

1-2-Objectives of the Study:

The two novels *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectation* have a many of important themes such as suffering, social problems, poverty and inequity. So, the study aims at presenting and analyzing the

theme of suffering in Dickens' novels, *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectation*.

The theme of suffering is a central theme in a number of Dickens' novels specially *Oliver Twist*.

Therefore the objective of the study includes the following:

1. To present historical background of Victorian society
2. To show the form of suffering, social classes and living condition

1-3-Questions of the Study:

1. To what extent the social status of the Victorian age affects Charles Dickens literary work?
2. How is the theme of suffering depicted in Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectation*?

1-4-Hypotheses of the Study:

1. Social status of the Victorian age greatly affected Charles Dickens literary works
2. The theme of suffering depicted in Charles Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* in different forms

1-5: The Significance of the Study

The significance of the study implies suffering, poverty, child labor and poor situation, practically children in Victorian period. Also, social problems that are social injustice like social inequality, discrimination within Charles Dickens's works.

1-6-Methodology of the Study:

The study follows the thematic descriptive analytical approach for analyzing suffering in Dickens' novels. The data will be collected from selected novel, *Oliver Twist*.

2-LITERATURE REVIEW

2-1-Charles Dickens's Literary Works:

Carter and McRae (2001) claim that Charles Dickens, the most popular novelist of the century, and one of the greatest humorists that England has produced. He is an English writer of novels and short stories. The novels of Charles Dickens concerned

with the problems of society at that time. Charles Dickens wrote thirteen novels, the first series of a collection of stories *Sketches* was published in 1836 the kind of light, humorous writing which had been popular for more than a century.

Carter and McRae (1997) argues that *Oliver Twist* was the second novel by Charles Dickens. It was begun in February of 1837 and ended in April of 1839. It highlighted the problems of poor city children who, after the Poor Law Act of 1833 ended up in the workhouse; this is the way in which Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century had to introduce new legislation and new mechanisms of social regulation in order to control an increasingly complex society. The publication of *Oliver Twist* began before the monthly publication of *The Pickwick Papers* ended. The two novels overlapped for nine month.

2-2-The Victorian period

Makati (2008:29) states that a social novel or social problem is an act of imagination which is the dominant social problem such as sex, race or class. A more specific example of social problems addressed in these actions is poverty, conditions in factories and mines, problems of child labour, violence against women and increased criminality. The Victorian era is considered to be a social age of criticism, revealing the causes that led to poverty, unemployment and common resentment. It is almost estimated that the first real social novels began to evolve around 1830. This is why the Victorian period can also be considered the Golden age of the novel, which Henry James described as complex in the aesthetic and psychological design wrought, the subtle balance of official and moral tensions.

John and Martin (2002) argued that the authors at that time drew attention to the details of the world of work and its mechanisms, but preferred to portray people physically and mentally injured because of their work. The main feature of the Victorian central narrative of the social narrative (1850-1880) was no longer an attempt to present solutions to the current social problems; it was a reflection of the golden era of British capitalism, and made the power of the system and the founders

responsible for many of the social order and not just ordinary people, Successful business victim. However, people such as Dickens expressed serious doubts about the unreasonable ideal of upward mobility. In the late Victorian social narrative (1880-1910), there was a new wave of accused elements and from there the so-called advanced slum story: mainly, as it may be delayed, bad living conditions.

Carter and McCray (2001) state that Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was the most representative literary figures of the entire Victorian era. Dickens says most of his novels are in London, and he knows London better than anyone else on Earth. He has dealt with comedy and criticized certain aspects of the Victorian settlement, in addition to the problems of society such as the poor. Wrote thirteen novels, received a good reception, but his reception was nothing compared to the international acclaim he received by the publication *The Pickwick*, which appeared in parts and English literature gave some of his most spectacular characters. But Dickens moves directly from England's point of view. He wrote about the social problems of young boys at *Oliver Twist* (1837-188) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-189); the two novels represent the suffering of children and the main theme of Dickens' writing.

2-3-The Impact of Industrial Revolution on England Environment and Life:

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the industrial revolution began in Europe and began to sweep the whole world. It has radically affected the various aspects of life, whether economic, political or social, by replacing workers in many professions with mechanical machines capable of carrying out their work. England was the first country in which the Industrial Revolution had emerged. The most important effects of this revolution were the development of the industrial sectors of cotton textiles and mining, as well as the invention of the steam engine, which caused a tremendous transformation of the economy at the time.

Carter and McRae (1989: 71) claim that the Industrial Revolution brought about profound changes in British society at the time, because the growth of London and other cities in Great Britain was a shift from a land-based lifestyle to a modern

economy based on industrialization and financial institutions. The economy during that time was changing from agriculture to industrial. In addition to poverty, disease and social problems, the European community suffered at that time from the economic depression that followed the Industrial Revolution.

2-4-The Theme of Suffering in Charles Dickens 'Literary works:

Gholami (2014: 5) claims that Charles Dickens is a novelist of the Victorian era to be greatly admired because of his ability to portray suffering, poverty and the poor during the industrial revolution realistically. *Oliver Twist*, hard times and are among his novels, which will illustrate the situation and the state of the lower class along against the stately life of the middle class and the aristocracy. He uses fiction as a way out of his constant fascination with the dark side of human nature. The treatment of crime by Charles Dickens was much more than an authorization device. It was a focal point for his deep interest in social problems and played an important role in his attempts to understand these social ills. His work was not limited to crime, but also raised questions about the poor law system and the living conditions of the working class.

The plight of the poor and their treatment in the workplace is the subject that Dickens particularly portrays in *Oliver Twist*. Oliver was orphaned immediately after his birth and became a parish child immediately. At the age of eight, he expelled from the church and taken to the poor house. It is clear that conditions in the workplace are intolerable as evidenced by Oliver's first experience. On the coarse steel bed, he cried to sleep. They call the poor go to sleep. The description of the bed confirmation of the rigor of the poor houses as proved by the Poor House Council of Guardians, the workhouse conditions should be harsh and less acceptable as those of prison. Dickens uses cynicism by praising tender laws in a favored country, but he criticizes the government of exploiting them and treating the poor as marginal members of society. Moreover, it evokes sympathy in the reader as imagined by an innocent child suffering from harsh hands. In this

way, Dickens achieves his goal; to engage the readers emotionally.

Gholami added that Oliver Twist and his companions suffered from the torture of famine for three months. At last they got so greedy and wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age.

2-5-Dramatic changes in lifestyle in 19 century

The impressive growth of cities in the first half of the 19th century led to the miserable living conditions for many people. Of course, the quality of life has been poor for centuries for many people in European cities, but the rapid urbanization associated with the industrial revolution intensified problems in the first half of the nineteenth century and made those miserable conditions clear. The Industrial Revolution changed the population of Great Britain in the late 18th century, which was only 7 million before the beginning. During the revolution, the number of inhabitants was 12 million in 1811. By 1851 a population of Great Britain had reached about 21 million because the movement of the population to the cities of the countryside to search work in the new factories. Therefore, it produced dramatic changes in lifestyle. Living conditions differed from the splendour of the middle class to lower-class workers.

Before the Government recognized housing as a concern of the nation, these institutions were in the hands of charitable associations and private companies. During the Industrial Revolution, thousands of new homes were built at cheap prices near the mines and factories. The conditions or quality of the houses were not of great concern to the factory owners. These houses were the first urban neighborhoods in England. The houses were small, and were very overcrowded. Families will take turns sleeping in the same bed, if they can afford one price. People sleep without a house, and fishermen sleep on their boats.

When the industrial revolution began in the 18th century, the vast majority of people lived in the countryside. But the growth of cities has coincided with the growth of the industry, and rapid

urbanization continues to grow in contemporary times.

3-0-Research Methodology

The study follows the thematic descriptive analytical approach for analyzing suffering in Dickens' novels. The data will be collected from selected novel, Oliver twist.

4-0-The analysis of the theme of suffering in Charles Dickens's Oliver Twist.

"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"

This passage, from Chapter 2, describes the conditions in the workhouse to which the orphan Oliver has just been sent. The idea of this description is sides: first, to increase our sympathies for poor Oliver, who suffered much and his fellow unfortunates, and another side, to show Dickens's protest against the welfare idea and practice of donation in the England of that time. Before many years, issue of Oliver Twist, the British Parliament approved a contradictory modification to the people's poor-laws. This amendment stated that the

poor could have public help only if they took up stay in official workhouses and restricted by their controls. In these workhouses, husbands were separated from wives, and living conditions were often miserable. Embodied behind the establishment of workhouses were the assumptions that moral virtue finds in work, that work made importance to success, that economic failure was the result of laziness, and that, therefore, poverty was a sign of moral degeneracy. In Dickens's opinion, a charity based on this kind of assumption did far more harm than good to the material and moral conditions of its recipients. In this passage, and throughout the early chapters of the novel, he adopts a sarcastic, harshly satirical tone to make this point. Dickens, in fact, says the exact opposite of what he really means and does no more than state the truth. All of the conditions, especially suffering he describes did actually exist. Rather than exaggerating to make his point, Dickens relies on the inherent absurdity of the way English society treated the poor to show itself through his description.

"The houses on either side were high and large, but very old; and tenanted by people of the poorest class. [...] A great many of the tenements [...] which had become insecure from age and decay, were prevented from falling into the street by huge beams of wood which were reared against the tottering walls, and firmly planted in the road; but even these crazy dens seemed to have been selected as the nightly haunts of some houseless wretches for many of the rough boards which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from their positions to afford an aperture wide enough for the passage of a human body. The kennel was stagnant and filthy; the very rats that here and there lay putrefying in its rottenness were hideous with famine"

This passage from chapter 5, which shows good example of Dickens's reality and suffering, he describes the poorest part of the town without showing any words that expressing by it. Dickens's was interested with anything that deals with the suffering, poverty and poor people, he desired to shock people by explaining how the poor really lived

and suffered. In this quotation Dickens makes people like their houses, which every poor house expresses on his social condition. Also Dickens explained that people are inhuman, they're not even people, just nameless bodies.

"Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquility, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air and among the green hills and rich woods of an inland village! Who can tell how scenes of peace and quietude sink into the minds of pain-worn dwellers in close and noisy places, and carry their own freshness deep into their jaded hearts! Men who have lived in crowded, pent-up streets, through lives of toil, and who have never wished for change—men to whom custom has indeed been second nature, and who have come almost to love each brick and stone that formed the narrow boundaries of their daily walks—even they, with the hand of death upon them, have been known to yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature's face, and, carried far from the scenes of their old pains and pleasures, have seemed to pass at once into a new state of being."

In Dickens's time, England was rapidly becoming an industrial, urban society. Dickens's works are much deal with the social and psychological conditions and suffering, and he is known as one of the first famous civilian European writers. In this passage from Chapter 32, describing Oliver's sojourn to the countryside with Mrs. Maylie and Rose, the author revealed his profound doubt about the influence of urban life in the human character. This passage evaluates the purity and health of the rural environment and argues clearly that even a lifelong city-dweller has in his blood a faint longing for the new state of being to which nature can develop him. Dickens goes on to note that, in the country, even the poor people "are tidy and clean. The dirty, starvation and suffering that characterize urban poverty are not present in rural England. Given the eagerness of England's rural poor to migrate to the city, it seems unlikely that this evaluation is realistic. In many ways, Dickens's idealized vision makes him all the more clearly as an urban writer.

The man's face was thin and very pale; his hair and beard were "grizzly, and his eyes were bloodshot. The old woman's face was wrinkled, her two remaining teeth protruded over her under lip and her eyes were bright and piercing. Oliver was afraid to look at either her or the man, – they seemed so like the rats he had seen outside"

Dickens seems to want the reader to sympathize with them, by depicting these people who are suffering much, as miserable and poor. In this description, they rarely think that this human, and Oliver views that he can't empathize with them because they're more like animals than people.

"He'd be cheap with nothing at all, as a premium. Take him, you silly fellow! He's just the boy for you. He wants the stick, now and then: it'll do him good; and his board needn't come very expensive, for he hasn't been over-fed since he was born. Ha! Ha!Ha!"

This passage chapter 22, Dickens describes London, ironically as an ideal place where every young boy, who is not a complete fool and who normally must die in the streets, can live quite a comfortable life. But this fiction was not true at all. In fact the life of the very poor people in London was horrible as well and full of suffering. The most probable career which could be expected of a young boy coming from the countryside to London was to become a thief. He could steal handkerchiefs and other.

The worthy things and hopes that it will be enough to earn his living. He could also accompany housebreakers and open doors of the houses for them. If he was lucky enough, he had another possibility, to work in one of the dirty factories for many hours for the whole week and get only six or seven shillings as a wage and this also another kind of suffering. Young gentlemen from Fagin's gang are counterparts of Oliver. They were probably innocent as well, but criminal life taught them and forced them to mature before time. All of the small drink alcohol play cards and behave like adults. They regard their job as important and benefit for society. When Jack Dawkins is arrested his accomplices feel it as something like victory and fame. And Fagin

strengthens their opinions. However, they are experienced criminals they sink into childish nativity and believe this fairy tale. All these event represent a form of suffering.

*"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".*

This exchange takes place between Rose and Nancy in Chapter 40. It is one of the most emotionally heightened conversations in the novel, and it represents a sophisticated treatment of the moral and social issues that dominate the story. Nancy, a prostitute, embodies for Dickens all the degradation in which poverty and suffering can force otherwise good people. Rose, on the other hand, represents all the purity that comes from good breeding. Both women embody the feminine compassion that forces them to help Oliver who suffers much, that feminine compassion, maternal and sisterly when directed toward Oliver. In this passage, Dickens emphasizes the key role that environment plays in distinguishing vice from virtue and the good life of suffering: the same loyalty to a loved one that would be a virtue in Rose is a self-destructive force for Nancy. Though Nancy is compassionate and intelligent, she deflects Rose's attempts to save her from her life of crime and suffering. Her love for Sikes and her compassion for

Oliver together force her to sacrifice her own life and suffer much.

"I never knew how bad she was, till the fever came upon her, and then her bones were starting through the skin. There was neither fire nor candle; she died in the dark – in the dark. She couldn't even see her children's faces, though we heard her gasping out their names. I begged for her in the streets, and they sent me to prison. When I came back, she was dying; and all the blood in my heart has dried up, for they starved her to death. I swear it before the God that saw it, – they starved her!"

This passage shows us how the theme of suffering controls all novels and repeated every time, everybody in the novel suffers and suffering takes different form. Mr. Bayton is a poor man, telling to Mr. Sowerberry and Oliver over the body of his dead wife. When we read this passage we find two questions: why does he repeat "in the dark"? Obviously, she was in the dark when she died, that means there is no light, but repeating it makes us wonder if, he has a half-crazy, but the suggestion of Mr. Bayton that she died in the dark has more figurative sense, as well. The whole system leaves people in the dark. There is the second question: that Mr. Ayton is accused of starving her to death? By using the pronoun "they" again, that's something he repeats: "they starved her." Does he mean the authorities concerned? the neighbors in the poor neighborhood around him, the rich people who turn a blind eye to the suffering of others? All of society, if it's all of society, does that mean that the reader, too, shares some of the guilt of starving her.

"The shop-boys in the neighbourhood had long been in the habit of branding Noah, in the public streets, with the ignominious epithets of 'leathers,' 'charity,' and the like; and Noah had borne them without reply. But, now that fortune had cast in his way a nameless orphan, at whom even the meanest could point the finger of scorn, he retorted on him with interest. This affords charming food for contemplation. It shows us what a beautiful thing human nature may be made

to be; and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity-boy".

This passage from chapter 52, page 39-39 is significant for a few reasons. First, it exemplifies a theme that often comes up in the novel, that of the passing on of mistreatment. Noah, who has been looked down upon and mistreated for being a charity boy, rather than exhibiting empathy towards Oliver because of this, only takes advantage of the fact that he is now higher than somebody and so can mistreat him. Those who are badly off, just look for those who are worse off to mistreat. This passage is also important in that it is a great example of the deep suffering and sarcasm the narrator often uses when discussing the more hypocritical or immoral characters, who society often either rewards for or allows to get away with such hypocrisy and immorality.

5-0: Conclusion, Findings and Recommendation

5-1: Conclusion

Dickens through his representations of poverty he reflected a society that was indifferent and often scornful of the misery it saw in great numbers around it. It was a society that saw the poor and the deprived as a race apart. Dickens conveys the huge barriers to social reform, and the connection of wealth, and its continued repression of the poor, through his portrayal of the disinterestedness of the political class. Dickens gave the contemporary social picture and attacked the various vices of the Victorian age, as well as his life, although he hated the social system into which he had been born.

5-2-findings

1. Poverty and suffering were not the fault of the people who endured it, but rather, the fault of the establishment, including the government
2. The rich are unsympathetic to the poor
3. The Poor Law resulted in the middle and upper-classes paying less to support the poor and attacked the poorest, because it forced people into the horrible workhouses

4. People were essentially treated like prisoners; not human beings who were just unlucky enough to be born into poverty
5. Those who are forced into this criminal underworld are forced into poverty because of the problems in the system. Not only does it destroy their lives, but it also has a negative impact on society at large
6. Wealth and high school are not absolutely fulfilled our dreams or expectations
7. Many things that cannot buy by money, such as love, happiness and trust

5-3:Recommendations

1. Raise public awareness of education
2. Solve the problem of child labor
3. More study for Victorian era

References

Carter, R, and John M. The Penguin Guide to English Literature: Britain and Ireland, London: Penguin Books, 1996

Carter, R. and McRae, J. (2001). The Penguin Guide to English Literature. Britain and Ireland, London: Penguin Books

Gholami, Y (1997) A Social Study of Poverty in Charles Dickens Hard

John, H (2004). The economic basis of social class. London. Kelsey

John, J, (2008) The novels and popular culture. A Companion to Charles

Makati, P, (2008). A Critical Study of Charles Dickens' Representation of the Socially

McDowall, D, (1989). Illustrated history of Britain. Longman

Mitchell, S, (2009). Daily life of Victorian England. Second Edition. Great Britain

The definition of social criticism. Retrieved on 22/05/2014 at 10:18 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_criticism

The definition of social Retrieved on 26/05/2014 at 08:40 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_structure. 106-anfasse, Nathalie. "Grotesque but not

impossible: Dickens's novels and mid Victorian realism". 15 Juin 2004, consulte le 11 fevrier 2013.url : <http://erea.org>. revuse .

Jone, R (2012) Counting Down Dickens Geeatse novels number 10 Oliver Twist". 2012. Retrieved in 10 may 2013108 mailto:user_services@https://ebooks.adelaid.edu.au/o/orwell/george/Charl

Dickens/chapter1.html18-

<https://www.enotes.com> How does Dickens use literary devices in "The Signal-Man"?" eNotes, 18 Oct. 2017, <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-dickens-use-literary-devices-signal-man-606968>. Accessed 22 June 2019

Class conflict in Victorian society. Retrieved on 04/02/2014 at 0 1:00 from <https://www.boundless.com/sociology/sociology/the-development-of-sociology/classconflictand-marx>

The definition of Marxist. Retrieved on 12/02/2014 at 3:20from <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/slaughte>.The definition of Marxist

Industrial Revolution.Retrieved on 20/02/2014 at 9:30from www.bep.org/sites/vcleary/ModernWorldHistoryTextbook/IndustrialRevolution/IREffects.htm

The Victorian age as the age of criticism. Retrieved on 20/03/2014 at 00from <http://educationcing.blogspot.com/2012/08/victorian-criticism.html>.

Social novel. Retrieved on 22/03/2014 at 10:10 from <http://www.novelguide.com/reportessay/literature/novels/social-criticism-literature>.

<https://study.co>

<https://pcdreams.com.sg>