



THE DEPICTION OF REALISM IN OLIVER TWIST BY CHARLES DICKENS

Khayrullayeva Nodira Nematilloevna

PhD, docent BSU English linguistics department

Hamdamova Umida Nozim qizi

3rd year student, BSU

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14880690>

Abstract: This article explores the intricate depiction of realism in Charles Dickens' seminal work, "Oliver Twist." Set against the backdrop of Victorian England, Dickens employs a vivid narrative style that brings to life the harsh realities faced by the impoverished and marginalized. Through the experiences of the orphaned protagonist, Oliver, and a cast of vividly drawn characters, the novel critiques social injustices, including child labor, poverty, and the failings of the legal system. The article examines how Dickens utilizes detailed descriptions, authentic dialogue, and a stark portrayal of urban life to enhance the reader's understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the time. Additionally, it analyzes the interplay between realism and sentimentality in Dickens' writing, arguing that while he seeks to evoke empathy for his characters, he remains committed to an unflinching representation of their struggles. Ultimately, this study highlights how "Oliver Twist" serves not only as a compelling narrative but also as a powerful social commentary that continues to resonate with contemporary audiences.

Keywords: Realism, Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, Victorian England, Social injustice, Poverty, Child labor, Marginalization, Characterization, Urban life, Social critique, Empathy, Detailed descriptions, Dialogue, Economic conditions, Narrative style.

Abstract: Ushbu maqola Charls Dikensning "Oliver Twist" asarida realizmning murakkab tasvirini o'rganadi. Viktoriya Angliyasi fonida joylashgan bu asar, Dikensning qashshoq va marginalizatsiya qilingan qatlamlar tomonidan duch kelinadigan qiyinchiliklarni hayotga olib keluvchi jonli hikoya uslubidan foydalanadi. Yetim Oliverning tajribalari va rang-barang personajlar orqali roman, bolalar mehnati, qashshoqlik va qonun tizimidagi kamchiliklar kabi ijtimoiy adolatsizliklarni tanqid qiladi. Maqola, Dikensning batafsil tasvirlar, haqiqiy muloqot va shahar hayotining keskin tasvirini qanday qilib o'quvchining o'sha davrning ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy sharoitlarini tushunishiga yordam berish uchun ishlatishini o'rganadi. Shuningdek, maqola Dikensning yozuvlaridagi realizm va his-tuyg'ular orasidagi o'zaro aloqani tahlil qiladi, uning





xarakterlariga nisbatan empatiya uyg'otishga intilayotganini, lekin ularning kurashlarini ochiq-oydin tasvirlashga sodiq qolishini ta'kidlaydi. Nihoyat, ushbu tadqiqot "Oliver Twist"ni nafaqat qiziqarli hikoya sifatida, balki zamonaviy auditoriya bilan davom etayotgan kuchli ijtimoiy sharh sifatida ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Realizm, Charlz Dikkens , Oliverni burish, Viktoriya Angliya, Ijtimoiy adolatsizlik, Qashshoqlik , Bolalar mehnati , Marginalizatsiya , Qahramonlar tasviri , Shahar hayoti, Ijtimoiy tanqid , Empatiya, Batafsil tasvirlar , Muloqot, Iqtisodiy sharoitlar, Naratviy uslub.

Annotation: The Depiction of Realism in *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens.

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens masterfully employs realism to portray the harsh realities of 19th-century England, particularly concerning the lives of the poor and the injustices of the social system. Through vivid descriptions and relatable characters, Dickens highlights the struggles faced by the lower classes, emphasizing themes of poverty, child exploration, and moral corruption. The novel opens with the birth of Oliver in a workhouse, setting the tone for his grim existence. Dickens uses stark imagery to illustrate the squalid conditions of the workhouse system, which serves as a critique of the Poor Law of 1834. This law aimed to reduce the cost of looking after the poor but instead perpetuated their suffering. The depiction of Oliver's mistreatment and the dehumanizing environment reflects the broader societal neglect of vulnerable populations. Furthermore, Dickens populates the narrative with a cast of characters that embody various facets of society, from the benevolent Mr. Brownlow to the sinister Fagin. Each character serves to expose different societal flaws and moral dilemmas. Fagin, for instance, represents the corrupting influence of poverty and crime, while Nancy's tragic fate underscores the complexities of loyalty and redemption within a brutal world. The use of realism in *Oliver Twist* is not merely for dramatic effect; it serves a social purpose. Dickens aims to raise awareness about the plight of the impoverished and advocate for social reform. His detailed portrayal of urban life, criminality, and institutional failures invites readers to empathize with those marginalized by society. In summary, *Oliver Twist* stands as a poignant example of realism in literature, effectively capturing the struggles of its characters against a backdrop of systemic injustice. Through his compelling narrative and rich characterizations, Dickens not only tells Oliver's story but also sheds light on the broader social issues of his time, making a powerful statement about humanity and compassion.[1]

The Victorian England depicted by Dickens was marked by significant economic upheaval. The industrial revolution disrupted the established social



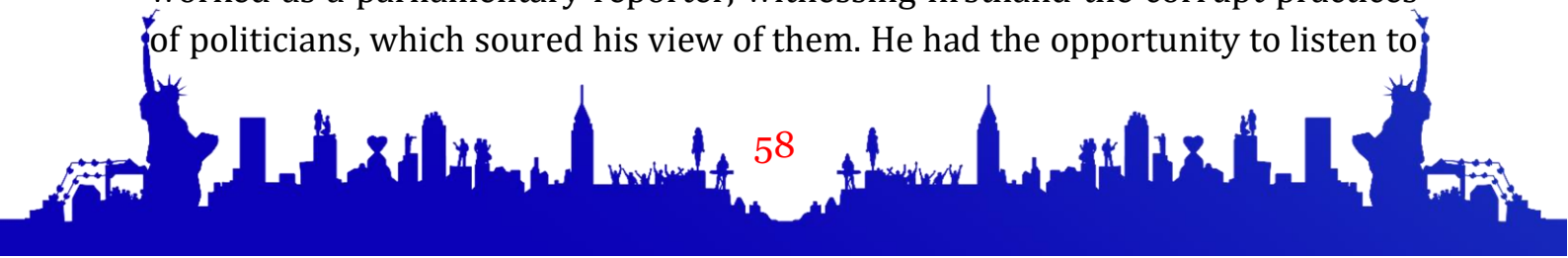


order, leading to a troubling gap between the wealthy and the impoverished working class. To fill their coffers, mill owners exploited their workers, who endured severe hardships. They received meager wages that were disproportionately low compared to the long hours they spent in factories. The plight of child laborers, especially orphans, was even more dire, as they lacked advocates to protest against the inhumane treatment they faced. These vulnerable children had no choice but to adapt to their circumstances, making them easy prey for the manipulative factory owners. Consequently, mill owners profited immensely from this exploitative arrangement, resulting in widespread chaos. Workers were dehumanized, viewed merely as "hands" expected to toil endlessly for the benefit of their employers. They labored for long hours in cramped, hazardous factories filled with dirt and grime. The narrative of **Oliver Twist** centers on an orphan boy who begins his life in a workhouse. After the shock of asking for more food, he escapes and joins a gang of pickpockets. The subtitle, "The Parish Boy's Progress," indicates that the novel serves as a platform for Dickens to critique the flaws of the workhouse system. Throughout his works, Dickens often highlights the stark divide between the rich and poor. In **Oliver Twist**, he vividly portrays the harsh working conditions faced by laborers, who are trapped in a cycle of suffering with no solution in sight. English society has become a factory, with people divided into two distinct groups: workers and owners. The impact of the industrial revolution was so profound that it permeated all aspects of society. People began to prioritize financial gain over human values, with the middle class focused solely on accumulating wealth at the expense of morality. Fundamental life values were disregarded, and materialism became the dominant pursuit. Dickens was a purposeful novelist, using his works to expose systemic abuses and advocate for the marginalized and oppressed. His novels often critique various corrupt social institutions, such as the boarding schools in **Nicholas Nickleby**, the court system in **Bleak House**, the manufacturing industry in **Hard Times**, the warehouses in **Oliver Twist**, and the authoritarian school authorities in **David Copperfield**. His advocacy is encapsulated in a speech he delivered in Birmingham in 1844: "If you would reward honesty, if you would give encouragement to good, if you would stimulate the idle, eradicate evil or correct what is bad education is one they need at the one efficient end." Dickens aimed for **Oliver Twist**, first published in monthly installments from February 1837 to April 1839, to shed light on the treatment of an innocent child raised in a workhouse system where he bore no blame. He illustrates how boys are





neglected and mistreated, experiencing such extreme hunger that one child threatens to consume another if he is not better fed. The harshness of the system is vividly illustrated in the account of Oliver's punishment for his simple request, which takes up a significant portion of the subsequent chapter. Oliver is vilified, threatened with severe punishments like hanging, and subjected to starvation, caning, and flogging in front of a group of other poor individuals. He is kept in solitary confinement in darkness for days and forced to sleep alongside coffins. When Dickens conceived and wrote **Oliver Twist**, new laws were just beginning to roll out across the nation. The workhouse system emerged after the Poor Law Act of 1834 was enacted, which negatively affected the elderly, sick, and impoverished. Instead of offering refuge to the marginalized, workhouses were treated more like prisons. The government's goal was to cut costs related to poverty by establishing a brutally deterrent regime. From then on, no cash support would be provided; the only alternative left for workhouse inmates was hard labor. Families were torn apart, possessions sold off, and children separated from their parents; heads were shaved, clothes boiled, and uniforms issued. The workhouse administration was overseen by self-satisfied and callous men, whom Dickens referred to as "the man in the white waistcoat," symbolizing the smug cruelty of the guardians in Oliver's workhouse. Dickens likely had firsthand knowledge of these conditions, as many specific details in **Oliver Twist** suggest he conducted thorough research before writing the novel. Generally, the workhouse system was harsh and unforgiving, treating the poor punitively as if their circumstances were entirely their own fault. The workhouse system was widely despised, and people did everything they could to avoid falling into it. Those who ended up there were often either extremely vulnerable or hardened individuals. The Victorian poor law system effectively confined people in a manner reminiscent of how the Nazis would have dealt with those they sought to eliminate. Dickens was deeply affected by the harsh realities introduced by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which faced significant criticism for its intent to reduce the costs associated with aiding the poor through a centralized workhouse system. This meant that relief—such as clothing and food—was only available in exchange for grueling labor. Families were divided by gender, and once admitted, they were not allowed to leave. Conditions in workhouses were so dire that only sheer desperation drove people to seek shelter there. Before fully committing to a career as a novelist, Dickens worked as a parliamentary reporter, witnessing firsthand the corrupt practices of politicians, which soured his view of them. He had the opportunity to listen to





various debates on public issues, revealing the emptiness of their attitudes towards their fellow citizens. Dickens used his novels as a platform to expose the corrupt practices and inhumane behavior of lawmakers that were rarely addressed in polite society and deserved condemnation for their injustice towards the oppressed classes. At just 25 years old, Dickens chose to share his insights through **Oliver Twist**, aware that individuals could fall into desperation, hunger, cruelty, and crime due to being born into poverty or facing dire circumstances. His own life experiences taught him much about these struggles, compelling him to empathize with those suffering in workhouses. His family had endured significant hardship, having been imprisoned in debtor's prison. Although their suffering continued there, it was still preferable to life in a workhouse since they were at least allowed to stay together—something largely denied to workhouse inmates. The harsh disciplinary measures imposed on Oliver reflect the practices common at the time in Cleveland Street. The official regulations of the Covent Garden workhouse explicitly prohibited second helpings of food, highlighting the similar conditions Oliver faced, which underscore his connection to the realities of London's workhouses. Oliver's well-known plea, "Please sir, I want some more," repeated on multiple occasions, illustrates the dire situation of the original workhouses that heavily influenced Dickens in writing **Oliver Twist**. While the workhouse was a confined space, it was not entirely isolated; the events occurring within its walls had a significant impact on the surrounding community, including the area where Dickens' family lived. The numerous windows at the front gate overlooked the street, allowing passersby to see faces behind the glass and possibly hear voices, reinforcing the link between Oliver's workhouse and the Cleveland Street workhouse nearby. For instance, Oliver's brown cloth cap resembles the uniforms worn at the Cleveland Street workhouse. [2]

It is well-documented in the biography of Dickens by Ionforester (1872) that at just 12 years old, Dickens was forced to work in Warren's blacking factory, pasting labels on bottles after his father was imprisoned for debt. This experience left a lasting mark on him throughout his life, shaping many of his successful novels, including **Oliver Twist**. He viewed this period as both humiliating and a descent into the immoral world of London's underclass, reflecting on how easily he could have become "a little robber or a little vagabond" without any care for his well-being. In the preface to **Oliver Twist** in 1841, Dickens expressed his desire to depict "little Oliver" as someone who embodies goodness despite adverse circumstances and ultimately triumphs.[4]





Dickens' focus on pickpockets, prostitutes, murderers, and burglars shocked many readers who were unprepared for these characters to be portrayed sympathetically throughout the narrative. In that same preface, he acknowledged that it was shocking to depict characters drawn from London's most criminal and destitute populations—like a thief or Fagin, a receiver of stolen goods, and young pickpockets and prostitutes. He aimed to portray them in their true form, revealing their struggles as they navigated the grim realities of life, haunted by the looming threat of gallows. Many readers were taken aback by the somber tones of **The Pickwick Papers**, Dickens' first novel, which was followed by **Oliver Twist**, presenting an even darker picture. As Dickens matured, he increasingly saw himself as a serious writer with a mission to advocate for the poor and homeless. In 1852, he told one of his critics, "Please do not think that I write merely to entertain or without purpose." [3]

In conclusion, Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist" serves as a profound exploration of realism, vividly portraying the harsh realities of 19th-century England. Through the lens of Oliver's experiences, Dickens sheds light on the social injustices faced by the impoverished and marginalized, effectively using his characters and settings to reflect the grim conditions of the time. The stark contrasts between the innocence of Oliver and the corruption of the adult world highlight the moral dilemmas inherent in society. Dickens' intricate characterizations and detailed descriptions not only engage readers but also compel them to confront the societal issues of his era, such as child labor, poverty, and the failings of the legal system. Ultimately, "Oliver Twist" stands as a testament to the power of realism in literature, urging readers to empathize with those who suffer and advocating for social reform. Through this timeless narrative, Dickens not only entertains but also educates, leaving an indelible mark on the literary landscape and inspiring future generations to reflect on the importance of compassion and justice in society.

Reference:

1. International Journal of Environment, Agriculture and Biotechnology Vol-9, Issue-3; May-Jun, 2024
2. Realism in Oliver Twist Shilpi Singh, Dr. V.B.Srivastava
3. Collins, Philip. **Dickens and the Modern World**. London: Macmillan, 1970.
4. Staveley, Helen. "The Realism of Oliver Twist: A Study of Social Class and Childhood." **Victorian Literature and Culture**, vol. 31, no. 2, 2003, pp. 365-380.
4. Kestner, Joseph A. **The Political Economy of Charles Dickens**. New York: Routledge 1996.

