

**Sudan University of Science and Technology**  
**College of Graduate Studies**



**Charles Dickens'**  
**Contribution to Victorian Social Reform**  
**Through his Novels**

**مساهمة شارلس ديكنز في الإصلاح الاجتماعي الفيكتوري من**  
**خلال رواياته**

**A Thiss Submitted for the Degree of Ph.D. in English Literature**

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**Almighty Allah says:-**

And they ask you,(O Mohammed), about the soul. Say. “The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind has not been given of knowledge except a little.”

Al-Isra, 85

## **Dedication**

*To my beloved family.*

*To my deceased father whose continuous encouragement kindled my enthusiasm and determination to finish this research. I wish you were here.*

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## **Abstract**

Charles Dickens is internationally recognized as a literary genius who created the most memorable characters in English fiction. Though a Victorian, his writings are still of reference to our present time.

Dickens was greatly influenced by the Industrial Revolution and its adverse consequences. Hence his main focus was on the social conditions; including inadequate sanitary provisions, child abuse, and other social maladies of the time.

In this research, it is attempted to show that Dickens was an influential literary figure, whose contribution to social reform was considerable. His influence is manifest in his novels and the speeches that he delivered during his tours at home and abroad. Though he was an advocate of social reform, he offered no specific solutions. Nevertheless, it was through his great popularity as a writer and novelist that some important legislations were enacted to improve the social conditions and give the working class hope for a better life in Victorian England.

The research also underlines the fact that Dickens was an outspoken critic of the Poor Law and its administration, by focusing on the abhorrent conditions under which the poor lived or children were forced into labour. Leaning on his own terrible experience as a labourer child, he fiercely attacked the administration, and expressed his deep repugnance through the characters of his fiction, as reflected by *Oliver Twist*, and the abuse and exploitation that he suffered as a child.

Dickens' works were a kind of direct appeal to the society to take action against the exploitation of children and oppression of women. In addition to his novels, which he used to fuel social change, Dickens was actively



involved in charities which funded schools for the poor and reformation institutions for the prostitutes.

The research ultimately concludes with the proclamation that Dickens was not a mere fiction writer. His works were intended to serve the social causes of bringing about reform, and raising people's awareness of the untoward Victorian social conditions and urge the authorities to take measures to improve the situation. This is conveyed through Dickens' powerful depiction of the prevailing conditions.

Ultimately, it can be said that Dickens' writings had influenced the Victorian society and enhanced the call for social reform that England came to witness later on.

## المستخلص

يعتبر شارلس ديكنسُ عبقريةً أدبيةً عالمية خلقت شخصيات لا تُنسى في الرواية الإنجليزية. وبالرغم من أنه ينتمي إلى العهد الفيكتوري، فإن كتاباته ما تزال ذات صلة بوقتنا الحاضر.

لقد تأثر ديكنسُ كثيراً بالثورة الصناعية وآثارها السلبية. ولهذا كان التركيز الرئيسي عنده على الأحوال الاجتماعية ومنها الخدمات الصحية غير الكافية، وسوء معاملة الأطفال والظواهر الاجتماعية السلبية الأخرى في ذلك الزمان.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم ديكنسُ كشخصية أدبية مؤثرة والإقرار بأن مساهماته في الإصلاح الاجتماعي كانت كبيرة. وقد كان تأثير هذا من خلال رواياته؛ والأحاديث التي كان يدلي بها أثناء تجواله في إنجلترا و خارجها. وبالرغم من كونه داعياً للإصلاح الاجتماعي، فإنه لم يقدم حلولاً محددة.

و مهما يكن، فنظراً لشهرة ديكنسُ العظيمة ككاتب و روائي وانتقاده الحاد للأوضاع التي كانت سائدة أقرت تشريعات هامة بغرض تحسين الأحوال مما أعطى الطبقة العاملة الأمل في حياة أفضل خلال العهد الفيكتوري.

و يهدف البحث أيضاً إلي إيضاح حقيقة أن ديكنسُ كان ناقداً صريحاً لقانون الفقراء" و إدارته، و ذلك من خلال تركيزه على الأحوال التي كان يعيش فيها الفقراء أو الأطفال الذين يضطرون للعمل. و استلهاماً لتجربته الشخصية المروعة كطفل عامل شن ديكنسُ هجوماً شديداً على الإدارة و عبر عن بغضه الشديد لممارساتها من خلال شخصيات رواياته كما يتمثل في شخصية ألفر توست والإساءة والاستغلال الذين عاني منهما.

و قد جاءت أعمال ديكنسُ كنوع من المناشدة المباشرة للمجتمع ليوقف ضد استغلال الأطفال و اضطهاد النساء، بالإضافة إلى رواياته التي استخدمها لإبقاء جذوة الإصلاح الاجتماعي مشتعلة. و كان ديكنسُ نشطاً في الجمعيات الخيرية التي كانت تمول مدارس الفقراء و مؤسسات إصلاح العاهرات.

خُصَّ البَحثُ في النَهايةِ إلى أن ديكُنسُ لم يكن مجرد روائي، فلقد قصد في أعماله إلى خدمة القضايا الاجتماعية ونادى بإحداث الإصلاح المنشود و زيادة إدراك الناس للأحوال الاجتماعية الفيكتورية غير المواتية كما أنه حث علي اتخاذ الإجراءات لتحسين الوضع.

و لقد تم إيضاح ذلك من خلال تصوير ديكُنسُ القوي للأحوال السائدة، ما ساعد إلى درجة كبيرة في لفت انتباه المجتمع و الحكومة إلى الحاجة للإصلاح.

في الخاتمة يمكن القول أن كتابات ديكُنسُ كانت ذات تأثير في المجتمع الفيكتوري، فلقد عززت الدعوة إلى الإصلاح الاجتماعي الذي عرفته إنجلترا فيما بعد.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### 1.1 Literature and Its Purpose

Literature, like all other human activities, necessarily reflects current social and economic conditions. Class stratification was reflected in literature as soon as it had appeared in life. Among the American Indians, for instance, the chants of the shaman, or medicine man, differ from the secret, personal songs of the individual, and these likewise differ from the group songs of ritual or entertainment sung in community. In the Heroic Age, the epic tales of kings and chiefs that were sung or told in their barbaric courts differed from the folktales that were told in peasant cottages.

Class distinctions in the literature of modern times exist more in the works themselves than in their audience. Although Henry James wrote about the upper classes and Émile Zola about workingmen, both were, in fact, members of an elite. The ordinary people would prefer sentimental romances and “penny dreadful.” Popular literature had already become commercially produced entertainment literature, a type which today is also provided by television scripts.

The elite who read serious literature are not necessarily members of a social or economic upper class. It has been said of the most ethereal French poet, Stéphane Mallarmé, that in every French small town there was a youth who carried his poems in his heart. These poems are perhaps the most “elite” product of Western European civilization. But the “youths” were hardly the sons of dukes or millionaires. It is a curious phenomenon that, since the middle of the 18th century in Europe and in the United States, the majority of readers of serious literature as well as of

entertainment literature have been women. The extent of the influence that this audience has exerted on literature itself must be immense.

The subject of literature is nothing less than human life, human experience. Every poem, play or story deals with some aspect of human life and experience. It has sometimes been said that literature is like a mirror that reflect life for us.

In the ancient times literature used to depict morals and life as it is. The Greek and Roman philosophers believed that the purpose of literature should be didactic, i.e. its purpose is to teach morals and good behaviour. However, Literature is of great importance and is studied as a means that helps provide the ability to connect human relationships, and define what is right and what is wrong. Therefore, words are alive more than ever before.

Aristotle presented the first fully developed theory as to how literary art can and should function within society. With the ability to see the world with a pair of fresh eyes, it triggers the readers to reflect upon their own lives. Reading a material that is relatable to the readers may teach them morals and encourage them to practice good judgement. This can be proven through public school systems, where the books that are used tend to have a moral-teaching purpose. An example would be William Shakespeare's stories, where each one is meant to be reflective of human nature; including both the good and bad. Consequently, this can promote better judgement of situations, so that the readers do not find themselves in the same circumstances as perhaps those in the fictional world. Hence, literature is proven to not only be reflective of life, but it can also be used as a guide for the reader to follow and practice good judgment from.

The world today is ever-changing. Never before has life been so chaotic and challenging for all.

The real significance of Dickens writings goes beyond the eloquent phrasing, plot devices, characterizations and the sensitive handling of emotional human condition. The characters were contingents of England and were immersing in a perfectly observed and created world, full of conflicts and contradictions, inspiration and intrigue, love and loss, spitefulness and self-loathing and justice and truth.

Dickens' novels have become public property. They have been endlessly retold, adapted, imitated, and pirated on both sides of the Atlantic for a century and a half. Dickens is often seen as the quintessential Victorian and his novels have almost become synonymous with Victorian England. For he frequently based his characters on real people and used real places, particularly the streets and neighbourhood of London, as setting for his stories. The connection between his fictional world and the actual world of Victorian England has fascinated his readers. Like many writers, Dickens drew on his own life experiences to produce his stories. These stories were mainly focused on evil society, and through them he critically describes the new industries that forced children into labour, and the injustice of the courts when they were to resort to.

Conditions in England urged writers to be directly concerned with contemporary social issues that focus on class, gender, and labour relation, all of which were the cause of societal turbulence and growing animosity between the rich and the poor of England. Hence the novels of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were used as platforms for criticisms that called for social reform. Dickens was the foremost social reform writer as will be shown in this research.

England was moving steadily in the direction of becoming Europe's most stable and prosperous country. The industrial revolution, and the railway age made it possible to use steam engines in mines,

factories and ships. Small towns began to swell into smoky centres of manufacturing industry. All this was taking place under a government and legislature that were still narrowly restricted to the privileged few, who were wealthy by birth or becoming wealthy through commerce. Despite this industrial revolution, with all the factories, mills, mines. England was still an almost entirely agricultural country. The English countryside was a part of everyone's existence.

The industrial revolution, however, was just beginning to bring dirt and squalor, ugliness and crime, into the lives of the poor who were forced by the new circumstances to live and work in the mills and factories of the new towns. Labourers were unfairly treated without redress, women workers were ill-treated and underpaid, while children were often forced to work under abominable conditions. Society in the countryside was still effectively feudal. A small agricultural community was still more or less governed by the landlord or lord of the manor to whom rents were paid by the tenants of farms or cottages. No body in the rural community had much authority except for the local parson, or, to a lesser extent, the apothecary or surgeon.

Industrial advancement created social unrest and economic distress among the masses. While creating the privileged class of capitalists and mill-owners, the Industrial Revolution also brought in its wake the semi-starved and ill-clad class of labourers and factory workers who were greatly dissatisfied with their miserable lot. National wealth was increased but it was not equitably distributed. A new class of landed aristocracy and mill-owners sprang up. They looked with eyes of disdain and withering contempt on the lot of the ragged and miserable factory hands. Conditions of life held no charm for labourers and workers in the field; for they were required to dwell in slum areas with no amenities. To make things worse, and prospects of better life more dismal, the debtor's

prisons were legally established, to become the final destination for the poor lot who failed to pay their debts.

These changes and living conditions in 19<sup>th</sup> century England were illuminated through Dickens' writing.

As well, the deplorable conditions of labourers, miners, debtors, and prisoners soon caught the eyes of social reformers. The Victorian era came to witness vigorous social reforms and a line of crusading humanitarian reformers. It was an age of humanitarian consideration and social promotion for great numbers of the English people.

It is no wonder that during this age a considerable number of writers and philanthropic social reformers emerged with a new humanist attitude to life which was not bound by creed or dogmas.

In the works of Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, Carlyle and Ruskin, can be noticed the crusading zeal of the literary artist to bring about salutary reforms in the social and economic life of the English people.

The growing importance of the masses and the large number of factory hands gave a spurt to the Reform Bills, which heralded the birth of democratic consciousness among the people. The Victorian age witnessed the conflict between aristocracy and plutocracy, on the one hand, and democracy and socialism on the other. The advance in the direction of democracy was well-marked out, and in spite of the protests of Tennyson and Carlyle, its sweeping tide could not be stopped. The long struggle for personal liberty was decidedly settled, and democracy became the established order of the day. The king and peers were stripped of their power and left as figure-heads of a past history. The last vestige of personal government and the divine right of rulers disappeared, the House of Commons became the ruling power in England and a series of new reform bills rapidly extended the suffrage until the majority of the



English the people were given the right to choose for themselves those who would represent them.

Dickens, one of the greatest writers in English literature, wrote about these issues and the problems that the people of his time faced. He made use of his own life experiences and creatively to reflect the conditions under which the people lived.

The selected three novels, *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, and *Hard Times* are illustrative of Dickens' emotional response to these conditions. His writings may well be considered as a warning against the conditions of his time. He wanted people to be aware of what was happening to them and put things right.

Dickens was considered the greatest novelist of his time. As a social reformer, he became one of the most famous writers in Europe and America. When he visited America to give a series of lectures, his admirers followed him wherever he went, and the speeches he delivered may well be likened to that of the fans of a superstar today.

He became well known the world over for his characters and. Some considered him the spokesman for the poor in view of his intense human sympathy, his unsurpassed emotional and dramatic power and his zeal for struggling against the evils and abuses that befall the oppressed class or helpless individuals.

Dickens made people aware of the terrible conditions which a considerable number of the English people lived under during the Victorian era, for he himself happened to experience those conditions. His own childhood was very much like that of many of his characters in *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*. The main focus in his novels is the poor people whose lives are reflection of his own misery and frustration during his childhood.

Close examination of Dickens' novels will provide a deeper understanding of the social condition of his time and his attitude towards the prevailing situation in England. Hence the attempt, to underline his reforming endeavours, which are the main objectives of this research.

This study will further confirm Dickens' warnings against industrialization and its inhumane nature. It attempts to substantiate the assertion that he was a social moralist writer who was intent on exposing the harsh reality of the Industrial Revolution. Even though he belongs to the middle class, he expressed great sympathy with the plight of the poor. He sought to make his readers aware of the terrible conditions under which people lived.

Dickens paid special attention to children whose lives were a constant reminder to him of his miserable childhood and his deep sense of the injustice and oppression that he suffered as a labouring boy. A victim himself, Dickens vehemently attacks child labour. In addition to being deprived of education; the children were subjected to injuries at the factories where they had to work hard and for long and get little pay. This is particularly obvious in *Oliver Twist*, in which he fiercely attacks the Poor Law Act and the workhouse system, for the harsh conditions under which the children had to work.

Though a male writer, Dickens' representation of female characters is employed to convey some views that were related to gender issues during his time. He is inclined to conform to the Victorian gender construction which is geared towards the pure and gentle woman. However, he is hostile to "fallen" women. Underlying this view, are undertones of criticism of the Victorian patriarchal system and a conciliatory attitude towards women. This will also be underlined in this research, for Dickens, unlike other Victorian male writers, was

sympathetic towards women in his society because he was aware of the exploitation and oppression that they were subjected to.

## **1.2 Significance of the Study**

The Victorian society was rampant with inequality, hunger, and poverty. Dickens wrote his novels as an indictment of his society and a plea to it.

The significance of this research lies in the fact that it deals with important issues, including poverty in general, child labour and the injustice done to the poor. These issues are relevant to all times, worldwide, including our present modern time. The research is also of importance to the students of literature and university teachers as well. It is expected to be of use and help to all of them. Hence it can be used as a reference.

## **1.3 Questions of the study**

This thesis attempts to answer the following Questions:

- 1-What impact did the industrial revolution have on Dickens' novels?
- 2-Was Dickens' support for the working class justifiable?
- 3-What measures Dickens took to support the workers?
- 4- To what extent can it be assumed that Dickens wrote his novels under sudden emotional impulse?
- 5-To what extent does Dickens succeed to represent the suffering of people during the Victorian era?

## **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

The main purpose of this research is to underline Dickens' contribution to social reform in 19th century England through his novels. This is based on the presentation, discussion and analysis of his three selected novels: Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and Hard Times.

## **1.5 Objectives of the Research**

During Dickens' life time England witnessed rapid changes. As one of the greatest English novelists he combined his literary mind with a variety of social changes and interests. Some critics argue that he saw the novel as an important tool for social reform. Thus, he can be considered as a social critic and the representative novelist of the Victorian period. Child oppression is a recurrent theme in Dickens' works; and it can be attributed to the social ills and the injustice done to children during the Victorian era.

Through interpretation and analysis of the three selected texts (Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and Hard Times) it will be attempted to show the extent of Dickens' writings and how he contributed to bringing about reform in England.

Dickens is believed to conform to the writing conventions of his time; and a close examination of his three novels will show how he truthfully and realistically depicts the social conditions of his time, especially the miserable lives of the poor.

This research attempts to investigate and analyze Dickens' works and his contribution to Victorian social reform. The objectives of the research are as follows:-

To examine the influence of the Victorian age on Dickens's work.

To explain how Victorian literature focused on the masses.

To highlight how Dickens used his literary capabilities to criticize the Victorian society.

## **1.6 Research Method**

In this research the descriptive analytical method is used. The three selected novels (Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and Hard Times)

are presented, with the help of synopses. Then, they are discussed and analyzed, focusing on Dickens' views and ideas as can be deduced from three selected novels.

# CHAPTER TWO

## Theoretical Background and Literature Review

### Introduction

Pursue of reform can be for many reasons. One reason is to bring about a specific type of conditions; one may want to implement reforms that will change the current conditions for the better. Perhaps, to give greater voice to the under classes: in order to plan and implement social reforms in the country's economy. Another reason may be to ensure that the liberal moneyed classes will have control of policy in general. Or, the aim may be to roll back reforms, and entrust the reactionary aristocrats with ultimate power. Whatever the case may be, it seems that reform during the Victorian era was an inevitable development.

A reform movement is a kind of social movement that aims to make gradual change, or change in certain aspects of society, rather than rapid or fundamental changes. A reform movement is distinguished from more radical social movements such as revolutionary movements.

Reformist ideas are often grounded in liberalism, although they may be rooted in socialist or religious concepts. Some rely on personal transformation; others on small collectives, such as Mahatma Gandhi's spinning wheel and the self-sustaining village economy, as a mode of social change. On the other hand, Reactionary movements, which can emerge against any of these, attempt to put things back the way they were before any successes the new reform movement can achieve, or to prevent any such successes.

## **A. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1.1 Social Reform Movements**

The Social Reform system in the Victoria age was a mechanism that sought to emulate the wave of initiatives that aimed at curing the social ills during the latter part of that era. Historically, such reforms were often rejoined to halt the general practices that had been taking place for many years in short bursts; hence reform was often accomplished by private citizens and businesses, with little or no government intervention. These reforms were also extremely diverse, ranging from the commonly cited safety or health codes of the early 20th century, to the ill-fated and universally banned movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The historical facts about social reform are quite messy. For the sake of simplicity, it can be said that the Victorian system displayed only the most common reforms and ignored the private sector reforms , favouring the more easily managed state reforms. These reforms can be seen as helpful, or harmful, for, overall, it depends on one's personal attitude, regardless of public opinion which was mainly concerned with the cost and benefit of kinds of reform that might be brought about.

Despite the fact that the United States's size alone accounted for its eventual supremacy, and the British entrepreneur's lack of capital re-investment allowed Germany to gain ground, it was found that the "foot-soldiers of the industrial machine" were unfit and uneducated for battle against their rivals. The poor standard of potential recruits for the Boer War sparked the realisation that the defence and expansion of the Empire was at stake. Not only this, but there was the rise of trade union membership and socialist ideas which accounted for the establishment of fears of revolution. The Independent Labour Party was formed in 1893,

and it was obviously clear that a series of measures would have to be implemented to placate the populace.

Reform movements began to take place within the major political parties, and were accompanied by the newly empowered middle classes that began to feel uneasy. This was reflected in the literature of the time by writers such as Morris, Carlyle, and Ruskin who warned that traditional English freedoms were under threat from land-desecrating capitalists and that the dignity of labour must be re-affirmed. There were those of middle class origin who wished to see for themselves the problems that were faced by the poverty-stricken people, in an attempt to alleviate their suffering.

Charles Booth was such a man who accumulated wealth from his shipping interests, and was dismissive of contemporary anecdotal literature of the time, as it conflicted with his own experiences in London. Dismissing the Social Democratic Federation's estimate that one in four Londoners was in great poverty, as socialist propaganda, he decided to carry out a survey for himself. Seventeen years and seventeen volumes forced him to come to the conclusion that the SDF had, in fact, underestimated the problem.

Marx's social theory is based on what he called historic materialism, a conception of history worked out by himself and Frederick Engels. According to his theory, the ultimate forces in the evolution of social life, the ultimate causes that determine the evolution of morals are of an economic nature. They are to be found in the changes of the modes of production of the necessities of life. To a given mode of production and exchange of the necessities of life, correspond certain forms of social institutions and moral conceptions. These forms will prevail as long as the former continues to exist, though not always in their purity or in absolute sway, they have to contend with remainders of former



institutions and the germs of a slowly evolving new mode of life. This is quite obvious in the earlier stages of social life. But the more complex society becomes, the more will the objective causes of social evolution recede into the background, and subjective ones appear to determine its course. Notwithstanding the powerful subjective factor is in history, remains under the control of the working of the economic foundations of social life. This idea has been underlined by Marks (1897;10) ,who states:-

*“Even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the natural law of its evolution, it can neither jump over normal phases of its development, nor can it remove them by decree. But it can shorten and alleviate the pain of child-birth”.*

Wherever the industrial development reached certain points, it is bound to call forth social movements and economic changes. These economic changes will have revolutionise the brains of the people more than all the pamphlets and leaflets written in glowing terms and distributed broadcast by the young heroes who are prepared to risk freedom and life for a generous ideal.

Marks (1859; 3) has formulated the main principles of social evaluation- in his *Criticism of Political Economy*- as follows:-

*“A formation of society will not disappear until all productive forces are evolved for which it is wide enough, and new and higher systems of production will never be installed until the material conditions of their existence are hatched out in the very bosom of the old society. Hence humanity always sets itself only to solve problems it is capable of solving; for if you examine things closer you will always find that the problem arises only where the material premises of its solution exist already, or are at least in the process of being formed”.*

Marx was a revolutionary evolutionist. But he was far from revolutionary romanticism, which in the natural philosophy of Socialism light is a more important factor than heat. In (1850; 7) he wrote:

*“The minority puts into the place of the critical a dogmatic conception. To them not real existing conditions are the motive force of revolution, but mere will. Whilst we tell the workers, you must run through 15, 20, 50 years of civil wars and struggles, not only for changing the conditions, but for altering yourselves and for rendering yourselves capable of political supremacy, you, on the contrary declare: ‘We must at once capture power, or we may go and lay down to sleep.’ Whilst we explain, especially to the German workmen, how undeveloped the proletariat is in Germany, you flatter in the coarsest way the national sentiment and the sectional prejudice of the German handicraftsmen – a process which, true, is more popular. Just as the Democrats have made the word people, so you have made the word proletariat a fetish. Just like the Democrats, you substitute the revolutionary phrase for the revolutionary evolution”.*

In a way similar to Dickens', Marx criticized capitalism for its oppression of the poor, and the term “Marxism” that comes into use was based on the suggestion that industrialization polarized society into the bourgeois and the much larger proletariat, who were the working class, hence the conflict between the two classes as noted in The Communist Manifesto that Marx co- authored with Friedrich Engels. “The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, and new forms of struggle in place of the old ones”. Marx (1850; 8) indeed Marx saw the industrialization process as the logical dialectical progression of feudal economic codes, necessary for the full development of capitalism.

Marxism sympathizes with the working class or proletariat and espouses the belief that the ultimate interest of workers best matches those of humanity in general. Marxists are committed to a workers' revolution as a means of achieving human emancipation and enlightenment. The theory of Marxism promotes socialism which is a political and economic system in which everyone has an equal right to a share of a country's wealth and main industries which are owned and controlled by the government (Heilbroner).

Written during the same period as the development of Marxism and socialist thought, Charles Dickens' works were also concerned with the relationships between the workers and the industrialists, and the poor and the rich. Marxian analysis would attempt to look at the work as a highly mediated "reflection" of the social conditions. Good Marxist criticism addresses not only the content of a given text, but also its form.

In addition to Marxism, other theories such as Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution (1859) also emerged. Darwin's concept stresses competition for survival in a capitalist society in which only the capitalist have access to economic resources while the poor are deprived. Therefore, the lower class struggles to survive by resorting to crime; the women are reduced to prostitutes while children and men are subjected to low paying jobs such as factory workers, dustmen and chimney sweepers.

Darwin's concept of "struggle for survival" has been translated into "survival of the fittest" was also known as "Social Darwinism" after it was developed into a theory by nineteenth century philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Spencer applied the theory of natural selection to social, political and economic issues, which was further adopted by Victorian writers such as George Elliot, or even earlier in the century, by authors like Jane Austen who incorporated it into their novels.

After 1890, social reformers used Darwinism to advocate a stronger role for government and the introduction of various social policies. Their movement became known as Reform Darwinism. Which argued that “Human beings need new ideas and institutions as they adapt to changing conditions” Darwin (1859; 20).

Living conditions varied from the splendour of the middle class to the squalor of the lower class labourers. Social commentators such as the Webb’s, and the Hammonds, and novelists such as Charles Dickens stressed the “rapidity of change and the terrible effects of industrial transformation upon the living standards of the masses” Hudson (992; 12).

In contrast to the middle class grandeur, the lower class lived in small overcrowded houses where poor sanitation led to fatal diseases such as cholera, typhoid and small pox. A large number of the working class also died from chest infections caused by the dust from mines and smoke from factories, while some children and men died at the factories due to accidents, mutilations and poisonous chemicals. Dickens’ novels, particularly Bleak House and Hard Times, specifically illustrate the living conditions of the working class.

Fortunately, the standards of living for the poor began to advance after the government passed public health acts in 1872 which controlled sanitation, hygiene and setting of boundaries on construction of homes. Further, human relations were altered by the people’s preoccupation with the accumulation of wealth during the Industrial Revolution. This was noted by Thomas Carlyle “how wealth has more and more increased and at the same time gathered itself more and more into the masses, strangely altering the old relations and increasing the distance between the rich and poor.” Hudson (1826; 10)

The kindnesses, goodwill, trust and communalism that existed during the pre-industrial era were replaced by “enmity, suspicion and distrust” between masters and workers (Tufnell Hudson 10). Consequently, as Carlyle observes, that the rich and poor become more separated, the masters do not personally acquaint with the workers as evidenced by Dickens in *Hard Times* whereby the labourers are also called the “Hands”, which confirms the indifference of the capitalists towards their employees.

During the Industrial Revolution, there were limited educational opportunities for children; their parents sent them to work. Child labour became an integral part of the system as the children were far less paid than adults. They worked under terrible conditions and for long hours with poor lighting, bad ventilation and without protective clothing.

However, with social outcry and reports of child abuse, laws prohibiting child labour and the factory acts in 1864 stipulated that no child under the age of twelve was to be employed as a factory worker. Unfortunately, some of these reforms were implemented long after people like Charles Dickens had gone to work as factory labours under untoward conditions.

Even though the Industrial Revolution brought an economic boom to the middle class in Great Britain and the rest of Europe, the poor whose existence was overshadowed by the success of the middle class were crushed. In Dickens’ novels there is depiction of the slums of London and its poor inhabitants the corruption of its society.

Thomas Hardy displays a kind of reformist inclination when he criticized certain social constraints that endangered people's lives in the 19th century. As a realist writer, he expressed the view that the current rules hindered the lives of all involved. In *two on a Tower*, he opposed

these rules. The novel is intended to overcome class- based boundaries of love.

It may be appropriate here to say that Dickens had but the most elementary knowledge of political economy as such. Indeed, he appears to have shared the old and not too accurate idea that political economy was a dry-as-dust hobby, in which sociologists and other uninviting people constantly speculate. However, he vowed emphatically that he shared Ruskin's view that no scheme of life, no political organization of industry, was or would be complete if it did not provide that all labour should only be pursued under conditions which would allow human qualities full play and which would promote the whole round of human happiness. Ruskin's full, final conception of political economy as a science of human welfare included within its scope not merely the processes by which men gain a livelihood, but all human efforts and satisfactions.

Dickens was not the exponent of any particular theory of general constructive reform. His teaching was limited to emphasizing the necessity for better sanitation and housing and education. He denounced the evils of landlordism, the poor law, child labour, the prison system, gambling, slavery, and other particular social defects. After all, he became the prose-prophet of the cause of social reform itself, and the firm upholder of that which alone is the assurance of its ultimate success.

At one time Dickens urges that our primary duty is to help in the uplifting of the community at large"; at another is bespeaking "your enlightened care for the happiness of the many ".At another, he quotes favourite strophes from Tennyson's Palace of Art and Lady Clara de Vere, in which the same lesson is taught. Always, the message is the same—the inalienable right of all men to equality of opportunity for social service and self- development.

In 1869, at a great gathering in Birmingham, Dickens declared, "I will now discharge my conscience of my political creed, which is contained in two articles, and has no reference to any party or persons. My faith in the people governing is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in the people governed is, on the whole, illimitable."

Some people George Gissing, believed that Dickens was never a democrat, and that in his heart of hearts he always held that to be governed was the people's good. However a few months later, Dickens refuted this, and declared that his faith in those who were governing the people was small and his faith in the great mass of the people who were governed was boundless. The declaration was not that it was " good to be governed " in the narrow sense in which the word is used, but that he had the profoundest belief that in spite of the yoke of class government, the people, the great mass of toiling, sinning, erring people, would yet work out their own salvation.

### **2.1.2 The Victorian society**

Until the late 1940's the British society had retained a rigid class structure, with the educated middle and upper classes tending to believe in their own moral and cultural superiority over the working classes. Proper models of behaviour were seen to emanate from this section of society, including correct pronunciation, table manners, appropriate dress and even the courting of wedding partners. With few exceptions, the holders of power and authority came from an upper class background and had a public school education. They saw themselves as the guardians of culture, and those lower down the social order seldom questioned their position. It was a social and cultural hierarchy that was largely self-policed, with members of different classes rarely willing or able to move to alternative social groupings. It was expected that people would

conform to the values of their peer group, and any attempt to transcend this hierarchy was restricted by social convention.

### **2.1.2.1 Historical background**

It was apparent that England was steadily becoming Europe's most stable and prosperous country during the Victorian age. The industrial revolution brought about great changes. There was great progress by the use of steam engines in railways as well as in factories and ships. Small towns were beginning to swell into smoky centers of manufacturing industry. All this was taking place under a government and legislature that were still narrowly restricted to the privileged few, who were wealthy by birth or becoming wealthy in commerce.

Despite the industrial revolution, with the factories, mills, mines and workshops, that emerged everywhere, England remained as a largely agricultural country. The English countryside was a part of everyone's existence. The industrial revolution, however, was beginning to bring dirt and squalor, ugliness and crime, into the lives of the poor who were forced to live and work in the mills and factories of the new towns. Labourers were being unfairly treated without redress, women workers were also ill-treated and underpaid, while children were often overworked under abominable conditions.

The Society remained under the control of the effectively feudal system. The small agricultural communities were still, more or less, governed by the landlords or lords of the manors to whom rents were paid by the tenants of farms or cottages. None of the rural community members had much authority, except for the local parson, or to a lesser extent an apothecary or surgeon.

### **2.1.2.2 Literary background**

By the end of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a considerable number of the English people had become avid novel-readers. Theatres



were regarded disreputable, possibly even immoral. Despite the fame and popularity of figures such as Byron, the greater demand by the people was for stories. Women had already triumphantly demonstrated their ability to compete successfully with their male counterparts; including. Mrs Radcliffe (1764-1823), Fanny Burney (1752-1840), Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849) and Jane Austen (1775-1817).

Coupled with the rapid rise in the popularity of the novels, was the growth of a moneyed, leisured and educated middle class reading public, and an increase in the number of circulating libraries. Serialization was to some extent an artistic strain on the novelists, but many major works, particularly those by Dickens, Thackeray and Hardy were first published as of the call for social reform.

The novelists of the first half of the century identified themselves with the age which requested the triumph of Protestantism. They shared a specific climate of ideas, feeling, and assumptions, and accept the idea of progress without much questioning. The age represented the triumph of Protestantism. The taboo on the frank recognition and expression of sex had come into existence slowly, hence the abandonment of Fielding.

Later on, the novelists began to question and criticize by displaying a kind of hostility to the dominant prevalent assumptions.

The character of scientific discovery was seriously disturbing to the 19<sup>th</sup> century minds. Instead of providing evidence that the universe was both stable and transparent to the intellect, it showed the universe to be incessantly changing and probably governed by the laws of chance. After the publication of *The Principles of Geology* (1830-3) by Charles Lyell and later *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) by Charles Darwin, many intellectuals were led into religious disbelief, or into some form of personal religions which, though they might contain elements of Christianity, were essentially anthropological.

David Hume's sceptic philosophical *Treatise on Human Nature*, offered a challenge for reformulation by Immanuel Kant, the German philosopher of Scottish descent. Another Scot, Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), made German thought widely known in Britain, Goethe being the chief influence. Carlyle led a new spirit of reform, a desire for individual fulfillment and liberation, "the religion of hero worship" or cult of great men, a reaction against the principle of laissez-faire and the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and James Stuart Mill. His views were rehanged to inspire the stream of "social problem" novels between 1830 and 1860. Most notable among those writers who fell under the spell were Elizabeth Gaskell, Disrael and Dickens.

### **2.1.3 Victorian era of social reform**

As the social consequences of industrialization became more apparent, so did the need for government oversight of working and living conditions in the mushrooming industrial cities. Many social reformers believed that the government should restrict the influence of powerful individuals. Others believed in the philosophy of self-help, which came to be borrowed as title of a mid-century best-seller by the social reformer Samuel Smiles. In his 1859 work, Smiles presented short, inspirational biographies of famous men and urged his readers to improve their own lives by following these examples.

The underlying belief of Victorian society was in progress—that things were better than ever before and could be made better still. This belief was the impetus for thousands of voluntary associations that worked to improve the lives of the poor, both at home and abroad. It also underlaid the charitable foundations created by wealthy benefactors and the public philanthropies of some of the greatest industrialists. Social experiments were conducted by individuals such as factory owner Robert Owen, who founded utopian communities in which wealth was held in

common. Novelists such as Charles Dickens were ardent social reformers who brought the intolerable conditions of the workhouses and the factories to the attention of the public in their books. Dickens's novels *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839) and *Hard Times* (1854) are examples of this kind of literature.

### **2.1.3.1 The Poor in perspective**

The Poor Law Act of 1834 was a system of laws which was introduced in England and the rest of Britain to provide public relief under a system which required that all those who needed assistance such as the widows, the sick and the unemployed, had to be accommodated at the workhouses. The act contained no clause that would permit for harsh treatment of the poor. Nevertheless, the fact was that it is the commissioners of the Poor Law Act who established the policy of brutality as pointed out by S. Robert (1898;67) "These commissioners, three in number and with extensive powers to form and supervise the newly created poor law unions, wished local guardians to give relief to able – bodied paupers only if they entered a workhouse".

This raised concern for the sick who were most likely to be forced into labour despite their physical condition. The workhouses were institutions in which the poor workers were housed in order to receive some relief, thus it was called "indoor relief" (Roberts, 98). At the workhouses one could find men, women, children, the old and sick who were allocated specific workhouses by the parishes in the districts to which they belonged. For example, a poor man or family living in Boston was expected to be admitted to a Boston workhouse as directed by a parish council or "beadle."

The rise of capitalism brought obvious prosperity within the middle class. Nonetheless, the Industrial Revolution was a period of immense poverty among the majority of the English citizens. Despite claims that

industrialization created employment, one should also bear in mind that the move from rural to urbanized areas must have economically affected a large number of people, for there would be high competition to survive in a capitalist society. Some people managed to become members of the middle class or the bourgeoisie, while others became skilled artisans, tradesmen and professionals. However, not every member of society belonged to the middle class, since there were people who belonged to the lower class and who were mostly unemployed, hence they were labeled by the Victorian middle class as “paupers”, a class of people who received the poor relief as stipulated by the Poor Law. The “paupers” were usually people who were not only unemployed or sick, but recipients of insufficient wages.

Prior to the Poor Law Amendment Act, relief was distributed to the poor citizens of the English society whether employed or not. However, in 1834, the Act implemented a new dimension whereby anyone who needed relief was required to become a member of a workhouse and they had to work in order to receive assistance. However, that outdoor relief still continued and the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws of 1832 – 1834 emphasized that outdoor relief to the able – bodied poor was a “master evil of the present system” (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws Report 279). From the orthodox poor law administrator’s perspective, aid in the form of wages was a serious crime because some of these people were employed; henceforth it upset the labour market (Rose, 607). The Royal Commission stipulated that outdoor relief was to be stopped and assistance was to be paid to “well regulate workhouses” (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws Report, 262). The question still remains, whether this was a plausible solution, since the outdoor relief payment still continued, which fact can be seen as an indication of the failure of the central authority.

The withdrawal of outdoor relief was further enforced by the government and the task was given to political Poor Law Commissioners who issued orders to Boards of Guardians, who were the custodians of poor relief. Hence, the issuance of the Outdoor Relief Prohibitory by a General Order.

### **2.1.3.2 The Living conditions of the poor**

During the Industrial Revolution, the poor were living under squalid conditions, despite the economic boom that the English society seemed to enjoy. In the early and mid-nineteenth century periods' the poor, the lowest class of society and providers of the required labour, did not benefit from the profit which they managed to generate through their hard work and toil. Although greater emphasis has been placed on the positive impact of industrialization, one cannot ignore the distress and social anxiety among the poor. It was the middle class, or rather the 'bourgeoisie' who consumed the profit, while the working class sacrificed their humanity. It is also important to note that urbanization due to the industrial developments was a double edged sword because of the "presence of abject poverty and its contrast with the affluence of the relatively rich, of the seeming degradation of the physical environment and massing of people into overcrowded cities; and of the worsening of relationships between the poor and rich..." Alick observed that it was only towards the end of the century that the lives of the poor greatly improved after the issuance of laws that monitored their living conditions and the health acts which improved the sanitation at the workers' houses.

### **2.1.3.3 Child labour**

Child labour is the employment of children under the age of eighteen and forcing them to working under conditions which harm them physically, mentally, and morally, and deprive them of access to education. Alexander Ganse and DabinChang, described child labour as

the employment of children in industries. It was also harmful because it increased illiteracy, and caused diseased and crippled children.

Child labour has been perceived as a product of the Industrial Revolution in Britain; for the massive industrial growth and productivity required a large amount of human labour and the cheapest available manpower was children who could easily be underpaid. In England, most of the child labourers were orphans or from poor families that were assigned to the workhouses. Consequently, child labourers were subject to exploitation, physical injuries and even death. In 1830, Richard Oastler vehemently wrote against Child Labour in *The Leeds Mercury* to say:

“Thousands of our fellow creatures are at this very moment existing in a state of slavery more horrid than are the victims of that hellish system of Colonial Slavery. These innocent creatures drawl out unified their shortbut miserable existence. The very streets of our towns are every morningwet with the tears of innocent victims at the accursed shrine of avarice,who are compelled not by the cart whip of the negro slave driver, but bythe dread of the equally appalling thong or strap of the over looker, to hasten half – dressed, . . . to those magazines of British infantile slavery,

The worsted mills of the town of Bradford.” Styal Mill (1850; 7)

The cruelty of child labour paralleled slavery, a system which brutally treated its subjects. It is evident that children were exploited: As Yancy(1854;34) described them, “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”.

During the Industrial Revolution, most of the child labourers were forced to work in factories on the urgent request of their parents or workhouse guardians As an industrially developing nation, Britain needed a sizable body of cheap human labour regardless of age and gender, in

order to accelerate productivity and development of the country. Nevertheless, despite the need for boosting the economy the means were inhumane, because of resorting to child labour. It was evident that “childhood was being sacrificed to the expansion of Britain’s textile industries”. It can safely be claimed that “during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution the employment of children on a vast scale became the most important social feature of English life, and the prosperity of the English manufacturers was based upon children’s victimisation and misery.

During the Victorian period, most of the lower class members of the English society were living in poverty and their children were either forced, or felt obliged to work in the factories in order to supplement the family’s income. Obviously, the fact was that economic conditions forced poor children into working, sometimes as hard and long as their parents. Even the British Government was thought to have overlooked child labour, a fact which was admitted by Altick who believed that the

Parliament itself claimed: "that a child was more useful to his family working: most children began working at the age of seven and were not allowed to leave the factory until they were twenty – one. They had to sign contracts called indentures that virtually made them the property of the factory owner.

A miner working at cotton mills, usually as a “scavenger,” whose task was to brush and sweep under the spinners and the piecers, was under the danger of being run over or caught by the wheels of the machines. In addition, the job of “chimney sweeper” required a child to climb up the narrow tunnels of chimneys and sweep out the trapped dust and smoke. As depicted by Blake “So your chimneys I sweep and soot I sleep”, As is evident in his “The Chimney Sweeper” the young children

were employed to clear the soot from chimneys, and chimney sweepers had to be small enough to fit into confined space.

However, towards the end of the century, it was evident that child labour was in decline, due to reforms that prohibited child labour as a result of the criticisms that were made against this practice. Among those writers who were aggressively critical of the system is Charles Dickens.

#### **2.1.3.4 Changes for the better**

It took time for the government to decide that working children ought to be protected by laws, for many people did not see anything wrong with the idea of children's work to earn a living. They felt that parents had a right to send their children out to work. People such as Lord Shaftesbury and Sir Robert Peel worked hard to persuade the public that it was wrong for children to suffer health problems and to miss out on schooling due to work.

#### **2.1.3.5 Education**

The provision of education in England was improved greatly by a series of laws that made basic education available to all children.

The 1870 Education Act set up school districts. Local rate payers were asked to build a primary school in an area where one did not already exist. The local board had the right to compel children to attend these schools and to charge a nominal fee. By 1874 over 5,000 new schools had been founded. In 1880 education became compulsory up to the age of 10 (raised to 12 in 1899) and in 1891 it was made free.

However, the absence of real reform in the secondary sector meant that education was only available up to the primary level. Hence, Britain could be regarded as lagging behind Germany and France.

In 1902 the Education Act greatly improved the situation. It provided for the funding of secondary schools out of local rates which helped to obtain grants from the central government. In 1907 a



scholarship scheme made it possible for the bright children from poor backgrounds to join secondary school. By 1914 Britain had a well-organised system of education.

#### **2.1.3.6 Education of the poor**

Doubtless, education is vital for every human being as they go through the stages of development. In Victorian England, it was believed that the training to be obtained in primary and grammar school would inhere as much in attitude as in the acquisition of skills fundamental to future employment.

However, not every child had the opportunity to go to school or receive at least some form of education. Poverty was one of the major causes that prevented a large sector of children from joining education. In nineteenth century Britain, there was a substantial number of children from poor families who could not go to school because their families could not afford paying the fees.

To the poor, the education system was inefficient and could offer very little. This is clearly depicted in Dickens' *Great Expectations*: “Mr Wopsle’s great aunt kept an evening school in the village; that is to say, she was a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity, who used to go to sleep from six to seven, in the society of youth who paid two pence per week each . . . . and Mr Wopsle had the room upstairs, where we students used to overhear him reading aloud in a most dignified and terrific manner. . . .”

The parody of Mr Wopsle’s great aunt’s evening school provides a truthful description of the type of education that was provided for the lower class. Pip tells that he learnt the alphabet from Biddy and neither from Mr Wopsle nor his aunt, which means neither of them, were doing their duty of educating the keen learners.

Another reason for the great number of unschooled children was that the lower class generally did not acknowledge the importance of education: to the great majority of parents, schooling appeared as a kind of idleness. The Victorian society, particularly the lower class believed that education, or book learning, would not help in moulding a potential agricultural labourer.

A survey carried out in Glasgow revealed that “most boy labourers and learners, took up six jobs at least when they were between fourteen and twenty. Most youth during their adolescent years would have been employed for more than five years. This means that most of these juveniles never had the chance to attend school, for they spent most of their time moving from one job to another.

Although some children went to school, their attendance always fluctuated, as the boys would leave the classroom to earn money while the girls would do domestic work.

In the nineteenth century, there was a minimum number of children who went to school because they believed that “working earned them money while school earned them nothing” (Altick; 250). Statistics reveal the high level of illiteracy within the community of children of the lower class. Deprivation of going to school was obviously due to the children’s poverty and the insufficient funds that the government allocated for education.

Due to deprivation of education, most of the socially disadvantaged people were forced into the world of crime and prostitution as means of survival. This is evidenced by *Oliver Twist*’s criminal friends, Fagin and his crew.

The only education that the poor child received was either that of being beaten into submission by the workhouse authorities or employers: “In *Oliver Twist*, the reproach on children’s education is extremely

apparent. Oliver, when raised by Mrs. Mann almost receives no education at all. What he knows is only to obey “the elder lady” if Oliver hopes to escape from her cruel ‘hands and sticks’ ” (Jiang; 21).

The education that the paupers received was that of apprenticeship only. They were taught about the trade in which they were involved such as chimney sweeping, blacksmith or a locksmith, just as Pip was to be apprenticed to Joe.

#### **2.1.4 Early social welfare reforms**

The Industrial Revolution and the growth of towns had created a number of serious social and health problems. A number of measures were brought in to alleviate the conditions of ordinary people: The Public Health Act of 1872 set up Health Authorities throughout England. However, the operation of the Act was seriously hampered by a lack of money. A further Act in 1875 increased funding and greatly improved the situation. It also brought together a range of acts covering sewerage and drains, water supply, housing and disease.

Other legislations during this period included the Artisans’ Dwelling Act (1875) which allowed for a large clearance of slums in England. In 1888 the system of local government was introduced to England and this was further improved upon in 1894.

Throughout the nineteenth century a series of Factory Acts had regulated conditions for workers in factories. By the 1870s workers in Britain had a half day on Saturday and this led to the growth of organised sports, especially soccer.

#### **2.1.5 Liberal governments and social reform**

The long period of conservative government between 1895 and 1905 had meant a slowing of reform. In 1900 it was estimated that 30% of the population lived on the edge of starvation. There were also great

inequalities of income and wealth. A working class family lived on about 18 shillings a week while a middle class family spent £10.

During the Boer War the medical condition of the working-class recruits was the cause of grave concern, and more attempts were made to improve the nation's health.

In 1906 a Liberal government was elected with a massive majority. It introduced a large number of social reforms. They included:-

- Medical tests for pupils at schools and the provision of free treatment (1907).
- Workers were compensated for injuries at work (1906).
- In 1908 a pension of five shillings was introduced for those over 70. This step was of great significance as it freed the pensioners from fear of the workhouse.
- In 1911 the government introduced the National Insurance Act that provided insurance for workers in time of sickness. Workers were paid a four penny weekly premium.
- Unemployment benefit was introduced into certain industries (e.g. Shipbuilding).

The basic social welfare service that had been created greatly improved the conditions for poorer people in the British society. To pay for this social reform the Liberals increased the taxes on the rich.

These reforms were resisted by the Conservatives who dominated the House of Lords; hence the crisis that was caused by their rejection of the 1909 budget. The Parliament Act followed to end the veto of the House of Lords.

## **B. Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In the nineteenth century, Great Britain and the United States shared a single literary marketplace that linked the reform movements, as well as the literatures, of the two nations. The writings of transatlantic reformers-antislavery, temperance, and suffrage activists-gave the novelists a new sense of purpose, and prompted them to invent new literary forms. The novelists who conceived themselves as reformers, sought to act upon their readers-and, through their readers, the whole world. Indeed, reform became so predominant that many of them borrowed from reformist writings even though they were skeptical of reform itself. Among them are some of the century's most important authors. The Novel of Purpose proposed a new way of understanding social reform in Great Britain and the United States.

#### **2.2.1 Victorian novel**

The nineteenth century was the great age of the novel, which is described by Henry James as an intricately inwrought aesthetic and psychological design, and a subtle balancing of formal and moral tensions.

The term “novel” did not come into use until the end of the eighteenth century, although the content itself had been formed earlier in the century by Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Smolett. Ian Watt attests to this fact by stating that Richardson and Fielding were the founders of the new form of writing. It became wide spread and flourished due to the increase in literacy as the middle class rose in power and importance. As industrialisation spread throughout Britain, the novel became an important means of portraying life and its social and moral values that were familiar to the readers. The Victorian novel became known for its focus on the social problems of the time.

The major Victorian novelists of the age include Charles Dickens (1812-1870), William Makepeace Thackeray (1811 – 1863) and George Elliot (1819 – 1888).

Charles Dickens, like Thomas Hardy, depicted the conflicts between individuals and society, and criticized the nineteenth century social structure. Generally, the early Victorian novelists accepted middle class values such as decorum, gentility, purity and property which were of great importance during that time. In most Victorian novels, class prejudice is also a major concern.

To many of his contemporaries, Dickens was ‘emphatically the novelist of his age,’ As noted by Miller (1999; 69)

“Dickens’ novels are both a symptom and a critique of the disciplinary society; they are the site of the first appearance in English fiction of a massive schematization of social discipline” Further, Barbara Lecker suggested that the “social critique of Dickens’ early novels develops, after mid-career, into a more comprehensive vision of Victorian England”.

Dickens’ novels were landmarks of literature in English and of English culture in the nineteenth century; thus, he is similar to the other Victorian novelists in the sense that he is able to address the middle class values through satirizing them. He criticizes the middle class for placing so much value on morality, yet it is the same people who exploit the poor. His Victorian novel challenges the middle class value of morality. Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom(1973;6) Comment that

*“If the middle class is properly to be described in a harsh fashion, then it is a paradox or an anomaly that the national culture which this class dominated should have given so much hearty a response to writers for whom the indictment of the failings of the middle class was a chief part of their enterprise. Many of the individual members should*

*themselves turn a questioning eye upon its ethos and seek to repudiate or meliorate those unnameable traits that were commonly ascribed to it."*

Similarly, Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* is mainly concerned with the contrast between human pretensions and human weakness and he portrayed the middle class social stratum and its hypocrisy. Dickens is equally aware of the precariousness or vulnerability of the new respectable social conception of the self and the buried life that is hidden beneath the veneer of polite manners (Peck and Coyle; 72).

Dorothy Van Ghent (1953;128), one of the twentieth century critics, identifies characterization "as a specific response to the nineteenth century processes of reification and alienation in which people were becoming things and things were becoming more important than people" (Peck and Coyle; 128).

It is true that with the influx of industrialisation, people became like machines as noted in the description of the workers in Dickens' *Hard Times*: "The wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. The measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coke town had to show for the shadows of rustling woods"

Dickens fits into the nineteenth century mode of writing which placed much emphasis on the condition of humanity placed against the backdrop of industrialisation, a tradition learnt from the late eighteenth century writers who dramatised the urban life and "human character with a keen eye for the changes which the Industrial Revolution brought into England in his lifetime" Daiches (1950; 50).

Dickens' artistic ability to represent characters placed in a modernised environment affirms him as one of the most successful authors whose "central position in British and Anglophone culture derives largely from his continuing appeal to the general or 'common' reader"

Raymond William (1983;4-6) claims that “Dickens was a representative of a new kind of perceiving the world, and showing the crowd, the city, modern social forms and institutions, and the power of industrialism”.

Others proclaim Dickens’ novels as masterpieces and believe that one can safely and justly rate him as a creative writer because of his great awareness of his social surroundings. As a social critic, his concern with human nature makes him a humanist, which can be discerned from his great concern with people as part of society, and their actions and desires.

According to Taine, a contemporary of Dickens, he is a satirical writer who attacks the oppressive society and the rigid education system in *Hard Times*. The depiction of the working class in *Hard Times* is an indication of Dickens’ awareness of the urban slums and the living conditions of the poor and the oppressive system to which they were subjected.

John Ruskin Gilbert and Gubar (1998; 31) applaud the realism of Dickens’ works by saying, “The essential value and truth of Dickens’ writings have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons, merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature. Allowing for his manner of telling them, the things he tells us are always true.”

Miller Lew (1996; 55) also believes that Dickens’ “object has been to present little pictures of life and manners as they really are”. Miller’s and John Ruskin’s comments are a confirmation of the view that Charles Dickens is a realist writer who achieves realism through caricature; for example, a character like Mr. Gradgrind in *Hard Times* is a caricature because of his obsession with “facts” and the education system he introduces. George Eliot (54-5), the acclaimed Victorian novelist, says: “We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; . . . his



preternaturally virtuous poor children and artisans . . . or that the working classes are in a condition to enter at once into a millennial state of altruism, wherein everyone is caring for everyone else, and no one for himself.”

Dickens’ works have been highly accredited although they have also received some criticism. Some French critics have pointed out that his works are weak and his characters lack depth. However, they failed to acknowledge that he is a realist writer; therefore, he places much emphasis on the depiction of the lower class people and their living conditions. Dickens cannot be discredited for failure to portray the invisible emotion and thoughts of his characters because this is a mode of writing that was introduced years after his death. Therefore, he does succeed in portraying the actual sordid and squalid lives of the poor. Other scholars have also suggested that Dickens’ works can be analyzed from a Marxist reading which is possible, but one has to bear in mind that his works cannot be grouped under Marxist novels because they do not conform to the philosophical portrayal of characters that defines a Marxist novel. In summation, Dickens is a greatly acclaimed English novelist whose works have been popular for more than a century despite the criticisms that have been laid against them.

### **2.2.2 Other novelist of the period**

In view of the novelists, deep sense of moral and social responsibility, they were naturally inclined to describe the society as it was, in order to make the readers realise the extent of social injustices. Their favourite setting was the city as the symbol of industrial civilisation and expression of anonymous lives.

The often used male pseudonym in their novels to explicate the daily life. Among them were the Brontes, From a statistical point of view, it is surprising that all the Brontë children survived infancy, and

that Branwell, Emily, Anne, and Charlotte all outlived the average age of death of twenty-five. In fact, they all survived scarlet fever. The Brontë family's tragedy was commonplace in a world in which illness, disease and death were part of everyday life to an extent unknown in the West today. Hence the focus on illness in many of the Brontë sisters' novels represents not only a historical reality but a paradigm that shaped the experience of nineteenth-century life and culture.

Charlotte Bronte is concerned with the plight of the industrial workers. She is aware that the revolt against unemployment caused by the introduction of machines during the early phase of the Industrial Revolution might lead to major social upheavals. However, what she eventually offers is a simplified solution to remedy the antagonism between masters and workers. Her solution is based on an idealized co-operation and co-existence between benevolent masters and loyal workers.

Mary Barton dramatizes the urban ills of the late 1840s, an era marked by industrial conflict, by strikes and lock-outs, by low wages and enforced unemployment, by growing class consciousness and by Chartist agitation which reached its climax in the year of the novel's publication. Torgerson contends that: illness and suffering were commonplace, they were not simply individual experiences but social and cultural constructions; thus, representations of illness and disease in the Brontës' fiction invite a closer reading of nineteenth-century discursive contexts. Specifically, she is interested in how illness in the texts becomes a device deployed by the author to critique social issues such as gender and class constraints.

Analyzing nineteenth-century depictions of illness and disease may well help to understand how the body becomes a site for negotiating larger ideological conflicts. The Brontës are inclined to use illness to represent larger cultural ills, thus laying the ground for social and cultural critique.

The Victorians believed that illness was a reflection of the state of the whole body or a person's "constitution" and that the body was affected by the condition of the mind and by external factors such as the weather. Recommended cures for diseases of both mind and body were diet, hygiene, and temperance suggesting that self-discipline and regulation were necessary to maintaining one's health and the corresponding status of 'normality.' In this way, illness became linked to individual agency so that poor health signified a lack of self-control which further signified a failure to conform to social norms.

Torgerson provides a valuable new approach to Victorian scholarship both for the connections it draws between illness in the lives of the Brontë sisters and in the larger historical context and for the extension of medical anthropology into literary analysis and theories of the body. Her arguments were largely based upon previous studies of illness in the nineteenth-century.

Gaskell is another novelist who interspersed themes of social reform and improvement. This is reflected in her intricate story which encompasses a range of social issues such as the role of women in Victorian Britain, industrialization and its effects on class divisions, along with the changing landscape of Britain that was brought on by advancement in trade in urban areas. It contrasts the snobberies, chivalries and artificiality of the country gentry of the South of England with the distinctive energetic anti-gentlemanly world of self-made manufacturers of the North.

Gaskell, another contemporary writer, used her writing as a platform. In many ways she is reckoned to be far ahead of her Victorian time. The themes which she dealt with such as feminism, social reform, and the plight of the working labourer were not readily discussed in England, and her characters were a portrait of her own self.

Gaskell effectively weaves a tale that conveys some of the revolutionary new ideas about social reform. The Industrial Revolution was stirring in England, but the mill owners were slow to equate this sweeping change with a need to improve the lives of their slave laborers. Labour strikes, such as those in North and South, were common as the unions endeavoured to achieve fair wages and working conditions.

There was a social issue prominent in the North and South of England that raised concern about the working conditions of the lower classes. Cotton was the primary export in the town of Milton. Marlborough Mills managed by John Thornton, was one of the most successful and had the fairest working conditions, yet Margaret still urged Thornton to make a difference in the circumstances of his employees.

Gaskell exalted education as a means to improve one's fate; nonetheless, she called for the promotion of mutual respect between laborer and master, something new to her time. However, change was slow to reach England; but partly due to the tireless efforts of authors such as Elizabeth Gaskell, public sympathy and influence finally produced a change in the lives and working conditions of the labour force.

There was also Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, a woman with a social conscience, living at a time of great social change and progress. She championed the cause of the working class. Throughout her life, she was concerned about the plight of English factory workers. Her *The Wrongs of Woman* describes the abominable living and working conditions of

female laborers in London. It reveals the working conditions outside of factories and helped gather support for passing the Factory Acts of 1844, 1847, and 1848. Her Pre-1842 industrial novels such as *Helen Fleetwood* (1839-41) presented powerfully detailed descriptions of factory girls' lives. She brought much needed attention to the plight of English factory workers in the 1840's through her editorship of *The Christian Lady's Magazine* from 1834 until her death.

Jane Austen's concept of the process of social reform that took place during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries depends on the ideal family unit. The wave of change was led by writers who believed that the quality of family life was crucial to the quality of life generally--to the happiness of the individual, to the well-being and proper raising of children, and to the successful functioning of society as a whole. Jane Austen's novels portray the period of transition between the two value systems, and her viewpoint corresponds to the enlightened opinions of the social reformers. She uses parody and burlesque for comic effect and to criticise the portrayal of women in 18th-century sentimental and gothic novels. Austen extends her them by highlighting social hypocrisy through irony; she often creates an ironic tone through free indirect speech in which the thoughts and words of the characters mix with the voice of the narrator.

Oscar Wilde is a social satirist, who uses irony and paradoxes to insinuate the problems and faults found in the Victorian society. The class system was defined by the animosity between classes, the upper class treating the lower class with disdain and disgust. The upper class was rigidly controlled by *savoir faire*, knowing what to eat, dress and how to behave.

In his work Wilde satirizes the class system, the etiquette and disposition that were expected from Victorians. He uses irony, humour

and characters not only to call attention to the absurdity of the Victorian behaviour but also to highlight the ironic humour in the characters, shortcomings that reflect the Victorians who were watching it.

Wilde also criticized the society, and his use of irony reveals an inconsistency between the characters, words and the truth, suggesting that society is hypocritical.

### **2.2.3 Victorian social reform**

In our consideration of the changes brought about in the social policy of Great Britain, in the decades immediately either side of 1900, one must look at the nation's industrial history and its position as the world premier industrial nation that had been cemented by the mid nineteenth century. However, one important fact is that the headlong embrace of laissez- faire capitalism ignored the social infrastructure. The emigration from the depressed agricultural areas to the industrial areas caused immense strain on the poorly-planned towns and cities. At the dawn of industrialisation, there were those who expressed concern about the health and hygiene of the dense industrial areas, notably Freidrich Engels (1844; 84) whose study of Manchester and London in 1844 collated in "Conditions of The Working Class in England", painted a truly dismal picture of urban squalor and hopelessness.

“Such is the Old Town of Manchester, and on re-reading my description, I am forced to admit that instead of being exaggerated, it is far from black enough to convey a true impression of the filth, ruin, and uninhabitable, the defiance of all considerations of cleanliness, ventilation, and health which characterise the construction of this single district, containing at least twenty to thirty thousand inhabitants. And such a district exists in the heart of the second city of England, the first manufacturing city of the world. If any one wishes to see in how little space a human being can move, how little air - and such air! - He can

breathe, how little of civilisation he may share and yet live, it is only necessary to travel hither." Engels (1844; 85)

The situation was further explained and confirmed by a number of reports on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain. Edwin Chadwick, was responsible for one of these reports; he also invoked the image of the "unknown country" as Henry Mayhew later did to bring to public attention the abysmal conditions with which the labouring poor had to contend. His principal concern appeared to be with "the miasma" emanating from decaying matter "the poisonous exhalations" which were the source of their physical, moral and mental deterioration. At the height of the cholera epidemic, the flushing of the sewers in order to dissipate the miasma, actually aggravated the problem by further contamination of the water supply, in the face of the advice which stated that the disease was spread by germs and infection.

Henry Mayhew's background was originally in law, but he became a playwright and journalist, who co-founded Punch Magazine. The outbreak of cholera in London prompted him to write an article concerning the effect of cholera in Bermondsey, extending the idea to the condition of the labouring classes in England and Wales. The talented writers, Reach, Mackay, and Brooks were assigned to various parts of the country whilst Mayhew concentrated on London, and the ensuing articles published in The Morning Chronicle caused quite a reaction.

Mayhew's work was praised by Christian Socialists and Radicals alike and substantial extracts from the reports were published in their own newspapers. The reports were collected and published in 1851 as "London Labour & London Poor" which highlighted the plight of the unemployed and starving working class. In 1856, Mayhew started a new series of articles about London's street folk, but critics stated that Mayhew originally promised to become the chronicler of the working

classes, and seemed to abandon that mission in favour of concentrating on the regressive street folk, probably to increase sales. His "revelation " was the existence of a "barbaric tribe" in the heart of the world` s greatest metropolis., which seemed even more regressive at the time (1850s 1860s as it was a period of relative well- being for the poor).

If Mayhew`s journalistic style laid him open to criticism, it was nothing compared to the caution with which the accounts of Charles Dickens were taken. The Westminster Review, in reviewing *Our Mutual Friend* in 1866, suggested that Dickens should write a pamphlet or go to Parliament, if he was so serious about the Poor Law, rather than use his novels as an instrument of reform. In fact, this avenue had greater effect, as his novels would have been more widely read than any political pamphlet. Indeed, the short- hand term for

Victorian squalor and deprivation is described as "Dickensian".

Although Dickens was now a very successful novelist, he continued to be interested in social reform. But, he diminishes his determination to create a vehicle for his ideas. In 1850 he began editing *Household Words* which included articles on politics, science and history. To boost sales, it also contained short stories, humorous pieces and serialisations of novels that were concerned with social issues such as his own "*Hard Times*" (1854) and Elizabeth Gaskell's "*North and South*" and "*Cranford*".

During this time Dickens campaigned in favour of parliamentary reform and improvements in the education of the poor, and was extremely hostile to the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act and wrote several articles on the workhouse system, public health and legal reform.

Elizabeth Gaskell herself was a writer who came from a Unitarian background, and her marriage to William Gaskell, a Unitarian minister, afforded her the opportunity to visit his parishioners, who were textile



workers. She was sufficiently moved by the poverty that she witnessed, to write novels sympathising with the poor and advocating social reform.

Mary Barton's *A Tale of Manchester Life* attempted to address the issue of urban poverty. Although a little melodramatic in places, its storyline of love, murder and wrongful arrest is gripping even to a modern readership, and the descriptive passages served only to confirm everything that Engels had written.

The closing years of the nineteenth century brought about a change in the attitudes towards poverty. Contemporary writers began to differentiate between the poor and the working classes. The major shift was from the blame of the feckless, to the blame in the actual structure of the economy, the move from advocating self-help, to governmental intervention, "individualism" to "collectivism". The Public Health Acts of 1848 and 1875 were largely left to local authorities to uphold, as they were not compulsory. It was only when the nation's industrial advantage over its main competitors began to erode that questions of eugenics were asked. "In the 1890s and 1900s there was much anxious discussion among doctors, education experts, nutritionists and criminologists of 'physical deterioration' and 'racial degeneracy'; and in all these fields expert opinion was deeply divided between a small but embattled minority who detected signs of irreversible organic decline in the British race, and a majority who thought that the symptoms of decay could be treated and cured by political intervention and environmental improvements." Harris (1993; 231)

Finding the 1881 Census inadequate, as he wished, Booth perused the London School Board records and went out and interviewed people. His helpers in this mammoth undertaking included Beatrice Potter, later Webb, who helped write the parts entitled "The Trades" which eventually was published under the title "Life and Labour of the People" in April

1889. It featured detailed accounts, diagrams and tables of statistics as well as his 'poverty map', a colour coded map indicating occupations, incomes, and the general state of the environment in each street. Booth found himself asking how poverty could be quantified, and the 'poverty line' came into being. The figure of eighteen to twenty-one shillings per week for a moderate-sized family, encompassing Classes C & D (A being the lowest) could, Booth calculated, "make ends meet" with frugality and self-discipline.

Booth's work presented the facts, but not the reasons, nor was there any comparison with other areas. However, the work was unprecedented in its descriptions and discoveries, as much as 85% cited irregular employment and low pay, or large family and sickness. The popular middle class myth of "idleness" accounted for a mere 15%, thus despite himself, "Booth lent support to the socialist view that poverty was a collective, not an individual, responsibility" (Fried & Elman .1969; xxviii)

Booth's findings did little to revise his conservative views, however, reassuring the public that despite his investigations, the threat of revolution was distant. His views appeared contradictory. Fearing that the people from Class B would drag those above them down, thus destroying the social structure, he advocated compulsory labour camps to train skills and discipline, under the threat of the poor house. This contradicted his "laissez-faire principles", but he saw these measures as "state socialism" in order to help those who could not help themselves, thus benefiting society as a whole. He reasoned that those with a stake in society and liable to rise up in revolution (Class E & F), would be pacified by the abolition of poverty, and they will regain a sense of obedience and sense of duty. Hence industry would become more efficient in the face of foreign competition. Booth's subsequent discovery of poverty in all areas

of London, often in the same areas, as the middle and upper classes did not modify his original opinions, and turning his attentions to the state of industry, the long hours and low pay and insecurity, he supported the rights of the entrepreneur. The `socialist` measures should, he explained, not hinder the creativity and wealth of industry and that education of the worker was the way forward. The influence of social and political institutions, religious bodies and philanthropic organisations was, he concluded, negligible, and the moral shaping forces on the poor were likely to be socialism and trade unionism. He was prepared to admit that socialism offered faith, hope and dignity and that it meant more than state repression and anti-individualism.

His eagerly anticipated concluding volume was seen as disappointing, offering no solutions, no alternative to his previously noted faith in individualism and `limited socialism`. He was, after all, a recorder rather than a reformer. This he left to others. Yet despite the congratulations afforded him for his statistical work, he fell back into nineteenth century conservatism and called for the expansion of the Poor Law.

Beatrice Potter, meanwhile, had parted from Booth and her work in the East End of London and was convinced that only a society-wide change could halt the march of poverty. Webb, Clara Collet, and others drew attention to the prevalence of sweated labour in households headed by women, and to the connection between below-subsistence-level wages and high infant and child mortality. Potter`s work amongst London`s Jewish community, and investigation of sweated trades was invaluable, and her marriage to Sydney Webb, cemented the intellectual socialism of her subsequent work within the Fabian Women`s Group.

"The Fabians, Sidney and Beatrice Webb in particular, devoted themselves to the analysis of social and economic conditions. They were

convinced of the incapacity of the free market to diminish poverty and inequality. They placed their faith instead in social ownership, economic planning and extensive measures by central and local government to provide institutional and other relief to prevent and cure poverty due to unemployment, old age, sickness and other causes of need. The Webbs devoted themselves to pressing these ideas upon leading politicians and civil servants." (Mc Briar: 1996; 16)

From 1909 to 1913 the Fabian Women's Group recorded the details of the daily budgets of thirty families in Lambeth, published as "Round About a Pound a Week" by Maud Pember Reeves, in 1907.

"At The Works" by Lady Florence Bell surveyed the lives and living standards of the people of Middlesbrough. Her book was more anecdotal and observational than Booth's, and was more concerned with the welfare of the ironworkers, wives who were important to the health of their men and the family. Illness or a change for the worse in wages would have a devastating effect on a family who were kept together by the women. Beatrice Webb initiated a number of studies on the aspects of poverty for the Royal Commission on the 1905-09 Poor Laws. All of them made clear the extent to which poverty persisted even in households headed by males working long hours, when wives and children contributed to family income in all ways possible.

#### **2.2.4 Social reform in literary work**

'Condition of England' novels sought to engage directly with the contemporary social and political issues with a focus on the illustration of class, gender, and labour relations, as well as on societal turbulence and the growing animosity between the rich and the poor in England. Even a superficial glimpse at the history of the early Victorian writings unveils that many writers shared a particular concern: the social consequences of

the Industrial Revolution in England at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These novels helped to raise the collective awareness of the reading public and, in a way, illuminated the directions for both nineteenth century and twentieth century welfare reforms. The novels of the 1840s and '50 s, devoted to industrial relations, are, apart from their fictional plots, debate or discourse about the current state of the nation. They can also be regarded as instruments of social analysis and a platform for reform messages. The fictional representations of the 'Condition of England' by the women writers of Victorian Age like Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna's *Helen Fleetwood*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, and Charlotte Bronte's *Shirley* are the most worth mentioning works of this genre.

The nineteenth century can be regarded as the high noon of the social realist novels. Major Victorian writers like Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Benjamin Disraeli and Elizabeth Gaskell diagnosed the 'Condition of England' in their works. Now the term the 'condition of England' novels is used to refer to a body of narrative fiction, also known as industrial novels, social novels, or social problem novels that were published in Victorian England during and after the period of the Hungry Forties, a decade of profound social unrest. The term came into prevalence from the famous 'condition of England' question raised by Thomas Carlyle in *Chartism* (1839), although some of these narratives were published earlier. 'Condition of England' novels sought to engage directly with the contemporary social and political issues with a focus on the illustration of class, gender, and labour relations, as well as on societal turbulence and the growing animosity between the rich and the poor in England. Even a superficial glimpse at the history of the early Victorian writings will unveil that many writers shared a particular concern: the social consequences of the Industrial Revolution in England at the

beginning of the nineteenth century. The industrial novel, which combined narrative interest with protest, was a rejoinder to a particularly murky period in which bank failures and the scarceness of jobs created conditions that many writers saw as dreadful.

‘Condition of England’ novels called for both social reform and reconciliation between the two nations, the rich and the poor. In their early stage these novels, seem to be like a storehouse of social principles, an ability to sympathize with unbearable social inequalities and injustices. A number of writers were strongly motivated to arouse commiseration for the atmosphere of the emerging working class. Social conscience was largely based on paternalism, which was a dominant ideology in early Victorian England until it was replaced by benevolence and humanitarianism, which were manifested in the reforms of late nineteenth century. However, the novels tended to exaggerate the degree and range of the social effects of the Industrial Revolution. They overstate the evils they expose by focusing exclusively on extreme cases. They tend to sentimentalize the poor, thus treating the working class monolithically.

The significance of the novels lies in the fact that they began the process of educating middle- and upper-class novelreaders, many of whom had formerly been quite ignorant of what was going on in the manufacturing areas of Britain. Although extremely weak as imaginative works of fiction, they also prepared the ground for those novelists of the later 1840s and the 1850s — Disraeli, Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, and Dickens — who dramatically raised the standard of writing of socialist novels. The novels helped to raise the collective awareness of the reading public and, in a way, illuminated the directions for both nineteenth century and twentieth century welfare reforms. The novels of the 1840s and ‘50 s, devoted to industrial relations, are, apart from their

fictional plots, debate or discourse about the current state of the nation. They are also instruments of social analysis and a platform for reform messages.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Discussion and Analysis**

This chapter attempts to discuss and analyze two selected novels: *Oliver Twist*, and *David Copperfield*, and show how they reflect the conditions under which the people in Dickens' time lived and the challenges they faced.

Dickens' lifetime coincides with the greatest period of penal and legal reform in British history. During that period many studies were carried out on the causes of crime, and how to remove them. This led to developments in educational and charitable institutions. Dickens himself had great sympathy for the suffering of children, and his sympathy drew much strength from the traumatic experience of his own childhood. He also had great pity for female offenders, and was charitable and kind to them. Indeed, he and virtually ran a home for fallen women, and was more lenient with female than male offenders. This was probably because he saw them as victims of circumstance; and despite ill-treatment, they remained loyal to their pimps. One reason why Dickens gave so much attention to crime and its effects in his works was that crime was an inescapable social problem at the time. Hence, his great passion for dramatizing and commenting on the outstanding topical issues of his day.

Dickens was also concerned with the world of increasing crime and how to combat it; some of his novels end without the operation of human or divine justice against offenders. The form of punishment he chooses most often is self-punishment, usually arising from a guilty conscience. This reflects the manner in which Dickens constructed his ideal moral world, in which mercy and forgiveness are highly rated and demanded, and punishment for evil is unnecessary; for evil characters ultimately come to inflict such punishment on themselves. As observed



by Reed (1995, 65) Dickens applied the same principles in his fiction similar those in fairy tales and children's literature of nineteenth century England: evil intentions are the evil person's own undoing.

### **3.1.1 Oliver Twist: Synopsis**

Oliver was born in a workhouse in a small town about 70 miles from London, in the early part of the 19th century. His mother died almost immediately after giving birth. He was brought up at a "child farm" in the country until he was about eight years old. At this point, the parish officials in charge of the farm decided it was time for him to start working, and he was sent back to the workhouse. There Oliver commits the unpardonable offense of asking for more food when he was close to starving. So the parish officials offered five pounds (a pretty good amount of money) to anyone willing to take Oliver on as an apprentice. The parish officials eventually send Oliver off with a coffin-maker.

At the coffin-maker's shop Oliver receives no better treatment than that at the workhouse or the child farm. The coffin-maker, Mr. Sowerberry, is not as bad as his wife, Mrs. Sowerberry, and the other apprentice, Noah Claypole. Oliver gets in trouble for knocking Noah, and decides to set out for London on foot.

When he is almost there, he runs into an odd-looking young man named Jack Dawkins (better known as The Artful Dodger). The Dodger buys him lunch and offers to introduce him to a "gentleman" in London who will give him lodging.

In London Oliver discovers that the Dodger and his friends are an unsavory bunch. The old "gentleman", Fagin, trains kids to be pickpockets, and then sells off what they steal. Oliver does not realize this fact until he is actually out with the Dodger and one of the boys, named Charley Bates. The pair steal a handkerchief out of a nice-looking old man's pocket, and Oliver is caught and taken away . After taking a better

look at him, Brownlow realizes that Oliver looks to be an innocent boy not a pickpocket, and he takes him to his home and takes care of him.

Fagin, the Dodger, Nancy (a prostitute), and Bill Sikes (another criminal) are greatly worried that Oliver will tell the police, and they decide to keep a watch on Brownlow's house. One day, when Oliver is sent by Brownlow on an errand to the city, Fagin and the other criminals attack him, Fagin decides to keep Oliver shut up in a dreary old house for weeks, all the while trying to manipulate him. Sikes and another thief tell Fagin that they need a small boy to help them break into a house on the outskirts of London, and Fagin volunteers Oliver. The plan fails, and Oliver is caught by the house servants. He receives kind treatment by the people of the house who become Oliver's caretakers

While Fagin and the criminals continue their search for Oliver, the young boy learns to read and write with the help of his friends, the Maylies. Meanwhile, he is reunited with his first friend, Mr. Brownlow. Fagin and his gang continue to track Oliver down.

Monks manages to get hold of, and destroy an important document related to Oliver's parentage. Nancy discovers what Monks and Fagin are plotting, and she informs Rose Maylie. Unfortunately, Bill Sikes (her lover) finds out about it and brutally murders her. Sikes tries to escape, and remains haunted by his crime. Eventually, he is killed while trying to escape from the police. In the meantime Mr. Brownlow manages to find Monks, his old friend. It is discovered that Monks is actually Oliver's half-brother, and that he is determined to corrupt Oliver so that he can secure the entire family inheritance to himself. Monks chooses to admit to everything rather than face the police.

Oliver ends up with what is left of his inheritance, and is legally adopted by Mr. Brownlow. He lives down the road not far from the

Maylies. Everybody lives happily ever after, except for Fagin, who is arrested and hanged and Monks dies in prison.

### 3.1.2 Theme/s in Oliver Twist

The three novels have many themes, which are different and similar. It can be said that the most dominant themes in Oliver Twist are: the theme of society and class, poverty, criminality, religion, fate and free will. And contrasting regions.

“Society and Class” is reckoned to be a central theme of most of Dickens’s novels. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens is inclined to underline the superficial class structures, and the fact that at the core, everyone is really the same, regardless of the social class in which they happen to be born. Dickens also shows how callous and uncaring the Victorian society was; folks just ignored the plight of the less fortunate because they were so self-satisfied, and so convinced that the systems adopted to take care of the poor were the best and most human. Dickens attacked the social evils of his time such as poor housing, unjust courts, greedy management and the underworld. These are actually the thematic evils that are reflected in "Oliver Twist". Consider the following passage;

*“And what an excellent example of the power of dress young Oliver Twist was. Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; – it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have fixed his station in society. But now he was enveloped in the old calico robes, that had grown yellow in the same service; he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once – a parish child – the orphan of a workhouse – the humble, half-starved drudge – to be cuffed and buffeted through the world, despised by all, and pitied by none”.* (*Oliver Twist:14*)

This implies that when he was born, Oliver could be anybody, and of any social rank and that marking him as a parish child and an orphan

was as simple as swapping his blanket for yellow calico robes. It also underlines the superficiality of class distinction. Saying that the difference between a nobleman and a beggar is only in the clothes that they wear is a pretty radical statement, and deciding the permanent place and rank of a person in the world when he is only a baby is mere complete fallacy.

*“Noah was a charity-boy, but not a workhouse orphan. [...] The shop-boys in the neighborhood 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 is, and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity-boy”.*  
(*Oliver Twist*: 26)

This quote shows that there are subtle distinctions of rank even at the very bottom of the social ladder: Noah might be a "charity-boy," and his father a "drunken soldier," but unlike Oliver, at least he knows who his father is. This is another place where Dickens clears away superficial distinctions between classes – the desire to kick the people below you on the social ladder is common to "the finest lord" and the "dirtiest charity-boy."

Consider the following passage which is about clothing:-

*“ as Oliver looked out of the parlour window, and saw the Jew roll [his old clothes] up in his bag and walk away, he felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone, and that there was now no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again. They were sad rags, to*

*tell the truth; and Oliver had never had a new suit before". (Oliver Twist: 8)*

The question is: Why is it so important that Oliver be in control of the clothes he wears? Other people are always putting Oliver into pigeonholes – calling him "young gallows," or "work 'us," and "badging" him as soon as he's born with the yellowed calico clothes of a parish boy. Choosing his own clothes becomes as important as being called by the right name – it's a way for Oliver to assert his independence over the system

"Poverty" is obviously related to the theme of "Society and Class." But while it is a theme concerned with stressing the fact that social class system is basically invented by society to justify the status quo. Dickens also expresses his genuine concern about the miserable lower class in *Oliver Twist*. He does not shy away the miserable conditions of the poor but portrays it with gritty realism.

*"the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed,' or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food, or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week". (Oliver Twist: 1)*

The description of the system of "baby-farms" is quite truthful: orphan babies would be sent out of the workhouse and brought up by someone paid by the parish. Some baby farms like that of Oliver's had a mortality rate as high as 90%. So, in the worst ones, only 1 baby in 10 would survive infancy. And the "poor-laws" Dickens refers to were designed to care for poor people, yet at the same time to make the

workhouses unpleasant enough to deter people who *could* work and support themselves from living at the expense of the parish. Not that anyone would want to, of course – and babies obviously had no choice in the matter, anyway. So calling these orphaned babies "juvenile offenders against the poor-laws" and as "culprits" who are without the "inconvenience" of adequate nutrition or clothing is some of the sharpest irony that are to be found in this novel. It is pretty damning of the whole system, because obviously the orphans have not done anything wrong:

*“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”. (Oliver Twist: 59)*

Thought the system was designed to care for poor people it actually increased their misery. And the sarcastic parenthetical comment here is particularly telling: it highlights the complacency of the parish authorities. They are so arrogant and self-satisfied that they think that their system is both just and humane, and that they should be thanked for their generosity.

*“They made a great many other wise and humane regulations having reference to the ladies, which it is not necessary to repeat”. (Oliver Twist: 59)*

One of the ways the parish authorities wanted to control the poor was to keep them people from reproducing and creating more little poor people, so they had strict rules to keep men and women (even if they were married) in separate quarters in the workhouses. The "wise and humane" part is obviously ironic – the rule is neither wise nor humane. But the "it is not necessary to repeat" bit is important too, – it is part of the self-censoring that is dominant in all Victorian fiction.

Poverty leading to crime and crime resulting in isolation are the other themes in the novel. Dickens had the opportunity to observe the residents of London streets from close quarters. In order to escape the pangs of hunger and shadow of insecurity, the poor children took to crime and fell into the hands of the underworld. Nancy's story relates the tale of an unfortunate woman who has fallen into the evil hands of Fagin because of her poverty and destitution. She is haunted by her guilt and regrets her presence in the criminal world. However, she feels helpless in the midst of criminals who fail to understand her feelings and offer her no sympathy. She feels isolated from the world around her.

Crime was a huge problem in London in the 1830s, when Dickens wrote his novels. He heavily drew on it, hence their appeal and popularity. Some novelists wrote about crime because they had a particular point to make about the source of criminal behavior, or possible solutions to the crime wave. Others wrote about crime just because they knew it would sell. In *Oliver Twist* it is obvious that Dickens had a point to make: his main intention was to portray the life of criminals, and discourage poor people from resorting to crime. He also wanted to show how external influences contributed to criminal behavior. Consider Dickens' sarcastic comment:

*"What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light. The prospect of the gallows, too, makes them hardy and bold. Ah, it's a fine thing for the trade! Five of them strung up in a row, and none left to play booty or turn white-livered!" (Oliver Twist: 9)*

Fagin's reflection on capital punishment shows another way that the system of institutionalized control just permeates society. Is capital punishment actually a good motivator for criminals? In *Oliver Twist* the fear of being hanged makes of Fagin's gang betray each other, more often

than not. Fagin still thinks he can stay one step ahead of all of them. Here is Fagin's version of the old "dead men tell no tales" line. And, of course, to "turn white-livered" means to lose courage and turn yourself (or your fellow criminals) in to the authorities. So this speech is ironic on a couple of levels: first, it is clearly the opposite of what the author (and, presumably, the reader) believes about capital punishment. Second, it is dramatic irony – we know that Fagin will eventually be betrayed and turned in to the police himself:

*"Stop thief! Stop thief!" There is a human passion for hunting something deeply implanted in the human breast. One wretched, breathless child, panting with exhaustion, terror in his looks, agony in his eye, large drops of perspiration streaming down his face, strains every nerve to make head upon his pursuers; and as they follow on his track, and gain upon him every instant, they hail his decreasing strength with still louder shouts, and whoop and scream with joy "Stop thief!" – Ay, stop him for God's sake, were it only in mercy! (Oliver Twist: 21)*

Here is another of those moments when the mob gets dehumanized. The whole crowd of people chasing Oliver is indeed not a group of individuals, but a mass of instinct, with the common desire to hunt and pursue. It makes the crowd seem savage and wild. Consider that description of the mob is in the present tense ("There *is* a human passion..."), which makes the scene seem very immediate, as well as more universal. Finally, Dickens steps in as a narrator, talking to the characters in the book and telling them how to behave.

*"Stopped at last. A clever blows that. He's down upon the pavement, and the crowd eagerly gathers round him; each new comer jostling and struggling with the others to catch a glimpse. "Stand aside!" – "Give him a little air!" – "Nonsense!he don't deserve it." – "Where's the gentleman?" – "Here he is, coming down the street." – "Make room*



*there for the gentleman!" – "Is this the boy, sir?" – "Yes." (Oliver Twist: 22)*

This paragraph immediately follows the chase scene quoted above; all the crowd is "jostling" around Oliver, who has been smacked to the ground. And, like in the paragraph before, none of the members of the crowd are differentiated. They are just a mob of voices. Nothing is separated by "he said," or "she exclaimed," because the crowd is basically acting with a single consciousness: the desire to "hunt something," as Dickens put it in the previous paragraph. Even the old gentleman, who turns out to be a pretty good man even he doesn't get a "he said." He is just one voice among the many that was hunting poor little Oliver. Oliver is the only one who's not just a part of the mob in this scene. It is him against the world

### **3.1.3 Characters in relation to theme/s**

Some characters in the novel are liberated and manage to live happily ever after, others are unable to escape the "labyrinth" that the city, their social class, and the systems of justice and religion seem to have created. One may wonder about the cause that can be said; that characters seem to give up their free will at certain points, and abandon themselves to a kind of bizarre fatalism, as much as Dickens wants to show how external influences can turn people into criminals. The emphasis here is on fate which seems to undermine that idea. How much freedom should anyone have? Or, is anyone who is trapped in the systems of social class and religion, unable to make any independent choices?

The novel deals with the life of not only Oliver but all the characters that are connected with his life. The author successfully paints such a large canvas with conviction. He gathers the different threads of the story and merges them into the novel with ease. The frequent shifts in

the scenes do not confuse the reader but relieve the monotony of continuous narration. They also serve to lift the gloom clouding the story.

The variety of characters portrayed in the novel exhibit their identities through their speech, appearance, and manner. Dickens seems to excel in creating such distinct characters with precision and detail. Fagin, the Artful Dodger, Bumble, and Fang are a few of his characters who can be distinguished even in a crowd.

"*Oliver Twist*" is a novel which projects the social evils prevalent during the nineteenth century. The author paints the criminal world with all its gory detail and exhibits its inhabitants with their deformity and wretchedness. He focuses his attention on the greedy and corrupt officials of the Parish and reveals the crudity and cruelty of the officers of the law. However, he does not express bitterness towards them. He laughs at them and their eccentricities through humor and irony.

Some have been critical of the frequent rhetorical moralizing and philosophical outpouring in the novel. Dickens used such devices neither to enhance the beauty of the novel nor to reform the people. The involvement of the novel made him express his views on certain issues without inhibition. Such expressions were conventional in the Victorian novels.

Dickens talks his way into the heart of his readers. Not merely does he tell a tale but he comments on it too, his attitude is that of a man talking unrestrainedly to a large audience and occasionally addressing it. His style is the natural outcome of that attitude.

Dickens is a master of realism. His observations, experience and encounters have filled the pages of the novel with incidents and characters that are true to life.

In *Oliver Twist* Dickens shows that only Oliver remains untainted by evil - despite the ill-treatment he receives, and the darkness and

corruption that surround him - chiefly as a result of his goodness and "sturdy spirit" Fagin fails to instill "into his soul the poison" which he hopes will "blacken it forever" (*O. T.*,185). By contrast, the "blackening" process seems to have affected most of the other characters in the novel. Bumble, who symbolises the workhouse injustice, cannot rise above muddle and perverse official thinking. Magistrate Fang, the exemplar of workhouse injustice, irrationally and arbitrarily abuses his authority. The workhouse, an institution originally designed to help the poor, has been transformed into a house of punishment by the New Poor Law; and callous officials like Bumble and Fang have contrived to make conditions worse. Hardened criminals such as Fagin and Bill Sikes thrive; in a world devoid of humanity and social justice.

Dickens makes his intentions clear in the preface to the third edition of the novel to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really do exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives" (*O. T.*; 34). The thieves and assorted underworld characters in the novel are full of wretchedness and misery. They did not become criminals of their own volition: unless slums were cleared, one could not expect any moral improvement in their lives.

To survive in this world, one must either be rich, or be sufficiently strong to preserve one's essential goodness of heart. As a "parish child", Oliver is "a half-starved drudge — to be cuffed and buffeted through the world - despised by all, and pitied by none", the "victim of a systematic course of treachery and corruption" (*O.T.* ;47). Yet despite Fagin's attempts to turn him into a thief, Oliver remains uncorrupted by crime; ultimately, he is thrown into the arms of Brownlow (who helps him to recover his fortune), and subsequently encounters the angelic Rose, who turns out to be his aunt. Despite the ill-treatment meted out to him in

Fagin's den, Oliver prays for his forgiveness, once the Jew is taken into custody.

But can the other characters in the novel remain equally pure in intention? Oliver's mother, Agnes, indulged into her sexual desires; and as her lover died before they had the chance to marry, had to suffer the inevitable consequences - penury and humiliation. Nancy, a prostitute since childhood, is bound to Bill Sikes, not only emotionally but also financially; and considers herself irredeemable, despite the fact that the narrator suggests that she is not totally corrupt. She fails to see that her guilt is socially imposed. Her attempt to help Oliver, an act of generosity, hasled to her death. The implication is clear; if Nancy could have been extricated from the corrupting influences around her, she might have had the chance to reform. However, in that indifferent, callous world of nineteenth century London, no one had thought of helping her - something which, as Reed suggests, provides an indictment of the largely middle-class Church of England and its adherents, who were inclined to believe that working-class prostitutes such as Nancy are irredeemable.

The conscious injustice and the crimes of Fagin, Bill Sikes and their group have to be punished more severely. Justice is meted out to Mr. Bumble through his marriage to Mrs. Corney for money, and his marriage precipitates a fall "from all the height and pomp of beadle ship, to the lowest depths of the most snubbed henpeckery" (*O. T.* ; 328). Both Mr. and Mrs. Bumble become paupers in that same "workhouse which they had lorded it over others" Though he is not a criminal by profession, Monles attempts to pry Oliver's inheritance away, by virtue of the fact that both have the same father. He eventually dies in prison after squandering his share of the inheritance, and being involved in fraud.

At first glance, Fagin's criminal underworld seems to resemble a charitable institution, in that it offers food and protection for several

waifs. But behind this facade lurks an atmosphere of unrestrained exploitation. As was the case in England, the sense of community in the thieves' den is informed by self-interest, or, in Fagin's words, by regard for the "number one." Fagin is aware that it is this philosophy that drives his thieves to crime; but it also ensures their survival as a unit. This he explains to Claypole: "You depend upon me. To keep my little business snug, I depend upon you. The first is your number one, the second my number one. The more you value your number one, the more careful you must be of mine; so ... a regard for number one holds us all together" (*O. T.* ; 388).

If anyone forgets this notion, then punishment is swift and savage. Nancy is punished for her acts of generosity; Oliver is threatened, locked up and called ungrateful for wanting to lead a crime-free life. Fagin himself approves of capital punishment, as it is a convenient way to dispose of potential informants. Such punishments are meted out by Bill Sikes, a hardened criminal who bullies and terrifies the boys, and eventually murders Nancy. None of these characters escape Dickens' retributive punishments. Haunted by Nancy's phantom, Sikes accidentally hangs himself — a death whose self-punishing nature, as Reed remarks, is accentuated by his belief that Nancy's eyes appear before him, thus causing him to slip. Fagin's den is eventually discovered; and the Jew himself is sentenced to execution, allowing him plenty of time for possible repentance. Instead, he is filled with despair at the prospect of death. Although aware of his guilt, he feels no repentance but only fears that he is going to pay the price for his actions by death. Fagin's authority, was once founded on fear; according to the retributive scheme of the novel, it is now appropriate that he himself should experience suffering and fear, prior to death. This is profoundly expressed in the following passage:-

*“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, in an emotionally heightened conversation, in which is rendered a sophisticated treatment of the moral and social issues that dominate the story. Nancy, the prostitute, embodies for Dickens all the degradation into which poverty can force otherwise good people.

Rose, on the other hand, symbolizes all the purity that comes from good breeding. Both women embody the feminine compassion that compels them to help Oliver. That maternal and sisterly compassion is what binds Nancy to her vice-ridden lover Sikes.

Dickens seems to emphasize the key role that environment plays in distinguishing vice from virtue: 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, thus proving that the damage done by bad upbringing is irretrievable. Yet Nancy’s decision to return to a life of “vice” is arguably the act in the entire novel. Her love for Sikes and her

compassion for Oliver together compel her to sacrifice her own life. Though Dickens clearly approves of the second emotion far more than of the first, it is likely that they stem from the same impulse in Nancy's character:

*"She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; but raising herself, with difficulty, on her knees, drew from her bosom a white handkerchief—Rose Maylie's own—and holding it up, in her folded hands, as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would allow, breathed one prayer for mercy to her Maker."* (O.T. ; 444)

The description of Nancy's death in this passage can hardly allow the reader to forget how society has completely failed Nancy. Because she had no one but Fagin to care for her as a child, she has not been able to live morally or comfortably.

In chapter 52 Dickens is inclined to express ambivalence about the death penalty. Consider the following passage on page 504:

*"Day was dawning when they again emerged. A great multitude had already assembled; the windows were filled with people, smoking and playing cards to beguile the time; the crowds were pushing, quarreling, joking. Everything told of life and animation but one dark cluster of objects in the centre of all the black stage, the cross-beam, the rope, and all the hideous apparatus of death."*

Despite the fact that Fagin is certainly guilty of many crimes, Dickens here expresses his view that death is always ugly, and that there is something deeply disturbing in the way people turn it into a spectacle. The passage highlights how profound Fagin's punishment is by positioning the looming specter of his death next to a scene that is full of life. Although Fagin's actions may have contributed to Nancy's death, in fact he has killed no one, and paying his life is hardly acceptable. Hence

the ease and excitement of the people in the scene around him raise the worry that he is not paying his life for justice, but for the enjoyment of the masses.

### **3.1.4 Literary devices**

A novel may have many levels of literary devices such as symbolism, imagery, and allegory. Setting and characters may convey symbolic meaning aside from their plot functions. Some trait or gesture of a person may symbolize an aspect of his character, as Bumble's fondness for his three-cornered hat serves to illuminate his devotion to a tradition of recognition, status, and power.

Fagin goes into "a maze of the mean dirty streets which abound in that close and densely-populated quarter" (19.4), and Sikes and Nancy drag Oliver "into a maze of dark, narrow courts (15.63). Careful consideration of the two examples would help one realize that the labyrinth motif recurs frequently in *Oliver Twist*. In both cases it is the powerful descriptions of the city, that help illuminate everything. Beside the fact that the streets of London were pretty difficult to navigate if one didn't know one's way around, it can be said that the idea of the labyrinth would add to the sense of confinement in the city. Nevertheless, the original labyrinth of Greek mythology was used as a prison. Therefore, the labyrinthine and maze-like streets of London may imply that the entire city is part of the same system of control and incarceration as the judicial system that literally imprisons people, and the parish system that confines poor people to workhouses.

Or, perhaps the main motif has more to do with criminality: Dickens seems to suggest that once a person turns to crime, it will be impossible to get back on the right track – just like in a maze. Take Nancy, for example: even when she is repeatedly offered the opportunity to abandon her life of crime, she refuses, saying, "I am chained to my old



life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it. I must have gone too far to turn back, – and yet I don't know “(46,74). Nancy here uses the metaphor of paths and crossroads, too – she says she's "gone too far to turn back." So it can be assumed that what Nancy is saying implies reference to the earlier motif of labyrinths and mazes, hence the relevance to her life of crime. If this is true, it can be said that Dickens is suggesting that becoming a criminal, is like entering a maze from which it is difficult or impossible to get out. Whether the mazes are suggesting that the city is a prison or that criminality is inescapable once you turn to crime, the maze and labyrinth motif strongly suggests pessimism.

The dog is like Sikes's shadow. He has some of the same personality flaws as Sikes, including a violent temper. Because the dog is always with him, one may be tempted to read the dog as a kind of stand-in for some part of Sikes's psyche. The only time the dog leaves him is when Sikes is almost out of his mind with guilt after having killed Nancy. Probably, the dog represents Sikes's violent and criminal impulses. The dog even kills himself by jumping after Sikes off the roof, and smashing its head on the rocks below. He cannot exist without Sikes, and seems to be a part of him.

Light and dark, and white and black are important symbols in *Oliver Twist*. Notice how often Oliver has trapped some dark place, and how the sun always comes out. No matter how dark things get for Oliver- metaphorically speaking- it is granted that things are going to brighten up eventually. Consider such instance as when Oliver, the child of light, is locked into an involuntary apprenticeship with a coffin maker, Mr. Sowerberry. Oliver is asked to join the funeral processions as a paid mourner (although Mr. Sowerberry gets paid for his services, as a great master, Oliver does not get a penny of it). Oliver's commitment to life is contrasted with the darkness and death that surround him. The parish

authorities had originally wanted to apprentice Oliver to a chimneysweeper – a job that would have caused Oliver to become blackened with soot and ash. When Oliver is arrested for picking Mr. Brownlow's pocket, the officer who makes up a name for Oliver unconsciously picks an appropriate one: "White." Oliver is as pure as the driven snow, while all of the areas of London associated with the criminal class are stained black.

The sun, like midnight, is a social leveler – it shines equally on everybody, whether through expensive stained glass, or through a window mended with paper or duct tape. No matter how dark it may be, one can bet the sun is going to come out. Dickens even draws a parallel between "light" and "life" and – the sun explicitly "brings back" both.

### **3.1.5 Oliver Twist as Genre**

Broadly speaking, the genre of *Oliver Twist* is novel. Slightly more specifically, it is a serial novel. As a little kid, Oliver has to get over various obstacles, and then he has to pass safely into adolescence. But it diverges from traditional coming-of-age stories in that Oliver is still a child at the end of the novel. He has not actually "come of age" by the time we leave him at the end of the last chapter.

### **3.1.6 Conclusion**

The novel *Oliver Twist*, with its remarkable characters, probable events, humor and peculiar locations, offers us some real insights into the social state of his day and the way that ordinary people were affected by them. Dickens was the first great Victorian writer to wade into the vital modern problems of the dissatisfaction of urban society, and show us "things as they really are" (Bayley 49). London did not expand into a great manufacturing city overnight; it had continuously developed into a commercial center, a port, and a core of government, finance, law and fashion, the largest and richest of European cities. It was a period of the

Industrial Revolution which changed Britain forever. London is depicted as a harsh and grim city, but it can be escaped, as Oliver did.

Oliver Twist is a novel which shows the Victorian society, its system, laws, and state authority and how it worked within the society. Dickens successfully introduced unpleasant facts to the consideration of his readers. In order to see the ugliness one has to look into the mirror. In my opinion the novel was like a mirror for the Victorian society to see its deficiencies and advantages. The novel had to have a happy ending otherwise it would have been too harsh for the author to show things as they really were.

Reading the novel may lead to contrary expectations. The readers of 'Oliver Twist' did not respond by taking to the streets and protesting the Poor Act Amendment. Nonetheless, it is a fact that the novel opened their eyes to the plight of the poor. It can be said that the social reformers must have won a better informed audience.

The real genius of Dickens is that he was able to promote his own beliefs through the novel, whose plot twists are enough to keep the reader engaged.

## **David Copperfield**

### **3.2.1 Synopsis**

As has been done with Oliver Twist this part will be devoted to David Copperfield Dickens's eighth novel, published in monthly installments (1849-50).

The novel traces the life of David Copperfield from the time of his birth to his mature manhood, when he is married and familiar with the vicissitudes of life. His early years are enjoyable with his mother — who was widowed shortly before his birth — and with her servant, Peggotty. Life is happy for David until his mother decides to marry Mr. Murdstone; afterward, life becomes unbearable for David. He is soon sent to a

miserable school where he becomes friendly with James Steerforth, his school mate.

After the death of his mother David is taken from school and put to work by Mr. Murdstone in a London warehouse. Although David enjoys the company of the impoverished Micawber family, with whom he boards, his other associates and the work are intolerable, so he runs away to his Aunt Betsey Trotwood in Dover. Despite her stern exterior, she treats him well, adopting him and sending him to a good school. While at school, he boards with a Mr. Wickfield and his daughter Agnes. After graduation, David works in the law office of Spenlow & Jorkins and soon falls in love with Mr. Spenlow's daughter, Dora.

About this time, Emily, the Peggottys' beloved niece, runs off to marry Steerforth, whom David had innocently introduced to her while she was engaged to Ham, a nephew of the Peggottys. The family is saddened by this development, but Mr. Peggotty sets out to find her and bring her back. David uses his spare time doing clerical and literary work to help Aunt Betsey, who now finds herself without financial resources. He marries Dora, only to find that he has a "child-wife" who knows nothing of housekeeping and cannot accept any responsibility.

Meanwhile, Uriah Heep, an "umble" clerk in Mr. Wickfield's employ, whom David dislikes, has deceitfully worked his way into a partnership, aided by Mr. Wickfield's weakness for wine. In addition, David also discovers that his old friend Mr. Micawber has gone to work for Heep. David has remained fond of the Micawbers, and it troubles him that his old friend is working for a scoundrel. Eventually, however, Micawber has a grand moment of glory when he exposes Heep as a fraud, helping to save Mr. Wickfield and restoring some of Aunt Betsey's finances.

David's wife, Dora, falls ill and dies, and David is troubled until Emily, the Peggottys' niece, returns to her uncle. David has felt guilty for some time for having introduced Emily to Steerforth. After reconciliation is accomplished, Emily, along with some of the Peggottys, and the Micawbers, leave for Australia to start a new life. Before they leave, David witnesses a dramatic shipwreck in which Steerforth is killed, as is Ham in attempting to rescue him. Still saddened by the loss of his wife and other events, David goes abroad for three years. It is only after he returns that he realizes that Agnes Wickfield has been his true love all along, and their happy marriage takes place at last.

### **3.2.2 Theme/s in David Copperfield**

In Dickens' David Copperfield there are many themes, here I am going to discuss two of these themes: Poverty, and Society and Class.

Obviously, poverty is bad. It is poverty that leaves David isolated and without a future as a child labourer in London. The charitable institutions are bad, it is at one of them that Uriah Heep has turned into a vengeful monster. Wealth is also bad, for it can make people selfish and unfeeling, like Steerforth. In the world of this novel, the only way for an honorable man to cope with poverty is to sacrifice long hours of his life to honest professional toil: this is the path that both David and Traddles choose. However, the characters who are allowed to work their way out of poverty are relatively few. It is only the sons of gentlemen – people who are born into the English middle class – who can follow David's path. The working-class characters like Mr. Peggotty and Ham Peggotty are virtuous in part because they do not upset the social order. Nevertheless, despite David's rags-to-riches story, the class system in *David Copperfield* is to a great extent still rigid.

*Mr. Peggotty was but a poor man himself, said Peggotty, but as good as gold and as true as steel—those were her similes. The only*

*subject, she informed me, on which he ever showed a violent temper or swore an oath, was this generosity of his; and if it were ever referred to, by any one of them, he struck the table a heavy blow with his right hand (had split it on one such occasion), and swore a dreadful oath that he would be 'Gormed' if he didn't cut and run for good, if it was ever mentioned again. It appeared, in answer to my inquiries, that nobody had the least idea of the etymology of this terrible verb passive to be gormed; but that they all regarded it as constituting a most solemn imprecation.*  
(3.46)

Mr. Peggotty is a poor man, but a generous one: he has adopted his orphaned niece and nephew and allowed widowed Mrs. Gummidge to share his home. But the real mark of Mr. Peggotty's greatness as a character is that he does these things without wanting to be thanked. One can contrast Mr. Peggotty's generosity to the vengeful character of Uriah Heep, the producer of a charitable institution, who is always reminded that he should be grateful to his betters. Mr. Peggotty's generosity produces other sympathetic human beings – fallible, maybe, but good-hearted, while Uriah Heep has an angry and destructive jerk. Perhaps Dickens is giving his readers a lesson to learn about the way the poor should be treated: to help them with unselfish generosity, rather than offer them charity with grudge.

*“As they looked at [Mrs. Mell], I looked at her also. Although it was a warm day, she seemed to think of nothing but the fire. I fancied she was jealous even of the saucepan on it; [...] The sun streamed in at the little window, but she sat with her own back and the back of the large chair towards it, screening the fire as if she were sedulously keeping it warm, instead of it keeping her warm, and watching it in a most distrustful manner. “(5.119)*

Let us consider the life of Mrs. Mell, whose 19<sup>th</sup> century mother has settled in a homeless shelter. Her extreme poverty seems to have caused the suspicions of many ordinary things in life, such as having a fire and being able to cook on it. In what tone does David describe her situation? How does he feel about her poverty? And, to what extent is this reflected in the novel when David is involved in a similar situation of poverty?

There are two kinds of society that *David Copperfield* seems to be concerned with. The first is society, like human community. This is the kind of society that rejects Emily for running away from Ham and deprives David of comfort when he is a factory worker. Every community has two faces: its inside and outside, being outside is always distressing. For, while the society can be cruel, at the same time it may provide a shelter for those who abide by its rules. Hence the outside turns to be positive.

The second kind of society to be found in *David Copperfield* is much more specialized: it is the restricted community of the wealthy upper-class in nineteenth Century England. Its representative is Steerforth, and main characteristic is its unproductivity: Steerforth belongs to it accidentally by birth. He does not have to work, even with respect to his education. As a member of that society, Steerforth does not need to have any interest in or sympathy for people in the lower social classes. Dickens describes this type of society as barren at best, destructive at worst. In a novel that prizes personal feeling and affection, the sterile rules of upper-class relations seem mechanical and inhuman.

Nevertheless, there are some differences between Emily's orphanhood and that of David's. She has lost her mother before her father; and where her father's grave is no one knows, except that it is somewhere in the depths of the sea."Besides," said Emily, as she looked

about for shells and pebbles, "your father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is a fisherman." (3.57-8)

Though she is only about five years old at this point, Emily already knows the important difference between herself and David. This difference has nothing to do with the question of gender. It is to do with David's father who was a gentleman and his mother who was a lady, whereas Emily's were a fisherman and a fisherman's daughter." It is at this early stage that we are made aware of the primary organizing logic in the novel. It is not mainly concerned with men and women, and the primary divisions between the working, middle, and upper classes.

From his lofty perspective as the son of an upper-class wealthy woman, Steerforth can look down on Mr. Mell and his beggared "near relation" – Mrs. Mell. Steerforth's wealth and noble birth give him an easy self-confidence and charisma that characters like David and Traddles cannot draw on. At the same time, his social position prevents him from sympathizing with the poor. It is his energetic nature which gets twisted and stunted by having nothing to do or prove. Society destroys Steerforth's moral compass:-

“The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written.” (11.5)

When David works in his factory, he is almost in a more pathetic position than the other boys. Mick Walker and Mealy Potatoes do not expect anything different from their lives. But David has been to school, and has experienced another kind of life. So, this sudden slide into a life



with no future fills him with "shame" and "misery" that "cannot be written." Still, one has to wonder; whether it is truly worse to be disappointed than to have no hopes at all.

### **3.2.3 Character analysis in relation to theme/s**

David is a character in transition because his family is unsettled and changing: it is not until he settles down with his perfect match, Agnes, that David's character finishes developing

Mr. Murdstone is a vicious brute, and we know this because of his treatment of his step-son and wives. We can tell that Dora Spenlow is spoiled and child-like because her aunts treat her like a doll, and even the stern Miss Betsey calls her "Little Blossom" (41.128). Further, we know that Emily is a good woman at heart because an excellent man, Mr. Peggotty, will search the world for her until he finds her. All of these characters exist in a complex web of social relations. The way they treat their family members, and the way their family members treat them, tell us a lot about their characters.

Probably, the best example of Dickens's use of physical appearances to show character is Miss Rosa Dartle's scar. Miss Dartle has a scar across her lip which is generally old and faded. But when she gets angry, it grows bright red and shows up starkly against her face. This scar shows Miss Dartle's twisted, passionate nature, which is generally hidden until she is particularly moved (as when she meets Emily at her boarding house, or when she confronts Mrs. Steerforth after the death of her husband). Other good examples of this type of characterization include Mr. Wickfield's red face – a sign of his alcoholism – and Uriah Heep's staring eyes and clammy skeletal hands, which are symbolic of his inhumanity.

While a character's appearance generally does say a lot about what he or she is like inside, in this novel there are two, really notable

exceptions: Miss Mowcher, the little person who dresses Steerforth's hair, and Steerforth himself. David initially dismisses Miss Mowcher from his mind because she is a little person, and he cannot imagine that she can play any role in the events of his life. But it is Miss Mowcher who reveals to David what Steerforth is plotting with Littimer, and it is also Miss Mowcher who catches Littimer in the act of stealing from his new master and hands him to the police. Hence, David's assumptions about little people seem to cloud his judgment.

Another example of this kind of misunderstanding is Steerforth, who is considered by David the most perfect person; he is handsome, self-assured, and charismatic. Indeed, Steerforth's easy manners seem to fool everyone, including the Peggottys. However, the only person to warn David against Steerforth is Agnes, who is too intelligent to be fooled by anyone.

Steerforth may provide one example of the danger of judging a book by its cover, but since we judge everyone else in the novel by appearances, from the grand-looking Mr. Micawber to the stern, honest Miss Betsey, we cannot be sure of the extent to which we learn this lesson.

#### **3.2.4 Literary devices**

To describe his characters, Dickens often resorts to figures of speech and other rhetorical devices. Following are examples of such devices as symbolism, imagery, and allegory.

When David arrives at Salem House, on orders from Mr. Creakle, Mr. Mell immediately attaches a sign to David's back: "Take care of him. He bites" "The sign definitely does not mean "Be nice to him." Rather, it means "Be careful around him." At plot level, this sign is a petty revenge by Mr. Murdstone on David for biting his hand. Symbolically, this sign demonstrates the intense isolation of David after he has been slowly

squeezed out of his mother's life and, eventually, out of her home. He has been labeled a bad boy by Mr. Murdstone – unjustly, certainly, and he is powerless to challenge Mr. Murdstone's orders.

The sign is so humiliating to David that he lives in fear of meeting the school boys at the beginning of the new term: he doesn't want them to mock him with the sign on his back; after all, every first day of school is awful to the pupils, let alone introducing one's self with a sign on one's back saying one bites. The sign deepens David's embarrassment and increases his shyness under new different circumstances.

Traddles is the first boy who recognizes the sign. But instead of teasing David or mocking him, Traddles thinks of the sign as a game; and this is a great relief to David. After being accepted by his mates, the sign quietly disappears. Mr. Creakle has taken the sign off only to make sure that he can beat David's back more easily. Symbolically, the removal of the sign implies that David has managed to make himself a place in the society of Salem House. He is no more isolated as he used to be.

### **3.2.5 David Copperfield Genre**

The genre question is pretty easy with *David Copperfield* – this is not surrealist experimental fiction. What we have here is a classic coming-of-age story, as we watch David grow from a boy to a man. And, since almost all of the drama in the novel comes from family stuff – David's abusive step-father, Annie Strong's (supposed) infidelity, David's unsuitable first marriage, Emily's flight from her family, and so on – it is believed that "family drama" is an appropriate description of what goes on in *David Copperfield*.

### **3.2.6 David Copperfield writing style**

The tone of *David Copperfield* is often melodramatic and emotional, but the language of the novel is actually quite realistic. There is a lot of dense descriptions of the setting and characters of the novel,

which makes it seem as though the events are happening in front of us. However, even the most objective account of the scenery of the novel will eventually give way to commentary from our helpful narrator, David himself. As has been pointed out in the section "Narrator Point of View" nothing in this goes unframed by David's impressions and judgments. Let us take, for example, David's description of his stepfather's horrible factory:-

*Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse was at the waterside. [...] Modern improvements have altered the place; but it was the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river, with some stairs at the end, where people took boat. It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant.*  
(11.2)

The most general of observations are: the placement of the factory in London in relation to the river Thames, its colouring, its rats (blech). At the same time, while this may seem like an objective description, it has subtle inflections of David's own feelings about the factory. When David "dare[s]" to say that it was covered with the "dirt and smoke of a hundred years," he is saying that that is how dirty he felt it to be at the time. The "dirt and rottenness" of the place also suggest connotations of personal disgust and hatred.

But what makes it really personal is that David sees this scene in his mind "not of many years ago [...] but of the present instance." The factory is so disgusting that David can see it, as though it is in front of

him now – and he shows it to the reader as though it is in front of both of us. It is like a traumatic flashback, this description of the factory. David's depth of bad feeling colours the whole description with a sense of disgust and revulsion that is anything but objective.

As a narrator, David uses these long, wordy descriptive passages so that he can move quietly back and forth between description and commentary. But his commentary is often so subtle that it seems to be part of the description. There is no sharp line between the novel's realistic scenes and its emotional content; both types of narration seem inseparable. By combining David's feelings with descriptions of the novel's world, Dickens makes David's feelings literally *a part* of the world of the novel. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why everything David narrates seems powerfully moving to the reader.

### **3.2.7 Conclusion**

Even though the novel's main focus is on David Copperfield, it also provides a broad cross-section of mid-nineteenth Century English life. David's adventures take him through many segments of society: from a rural village in Suffolk to coastal Yarmouth; from abusive country schools to degrading city factories, and from poverty and obscurity to fame and fortune. Given the wide range of this novel, it makes sense that the final chapter goes well beyond David's life to survey the different lives of people we have met during the novel course of events.

The final chapter, "A Last Retrospect" is much like the other retrospects that are to be found in Chapters 18, 43, and 53. All three chapters are narrated in the present tense, as though David is looking at the events and unfolding them right before his eyes. The use of the present tense contrasts with David's usual past-tense mode of narration. By changing the mode of storytelling from past to present tense Dickens is ratcheting up the emotional content of each of these chapters: they no

longer take place in David's distant memories. Suddenly, the events narrated seem to be happening right up close.

Dickens uses this emotional method of storytelling six times to emphasize both extreme joy and extreme sorrow in David's life. These chapters work like punctuation – the exclamation points of the novel, if you will. It goes without saying that the final chapter is the last exclamation point the novel needs.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Social Reform in Education

#### Introduction

Evidence of Dickens's concern about the important issue of education is conveyed in his fiction, and public speeches. While he was sensitive to the various educational developments which he witnessed in his lifetime, he fell short of offering practical solutions to problems, and his work only reflects a selected range of issues and institutions. In this chapter it will be attempted to dwell on some of Dickens novels, and underline his endeavours as a social reformer.

Dickens strongly believed in universal, non-sectarian education, though not necessarily under a state system. His general outlook on the subject is encapsulated in a speech he gave in Birmingham in 1844; he said, "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 -- comprehensive liberal education -- is the one thing needful, and the one effective end" (*Speeches*, 63).

Like so many of Dickens' novels, "Hard Times" the addresses societal problems of the day. One such problem which he focuses on is the system of education which he considers an embedment to imagination. The social consequences of industrialization and urbanization are perhaps most persuasively depicted in Hard Times which Dickens wrote at the prompting of urgent external circumstances. The novel more than any other of his Condition of English novel is influenced by Carlye's social criticism, for it deals with a number of social issues, including relations, education for the poor, class division and the right of the common people to amusement. It also draws upon the popular concern with the question of reforming divorce laws. Cazamian (1973;17)

sees Dickens in *Hard Times* as an "intermediary link between the social thought of Carlyle and Ruskin". On the other hand, Raymond Williams (1983 :93) describes *Hard Times* as " a thorough-going and creative examination of the dominant philosophy of industrialism of the hardness that Mr. Gaskell saw as little more than a misunderstanding, which might be patiently broken down."

On every page, *Hard Times* manifests its identity as a polemical work, a critique of mid-Victorian industrial society dominated by materialism, acquisitiveness, and ruthlessly competitive capitalist economics. To Dickens, at the time of writing *Hard Times*, these things were represented most articulately and persuasively. The novel opens significantly in Mr. Gradgrind's school-room, Dickens which depicts as a microcosm of the inhuman world outside.

However, this is not simply a literary device in which the author creates the world of the novel in miniature to foreshadow the coming events. The classroom seems to have been intentionally created as a factory whose obvious purpose is to manufacture future workers; For education in Coke town is a process by which innocence and imagination are rooted out of the children so that they may grow into soulless automatons expecting nothing other than the drudgery of industrial life. By depicting the potential evils of mass education in this way Dickens seems to adopt a position often espoused by the radical theorists who believe that the power structure uses the society's supposedly benevolent institutions to perpetuate its own power and subjugate those whom these institutions are supposed to help. Obviously, Dickens is inclined to using overstatement to make his point. Nevertheless, Coketown schoolroom is drawn more from fact than fancy. It is based on a type of schooling referred to either as the Monitorial System or the Lancasterian System after its originator, a London teacher named Joseph Lancaster. The



system was employed both in England and the U.S.A. in the early and mid-19th century, especially in urban centers and with poor children.

Mr. Grandgrinds believes that the world has no place for fancy or imagination. His own five children are models of a factual education. Since they have never been permitted to learn anything of the humanities, they are ignorant of literature and any conception of human beings as individuals. Even fairy tales and nursery rhymes have been excluded from their education. As the story develops, the readers will realize the effect of this type of teaching on the students' life.

“NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!” (Hard Times, 1.1)

It is interesting that even when giving these instructions, Gradgrind cannot help but speak metaphorically. In his world there is no imagination, no fancy, no emotions, only fact and self-interest. Consider how the situation is described:

*“So, Mr. M'Choakumchild began in his best manner. He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the sciences of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and leveling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had*

*taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek". (Hard Times.2.48-49)*

It can also be observed that the educational preparation of Mr. M'Choakum is so completely based on fact, and that even its mild gestures towards creativity seem to be completely non-creative. Rather, it is a machine-like conformist and decorative kind of education. Though he can teach drawing, in reality he is only teaching "from models", and never from the imagination. He knows history, but the phrase "of all the peoples" gives us the idea that what he mostly knows is dates and events.

One of his students is a girl called Sissy Jupe. Mr. Gradgrind asks her what her name is, and she tells him Sissy Jupe. But he does not her name, he is consider this a name; so he tells her it is not Sissy but Cecilia. He asks her about her father's job, and she tells him that he works in the horse riding. When he asks her to define a horse she is unable to do so, he reverts to his model pupil, Bitzer, to provide the required definition.

To him Bitzer's definition is real knowledge, but Sissy who has been brought up among horses all her life, has no real knowledge about horses.

Dickens's critique is embodied in the exchange between Gradgrind, Bitzer and Sissy Jupe over the proper definition of a horse. Bitzer, who has learned the definition by rote, classifies it as a "*Quadruped*" and "*Gramnivorous*," whereas Sissy, the horse-breaker's daughter dubbed "*Girl number twenty*," is reprimanded for possessing "*no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals*" (Hard Times 1.2).

*"You are extremely deficient in your facts. Your acquaintance with figures is very limited. You are altogether backward, and below the mark." 'I am sorry, sir,' [Sissy] returned; 'but I know it is quite true. Yet I have tried hard, sir.' 'Yes,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'yes, I believe you have tried hard; I have observed you, and I can find no fault in that respect.'*

*'Thank you, sir. I have thought sometimes;' Sissy very timid here; 'that perhaps I tried to learn too much, and that if I had asked to be allowed to try a little less, I might have — ' 'No, Jupe, no,' said Mr. Gradgrind, shaking his head in his profoundest and most eminently practical way. (Hard Times 1.15)*

Gradgrind is so accustomed to his educational system that even in the face of its obvious failure he blames her, and not his theories. This seems like a pretty astute observation of people who are ideologues of one kind or another.

One day, as he walks from the school to his home, Gradgrind is immensely displeased and hurt to find his two oldest children, Louisa and Tom, trying to peek through the canvas walls of a circus tent. It eases his mind even less to discover that the two youngsters are not at all sorry for acting against the principles under which they have been reared and educated. Later, he and his industrialist friend, Mr. Josiah Bounderby, discuss possible means by which the children might have been misled from the study of facts, for Sissy Jupe, a daughter of a circus clown, has influenced the young Gradgrinds.

Having decided to remove Sissy Jupe from the school, Bounderby and Gradgrind set out immediately to tell the girl's father. When they arrive at the inn where the Jupes are staying, they find that the father has deserted his daughter. Moved by sentiment, Gradgrind decides to keep the girl in his home and to let her be educated at his school, all against the advice of Bounderby, who thinks Sissy Jupe will only be a bad influence on the Gradgrind children.

The educational critique in *Hard Times* confirms Dickens's familiarity with pedagogical developments. The presentation of Mr. M'Choakumchild is further evidence of Dickens's interest in contemporary developments. The schoolmaster is the product of Kay-

Shuttleworth's pupil-teacher system, which apprenticed proficient boys and girls to school managers for five years, before allowing them to enter the training colleges for a maximum of three years, and then to graduate as certified teachers.

While M'Choakum child features only briefly in *Hard Times*, Dickens depicts teacher, in *Our Mutual Friend*, as occupying a far more prominent position in the narrative. Bradley Headstone, described as a "*highly certificated stipendiary schoolmaster*", (*Our Mutual Friend*.2) is also a product of the training college system in *Our Mutual Friend*. Consider the sociological development of the new generation of teachers: Headstone and his pupil-teacher Charley Hexam are products of the best education available to individuals from poor backgrounds; they are encouraged to rise above their social origins in their quest for respectability.

The training college experience, on the other hand, is again presented unsympathetically by Dickens: Headstone "*had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge, to the point where his mental "wholesale warehouse" was "always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers"* (*Our Mutual Friend*.2). Though he is relatively well paid, and thus reflects the enhanced status of qualified teachers, Headstone displays a vicious temperament, which proves to be his undoing.

The respectability of Headstone is precarious. He falls for Lizzie Hexam, but because of his obnoxious behaviour is rejected. Dickens exacerbates this feeling of injustice by positing as his rival Eugene Wrayburn -- the indolent, briefless barrister, who has the benefit of a public school education. Their confrontation serves as an indictment of the whole teaching profession. Dickens continually takes Wrayburn's side in the rivalry over Lizzie, stressing the "boyish weakness" and "great selfishness" of Headstone's speech, and presenting his short temper and

"consciously bad grace" as evidence of unworthiness. While Headstone declares that he has a "right to be considered a better man" than Wrayburn, with "better reasons for being proud," the latter calmly counters, "*How I can reproach you with what is not within my knowledge, or how I can cast stones that were never in my hand, is a problem for the ingenuity of a schoolmaster to prove*" (*Our Mutual Friend*.6).

By making the character of Headstone a significant element in the plot, Dickens highlights several considerations for the new generation of teachers and how they affect the education system.

"David Copperfield" is also a novel of education. School is only one of many avenues for education available to David. Indeed, many of his most productive sites of education – the factory where he learns the misery of isolation and poverty; Miss Betsey's cottage and Mr. Peggotty's boat house where he learns the importance of generosity; the bad first marriage where he learns the importance of finding a partner who shares your ideas – teach through experience rather than books. At the same time, there are some really memorable depictions of schools in this novel. Mr. Creakle's hugely abusive dive of a school, is unforgettable, for it exposes some classic critiques of the use of physical punishment on students in schools and its effects on both students and teachers. Dickens combines some specific, barbed attacks on the styles of schools in his day with a broader inquiry into what learning means and where we might achieve it outside of the classroom.

*"I hand the first book to my mother. Perhaps it is a grammar, perhaps a history, or geography. I take a last drowning look at the page as I give it into her hand, and start off aloud at a racing pace while I have got it fresh. I trip over a word. Mr. Murdstone looks up. I trip over another word. Miss Murdstone looks up. I redden, tumble over half-a-*

*dozen words, and stop. I think my mother would show me the book if she dared, but she does not dare. (David Copperfield.74)*

Before David falls into the hands of the Murdstones, he shows a love of reading remembering Peggotty's crocodile book! But once the Murdstones are watching him like hawks while reciting his lessons, just waiting for him to mess up, suddenly all of David's smarts dry up. This is the most basic lesson of this novel: treat a kid cruelly, and you'll get nothing out of him. Treat him kindly, and you'll get a happy and productive kid. consider the following exchange:-

*"I tell you, Clara," said Mr. Murdstone, "I have been often flogged myself."*

*"To be sure; of course," said Miss Murdstone.*

*"Certainly, my dear Jane," faltered my mother, meekly. "But—but do you think it did Edward good?"*

*"Do you think it did Edward harm, Clara?" asked Mr. Murdstone, gravely". (David Copperfield 92)*

Here when Mr. Murdstone plans to beat David, he tells David's mother that he has often been beaten as though that is supposed to be a comfort to her. But obviously Mr. Murdstone has learned to be cruel by example; someone was once cruel to Mr. Murdstone. Here is a vivid description of David's experience on his first arrival at Salem House:

*"I gazed upon the schoolroom into which he took me, as the most forlorn and desolate place I had ever seen. I see it now. A long room with three long rows of desks, and six of forms, and bristling all round with pegs for hats and slates. Scraps of old copy-books and exercises litter the dirty floor. Some silkworms' houses, made of the same materials, are scattered over the desks. Two miserable little white mice, left behind by their owner, are running up and down in a fusty castle made of pasteboard and wire, looking in all the corners with their red eyes for*

*anything to eat. A bird, in a cage very little bigger than himself, makes a mournful rattle now and then in hopping on his perch, two inches high, or dropping from it; but neither sings nor chirps. There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books. There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless from its first construction, and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink through the varying seasons of the year". (David Copperfield.135)*

David's first encounter with Salem House cannot be more truthfully and beautifully illustrated. Consider the way he uses setting and scenery to establish mood for the following development. We know that Salem House is going to be a bad school because it is filled with a "strange unwholesome smell." We know that it is going to be like a restrictive trap for its students because there is a bird "in a cage very little bigger than himself ". Who won't even sing? We also know that the emphasis of this school sure isn't going to be on learning, because the schoolroom smells of "rotten ink."

What distinguishes *Hard Times* from the two earlier novels is not that Dickens' veil of society has changed, but that his depiction of the society is more realistic. The characters are still divided into blacks and whites, but there is a greater concern with explaining the rationale behind their behavior. Gradgrind, like *Dombey*, is given a new insight into life's meaning by a character of incorruptible goodness. But as mentioned earlier a philosophical basis for Gradgrind's pride and selfishness is provided. He does not, like *Dombey*, act without apparent motivation. And Sissy Jupe, although unmistakably one of the incorruptible child-heroes, is given a background which explains her immunity to the Gradgrind philosophy. Gradgrind tells her, "the circumstances of your early life were too unfavourable to the development of your reasoning power .

Louisa, like Edith Dombey, has been deprived of her childhood and forced into an unhappy child, not a figure of evil who joins the ranks of the villainous. Her defense of her brother is fully explained by her emotional needs which have never been satisfied. Even Harthouse, the "villain" of the piece, has a philosophy behind him. His behavior does not stem from a nature of absolute evil like Carker's or Fagin's, but from a decision to live like those around him. "Everyman is selfish in everything he does, and I am exactly like the rest of my fellow-creatures".(Hard Times;177)

Dickens's evil characters have never been revealed before. The realistic portrayal falters in the treatment of the lower classes.

It has been observed that Dickens knew little of the working class and that this ignorance resulted in a misrepresentation of the working classes and class manners. But the characters of Stephen and Rachel reveal more than Dickens' ignorance of working class manners and customs. They are middle class individuals; they show little understanding of the workers' plight as if they had never themselves been inside the factory. They reflect Dickens' fear of the lower classes. The factory workers are their enemies because they submit to and believe in middle-class ideals and rationalization. Stephen refuses to aid the workers because it is not his position in the society to try to control his life. Rachel is a woman working, ever working, but content to do it, and preferring to do it as her natural lot, until she should be too old to labour any more". If this is the middle class dream; they accept their deprivation as their due. However, the most important difference between *Hard Times* and the earlier novels is that Dickens can no longer maintain his happy ending.

In *Oliver Twist* and *Dombey and Son* the novels' endings find the good characters living in bliss in an isolated country setting. But in *Hard Times*, Stephen, the embodiment of goodness, dies; Dickens seems to realize that no virtue is an insurance against the destructive force of



society. But if Dickens has taken a more realistic look at his society, and found that innocents like Oliver Twist cannot survive, he is not to alter his solutions. Rather, he turns away from society altogether, and places his faith in life after death. In recounting Mrs. Gradgrind's death he writes that "she is like Oliver, we will surely find it like Stephen, in our "Redeemer's rest".(p.274)

Thus *Hard Times* is a departure from Dickens' earlier work. But although it reveals a growing discomfort with the world around him, it gives no indication of the G.B Shaw finds. The increasing pessimism leads him to an even more passive solution: life on earth has little significance; we must try to make it as bearable as possible, but we will all find our just deserts after death.

#### **4.1 Conclusion**

There is a strong case made in *Dickens*'s novels: that education is not simply the classroom experience of memorizing facts. In his novels Dickens expresses the idea that having an emotional component to our education is crucial. It is also shown in the novels that this kind of learning can happen at any time in life. Learning about the way other people live the fundamental to valuing them as fellow creatures; learning about them only in terms of their productivity is a recipe for class warfare. If this proper groundwork is not laid, then a perverted kind of learning can take its place, full of cynicism and misanthropy.

Dickens is one of the great 19th century writers, and he can be counted on to give a rich and revealing picture of contemporary schooling. He stands out as social critic, and in his novels he seems to refrain from giving negative portrayals unlike his fellow writers. He portrays mass education as a sinister force whose aim is to destroy in the students those qualities which Dickens treasures most. He made the best choice when he used factory-style method of mass education to begin his

novel about the depersonalization and dehumanization caused by the excesses of the Industrial Revolution. Even those who are inclined to portray the negative side by depicting the teacher's incompetence or cruelty cannot refute the underlying value of Dickens' attack on the educational system through his depiction of schooling in his time.

Dickens has given us a view of what a more systematized urban school might have been like at that time.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Literary Career and Achievement

#### Introduction

The question why we still read Dickens is one that is always raised. The answer may be, "Because he teaches us how to think" But it will be reasonably acceptable to say that many writers can teach us how to think. We read Dickens not just because he was a prominent writer of his time, but a man whose writings still appeal to our modern times. We read Dickens because his perception and investigation of the human psyche is profound and illuminating, and because he tells us things about ourselves by portraying people and their traits and habits that may well seem familiar in our present time.

Dickens' messages about poverty and charity have travelled through decades and we can learn from the experiences of his characters almost as easily as we can learn from contemporary experiences. These are many reasons that make us read Dickens.

"We need to read Dickens's novels," "because they tell us, in the grandest way possible, why we are what we are." Like most people, we think we know who we are without knowing it. We are Oliver Twist, always wanting and asking for more. We are Nicholas Nickleby, the son of a dead man, incurably convinced that father is watching us from beyond the grave. We are Esther Summer's son, longing for a mother who has left because of circumstances beyond her control. We are Pip who is in love with someone far beyond his reach. Dickens tells us a lot about human beings and human interaction.

#### 5.1 Dickens' Achievements

One of the great achievements of Charles Dickens is the impact of his writing on social reform. Through his portrayal of *Oliver*

*Twist*, Dickens attacked the thePoor Law of the Victorian era. In *Bleak House* Dickens show his social realism, for the novel is full of with social analysis and protest. Through the use of pathos and melodrama Dickens, has managed to uncover the corruption at the heart of the Victorian society.

Dickens also introduced the readers to the historical detective novel, and the thriller, genres that maintain their popularity and widespread appeal to this day. It is said that *A Tale of Two Cities* was written by Dickens after he had read Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History*. Carlyle's study of the oppression of the poor is obviously reflecting the themes of *A Tale of Two Cities* through which Dickens draws parallels between France at the time of the Revolution and England. Dickens, of course, was concerned that a similar revolution might be kindled in his own country.

Dickens used his literature to address a number of societal issues, from the imbalance of the social classes to children's rights, an issue which is most obviously brought under focus through the depiction of Oliver Twist and Pip in *Great Expectations*. He publicly and repeatedly spoke out and stressed these issues, employing his powerful and life-like descriptionsand monopolizing his overwhelming popularity to bring about the desired changes. His epitaph read: "sympathy with the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed" and his death meant of the loss of one of England's greatest writers.

During the nineteenth century, Dickens stood out as the most dominant literary figure of his time. His successful career coincided with the first half of the reign of Queen Victoria. He was the precursor of social reform who preceded Charles, Darwin and Karl Marx who eroded the century's liberal consensus. Although best known for his novels, his shorter works, particularly his Christmas stories, also gained fame.

Fiction became the property of an increasingly democratic and literate society on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Dickens mastered the serial novel, producing most of his major works in parts that were published monthly. His exaggerated humor and sentimentality touched a deep chord in the reading public of the day, and his cast of legendary characters is legion. As a social critic of both private and public evils, he criticized his age for the destructive nature of the new factory system in *Hard Times* (1854), the utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham in *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839), the dehumanizing greed exhibited by Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, and legal corruption in *Bleak House* (1852-1853). Not only did Dickens entertain, but also his moral concerns helped shape the public conscience of his own and later times.

Known for his biting satire of the social conditions of his time as well as for his comic worldview, Dickens began, with *Pickwick Papers*, to establish an enduring novelistic reputation. In fourteen completed novels and countless essays, sketches, and stories, he emerged as a champion of generosity and warmth of spirit, those human traits most likely to atrophy in an industrialized society. In his own day, he appealed to all levels of society, particularly to members of the growing middle class, whose newfound literacy made them educable to eradicate the social evils they themselves had fostered.

He was extremely popular in the United States despite his ongoing attack on the lack of an international copyright agreement; an attack which was directed in part against the Americans who had a financial stake in pirated editions of his works.

Above all, Dickens appealed to his readers' emotions and, through them, to an awakened social sense. To be sure, Dickens's sentimentality offends as many modern readers as it pleased the Victorian. Indeed, the twenty-first century reader may study his novels primarily for the

enjoyment of his craft, but to do so is to ignore Dickens's purpose: to argue on the side of intuition against materialism, as Angus Wilson puts it, or on the side of the individual against the system, as Philip Hosbaum has pointed out. In his facility for comic language, for example, Dickens created the unforgettable Sairey Gamp, Flora Finching, and Alfred Jingle, whose manic lingo creates worlds with a preposterous logic of their own. But such lingo is sometimes a shield for a warm heart and sometimes an indicator of fragmentation and despair.

The keen reader would discover that Dickens's attacks on certain social institutions, such as the Poor Law in *Oliver Twist* or the Court of Chancery in *Bleak House*, are actually attacks on universal human evils—the greed, hypocrisy, and lust for power that lead to dehumanization and make, for example, a “species of frozen gentleman” out of Mr. Dombey instead of a warm, affectionate human being.

## **5.2 Journalism and Early Novels**

At the age of 20, Dickens was energetic and full of good humor. He actually enjoyed mimicry and popular entertainment, lacked a clear sense of what he wanted to become, and deep at heart, he knew he wanted to be famous. He was drawn to the theatre and landed an acting audition at Covent Garden, for which he prepared meticulously but which he missed because of a cold, ending his aspirations for a career on the stage. A year later, he submitted his first story "A Dinner at Poplar Walk" to the London periodical, *Monthly Magazine*. He rented rooms at Furnivall's Inn and became a political journalist, reporting on parliamentary debate and travelling across Britain to cover election campaigns for the *Morning Chronicle*. His journalism, in the form of sketches in periodicals, formed his first collection of pieces; titled *Sketches by Boz-Boz* (1836) which is a family nickname that he used as a pseudonym for some years..

The success of these sketches led to a proposal from publishers Chapman and Hall for him to supply text to match Robert Seymour's engraved illustrations in a monthly letterpress. After the second installment, Seymour committed suicide and Dickens, who wanted to write a connected series or sketches, hired "Phiz" to provide the engravings for the story. The resulting story was the *Pickwick Papers* with the final installment selling 40,000 copies.

In November 1836 Dickens accepted the job of editor of Bentley's *Miscellany*, a position he held for three years, until he fell out with the owner. In 1836 after finishing the last installments of *The Pickwick Papers* he began writing the beginning installments of *Oliver Twist* while continuing work on Bentley's, plays, the production of which he oversaw. *Oliver Twist*, published in 1838, became one of Dickens's best known stories, with dialogue that transferred well to the stage. More importantly, it was the first Victorian novel with a child protagonist.

### **5.3 Style and Techniques**

Dickens loved the style of the 18th century. According to Ackroyd, other than this, perhaps the most important literary influence on him was that of the fables of *The Arabian Nights*. His writing style is marked by a profuse linguistic creativity. Satire, flourishing in his gift for caricature, is his forte. An early reviewer compared him to Hogarth for his keen practical sense of the ludicrous side of life, though his acclaimed mastery of varieties of class idiom may in fact mirror the conventions of contemporary popular theatre.

Dickens worked intensively on developing arresting names for his characters that would reverberate with associations for his readers, and assist the development of motifs in the storyline, giving what one critic calls "allegorical impetus" to the novels' meanings. To cite one of

numerous examples, the name Mr. Murdstone in *David Copperfield* conjures up twin allusions to "murder" and stony coldness. His literary style is also a mixture of fantasy and realism. His satires of British aristocratic snobbery—he calls one character the "Noble Refrigerator"—are often popular. Comparing orphans to stocks and shares, people to tug boats, or dinner-party guests to furniture are just some of Dickens's acclaimed flights of fancy.

Dickens, the author, worked closely with his illustrators, supplying them with a summary of the work at the outset and thus ensuring that his characters and settings were exactly how he envisioned them. He would brief the illustrator on plans for each month's installment so that work could begin before he wrote them. Marcus Stone, illustrator of *Our Mutual Friend*, recalled that the author was always "ready to describe down to the minutest details the personal characteristics, and ... life-history of the creations of his fancy."

Dickens is often inclined to use 'idealized' characters and highly sentimental scenes to contrast with his caricatures and the ugly social truths he reveals. The story of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) was received as incredibly moving by contemporary readers but viewed as ludicrously sentimental by Oscar Wilde: "You would need to have a heart of stone," he declared in one of his famous witticisms, "not to laugh at the death of Little Nell." (Although her death actually takes place off-stage). In 1903 G. K. Chesterton said, "It is not the death of Little Nell, but the life of Little Nell, that I object to."

In *Oliver Twist* Dickens provides readers with an idealized portrait of a young boy so inherently and unrealistically 'good' that his values are never subverted by either brutal orphanages or coerced involvement in a gang of young pickpockets. In his later novels, Dickens tends to centre on idealized characters (Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* and Amy Dorrit



in *Little Dorrit*), but this idealism is meant only to highlight his tendency towards poignant social commentary. Many of his novels are concerned with social realism, focusing on mechanisms of social control that direct people's lives. For example, the factory networks in *Hard Times* and the hypocritical exclusionary class codes in *Our Mutual Friend*.

Also, Dickens is inclined to employ incredible coincidences (e.g., *Oliver Twist* turns out to be the lost nephew of the upper class family that randomly rescues him from the dangers of the pickpocket group). Such coincidences are a staple of eighteenth century picaresque novels such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, which that Dickens enjoyed reading so much. However, to him these were not just plot devices but an index of the humanism that led him to believe that good wins out in the end and often in unexpected ways.

## **5.4 Characters**

Dickens used his rich imagination, sense of humor and detailed memories, particularly of his childhood, to enliven his fiction.

Dickensian characters, especially so because of their typically whimsical names, are amongst the most memorable in English literature. The likes of Ebenezer Scrooge, Tiny Tim, Jacob Marley, Bob Cratchit, *Oliver Twist*, The Artful Dodger, Fagin, Bill Sikes, Pip, Miss Havisham, Sydney Carton, Charles Darnay, David Copperfield, Mr. Micawber, Abel Magwitch, Daniel Quilp, Samuel Pickwick, Wackford Squeers, Uriah Heep are so well known that they became part and parcel of British culture, and in some cases have passed into ordinary language: a scrooge, for example, is a miser.

Dickens' characters have often become so memorable that they took on a life of their own outside his novels.

## 5.5 Episodic Writing

As has been stated earlier, most of Dickens's major novels were first written in monthly or weekly installments in journals such as *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *Household Words*, and were later reprinted in book form. These installments made the stories cheap, accessible and the series of regular cliff-hangers made each new episode widely anticipated. American readers (most truly called 'fans'), even waited at the docks in New York, shouting out to the crew of an incoming ship, "Is Little Nell dead?"

Part of Dickens's great talent was to incorporate this episodic writing style and still end up with a coherent novel at the end. The monthly numbers were illustrated by, amongst others, "Phiz" (a pseudonym for Hablot Browne). Among his best-known works are *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Bleak House*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens's technique of writing in monthly or weekly installments (depending on the work) can be understood by analyzing his relationship with his illustrators. The several artists who filled this role were privy to the contents and intentions of Dickens's installments before the general public. Thus, by reading these correspondences between author and illustrator, the intentions behind Dickens's work can be better understood. What was hidden in his art is made plain in these letters, which also reveal how the interests of the reader and author do not coincide. A good example of this is to be found in the monthly novel *Oliver Twist*. At one point in this work, Dickens had Oliver become embroiled in a robbery. That particular monthly installment concludes with young Oliver being shot. Readers expected that they would be forced to wait only a month to find out the outcome of that gunshot. In fact, Dickens did not reveal what

became of young Oliver in the succeeding number. Rather, the reading public was forced to wait two months to discover if the boy lived.

Another important impact of Dickens's episodic writing style resulted from his exposure to the opinions of his readers. Since he did not write the chapters very far ahead of their publication, he was allowed to witness the public reaction and alter the story, depending on those public reactions. A fine example of this process can be found in his weekly serial *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which is a chase story. In this novel, Little Nell and her Grandfather are fleeing the villain Quilp. The progress of the novel follows the gradual success of that pursuit. As Dickens wrote and published the weekly installments, his friend John Forster pointed out: "You know you're going to have to kill her, don't you." Why this end was necessary can be explained by a brief analysis of the difference between the structures of a comedy versus a tragedy. In the former, the action covers a sequence "You think they're going to lose, you think they're going to lose, they win". In the later, it is: "You think they're going to win, you think they're going to win, they lose". The dramatic conclusion of the story is implicit throughout the novel. So, as Dickens wrote the novel in the form of a tragedy, the sad outcome of the novel was a foregone conclusion. If he had not caused his heroine to lose, he would not have completed his dramatic structure. Dickens admitted that his friend Forster was right and, in the end, Little Nell died.

## **5.6 Autobiographical Elements**

All authors might be said to incorporate autobiographical elements in their fiction. This is particularly true of Dickens' novels, even though he took pains to mask what he considered his shameful, lowly past. *David Copperfield* is the most obviously autobiographical novel, but the scenes in *Bleak House* of interminable court cases and legal arguments are drawn from the author's brief career as a court reporter.

Dickens's own family was sent to prison for poverty, a common theme in many of his novels, and the detailed depiction of life in the Marshalsea prison in *Little Dorrit* is drawn from Dickens's own experiences of the institution. Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is thought to represent Dickens's sister-in-law, Nicholas Nickleby's father and Wilkins Micawber are certainly Dickens's own father, just as Mrs. Nickleby and Mrs. Micawber are similar to his mother. The snobbish nature of Pip in *Great Expectations* also has some affinity to the author himself. The character of Fagin is believed to be based upon Ikey Solomon, a 19th century Jewish criminal of London and later Australia. It is reported that Dickens, during his time as a journalist, interviewed Solomon after a court appearance and that he was the inspiration for the gang leader in *Oliver Twist*. When the work was published in 1838 the unpleasant, to modern eyes, stereotype of the Jewish character "Fagin" as fence and corrupter of children reflected only the endemic view of the time. The characterization aroused no indignation, or even comment, and it seems to have been written without conscious of anti-semitic intent. By 1854, however, Dickens was moved to defend himself against mild reproof in *The Jewish Chronicle* by reference to his "strong abhorrence of...persecution of Jews in old time" that found expression in his *A Child's History of England*. His sensitivity on the subject increased: in 1863 he explained that the character of Fagin was "called a 'Jew', not because of his religion, but because of his race." He took pains to include in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864) the sympathetic Jewish character "Riah".

Dickens may have drawn on his childhood experiences, but he was also ashamed of them and would not reveal that this was where he gathered his realistic accounts of squalor. Very few knew the details of his early life until six years after his death, when John Forster published a biography on which Dickens had collaborated. A shameful past in

Victorian times could taint reputations, just as it did for some of his characters, and this may have been Dickens's own fear.

### **5.7 Social Commentary**

Dickens's novels were, among other things, works of social commentary. He was a fierce critic of the poverty and social stratification of Victorian society. His second novel, *Oliver Twist* (1839) shocked readers with its images of poverty and crime and was thought to be the cause for the clearing of the actual London slum on which the story of *Jacob's Island* was based. In addition, the tragic story of Nancy, the prostitute, caused Dickens to humanize such women for the reading public; women who were regarded as "unfortunates," inherently immoral casualties of the Victorian class/economic system. *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* elaborated expansive critiques of the Victorian institutional apparatus: the interminable lawsuits of the Court of Chancery that have destroyed people's lives in *Bleak House* and a dual attack in *Little Dorrit* on inefficient, corrupt patent offices and unregulated market speculation.

### **5.8 Influences and Legacy**

Dickens' novels enjoyed great success and popularity during and after his lifetime. His first full novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), brought him immediate fame, and this success continued throughout his career. Although rarely departing from his typical "Dickensian" method of always attempting to write a great "story" in a somewhat conventional manner (the dual narrators of *Bleak House* is a notable exception), he experimented with varied themes, characterizations, and genres.

Some of these experiments achieved more popularity than others, and the appreciation of his works has varied over time. Usually, he was keen to give his readers what they wanted, the monthly or weekly publication of his works in episodes meant that the books could change as

the story proceeded at the whim of the public. Good examples of this are the American episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* which Dickens included in response to lower-than-normal sales of the earlier chapters. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the inclusion of the positive portrayal of the character of Riah, the Jew, came in response to public disapproval of 'Fagin's' depiction in *Oliver Twist*.

Although his popularity has waned a little since his death, Dickens continues to be one of the best known and most read of English authors. There are at least 180 motion pictures and TV adaptations that are based on Dickens's works, which fact indicates and confirms his success. Many of his works were adapted for the stage during his lifetime, and as early as 1913 a silent film of *The Pickwick Papers* was made.

Dickens' characters were often so memorable that they took on a life of their own outside his books. Gamp became a slang expression for an umbrella. The characters of Mrs Gamp and Pickwickian, Pecksniffian, and Gradgrind all entered dictionaries because of Dickens's portrayal of them as characters who are quixotic, hypocritical, or emotionlessly logical. Sam Weller, the carefree and irreverent valet of *The Pickwick Papers*, was an early superstar, perhaps better known than his author at first. It is likely that *A Christmas Carol* stands as his best-known story, with new adaptations almost every year. It is also the most-filmed of Dickens's stories, with many versions dating from the early years of cinema. In view of its simple morality tale with the theme of redemption, it seems to sum up the true meaning of Christmas. Indeed, it eclipses all other Yuletide stories in not only in terms of popularity, but also it adds archetypal figures (Scrooge, Tiny Tim, the Christmas ghosts) to the Western cultural consciousness.

At a time when Britain was the major economic and political power of the world, Dickens highlighted the life of the forgotten poor and

the disadvantaged at the heart of the Empire. Through his journalism he campaigned on specific issues-such as sanitation and the workhouse. Nonetheless, his fiction probably demonstrated its greatest prowess in changing public opinion in regard to class inequalities. He often depicted the exploitation and repression of the poor and condemned the public officials and institutions, for allowing such abuses to exist, and consequently flourish. The most strident indictment of this condition is in *Hard Times* (1854), Dickens's only novel-length treatment of the industrial working class. In this novel, he uses both vitriol and satire to illustrate how this marginalized social stratum was termed "Hands" by the factory owners; that is, not really "people" but rather only appendages of the machines that they operated.

Dickens' writings inspired others, in particular journalists and political figures, to address such problems of class oppression. For example, the prison scenes in *Little Dorrit* and *The Pickwick Papers* were prime movers in having the Marshalsea and Fleet Prisons shut down. As Karl Marx (1977) said, Dickens, and the other novelists of Victorian England, "...issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together..."

The exceptional popularity of Dickens' novels, even those with socially oppositional themes (*Bleak House*, 1853; *Little Dorrit*, 1857; *Our Mutual Friend*, 1865) underscored not only his almost preternatural ability to create compelling storylines and unforgettable characters, but also ensured that the Victorian public confronted the issues of social justice that had commonly been ignored.

Dickens' fiction, with often vivid descriptions of life in nineteenth century England, has inaccurately and anachronistically come to symbolise on a global level Victorian society (1837 - 1901) as uniformly

"Dickensian" In fact, his novels' time span extended from the 1770s to the 1860s. In the decade following his death in 1870, a more intense degree of socially and philosophically pessimistic perspectives invested British fiction; such themes that stood in marked contrast to the religious faith that ultimately held together even the bleakest of Dickens's novels.

Clearly, Dickens had considerable influence on later Victorian novelists; including Thomas Hardy and George Gissing, although their works display a greater willingness to confront and challenge the Victorian institution of religion. They tend to portray characters caught up by social forces (primarily via lower-class conditions), but they usually steer them to tragic ends beyond their control.

Novelists continue to be influenced by his books; for example, such disparate current writers as Anne Rice, Tom Wolfe, and John Irving evidence direct Dickensian connections. Humorist James Finn Garner even wrote a tongue-in-cheek "politically correct" version of *A Christmas Carol*, and other affectionate parodies include the Radio 4 comedy *Bleak Expectations*.

Although Dickens's life has been the subject of at least two TV miniseries and two famous one-man shows, he has never been the subject of a Hollywood "big screen" biography.



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The social reform system is a mechanism that seeks to emulate the wave of initiatives aimed at curing social ills during the late Victorian and progressive areas. Historically, such reforms were often halting affairs taking place over many years in short bursts, and often reform was largely accomplished by individual citizens and private businesses with little or no government intervention. These reforms were also extremely diverse, ranging from the commonly cited safety or health codes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, to the ill-fated and universally banned temperance and prohibition movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

During the nineteenth century Britain witnessed several changes in different fields, especially in the social system. These changes occurred because of the new demands of the Industrial Revolution that made Britain the first industrial country in the world; with the most flourishing economy. Economic progress led to many social problems such as poverty and bad living conditions. These problems and changes that resulted from the industrial revolution offered a new focused of interest to the 19<sup>th</sup> century writers. Charles Dickens, one of the most outstanding literary figures of the age, manages to depict his novels the current situation of his time. He drew upon his personal experiences as a child and the hardships and suffering of his childhood.

Not only was Dickens the first great urban novelist in England but also one of the most important social commentators who used fiction effectively to criticize the economic, social, and moral abuses in the Victorian age. He showed compassion and empathy towards the vulnerable and disadvantaged segments of the English society, and contributed to several important social reforms. It is strong social

commitment and awareness of the social ills is derived from his traumatic childhood experiences. In his adult life he developed a strong social conscience and deep sympathy with the victims of social and economic injustices. In a letter to his friend Wilkie Collins, dated September 6, 1858, he stressed the importance of social commitment: “Everything that happens [...] shows beyond mistake that you can’t shut out the world; that you are in it, to be of it; that you get yourself into a false position the moment you try to sever yourself from it; that you must mingle with it, and make the best of it, and make the best of yourself into the bargain” (Marlow, 132).

The questions of the research have been affirmatively answered and confirmed, and it has been shown that in his novels Dickens stressed his beliefs in the ethical and political potential of literature. Dickens saw his fiction as a springboard for debates about moral and social reform. In his selected novels he showed himself as an outspoken critic of the unjust economic and social practise of his time. His deeply-felt social commentaries helped raise the common awareness of reading public.

Dickens was able to identify with the plight of the labouring sector, particularly those who were subjected to factory work at a tender age. Judging from his biography, it can safely be said that in his literary works Dickens mirrors the artist's life. The negative impact of the untoward conditions under which the labourers, including children, worked was substantiated by reference to records and the testimonies of child labourers who suffered injuries and physical abuse under unbearable working conditions. According to Nardinelli, the factories were “. . . hellish institutions for the destruction of childhood” (Nardinelli,740). Due to child labour, a considerable number of children became part of the work force that contributed to the growth and development of the British textile industries.

Dickens's early works express faith in the new commercial middle class, as opposed to the old aristocracy. In his observation Dickens highlights the discrepancy between ideas and practice of this new class, and the contribution between principles and morality, as a social commentator. Dickens was fully aware of the need for the reform of the English society; he urged the wealthy and privileged to be more humanitarian towards the poor and vulnerable.

During the 1850s Dickens' interest shifted gradually from the examination of individual social ills to the examination of the state of the society, especially the laws, education, and the terrible condition of the poor.

The research objectives have been confirmed: Dickens significantly contributed to the formation of public opinion, which he helped in its emergence as an increasingly influential factor on the decisions of the rating authorities. Also, he contributed to a series of legal reforms, including the abolition of the inhumane imprisonment for debts, purification of the Magistrates' courts, a better management of criminal prisons, and the restriction of capital punishment.

Dickens was not the first novelist to draw the attention of the reading public to the deprivation of the lower classes in England, but he was much more successful than his predecessors in exposing the ills of the industrial society, including class division, poverty, and the experience of metropolis. Dickens used the novels as a repository of social conscience. He is at once central and untypical in the social novel.

As a novelist who became universally associated with social issues, he was criticized for allowing his imagination to come between his writing and his subject, and that his underlying attitudes can be evasive. Though, most of his characters have a job, Dickens rarely shows them at work.

Dickens totally rejected the claim of classical economics and showed his moral concern for the social well-being of the nation. His early novels expose isolated abuse and the shortcomings of individual people, whereas his later novels contain a bitter diagnosis of the condition of England. He is thought to have created a utopian and nostalgic vision of pre-Victorian and pre-industrial England, prior to the rapid voices of industrialisation and urbanisation. Although in his novels he is inclined to be comic they are not free of his characteristic social commentary, which would become more pronounced in his later novels.

The later novels of Dickens contain some of his most trenchant pieces of social commentary. Beginning with his second novel, *Oliver Twist*, through *Nicholas Nickleby*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes*, *Dombey and Son*, *Hard Times* and ending with *Little Dorrit*, he seems to have totally rejected the claims of classical economics, for he stresses his moral concern for the social well-being of the nation.

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