

CHARLES DICKENS'S NOVELS AS A MIRROR OF VICTORIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract: *Charles Dickens, one of the most influential authors of the Victorian era, is widely renowned for his poignant novels that vividly capture life during his time. His compelling characters, evocative descriptions, and gripping narratives brought the streets of London to life, spotlighting the social conditions, institutional flaws, and societal norms of the period. This article delves into understanding the impact of Dickens' works on Victorian society.*

Key words: *Victorian literature, novel genre, novelist, Victorian writers, Charles Dickenson, "Oliver Twist".*

Charles Dickens born in 1812 in Portsmouth, England, his early life was fraught with financial instability and hardship. At the tender age of twelve, he was forced to work in a boot-blackening factory due to his father's imprisonment for debt. This experience deeply impacted Dickens, shaping his views on poverty, social justice, and education, which would later become recurring themes in his novels. His writing career began as a parliamentary reporter before he catapulted into fame with his serial publications like "The Pickwick Papers," "Oliver Twist," "Nicholas Nickleby," and later, standalone works like "David Copperfield," "Bleak House," and "Great Expectations." Dickens' works offered a gritty portrayal of Victorian society's underbelly, including the plight of the poor, the labor conditions, and the treatment of children. His novels brought attention to the harsh realities that many of his contemporaries chose to overlook, forcing society to confront these issues. In "Oliver Twist," he depicted the struggles of the poor and the corruption within workhouses and the criminal world. "Hard Times" critiqued the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and utilitarianism. "Nicholas Nickleby" shed light on the inhumane conditions of Yorkshire boarding schools, leading to widespread reforms. "But among them Dickens's "Oliver Twist" is so popular for readers. It is about a young orphan forced into a life of unjust working conditions and pushed into crime to survive.

The main characters are Oliver, his mother, Bill Sikes, Nancy, Bumble, Fagin and so on. The story follows the titular orphan, who, after being raised in a workhouse, escapes to London, where he meets a gang of juvenile pickpockets led by the elderly criminal Fagin, discovers the secrets of his parentage, and reconnects with his remaining family". [2, 218] The novel is a literary work in which many human problems are discussed as a description of the deeds or social life of the everyday society. The novel presented a much more realistic picture of social life. This is because the scope of the novel is very possible to describe the situation through events that are woven by the author through his characters. Learning about social values is very important and be function as an example to see which is good and bad things. It is also a difficult challenge for educators today, to help learners to use their free time by doing activities that are useful for the development of self-learners to become a superior resource. Learning appreciation novel have an important role in helping the younger generation to develop themselves further into a subtle personality. In line with that statement the researcher encouraged that by studying and appreciating the literature, the learners will be able to achieve good results in the teaching of language and literature. Thus, it can be concluded that through the appreciation of literature, the learners will learn the values of good and bad life then they will appreciate the stories in the literary works and make the values contained therein as an example and role model in the life of society. "The focus of the research is analyzing social values in Charles Dickens's novel Oliver Twist through generic structure approach." [4, 374] From the focus, the researcher formulates the following research question is how the social values in Charles Dickens novel reviewed through generic structure of the novel? Based on the research question, it had been known that the objective of this research was to get deeply meaning about the social values in Charles Dickens novel through generic structure approach. Those results led to implication that Indonesian literature educator can apply Charles Dickens novel Oliver Twist directly in the teaching process and motivate the students to analyze the novels. At the beginning of this novel that Oliver Twist is born in a workhouse in 1830s England. His mother, whose name no one knows, is found on the street and dies just after Oliver's birth. Oliver spends the first nine years of his life in a badly run home for young orphans and then is transferred to a workhouse for adults. The workhouse where Oliver and his companions live is based on charitable institutions of the time which treated the poor as if poverty was a crime; the aim of Dickens's satire is to expose a form of public charity which eliminates poverty by starving the poor. The titular orphan, who, after being raised in a workhouse, escapes to London, where he meets a gang of juvenile pickpockets led by the elderly criminal Fagin,

discovers the secrets of his parentage, and reconnects with his remaining family. Crime, poverty, institutions, class, individualism, social bonds, social forces, fate, city and country. Moreover, there are many values of this novel. This value in *Oliver Twist* is illustrated in the following quotations:

‘Hush!’ said Mrs. Maylie, laying her hand on Oliver’s head. “You think like a child, poor boy! But you teach me my duty, notwithstanding. I had forgotten it for a moment, Oliver, but I hope I may be pardoned, for I am old, and have seen enough of illness and death to know the agony of separation from the objects of our love”[1,211] From the above quotation text, it can be concluded that Oliver has unknowingly prompts Mrs. Maylie to realize the meaning of responsibility and the need to be strong to survive a tough life. Thus, the value of obligations and responsibilities are related to each other. He was still more astonished to find that this firmness lasted, and that, under all the care and watching which ensued, Mrs. Maylie was ever ready and collected, performing all the duties which devolved upon her steadily, and, and to all external appearance, even cheerfully. “But he was young, and did not know what strong minds are capable of under trying circumstances”[1,198] From the above quotation it can be concluded that the value of duty can be applied by Mrs. Maylie in her serving at Rose, although with a very sad heart and unable to see the suffering of Rose, Mrs. Maylie still carries out her obligations as a mother to her son. “Social values in terms of the value of love, the value of responsibility and the value of harmony in the life of *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens are clearly visible in the contents of the novel”. [3,123] The description of the social values in the story illustrates the value of community life is about the relationship between human and daily life. The value of social values can be adopted by certain societies about what is true, worthy, sublime, and good to practice in real life. These values are the values of love and affection, the value of service, the value of helping, the values of kinship, the value of caring, the value of loyalty, the value on a sense of acceptance and belonging, the value of obligation, the value of discipline, the value of justice, the value of tolerance, the value of cooperation and the value of democracy. The overall values are combined within the story’s structure in *Oliver Twist* novel by Charles Dickens. At the end the story follows the titular orphan, who, after being raised in a workhouse, escapes to London, where he meets a gang of juvenile pickpockets led by the elderly criminal Fagin, discovers the secrets of his parentage, and reconnects with his remaining family. Fagin gets arrested and gets a visit from Oliver, after which he is executed. Oliver, Mr Brownlow, and the Maylies end up living peacefully in a small village in England. *Oliver Twist* does have a happy ending. Oliver himself is adopted by Mr. Brownlow, who has managed to expose the nefarious works of Monks, Oliver’s half-

brother. However, Fagin is hanged and the Artful Dodger is deported to Australia, so things don't end happily for everyone.

In conclusion, Charles Dickens's novels serve as a powerful mirror of Victorian society, reflecting its social inequalities, injustices, and moral dilemmas. Through his vivid characters and intricate plots, Dickens sheds light on the struggles of the lower classes, the corruption of the upper classes, and the harsh realities of industrialization. His works continue to resonate with readers today, offering valuable insights into the complexities of human nature and the enduring relevance of social issues. Dickens's ability to capture the essence of Victorian society in his novels cements his legacy as one of the most important literary figures of his time.

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