

**THE ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF THE SOCIAL STATUS OF
CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN THE WORKS OF CHARLES
DICKENS**

Based on the novels "Oliver Twist" and "Great Expectations"

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Abstract: This article examines the artistic representation of the social status of children and adolescents in the novels of the nineteenth-century English writer Charles Dickens. The study is based on *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* and analyzes how issues such as social inequality, poverty, orphanhood and marginalization of children are depicted within the framework of Victorian society. The research draws on social-constructivist theories of childhood (P. Aries, H. Cunningham), principles of Victorian realism (R. Williams) and modern approaches to Dickens's social criticism. Using historical-literary, comparative, textual and sociological methods the article demonstrates that child characters in Dickens's novels function as central artistic instruments for exposing moral crises and social injustice, while simultaneously promoting humanistic values.

Keywords: childhood, social status, Victorian literature, Dickens, orphanhood, social inequality

Introduction: In nineteenth-century England childhood emerged as an acute social issue. The Industrial Revolution led to profound economic and social changes, resulting in the widespread exploitation of child labor, the expansion of workhouses and the institutionalization of orphaned children¹.

. ¹ Child labor was one of the central social problems addressed by Victorian social policy.

In this historical context, literature became a powerful medium for exposing social injustice and moral contradictions.

The concept of childhood as an independent social category gained scholarly attention largely through the works of Philippe Aries who argued that childhood is not merely a biological stage but a historically constructed social phenomenon (Aries 1962). This theoretical perspective provides an essential methodological foundation for analyzing Victorian literature. Dickens's novels were produced within this socio-historical environment and his child characters are portrayed as the most vulnerable yet morally pure members of society. The aim of this article is to analyze the social status of children and adolescents in Dickens's novels and to reveal their artistic and ideological functions within the narrative structure.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework .The literary and social concept of childhood has been extensively explored by Western scholars. Aries emphasizes that the modern understanding of childhood was formed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Hugh Cunningham highlights that during the Victorian period, children became one of the most socially disadvantaged groups in England (Cunningham 1995). In Dickens studies Michael Slater characterizes Dickens as the "voice of social conscience" arguing that his child characters reveal the ethical failures of Victorian society. J. Hillis Miller interprets the child figures in Dickens's novels as forms of moral resistance to oppressive social systems. Raymond Williams situates Dickens within the tradition of social realism, emphasizing his exposure of class inequality and institutional injustice (Williams 1973).

Research Methodology: This study employs a comprehensive methodological framework consistent with master's-level dissertation research. The analysis integrates historical-literary, comparative, textual and sociological approaches to ensure a multidimensional interpretation of child and adolescent characters in Dickens's novels. The historical-literary method is used to examine the socio-economic conditions of Victorian England, particularly child labor, poverty, orphanhood and the functioning of charitable and state institutions. This approach enables a direct correlation between fictional representation and historical reality. The comparative literary method facilitates a systematic

comparison of child and adolescent characters in *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations* allowing for an exploration of the evolution of childhood representation across Dickens's works. The close reading (textual analysis) method is applied to key episodes, dialogues and narrative descriptions in order to identify the artistic and ideological functions of child characters. Special attention is paid to the depiction of innocence, moral integrity and social victimization. Additionally, a sociological-literary approach, grounded in the theories of Aries, Cunningham and Williams, is employed to analyze child characters within the broader context of class structure, social mobility and moral values in Victorian society.

Results and Discussion: Childhood and Social Oppression in *Oliver Twist*. In *Oliver Twist* orphaned children are portrayed as direct victims of an inhumane social system. Through the figure of Oliver, Dickens exposes the cruelty and hypocrisy of the Victorian workhouse system, which was ostensibly designed to provide charity but functioned as an instrument of oppression². As Golding notes, the novel represents a powerful moral critique of state-controlled welfare institutions (Golding 1985). Oliver's innocence is deliberately contrasted with the brutality of social institutions, transforming childhood into a symbol of moral purity opposed to systemic injustice. Childhood and Social Mobility in *Great Expectations* In *Great Expectations*, the character of Pip embodies the theme of social mobility. However, Dickens presents this process critically rather than idealistically. Pip's rise in social status intensifies his moral conflicts and inner alienation. George Brook interprets this trajectory as a critique of the Victorian myth of success and upward mobility (Brook 1970)³. This childhood in this novel is depicted not merely as a stage of victimhood but as a formative period of ethical and psychological development.

² The workhouse system was regulated by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

³ Pip's character illustrates the conflict between material success and moral

integrity.

Conclusion: The findings of this study demonstrate that children and adolescents in Dickens's novels function as central artistic devices for revealing social inequality, moral decay and institutional injustice in Victorian England. While *Oliver Twist* portrays childhood as a victim of social oppression, *Great Expectations* presents it as a complex process of personal and moral formation. Through child characters, Dickens urges society to reconsider its ethical responsibilities and humanistic values.

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