

# OPPRESSION REFLECTED IN CHARLES DICKENS' *OLIVER TWIST* NOVEL (1837): AN EXISTENTIAL APPROACH

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## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana penindasan terhadap anak yang digambarkan oleh Oliver dalam novel *Oliver Twist* (1837) karya Charles Dicken menggunakan pendekatan eksistensial. Novel *Oliver Twist* (1837) dianalisis dalam dua aspek. Pertama didasarkan pada apa saja indikator penindasan anak terhadap Oliver dalam novel menggunakan pendekatan eksistensial, kedua didasarkan pada mengapa penindasan terhadap anak pada Oliver secara khusus dibahas oleh Charles Dicken dalam novel. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Penelitian ini menggunakan dua sumber data, yang pertama adalah novel *Oliver Twist* (1837) karya Charles Dicken sebagai sumber utama. Sumber data kedua diambil dari sumber lain yang terkait dengan penelitian ini. Kedua jenis sumber data tersebut diperoleh melalui toko buku dan internet kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis deskriptif. Berdasarkan penelitian tersebut, peneliti menarik beberapa kesimpulan. Yang pertama didasarkan pada penindasan terhadap anak yang tergambar dalam novel menggunakan pendekatan eksistensial. Kedua, ada beberapa jenis penindasan terhadap anak yang digambarkan dalam novel. Ketiga, adakah latar belakang penulis mengangkat penindasan terhadap anak yang tercermin oleh Oliver sebagai topik utama dalam novel *Oliver Twist* (1838).

**Kata Kunci:** Penindasan terhadap anak, eksistensial, Charles Dicken, *Oliver Twist*.

## Abstract

This study aims to explain how child oppression is reflected by Oliver in the novel *Oliver Twist* (1837) by Charles Dicken using an existential approach. The novel *Oliver Twist* (1837) is analysed in two aspects. First is based on what are indicators of child oppression of Oliver in the novel by using existential approach, second is based on why child oppression of Oliver specifically addressed by Charles Dicken in the novel. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This study uses two sources of data, the first is the novel *Oliver Twist* (1837) by Charles Dicken as the main source. The second source of data is taken from another resource that is related to the study. The two types of sources are obtained through the book stores and the internet then analysed by using descriptive analysis. Based on these studies, the researcher draws some conclusions. The first is based on child oppression reflected in the novel by using an existential

approach. The second is there is some kind of child oppression which is depicted in the novel. The third is there some background of effect the author raised child oppression reflected by Oliver as the main topic in the novel *Oliver Twist* (1838).

**Keywords:** Child oppression, Existential Approach, Charles Dicken, *Oliver Twist*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Oppression [is] the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual group, or institution. Typically, a government or political organization in power places restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups so they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups. The oppressed individual or group is devalued, exploited, and deprived of privileges by the individual or group who has more power. (Barker, 2003: p. 307)

Sometimes oppression is received by children although in their ages they need peace and time to enjoy their childhood.

In *Oliver Twist* novel by Charles Dickens talks about child oppression. Child Oppression needs to study because it is still found in many children, they work to live, and they can't get their happiness as a child and lost their childhood. Researchers want to show that oppression is the wrong action and tells that oppression is a problem for children in this study.

The main character of this story was a youngster named Oliver. The tale began with the birth of an infant without a father. After his mother died a few months later, no one knew who his real family was. The workhouse was the last option for Oliver's care. Unfortunately, the home known as the workers' house was never good, as was its name. The manager has never taken the disadvantaged people seriously. That was the major reason Charles Dickens want to be chosen. The workhouse should be a haven of sanctuary for the downtrodden, yet it frequently becomes a torment for them. In *Oliver Twist*, one of his best – loved stories, Dickens takes his readers into shady underworld of Victorian London, where innocent children were taught by evil man to steal for a living.

*Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens is an interesting novel that easy to understand. Language use is simple and the storyline of *Oliver Twist* is nice because in the beginning,

the writer talks about who is Oliver Twist, where he was coming from, what is his problem, and in the end, closed with happy ending. There are some reasons why the researcher is interested to analyse this novel. First, the topic of the novel is interesting. This novel talked about child abuse experiencing by Oliver, and the researcher it still relates to what happen nowadays. The second, this study can be beneficial for the student with the good moral values contained in this research that oppression is need more be concerned nowadays, for parents or whoever. From the explanation above the writer decided to analyse this novel by using the theory of existential entitled Oppression Reflected in Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist Novel (1837): An Existential Approach.

## **2. METHOD**

In analysing the research, the researcher uses descriptive qualitative approach. Descriptive qualitative approach is the research obtained the data through library and the internet then analysed using descriptive analysis. Firstly, the researcher reads the whole novel Oliver Twist (1837) then take some notes to relate to the issue. The second, the researcher is browsing the internet to get several information and articles related to the object of the study then identifying the problem and finding the data. The third, the researcher analyses the data using existential approach. While, in presenting data validity, the researcher uses triangulation

## **3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1 Oliver Twist's Existence**

As existentialism point of view Sartre's philosophy is an "elaboration of one basic idea," which is that an individual's character consists in the projects the person pursues. The author's thorough explication of Sartre's notion of character is highly original as is his use of that notion to make better sense of bad faith, good faith, sincerity and authenticity.

#### **3.1.1 Bad faith**

Oliver Twist is the main character in Oliver Twist Novel. The novel reveals about Oliver's misery life. Oliver is an orphan who lives in workhouse.

“You know you’ve got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by the parish, don’t you?” (p: 11)

The workhouses that figure prominently in the first few chapters of the novel were institutions that the Victorian middle class established to raise poor children. Since it was believed that certain vices were inherent to the poor and that poor families fostered rather than discouraged such vices, poor husbands and wives were separated in order to prevent them from having children and expanding the lower class. Poor children were taken away from their parents in order to allow the state and the church to raise them in the manner they believed most appropriate. But the facts in the field prove that what should be a guardian for abandoned children is just a cover for those who make a profit. In workhouse, Oliver was getting not only physical but also mental abuse.

The gentlemen on the workhouse board call Oliver a “savage” who is destined for the gallows. After Oliver’s outrageous request for more food, the board schemes to apprentice him to a brutal master, hoping that he will soon die.

“I never was more convinced of anything in my life,” said the gentleman in the white waistcoat, as he knocked at the gate and read the bill next morning: “I never was more convinced of anything in my life, than I am that that boy will come to be hung.” (p: 14)

Even when the upper classes claim to be alleviating the lower-class predicament, they only end up aggravating it. In order to save Oliver from what they believe to be his certain fate as a criminal, the board essentially ensures his early death by apprenticing him to a brutal employer. It is considered as workhouse’s bad faith.

Bumble names Oliver as a child born of “low and vicious” parents, reproducing the stereotype that the poor inherit a criminal nature. His status as the middle-class beadle for a workhouse gives him the right to speak for Oliver and therefore to define Oliver’s identity as he sees fit. With his identification papers, Bumble has the power of the state to back up his word. Oliver only has his own word to back him up. Outside of the workhouse, Oliver has no legal existence unless he commits a crime and enters the courtroom. The poor are thus reduced to a public existence as criminals, corpses, and “idle, lazy” paupers living on state charity. The state chooses to recognize their existence only when they commit crimes, die, or enter the workhouses. (p: 39)

### 3.1.2 Good faith

Oliver's good faith can be seen through the novel. His bravery to ask for more food for him and others in the workhouse is considered as his good faith. (p: 13)

Another example of Oliver's good faith is occurred when Oliver trained to pickpocketing with Dogger and Bates, Oliver knew the meaning of pocket-handkerchiefs games. He hesitated and felt wrong associating with them. He innocently falls in with a gang of youthful thieves and pickpockets headed by a vile criminal named Fagin. He thinks Fagin is his savior but unfortunately, they rode him into the valley of evil.

In an instant the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind.

He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to his heels; and, not knowing what he did, made off as fast as he could lay his feet to the ground. (p: 53)

### 3.1.3 Sincerity and Authenticity

The first pick-pocketing mission of Oliver showing Oliver's sincerity and authenticity. One day the Artful Dodger, Charley Bates and Oliver were sent on a pick-pocketing mission. Oliver did not pick any pockets, but it was he who was caught and taken to the police station. There he was rescued by kindly Mr. Brownlow, the man whose pocket Oliver was accused of having picked. This adventure left a rude shock on young Oliver's mind and for some time he was terribly sick. He was carefully looked after by Mr. Brownlow, his gruff friend Mr. Grimwig and the old housekeeper Mrs. Bedwin.

When Mr. Brownlow sends Oliver out on a mission to return books (prompted by his friend Grimwig to test Oliver's virtue), Oliver is showing his sincerity, he gladly took the assignment as an expression of his gratitude for his well-being cared for.

“Oliver, delighted to be of use, brought down the books under his arm in a great bustle; and waited, cap in hand, to hear what message he was to take.” (p: 81)

The moment when Oliver being Mr. Sowerberry's apprentice, Sowerberry finally made him an attendant at children's funerals. Noah Claypole, another employee of Sowerberry, once teased Oliver about his parentage. Oliver patiently stood the insult but when he could not endure more, he ran into a violent fury and fiercely hit Claypole. (p: 35)

His sense of familial love and duty is strong enough to compel him to violently come to his mother's defense. It implies that loyalty to kin, and the desire for the love of a family, is an impulse with which children are born, not one that needs to be learned and nurtured.

Oliver's sincerity was also evident when he was told to engage in a robbery. Oliver refused to do so and chose to let them go. Oliver plans to dash for the stairs and warn the family.

“Oh! for God's sake let me go!” cried Oliver; “let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London; never, never! Oh! pray have mercy on me, and do not make me steal. For the love of all the bright Angels that rest in Heaven, have mercy upon me!” (p: 124)

Another scene shown Oliver's sincerity is when Oliver didn't want to be apart with miss Maylie.

“Oh! dear lady, if I could but work for you; if I could only give you pleasure by watering your flowers, or watching your birds, or running up and down the whole day long, to make you happy; what would I give to do it!” (p: 179)

Oliver felt sad when he knew Miss Rose Maylie was ill. Oliver, who watched the old lady anxiously, observed that she was alarmed by haggard appearances of Rose; seeing that she persuades Rose to treat her illness, Oliver endeavored to do the same, and they so far succeeded, that Rose was persuaded by them. It is indeed showing Oliver sincerity.

“Oh! consider how young and good she is, and what pleasure and comfort she gives to all about her. I am sure—certain—quite certain—that, for your sake, who are so good yourself; and for her own; and for the sake of all she makes so happy; she will not die. Heaven will never let her die so young.” (p: 186)

### **3.2 Oliver Twin's Oppression**

Oliver faces the oppression in walking through his life. These happened as the result of the conflict between him and his circumstances. There are three kinds of oppression that Oliver faced, namely; marginalization, violence, and cultural imperialism.

#### **3.2.1 Marginalization**

In the narrative, the workhouse functions as a sign of the moral hypocrisy of the working class. Mrs. Mann steals from the children in her care, feeding and clothing them

inadequately. The Victorian middle class saw cleanliness as a moral virtue, and the workhouse was supposed to rescue the poor from the immoral condition of filth. However, the workhouse in Dickens's novel is a filthy place—Mrs. Mann never ensures that the children practice good hygiene except during an inspection.

“Goodness gracious! Is that you, Mr. Bumble, sir?” said Mrs. Mann, thrusting her head out of the window in well-affected ecstasies of joy. “(Susan, take Oliver and them two brats upstairs, and wash ’em directly.)” (p: 8)

Oliver has been described as marginal riders who suffered strong work at an early age.

“So, you’ll begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o’clock,” added the surly one in the white waistcoat.” (p: 12)

Workhouses were established to save the poor from starvation, disease, and filth, but in fact they end up visiting precisely those hardships on the poor. Furthermore, Mr. Bumble's actions underscore middle-class hypocrisy, especially when he criticizes Oliver for not gratefully accepting his dire conditions. Bumble himself, however, is fat and well-dressed, and the entire workhouse board is full of fat gentlemen who preach the value of a meagre diet for workhouse residents.

“You’ve over-fed him, ma’am. You’ve raised a artificial soul and spirit in him, ma’am unbecoming a person of his condition: as the board, Mrs. Sowerberry, who are practical philosophers, will tell you. What have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It’s quite enough that we let ’em have live bodies. If you had kept the boy on gruel, ma’am, this would never have happened.” (p: 39)

### 3.2.2 Violence

The first violence occurred when Young Oliver Twist, an orphan, spends his first nine years in a “baby farm,” a workhouse for children in which only the hardest survive. Oliver Twist's ninth birthday found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference due the lack of food. Oliver and the others children got maltreatment there.

“Oliver was about to say that he would go along with anybody with great readiness, when, glancing upward, he caught sight of Mrs. Mann, who had got behind the beadle's chair, and was shaking her fist at him with a furious countenance. He took the hint at once, for the first had been too often impressed upon his body not to be deeply impressed upon his recollection.” (p: 10)

“Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry; and Oliver cried very naturally indeed.” (p: 12)

The second violence which Oliver experienced is hunger not only in baby farm but also at workhouse. The children in the workhouse were given very little to eat, so virtually they were always hungry. One day Oliver was forced by other children to ask for a second serving of porridge. The authorities were stunned by this unusual and unprecedented demand. In order to give him deterring punishment, they immediately put him in solitary confinement and posted a bill offering five pounds to some master who would take him off the parish.

“Nobody controverted the prophetic gentleman’s opinion. An animated discussion took place. Oliver was ordered into instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.” (p: 14)

The third Oliver’s violence happened when he became Mr. Sowerberry’s apprentice. Oliver suffers torment at the hands of Noah Claypole, a fellow apprentice and "charity boy" who is jealous of Oliver's promotion, and Charlotte, the Sowerberrys' maidservant, who is in love with Noah. The climax is occurred when Noah teased Oliver about his parentage. Oliver patiently stood the insult but when he could not endure more, he ran into a violent fury and fiercely hit Claypole. It was with great difficulty that he was overpowered by Mrs. Sowerberry, Charlotte, a maid at Sowerberry’s and Claypole, and cocked in the cellar When Sowerberry returned. Oliver was given a severe thrashing. (p: 39)

The fourth violence happened in Oliver life is when he got physical abuse by Bull’s Eye, Bill Sikes’ dog.

“.....he jumped suddenly to his feet, and tore wildly from the room: uttering shrieks for help, which made the bare old house echo to the roof.

“Keep back the dog, Bill!” cried Nancy, springing before the door, and closing it, as the Jew and his two pupils darted out in pursuit. “Keep back the dog; he’ll tear the boy to pieces.” (p: 89)



The fifth violence is depicted when Oliver realizes that he will be made to participate in a robbery. Horrified, he begs Sikes to let him go. Sikes curses and prepares to shoot him, but Crackit knocks the pistol away, saying that gunfire will draw attention. Crackit clasps his hand over Oliver's mouth while Sikes pries open a tiny window. Sikes instructs Oliver to enter through the window and open the street door to let them inside, reminding him that he is within shooting range all the while. (p: 124)

### 3.2.3 Cultural Imperialism

In this novel cultural imperialism is shown vividly. The first is shown at Noah Claypole's relationship with Oliver. It illustrates Victorian England's obsession with class distinctions. The son of destitute parents, Noah is accustomed to the disdain of those who are better off than he. Thus, he is relieved to have Oliver nearby, since, as an orphan, Oliver is even worse off than he is.

"I'm Mister Noah Claypole," said the charity-boy, "and you're under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian!" (p: 27)

Dickens shows that class snobbery is a universal quality, characteristic of the lowest as well as the highest strata of society. Moreover, snobbish behavior seems a component of class insecurity. The poor mercilessly taunt those who are poorer than they, out of anxious desire to distinguish themselves from those who are even worse off in life.

The second cultural imperialism is established in a relationship between clothing and identity. The disguise that Nancy wears when she enters the police station reveals key differences between the middle and lower classes in Victorian society. The crowning touch to her disguise is a plainly displayed door key, which marks her as a member of a property-owning class. Because she disguises herself as a middle-class woman, the legal system, in the form of the police station, recognizes her as an individual worth hearing. In the attire of the middle class, she gains both a social voice and social visibility. She becomes an individual rather than a member of the penniless mob. (p: 84)

Just as Nancy assumes a middle-class identity by changing her clothing, Oliver sheds his identity as an orphan pickpocket when he leaves behind his pauper's clothes. Brownlow purchases an expensive new suit for him. Oliver thus assumes the identity of a gentleman's son by wearing the clothing of a gentleman's son. After he dons his new clothing, Mr. Brownlow asks him what he might like to be when he grows up. At the

workhouse, the authorities never even bother to ask Oliver his opinion on the matter of his apprenticeship. (p: 75)

“What! wouldn’t you like to be a book-writer?” said the old gentleman.” (p: 75)

In Victorian England, even more than today, an individual’s profession determined a large part of his or her identity. The fact that no one at the workhouse asks for Oliver’s opinion regarding his apprenticeship shows, once again, how much he is denied the right to define himself. Oliver’s situation symbolically represents the silence of the poor. The poor cannot define their social identity—instead, the empowered classes define the identity of the poor for them. Oliver and Nancy both gain a voice the moment they shed their pauper clothing.

The third, class identity is correlated not only with clothing, but with history as well. Once Oliver dons his fine clothes, Brownlow asks him to give his own version of his life history. Earlier in the novel, when Oliver wears pauper’s clothing, other people control his history and, therefore, his identity. When he is Sowerberry’s apprentice, Oliver attempts to assume control of his identity by denying Noah’s insults to his mother, but instead he receives a beating for trying to assert the correct version of his past. Once he sheds his pauper status, however, Oliver’s right to explain his past is firmly established. The fact that Oliver is an orphan further underscores his lack of connection to his past. Whereas the upper classes, and particularly members of the aristocracy, are able to establish their identities by tracing their genealogies, Oliver seems to have no genealogy.

The fourth scene shown cultural imperialism in this novel is depicted on a very different form of thievery. Mrs. Corney, the middle-class matron of the workhouse, enjoys far more luxury than the pauper residents. They are crammed into tiny, unheated spaces, while Mrs. Corney enjoys a room to herself with a blazing fire during the bitterly cold winter. The amenities of her apartment, which draw Mr. Bumble’s eyes and heart in her direction, represent money that would have been more justly spent on the paupers under her care. Thus, her lifestyle is based on theft, but, because she is robbing those who have nothing, her theft will never be acknowledged. (p: 150)

The fifth scene shown cultural imperialism is the marriage between Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corney. Mr. Bumble’s proposal to Mrs. Corney is a parody of a certain kind of middle-class marriage. Mr. Bumble assesses the exact condition of Mrs. Corney’s furniture and ascertains that her small padlocked box contains money. At the end of this

extensive inventory, he decides to go through with his proposal. During the Victorian era, many marriages were primarily economic arrangements, especially for people of middle-class status and above.

#### 4. CLOSING

Devaluation, exploitation, and privilege are key concepts in oppressive behaviour, which are inextricably linked to the phenomenon of oppression, which exists in all societies, and has probably done so throughout history. Attempts to eradicate oppression in society are relatively new, and the focus may be on one group to the neglect of another. The writer takes a work in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* to be analyzed using Existential approach of Jean-Paul Sartre. Novel as one of the literary works describes story of history through its fictional characters, the name is Oliver Twist. The character of main character is shaped because of their unyielding struggles in life or so call something happens because of the admonition of life. England had a terrible history in the 19th century. According to Hoagland, the industrial revolution of Victorian Era had many impacts on society, such as: high unemployment, rapid urbanization and criminal action at this time (Hoagland,1960:203). Imbalance social state performed an oppression happened everywhere even that was experienced of kids.

In "Oliver Twist" Dickens almost emerged as a crusader against the social evils of his times. Dickens has presented the pathos of innocent childhood and protest against the abuses of powers, especially on the part of the governmental institution. He throws light on the workhouse system of those days in England. The novel deals with the sad story of sorrows and struggles of an orphan boy and his ultimate union with well-deserved happiness. The first part of the novel presents the early childhood of Oliver in the workhouse and about his days of service as an apprentice. The later part of the novel deals with Oliver's experience in London where he is caught in the net of a master criminal named Fagin. Dickens wants to show how crime is bred (brought up). The story describes how Oliver keeps his honesty and purity in the midst of sinful ways and how he finally finds the happy home amongst good and kind people.

The novel presents cruelty and meanness of Parish (jurisdiction) authorities. This can be seen in the portrayal of Mrs. Mann, Mr. Corney, Mr. Bumble, Mr. & Mrs. Sowerberry (undertaker) Mrs. Man, was in charge of Baby farm. Being 'a very great

practical philosopher' and a woman of wisdom and experience, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use. The parish doctors were usually the cheapest and most inexperienced Doctors. This Parish authorities starved and ill-treated poor under their care in order to make money for themselves. Mr. & Mrs. Sowerberry ill-treat Oliver so much that Oliver eventually runs away from their house.

The unprotected, neglected, starved and beaten children were led to enter the world of crime. Fagin is the leader of a gang of young pickpockets who also deals in stolen goods. The young victims are The Dodger, Charle Bades, Tom Chitling and later Noah Claypole worked for him. All these boys are engaged in pick pocketing. Young boys of streets were trained by giving them tobacco and wine, and was making them think that the life of a criminal was something romantic. In the novel crime is shown to be ugly as well as miserable. Dickens has lighted up the dark places that his well-to-do readers did no exists or had not troubled to know. Social parasite like Fagin is the breeder of the criminals he makes young thieves work for him and if they are caught, they suffer imprisonment and even death while he gets off scot-free. The description of the criminal activities of Fagin and his band is a realistic picture of the underworld of London of those days.

Dickens' argument about poverty, social institutions, and class immobility is a complex imagining of the interrelation of the three. Dickens believes that workhouses play to the worst desires of people in power—people like Sowerberry and the Bumbles—to keep the poor, poor. The workhouses then enable the middle and upper classes to argue for a self-fulfilling prophecy: that people who have no options in life, no ability to make a positive contribution to society, either die or become society's outcasts. Dickens does not excuse crime committed by those who are inherently evil (Fagin and Sikes), but he does tend to be more sympathetic to the lives of those that have been determined by terrible circumstances (Oliver, Nancy, Bates and the Dodger). Dickens champions Oliver above all, since Oliver struggles so mightily to maintain his goodness, and manages to do so.

Thus "Oliver Twist" serves as a mirror that shows the social condition of England of the early 19th century.

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