

## ANALYSIS OF OLIVER TWIST

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**Abstract:** *This article analyzes Charles Dickens' novel Oliver Twist, focusing on themes of poverty, social injustice, and the impact of the criminal underworld on individual lives. The novel portrays the journey of an orphan boy navigating a harsh society while striving to maintain his innocence and morality. Oliver's resilience and pursuit of goodness highlight the challenges faced by the underprivileged in Victorian England, offering a critique of the era's social inequalities and advocating for compassion and reform.*

**Key Words:** *Victorian England, poverty, social injustice, criminal, underworld, innocence, morality, identity, family, social critique*

**Introduction**

Oliver Twist, written by Charles Dickens and first published in 1837-1839, is one of the most influential novels of the 19th century. The novel's primary focus is the life of a young orphan named Oliver Twist, who is born into the harsh and unforgiving social system of Victorian England. Through Oliver's struggles, Dickens exposes the systemic injustices of society, such as poverty, child labor, and the exploitation of vulnerable children. The novel also explores the concept of morality, innocence, and the fight for justice, making it a timeless work that continues to resonate with readers today.

The novel begins with the birth of Oliver Twist in a workhouse in a small town. His mother, who dies shortly after childbirth, leaves Oliver with no family, and he is raised in the cold, rigid environment of the workhouse. His early life is

marked by extreme neglect and hardship. At the age of nine, after being punished for asking for more food, Oliver runs away to London, hoping to find a better life.

In London, Oliver meets a group of juvenile criminals, led by the old and cunning Fagin. Fagin runs a gang of pickpockets and trains young boys to steal. Oliver is reluctantly drawn into their world of crime. During one of the gang's thefts, Oliver is caught, but he is saved by a kind gentleman, Mr. Brownlow, who takes him into his home. As Oliver's life begins to improve, he learns more about his mysterious past and eventually uncovers the truth about his family. Throughout the novel, Oliver faces numerous challenges, including being deceived by people who want to exploit him, being kidnapped, and suffering from the cruelty of those around him. However, despite the harshness of the world, Oliver's innate goodness and purity remain intact. Ultimately, after much struggle, he is reunited with his true family, and justice prevails.

This novel includes different themes. One of the primary themes in *Oliver Twist* is the representation of poverty and its harsh effects on society. Dickens uses the workhouse system as a backdrop to show how the poor were treated during the Victorian era. The conditions in workhouses were deplorable, and the system was designed to discourage the poor from seeking assistance. Through Oliver's experiences, Dickens highlights the dehumanizing effects of poverty and the inability of the social system to offer any real help to those in need. Dickens also critiques the Poor Law of 1834, which he believed was deeply unjust, as it worsened the conditions of the poor. Oliver's struggle to survive in such a system is a direct reflection of the struggles faced by the working class during that period. The novel forces readers to reflect on the consequences of societal indifference to the suffering of the poor.

The next theme are innocence and morality. Oliver represents innocence in a world full of corruption and moral decay. He is a symbol of purity, and his ability to maintain goodness, despite the criminal environment around him, serves as a stark contrast to the characters who have succumbed to vice. Oliver's moral compass is unwavering, even when faced with temptation and danger.

The novel contrasts Oliver's innocence with the corrupt characters he encounters, such as Fagin, the Artful Dodger, and Bill Sikes. These characters embody different facets of evil-greed, manipulation, and violence. Despite the hardships Oliver faces, he remains a beacon of morality, showing that even in the darkest of circumstances, goodness can prevail.

The role of family and identity is also described in this novel. Family and identity play crucial roles in Oliver's life. Throughout the novel, Oliver's search for his true family and his place in the world drives much of the plot. His eventual reunion with his family symbolizes the restoration of justice and the importance of familial bonds. The novel also explores the theme of identity through the character of Oliver. He is initially unaware of his heritage, and the mystery of his parentage drives much of the narrative. His quest to find out who he truly is reflects the broader theme of the search for personal identity, which resonates with readers on a universal level.

Another significant theme in *Oliver Twist* is the battle between good and evil. The novel presents a series of contrasting characters who embody different moral positions. Oliver represents the ultimate good, while Fagin, Sikes, and others represent varying degrees of evil. Dickens uses these characters to explore the impact of environment, upbringing, and choice on a person's morality.

The novel suggests that while external forces, such as poverty and the criminal system, may influence a person's behavior, ultimate responsibility lies with the individual's choices. Oliver's resilience against these forces highlights the triumph of good over evil, no matter how overwhelming the odds may seem.

### **Character Analysis**

Oliver Twist is the main character. He is the protagonist, and his character is central to the novel's moral message. His purity and innocence make him a sympathetic character, and readers are encouraged to root for him as he navigates the challenges of his world. Despite the various hardships he endures, including neglect, abuse, and exploitation, Oliver retains his moral integrity. His character serves as a critique of the social system that allows such injustices to occur.

Fagin is one of the primary antagonists in the story, a manipulative, cunning criminal who trains children to become pickpockets. He represents the corrupting influence of crime and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals. Fagin's character is complex, as he is both a victim of society and a perpetrator of evil, driven by greed and self-preservation.

Bill Sikes is a violent and ruthless criminal who represents the darker side of humanity. His brutal treatment of his dog and his eventual violent actions towards others, including Nancy, illustrate the destructive power of evil. Sikes is the embodiment of unchecked violence and cruelty, and his tragic end is a direct consequence of his immoral choices.

Mr. Brownlow is a kind, moral character who serves as a father figure to Oliver. His willingness to take Oliver in and his eventual role in helping Oliver uncover his true identity represent the theme of compassion and justice in the novel. Mr. Brownlow's character contrasts sharply with the other figures of authority in the story, such as the workhouse officials, who embody the cruelty of the system.

### **Conclusion**

Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens is a profound social critique of Victorian England, highlighting the harsh realities faced by the poor and marginalized. Through the character of Oliver, Dickens illustrates the resilience of innocence and the enduring power of kindness in a world rife with corruption, crime, and social inequality. The novel not only exposes the inhumane conditions of workhouses and the exploitation of vulnerable children but also emphasizes the importance of compassion, family, and moral integrity. Ultimately, Oliver Twist serves as a timeless reminder of the need for social reform and justice, urging readers to reflect on the societal issues that persist in their own time. Dickens' ability to intertwine social commentary with a compelling narrative has ensured the novel's place as a classic in English literature, continuing to inspire and educate readers around the world.

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