

# Orphans in the Victorian Era in *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist*

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato bakalářská práce analyzuje postavení sirotků ve viktoriánské společnosti ve dvou slavných románech – *Jana Eyrová* od Charlotte Brontëové a *Oliver Twist* od Charlese Dickense. Tato bakalářská práce znázorňuje tři hlavní témata: sociální třídu, sociální prostředí a pohlaví, která jsou ústředním předmětem analýzy. Hlavním cílem bakalářské práce je zjistit hlavní rozdíly a podobnosti mezi romány, přesněji mezi protagonisty Janou a Oliverem. Romány a jejich protagonisté jsou kromě toho také porovnání se skutečným životem sirotků ve viktoriánské době, který je popsán v teoretickém kontextu práce. Oba romány jsou příběhy o sociálním pokroku hlavních postav a oba autoři zdůrazňují, že dokonce i ti nejvíce utrpení malí sirotci mohou dosáhnout svého šťastného pohádkového konce tím, že budou činit dobrá životní rozhodnutí. Historicko-kulturní výzkum ukáže, že skutečný život sirotků nejnižší sociální třídy ve viktoriánské době, během níž se tyto romány staly populárními, byl však mnohem horší.

Klíčová slova: Sirotci, viktoriánská doba, Charlotte Brontë, Jana Eyrová, Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, sociální třída, sociální prostředí, pohlaví, viktoriánská společnost.

## **ABSTRACT**

The thesis analyses the position of orphans within the British Victorian society in two famous novels - *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. The thesis introduces three key themes: social class, social environment, and gender, which are the primary focus of the analysis. The main objective of the thesis is to establish the major differences and similarities between the novels, more precisely between their protagonists Jane and Oliver. Furthermore, the novels and their protagonists are also compared to the real life of orphans in the Victorian era, which is described in the theoretical background of the thesis. Both of the novels are tales of social progress of the main character and both authors emphasize that by making good choices in life, even the most miserable little orphans might have their happily ever after fairy-tale ending. The historical-cultural research will show that lower-class orphans themselves in the Victorian era during which the novels became popular had it much worse.

Keywords: Orphans, Victorian era, Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, social class, social environment, gender, Victorian society.

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### **Motto**

“Family not only need to consist of merely those whom we share blood, but also for those whom we’d give blood.”

Charles Dickens

I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor’s/Master’s thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era, the most progressive period of British history, describes the age when Queen Victoria came to the throne from 1837 to 1901. The Victorian era was an extended period during which a large number of significant changes occurred and many aspects of daily life in England changed entirely forever. During the sixty-four-year reign of Queen Victoria, England led the transformation of the new modern world<sup>1</sup> and rose towards its highest peak – the empire was enormous, and the industry was extremely prosperous, which is the reason Britain led to other countries to try to follow its example, starting from the architecture, literature, technology and many more aspects.<sup>2</sup>

Professor of Social History Hugh Cunningham states that the Victorian family was based on the assumption that the family was the primary foundation of the society and in order to function correctly, it had to be complete with a father who worked outside the home and mother who remained at home along with their offspring.<sup>3</sup> Servants were a standard part of the household in middle and upper class families, which also often included grandparents and other relatives under the same roof. Children in lower class families often went largely unschooled and went to work at an early age.<sup>4</sup>

It was Queen Victoria's family and the queen herself who became the ideal representation of the Victorian family and its values. In the course of 17 years, nine children were the outcome of her marriage with Prince Albert.<sup>5</sup> Concerning orphans, it is worth mentioning that Queen Victoria became the godmother and guardian of Sarah Forbes Bonetta, an African princess, whose parents were murdered during the Okeadon war in Africa. Sarah had the privilege to get education and her life differed significantly from the lives of other Victorian orphans.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 2nd edition (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2009), IIX-IX.

<sup>2</sup> Melinda Corey and George Ochoa, *The Encyclopedia of the Victorian World: A Reader's Companion to the People, Places, Events, and Everyday Life of the Victorian Era* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1996), XVI.

<sup>3</sup> Hugh Cunningham, "Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire" review of *Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire*, by Laura Peters, *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Social, Political, and Cultural Studies*, 2003, vol. 45, no. 4737, 737.

<sup>4</sup> "Victorian Era Family Daily Life in England," Victorian-Era.org, accessed April 21, 2019, <http://victorian-era.org/victorian-family.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Sally Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Caroline Bressey, "Of Africa's Brightest Ornaments: A Short Biography of Sarah Forbes Bonetta," *Social & Cultural Geography* 6, no. 2 (April 2005): 253–64.

David Floyd suggests that Victorian Era could be called the Era of the Orphan, as the number of them was countless.<sup>7</sup> Christine A. Adamec and Laurie C. Miller, the authors of *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, define the term orphan as “a person whose parents have died or who are presumed dead; usually refers to a dependent child.”<sup>8</sup> However, Laura Peters extends this definition by arguing that the term orphan was also used to describe children who suffered from the loss of only one parent or those whose parents abandoned them.<sup>9</sup> As Dr. Jacqueline Banerjee points out, many mothers passed away while or due to giving birth. Moreover, the death rate of young men also increased rapidly, caused for example by various epidemics.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Laurence Stone argues that “half of all children would have lost one parent before completing adolescence;” therefore, the number of orphaned children during the Victorian era was much higher than in any other earlier period of British history.<sup>11</sup>

The theoretical background deals with the themes of social class, social environment, and gender in the Victorian society, especially orphans, who are the primary focus of the thesis. Social class in Victorian England was traditionally divided into three main sub-classes: the working class, middle class and upper class, and the boundaries of this hierarchy were deeply respected. The life of working-class Victorians differed significantly from the life of the aristocrats; therefore, each population’s social environment corresponded with their distinct position within the social class hierarchy. Orphans were greatly dependent on local and municipal institutions which were responsible for them. As represented in the following analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist*, the most typical possibilities that Victorian orphans had were adoption or fostering by their relatives; going to the workhouse or baby-farming house, both institutions with alarming conditions; boarding educational institutions; and, finally, a life on the streets which was frequently connected with criminality. In addition, as indicated by Professor Jan Marsh of the Victoria and Albert Museum, male and female Victorians were treated differently according to their gender, mostly due to the fact that Victorian era was regarded as an era of male supremacy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> David Floyd, *Street Urchins, Sociopaths and Degenerates: Orphans of Late-Victorian and Edwardian Fiction* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Christine A. Adamec and Laurie C. Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, 3rd ed. (New York: Facts On File, 2007), 207.

<sup>9</sup> Cunningham, “Orphan Texts: Victorian Orphans, Culture and Empire,” 737.

<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline Banerjee, “Ideas of Childhood in Victorian Children’s Fiction: Orphans, Outcasts and Rebels,” last modified August 22, 2007, accessed April 21, 2019, <http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/childlit/childhood4.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Laurence Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 313.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Marsh, “Gender Ideology & Separate Spheres in the 19th Century,” accessed April 21, 2019, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/g/gender-ideology-and-separate-spheres-19th-century/>.

The analytical part concentrates on the novels *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. The analysis of both works is based on theoretical research, i.e. not very much statistical analysis; therefore, the examination itself is divided into three main parts: social class, social environment, and gender. Each part describes certain aspect of or stage in the life of the main protagonist, e.g. their progress from the lower class into the upper class of the Victorian society. Both writers display a view of the Victorian era and they locate their orphaned heroes into the 19<sup>th</sup> century; by which they build countless obstacles the protagonists have to overcome in order to deserve their place within the Victorian society.

**I. THEORETICAL AND  
HISTORICAL/CULTURAL  
BACKGROUND**

## 1 ORPHANS IN THE VICTORIAN ERA

As is claimed by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw, who first coined the term “intersectionality” in 1989, social class, social environment and gender are closely connected. Intersectional theory suggests that “subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality.” Crenshaw argues that these features do not stand on their own, but they complement each other; therefore their connection should be emphasized,<sup>13</sup> as it will be pointed out in the analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist* itself. In addition, Leslie McCall maintains that intersectionality is “the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies in conjunction with related fields, has made so far.”<sup>14</sup> For this reason this analytic framework “has become the ‘gold standard’ multidisciplinary approach for analysing a subject’s experiences of both identity and oppression.”<sup>15</sup> (sic)

### 1.1 Social class

The norms of social hierarchy are often misunderstood. It is assumed that the whole concept is based on money in general, but there were many features by which the social classes were distinguished, for instance, the place the family lived, how educated the members were, or their manners and values. The faith of the Victoria society relied on the strong character of individuals, the sense of purpose, and ethnicity. A Victorian knew where he belonged, and he respected the social hierarchy. It was immoral to act contrary to the values and norms of one’s social class or to behave like someone from another class.<sup>16</sup> Members of the society held onto the set of traditional Victorian values without exception and consented to the potential punishment when these values were infringed upon.<sup>17</sup>

Victorians were traditionally divided into two classes – aristocrats and commoners, who researcher Sally Mitchell further divides into the working class and the middle class. The main difference was in the type of work these people did and how much money they earned.<sup>18</sup> As indicated by Professor Kathryn Hughes, social inequalities between the upper, middle, and working class increased when the middle class started to thrive in the late

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<sup>13</sup> Jennifer C. Nash, “Re-Thinking Intersectionality,” *Feminist Review* no. 89 (06, 2008): 1-15.

<sup>14</sup> Leslie McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” *Signs* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1771.

<sup>15</sup> Nash, “Re-Thinking Intersectionality,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England*, 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> Marilynne Robinson, “Modern Victorians: Dressing Politics in the Costume History,” review of *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, by Gertrude Himmelfarb, Harper’s Magazine, July 1995, 74.

<sup>18</sup> Mitchell, *Daily life in Victorian England*, 18.

18<sup>th</sup> century, contrary to the working class which was not prosperous at all.<sup>19</sup> The distinctions between these social classes were extremely noticeable in the living conditions. The social class of the poor was the one with the most people in it, and during Victorian times the term “poor” was equal to terms “labourers” and “paupers.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the British aristocracy and gentry were the wealthiest members of the Victorian society, and they also became more directly interested in electoral politics for the first time during this era.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding jobs outside the home, women of the upper class usually did not need to earn money, in contrast to the middle- and working-class families, whose income was usually composed of earnings from all members of the family, including women and children. In addition, Professor of Economic History Robert C. Allen refers to an 1898 analysis of manual occupations by Robert Dudley Baxter in his landmark work *The National Income*, which demonstrates that 60% of people working in the industrial sector were women and children.<sup>22</sup>

### 1.1.1 The working class

Working-class men and women did manual labour. Their job usually required physical strength, and they could be easily recognised by their dirty clothes and hands. As for the money they earned, it was usually barely enough to cover their daily needs and help them to survive. The toughest time for a working-class family was when the children were born, and the woman, therefore, was not able to keep a job anymore because she needed to take care of them. Once the children got older, they could help with work, either at home or they often joined their parents or older siblings in their jobs. As the family’s level of income increased, there was a chance for them to get above the poverty line again. Nevertheless, saving some money was rarely an option; thus, when they could not work anymore, many of the elder family members spend the rest of their lives in workhouses for the poor.<sup>23</sup>

The children of the Victorian working class lived under what we would consider today terrible conditions, which often caused their death. The ones from the most impoverished families often had to be pulled out of school and forced to find a job so they could contribute

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<sup>19</sup> Kathryn Hughes, “The Middle Classes: Etiquette and Upward Mobility,” published May 15, 2014, accessed April 19, 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-middle-classes-etiquette-and-upward-mobility>.

<sup>20</sup> Robinson, “Modern Victorians: Dressing Politics in the Costume History,” 74.

<sup>21</sup> Arthur Pollard, *The Victorians: The Penguin History of Literature* (London: Penguin Book, 1993), 99-105.

<sup>22</sup> Robert C. Allen, “Class Structure and Inequality During the Industrial Revolution: Lessons from England’s Social Tables, 1688-1967,” *The Economic History Review* 72, no. 1 (2019): 92-3.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, *Daily life in Victorian England*, 18-19.

to the family income. They usually worked in various manufacturing factories for 6 to 16 hours a day and sometimes they were too tired to leave the factory when their shift was done. For instance, noted German socialist philosopher Friedrich Engels describes such a situation when a child, “too tired to go home, hid in the wool of the drying-room to sleep there.” (sic) Not only were the working hours too long, but as the result of having worked in a cold and damp environment, the children often became ill or disabled for life. As Engels illustrates, their knees would be “bent inward and backwards, the ankles deformed and thick, and the spinal column often bent forwards or to one side.”<sup>24</sup>

### 1.1.2 The middle class

The flourishing of the middle class was the outcome of the industrial revolution in England, which created a significant distinction between the working- and the middle-class Victorians.<sup>25</sup> A certain “style of living” was considered to be the distinguishing feature most typical for the middle-class society, as its members were usually living in the suburbs and the bigger towns. The level of income did not make a big difference to middle-class people, as on the other hand, education, and Victorian values gained importance during the 1850s.<sup>26</sup> Receiving a decent education became the norm for the children of middle-class families. The sons were usually sent to boarding schools, or they attended the local grammar schools. The daughters were usually home-schooled, or they also went to the local schools. In contrast to the lower class, the middle-class men’s work was less dirty and physical, and the income did not have a clearly defined role within the class, as both wealthy bankers, and poor clerks were considered to be a part of the middle class.<sup>27</sup>

As some middle-class women wanted to experience life outside the world of the house, the information and skills they were taught in girls’ schools were not enough for them anymore, and they were longing for some deeper education and knowledge. Moreover, according to Mitchell, it was not until the late 1840s that “the first organised movements for women’s rights” emerged out of a perceived need for a revolutionary change.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Engels, “The Condition of the Working Class in England,” *Voices From the Past* 93, no. 8 (August 2003): 1246-1247.

<sup>25</sup> Simon Gunn, “Class, Identity and the Urban: The Middle Class in England, c. 1790-1950,” *Urban History* 31, no. 1 (2004): 31.

<sup>26</sup> Gunn, “Class, Identity and the Urban,” 35-6.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, *Daily life in Victorian England*, 19-21.

<sup>28</sup> Mitchell, *Daily life in Victorian England*, 7.



### 1.1.3 The upper class

Aristocrats, as the highest people of the upper class were often called, usually did not need to work to earn a living. Typically, the oldest son inherited the title, family land, and investments which became the source of his income and secured his comfortable lifestyle. Another source of income for the upper-class Victorians derived from charging rent for their properties. Some of them had enormous tracts of the land which they usually turned into smaller farms for rent. Although the remaining sons may have acquired some land as well, and usually a house or steady income, they often had to go into a paid profession – as clergymen, military officers, or colonial administrators. The family either lived in their country house or townhouse, with staff and servants. They often throw parties, balls, dinners or they attended other events such as horse racing, cricket and foxhunting. Regarding the children's education, the sons attended better public schools (usually boarding private schools) and a governess was hired to educate the daughters at home.<sup>29</sup>

It must be understood that there were many degrees of the aristocracy, usually based on wealth and education. There were 562 Victorian families with a title in 1842, – ranking from highest to lowest: duke, marquess, earl, viscount, and baron. The head of these families took on some individual responsibilities and privileges, for example he became a member of the House of Lords, it was not possible to arrest him for debt, and in case of a criminal offence instead of being tried by a criminal court he would be tried by a jury consisting of other aristocrats.<sup>30</sup>

## 1.2 Social environment

Social environment defines “the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact.”<sup>31</sup> Concerning orphans and the following analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist*, this chapter describes where, how and under what conditions orphans lived and what their possibilities were during the Victorian period. The chapter focuses on adoption and fostering by the immediate family or friends; orphan homes such as workhouses and baby farms; educational boarding institutions; and, last but not least, the streets, where countless orphans lived and frequently became criminals in order to survive.

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<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, *Daily life in Victorian England*, 21-23.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Barnett and Michele Casper, “A Definition of “Social Environment”,” *American Journal of Public Health* 91, no.3 (March 2001): 465.

### 1.2.1 Adoption and fostering

Adoption or fostering by the close family or family friends was usually the first and the most obvious choice after the death of the child's parents. According to a definition by Adamec and Miller, adoption is described as "the lawful transfer of parental obligations and rights." It gives a touch of family connection to the adopted child, a feeling that she or he finally belongs somewhere.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, fostering is defined by *The Oxford Dictionary* as "taking care of a child, usually for a limited time, without being the child's legal parent."<sup>33</sup> Both adoption and foster care are likely to transform the life of an adopted child gradually – either positively or negatively. The primary purpose of both is to provide a safe and secure place to live in for those who are in a weak position and have nowhere else to go.<sup>34</sup>

England had no proper laws or restrictions on adopting a child until the Adoption of Children Act of 1926; therefore, adoption, in general, was an informal process in the Victorian Era. Anyone at all was able to adopt a child or accept a baby from those who did not want one.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Pamela Walker claims that the off-the-record history of adoption in Britain is quite rich, mainly among the families from lower social classes who often were not able to take care of more children due to poverty.<sup>36</sup>

In Victorian England, quite a lot of people sought to make some profit out of the lack of control over the adoption. They could sell orphans for a small fee to those who needed a servant, or another pair of hands to help them in their business.<sup>37</sup> These children were treated very severely, were greatly abused, and often never found a loving home. Adamec and Miller defines the term abuse as "physical, sexual, or long-lasting emotional harm to a child." Although, as the literary theorists claim, it was still believed that adopted children had much better lives than those who were living in orphanages or similar institutions, especially in rough times during the Victorian Era.<sup>38</sup>

Besides adoption, as already mentioned, there was another possibility for the orphaned children – the foster care system, which was initially established in the US in order to watch

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<sup>32</sup> Adamec and Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, 11-14.

<sup>33</sup> "Fostering," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fostering>.

<sup>34</sup> Philip A. Fisher, "Review: Adoption, Fostering, and the Needs of Looked-after and Adopted Children," *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 20, no. 1 (2015): 5.

<sup>35</sup> Jenny Keating, *A Child for Keeps: The History of Adoption in England, 1918-45* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Pamela J. Walker, "Adoption and Victorian Culture," *History of the Family* 11 (2006): 212.

<sup>37</sup> Lloyd DeMause, *The History of Childhood: The Untold Story of Child Abuse* (New York: P. Bedrick Books, 1974), 427.

<sup>38</sup> Adamec and Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, 3.

over children who were mistreated.<sup>39</sup> Even before the 17<sup>th</sup> century, parents were sending their children away to be fostered by their relatives. This was happening for many reasons, usually, because the parents were not able to take care of their children or they wanted them to have better opportunities, like getting an education or a good job, which they could not give the children themselves.<sup>40</sup>

Then again, as the adoption process was informal, the parental rights and responsibilities could not officially be passed on to the adoptive parents, as a result sending the children to foster homes became quite common. In fact, in these cases, children with no parents became wards of the state, and the parenting role was to some extent transferred onto the court. In spite of this, the children were still often treated like belongings instead of human beings.<sup>41</sup>

### 1.2.2 Workhouses

In a review article on the website The Workhouse written by journalist Laurence Dopson, The Poor Relief Act of 1601 is cited as the reason England's parishes officially became liable for the "impotent poor – older people, the choric sick, and orphans."<sup>42</sup> Workhouses in Victorian England were publicly controlled, financially supported by local taxation and they served as shelters for people with no roof over their head and those without a job.<sup>43</sup> Although, providing asylum to people seeking refuge was the primary purpose of these institutions, Professor of Social History M. A. Crowther, also describes a workhouse as a place where several needs of everyday life had to be combined. These would usually be schools, hospitals and old people's homes.<sup>44</sup>

According to Peter Higginbotham, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was created to form all parishes in England and Wales into so-called Poor Law Unions, and thus it created an entire system united and controlled by a central Poor Law Commission. The original idea was to build new Union Workhouses with separated buildings for children, old people, women and men. Despite this, the "general mixed workhouses" were built instead to provide the shelter to everyone to keep men, women and children separated.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Adamec and Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, 107.

<sup>40</sup> DeMause, *The History of Childhood*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Adamec and Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, 13-14.

<sup>42</sup> Laurence Dopson, "Workhouse," *Nursing Standard* 26, no. 45 (July 2012): 30.

<sup>43</sup> Ruth Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse: Oliver Twist and the London Poor*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>44</sup> M. A. Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929: The History of an English Social Institution* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational, 1981), 3.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Higginbotham, "Introduction," accessed January 18, 2019, <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/intro/>.

However, there was one crucial aspect which distinguished workhouses from other institutions – their localism. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, workhouses fell within the local government authority,<sup>46</sup> a fact which had an enormous impact on the living conditions in these institutions, mainly because the government generally did nothing to improve them and very often ignored what was happening behind the walls of the workhouse.<sup>47</sup> In the Victorian Era, the people living in workhouses were called inmates even though the workhouse was not considered a prison and people could usually leave the building and return. All inmates were dressed in a workhouse uniform, slept in shared bedrooms, had supervised baths and did hard work, typically breaking apart stones or old ropes. Their diet was based on a repetitive diet consisting on basics such as porridge, bread and cheese<sup>48</sup> which had almost no nutrition value. The famous example from *Oliver Twist* “Please, sir, I want some more” is examined in the analysis of the novel.

### 1.2.3 Baby-farming houses

The term baby-farmers describes women who made their own houses available for children in exchange for financial compensation received from the mothers, families, the government or other institutions, usually at least for a few months. Abuse, cruelty, hunger and neglect were embodied in everyday life of the children living in farming houses.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, many cases of child murder occurred in these institutions. As stated by specialist in literary theory and Victorian literature Jules Law, there was a time in history when the terms “baby-farming” and “child-murder” were perceived as equal.<sup>50</sup> Dorothy Haller of Loyola University argues that it was a common belief that the baby-farmers would “take care of” the child and for a small fee, the mother was assured not to see her baby alive ever again.<sup>51</sup> Such example could be observed in the story of Amelia Dyer, “who killed numerous infants she was paid to care for and who was eventually hanged for her crimes in June 1896.”<sup>52</sup>

The Victorian society, especially those from the higher social classes, often forced unmarried mothers to abandon their babies and give them up in favour of baby-farming

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<sup>46</sup> Crowther, *The Workhouse System 1834-1929*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> David Coleman and John Salt, *The British Population: Patterns, Trends and Processes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 44.

<sup>48</sup> Higginbotham, “Introduction.”

<sup>49</sup> Joanne Pearman, “Bastards, Baby Farmers, and Social Control in Victorian Britain” (PhD Thesis, University of Kent, 2017), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Jules Law, *The Social Life of Fluids: Blood, Milk, and Water in the Victorian Novel*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 139.

<sup>51</sup> Dorothy Haller, “Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England,” in *The Student Historical Journal 1989-1990*, volume 21 (Loyola University, 1989), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Barbara Butcher, “The Baby Farmer of Reading,” *History Today* (June 2014): 38.

houses where the children were raised; otherwise the mothers were disrespected and despised by the Victorian society. Another reason for leaving a baby in this institution was that the mothers, especially from the lower social class, were not able to both work and raise the baby at the same time. Leaving the child with the baby-farmers, they had the opportunity and time to work and pay the baby-farmers for the childcare. On the contrary, some mothers gave their children away permanently so those could be eventually bought by anyone who offered the highest amount of money. The mothers were promised that the baby-farmers would find a caring family for their children; however, that was hardly ever the case.<sup>53</sup>

Baby-farming houses were widely promoted in newspapers all over England. All adverts were based on offering long-term childcare and were focused primarily on unmarried mothers with illegitimate children who needed this service the most. To illustrate this point, here is an advert in London daily newspapers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century:

ADOPTION. – A person wishing a lasting and comfortable home for a young child of either sex will find this an excellent opportunity. Advertisers having no children of their own are about to proceed to America. Premium, Fifteen pounds. Respectable references are given and required. Address F.X.-<sup>54</sup> (sic)

#### 1.2.4 Educational institutions

In the early 1800s, no primary education was legally required in England; moreover, there was no structured national educational system or curriculum in place which the children were to study. All of this changed within one century starting between the years 1830-1840 when that some educational institutions began to receive money from their local government institutions for the very first time. Finally, the Education Act of 1870 introduced a significant change to all children once several schools, which were supported by the local government, were established. Thus, the possibility of education was made available to everyone.<sup>55</sup>

Victorian children had few possibilities of education. There were day schools, village schools, boarding schools, factory and parish schools for the working class, and academies and better public schools for the upper class. In the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the main aim of the national government became to provide education outside of the house, where mothers were usually educating their children – if they were lucky enough to be educated. A proper educational system helped to lower the differences among the social classes, as all

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<sup>53</sup> Adamec and Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Haller, “Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England,” 4.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Gargano, “Introduction,” in *Reading Victorian Schoolrooms: Childhood and Education in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 2.

the children now had at least the possibility to attend schools. The institutionalization of education significantly changed the social and family life, and brought many opportunities for the Victorian children.<sup>56</sup>

Boarding schools for the elite were places which provided amazing possibilities of high-quality education for all upper-class children, but usually only for privileged boys. On the other hand, there were also boarding schools for lower-class children, where the quality of education was significantly lower. As Laurel Cleary states, discipline at these institutions frequently involved corporal punishment – children were often beaten as well as punished in many other ways. Illegitimate or unwanted children were often placed into the London boarding schools, because these institutions were usually run by the municipal government and therefore generated a profit.<sup>57</sup> Examples of such institutions might be found in Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* – the Lowood institution, as well as in the real life of Brontë sisters – the Clergy Daughter's School.

### 1.2.5 The streets

If any of the possibilities already mentioned were not available, the streets were the orphans' last chance for survival. According to Adamec and Miller, they did not have any other option than to live “as thieves, prostitutes, or beggars.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, criminality and poverty were the everyday companions of these young children, who had no family to turn to. Moreover, neither the church nor the state cared for them. The industrial revolution brought many citizens of the countryside into bigger towns such as London. However, there was no employment or accommodation for poor people, as mechanization reduced the need for manual work, thus many of them, young and old, ended up on the streets.<sup>59</sup> People were sleeping on the rooftops, in the trees, inside of animals' holes, and in the damps or drains. A significant portion of this new urban population became criminals, which caused a constant increase in the crime rate all over England.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately, this destitute way of life was widespread for many orphans during the Victorian era. No one was looking after them; no one cared for them. Many did not seek this lawless lifestyle, but by being brought up in a such an environment, they were surrounded

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<sup>56</sup> Gargano, “Introduction,” 2-3.

<sup>57</sup> Laurel Cleary, “Victorian Boarding Schools,” accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.theclassroom.com/victorian-boarding-schools-12082497.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Adamec and Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, xxiii.

<sup>59</sup> Jeannie Duckworth, *Fagin's Children: Criminal Children in Victorian England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2002), ix.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London: Vintage, 2001), 137-143.

with crime every day, thus they soon started copying what they saw on the streets. No one wanted to employ homeless children, as they were filthy and hungry; therefore, they tried to sell anything that could be sold and to steal whatever they could. If an adult were caught by the police, the prison life might not be worse than the life on the streets – a prison means having something to eat and a roof over their head.<sup>61</sup> These youngsters had to do their best in order to survive, which only the sharpest and most resilient did. Finally, the Education Act of 1870 helped to lower the number of young children on the streets and put them into schools instead of punishing them. Therefore, the crime rate decreased, and the children were able to obtain some education, which would to an extent broaden their future job and living conditions and opportunities.<sup>62</sup>

Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* describes one of the most famous portrayals of the London underworld in British literature. His criminal characters the Artful Dodger, Fagin, Bill Sikes, and Nancy expose a world full of criminality, homelessness, and death – something which Victorian readers of popular literature had never seen before in what had been a genteel tradition of poetry and fiction. Thus Dickens is one of the first writers to introduce social issues into popular literature. The significance of this influence on the general public in terms of introducing specific new laws and institutions will be discussed below.

### 1.3 Gender

The term *gender* implies “the perceived and natural differences between men and women.” The codes of behaviour associated with a specific gender are taught in the early years of a child's life according to the expectations the society has; these codes are referred to as the gender roles. Children attempt to adopt and imitate the adults they are surrounded with; therefore, the family environment is the first place their gender identity begins to take shape.<sup>63</sup>

The Victorian era was a period of male supremacy in most areas of women's lives. Women did not have any legal rights, and their only duties were to be a good wife and mother and taking care of the household and the children; it was this rigid gender role which was passed on to their daughters at a very young age. There was no need for other than the minimum required education, because they were not expected to need it at home. Elementary

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<sup>61</sup> Duckworth, *Fagin's Children*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Duckworth, *Fagin's Children*, ix-x.

<sup>63</sup> Silver Damsen, “Gender,” in *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature*, ed. Jennifer McClinton-Temple (New York: Facts On File, 2011), 40.

education for both genders became required when the Education Act of 1870 was passed, and girls were finally taught to read, write and do arithmetic. If their families consented or wanted them to, some girls or young women had an opportunity for further secondary education, but this did not become common until the 1890s.<sup>64</sup>

#### 1.4 Illegitimate children and unmarried mothers

According to history professor Ginger Frost from Samford University, “bastardy was a serious stigma legally, socially, and emotionally” as the Victorian society considered the “heterosexual monogamous marriage the only respectable family formation.”<sup>65</sup> In this manner, illegitimate children posed a threat to the perfect image of a Victorian family. Professor Frost also describes Victorian England as the strictest country concerning laws against illegitimate children and she claims that the law generally perceived an illegitimate child as a parentless orphan with no mother even though the mother was still alive.<sup>66</sup>

Social historians Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt state that “illegitimacy was an offence against Christian morality and the institution of marriage.”<sup>67</sup> For that reason, illegitimate children and the unmarried mothers had a tough life and were frequently the victims of discrimination.<sup>68</sup> To give another example, Dorothy Hatcher, who was born in 1904 as an illegitimate child, describes her life along these lines:

I must have been a very bewildered little girl... I seemed to have no rights, no privileges as others did... An unsettled early life, the stigma of being illegitimate and not realising why I was despised because of it, all combined to make me grow up with the feeling that everyone was against me. I had a huge inferiority complex and it has taken the best part of my life to conquer.<sup>69</sup> (sic)

As historian Jenny Keating claims, there were not many possibilities that unmarried mothers from a lower social class could provide for themselves and the children. The women’s wages, if they earned any, were too low. Moreover, many of them could not find a job and keep it; thus, they had no income at all. They could go into a home for mothers or a workhouse, but these institutions were usually already full, the living conditions there were unbearable, or

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<sup>64</sup> Çağlar Demir, “The Role of Women in Education in Victorian England,” *Journal of Educational and Instructional Studies in the World* 5 (May 2015): 55.

<sup>65</sup> Ginger Frost, “The Black Lamb of the Black Sheep: Illegitimacy in the English Working Class, 1850-1939,” *Journal of Social History* 37(2) (2003): 293.

<sup>66</sup> Frost, “The Black Lamb of the Black Sheep,” 293-5.

<sup>67</sup> Ivy Pinchbeck and Margaret Hewitt, *Children in English Society, Vol. 2, From the Eighteenth Century to the Children Act 1948* (London: Routledge, 1973), 613.

<sup>68</sup> Keating, *A Child for Keeps*, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Frost, “The Black Lamb of the Black Sheep,” 301.



the officials refused to take the mothers in.<sup>70</sup> In the *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, Dr John Launer gives an example of such discrimination in his article “Memories of the Workhouse”; there he argues that a woman who had already gone into labour was denied to enter the Cleveland Street Workhouse in and forced to deliver her child in front of the workhouse doorway.<sup>71</sup> Charles Dickens had lived near the Cleveland Street Workhouse; for that reason, many researchers believe that the workhouse from his acclaimed novel *Oliver Twist* is based on this actual home.<sup>72</sup> Illegitimacy is also explored in *Oliver Twist*, as the unmarried woman Agnes gives birth to her son in the workhouse and dies immediately after, leaving the child with no one; thus Oliver becomes a poor orphan, seemingly condemned for the rest of his life to the workhouse.

Left with no other choice, the most desperate mothers were often forced to abandon, sell or sometimes even kill their children.<sup>73</sup> The term “infanticide” is according to *The Oxford Dictionary* defined as “the crime of a mother killing her child within a year of birth”<sup>74</sup> and as Ginger Frost states, this was a widespread crime with Victorian women, especially those from the lower social classes, who did not want to feel ashamed and disrespected by society. Frost states in her article that in 1860 a poor unmarried woman named Ann Murphy “buried her two-week-old child alive in Liverpool; the baby lay in the hole for three hours before a gardener discovered it.”<sup>75</sup>

Literary theorists Adamec and Miller argue that Victorian society, especially people from the higher classes, assumed that the illegitimate children were as bad as their mothers who brought them into the world in sin.<sup>76</sup> These children were also treated much worse than orphans whose parents had died. Dorothy Haller of Loyola University – whose paper won the History Writing Award in 1990, states that in 1836 Muller’s Orphan Asylum based in Bristol did not accept these illegitimate orphans under its roof at all. It was believed that they might “infect” the mentality of the other children and turn them “bad”.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Keating, *A Child for Keeps*, 30-31.

<sup>71</sup> John Launer, “Memories of the Workhouse,” *Postgraduate Medical Journal* 91, no. 1075 (May 2015): 299-300.

<sup>72</sup> Ruth Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse: Oliver Twist and the London Poor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2-3.

<sup>73</sup> Keating, *A Child for Keeps*, 30-31.

<sup>74</sup> “Infanticide,” English Oxford Living Dictionaries, accessed February 21, 2019, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/infanticide>.

<sup>75</sup> Frost, “The Black Lamb of the Black Sheep,” 297.

<sup>76</sup> Adamec and Miller, *The Encyclopedia of Adoption*, 25.

<sup>77</sup> Haller, “Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England,” 1.

## 1.5 Orphans in Victorian literature

Many writers of the Victorian period, such as Charles Dickens, William Wordsworth, Hans Christian Andersen, and Felicia Hemans, portray the child as “an angelic emblem,” someone who is innocent and pure and is immune to corruption and the environment. Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* is one of the typical portrayals of such child. Oliver is seen as an innocent little orphan boy who is designed to evoke sympathy in other characters and especially in the reader himself. He makes everyone, even the most unapproachable person, to adore him – for example, the thief-master Fagin, who treats Oliver much better than the other boys.<sup>78</sup>

On the other hand, some realist authors show the child as someone who is not a human being yet, someone who needs to be taught the acceptable standards of behaviour. Victorian literature for children is filled with tales describing terrible outcomes of children’s rebellion, for example, the three volumes of *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818, 1842, 1847) by Mary Sherwood relate many stories in which the children are “burnt to death, hung, and other appalling punishments for transgressing social and religious law.” Such stories were written to set an example for Victorian children and to frighten them into compliance. The authors often describe many forms of physical or psychical aggression which are used in order to make the children follow the social norms of the Victorian era. The child’s discipline and obedience are the most important features.<sup>79</sup> The child is often treated like an animal – Jane, the orphan girl from Brontë’s novel *Jane Eyre*, is locked away in a dark abandoned room after she tries to defend herself against her cousin John, who is continuously bullying her. Her aunt Mrs. Reed does not believe her, and likens her behaviour to a “mad cat.”<sup>80</sup>

In the “Ideas of Childhood in Victorian Children’s Fiction: Orphans, Outcasts and Rebels,” Dr. Jacqueline Banerjee describes how the orphan literature deeply affected the Victorian society. The story of the chimney sweep Tom from Charles Kingsley’s *The Water-Babies* (1863) is one primary reason the Chimney Sweepers’ Regulation Act was passed, even though previous bills had been rejected. Banerjee also argues that by portraying the real struggles of the orphan children, the writers built the awareness of these social issues among the Victorian middle class, who were the only chance for a better life for these children.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Naomi Wood, “Angelic, Atavistic, Human: The Child of the Victorian Period,” in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 116-119.

<sup>79</sup> Wood, “Angelic, Atavistic, Human: The Child of the Victorian Period,” 120-1.

<sup>80</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Richard Nemesvari (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1999), 69-75.

<sup>81</sup> Banerjee, “Ideas of Childhood in Victorian Children’s Fiction.”

## **II. ANALYSIS**

## 2 INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS

As pointed out in the chapter Orphans in the Victorian Era, intersectionality coins social class, social environment, and gender together, as these terms are closely connected and together they form a part of one's identity.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the analysis of *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist* will be based on these three main categories, as the novels describe the progress of the main protagonists from the lower-class orphans into the upper-class individuals, and their journey takes them through many kinds of social environment.

*Jane Eyre* was published in 1847 and the book immediately became successful. *Oliver Twist* was first published in 26 monthly instalments beginning in 1837 in *Bentley's Miscellany* magazine, and later in 1838 finally issued as a book. Both writers published their books under pen-names and they based their main characters and other features in the books on their own lives. Jane has been seen as representing Brontë herself; moreover, many other features from her life can be observed in the novel. Dickens's protagonist Oliver can be seen as the portrayal of the author himself when he was a child. Dickens describes his own childhood through Oliver, however, he makes Oliver's story much more challenging.

Both Jane and Oliver represent lower-class orphans in 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian England. However, each character's lower-class position in the society greatly differs, as Jane lives with her abusive upper-class relatives, while Oliver's first home is a baby-farming house and a workhouse, where he needs to fight for survival. They both ascend to the upper class because they inherit money from their relatives; and at the end of the story, they discover where they truly belong and find their happy ending.

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<sup>82</sup> Nash, "Re-Thinking Intersectionality," 2.

### 3 ANALYSIS OF JANE EYRE

The novel *Jane Eyre, an Autobiography* was published in October 1847 under Charlotte Brontë's pen name Currer Bell, who was presented just as an editor, not the author of the book. The novel became hugely successful both among the Victorians and the world of Victorian literature in general. Women during the Victorian era were still not accepted as writers; in fact, Currer Bell was thought to be a man from the beginning. It never occurred to most of the reviewers of *Jane Eyre* that Currer Bell could be a woman. Although despite the title, the novel is not a true autobiography, but there are many resemblances to the author's life, e.g. the death of her own sisters at the Clergy Daughter's School and Helen Burns in the novel, as well as the fact that both Charlotte and Jane worked as a governess and they both lost their mother. In addition, many characters from the novel were inspired by Brontë's relatives and friends, for example, the Rivers and the Reed family.<sup>83</sup>

*Jane Eyre* completely changed the Victorian literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Brontë challenges social institutions such as family, social class, Christianity, and education by raising questions concerning gender, social class, and marriage issues.<sup>84</sup> The novel describes how the main heroine breaks the gender, sexual and social stereotypes of the Victorian era and portrays social changes of that time which other writers such as Jane Austen were still ignoring. The contrast between the works of Austen and Brontë was mainly due to their social class difference. The fathers of both writers were clergymen, but Brontë's family was poor, and Patrick Brontë had to establish himself with the help of others, e.g. through several apprenticeships, until he was able to become a teacher.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the Brontë sisters lost their mother when Charlotte was about 5 years old and her sisters were even younger.

The story of Jane starts at Gateshead, where she lives after her parents' death with her abusive aunt Mrs. Reed and her three children. Jane is greatly mistreated in this household; therefore, she moves to the Lowood boarding school with pleasure. The Lowood institution is run by Mr. Blocklehurst, who does not care about the conditions the students have to live in, as described in more detail above in the subchapter 'Educational institutions.' After Jane becomes a teacher in Lowood, she feels that her life needs a change. Jane finds a job as a governess and moves to Thornfield. Not only she is pleased with her new job, but she also meets the love of her life there. Shockingly, after finding out that Rochester is already

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<sup>83</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 9-11.

<sup>84</sup> Karin Jacobson, *CliffsNotes Jane Eyre* (New York: Hungry Minds, 2000), 7.

<sup>85</sup> Patricia Beer, *Reader, I Married Him: a Study of the Women Characters of Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 84-5.

married, Jane refuses to become his mistress and runs away from Thornfield, which leads her to another unexpected life event – a meeting with her long-lost cousins. Jane's uncle leaves her a fortune which she splits between herself and her cousins. Jane rejects St. John Rivers' proposal to become his missionary wife and returns to Rochester, who has now lost an arm and gone blind during a devastating fire at Thornfield. Jane feels equal to him now; therefore, she agrees to marry him, and ten years later she tells the readers about their happy marriage and the birth of their son.

### 3.1 The plain heroine

Of all Brontë's heroines, it is Jane Eyre and Lucy Snow from Brontë's third novel *Villette* who show the closest resemblance to Charlotte. Jane Eyre is presented to Victorian readers as an orphaned heroine of slightly unpleasant appearance – small, thin and plain, with a sharp temper and no money. These features, so atypical for a young female character in a literary work of the period, make her seem worthless in the eyes of other people.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, she is intelligent and uses her conscience to guide her through the most challenging situations in her life.<sup>87</sup> Jane profits from her emotional strength, her desire and imagination. She is not a conventional Victorian orphan; in fact, each Brontë's heroines were different; they never settled for less than they could attain in life.<sup>88</sup>

The complexity of Jane's character is shown throughout the whole novel. As the novel starts, she is pictured as an angry young orphan at the age of ten living with the Reed family where no one treats her with kindness; no one loves her. The next stage of Jane's life takes the reader to Lowood boarding school, where Jane suffers at the beginning but eventually thanks to her hard work and the influence of Miss Temple develops into an intelligent, strong and independent young lady. Jane's first job outside of Lowood brings her to Thornfield, where she experiences love; both extremes of it – overwhelming, genuine love and painful, hopeless love. When Jane flees from Thornfield and finds her long-lost cousins, she gets back on the right path and finds her inner strength and hope again. As Jane finishes her story at Ferndean, she is a strong, financially independent lady who is now in an equal marriage to the love of her life, Mr. Rochester. Despite everything that has gone wrong in her life she finds her happy ending – love, family, equality, and decency.

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<sup>86</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> Merle Rubin, "Jane Eyre: Heroine of Heroines," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Mar 11, 1991): 1-2.

<sup>88</sup> Susan Ostrov Weisser, "Thornfield and 'The Dream to Repose on': Jane Eyre," in *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre*, updated ed., ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2007), 79.

## 3.2 Social class

The Victorian Era can be analysed in terms of class and gender. Victorian women suffered more than did men from the social norms which were established on gender and class inequality between the sexes and different social classes. Charlotte Brontë draws the reader's attention to these issues by creating one of the first female heroines – Jane Eyre. The novel itself is a mirror of the Victorian society considering that no writer until Charlotte Brontë, had ever created a woman character who was able to overcome the obstacles of class and gender separation. Moreover, even Charlotte's sisters believed that creating such a heroine was not possible at that time.<sup>89</sup> However, Charlotte Brontë responded with these exact words: "I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours."<sup>90</sup>

The novel *Jane Eyre* demonstrates Jane's lifelong efforts to overcome the class and gender obstacles and restrictions of Victorian society, as she is not only a female but also an orphan, which both play a significant role in her life. As commented on in a biography by Brontë's contemporary fellow novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, Jane's transition from a lower-class orphan into a middle-class governess and then especially into an upper-class young woman is one of the critical features and achievements of both Jane and of the novel.<sup>91</sup>

### 3.2.1 The working class

As mentioned above, Charlotte Brontë was only 5 years old when her mother died, which is another similarity between the heroine Jane and the author herself – they both lost their mother very young. Even though Jane begins her story at Gateshead with the Reeds family, who are a part of the upper class, she is not perceived as an upper-class member of the society. Her aunt Mrs. Reed and her three children are superior to her, and they despise her. They often remind Jane that she is just a poor orphan who has no money and property and they make sure that Jane knows that she does not belong in Gateshead. Her cousin John is the one who treats Jane the worst.<sup>92</sup> He frequently calls her "bad animal" and shows her that she should not be at Gateshead with them, e.g. by telling her:

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<sup>89</sup> Nilay Erdem Ayyildiz, "From the Bottom to the Top: Class and Gender Struggle in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*," *Selcuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, no. 37 (2017): 146-8.

<sup>90</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell and Elisabeth Jay, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 235.

<sup>91</sup> Ayyildiz, "From the Bottom to the Top," 146-8.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

You are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense.<sup>93</sup> (sic)

John's usage of words such as "dependant," "no money," "none," and "beg," allude to Jane's social status. Therefore, at Gateshead, Jane is considered to be a member of the lower-class society, also often referred to as the working class. However, she does not live the ordinary life of the working-class society. By growing up with the Reeds, she was given a certain privilege for a better life. Jane is greatly biased by her upbringing in the upper-class family and relates poverty to degradation and idleness.<sup>94</sup> While Dickens portrays the life of Oliver Twist under much worse conditions. In contrary to his childhood in the workhouse and on the streets, Jane's abusive relatives do not seem that bad.

The Reeds family treats her as she is a servant, not as their blood relative. After a conversation with a servant at Gateshead which came after the fight with young John Reed, Jane becomes conscious of the fact that even the servants are superior to her:

"What shocking conduct, Miss Eyre, to strike a young gentleman, your benefactress's son! Your young master!" Jane replies: "Master! How is he my master? Am I a servant?" The lady's maid says: "No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep. There, sit down and think over your wickedness."<sup>95</sup> (sic)

Bearing in mind her conversation with the servant, Jane realises her degrading role in the household and accepts leaving Gateshead for the Lowood School, a boarding school for orphaned children of the lower-class society. Noted poet and feminist Adrienne Rich claims that "by choosing not to be a part of the social charade and by not doing what is expected of a young girl in her position, Jane takes a stand against the social conventions."<sup>96</sup>

Another chapter of Jane's life, in which she continues to represent a poor lower-class orphan, is situated in the Lowood institute, where the students live under strict and life-threatening conditions and where they are abused by the cruel headmaster Mr. Brocklehurst and their teacher Mrs. Scatcherd. Mr. Brocklehurst is corrupt, and he does not serve the Lowood School well, he invests as little money as possible into the school and keeps the rest. Therefore, his own family lives comfortably, e.g. his wife and daughters are "splendidly

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<sup>93</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 67.

<sup>94</sup> Ayyildiz, "From the Bottom to the Top," 148.

<sup>95</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 69.

<sup>96</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Jane Eyre: The Temptations of a Motherless Woman," in *Jane Eyre: A Norton Critical Edition*, ed. Richard J. Dunn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), 472.



attired in velvet, silk and furs”<sup>97</sup> while the girls are starving and wearing skimpy clothing. Mr. Brocklehurst shows that he wants the girls to be aware of their lower-class position in society.<sup>98</sup> Mr. Brocklehurst can be compared to Mrs. Mann from *Oliver Twist*, who was in charge of the baby-farm, for the reason that she does not care about the orphans as well and keeps the money for herself.

At Lowood Jane learns that all people from the same social class are not the same. Not all the upper-class people are necessarily cruel like her aunt Mrs. Reed or Mr. Brocklehurst, and not everyone poor is necessarily bad. Thanks to Helen Burns and Miss Temple, she realises that class does not determine what kind of person you are. Moreover, after Helen’s death, Jane pledges not to act upon the discrimination she faces caused by the fact that she belongs to the lower class.<sup>99</sup>

### 3.2.2 The middle class

When Jane becomes a teacher at Lowood, she is convinced that she now belongs to the middle class – she claims that she “was promoted to a higher class.”<sup>100</sup> Jane enjoys being a middle-class young woman who is educated enough to be a teacher and later a governess. When she moves to Thornfield she is no longer that poor little orphan. The master of Thornfield Mr. Rochester represents the top of the social hierarchy and Jane is just a servant to him, and she is expected to respect his master role. When it comes to class division, Jane thinks of herself as superior to the other servants; therefore, she no longer considers herself to be at the bottom of the social hierarchy. However, Jane still dreams of her independence and equality, and she does not like the fact that Mr. Rochester “owns” her.<sup>101</sup>

Jane is entirely satisfied with the governess work at Thornfield; however, as she becomes engaged to Mr. Rochester he compares the governess work to servitude when he says: “You will give up your governessing slavery at once.”<sup>102</sup> (sic) Being a governess was appropriate for a middle-class woman of unknown origin, but it is not adequate for the future wife of an upper-class gentleman. Moreover, the class difference between Jane and Rochester poses a real threat to the possibility of their marriage – how can a simple governess marry a rich upper-class gentleman?<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 127.

<sup>98</sup> Ayyildiz, “From the Bottom to the Top,” 148-9.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 139.

<sup>101</sup> Ayyildiz, “From the Bottom to the Top,” 149-50.

<sup>102</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 356.

<sup>103</sup> Ayyildiz, “From the Bottom to the Top,” 149-50.

### 3.2.3 The upper class

After inheriting a fortune which her uncle Eyre left her, Jane's life is changed gradually. Jane has enough money to become independent and she ascent into the upper-class society. Suddenly, she turns out to be financially equal to Rochester now; therefore, the barrier which was keeping them apart has been broken down.<sup>104</sup> Jane decides to return to Rochester and finds out that a fire at Thornfield caused the fact that he is "helpless indeed – blind and cripple"<sup>105</sup> now. Their roles exchanged, Jane is now both physically and financially independent, while Rochester becomes physically dependent on her. Jane agrees to become Rochester's wife because she believes they are equal to each other now.

Jane moves up the social ladder, starting from the very bottom as a poor orphan girl to the very top when she becomes an upper-class lady. She overcomes all obstacles the society put in her way and breaks down all the barriers which separate the Victorian social class hierarchy. Owning her upper-class transition to her uncle, Jane is able to fit in the upper-class society. This situation is similar to Oliver Twist, only thanks to his inherited money and Mr. Brownlow's adoption he now belongs among the upper-class Victorians.

## 3.3 Social environment

When Jane's parents die, she lives with her uncle's family, the Reeds, which might be considered somehow similar to adoption or fostering at that time, as the process was still unofficial. The next period of Jane's life leads the readers to the Lowood boarding school, an educational institution. Later on, before she encounters her long-lost cousins, Jane spends some time on the streets, fighting for survival – same as Oliver Twist. Therefore, the types of social environment described in this subchapter are adoption and fostering, educational institution, and the streets.

### 3.3.1 Adoption and fostering

The Brontë children lost their mother when they were young children – Charlotte was 5 years old. In Charlotte's novel, after Jane becomes an orphan at a very young age, she comes to live with her relatives, the Reeds at Gateshead, where the novel itself begins. Mrs. Reed promises to Jane's dying uncle Mr. Reed to take care of Jane and treat her as one of her children. Despite this promise, Jane is brought up under awful conditions at Gateshead, where everyone abuses and neglects her. The Reeds make sure that Jane knows she does not

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<sup>104</sup> Ayyildiz, "From the Bottom to the Top," 152.

<sup>105</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 530.

belong to their family and she is not welcome in their home. Jane believes that she “was discord in Gateshead-hall; I was like nobody there.”<sup>106</sup>

One day all the children are playing in the drawing room but Jane, because Mrs. Reed is annoyed with her, is excluded from the family circle, so she is hiding in the window-seat and peacefully reading *History of British Birds* by Thomas Bewick<sup>107</sup> when John comes and reminds her of her position within the Reeds family by telling her:

You have no business to take our books: you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows.<sup>108</sup> (sic)

He takes the book out of Jane's hands and tosses it at her. Jane, who is not able to tolerate his abuse anymore, defends herself. She calls John a “wicked and cruel boy” and likens him to “a murderer” and a “slave-driver.”<sup>109</sup> However, not only is she held responsible for the fight, but she is also banished to the “red-room”, where her uncle breathed his last. Having thought that she sees his ghost, Jane faints, and when she regains her consciousness, she is laying in her bed. A physician Mr. Lloyd tells Mrs. Reed it would be for the best if she allows Jane to go away to school because he can see how miserable she is at Gateshead.

Thinking the new school to be an exciting place, where they would teach her to paint, sing, and speak French, a place where she could be as far away from Gateshead as possible, Jane agrees immediately. She could not be happier about leaving the place of her terrors and starting a new chapter of her life. However, days and weeks have passed, and Jane is still at Gateshead slowly losing hope for her new beginning. The isolation between her and the Reeds is even more significant after the incident with John and Jane rarely spends any time with them. Three months after the incident, Mrs. Reed calls for Jane to come to the breakfast-room. Mr. Brocklehurst waits for her there and asks her questions about hell, sin, and the Bible. Not only Mrs. Reed has already told Mr. Brocklehurst how evil Jane is, but she also claims that she is a liar, at which point Mr. Brocklehurst assures her that he will specifically warn everyone at Lowood about Jane's nature. Jane feels aggrieved by such an offensive and false description of her character, thus after Mr. Brocklehurst leaves, she tells her aunt

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<sup>106</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 73.

<sup>107</sup> Jacobson, *CliffsNotes Jane Eyre*, 20.

<sup>108</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

the feelings she has been keeping inside for a while and which shows how miserable she was at Gateshead:

I am not deceitful: if I were, I should say I loved you; but I declare, I do not love you: I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed; and this book about the liar, you may give to your girl, Georgiana, for it is she who tells lies, and not I...I am glad you are no relation of mine: I will never call you aunt again so long as I live. I will never come to see you when I am grown up; and if anyone asks me how I liked you, and how you treated me, I will say the very thought of you makes me sick, and that you treated me with miserable cruelty.<sup>110</sup> (sic)

The fourth day after Mr. Brocklehurst's visit marks the day when Jane leaves Gateshead. Neither her aunt nor her cousins get up to say goodbye and wish her luck on her journey and for the next chapter of her life. Only Bessie, the maid, with whom Jane becomes friends during her last days at Gateshead, goes with her to the coach where Bessie bids Jane farewell as she departs for a new life at Lowood.

### 3.3.2 Educational institution

The Bildungsroman, also called a novel of education, describes a work in which a character develops from a child or a young adult into an adult. The moral and mental development of the character throughout the story is the principal feature of this genre, which began in Germany in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and soon became popular around Europe. Besides *Jane Eyre*, there are countless examples of this genre during the Victorian era, such as *David Copperfield* or *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. The form continued in popularity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for example *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee.<sup>111</sup>

The novel *Jane Eyre* is frequently referred to as a novel of education, introducing the importance of education as one of the main themes of the novel. The criticism of the school system during the 1800s is intentional, and its purpose is to demonstrate that if the schools were managed as they should be, there would be more intelligent students like for example Jane, Adele or John Rivers.<sup>112</sup>

The mental and spiritual development of Jane, which is the essential feature of Bildungsroman, is especially noticeable after a fight with her abusive aunt Mrs. Reed:

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<sup>110</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 95.

<sup>111</sup> "Bildungsroman," Literary Devices, accessed April 18, 2019, <http://www.literarydevices.com/bildungsroman/>.

<sup>112</sup> Aaron Ho, "Brontë, Charlotte," in *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature*, ed. Jennifer McClinton-Temple (New York: Facts On File, 2011), 229-32.

Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhoped-for liberty.<sup>113</sup> (sic)

Following the disagreement, Jane is sent to the Lowood School for poor and orphaned children. Charlotte Brontë got the inspiration for the Lowood School from her own experience at the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge, which she had attended and where her two sisters Marie and Elizabeth had tragically died of consumption<sup>114</sup> – similar to Helen Burns, Jane's best friend, whose character is based on Brontë's sister Maria. The Lowood institute is led by the clergyman Mr. Brocklehurst, who believes that the terrible environment the girls live in would improve "the spiritual edification of the pupils, by encouraging them to evince fortitude under the temporary privation"<sup>115</sup> therefore he allows only the minimal amount of food, clothing and entertainment for the girls which is enough to survive.<sup>116</sup> The Lowood girls are permanently hungry, as the food is never enough to satisfy their empty stomachs; their uniforms are sewed from thin and cheap material which is entirely insufficient for the two miles walk to Brocklebridge Church they have to take every Sunday regardless the weather outside.

It is not only Mr. Brocklehurst, but also some other teachers at Lowood who cause much harm to the students. For example, Mrs. Scatcherd's uncompromising practice of corporal punishment and public humiliation serve as her major teacher techniques. She dominates the other teachers, has a strong and punctual personality and is always in control.<sup>117</sup> Mrs. Scatcherd is especially cruel to Helen Burns, Jane's friend. Helen is an intelligent young girl and often knows the answer for questions no one else does. However, she is treated even worse when this happens. Mrs. Scatcherd sends her to the corner of the classroom and accuses her of being a "dirty, disagreeable girl."<sup>118</sup>

On the other hand, Jane finds two people at Lowood with whom she comes to love. The first person is her teacher Miss Temple who later becomes the headmistress of the Lowood School. She is illustrated as a kind, helpful, tolerant and supportive person.<sup>119</sup> She teaches Jane how to behave like a lady and how to be more compassionate. The second person Jane

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<sup>113</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 96.

<sup>114</sup> Ho, "Brontë, Charlotte," 229.

<sup>115</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 126.

<sup>116</sup> Weisser, "Thornfield and 'The Dream to Repose on': Jane Eyre," 79.

<sup>117</sup> James A. Muchmore, "From Laura Ingalls to Wing Biddlebaum: A Survey of Teacher Identities in Works of Literature," *Issues in Teacher Education* 21, no. 1 (Spring, 2012): 12.

<sup>118</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 115.

<sup>119</sup> Ho, "Brontë, Charlotte," 231.

loves is Helen Burns, her companion and fellow student at Lowood from whom she learns to be more spiritual and braver. However, Helen is one of the victims of the typhus epidemic, and she dies while Jane holds her friend in her arms. Jane's memory of love associated with suffering is demonstrated in her relationship with Helen and Miss Temple – both of whom she genuinely loves. Jane communicates her feelings to Helen:

I know I should think well of myself; but that is not enough: if others don't love me, I would rather die than live - I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen. Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me, or to stand behind a kicking horse, and let it dash its hoof at my chest.<sup>120</sup> (sic)

After the death of almost half of the Lowood's girls from typhus combined with the hostile living environment of the school, a couple of gentlemen step in and participate in the conversion of the Lowood institute into a better place.<sup>121</sup> Mr. Blockehurst is no longer the manager of Lowood, and the living conditions have improved significantly since he left. Miss Temple points Jane in the right direction, and Jane seems to thrive – she becomes one of the best students and works hard. Jane spends six years as a student at Lowood before she becomes a teacher and stays there for two more years. However, as Miss Temple gets married and leaves the school, which would be commonly expected for a woman of the period to do, Jane feels like Lowood is no longer the place for her; thus, she decides to become a governess and places an advertisement in the newspaper. This decision leads Jane to Thornfield, where she becomes the governess of a ten-year-old French girl and can use the language which she had longed to learn when she first came to Lowood.

### 3.3.3 The streets

When Jane comes to the revelation of Rochester's secret – his first wife Bertha, who is locked in the attic in Thornfield, their wedding is cancelled. Jane also refuses to become Rochester's mistress, as he tries to persuade her to do. Instead, Jane runs away from Thornfield with only twenty shillings – all the money she has left, and no spare clothes. She hesitates only for a second as she passes Rochester's room and thinks about what she is throwing away. Nevertheless, she decides to leave Thornfield behind and sets off on her journey to the unknown. This event is similar to the one in *Oliver Twist* when young Oliver runs away from his apprenticeship and starts a new chapter of his life as a homeless child.

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<sup>120</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 133.

<sup>121</sup> Ho, "Brontë, Charlotte," 231.

By leaving Thornfield, Jane leaves everything behind her, even herself. She wishes to reshape her character and her individuality, which was swallowed up by Rochester. This is why she takes only what she needs for the journey; she wants to put her past behind her. Jane feels the need to become a new person, to start from the very bottom. She refers to the future herself as “an awful blank: something like the world when the deluge was gone by.”<sup>122</sup>

Jane gives all her money to the coachman who takes her to Whitcross, where she is now broke. After leaving her packet in the coach, she indeed has nothing now and spends three days wandering around the country, sleeping in the woods, trying to find a job and a shelter, and begging for something to eat. The third night she is not far from collapsing from exhaustion when she makes it to Marsh End, where the Rivers family lives. Even though the housekeeper at first refuses to take her in, St. John Rivers provides Jane with shelter and food. Jane gets along with the family very well, and she even gets an offer to become a schoolmistress in the local parish. Moreover, she discovers that the Rivers are her relatives.

### 3.4 Gender

Charlotte Brontë in her novel *Jane Eyre* shows equality between the sexes, which was quite a courageous move at the time of Victorian Era within the patriarchal society of the time. Jane believes that women and men should be treated equally, but at the same time men have continually let her down ever since she was a child.<sup>123</sup> John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Edward Rochester, and St. John Rivers – all of them, using their practices and the role of authority, try to humiliate and defeat Jane and to show her where she truly belongs.

John Reed, as the only male representative of the Reed family, shows his patriarchal power over all female members of the family, Jane especially. This role enables John to terrorise not only Jane, but also his sisters and the family servants. Jane realises that John, despite his young age, has every right to such behaviour just because of being a male. His sisters Eliza and Georgina are still privileged; however, in contrast to John, significantly less so.<sup>124</sup> In comparison to John, Jane is significantly disadvantaged not only because of her social class status, but also because of being a poor orphan girl.

The abuser John is replaced by Mr. Brocklehurst, who represents the male authority overseeing Jane at Lowood. Mr. Brocklehurst is Lowood’s manager, who symbolises a hypocritically negative view of Christianity due to his lack of compassion and humanity. He

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<sup>122</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 412.

<sup>123</sup> Ho, “Brontë, Charlotte,” 229.

<sup>124</sup> Ayyildiz, “From the Bottom to the Top,” 148.

gives the girls only as little food as possible to keep them alive while his family lives a comfortable life, as mentioned above in describing Jane's life in Lowood.

St. John Rivers' oppression on Jane is mainly emotional. He is the minister at Morton, which is not enough for him; thus, he wants to become a missionary, so he can fulfil his life mission.<sup>125</sup> He wants to marry Jane only because he believes she would be the perfect fit for his missionary life. Jane is expected to abandon her belief in true romantic love and marry him to fulfil his destiny, not hers, and follow him to India. Jane declines the proposal several times, but St. John does not seem to give up.

The novel *Jane Eyre* contains many allusions to the Bible, which makes the novel deeply intertextual. In chapter 6, Jane tells Mr. Brocklehurst: "I like Revelations and the book of Daniel, and Genesis and Samuel, and a little bit of Exodus, and some parts of Kings and Chronicles, and Job and Jonah." By this statement, Jane claims that she prefers the narrative stories from the Bible, e.g. ones featuring families and children.<sup>126</sup> Besides the intertextual features from the Bible, Shakespeare, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and other works, gender aspects of *Jane Eyre* are heavily influenced by fairy tale elements from the Cinderella and especially the *Bluebeard* ('Barbe Bleue' in French) by Charles Perrault which tells a story about a man who locked and killed his wives in his attic.<sup>127</sup>

Therefore, the character of Mr. Bluebeard is echoed in Mr. Rochester because he also kept his wife Bertha under a lock in his attic and wanted to marry Jane. Mr. Rochester is a wealthy upper-class gentleman; and Jane's employer.<sup>128</sup> From the beginning he makes clear that Jane is only a governess and he is her master:

Go into the library – I mean, if you please. – (Excuse my tone of command; I am used to say 'Do this,' and it is done: I cannot alter my customary habits for one new inmate.) – Go, then, into the library; take a candle with you; leave the door open; sit down to the piano, and play a tune.<sup>129</sup> (sic)

Later, after falling in love with her, Rochester still does not treat Jane equally – a fact which Jane finds hard to overcome. It seems like Rochester tries to buy her; he buys her clothing and jewellery which she refuses to wear because she wishes to continue working as a governess and earn her own money. When Jane comes back to Rochester after inheriting a fortune after her long-lost uncle, they are now perceived as equal, both physically, as he has

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<sup>125</sup> Ho, "Brontë, Charlotte," 230-1.

<sup>126</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 92.

<sup>127</sup> John Sutherland, "Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?" in *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?: More Puzzles in Classic Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 68-9.

<sup>128</sup> Beer, *Reader, I Married Him*, 98.

<sup>129</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 194.



lost his eyesight and is disabled after a horrible fire in Thornfield, and socially, as Jane is not a poor lower-class woman anymore. This is one way Brontë portrays the equality between men and women in the Victorian Era – Rochester must be both sightless and disabled for Jane to finally be equal to him as a woman.<sup>130</sup>

Furthermore, not only the men in Jane's life are tyrannising her but the women also act with no respect, not only to Jane but also to each other. For example, Jane's aunt Mrs. Reed, Mrs. Scatcherd from Lowood, Grace Pole who keeps an eye on Rochester's first wife Bertha or Mrs. Fairfax who disagrees with Jane and Rochester's relationship due to their different social status.<sup>131</sup> There is hardly ever any solidarity among the women in many of Brontë's works, and, moreover, she tends to create pairs of rivals. In *Jane Eyre* the rivals are Jane and Blanche Ingram and also Jane and Rochester's first wife Bertha Mason, whom Brontë depicts as Jane's alter ego.<sup>132</sup> The authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic* Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha "is Jane's truest and darkest double," i.e. she represents all the rage Jane has and all the wildness she has been keeping inside her ever since Gateshead.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ho, "Brontë, Charlotte," 229-32.

<sup>131</sup> Ho, "Brontë, Charlotte," 231.

<sup>132</sup> Barbara Nelson, "Faces of Jane Eyre," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 1, no.1 (2011): 184.

<sup>133</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 360.

## 4 ANALYSIS OF OLIVER TWIST

Beginning in February 1837, a series called *The Parish Boy's Progress*, as the novel *Oliver Twist* was initially known as, was published under the name of Boz every month in *Bentley's Miscellany* magazine.<sup>134</sup> Boz was Dickens' pen-name under which he had been publishing the successful *Sketches by Boz* in the *Monthly Magazine* which illustrate life in London during the Victorian era. Dickens finished *Oliver Twist* in September 1838 and the novel was published by the end of the same year, even though the monthly series did not finish running until March 1839.<sup>135</sup>

The novel *Oliver Twist* achieved fame for Dickens' criticism of the 1834 New Poor Law and the cruel behaviour against the poor. Based on recent discoveries by Historian Ruth Richardson published in 2010, Charles Dickens had lived close to the Cleveland Street Workhouse; this fact, therefore, suggests that *Oliver Twist*, like some of Dickens' other novels, might be based on real-life circumstances. There was no plaque or sign on Dickens' first house in London, thus the connection between the house and the workhouse has been unknown until 2010. In addition, there are other similarities between the author himself and the protagonist Oliver. Charles Dickens was also abused and neglected when he was child, due to his father's imprisonment he was forced to work in a factory and he had to take care of himself.<sup>136</sup> To quote the Dickens' own words: "I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond."<sup>137</sup>

*Oliver Twist* was unique from the very beginning; the novel was written more structurally than other works by the author, with a tight and complicated plot. The birth of a new life along with death occur on the first pages of the book – Oliver is brought to the world by his unmarried mother Agnes who dies shortly afterwards.<sup>138</sup> Oliver's life in the workhouse under horrible conditions is exchanged for an apprenticeship which becomes a nightmare too. Oliver decides to run away and gets to London, where the young thief Artful Dodger finds him on the streets and brings him to Fagin, a thief master who is in charge of a child gang of thieves. Fagin does his best to transform Oliver into a thief, but he fails every time. For a little while, Oliver is saved by Mr. Brownlow and lives in his house. Unfortunately, this happy period of Oliver's life does not last long. Nancy kidnaps and brings

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<sup>134</sup> Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse*, 14.

<sup>135</sup> Harry Kaste, *Oliver Twist: Notes* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), 11.

<sup>136</sup> Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse*, 6-12.

<sup>137</sup> George Newlin, *Everyone in Dickens* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 805.

<sup>138</sup> Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse*, 14.

him back to Fagin, who forces Oliver into a burglary quest with Sikes and Toby Crackit, during which Oliver is injured. As the robbers try to escape, Oliver, who is not conscious, becomes a burden so Sikes decides to leave him behind in a dump. When Fagin finds out what happened he gets furious, and then a mysterious man Monks, who is annoyed with Fagin's inability to turn Oliver into a thief, comes on the scene. After Oliver comes around he manages to knock on the door of the house nearby, having no idea it is the same house they attempted to rob last night. Mrs. Maylie and her niece Rose take pity on the poor little boy and take him in. After Nancy sacrifices her life in order to save Oliver, it becomes clear that Monks, Oliver's half-brother, has attempted to ruin Oliver so he could inherit the entire property of their father himself. By the end, it is discovered that Rose is the younger sister of Oliver's mother; therefore, his aunt, and Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver.

#### 4.1 The innocent boy

Oliver Twist arrived in the world as an illegitimate orphan when his mother Agnes gives birth in a workhouse, after which she dies. By creating a bastard protagonist, Dickens critiques the New Poor Law and its harsh clause which made only the mother responsible for the illegitimate child, not the father, in order to decrease the amount of bastard children.<sup>139</sup> Oliver gets his gentle appealing looks from his mother Agnes, who was very beautiful. Oliver's appearance and manners help him survive even in the hardest times of his life. Many people sympathize with him and forgive him for anything he has done – often because he was forced to, as for example the Maylie family or Mr. Brownlow. On the other hand, due to his resistance against tyranny and his striving for a better life, he is able to overcome all the obstacles and face his pauper life.<sup>140</sup>

Dickens' portrayal of such an innocent pure boy, one who is able to maintain these qualities even though life challenges his morality, gives hope to the readers saying that as long as the hero remains himself, he is able to overcome anything.<sup>141</sup> However, what Oliver saves at the end is not his kindness, but the fact that Mr. Brownlow and the Maylie family believe in him despite his challenging past that seems to be hunting him. His qualities and character help him survive but he always tells his guardians the truth and they accept him

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<sup>139</sup> Susan Zlotnick, "'The Law's a Bachelor': Oliver Twist, Bastardy, and The New Poor Law," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 34, no. 1 (2006): 131–46.

<sup>140</sup> Diana Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," in *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature*, ed. Jennifer McClinton-Temple (New York: Facts On File, 2011), 341–4.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

for it.<sup>142</sup> This Victorian idea of “deserving” a good life because of moral behaviour and actions also applies to Jane Eyre, whose pure qualities and her quest for true love, equality, and independency bring her a happy ending after all.

Oliver is often described as “a passive hero” whose family connections determine his social status more than his own actions; not knowing his lineage makes him struggle because he does not know where he belongs. Despite this, Oliver is the perfect picture of innocence and even with almost no education at all, he shows that he is intelligent and eager to learn new things. The aim of the New Poor Law was to unite poverty and immorality; however, Dickens shows that a poor little boy does not need to become corrupt simply because he is poor; there is another way to survive. Oliver can have it all – “he can simultaneously be both morally good and dead broke.”<sup>143</sup> In the preface of the novel Dickens tells the readers that he wants to show Oliver as “the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last.”<sup>144</sup>

Moreover, the stage of childhood was by the Victorians regarded as especially important, perhaps for the first time in history. The representation of the angelic children in the literary works was aimed at the middle- and upper-class readers and society in general, thus the portrayal of Oliver, who is an abused lower-class orphan at the very bottom of Victorian hierarchy, left them speechless.<sup>145</sup>

## 4.2 Social class

Charles Dickens is especially admired for his emphasis on social issues, specifically the wellbeing of children. Social inequality, living and working conditions of the poorest members of the Victorian society, and child labour in particular are the major themes in several of his works. One of Dickens’ main themes is to persuade the society that the social class does not clarify one’s character; thus, such inequalities corrupt the society in general.<sup>146</sup>

Dickens criticizes the Poor Law Act and the harsh conditions of the workhouse system through his novel *Oliver Twist*. He expresses sympathy for the poor and by his writing he draws the attention of the Victorian society to their issues. Dickens is respected especially for the accurate portrayal of the poor and poverty among the lower-class society in England.

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<sup>142</sup> Zlotnick, “The Law’s a Bachelor,” 133.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2002), vii.

<sup>145</sup> Chlebek, “Dickens, Charles,” 342.

<sup>146</sup> Jennifer McClinton-Temple, “Dickens, Charles,” in *Encyclopedia of Themes in Literature*, ed. Jennifer McClinton-Temple (New York: Facts On File, 2011), 340.

He compares and contrasts the lower-class society with the upper-class citizens in order to demonstrate the major differences between them. The main aim of his novel is “to emotionally engage the readers,” and thus they focus on to the horrible life the main protagonist, who is, after all, just an innocent child.<sup>147</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The working class

Oliver’s mother dies immediately after giving birth to him, therefore he becomes an orphan and a parish child at the very beginning of his life, which puts him at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The working-class children in *Oliver Twist* are illustrated as the most vulnerable group of the Victorian society.<sup>148</sup> The struggles of his young life in the baby-farm, workhouse, and on the streets will be described in more detail in the following chapter “Social environment,” but it needs to be mentioned that during all these stages of his life he is a lower-class orphan whose life was filled with poverty and abuse. The moment he is born, his fate is already determined by the fact that he is an illegitimate orphan in a workhouse:

But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which 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.<sup>149</sup> (sic)

When the reader meets Oliver again, in the baby-farm, he is “a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference.”<sup>150</sup> Such characteristics demonstrate that his condition was caused by starvation. Dickens emphasizes the presence of hunger throughout the whole novel, particularly within the working-class citizens.<sup>151</sup>

On the contrary, when the pale thin child is brought back to the workhouse, he meets the board of the workhouse, who are described as “eight or ten fat gentlemen” out of whom one “was a particularly fat gentleman with a very round, red face.”<sup>152</sup> By this contrast Dickens emphasizes the difference between a lower-class orphan Oliver, and the upper-class gentlemen who let the children starve but they themselves were well-nourished or even over-

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<sup>147</sup> Yazdan Bakhsh Gholami, and Abdol Hossein Joodaki, “A Social Study of Poverty in Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times*, *Bleak House* and *Oliver Twist*,” *Journal of Novel Applied Sciences* 3, no. 6 (2014): 645-47.

<sup>148</sup> Chlebek, “Dickens, Charles,” 341.

<sup>149</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 3.

<sup>150</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 5.

<sup>151</sup> Gholami, and Joodaki, “A Social Study of Poverty,” 647.

<sup>152</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 8.

fed. By showing a picture of poverty and the conditions under which the poor live, Dickens engages the reader with the poor and shows that the society did nothing to help them.<sup>153</sup>

When Oliver gets to London, he joins Fagin's gang; the boys signify the working children of the lowest social class who in order to survive are forced to become criminals and thus lose their innocence and childhood. Dickens made the boys look still very young, but their behaviour was similar to adults, in contrary to Oliver, who was still a pure, innocent boy; he was not corrupted by the criminal world as the Dodger and Nancy already were.<sup>154</sup>

#### 4.2.2 The middle class

At the end of his social class progress, Oliver skips the middle class and after inheriting a fortune and being adopted he goes straight into the upper echelon of society. In the meantime, he lives with a middle-class family while working for Mr. Sowerberry, who is an undertaker. Oliver's role is to be "a mute during funeral processions" by which Dickens stresses and reminds to the reader that throughout his whole life Oliver is constantly being subjected to death.<sup>155</sup>

Contrary to Jane Eyre, who definitely deserves the transition to the middle-class society by studying and working hard, Oliver, even though he is just a child and is not able to do anything about his social status, moves to the upper class only thanks to a fortune he inherits, not by working hard. Perhaps this is why Jane has been embraced by some feminist critics as a literary model in Victorian literature.<sup>156</sup>

#### 4.2.3 The upper class

The story of *Oliver Twist* describes his adventures and attempts for survival. Yet despite the hardships, it is finally a realistically-told story of optimistic progress. Oliver is born as an illegitimate poor orphan in a workhouse, but as he reclaims his rightful legacy not only does he become rich, but he also moves up the social class ladder. Suddenly, he discovers that he has some blood relatives and he learns about his parents. Moreover, he finds his home when Mr. Brownlow adopts him.

Oliver's rightful identity and place within the Victorian society is re-established once the story takes him to his long-lost relatives and Nancy reveals Monk's original intentions

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<sup>153</sup> Gholami, and Joodaki, "A Social Study of Poverty," 648.

<sup>154</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 342.

<sup>155</sup> Gholami, and Joodaki, "A Social Study of Poverty," 648.

<sup>156</sup> Ross C. Murfin, "Feminist Criticism and Jane Eyre," in *Jane Eyre* (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism), ed. by Beth Newman (Boston: Bedford St Martins, 1996), 461-4.

to Mr. Brownlow and the Maylie family. The novel is strongly melodramatic, i.e. many of the individuals are clearly depicted as having an unequivocally good or bad character. In what has become a stereotypical tale in both British and American fiction, with the adjective *Dickensian* entering the English language, Oliver must be pictured as a poor outsider orphan who is actually a descendant of an upper-class family in order to revitalise a paternalistic society which does not identify the poor as intruders, but as a part of the social fabric and, indeed, of the larger family.<sup>157</sup>

### 4.3 Social environment

Oliver passes through many types of social environment throughout his story. His mother gives birth to him in a workhouse, from where he is transferred to a baby-farm and after a few years he returns back to the same workhouse. When Oliver runs away from his apprenticeship and sets out to London, he is living on the streets. Having no idea what is going to happen, he unknowingly joins a gang of thieves and thanks to an unfortunate coincidence on a pick-pocketing quest Oliver gets to Mr. Brownlow, where he experiences a comfortable life for the very first time. Sadly, as he offers to run an errand for his caretaker, he is kidnapped and taken back to Fagin. Oliver's story becomes even more complicated after another failed quest with Sikes which takes Oliver to the Maylie family, with whom, as the reader later finds out, Oliver is actually related. Thanks to Nancy's sacrifice of her own life, as described in subchapter Gender, all the mysteries are unravelled and Oliver's story ends happily once Mr. Brownlow finally adopts him. Therefore, the types of social environment in Oliver's life described below are: a baby-farming house, workhouse, the streets, and adoption and fostering.

#### 4.3.1 Baby-farming house

Despite that Oliver is born in a workhouse, the parish authorities decide that he "should be farmed"<sup>158</sup> and they send him to a baby-farm run by Mrs. Mann. The children here frequently die of starvation because Mrs. Mann does not give them enough food to survive; instead she keeps all the money for herself. Unfortunately, no one cares about the rising number of dying orphans under her protection. As already mentioned, there is another resemblance between the two novels – Mrs. Mann and Mr. Brocklehurst from *Jane Eyre*.

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<sup>157</sup> Zlotnick, "The Law's a Bachelor," 134.

<sup>158</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 3.

On the day of his ninth birthday Oliver is to be found in a coal cellar where he is being held and beaten up together with two other boys for, in a fine bit of Dickensian irony, “atrociously presuming to be hungry.”<sup>159</sup> Mr. Bumble unexpectedly comes to the baby-farm and wants to take Oliver back to the workhouse because he is now too old for the baby-farm. The “prisoner” needed to be released and washed immediately following Mrs. Mann’s orders and afterthought brought into the room where Mr. Bumble was waiting for him.

The conditions of Oliver’s life in the baby-farm differ greatly from Jane’s life with the Reeds. Even though she was abused, neglected, and offended by her relatives, at least she had a bed to sleep in and food to eat every day – Oliver did not.

### 4.3.2 Workhouse

Charles Dickens’ stated primary purpose of *Oliver Twist* was to bring the Poor Law of 1834 into the focus of Victorian society. His intention was to portray the reality of how powerless orphaned children were mistreated by the government institutions. His primary focus of attention was aimed at the workhouse. The function of the workhouse was to provide care for the less fortunate, in this case, orphans, yet the children were mostly seen as a source of cheap labour.<sup>160</sup>

Oliver is born in an unnamed workhouse and his mother Agnes soon after giving a birth of her son dies. However, before she dies, when she hears her child’s cry as he is finally able to breath; she says, “Let me see the child and die.”<sup>161</sup> And she does so. Later, an old nurse claims that no one knows who the woman was. They conclude that because she has no wedding ring, she is not married; therefore, the little boy is an illegitimate orphan, which makes his life even worse. The name “Oliver Twist” is given to him by Mr. Bumble, who assigns the names randomly based on alphabetical order.<sup>162</sup> Oliver stays in the workhouse for a few months. However, due to the environment not being suitable for new-borns, he is relocated to a “private asylum,” a baby-farm where is Mrs. Mann in charge.

When he comes back to the workhouse, he is nine years old and the board and Mr. Bumble have to decide what trade Oliver will be taught. One of the board members informs Oliver that he will “begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o’clock.”<sup>163</sup> After that Oliver is shown to his bed and he cries himself to sleep. In the meantime the reader is told

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<sup>159</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 5.

<sup>160</sup> Chlebek, “Dickens, Charles,” 342.

<sup>161</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 2.

<sup>162</sup> Chlebek, “Dickens, Charles,” 342.

<sup>163</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 9.



that the workhouse rules have changed and the inmates' daily portions of food were reduced to a minimum: "three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll on Sundays."<sup>164</sup> (sic) The reason was that the workhouse was too full; people were satisfied living there, and the board decided that it needs to be changed. By implementing the food restriction and other policies, the number of workhouse inmates was significantly reduced, and the board was delighted; although many of them ended up in the local cemeteries.

The novel achieved fame for the genuine portrayal of the workhouse conditions. Probably the most well-known passage from the book takes place after several months of privatization and it shows the vicious behaviour of the workhouse authorities.<sup>165</sup> On behalf of all famished children Oliver is chosen to ask the workhouse authorities for more food. He comes to the master and says: "Please, sir, I want some more." However, his heart-breaking request is firmly rejected, regarded as inappropriate, and Oliver is punished with cruelty and put in solitary confinement; Mr. Limbkins even suggests that Oliver should be hung.<sup>166</sup> On this impossible situation Dickens illustrates the importance of the local authorities who are supposed to provide care for the most vulnerable members of the society who have no one else to turn to.<sup>167</sup>

After this incident, Oliver is viewed as a rebel and no one treats him well; moreover, the workhouse authorities want to get rid of him by offering him for an apprenticeship. A notice "offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish"<sup>168</sup> (sic) is posted on the workhouse gate the following morning. Not only does the workhouse offer Oliver to anyone for any kind of work, but they want to get rid of him so badly, they are willing to pay that person five pounds. After a week in the solitary, where he is being beaten and shown as a deterrent example to scare other inmates, the first volunteer who wants to take Oliver comes to the workhouse. The chimney sweep Gamfield needs those five pounds more than he needs Oliver. Just before the papers are signed, one of the officials notices that Oliver is scared to death and he grants his request not to be placed with this cruel-looking man. Oliver remains in the workhouse and the notice offering him for an apprenticeship stays on the workhouse gate. The next volunteer is Mr. Sowerberry, a mortician who wants the boy to help him with his business. The board comes to an agreement with no issue this time and Oliver's life outside of the workhouse begins.

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<sup>164</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 10.

<sup>165</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 342.

<sup>166</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

<sup>167</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 342.

<sup>168</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

### 4.3.3 The streets

After a fight with Noah, a charity boy also employed by Mr. Sowerberry, Oliver is locked away in a dust cellar, unable to calm down. Mr. Bumble, who is called by Sowerberry's wife, blames Oliver's sudden rage on the family, who were giving Oliver meat: "You've raised a artificial soul and spirit in him. [...] If you had kept the boy on gruel, ma'am, this would never have happened."<sup>169</sup> (sic) In fact, greater energy and, thus, greater assertiveness are indeed effects caused by eating meat, as studies have shown.<sup>170</sup> When they release Oliver from the cellar, they tell him to go to sleep among the coffins; however, as the sun rises, Oliver decides to escape from the house. Both Oliver and Jane thus flee from their house of terrors, and they set off for a journey to an unknown world which they have never seen before. They both walk a great distance, sleep whenever they can, and beg for food and shelter. Nevertheless, the journey eventually takes them to their long-lost family and to the happy ending that awaits them at the end of the story.

The novel is especially famous for its portrayal of the crime-filled underworld in London, where everyone has to fight for survival.<sup>171</sup> As Oliver comes to a sign which notifies him that London is seventy miles away, he decides to set out that direction. Having neither food nor money, Oliver's only option is to beg for food and lodging, otherwise he is forced to sleep outside in the cold. After many days on the road, Oliver finally gets close to London, where, as he rests on the doorstep, he is approached by the Artful Dodger, who offers him something to eat and drink, and to take him to a "spectable old genelman"<sup>172</sup> (sic) who will find a spare bed for the poor little boy. Oliver, having not slept under a roof for many days, decides to join the Dodger and meet the old gentleman.

The Dodger leads the way and after a while the boys enter a house in serious disrepair and they find the old gentleman cooking some food in the kitchen. Fagin, as the Dodger calls him, is a "villainous-looking and repulsive very old shrivelled Jew,"<sup>173</sup> (sic) but what Oliver does not know yet is that Fagin is a fence, pimp, and leader of a gang of thieves.<sup>174</sup> Fagin is not alone in the kitchen, there are four or five more boys who are sitting around a table with a pipe in one hand and an alcoholic drink with the other, all acting like adults. Lecturer Liz

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<sup>169</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 39.

<sup>170</sup> Nathalie T. Burkert, J. Muckenhuber, F. Großschadl, É. Rásky, and W. Freidl, "The Association between Eating Behavior and Various Health Parameters: A Matched Sample Study," *Nutrition and Health* 9, no. 2 (February 2014): 1, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0088278.

<sup>171</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 343.

<sup>172</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 46.

<sup>173</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 48.

<sup>174</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 344.

Thiel argues that it was quite common for Victorian literature to make lower-class children look and act like adults, not stating their actual age, in order to emphasize the corruption of Victorian society.<sup>175</sup> The boys help Oliver out of his coat and search his pockets in order to find something valuable while Oliver thinks they are trying to help him. After that he is given some food and a hot drink with gin which immediately puts him into a deep sleep.

The following day Oliver watches how Fagin plays a game with the boys who try to pick his pockets. Oliver is a pure and innocent little boy, therefore when he sees this game for the very first time, he truly believes it is just a game and not a practice for the real theft. However, the boys truly are thieves, all of them. In chapter 25 Toby Crackit says to the Dodger: “You’ll be a fine young cracksman afore the old file now.”<sup>176</sup> Captain Francis Grose together with Hewson Clarke in *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* define “cracksman” as “a house-breaker” and “old file” as “an old fraud.”<sup>177</sup>

Charley Bates and the Artful Dodger are fully absorbed by their profession, and Fagin chooses them to help him train Oliver and convert him into a thief. They are practicing the picking pockets game with Fagin every day and Oliver still thinks it is just a game.<sup>178</sup> One day the boys take Oliver out for a walk, when the Dodger tries to pick pocket Mr. Brownlow of his handkerchief. The boys manage to disappear, but Oliver, who is shocked by the sudden sequence of events, does not know what is going on. He is accused of being the thief who tried to rob the gentleman and arrested. Nevertheless, due to this wrongful accusation, Oliver is brought to Mr. Brownlow’s house and the gentleman becomes his guardian.

Unfortunately, after a while, Oliver is brought back to Fagin who keeps him under a lock for a long time now. Finally, when Fagin picks Oliver to join Sikes for his big burglary, Oliver’s role is to be a “little snakesman – a boy who gets into a house through the sink-hole, and opens the door for his accomplices.”<sup>179</sup> (sic) Before Sikes makes him go through a window to get into the house, Oliver begs for mercy: “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!”<sup>180</sup> (sic) Unfortunately, the criminals have no mercy and force Oliver through the

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<sup>175</sup> Liz Thiel, “Degenerate ‘Innocents’: Childhood, Deviance, and Criminality in Nineteenth-Century Texts,” in *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 131-145.

<sup>176</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 152.

<sup>177</sup> Francis Grose and Hewson Clarke, *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue; A Dictionary of Buckish Slang, University Wit, and Pickpocket Eloquence* (Northfield: Digest Books, 1971), 64-95.

<sup>178</sup> Thiel, “Degenerate ‘Innocents’,” 134.

<sup>179</sup> Grose and Clarke, *1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 155.

<sup>180</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 136.

window, threatening him with a gun. Oliver's innocence and pureness appear again; he does not intend to open the door to his accomplices Sikes and Crackit, instead he wants to run upstairs and warn the residents of the house about the burglary. Sadly, he is shot by the awoken servants before he even tries. Sikes pulls him back out through the window and they attempt to escape. Oliver becomes a burden as he is not able run nor move on his own, therefore, Sikes ditches him in order to save himself.

As a final point, Fagin fails to convert Oliver into a thief. He admits that Oliver is extraordinary when he tells Monks: "I saw it was not easy to train him to the business [...] he was not like other boys in the same circumstances."<sup>181</sup> (sic) Dickens depicts Oliver as special; as the ultimate symbol of innocence and purity, typical for a Romantic hero.<sup>182</sup> However, the romantic hero Oliver is pictured in a world full of Realism, which includes the elements of melodrama, parody, and Gothic. Dr. Claire Wood argues that *Oliver Twist* is a novel of mixed genres. The reader might feel sympathy for the children of the street or for Nancy; moreover, he or she could find the satiric portrayal of Fagin's over-mature boys absurd. The Gothic features, such as ghosts are present in the novel as well when Sikes is followed by the ghost of Nancy.<sup>183</sup> In addition to *Jane Eyre*, the Gothic elements are present for example in the red room, where Jane is captured after her fight with John Reed. She believes she saw a ghost of her kind uncle Mr. Reed and faints.

Dickens's works were read especially by the middle-class Victorians, to whom he aimed to point out that most of the orphans who ended up on the streets had no other choice but to choose a criminal life if they wanted to survive; therefore, they needed to be saved – like Oliver was. Other characters from the novel were not that lucky, for example Nancy, the Artful Dodger and Bill Sikes all choose this life because they wanted to survive, but nobody was there to save them.<sup>184</sup> In addition, Thiel claims that the portrayal of Fagin's gang in the novel is probably the most persistent exemplification of a criminal child gang in the literature.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 161.

<sup>182</sup> Thiel, "Degenerate 'Innocents'," 136.

<sup>183</sup> Claire Wood, "Oliver Twist: a Patchwork of Genres," published May 15, 2014, accessed April 18, 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/oliver-twist-a-patchwork-of-genres>.

<sup>184</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 343.

<sup>185</sup> Thiel, "Degenerate 'Innocents'," 131.

#### 4.3.4 Adoption and fostering

Oliver meets his generous upper-class rescuer when he is accused of robbing him of his handkerchief and takes the responsibility for his companions the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates. When Mr. Brownlow realizes that Oliver is not the one to blame, he decides to defend him and takes him into his own house, where Oliver is protected and nurtured. Unfortunately, Fagin manages to locate him, and Nancy with Sikes capture him on his way to the bookshop. Fagin keeps Oliver locked in a small room and continues in his efforts to corrupt him.

After the failed burglary of the Maylie's house, Oliver is once again saved by good people who perceive him as an innocent and gentle child, even though he tells the truth about his past. The Maylie family and Doctor Lloyd decide to protect him against the hands of justice. Rose, also an orphan, is a generous, kind, and gentle young lady with a deep fondness for the poor, the orphans particularly. Rose gets to like Oliver immediately and is eager to help and save him. The family keeps the boy safe and nurture him until he is strong enough. Then they take him to their house in the countryside, where they all live together happily. This environment is a telling contrast to Oliver's life on the streets; obviously only a member of the upper classes could afford a second living residence,<sup>186</sup> a detail which Dickens uses to further emphasise the disparities of wealth in Victorian England.

Oliver becomes passionately attached and committed to his rescuers, which is remarkably evident when Rose becomes sick and it seems she will die. Oliver's words to Mrs. Maylie, Rose's guardian, are:

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.<sup>187</sup> (sic)

Nonetheless, Oliver's location is discovered again, but thanks to Nancy, who reveals Monks' intentions to Rose Maylie, Oliver is once again saved, and his mysterious story is unravelled. Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver, and moreover, it is discovered that Rose Maylie is the younger sister of Oliver's mother; therefore, Oliver's aunt. Oliver finds his happy ending with Mr. Brownlow, who becomes truly fond of him. Dickens finishes the novel with a portrayal from Oliver's life with his guardian and saviour:

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<sup>186</sup> Mitchell, *Daily life in Victorian England*, 21-23.

<sup>187</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 202.

I have said that they were truly happy; and without strong affection, and humanity of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe true happiness can never be attained.<sup>188</sup> (sic)

The theme of the orphan's salvation by kind-hearted benefactors is one of the major aspects of many novels by Charles Dickens. Besides *Oliver Twist*, this feature might be found in his works *Great Expectations*, and *David Copperfield*. Oliver's unique features of innocence and genuineness symbolize his representation of an "angelic" child. Because of such angelic features his rescuers identify him as someone who needs to be taken care of; a trustworthy and kind child. Good people such as Mr. Brownlow and the Maylie family come to the rescue of Oliver when he needs them the most, and they offer him their love and compassion.<sup>189</sup> Furthermore, as Professor Diana Chlebek claims:

Dickens's treatment of the themes of childhood, survival, and work are among his greatest accomplishments in this work. *Oliver Twist* was the first British novel to focus on the character of a child and to give the English pauper child a voice. It thus has a special status in the history of British literature and culture.<sup>190</sup> (sic)

The aspect of adoption and fostering in *Oliver Twist* has a positive nature; he finds his home where he is loved, and he adores his family too. This is in contrast to *Jane Eyre*, whose experience with adoption is quite the opposite. Her own blood relatives treat her like a servant, or even worse, they beat her, offend her, and abuse her the whole time at Gateshead. However, opposing to Oliver's childhood full of abuse, starvation, and criminal corruption, Jane's life with the Reeds still seems to be within the acceptable limits.

#### 4.4 Gender

The novel *Oliver Twist* has two major protagonists; the first one is, of course, Oliver, and the second one is his aunt Rose. They both get their happy ending at the end, however, they each achieve it through completely different actions. By the portrayal of more illegitimate characters of different gender Dickens explores how the genders compete with each other and how are treated differently based on the New Poor Law and its bastardy clause. *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress* is not only a story describing Oliver's development, but also a story of progress of its three main female characters: Oliver's mother Agnes, the

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<sup>188</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 346.

<sup>189</sup> Irena Avsenik Nabergoj, "Children without Childhood: The Emotionality of Orphaned Children and Images of their Rescuers in Selected Works of English and Canadian Literature," *Acta Neophilologica* 50, no. 1-2 (2017): 104-106.

<sup>190</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 341.

prostitute Nancy, and Oliver's guardian angel Rose. Oliver's representation of his kindness emphasizes what is wrong with the New Poor Law, as it assumes that all poor people has to be bad; moreover, the role of women in the novel is to confirm that. For example, Nancy represents the bad habits, criminality, and poor quality of life, which were the typical features of the New Poor Law.<sup>191</sup>

Nancy, who is also an orphan, is a representative of the literary trope of the "heart-of-gold prostitute," also known as the hooker/whore with a heart of gold or the "tart with a heart," i.e. a prostitute but at the same time a good person.<sup>192</sup> Nancy owes her life to Fagin, who took her in when she was a child, and by stealing and prostitution she managed to survive. Therefore, her commitment to Fagin is even deeper and she feels like there is no escape from it for her. She cries to Fagin: "I thieved for you when I was a child not half as old as this!", pointing to Oliver, "I have been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since."<sup>193</sup> When she meets Oliver, she is moved by his pure character, especially his innocence; therefore, when he is in trouble, she tries to protect him. Moreover, she even sacrifices her own life so Oliver could get what truly belongs to him. Even though Nancy rescues her soul when she saves Oliver, Dickens makes her die on purpose in order to emphasize that the children living on the streets need to be saved or horrible things will keep happening to them.<sup>194</sup>

Dickens preserves the Victorian morality of working-class women in the novel; such as Nancy, who unravels the mystery story of Oliver's mother Agnes; however, he still makes them answerable for their sins and let both Nancy and Agnes die. They were not strong enough to suppress their passion for immoral affairs, such as a relationship outside of a marriage or theft and prostitution. Furthermore, *Oliver Twist* unites Agnes with Nancy, and puts both of them in contrast to Rose, who is pictured as the ideal representation of a female; Dickens' gentle flower.<sup>195</sup> Nancy tells Rose: "If there was more like you, there would be fewer like me, - there would - there would!"<sup>196</sup> Therefore both Agnes and Nancy stand on the edge the society, whereas Rose represents the common 19<sup>th</sup> century trope of the "angel-in-the-house" who takes care of domestic duties, allowing her husband to leave the home to

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<sup>191</sup> Zlotnick, "The Law's a Bachelor," 133-4.

<sup>192</sup> Sarah Appleton Aguiar, *The Bitch is Back: Wicked Women in Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001), 43.

<sup>193</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 98.

<sup>194</sup> Chlebek, "Dickens, Charles," 343.

<sup>195</sup> Zlotnick, "The Law's a Bachelor," 139.

<sup>196</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 252.

earn a living. Moreover, Professor Brenda Ayres argues that “the good people surround her [Rose] and contain her within a proper domestic sphere so that she will never be a social misfit like Nancy or Agnes.”<sup>197</sup>

The young thieves from Fagin’s gang are all children, although they behave like adults: “seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men.”<sup>198</sup> Such detail illustrates that the children had to mature in order to survive on the streets. By sacrificing their childhood innocence and sense for what is right and wrong they make sure they stay alive, so they commit crimes for Fagin who provides them with food, clothing and a roof above their heads.<sup>199</sup> Dickens makes a contrast between the pure innocent protagonist, who is still a naïve child and the skilled felons, who behave like grown men.<sup>200</sup> When Oliver first meets the Artful Dodger, Dickens compares him to Oliver:

The boy [...] was about his own age: but one of the queerest looking boys that Oliver had even seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, commonfaced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man. [...] He wore a man’s coat, which reached nearly to his heels.<sup>201</sup> (sic)

#### 4.5 Illegitimacy in *Oliver Twist*

Oliver’s biological mother Agnes dies shortly after giving a birth to his son, leaving him in the world as an illegitimate orphan. Illegitimacy and children out of wedlock were a threat to the social order in the Victorian era. Therefore, Dickens leaves Agnes to die and this way she is not neglected, moreover, she might be idealized throughout the novel. However, Agnes’s absence in the life of her son puts Oliver more in a weak position to the system and society he has to grow up in. The reader does not know anything about Agnes at the beginning of the novel; moreover, Dickens does not even mention her name or refer to her in any way.<sup>202</sup> In the workhouse she is addressed to as “a young woman,” “the patient,” or “a good-looking girl.”<sup>203</sup> Her name is mentioned for the first time in the whole novel in Chapter 38 when Monks come to a possession of a little gold locket with the name Agnes

<sup>197</sup> Brenda Ayres, *Dissenting Women in Dickens’ Novels: The Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1998), 124.

<sup>198</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 48.

<sup>199</sup> Chlebek, “Dickens, Charles,” 343.

<sup>200</sup> Thiel, “Degenerate ‘Innocents’,” 131.

<sup>201</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 45.

<sup>202</sup> Karen Elizabeth Tatum, “Something Covered with an Old Blanket: Nancy and Other Dead Mothers in *Oliver Twist*,” *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 65, no. 3 (September 2005): 244-246.

<sup>203</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 2-3.



engraved on the inside<sup>204</sup> which was stolen from Oliver's mother in the workhouse where Oliver was born.

The melodramatic aspects of the novel are represented in the relationship of Oliver's parents – an upper-class married gentleman Edwin Leeford, who seduces an innocent inferior maiden Agnes Fleming. Edwin is already married because he was forced into it in order to maintain the family pride; he dies in Rome before Oliver is even born. His parents left him in the world as a poor, illegitimate orphan of the workhouse.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 237.

<sup>205</sup> Zlotnick, "The Law's a Bachelor," 132.

## CONCLUSION

Both *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist* are tales of progress from the bottom of the social hierarchy to the top. The children start their life as poor lower-class orphans with no money and no loving family. Despite their similar lower-class position within the Victorian society, their life significantly differ. Jane, who is unofficially adopted by her upper-class relatives the Reeds, experiences a lot of abuse, neglect, and other forms of mistreatment, yet she lives in a house, has her own bed, and something to eat every day. Oliver, in both the early stages of his young life in the baby-farm and workhouse, has none of these things; he lives in institutions which do not provide enough food, hence the legendary quote from the novel: “Please, sir, I want some more.”<sup>206</sup> The living conditions of both orphans become more comparable once Jane moves to Lowood, although she still claims that she “would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries.”<sup>207</sup>

Jane studies and works hard for her independence; she becomes a teacher in Lowood, and eventually a governess at Thornfield. All by herself, she ascends to the middle-class society. But only the inheritance from her uncle helps Jane to arise into the upper-class. This ending is similar to that of Oliver, who only ends up among the upper-class because of the fortune he inherits from his father, and thanks to the upper-class gentleman Mr. Brownlow who adopts him. Both Jane and Oliver are able to overcome every obstacle in their way and thanks to inheriting money from their relatives, they ascend to the upper class. Jane generously splits the fortune with her long-lost relatives. In Oliver’s case, after Nancy reveals his true identity, he finds out that not only he has found his family, but he also inherits money which his half-brother Monks wanted to keep for himself. Despite this, Oliver, the same as Jane, gives half of his money to Monks. These actions show they are both good people who deserve to be happy.

However, their happy ending is achieved not only by inheriting the money, but especially due to the fact that they have found love and family. When Jane becomes rich and independent, she finally feels equal to Rochester and therefore she is now able to love him a marry him – starting a family with him is her happy ending. On the other hand, Oliver’s happy ending is not connected with money that much, he gets his happy ending as he finds people who love him despite of his past. Firstly, there is the Maylie family – especially Rose, who is in fact his aunt. They adore him even though he has taken part in the robbery of their

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<sup>206</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 11.

<sup>207</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 139.

own house. Secondly, Mr. Brownlow, who sees his true innocent nature, thus when he adopts him, Oliver finds his home forever. Therefore, Oliver's experience with adoption is completely different to the experience Jane had with the Reeds. Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver because he adores the little boy and wants to give him a home. Oliver discovers what is like to have a family and someone who cares about him, whereas Jane is left with Mrs. Reed and her abusive cousins after the only kind person she had left, her uncle Mr. Reed, dies. The unfair and brutal treatment Jane receives at Gateshead makes her believe that love relates to suffering, as she has no experience with genuine love and a loving family.

Furthermore, both of the characters deserve their 'happily-ever-after' ending based on Victorian moral values, which emphasize the importance of individualism, mutual support, independence, law and order, the authority of family, and strict sexual principles.<sup>208</sup> Jane and Oliver were good people who made good choices. Therefore, they deserve to ascend to the upper class and have a comfortable life. On the other hand, even though she made a good choice at the end and saved Oliver's life, Nancy dies. Her life was apparently not good enough, so she did not meet the criteria of a good person, therefore, her death was inevitable – same as the death of Oliver's mother Agnes. She gave birth to an illegitimate child, which does not make her good enough to satisfy the moral needs of Victorian society. In contrast to the women characters who die, there is Rose. According to Victorian morality, she is a good person as well, she manages to survive her illness and she finds her happiness once she gets married to Harry Maylie and finds her family in Oliver, her nephew.

The novels *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist* were based on the real life of their authors. Jane shows the closest resemblance to Charlotte Brontë; for example, their similar appearance, they both worked as a governess, and their mother died when they were very young. Moreover, many characters from the novel are inspired by Brontë's relatives or situations that happened to her; the death of her sisters at the Clergy Daughter's School (and the institution itself) is represented in Jane's friend Helen Burns at Lowood School for orphaned girls.<sup>209</sup> As for Charles Dickens, in 2010 Historian Ruth Richardson connected the dots in his life when she discovered that his house in London was located near the Cleveland Street Workhouse. Therefore, she argues that Oliver's experience in the workhouse is based on real life in the Victorian era; life which Dickens observed from his own house in London.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Gordon Marsden, "Introduction," in *Victorian Values: Personalities and Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Society* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 2.

<sup>209</sup> Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, 11.

<sup>210</sup> Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse*, 6-12.

Although the novels are based on the real-life circumstances of the authors, the reality of the Victorian era was much worse. Until the Adoption of Children Act of 1926, there were no laws and regulations on adopting a child in England;<sup>211</sup> therefore, off-the-record adoption was quite common.<sup>212</sup> Many children were abused and neglected, and the conditions in institutions such as workhouses and baby-farming houses were often even life-threatening. The children were often placed in these institutions because their parents could not take care of them, yet many of the children died anyway. The terms “baby-farming” and “child-murder” were interconnected for a reason,<sup>213</sup> as indicated by the example of Amelia Dyer, the baby-farmer child murderer hanged in 1896. Furthermore, Historian Ruth Richardson claims that the workhouses, orphanages, and other similar institutions were significantly affected by the novel itself, as *Oliver Twist* has always counted among the most widely read novels of all time.<sup>214</sup> The end of the workhouse age is dated back to April 1, 1930, when the local powers took control over their responsibilities and brought the workhouse times to an end.<sup>215</sup> Another important and life-changing law was the Education Act of 1870, which made schooling of all 5-12 years old children obligatory; and thus lowered the amount of children on the streets, who ended up living there as criminals.<sup>216</sup>

The novels *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist* drew attention to the lives of Victorian orphans, therefore the middle-class Victorian society realized that these children need help. More progress was made during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however some challenges remained to make the children’s lives better. Even nowadays, many orphans with no other means of support are placed into abusive private foster or public children’s homes, as many victims subjected to abuse in such institutions have confirmed. The UK Government Digital Service published statistics of *Fostering in England 2017 to 2018* stating that there are 53,040 foster children in England at the moment and during the years 2017-2018 the total number of 2,455 abuse accusations against the foster parents were made.<sup>217</sup> These statistics and other studies show that making sure orphans, in Britain as everywhere, are given the same opportunities as all children should have.

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<sup>211</sup> Keating, *A Child for Keep*, 2.

<sup>212</sup> Walker, “Adoption and Victorian Culture,” 12.

<sup>213</sup> Law, *The Social Life of Fluids*, 139.

<sup>214</sup> Richardson, *Dickens and the Workhouse*, 13.

<sup>215</sup> Dopson, “Workhouse,” 30.

<sup>216</sup> Duckworth, *Fagin’s Children*, ix-x.

<sup>217</sup> “Fostering in England 2017 to 2018: Main Findings,” *Government Digital Service*, published January 31, 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fostering-in-england-1-april-2017-to-31-march-2018/fostering-in-england-2017-to-2018-main-findings>.

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