

## Characteristics of Tragi-Comedy in Charles Dickens's Novel Oliver Twist

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#### Abstract

The English novelist Charles John Hoffman Dickens (1812-1870) is well known for scholars and students of English literature. His name is always accompanied to some( classics) in the history of the English novel such as: ( Oliver Twist( 1839), David Copperfield (1850), Hard Times ( 1854 ) ,The Tale of Two cities ( 1859 )Great Expectations (1860) and other novels. He is one of the most professional novelists of the Victorian age; rather, he is regarded by many critics as the father of the realistic trend and the greatest novelist of his age.

In his fiction, Dickens created some of the world's best-known fictional characters that became prototypes not only in English but in world literature as well. Oliver Twist presents unique depiction of evil and good characters in English society through a highly serious and powerful conflict full of dramatic events like a traditional tragedy, but the line of action turns to satisfaction and happy end just like a work of comedy. This paper claims that the novelist employs the dramatic genre: Tragi-comedy into novel by mixing elements of both tragedy and comedy. Although the action in the novel is highly tragic and full of miseries and evil plots, the novel ends happily.

**Key words:** Charles Dickens, Victorian Novel, Tragi-comedy.

Oliver Twist was published in 1839. It aroused a great attention among readers being a novel that tackles an interesting theme, totally new and shocking to readers and society: the suffering of the starving orphans in London and their exploitation by gangers and criminals in the streets. This theme which clearly lies in the very center of realism had rarely been touched in English fiction before Dickens, rather, he may be considered the pioneer novelist who venture to introduce such humanistic theme as a direct criticism of the emerging cruelty of the aristocrat culture in the nineteenth century, industrial England. Whether in Hard Times, Nicholas Nickleby , Old Curiosity Boy or Oliver Twist," children are invariably shown as victims of social wrong, injustice and warped morality of the age."<sup>1</sup> After many decades of the wide spread and dominance of the romantic novel of Charlotte and Emily Bronte, it is totally shocking to the public that such themes and thoughts appear in English fiction. It is so clear that Dickens writes under the

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influence of the socialist thought which spread in Europe in the nineteenth century. The significance of Dickens's (socialistic thought) results in fictional works that interpret the social pains and dangers of the industrial – economic mood as the socialist philosophers keep announcing. But Dickens's vision was "too broad and flexible to be confined to a single social or philosophical school", and that is why he had been considered "Marxist before Carl Marx"<sup>2</sup>

Like the majority of Dickens's fiction, *Oliver Twist* skillfully combines vivid narrative with intelligent way of characterization, social conscience and hurt-tugging emotions in a convincing mixture. Hence, it is not a mere incident that the real pioneer of the realistic trend, Charles Dickens, creates characters of great presence in the collective memory of readers. The novel had been a complaining book, focusing on the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 which threw huge numbers of the homeless poor into conditions of semi-imprisonment.<sup>3</sup> The first few chapters of the novel are a very strong protest against the workhouse life that virtually dehumanized human beings, certain systems that had been initiated to be relief to the poor people had gradually been so corrupted that instead of giving them any comfort, they had actually made their life unbearable. It was under Queen Elizabeth that laws were made to provide relief to those poor people who could not support themselves<sup>4</sup>. There was a two-fold arrangement: The old, the sick, the lame and the blind were relieved at home; orphans were sent out and then apprenticed to a trade. The vagabonds were sent for relief to the houses of correction. The theory behind this arrangement was to provide work to the able-bodied poor and to offer relief to the disabled. Special buildings were set up to provide work to the poor people under supervision. These buildings were known as workhouses. By the Act passed in 1722 the poor could be compelled to live in the workhouse or he was to be denied any relief. This was known as the workhouse test.<sup>5</sup> They turn to contain a mixture of able and disabled alike and by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, they became symbols of complete scorn and dehumanization. In most workhouses husbands were separated from wives, children lacked proper care, diseases were common and crime was widely spread. A huge space of the first chapter of *Oliver Twist* is devoted to mock on the organizations of charity run by the church and the government in Dickens's time. The system Dickens describes was put into place by the poor law of 1834, which stipulated that the poor could only receive government workhouses. Residents of those workhouses were severely curtailed by a host of hard regulations. Labor was required, families were always separated, and rations and food and clothing

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were meager. The workhouses operated on the common principle that poverty was the sequence of laziness and that the dreadful conditions in the workhouse would inspire the poor to improve their own circumstances. Yet, the economic dislocation of the Industrial revolution made it impossible for many to do so, and the workhouses did not provide any means for social or economic betterment. Furthermore, as Dickens points out, the officials who ran the workhouses blatantly violated the values they preached to the poor. Dickens describes with great sarcasm the greed, laziness and arrogance of charitable workers like Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Mann. In general, charitable institutions only reproduced the awful conditions in which the poor would live anyway. As Dickens puts it, the poor choose between "being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it", (p.27).

Theft, crime prostitution and gangs are widely depicted in this novel. In order to affirm this aspect, Oliver Twist presents some evil characters, the most famous of them that became a stereotype in English fiction and stands as an equivalent for Shakespeare's Shylock in the famous play which is classified according to the dramatic terms as Tragi-comedy: The Merchant of Viennese (1600): Fagan, the old Jew, a wicked gang master who runs a house for homeless children and brings them to be thieves.

A lot of discussion had been made over anti-Semitism during Dickens's lifetime and in modern times as well. Not only in England, but in whole Europe, the Jewish issue was highly questionable as a clear reflection of the real suspicious role of the members of the Jewish community in the political and economic life of societies. The reference to the individual Jew in different communities as (Shylock) since the Elizabethan age is an obvious interpretation of the negative, rather the aggressive, attitude towards the recurrent, hidden attempts of the Jews to dominate societies using their huge financial power. In Shakespeare's play, the Jew shylock is the play's antagonist; a usurer who involves in illegal activities and lends money in very wicked conditions. In Oliver Twist Dickens repeatedly referred to Fagin – no less than 257 times in the first 38 chapters- as the "Jew" whereas the race and religion of another villain in the novel, Bill Sikes, for instance, goes unremarked. Dickens creates another Shylock about a couple of centuries later and the Jewish community in London was lamenting as to why " Jews alone should be excluded from 'the sympathizing heart ' of this great author and powerful friend of the oppressed" The novelist defended himself saying that Fagin had been described as a Jew, " because it unfortunately was true of

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the time to which that story refers, that that class of criminals almost invariably was a Jew". If Jews were offended, he said, then " they are a far less sensible, a far less and a far less good-tempered people than I have always supposed."<sup>6</sup>

The name (Fagin) itself is rarely used in English, Dickens took Fagin's name from a friend he had known in his youth while working in a boot-blackening factory .It might also be based on the criminal Ikey Solomon, who was a fence at the center of a highly publicized arrest, escape, recapture and trial. Some accounts of Solomon also describe him as a London underworld "kids man" (a kids man was an adult who recruited children and trained them as pickpockets, exchanging food and shelter for goods the children stole.)<sup>7</sup>

The novel appeared for the first time in a weekly periodical as the publishing customs at that time, and the serial form obliged the writer to follow a special narrative technique depends heavily on surprises and sudden turns. In order to support the hypothesis of the study, it is better to summarize the plot as the following: Oliver twist, the central character, is born in a workhouse in 1830s England. No one in the novel knows his mother's name; she is found on the street and dies just after Oliver's birth. The little orphan spends the first nine years of his life in a badly run home for young orphans and then is transferred to a workhouse for adults. The other boys in the house bully Oliver by asking for more gruel at the end of a meal, the thing that caused Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle, to offer five pounds to anyone who will take Oliver away from the workhouse. Being apprenticed to a brutish chimney sweep, Oliver decides to escape and is eventually apprenticed to a local undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry. When the undertaker's other apprentice, Noah Claypole, comments badly about Oliver's mother, Oliver attacks him and incurs Sowerberry's wrath. Feeling sad and hopeless, Oliver runs away at dawn and travels - without any previous planning – to London.

Starved and exhausted, Oliver meets a boy of his own age in London, who offers him shelter in the London house of his benefactor, Fagin. Fagin trains orphan boys to pick pockets for him. After a few days of training, Oliver is sent on a pick pocketing job with two other boys. When he sees them swipe a handkerchief from an elderly gentleman, Oliver is horrified and runs off but he is caught and convicted of the theft. Mr. Brownlow, the man whose handkerchief was stolen, takes the terrified Oliver to his home and nurses him. Mr. Brownlow is struck by Oliver's resemblance to a portrait of a young woman that hangs in his house. Oliver thrives in Mr. Brownlow's

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home, but two young adults in Fagin's gang, Bill Sikes and his lover Nancy, capture Oliver and return him to Fagin.

The old Jew, Fagin sends Oliver to help Sikes in a burglary. A servant of the house shoots fire and Oliver is injured, and after Sikes escapes, Oliver is taken in by the women who live there, Mrs. Maylie and her beautiful adopted niece; Rose. They grow fond of the tender boy; Oliver, and he spends a happy summer with them in the countryside. But Fagin and a mysterious man named Monks are set on recapturing Oliver. At this time, it is discovered that Oliver's mother left behind a gold locket when she died. Monks obtains and destroys that locket. When the Maylies come to London, Nancy meets secretly with the daughter, Rose and informs her of Fagin's plot, but a member of Fagin's gang hears the conversation. When Nancy's discloser reaches Sikes, he brutally murders her and escapes out of London. Pursued by his guilty conscience and an extraordinary anger, he hangs himself.

The murder and its aftermath form the turning point of the plot. The Maylies have reunited with Mr. Brownlow, confronts Monks who tells them the truth about Oliver's parentage. It is also revealed that Monks is Oliver's half brother. Mr. Leeford, their father was married to a wealthy woman and the marriage was unhappy, he had an affair with Oliver's mother, Agnes Fleming. Monks has been pursuing Oliver for a long time in the hope that his half-brother is deprived of his share of the family inheritance. Mr. Brownlow forces Monks to sign over Oliver's share to Oliver. Moreover, it is discovered that Rose is Agnes's younger sister, hence Oliver's aunt, and to bring out all the elements of a happy end like a typical Tragi-comedy, Fagin is hung for his crimes. Finally, Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver, and they enjoy life with the Maylies.

To measure this huge crowd of events and characters, it is better to shed a light on the writer's way of characterization. Designing the character is a notable feature of Dickens's fiction. It is because of the influence of Drama on the novelist that most of the characters in his novels come alive before the readers' eyes because of the faithful depiction of their physical appearance. Dickens had a very minute observation and he skillfully caught the apparently trivial and meaningless gesture which gave a character his individuality. This enabled the reader to accept it firmly.

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Dickens uses another method to give individuality to his characters by giving them tags. Sometimes these tags are physical: Uriah Heep has virtually no eye brows and no eye lashes; Piggoty's blouse is always getting unbuttoned at the back; the Artful Dodger is always wearing a man's coat which reaches nearly to his heels. But in other cases, speech- tags are used: Fagin has the habit of addressing everybody as 'my dear'; 'I shall eat my head' seems peculiar to Mrs. Grimwig ; Mr. Micawber keeps on saying " I never will desert Mr.Micawber".

Dickens carefully follows the individual way of speeches of his characters and catches something restricted in them as if the fictional character is acting on the stage. He tries to observe the recurrent words or phrases they repeat, the themes with which they are obsessed, the turn of speech they are used to, the wit or nonsense peculiar to make his characters alive. Dickens's method of characterization is not that of psychological analysis but it is a direct method of triumphant exhibition as the theatrical influences demand. He creates a memorable and sharp image of a character with strong impression of richness beneath. He makes the reader feels of the beauty or horror of a character first; analysis takes the second place. So that, the reality of Bumble, Fagin, Sikes, the Dodger, Noah and Charley Bates is vivid and convictional. Equally real are all the other characters in the novel. It is also worth mentioning that humor lies in the soul of Dickens's work. Characters like Micawber and Betsey Trotwood have become famous because of their sense of humor and they are smartly used to enhance the comic relief of the tragedy.

In spite of that, some critics believe that the central character, Oliver Twist is on many levels not a believable character, because although he is raised in corrupt surroundings, his purity and virtue are absolute.<sup>8</sup> Through the narration, Dickens uses Oliver's character to challenge the Victorian common idea that paupers and criminals are already evil at birth, arguing instead that a corrupt environment is the source of vice. At the same time, "Oliver's moral scruples about the sanctity of property seem inborn in him". Furthermore, other pauper children "use rough Cockney slang, but Oliver, oddly enough, speaks in proper King's English."<sup>9</sup> Oliver doesn't become angry or indignant even when he is abused or mistreated. When Sikes and Crackit force him to assist in a robbery, Oliver merely begs to be allowed to "run away and die in the fields" <sup>10</sup>. Oliver does not present a complex picture of a person torn good and evil; instead, "he is goodness between incarnate."<sup>11</sup>

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In this way of characterization, Oliver becomes a flat character and a symbol more than a specific character or an individual ; he is the embodiment of innocence. Dickens describes him, significantly, in the opening sentence of the first chapter, as an "item of morality"(p.6). Dickens says in the preface to the third edition (1841), "I wished to show in the little Oliver the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance and triumphing at last." He felt and wanted us to feel and deeply affected by Oliver's case of humanity, rather than by the child himself, for he stands for every similarly deprived and homeless child.

As a result, Oliver seems, to the reader, to be a boy devoid of personality. His behavior is at all times unreasonable and sometimes unbelievably pious. He does not speak or behave as a boy in his circumstances would and the author doesn't tell us the source of this high breeding. His one clear characteristic, in the early chapters at least, is courage. Because "nature or inheritance had planted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast" (p.6), he was able to survive the cruel system of Mrs. Mann (the superintendant of the workhouse town's orphanage, in whose charge Oliver spends his first nine years of life). Further evidence of Oliver's spirit is seen in ch.3, when he resists being apprenticed to Mr. Gamfield; in ch.6 when he fights Noah; and in ch.7 when he runs away. But when Oliver reaches London, as the critic G. Gissing says, "Everything seems done to him and for him, and almost nothing is done by him."<sup>12</sup>

The critic Dr. Arnold Kettle writes believes that the weakest aspect of this novel is undoubtedly its plot calling it "silly and mechanical and troublesome". Moreover, he points out that the novel itself reveals a "profound and honest interpretation of life, not through the plot but in spite of it "<sup>13</sup>. Oliver Twist is not the only Dickens novel to suffer from this disadvantage, the novelist George Orwell, in his essay on Dickens, analyses the trouble with what he calls the "awful Victorian Plot". In the typical Dickens novel there always exists a framework of tragi - comedy. The last thing anyone remembers about these books "is their central story." Orwell goes on to say that the melodrama begins as soon as Dickens tries to bring his characters into action: " He cannot make the action revolve round their ordinary occupations; hence the crowded puzzle of coincidences, intrigues, murders, disguises, buried wills, long lost brothers, etc, etc."<sup>14</sup> Almost all these devices are used in Oliver Twist.

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Just like typical tragi – comedy from the Elizabethan age, with many melodramatic features, the novel opens with Oliver as an orphan and nothing is known of his parents' identity. But he has a half-brother, Monks, who appears as a villain stranger in the middle of the novel. Monks' chief target is to cheat Oliver of his lawful share of inheritance. The core of the plot is the gradual revelation of this conflict, between Monks and his agents on the one hand, and Oliver (who knows nothing about it) and his friends on the other hand. The two sides are put against each other in a conflict by a series of improbable coincidences.

Sudden turns and improbable coincidences that occur lively on the stage were accepted conventions in 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction, so, Victorian readers would be able to digest these improbabilities more easily than readers can today. One of the most notable features of modern fiction is the complete neglecting of coincidence to the advancement of the, gradual and reasonable development of plot. However, it is clear that Dickens took far more care with the construction of his later novels than he did with Oliver Twist. The careful reader will find, in the course of Oliver Twist, several questions which the plot fails to answer. For example: There is something inconsistent about the burning of Oliver's father's will (as told by Monks in ch.51). This will was the only statement of Oliver's right to inherit his father's fortune, on condition that the boy "in his minority should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonor, meanness, cowardice or wrong." (p.487) If this will had been burnt, why should Monks have been so anxious to involve Oliver into crime?

Although these tragic inconsistencies and unnecessary details of the plot are of some interest to a student of Dickens' method of narration, they are of little importance in the discussion of the weakness of the plot that had been mentioned previously. For, as Dr. Kettle explains, "the plot's major fault is that it fails to correspond with the novel's center of interest or 'essential pattern' "<sup>15</sup> which is its consideration of the plight of the poor. The critic Kettle concludes that the struggle throughout Oliver Twist between the plot and the pattern " is indeed a life and death struggle as to whether the novel shall live or not. And so far as the plot succeeds in twisting and negating the pattern, the value of the novel is in fact weakened."<sup>16</sup>



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Moreover, the critic John Bayley believes that the whole conflict in Oliver Twist saying is not a real one: " even the apparent contrast between Fagin's world and that of Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow is not a real one" not because the happy Brownlow world is rendered sentimentally and unconvincingly by Dickens, but because "the two do in fact coexist in consciousness: they are the twin sides of the same coin of fantasy, not two real places that exist separately in life."<sup>17</sup> The long burglary sequence, when Sikes takes Oliver down to Chertsey to crack the Maylie house and the two worlds collide at last, is one of the most dreamlike in the novel. Dreamlike too is a later collision, the meeting of Nancy and Rose Maylie in the hotel bedroom. It could be suggested that another novelist would make such a confrontation of worlds the most reality enhancing note in his tale, but in Oliver Twist they only confirm the dream atmosphere.

The tragic – comic mixture "is more firmly ingrained in Dickens's novels than is sometimes recognized" says the critic George H. Ford, the obvious place to look for it is in "the structure of his books in which we find scenes of dramatic intensity followed by scenes of comedy"<sup>18</sup>. This method was no doubt attributed to serial publication, but in Dickens it is a more deeply – rooted device which affects both structure and characterization. His letters indicate that the juxtaposition of serious and comic is necessary not only to the reality of the comic character but of the serious character as well, so that "Lear without his foul is not Lear."<sup>19</sup>

But the most interesting application of the tragic- comic mixture in the novel can be found in the characterization of the villains. The mixture here is employed not so much between the characters as within the characters: Bumble, Fagin, Squeers, Sampson and Sally Brass, Uriah Heep, and other major and minor villains are conceived with vitality and delight. The vitality is apparent in the humor they present. They all represent vice or unpleasantness of different kinds, but they all share the characteristic of arousing not only the reader's hatred but also amusement.

On the moral and social level, "Oliver Twist had a twofold moral purpose ", says the critic Frederick Lewis, "to exhibit the evil working of the Poor Law Act, and to give a faithful picture of the lives of thieves in London". The motives hung well together, for in Dickens' view the pauper system was directly responsible for a great deal of crime<sup>20</sup>. It must be remembered that, by the new act of 1834, outdoor sustenance was as much as possible done away with, paupers being henceforth relived only on condition of their entering a workhouse, while the workhouse life was made thoroughly

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uninviting, among other things by the separations of husbands and wives, and parents and children.

Style also serves the tragic- comic structure: the first seven chapters of the novel devoted to Oliver's early years, are considered by many critics to be the finest part of the book.<sup>21</sup> They contain Dickens' sever attack of the existing system for 'relieving paupers'. Dickens' chief tool in these chapters is irony, which is contrasted with straight reporting. For example, chapter 2 begins with a statement of fact: " For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception", (p.4).This is followed, a few sentences later, by a shift to heavy irony: "The parish authorities magnanimously and humanly resolved that Oliver should be 'farmed'."(P.4) Examples of this irony abound in the next few chapters. Mrs. Mann is called Oliver's "benevolent protectress", ( p.10 ). The Board of Guardians as a body of " very sage, deep, philosophical men" whose regulations were " wise and human", (p. 13), Even the famous watery gruel is a "festive composition", (p.14 ).

This professional employment of irony in satire gains force by its juxtaposition with the realistic core of narration. In the first chapter Dickens paints a terrible picture of the coldness and indifference of the workhouse: Oliver's mother is attended in childbirth by a parish surgeon who "did such matters by contract," and an old woman from the workhouse who "was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer", (p.2). The surgeon's carelessness towards the dying woman is brought out by contrasting details such as the "great deliberation" with which he puts on his gloves. The same carelessness is shown by the priest at the pauper's funeral ( ch.5 ), who keeps the mourners waiting in the cold weather for more than an hour, and is then seen "putting on his surplice as he came along" and reads only " as much of the burial service as could be compressed into four minutes", (p.56). The whole episode of the poor woman's death and funeral shows Dickens' high skills, both as an experienced writer of the serial form, and as a social critic.

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On many occasions, Dickens also uses Caricature to express his views on the social class system. This is seen most clearly in the portrait of Mr. Bumble, especially when Bumble is discussing Oliver's rebellion with Mrs. Sowerberry: " 'It's not madness, ma'am, ' replied Mr. Bumble after few minutes of deep meditation.' It's Meat... You've overfed him, ma'am. You've raised an artificial soul and spirit in him, ma'am, unbecoming a person of his condition", (p. 45). Here, Dickens is caricaturing the attitude behind the Poor Laws and the ignorance and inadequacy of local officials.

It is of great importance to the study to give the first seven chapters of Oliver Twist a deep and close reading, for they contain the germ of the entire novel. The following nine chapters introduce the world into which Oliver falls, an underworld dominated by Fagin. These chapters include an interlude in Mr. Brownlow's household, which "seemed like heaven itself", (p. 64). For the introduction of Fagin and his gang, Dickens uses irony, but the bulk of these chapters are written in a plain, straight ford narrative style, as the plot goes underway. The police-court episode (ch.11) provides another example of Dickens' social criticism, this time without any recourse to irony or caricature.

In chapter 7, Dickens devotes three paragraphs to a justification of the arrangement of tragic and comic scenes in regular alternation which he will be using for the next ten chapters, and to some extent for the rest of the book. For, in interviewing the worlds of Bumble and Fagin, he is bringing out both the comic and the hard aspects of the same situation: the abuse of the poor in a roughly classified society.

This section (Chapters1-7) culminates in the "expedition" and "burglary" chapters, which one critic has called "one of the most dreamlike" sequences in the novel. There is a nightmare quality about the long journey on which Sikes takes Oliver, almost literally at gun-point, starting with the bustle of Smithfield market which Dickens describes with much detail, continuing with the cart-rides to unknown destinations and ending with the terrifying loneliness and darkness of open countryside. But the actual episode of burglary seems realistic, with unnecessary detail about clothes and equipment. After Oliver has fully entered into the Maylie household the atmosphere turns again to dreamlike telling.<sup>22</sup>

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Throughout the narration of the first section of the novel, Dickens varies the place of the events. Some chapters are used mainly to portray character and build up atmospheres; others are used to advance the action. The researcher could Compare for example chapter 25 and 26: chapter 25 does almost nothing but set the scene for what follows, whereas chapter 26 is complex and swift- moving, with its introduction of Monks and general enhancing of the plot. Yet even in this crowded chapter, Dickens finds time to practice social criticism by inserting a paragraph or two in describing the clientele of the Three Cripples.

Some critics also consider section 2 as the weakest section of the novel. For in nine chapters the action is moving too slowly. Oliver rests gratefully into the comfortable warm of the Maylie household and the only relief is provided by the slightly ridiculous minor characters, Giles and Brittles, Blathers and Duff<sup>23</sup>.

Like the comic relief in an Elizabethan tragedy, this section completely removes the reader from the essential conflict of the novel. Dickens gives glimpses of the sinister background figure Monks, but he is never fully realized. Fagin appears once, but he is seen as a dreamlike figure. Dickens devotes much space to praise of charming Nature and peaceful life in the countryside. He also inserts a picture of Oliver thriving, studying and pouring out gratitude. "So three months glided away"(p. 149), the phrase smartly briefs the smooth monotony of these chapters. The function of these chapters lies mainly in providing the readers with relief out of the tension of the serious core of events.

It is s astonishing that the final section of the novel contains all the elements of the first two for it implies a collision of the unreal Maylie world with the deep reality of the underworld of criminals. It opens with two chapters that re- introduces Mr. Bumble in the story. This character serves the comic side of the narration with a touch of fun before becoming embroiled with Monks and the complications of the plot. The setting then returns to London. For two chapters Nancy is the central figure; two more chapters bring in the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow. The action rises in the final ten chapters in which all the major characters combine towards the climax ( the murder of Nancy by Sikes ) and its aftermath. The final chapters ( 52 and 53) works as an epilogue in Drama: The fact, about Oliver's parentage and property, is reviled and all its consequences are at last stored out, the gangers who escape death or imprisonment are arrested and publically punished (

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Fagin's execution) . A tender feeling of satisfactions comes to crown the happy end, Virtue, at last, is rewarded and Evil defeated.

In brief, the style in Oliver Twist has the main characteristics of Dickens's that used in the majority of his fiction: The heavy dependence on irony; especially prevalent in the early chapters; as a means of emphasis and as a form of humor. The remarkable use of detail: even when strictly irrelevant, to build atmosphere or character. Use of exaggeration and caricature, for emphasis. In so many occasions, the use of contrast: between comedy and tragedy, setting, characters and realism and fantasy. Dickens also employs dialogue to portray character and atmosphere than to advance the action. Use of recurrent imagery: images of darkness, suffocation, labyrinths or mazes. Symbolism is an important tool which Dickens makes a great use of. The most obvious example of this is seen whenever the weather is mentioned: it is invariably appropriate to the events taking place; for example, the weather is bitterly cold in most of the workhouse chapters, especially when Oliver is born and when Old Sally dies, but in the Maylie chapters there is almost perpetual bright sunshine and warmth; the meeting between Monks and the Bumbles takes place on a "dull, close, overcast summer evening" (p. 166) which ends in a spectacular thunder- storm. Further examples of symbolism may be found in the speech and appearance of the different characters: Oliver speaks "pure" English because he is pure and "the paupers look ugly because poverty is ugly, while the good characters are always good-looking."<sup>24</sup>

In the use of description, the novelist does not allow his reader to imagine things by himself. Rather, every scene, every state of mind, is described in abundant detail. Where this is not done, the details are omitted purposely to create a feeling of mystery or suspense. This aspect of Dickens "is one of the significant differences of method between Dickens and any comparable writer of our time."<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the narration, Dickens expresses an important idea springs from his social awareness, that is: The strong and virtually unbreakable association of crime with isolation. Although the first introduction to the underworld gives the feeling that there is, among the thieves and criminals, some kind of friendship that keeps them united, the thing which suggested that the underworld offers an alternative to the hard social order of England in the nineteenth- century. But this impression does not persist very long because "the spirit of camaraderie is only a façade, a mask which covers the terrible loneliness of the individuals" and the most successful in the

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underworld "are those who are most concerned with self-interest."<sup>26</sup> The boys in the gang may not be able to observe this important fact, but the adult criminals are very clear about it. The beliefs about any sense of unity and friendship among the gangers are disappeared when Oliver is betrayed to the police in chapter 10. The other boys not only have no moral concept about the betrayal of the innocent Oliver, but they clearly gloat in their triumph. They feel amused at Oliver's puzzlement and run away slightly when the situation demands their disappearance. As another example, Nancy, has a genuine regard for Bill Sikes, she resists all temptations to better her life and gain some amount of social responsibility. But, in spite of her love for Bill, she falls a victim to his mistrust. When Bell feels that Nancy might reveal any secrets about him, he soon murders her. All her pleadings, all her entreaties, all her appeals to his good sense and all her professions of loyalty and love fall on deaf ears. The episode confirms that Bill Sikes belongs to a world in which he prefers nobody other than himself and there is no room for human feelings. Moreover, the worst of these criminals, Fagin has no conscience about sending others to prison, transportation, or even the gallows. If any member of the gang threatens to be menacing, he can himself arrange the death of that member. To sum up this criminal aspect: all these criminals believe in the concept of number one. Fagin explains it very clearly when he gives the first lesson to Noah Claypole on his joining the gang; "every man's his good friend. He hasn't as good a one as himself anywhere" (p. 88). So, these characters look after themselves first and they don't care for others. The result is utter loneliness. Bill Sikes is isolated, which makes his death even more terrible. Fagin is also very lonely during his last moments in his cell.

The deep isolation of the criminals strongly affects their capacity for experiencing real human feelings. The most human figure in this gang is Nancy but her affections also wither away. Fagin, Sikes, and Monks are totally deprived of human feelings. Their only concern in their life is to get as much money as possible and they do not have any deeper urge to give any meaning to their life. They are designed to act as caricatures of the essential shallowness of criminality, so they can serve the main structure of Tragi-comedy.

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On the contrary, Oliver doesn't belong to the world of vice. His one craving in life is for love and affection. Amidst a hostile, material society, the starving orphan receives nothing but neglect and humiliation. He strives to get attention and respect to establish himself as a human being and member of society. Moreover, he tries, alone, to develop a character and personality of his own. At the subconscious level he experiences a fear of spiritual extinction if he is forced into the world of crime. So he desperately tries to escape it. Nancy's feelings for Oliver can be interpreted as the last desperate bid of a woman to express her maternal urges or to play the role of the lost mother. But these members are totally entrenched into the world of crime and there is no hope or chance for them to repent.

### Conclusion

Basically, Oliver Twist is the story of the exploitation of an orphan, "and there is perhaps no greater lover of oppressed children throughout English Literature than Dickens." In this novel – and many others- Charles Dickens expresses his dissatisfaction with the current social conditions and his eagerness for social reform led him to satirize the social institutions. He openly attacks the inhuman conditions of thrift in the workhouses, the stupidity of law and the shabby medical facilities. Dickens bitterly believes that the horrible circumstances in the workhouse brings forth its dreadful harvest of crime and vice, so that to argue that "criminals are made not born, and that they took to crime because they knew nothing better."<sup>26</sup> Naturally Oliver's sad plight under cruel system of the workhouse and thereafter under the thieves arouse the reader's pity for the famished orphan who, in his ninth birthday " Found a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference"(p.12) He is taken to thrown in the workhouse where "one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years"(p.15). The boy has been treated miserably and feels quite lonely in the world. Oliver Twist is a study of the sinister designs that controlled the Victorian World. Dickens's object was to tell the truth; to show how crime is bred. The core of the novel is the contrast between two worlds: The underworld of the workhouse, the thieves and the comfortable world of the Maylies and Brownlows. Pictures of light and darkness are contrasted.

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Critics notice a strong influence of theatre on Dickens's early work. "For anyone concerned with a wide, popular audience like Dickens, the theatre must inevitably have been a strong influence."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Writing novels for the weekly periodicals implies certain narrative techniques to suit the serial form and to attract the reader and arouse his curiosity. The weekly chapters share many features with scenes in Drama. From the very beginning, Oliver Twist shows the same themes and features of a typical Tragedy. But in the final section of the novel things turn suddenly to bring the reader's satisfaction. Disclosures of the old mysteries, the severe punishment for the villains and the great reward for the good characters, all that elements form the happy end in a collision much like a Tragi-comedy.

### Notes

1. Rajinder Paul Dickens: Oliver Twist ( New Delhi: Rama Brothers , 2010), p.11.
2. Ibid, p.15. Carl Marx( 1818-1883), German philosopher, economist, historian , sociologist and political theorist.
3. The new Poor Law was meant to reduce the cost of looking after the poor and impose a system which would be the same all over the country ( England). Under the new Poor Law, parishes were grouped into unions and each union had to build a workhouse if they did not already have one. The new law ensured that the poor were housed in workhouses , clothed and fed. Children who entered the workhouses would receive some schooling. In return for this care, all paupers would have to work for several hours each day. However, not all Victorians shared this point of view. Some people spoke out against the new Poor Law, calling the workhouses (Prisons for the Poor).  
[http// Spartacus- Educational.com](http://Spartacus-Educational.com)
4. Ruth Richardson Oliver Twist and the Workhouse (London: British Library, 2014) p.33.
5. Ibid, p.66.
6. J. Hills Miller Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels ( London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.112.
7. John Bayley : Dickens and the Twentieth Century ( London: Penguin Critical Anthologies,2002),p.29.
8. See for instance: G. Gissing The Immortal Dickens (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.111-114.
9. Ibid.p.116.



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10. Charles Dickens Oliver Twist (London: Longman Group Ltd, 2009), P.19, all subsequent references are to this edition and will be referred to by page number only.
  11. G. Gissing, p.115.
  12. Ibid' p.117.
  13. Arnold Kettle An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol.1 (London: Penguin Books, 1951), p.213.
  14. George Orwell "Charles Dickens" in Jackson Lewis ed., Inside the Whale (New York :Bantam Book, 2007), p.211.
  15. Arnold Kettle, p.216.
  16. Ibid, p.218.
  17. John Baylel "Oliver Twist: Things as They Really Are" in Edward Johnson ed., Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (London: Longman, 2009), p.31.
  18. George H. Ford Dickens: His Character, Comedy, and Career (New York: Harper & Brothers, 2011), p.119.
  19. Ibid, p.122.
  20. Fredrick Lewis Allen The Moral World of Dickens in Arthur Sabir ed., Charles Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays (London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2008) pp.18-19.
  21. See [http:// www.edu/Dickens/](http://www.edu/Dickens/) essays
  22. George H. Ford Dickens and his Readers (London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2006), p59.
  23. John Robb, "Reading Dickens" in London Review of Books 24-9-2004. <http://Kcweb.nhm.ccd.edu>.
  24. William Empson "Symbolism in Oliver Twist" in Dickens and the Twentieth Century (London: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2005) pp.112-114.
  25. Ibid. p.119.
  26. K.J. Fielding Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction (London: Arnold Publishers, 2009), p. 203.
  27. Arnold Kettle p. 219.

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7. [http// www.edu/Dickens / essays](http://www.edu/Dickens/essays)
8. [http// Spartacus – Educational.com](http://Spartacus-Educational.com)
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15. **Paul, Rajinder** Dickens: Oliver Twist New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 2010.
16. **Robb, John** "Reading Dickens" London Review of Books 24-9-2004, [http// kcweb.nhm.ccd.edu](http://kcweb.nhm.ccd.edu).

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## ملامح التراجيكوميديا في رواية جارلز دكنز أوليفر تويست

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### خلاصة البحث

الروائي الأنكليزي جارلز هوفمان دكنز ( 1812-1870) معروف جيدا للباحثين و طلبة الأدب الأنكليزي و غالبا ما يقرن اسمه ببعض روائع في تاريخ الرواية الأنكليزية مثل ( الأزمنة الصعبة 1854) و ( الآمال العظيمة 1860) و ( قصة مدينيتين 1859) و ( دافيد كوبرفيلد 1850) و ( أوليفر تويست 1839) و روايات أخرى . ان ديكنز هو أحد الروائيين البارعين في العصر الفكتوري بل أن بعض النقاد يعده الأب الفعلي لتيار الواقعية في الرواية الأنكليزية. ابتكر ديكنز العديد من الشخصيات الروائية التي أصبحت فيما بعد نماذج ليس في الأدب الأنكليزي فحسب بل في الأدب العالمي. تقدم رواية ( أوليفر تويست) تصويرا فريدا للشخصيات الشريرة و الخيرة في المجتمع الأنكليزي عبر صراع قاس مرير مليء بالأحداث الدرامية مثل أي تراجيديا تقليدية لكن خط الأحداث يتحول فجأة الى الرضا و النهاية السعيدة مثل أي عمل كوميدي. تفترض هذه الدراسة أن الروائي جارلز ديكنز يوظف الجنس الدرامي المعروف ب ( تراجي كوميدي) في الرواية عن طريق مزج عناصر التراجيدي و الكوميديا اذ ان الرواية تنتهي نهاية سعيدة ترضي القاريء ويفرح بها رغم أن معظم أحداثها مأساوية و حبكتها مليئة بالمؤامرات و الدسائس.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** جارلز ديكنز، الرواية الفكتورية، تراجيكوميديا