

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF CHARLES DICKENS'
REPRESENTATION OF THE SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED**

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this research to God for granting me the strength and the endurance to carry out this project and overcoming the challenges I encountered.

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Declaration

I declare that **A Critical Study of Charles Dickens' Representation of the Socially Disadvantaged** is my own work and all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Miss Pamela Makati

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	3
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY IN THE MAKING OF AN ARTIST	7
1.1 CHARLES DICKENS' BIOGRAPHY	7
1.2 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND DICKENS' WORKS	17
1.3 THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY	25
1.4 THE VICTORIAN NOVEL	29
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	37
2.1. THE REALIST SCHOOL OF THOUGHT	37
2.2 FEMINISM AND DICKENS' NOVELS	50
2.3 PERSPECTIVES ON DICKENS' WORKS	59
CHAPTER THREE: THE POOR IN PERSPECTIVE	66
3.1. THE POOR LAW ACT	66
3.2 THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE POOR	75
3.3 THE POOR IN DICKENS' WORKS.....	80
CHAPTER FOUR: CHILDREN IN MISERY	88
4.1 CHILD LABOUR.....	88
4.2 DEPRIVATION OF EDUCATION TO THE POOR CHILD	96
4.3 EXAMINATION OF THE PLIGHT OF CHILDREN IN DICKENS' NOVELS	101
CHAPTER FIVE: TOLERATED AND UNACCEPTED WOMEN.....	108
5.1 THE VICTORIAN "ANGEL IN THE HOUSE"	108
5.2 THE REBELLIOUS WOMAN.....	115
5.3 A COMPARISON OF DICKENS' FEMALE CHARACTERS AND THOSE CREATED BY FEMINIST WRITERS	122
CHAPTER SIX	126
CONCLUSION	137
APPENDIX 1	145
APPENDIX 2	147
APPENDIX 3	148
APPENDIX 4	149
APPENDIX 5	152
APPENDIX 6	154
APPENDIX 7	157
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	163

Abstract

This research is an examination of Charles Dickens' representation of the underprivileged in the Victorian society. The socially disadvantaged members that will be under discussion are the poor, women and children, who are of major concern in Dickens' selected texts namely *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist*. It is evident that Dickens noted the impact of industrialisation on the Victorian society as it created a massive urban development, leading to a higher class division. Initially, the English society consisted of the aristocracy, the landed gentry and the servants who belonged to the lower class. The influx of industrialisation created a further division of these classes in which there emerged the capitalists or bourgeoisie, who were the industrialists like Mr. Bounderby in *Hard Times*, and the working class, who were the industrial workers.

Although the Industrial Revolution fostered urban growth, it is unfortunate that the number of the poor also increased. Many of them lived under squalid conditions with poor sanitation leading to fatal diseases and even death. Being a socially conscious writer, Dickens depicts the world in which he lives, as a strategy to raise awareness in his readers of what was really happening, and hopefully, to bring social reforms.

Apart from the poor, Dickens also portrays the brutal treatment of children at the workhouses. This research will show that Dickens was an obstinate critique of the Poor Law and its administration. Furthermore, it will be proven that Dickens also abhorred child labour because of his own childhood experience. Moreover, his repugnance is also noted in the way he creates child characters like Oliver Twist who are mistreated and exploited as child workers.

Dickens representation of women is largely influenced by the Victorian ideology surrounding the role of women in society. It is evident that the English society was very patriarchal and strongly confined women to domesticity. Women were also expected to uphold virtue and purity and if they lost both, they were despised and not tolerated at all by society. Although Dickens creates both the Victorian stereotypical woman who is the “angel in the house,” and the antitypical women who comprise of the prostitutes, those who bear children out of wedlock and the larger than life characters like Mrs. Joe Gargery and Molly in *Great Expectations*, he is revealing the different types of women one can find in society. Moreover, the juxtaposition of the stereotype and the antitype is also a suggestion of the latter’s struggle to fight against patriarchy by assuming the unexpected. Therefore, this research will prove that Dickens is not a patriarchal writer but he actually sympathizes with the plight of women.

A realist and naturalist reading of Dickens’ selected texts will provide literary theory for this research. Writing during the time that both theories were grounded, it is evident that Dickens adopted both elemental forms of writing. A feminist approach to Dickens’ female characters will also foster the analysis. Being a realist and naturalist writer, Dickens is comparable to writers of his time such as Nikolai Gogol from Russia who also employs a similar mode of writing in his works. Dickens’ antitypical female characters are comparable to those of the later feminist writers who have placed much emphasis on the independent female characters. It is evident that Dickens’ creation of violent or impure female characters influenced the feminist writers to use them as representations of female independence.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to critically analyze Charles Dickens' representation of characters who are the underprivileged members of an industrialised society. The middle class was the new emerging class which consisted of the capitalists. A closer examination of Dickens' specific novels will provide a deeper understanding of the Victorian society during the Industrial Revolution and his attitude towards the ideologies of his society.

Through a critical analysis of Dickens' selected texts namely *Great Expectations*, *Bleak House*, *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times*, this research aims to show that Charles Dickens is a realist writer whose characters have been created with devotion to the realist and naturalist mode of writing. Being a nineteenth century author, Charles Dickens conforms to the writing conventions of that period. A realist reading of Dickens' texts proves that he depicts the oppressive nature of the nineteenth century society and its subjection of the poor, children and women.

Moreover, this study shall further confirm that Dickens criticizes industrialisation and its destructive nature. A critical study of Dickens' presentation of the living conditions of the poor will further substantiate the assertion that Dickens was a social moralist and an author who exposed the harsh reality of the Industrial Revolution. Even though Dickens came from a middle class family, he sympathized with the plight of the poor, and, through his writings; he sought to bring awareness to the Victorian society of the injustice and unbearable living conditions experienced by the poor.

Apart from the poor, another set of underprivileged members of society in which Dickens was particularly interested were children. Charles Dickens' childhood experience contributed to his sensitivity towards the oppression and neglect of children by family and other members of

society. A victim of child labour himself, Dickens vehemently attacks the unpleasant experience, which shall be further explored through the course of this research study. He criticizes this phenomenon because of its debilitating effects to which he was subjected, such as deprivation of education. In addition to the deprivation of education other destructive effects include injuries sustained at the factories and exploitation through excessive working hours with little pay. His texts, particularly *Oliver Twist*, attack the Poor Law Act and the workhouse system because of its harsh conditions which the children had to endure.

Although Dickens is a male writer, his representation of female characters is a portrayal of the ideologies surrounding gender issues during his time. He conforms to the Victorian gender construction of being biased towards pure and gentle women, yet hostile to “fallen” women. Underlying this ideology, there are undertones of criticism of the Victorian patriarchal system and conciliatory attitude towards women. Therefore, this research will show that Dickens, unlike other Victorian male writers, sympathises with the women of his society who are forced to endure exploitation and oppression.

Finally, this research study will also show that Dickens’ works were one of the major driving forces in the implementation of social reforms in England. As already noted above, Dickens sympathised with the underprivileged in society such as the poor, women and children. His works were a form of direct appeal to society to take action against poverty, exploitation of children and the oppression of women. Apart from writing novels as a form of fuelling social change, Dickens was also actively involved in charities which funded schools for the poor and also reformation institutions for prostitutes. His essay writing and the delivery of speeches also acted as vehicles for social change. Therefore, this research ultimately seeks to proclaim that Dickens was not just a fiction writer, but his works had a social mission, to make the readers take

note of the unprivileged members of the Victorian society so that they could take action to improve their plight.

Charles Dickens has been chosen for this area of study because of his concern for the poor and his discussion surrounding the plight of women and children. Dickens' works and the issues he raises are relevant to modern contemporary society because these unprotected, exploited members are still the most vulnerable. Dickens' novels provide a historical representation of the conditions experienced by the poor under the oppressive power of the capitalists. This research will give a detailed critical analysis of the predicament of the poor and the plight of children and women in the Victorian society and their quest for survival in an industrialised society.

The research will be carried out through a detailed critical analysis of Dickens' works and how they have positively impacted the British society. Moreover a detailed examination of Dickens' texts will be carried out from a realist, naturalist and feminist perspective. An extensive literature review will be conducted to provide a deeper understanding of Dickens' works and his attitude towards the exploitation of the poor, women and children.

This research study consists of six chapters. The first chapter will be an intensive critical study of the historical background of Dickens' works. The chapter consists of Dickens' biography, the Industrial Revolution and its impact on Dickens' writings, the Victorian society and the development of the Victorian novel. Each section will determine how that component played a major role in shaping Dickens' form of writing and the issues highlighted in his works. Chapter two will discuss the theories to be used for the research study which are realism and feminism. The second part of the chapter will be an examination of different authors' perspectives on Dickens' works. The third chapter will be an analysis of the Poor Law Act, the living conditions

of the poor and Dickens' representation of the two issues in his novels. Chapter four also critically analyses the exploitation of children through child labour and deprivation of education. A discussion of the depiction of the Victorian gender constructions will be conducted in the fifth chapter. The final chapter will show that Dickens' works were influential in the implementation of the British social reforms. The conclusion will summarize the issues discussed throughout the research study, and also recommend areas for further research.

CHAPTER ONE: History in the making of an artist

1.1 Charles Dickens' biography

“He was a great comic artist and a great entertainer, but his influence over his public was strongest, perhaps when he struck a vein of sentiment which ran deep in Victorian society”
(David Cody)

Charles Dickens was born on 7 February 1812 in Portsmouth, England, the second son of eight children born to Elizabeth Barrow (1789-1863) and John Dickens (1785-1851), a clerk in the Navy Pay Office (Merriman). Dickens' father was a well paid clerk, but he was often in debt due to his extreme congeniality and hospitality. In 1814, Dickens moved to London, then to Chatham where he was a student. In 1824, his father was imprisoned in Marshalsea along with the rest of his family because of debt, but twelve year old Charles was sent to work at a blacking factory in Hungerford Market, London, a warehouse for manufacturing, packaging and distributing “blacking” or polish for cleaning boots and shoes, which enabled him to support his family.

While working at the blacking factory, he dined on a slice of pudding and for his twelve hour daily labour, received meagre wages of six shillings a week. In addition to his miserly existence, he slept in an attic in Little College Street, at Camden Town (“The Complete Works of Charles Dickens”). Such an execrable experience at a tender age led Dickens to empathize with the wretched condition of children in his novels, which ultimately was parallel to the state of poor children in Victorian society. The period of hardship in Dickens' life obviously played an influential role in many of his novels. The ability to depict real life situations was greatly influenced by his unpleasant experience as a young man, which included being a victim of child

labour. Dickens expressed his anxiety and disillusionment after being exposed to child labour and the loss of an opportunity to be educated:

“No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I . . . felt
my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished
man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance. . . of the
misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what
I had learned and thought, and delighted in, and raised my
fancy and emulation up by, was passing away from me. . . cannot
be written.” (qtd. by Pykett 1)

After his father’s release from debtors’ prison, his mother forced him to remain working at the factory, a fact which emotionally scarred him for the rest of his life. His father, however, later allowed him to study at Wellington House Academy in Hampshire Road, London, from 1824-1827. Dickens was then able to secure a post as a law clerk and later a shorthand reporter at Doctor’s Commons. Working as a reporter in the Courts and Parliament provided him with first hand background information of the inner workings of the justice system which would later appear in many of his novels, particularly *Bleak House*. Being a reporter greatly impacted the writings of his earliest letters which allude to his working experience. Moreover, he developed a more critical perception of society, which enabled him to write his novels from a realistic perspective, connecting real life experiences to his characters. The Parliamentary scenes which he observed provided him with the raw material for later satiric portraits as well as shaping his social vision and his attitude towards bureaucracy, officialdom and the ruling class (Pykett 23).

Charles Dickens is to Victorian England what Shakespeare was to Renaissance England as he was able to typify the period his writings disclose and expose (Brown 45). Acclaimed as the greatest genius of his age, Dickens relentlessly called for reform at every level, implored the reader to embrace the disadvantaged for his or her own good, and offered moral values and the image of a warm heart as the emblem of the solution to the cruel and mindless indifference of a society given over to the pursuit of wealth and property or “money, money, money and what money can make of life,” as Bella Wilfer says in *Our Mutual Friend* (Merriman).

Dickens is a writer who touched the lives of many and all the people of England enjoyed his novels, including both the lower and upper classes. The events in his childhood created the richness and pathos which he uses for the representation of the characters in his novels. The main focus that his novels entail is on the poor population which connects to his own personal conflicts and frustrations of his childhood (Brown 44). His early life is a recurrent element in his childhood novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*. The unpleasant childhood that Dickens experienced is noted in his biography by John Forster and one can read the bleakness and the bitterness:

“It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an early age. It is wonderful to me that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion on me – a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate and soon hurt, bodily or mentally – to suggest that something might have been, to place me at my command school. Our friends, I take it, were tired out. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so, if I had been twenty years of age,

distinguished at a grammar – school, and going to Cambridge”. (23)

Dickens’ early childhood experiences influenced him into becoming a realistic novelist, and he based his novels on the social conditions surrounding him (Baker 2). It is even believed that before writing any of his novels, he visited the places on which he based his themes. For example, when preparing for *Hard Times*, he visited Preston to observe the effects of a strike in a manufacturing town. This is an indication of how he stressed the importance of connecting reality to his novels. Dickens’ main focus was the poverty-stricken parts of England which influenced him to sympathize with people who were neglected, unloved and suffering. His characters not only represented the public, but they also connected with the readers.

Dickens’ popularity is due “to his intense human sympathy, his unsurpassed emotional and dramatic power and his aggressive humanitarian zeal for the reform of all evils and abuses, whether they weigh upon the oppressed classes or upon helpless individuals” (Fletcher). Dickens has been considered one of the most moving spokespersons that the poor have ever had. The pathos and tragedy of their experiences, aged and honest toilers subjected to pitiless taskmasters or the yoke of social injustice, lonely women uncomplainingly sacrificing their lives for unworthy men, such as Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, recur in Dickens’ novels. Sad faced children, the victims of cold hearted parents, for example the Pockets children in *Great Expectations* and the Gradgrind children in *Bleak House* or children of the worst criminals, for example Esther in *Great Expectations* is also another feature that appears in Dickens’ works (Fletcher). In the foreground, there is a definite humanitarian aim, an attack on social evil, the poor house system, the cruelties practised in private schools and the oppression of women by the patriarchal Victorian society (Fletcher).

One of the novels selected for this study is *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839), which portrays the misery and degradation of destitute children and adults (Stowell 140). A victim of child labour, Oliver is sold to an undertaker and later escapes the horrid experience and goes to London where he is exposed to the criminal activities of a gang led by Fagin. The foreshadowing misfortunes of Oliver's life haunt him at his birth:

“But now he was enveloped in the old calico robes, that 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.” (5)

The vivid description of Oliver's dressing sets the tone for the events in his life. The colour yellow is a symbol of dullness and, in the case of Oliver, sadness as confirmed by the harsh experiences at the workhouse, undertaker's house and in London. The terms “badged” and “ticketed” show the commodification of Oliver and all the other babies born at the parish. Instead of treating the children as human beings, they are labelled as if they were products or objects. In the workhouse, the children lacked individual identity leading to their isolation and abuse in the world. Similarly, Oliver's life is characterised by loneliness and lack of parental care and protection because he is an orphan.

The novel *Oliver Twist* consists of events in Oliver's life in different locations. The first place in which the reader encounters Oliver is at the workhouse where he is taken at the age of eight. Dickens' exposes the injustices of the workhouse officials and their practices through grotesque realism. The description of the workhouse board members is a satire on their incompetent

administration of the system. When Oliver goes to the workhouse, he is introduced to “ten fat gentlemen” and one who was “particularly fat” with “a very round, red face” (12). The fat gentlemen are juxtaposed against the children at the poor house who were starved as evidenced by the scene in which the older children forced Oliver to ask for more food. In the novel, it is stated that the inmates were fed on small quantities of oatmeal, three meals of thin gruel a day and half a roll on Sundays. As a result, the pauper’s clothes “fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two’s gruel” (14).

Charles Dickens also exposes child labour enforced on children at the workhouses. The “red-faced gentleman informs Oliver that he is going to be trained in a new trade, which turns out to be picking oakum at six in the morning. He is later sold to Mr. Sowerberry the undertaker, where he takes the role of being a mute during funeral processions. The reader empathises with Oliver because at a tender age, he is already being exposed to death. He later escapes from Mr. Sowerberry and goes to London where he is confronted by criminals. The three different locations in which Oliver finds himself, act as antagonistic forces against his innocence; however, his naivety remains untainted even after relations with the corrupt gang.

According to David Daiches, *Oliver Twist* is “full of nightmare symbols of loss. . .” as shown in the description of Mr. Sowerberry’s shop:

“An unfinished coffin on black tressels, which stood in the middle of the shop, looked so gloomy and death-like. . . . The shop was close and hot, and the atmosphere seemed tainted with the smell of coffins. (34)

The image of the coffin represents death and reminds the reader of Oliver’s circumstance that he is an orphan. Death is a symbol of loss of life, just like Oliver has lost his parents.

Dickens also uses powerful imagery and language to highlight the poverty and starvation of the poor as evidenced in the scene when Oliver and Mr. Sowerberry go to collect a dead woman's body and the husband says:

“I say she starved to death. . . and then her bones were starting
through the skin. There was neither fire nor candle; she died
in the dark – in the dark.” (42)

The poverty of the lower class is depicted through starvation and disease, which shows that the society did not do much to assist the poor. The passage also heightens emotions in the reader as one is forced to imagine someone dying from starvation and disease. This grim reality sets a sad tone in the novel, which parallels the misery of Oliver's life.

Bleak House (1853) is considered to be one of Dickens' greatest works of social criticism (“Charles Dickens”). The novel is centered on the growth of Esther Summerson, a young girl who grows up thinking she is an orphan, but later finds out that she was abandoned by her mother because she was born out of wedlock. She goes to live with Mr Jarndyce and meets with characters like Ada, Richard, Mr. Woodcourt, the Jellybys, the Pardiggles and the members of the lower society such as Jo and Tom-All-Alone's. *Bleak House* is a social comment on the administration of social justice and the law as depicted through the lawsuit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Moreover, Dickens also attacks the society for its failure to be involved in the assistance of the poor. Thus, *Bleak House* is:

“a social problem novel, a ‘Condition of England’ novel which is
concerned both to represent and to anatomize the signs of the times. . .
. . . the iniquities of the Court of Chancery, slum conditions,

sanitation reform, the education of the poor and orphaned, the Niger expedition, the home mission against the overseas mission and female emancipation” (Pykett 129).

Dickens’ use of language in *Bleak House* aims at representing London as the city of industrialisation, which signifies urban turmoil and atomization:

“Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another’s umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.” (1)

Furthermore, the novel is a comment on a fragmented society in “which human beings are isolated, self-divided and alienated from one another. At the same time it seeks to insist, not least through the operations of its labyrinthine plot, on the interconnectedness of society and the inescapability of the consequences of social action or inaction” (Pykett 132).

Hard Times (1854), is an assault on the industrial vice and political economy that exploits the working class and deadens the society. The novel is also concerned with contemporary issues such as the eight-month Preston Strike of 1853-4. The novel is based on the “morality of the

utilitarian industrialist and its effect on the possibilities of human happiness” (Daiches 1056). Dickens juxtaposes the lives of the poor and that of the middle class in order to portray the different lifestyles led by the two classes, and to raise social consciousness in the reader.

Great Expectations (1860-61) is a story of the orphan Pip whose siblings are all dead, except for his sister Mrs. Joe Gargery who looks after him. The novel evokes the reader to pity Pip because of his circumstances as an orphan, who grows up under the abusive hand of his sister. Dickens skilfully exposes the slums in which the poor lived such as the forge where Pip grows up. The prison is also a recurrent feature in the novel, for example, Magwitch has just escaped from prison when he meets Pip for the first time. He is later caught and sent by the Hulks, a prison ship that transported dangerous criminals to Australia. Magwitch’s character is Dickens’ revelation that from childhood, all that the poor are exposed to is crime. Therefore, members of the lower class are stereotyped as criminals from an early age, who take many trips in and out of courts and the prison.

All of Dickens’ works are social critiques which attack the institutions that do not perform the roles for which they were created and thus fail to reform society. He has also written other novels such as *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37) which is an allusion of the Victorian class struggles at the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution (Terpening). *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) is a representation of the fragmented human bodies which are used as metaphors for divided human relationships, families and societies, which further parallel the extremely dehumanized and acquisitive Victorian society (Mitsuharu). Most of Charles Dickens’ novels are social commentaries which depict the placement and role of Victorian women as noted in *Little Dorrit*. In addition to the above, Dickens’ other novels which are noted for their social criticism are as

follows: *Nicholas Nickelby* (1838-39), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841).

1.2 The Industrial Revolution and Dickens' works

The Industrial Revolution greatly impacted Charles Dickens' novels as he attacked its nature and effects on humanity. Pat Hudson defined this technological phenomenon as “a shift from agrarian and rural based occupations to predominantly urban-based industrial and service employments. . .” which resulted in “radical shifts in social relations” (4). Charles Dickens and other authors of his time, wrote in a period of growing competition and industrial unrest which resulted from the “divorce of labour from the land and the rise of proletarianised wage labour” (12).

It is believed that the Industrial Revolution was caused by an outgrowth of social and institutional changes brought by the end of feudalism in Britain after the English Civil War in the seventeenth century (Ashton 35). The British Agricultural Revolution made food production more efficient and less labour intensive, forcing those who lost their jobs into cottage industries such as weavers. Henceforth these industries spanned into newly developed factories. The change from agricultural to technological production enabled the economy to immensely support an increasing non-agricultural workforce (Hartwell, qtd. by Hudson 5).

Government grants of limited monopolies to inventors and increase in the rate of capital formation under a developing patent were considered an influential factor (Hartwell qtd. by Hudson 5). The effects of patents of the development of industrialization are illustrated in the history of the steam engine. In return, for publicly revealing the operations of an invention, the patent system rewarded inventors by allowing inventors such as James Watt to monopolize the production of the first steam engines. Therefore, the technological revolution was a result of an autonomous increase in knowledge and its application which led to the transformation of the machine and a more productive organisation of industry (5).

Additionally for Great Britain, the Industrial Revolution was spanned by the increase in world trade and the influx of natural or financial resources that Britain received from its numerous overseas colonies and the profits from the British slave trade between Africa and the Caribbean which helped fuel industrial investment (Hartwell qtd. by Hudson 5). The greater liberalization of trade from a large merchant base could have allowed Britain to produce and utilize emerging scientific and technological developments more effectively than countries with stronger monarchies such as China and Russia. This was evidenced by the fact that Britain emerged from the Napoleonic wars as the only European nation not ravaged by financial plunder and economic collapse.

The stable political situation in Britain and the society's greater receptiveness to change is also another factor that favoured the Industrial Revolution (Smelser 92). Due to the enclosure movement in the eighteenth century, which was a process entailing the privatization of property, the peasantry was destroyed as significant source of resistance to industrialization and the landed upper classes developed commercial interests that made them pioneers in the advancement of the growth of capitalism. Furthermore, the increasing use of industrial or fixed capital instead of merchant or circulating capital, led to a new type of profit generation (Hudson 5).

Consequently, capitalism emerged as one of the key elements of production during the Industrial Revolution. Capitalism is a social system based on the recognition of individual rights, including property rights in which all property is privately owned ("Capitalism"). It is also fundamentally individualistic because the each person is the centre of capitalist endeavour ("Capitalism"-The European Enlightenment). The concept of capitalism is drawn from the Enlightenment ideology on individuality that all individuals should be free to pursue their own interests. It is evident that capitalism played a major role in Dickens' works particularly in *Great Expectations* as noted

through Pip's desire for wealth and gentility and the centrality of money within the novel itself as evidenced by characters like Miss Havisham, her father and the greedy Compeyson (House). In *Hard Times*, one encounters the bank owner Mr. Bounderby who rose from poverty to become a self-made industrialist (Dickens 12). It is evident that capitalism, as one of the effects of the Industrial Revolution, shaped the literary works of the nineteenth century writers such as Charles Dickens. The parody employed by Dickens in describing Mr. Bounderby is an indication of his repugnance towards capitalism:

“A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much out of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start.” (12)

Mr. Bounderby is a representative of capitalism and Dickens' attitude towards him is synonymous to his approach to entrepreneurship. Mr. Bounderby's description influences the reader to dislike him, in the same way that Dickens dislikes capitalism. Bounderby is characterised as a “powerful individual driven by greed and guided by a distorted view of human nature” and he is a “self serving capitalist; rather than an insightful forward-looking crafter of a new industrial age,” thus “representing all that is wrong with capitalism” (Oldham). Bounderby is a typical industrialist who views his employees as “mere factors of production, not much different from the machines they operate” and his insensible manner towards the workers

demonstrates the “middle class efforts to avoid fraternisation and social contact with the lower classes.” (Oldham).

Similar to Dickens, German socialist Karl Marx also criticized capitalism for its oppression of the poor leading to the term “Marxism,” a theory based on the suggestion that industrialization polarized society into the bourgeois and the much larger proletariat, who are the working class leading to a conflict between the two classes as noted in *The Communist Manifesto* which he co-authored with Friedrich Engels:

“The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.”

Marx saw the industrialization process as the logical dialectical progression of feudal economic codes, necessary for the full development of capitalism (Sowell 281). Marxism sympathizes with the working class or proletariat and espouses the belief that the ultimate interest of workers best matches those of humanity in general. Marxists are committed to a workers’ revolution as a means of achieving human emancipation and enlightenment. The theory of Marxism promotes socialism which is a political and economic system in which everyone has an equal right to a share of a country’s wealth and main industries which are owned and controlled by the government (Heilbroner). Written during the same period as the development of Marxism and socialist thought, Charles Dickens’ works were also concerned with the relationships between the workers and the industrialists, and the poor and the rich.

In addition to Marxism, other theories such as Charles Darwin's *Theory of Evolution* (1859) also emerged during the Industrial Revolution in which Darwin claimed there is a variation in every organism which competes for limited resources, resulting in a struggle for survival. Darwin's concept that organisms compete for survival is noted in a capitalist society in which the capitalists are the only ones with access to economic resources while the poor are deprived. Therefore, the lower class struggles to survive by resorting to crime, the women are reduced to prostitutes while children and men are subjected to low paying jobs such as factory workers, dustmen and chimney sweepers. Darwin's concept that there is a struggle for survival has been translated into "survival of the fittest" also known as "Social Darwinism" a theory developed by nineteenth century philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) by applying the theory of natural selection to social, political and economic issues, which was further adopted by Victorian writers such as George Elliot, or even earlier in the century, authors like Jane Austen also adopted the theory and incorporated it into their novels.

"Social Darwinism" also played a major role in the development of naturalism and its application in literature. As noted in most naturalists' works, the major focus is on the lower class who obviously struggle to survive in an economically competitive world. The capitalist environment impacts their well being by subjecting them to exploitation, unbearable living conditions leading to diseases and death. The fittest poor manage to survive by resorting to crime, otherwise the capitalist environment will swallow them up. It is evident that during the Industrial Revolution, the environment favoured the capitalist while the socially disadvantaged suffered; a phenomenon which has extended to our contemporary world. Writing during the Industrial Revolution, all the theories and ideas expounded during this period obviously impacted Charles Dickens who is applauded for his application of naturalism into his works.

Apart from the intellectual and scientific theories and developments during the Industrial Revolution, industrialization led to the creation of the factory system which was largely responsible for the rise of the modern environment, due to the rural – urban migration of people in search of employment. The Industrial Revolution appeared to be a positive phenomenon, but it also had a negative impact on society as it created a rapid population increase in the cities leading to an escalation in slum communities. Living conditions varied from the splendour of the middle class to the squalor of the lower class labourers. Social commentators such as Toynbee, the Webbs, the Hammonds and novelists such as Charles Dickens stressed the “rapidity of change and the terrible effects of industrial transformation upon the living standards of the masses” (Hudson 12).

In contrast to the middle class grandeur, the lower class lived in small overcrowded houses where poor sanitation led to fatal diseases such as cholera, typhoid and small pox. A large number of the working class also died from chest infections caused by the dust from mines and smoke from factories while some children and men died at the factories due to accidents, mutilations and poisonous chemicals. Dickens’ novels, particularly *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, specifically illustrate the living conditions of the working class. Fortunately, the standards of living for the poor began to advance after the government passed public health acts in 1872 which controlled sanitation, hygiene and setting of boundaries on construction of homes.

Moreover, human relations were definitely altered by the people’s preoccupation with the accumulation of wealth during the Industrial Revolution as noted by Thomas Carlyle in 1826:

“... how wealth has more and more increased and at the same time
gathered itself more and more into the masses, strangely altering

the old relations and increasing the distance between the rich and poor.” (qtd. by Hudson 10)

The kindness, goodwill, trust and communalism that existed during the pre-industrial era, was replaced by “enmity, suspicion and distrust” between masters and workers (Tufnell qtd. by Hudson 10). Consequently, as noted by Carlyle that the rich and poor become more separated, the masters do not personally acquaint with the workers as evidenced by Dickens in *Hard Times* whereby the labourers are also called the “Hands” which confirms the indifference of the capitalists towards their employees.

During the Industrial Revolution, there were limited educational opportunities for children; therefore, it was better for them to work. Child labour was an integral part of the system as the children were far paid less than adults (Landes 57). They worked under terrible conditions such as long hours with poor lighting, deficient ventilation and lack of protective clothing. However with social outcry and reports of child abuse, laws prohibiting child labour and the factory acts in 1864 stipulated that no child under the age of twelve was to be employed as a factory worker. However, it is unfortunate that some of these reforms were implemented long after people like Charles Dickens had already been forced into the gruesome and traumatizing factory work at his age.

Even though the Industrial Revolution brought an economic boom to the middle class segment of Great Britain and the rest of Europe through the emergence of the capitalists, it crushed the poor whose existence was overshadowed by the success of the middle class. Dickens’ novels expose the slums and filth of London and its surroundings by realistically depicting the corruption of its

society. Thus the Industrial Revolution evoked sympathy and a desire for social change in writers like Charles Dickens.

1.3 The Victorian Society

The Victorian society is marked by Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 to 1901; thus, it is referred to as the Victorian era. Queen Victoria's sixty four year reign is the longest in British history and the cultural, political, economic, industrial and scientific changes that occurred during her reign were remarkable. When Victoria ascended to the throne, Britain was essentially agrarian and rural, but by the time of her death, the country was vastly urbanized and largely industrialized.

During the Industrial Revolution, the Victorian society consisted of a hierarchical structure comprising of the upper class, followed by the middle class, the working class and the impoverished under class (Cody). These different social classes could be distinguished by inequalities in areas such as politics, authority, wealth, education, culture, working and living conditions. Members of the lower class were perceived as irrational, immature, superstitious, brutal, excessively sexual and filthy (Wohl). Due to the powerlessness of the lower class members, they were subjugated to exploitation and treatment similar to that of animals.

One prominent feature of the Victorian society was the abundant poor. Because of poverty, children were forced into child labour and forced to work as chimney sweepers and they could crawl up the twelve by fourteen inch chimneys, some as small as seven inches square, so that they would clean out the annual average of forty gallons of soot that was deposited there. Some boys became rat catchers and they were required to use arsenic to poison the rats, but as this could be expensive, they could also use a ferret to flush the rats out and kill them (Kelsey 1). Children could also become messengers and it was quite common for a gentleman to ask a nearby street urchin to run errands for him. Charles Dickens depicts Jo in *Bleak House*, as a street urchin and he is asked by Lady Dedlock for some information concerning Nemo. Some

children could also work as mud larks which meant that they had to wade into the Thames River at low tide to scrounge for bits of coal, rope, bones and copper nails, but they had to be careful so that they would not cut their bare feet.

Urban overpopulation resulted in the poor living in appalling and overcrowded housing conditions. Improvement in the sanitation meant increased rent which most of the workers could not afford. More living space per family would increase the distance between home and work, therefore it meant that more families would live further away from work. The solution was to overcrowd the cramped squalid living quarters as portrayed by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*, Tom - All - Alone's and the Coketown inhabitants in *Hard Times*.

In the early nineteenth century, there was a high rate of prostitution which came to be known as the great social evil. Between 1848 and 1870, there were a lot of institutions working to "reclaim" these "fallen women" from the streets and at the same time restraining them from entering the respectable society by forcing them to work as domestic servants. The theme of prostitution and the "fallen woman" became a staple feature of Victorian literature and politics. Prostitution was perceived as a social problem rather than just a fact of urban life. Prostitutes were often presented as victims in sentimental novels such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. The emphasis on the purity of women led to the portrayal of the prostitute as soiled, corrupt and in need of cleansing. Sympathetic writers raised economic deprivation as a major cause of prostitution.

The emphasis on female purity was allied to the importance of the homemaking role of women, who, by her domesticity, helped to create a space free from pollution and corruption from the city. The prostitute came to have symbolic significance as the embodiment of the violation of

that divide. The anonymity of the city led to the increase in prostitution and unsanctioned sexual relationships. Altick attests that “Dickens and other writers of his time associated prostitution with the mechanization of modern life, portraying prostitutes as human commodities consumed and then thrown away like refuse” (25).

The status of women in the Victorian era is often seen as a discrepancy between England’s national power and wealth and what many, then and now, consider its appalling social conditions. During this period, difficulties escalated for women because of the vision of the ideal woman shared by the society. Women could not vote and they could not become property owners. The role of women was to have children and they could not hold a professional job unless it was that of being a teacher or a domestic servant. Furthermore, women were only confined to the domestic sphere and their duty was to be in charge of servants and to organize parties which would promote the prestige of their husbands and enable them to meet new people and establish economically important relationships. A woman was also required to be “good tempered,” compassionate towards the suffering and well mannered and clean (Burton 50).

Education was viewed as the economic necessity of men only. The attitude towards women and education was that education need not be of the same extended, classical and commercial characteristic as that of men. Women were supposed to be educated in issues that involved domesticity. Subjects such as history, geography and general literature were important, but not Latin and Greek. Women who wanted to study law, physics, engineering or medicine were satirized and dismissed. The Victorian society deemed it unnecessary for women to attend university.

However, the Victorian society appeared to be a stable society because of the lavish lifestyle of the aristocracy and the enormous profits gained by the middle class, yet the emergence of the “bourgeoisie” also meant a massive increase in poverty and urban overpopulation due to the rural – urban migration. Furthermore, women were also oppressed as they were confined to the domestic sphere and they were not welcome in the masculine public domain of politics and business. Children were also exploited as they were subjected to child labour and they worked under harsh conditions. The Victorian society, particularly the middle class, upheld strong moral values and morals, yet they did little to help the poor or change their condition.

1.4 The Victorian Novel

The nineteenth century was the great age of the novel, which is described by Henry James as “an intricately inwrought aesthetic and psychological design, and a subtle balancing of formal and moral tensions” (qtd. by Pykett 13). The term novel did not arise until the end of the eighteenth century although the content itself had been formed earlier in the century by Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and Smolett (Karl 6). Ian Watt further attests to this point by stating that Richardson and Fielding were the founders of a new form writing (9). This form of literary art was bound to flourish since there was an increase in literacy as the middle class rose in power and importance (Daiches 890). As industrialisation spread throughout Britain, it was common that the novel became a means of portraying life and its social and moral values familiar to the readers. Thus, the Victorian novel became greatly known for its concern for the social problems of the time.

The major Victorian novelists are Charles Dickens (1812-1870), William Makepeace Thackeray (1811 – 1863) and George Elliot (1819 – 1888). Charles Dickens like Thomas Hardy, depicts the conflicts between individuals and society, and also criticises the nineteenth century social structure (Peck and Coyle 113). The early Victorian novelists accepted middle class values such as decorum, gentility, purity and property which were important during that time. In most Victorian novels, class prejudice is also a major concern. To many of his contemporaries, Dickens was ‘emphatically the novelist of his age,’ in whose novels “posterity will read more clearly than in any age of contemporary records, the character of our nineteenth century life” (Pykett 8). D.A. Miller, a critic, contended that “Dickens’ novels are both a symptom and a critique of the disciplinary society; they are the site of the first appearance in English fiction of a massive thematization of social discipline” (qtd. by Pykett 18). Furthermore, Barbara Lecker also

suggested that the “social critique of Dickens’ early novels develops, after mid-career, into a more comprehensive vision of Victorian England” (691).

Dickens’ novels were landmarks of literature in English and of English culture in the nineteenth century; thus, he is similar to the other Victorian novelists in the sense that he is able to address the middle class values through satirizing them (Pykett 3). He criticizes the middle class for placing so much value on morality, yet it is the same people who exploit the poor, therefore his Victorian novel challenges the middle class value of morality. Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom say:

“If the middle class is properly to be described in a harsh fashion, then it is a paradox or an anomaly that the national culture which this class dominated should have given so much hearty a response to writers for whom the indictment of the failings of the middle class was a chief part of their enterprise. Many of the individual members should themselves turn a questioning eye upon its ethos and seek to repudiate or meliorate those unamiable traits that were commonly ascribed to it.” (6)

Similarly, Thackeray in *Vanity Fair* is mainly concerned with the contrast between human pretensions and human weakness and he portrayed the middle class social stratum and its hypocrisy. Dickens is equally aware of the precariousness or vulnerability of the new respectable social conception of the self and the buried life that is hidden beneath the veneer of polite manners (Peck and Coyle 72).

Dorothy Van Ghent, one of the twentieth century critics, has identified characterization “as a specific response to the nineteenth century processes of reification and alienation in which people were becoming things and things were becoming more important than people” (qtd. by Peck and Coyle 128). It is true that with the influx of industrialisation, people became like machines as noted in the description of the workers in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*:

“The wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot
weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul.
The measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the
substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of
rustling woods. . . . (99)

The motion of the workers is monotonous and automated like that of a machine. In this passage, Charles Dickens shows that the workers have become synonymous to the machines as their actions are similar to that of a machine. The Hands are not regarded as individuals anymore; but, they are considered as automotives:

“For the first time in her life, Louisa had come into one of the
dwellings of the Coketwon Hands; for the first time in her life
she was face to face with anything like individuality in
connexion with them. She knew of their existence by hundreds
and by thousands. She knew what results in work a given
number of them would produce in a given space of time.” (141)

Louisa identifies the workers through their work and not their individual identity. Her perception shows that the workers are now comparable to machines, which society identifies for their roles. Each worker has lost his or her individuality because of their synonymy to the machine. In this

way, Dickens fits into the nineteenth century mode of writing which placed much emphasis on the condition of humanity placed against the backdrop of industrialisation, a tradition learnt from the late eighteenth century writers who dramatised the urban life and “human character with a keen eye for the changes which the Industrial Revolution brought into England in his lifetime” (Daiches 1050). Dickens’ artistic ability to represent characters placed in a modernised environment affirms him as one of the most successful authors whose “central position in British and Anglophone culture derives in large part from his continuing appeal to the general or ‘common’ reader” (Pykett 4). Furthermore, Raymond William claims that “Dickens was a representative of a new kind of perceiving the world, and showing the crowd, the city, modern social forms and institutions, and the power of industrialism (qtd. by Pykett).

In some instances, the Victorian novel continued with the literary canon of depicting the protagonist as a virtuous person. The hero is always a representation of moral earnestness and wholesomeness, including crusades against social evils. For example, Charles Dickens portrays Oliver Twist as a character who maintains his virtue despite the corrupt world in which he finds himself. He is juxtaposed against a tainted society; yet, he remains pure. A constant conflict is waged between goodness and evil, innocence and corruption. The idea of juxtaposing good and evil is also prevalent in the eighteenth century writings of Blake and Wordsworth who wrote in and transitional age of the pre-industrial era and the modern world. Similarly, William Makepeace Thackeray, one of the renowned Victorian novelists, also depicts in his novel *Vanity Fair*, how “the demands of society operate on human character” (qtd. by Daiches 1060). While Dickens focuses on the poor and their struggle to survive in a demanding world, Thackeray’s places much focus on the characters and scenes of the upper classes.

Moreover, a new way of characterization was noted in the Victorian novel. Instead of the writer introducing or describing the character, the reader could now learn a character through their speech (Karl 20). Although the Victorian novel lacked the twentieth century's suitable method of the use of psychoanalysis, and revelations by the "inner man," the nineteenth century novelist relied on vernacular conversation to disclose the conscious (20). Dialogue, therefore, became a common feature of the novel. In addition, Dickens' novels also bear some theatrical elements in the way in which certain characters deliver their speeches, which shows that the conventions of the theatre have been absorbed or replaced by the novel (107). The conversational idiom attracted large audiences, even the illiterate, who could hear their own accents as noted through Magwitch and Joe in *Great Expectations*, Sleary and Stephen in *Hard Times*, Fagin and his crew in *Oliver Twist*, and Jo and the members of Tom-All-Alone's in *Bleak House*. The power of language in a novel is attested by Michael Foucault who absolutely views language as "performative and operative: language does not merely represent the world, but it does work in the world" (qtd. by Pykett 17).

According to Ian Watt:

"The actors in the plot and the scenes of their actions had to be placed in a new literary perspective: the plot had to be acted out by particular people in particular circumstances, rather than, as had been common in the past, by general human types against a background primarily determined the appropriate literary convention." (12)

Ian Watt's description of the novel led to the development of realism and the impulse to describe the everyday world that the reader can recognize as an element of the Victorian novel. This new

literary genre rejected the romantic idealism and dependence on established moral truths and became a philosophy that was greatly pessimistic and deterministic. As realist novels, Dickens' works challenge the inhumanity of new social legislation. Dickens also accurately depicts the lower class trying to survive in the new urban society as more people migrated from the rural landscape to an urbanized society. With the tide of industrialization, a new sense of individualism was ushered in and people had to find ways of fending for themselves in an impersonal urban world. Dickens' works depict the bourgeoisie exploiting the workers in an effort to gain more profit, while the lower class members were forced to engage in crime. George Elliot's novel *Silas Marner*, for instance, depicts the selfishness of the bourgeoisie and the struggle to survive of the poor. Similarly, Dickens learnt from his own circumstance and observations, combining an extraordinary relish for the odd, the colourful and the dramatic in urban life and in human character with a keen eye for the changes which the Industrial Revolution brought into England.

As a realist writer, Dickens' novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *Hard Times* depict the impact of urbanization on the poor leading to the emergence of a criminal class and the ubiquity of commercialization and the profit motive and its dissolving effects upon family and friendships. Therefore, the Victorian novel confronts the reader with grim depictions of human suffering and misery. Moreover, Victorian writers agree that the machine principle, the manifest antithesis to the spirit, was corrupting the life of England (Trilling and Bloom 7). Its grossest and most readily observable effect was the dehumanization of the worker, who had become a mere, disposable element in the process of production, an object and raw material to be used as needed, his cost as a source of energy reckoned in no different way than that of coal (7).

Furthermore, the Victorian novel also ventures into social realms and deals with subclasses of humanity, focusing on gender, class and empire. There is frequent attention on the upper middle class Englishmen in London and its environs, yet behind and around these men were women, workers and servants. The Victorian society was a patriarchal society; the men were the ones who were economically empowered, while the women were forced to depend on men for financial stability. In addition, the Victorian society was particular about class and any form of interaction between classes was not permissible and inter – class marriages were not accepted in society. Victorian novels depict women who are usually confined to the domestic sphere and forced conform to societal norms. If at any point a female character is rebellious, she is punished until she becomes docile as she is expected.

Strong images and symbols also characterised the nineteenth century novel; thus, the novelists often created layers of complex symbolic meaning that reached far deeper than the superficial pattern of social action suggested to the casual reader. For example, in *Bleak House*, Dickens uses images such as fog social injustice and moral decadence:

“Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city.
Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. . . fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little ’prentice boy on deck.” (1)

The fog is representative of the corruption in the city of London, and its effects on some members of society such as the ‘’prentice boy.’ The repetition of the word ‘fog’ signifies the

intensity of vice in the society. The Victorian novel exposes social ills through strong images that realistically depict society's neglect of the poor and corrupt ambition to belong in the middle class and the division between classes.

The prison is representative of one's confinement to their social class as evidenced in *Great Expectations*. Pip is confined to his social class until a mysterious benefactor, who later turns out to be the criminal Magwitch, fulfils his dream of becoming a gentleman so that he can be a member of the middle class.

The Victorian novel was a vehicle which writers used to deliver social criticism. It was a source that gave the reading public a clear picture of what was happening during the nineteenth century. Thus it can be concluded that the Victorian novel was a realistic depiction of England and the rest of Britain in the industrial era. The novel was a new form that was developed from drama, and Dickens' novels have some theatrical elements such as dialogue which enables the reader to identify the personalities of the characters in the texts and to understand the symbolic role of each character. Therefore, the Victorian novel, through its realistic depiction of characters and the Victorian society in general, enabled the readers to understand what was going on in England at that time.

CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework

2.1. The realist school of thought

In Britain and France, realism originated as a movement antonymous to the Romantic Movement of the eighteenth century which placed much emphasis on the idealistic representation of life in literature and art. The French realists Flaubert and Courbet identified realism as “a tendency to suppress sensibility, imagination, and thought; and, finally, abstinence from the excesses of romanticism” (qtd. by Brown 225). It was in 1856 that the French school of thought consecrated realism as a literary term. Prior to the birth of realism as a literary term, Sir Walter Scott, in 1815, identified Victorian realism in Jane Austen’s novel *Emma* when he claimed that the English novel had developed a new style of writing that focused on the values and practices of the lower classes:

“The narrative of all her novels is composed of such common occurrences as may have fallen under the observation of most folks; and her dramatis personae conduct themselves upon the motives and principles which the readers may recognise as ruling their own and that of most of their acquaintances. The kind of moral also, which these novels inculcate, applies equally to the paths of common life.” (qtd. by Travers 70)

Although Walter Scott does not use the term realism, it is evident that what he described in Jane Austen’s novel later emerged as the full blown aesthetic in the nineteenth century. Victorian realism greatly influenced Charles Dickens as noted in his creation of familiar characters with whom the reader can relate. For example, any industrial worker is able to identify with the plight of The Hands’ living and working conditions in *Hard Times*.

The German realist school of thought is similar to Scott's identification of Victorian realism. Theodore Fontane, a German novelist, praised realism for its respect of the unsubstantial details of life, its capacity for emotional empathy and the compassion of the presentation of actual life (qtd. by Travers 72). Fontane's proposition is further reinforced by Ian Watt who contends that the 'embodiment of the particulars of life' is formal realism (qtd. by Schwarz 99). George Eliot, one of the Victorian realists, and Fontane, both assert that realism is noted in the emphasis of moral emotion which the reader is compelled to comprehend with all aspects of human experiences despite their personal or social backgrounds. Although Fontane and George Eliot stress that realism should depict the truth about life and general human endeavours of people from different social classes, Walter Scott places great emphasis on realism as a depiction of the experiences of the lower members of society. While Fontane agrees with Scott's premise that the realist should reproduce everyday existence, he does not believe that realist novels should become propaganda for the oppressed and the dispossessed, simply illustrating human suffering (qtd. by Travers 72).

Although the German realist school of thought claims that realist literature should not intend to raise some form of social consciousness, one realizes that Dickens' works promote social awareness by exposing the oppression to which the poor are subjugated as noted in the presentation of the inhabitants of Tom-All-Alone's in *Bleak House*, The Hands in *Hard Times*, Joe and Biddy in *Great Expectations* and Fagin and his criminal gang in *Oliver Twist*. In the preface to *Oliver Twist*, Dickens mentions that:

"It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really do exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives; to shew them as they really are, for ever

sulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great, black, ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they may; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was greatly needed, and which would be a service to society.” (lxii)

John Peck and Martin Coyle propose that “realist novelists are often moralists, concerned with how correct conduct can be achieved in the complex conditions of the real world” (115). This suggests that realism is often concerned with highlighting the need to create a morally upright society. Dickens, therefore, ventures into social realms and deals with subclasses of humanity. He is a realist in the sense that he depicts the reality of the slums of London, the life in the workhouses and the oppressive power of the middle class. In the Preface to *Oliver Twist*, Dickens defends his portrayal of the poor and the emergence of a criminal class characterised by degradation and coarseness by declaring that:

“I saw no reason, when I wrote this book, why the very dregs of life, so long as their speech did not offend the ear, should not serve the purpose of a moral at least as its froth and cream. In this spirit, I wished to shew, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last. . . . (Oliver Twist lxi-lxii)

Dickens’ works do not only awaken social consciousness, but they also promote moral standards.

Halevi-Wise posits that among the nineteenth century realists: “Dickens exhibits the greatest propensity to stage full-blown storytelling events which furthermore tallies with his keen dramatic sense and prolific delight in fiction making” (81). Additionally, “He felt a need and

duty to tell the story of his actual world, and his sporadic uneasiness which the conventions of realism never went so far as preventing him from believing that through his novels he could and should represent the social problems of his nation” (100).

Realism is to be understood as a general tendency or purpose of conveying to the reader, whatever else may be accomplished, a strong sense of things actual in experience and within the range of the average life (Myers 2). Beauty, ugliness, even strangeness, may tinge the actuality and the normality, yet if these two qualities retain their essential nature and are distinctively evident in a novel, that book has been called realistic (2). To be classed as realist, a novel must be addressed with all seriousness and in some actuality to the broad average of humanity, and it must imply strongly that the facts narrated may be paralleled, though perhaps on a smaller scale and with less intensity in the lives of the reader and his associates (2). Thus, Dickens’ novels are realistic because in creating his characters, especially characters from the lower class, “the moving force seems to be a desire for the final and utter truth about life” (4). In search for this truth, realists have enlarged their view of normality and have gained power in the use of actuality.

Ian Watt inferred that:

“... the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (32)

Therefore, realism depends upon the symbolic connection between language and the world imitated. Dickens' characters are realistic and representative of the society to which they belong. French writers such as Gustave Flaubert in the novel *Madame Bovary* creates realistic characters whose language can be identified by the people whom they represent (Travers 890). Similarly, Charles Dickens also assigns to his characters, language that defines their social class and background. In *Bleak House*, Charles Dickens introduces the reader to a brick maker who is visited by Mrs. Pardiggle, Esther and Ada. His language is characteristic of his class:

“Is my daughter a-washin? Yes, she is a-washin. Look at the water. Smell it!
that's wot we drinks. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin,
instead! An't my place dirty? Yes, it is dirty-it's nat'rally dirty, and it's
nat'rally onwholesome. . . . (107)

The form and content of the brick maker's language informs the reader that he belongs to the lower class. The character's accent tells the reader of his background while the words expose the squalid and abject poverty. Charles Dickens' use of olfactory imagery also engages with the reader's senses by inducing one to imagine the smell of dirty water, presumably, sewage water. In this light, Dickens' genius is noted through his artistic and realistic portrayal of familiar characters and situations which the reader may recognise. Additionally, Donald Fanger and Caryl Emerson both acknowledge that language plays an important role in the development of realism and characterization in a novel:

“Realism seeks to legitimize the accurate description of a vulgar scene with
the use of language its participants would have spoken. . . for dialogue that is
the real language of ordinary men. The language of realism seeks to present

the object with maximum of emotional and stylistic deformation. (6)

The setting of a novel also fosters the development of realism through the ‘faithful and complete rendition of reality’ which is administered by the ‘representative minutiae of a given place and time as a means of representing a particular social reality in its uniqueness’ (Fanger and Emerson 7-9). For example, Charles Dickens informs the reader of the underlying issues that the novel highlights through the emphasis placed in the description of place, as noted in *Hard Times*, when he describes the industrial town, Coketown:

“It was a town of *red* brick, or of brick that would have been *red* if the smoke and *ashes* had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural *red* and *black* like the painted face of a savage. (19) (Italics mine)

The emphasis of the colour red through repetition, presents the reader with visual imagery as one tends to imagine the colour in its original state, and, after it has been spoiled by smoke. The reality of the description of Coketown, lies in the true depiction of any industrial building in the real world, which eventually becomes soiled by the smoke from the manufacturing fires and machines. Furthermore, the colour ‘red’ is also symbolic of blood, while ‘black’ reminds the reader of evil. The two colours juxtaposed against the word ‘machinery’ propels one to conclude that machines cause blood and they are evil, while the word ‘ashes’ insinuate death.

Dickens’ deliberate diction in the description of the industrial town, executes the idea that industrialisation has resulted in the injuries and deaths of some workers. This view further reiterates the perception that Dickens was a critic of the Industrial Revolution, a phenomenon characteristic of realist literature. Therefore, as attested by Thibaudet, “a realistic work attains its perfect artistic level when, from its intense truth, we pass naturally and necessarily to a great symbolic intuition” (qtd. by Fanger and Emerson 10).

The particularization of individuals in a novel also fostered the development of realism. Apart from the language and setting as components that instigate characterization, the early realists created identity and individuality for their characters. This new form of writing was employed through the naming of the characters using realistic names instead of symbolic or referential names, as was the case prior to eighteenth century writing (Ian Watt qtd. by McKeanon 370). Daniel Defoe named his protagonist Roxanna while Richardson added a surname to the name, for example, Clarissa Harlowe, Robert Lovelace, while Fielding's characters were named Colonel Fames, Sergeant Atkinson or Captain Trent. In Dickens, this canon still carries on as the reader encounters Joe Gargery, Mr. Wemmick, Esther Summerson or even Stephen Blackpool. Locke defined individual identity as a characteristic of consciousness through duration in time (qtd. by Ian Watt 15). The use of actual names further authenticates them as characters embedded in the circumstances in which they are placed. Furthermore, Ian Watt stated that, "Proper names have exactly the same function as in social life: they are the verbal expression of the particular identity of each individual person. In Literature, this function of proper names was first fully established in the novel." Therefore, the advent of realism introduced a form of writing which fostered imitations of the real world through actual place, time and characterization.

Dickens' realism is also noted in the way he is concerned with the individual psychology; for example, in *Great Expectations* Pip's psychological state is explored throughout the novel. Certainly, Dickens is aware that psychological estrangement is a condition of social existence, and he pays special attention to the psychic liabilities of social conditioning (Ermarth 182). "Nobody" frequently appears as a character in his novels, usually a victim of class privilege (182). Thus, Dickens' overriding concern lies with the individual's psyche as a part of the system that conditions it, even as a reflex of that system.

The French realist school of thought introduced a new form of realism called naturalism. Edmond and Jules Goncourt were the first to attempt the formulation of a naturalist approach to society and literature (Travers 74). They argued that the modern writer as a scientist, should delve into the realm of the impure and the debased, which is further reiterated by Balzac as he describes naturalism as an approach that “banishes ideals and moral standards in favour of recognition of the facts of self interest and personal appetite (qtd. by Travers 71). The age of realism and naturalism is characterised by “the decline of religious faith, the rise of nihilism and the collapse of traditional structures” leading to “personal happiness and self-realization” (Travers 73). Naturalism acknowledges the actions of an individual as controlled by nature.

This new mode of writing led authors to challenge the early Victorian mode of writing based on decorum and morals by depicting adultery and murder as noted in Emile Zola’s novel *Therese Raquin*. Therefore, he further proposes that “people are completely dominated by their nerves and blood, and are without free will, drawn into each action of their lives by the inexorable laws of their physical nature” (qtd. by Travers 75).

French novelist Honore de Balzac, wrote in the preface to his magnum opus collection titled *La Comedie Humaine*: “Society resembled Nature. Does not Society make man, according to the environment in which he lives and acts, into as many different men as there are species in zoology?” (liii). In support of Balzac’s declaration, French novelist Emile Zola, also posited that writers must observe people and society objectively as if they were scientists about to draw conclusions from their experiments and observations (Brian and Hurt 972). Zola’s conviction also states that “human destiny was shaped by environment and hereditary factors” (qtd. by Travers 75). Therefore, society and backdrop influences the actions, thoughts and character of a person. As confirmed by Zola in the preface to his novel *Therese Raquin*, naturalism is a “study of temperament and the profound modifications of an organism subject to the pressures of environments and circumstances” (23). Furthermore, naturalism is an extension or continuation

of realism with the addition of pessimist determinism (Reuben). Naturalism is also called “later realism” which consists of pseudo – scientific connections, its experimental novels and its assumption that the norm of human experience is the extreme (Stang 5).

Naturalist novels or “scientific novels” are created by placing characters with known inherited characteristics into a carefully defined environment and observing the resulting behaviour. The principal characters are representative types rather than striking individuals, for example, in *Hard Times*, The Hands are representative of the workers in an industrialised society. Therefore, characters in naturalist novels are selected to illustrate realistic aspects of society. Naturalism is also characterized by a pervasive pessimism about humanity, for example, Emile Zola’s and Thomas Hardy’s novels are often characterized by a sense of doom, culminating in a final catastrophe.

Naturalism purports to tell the truth about life as it had been revealed by science and professes to follow exactly the scientific methods that involve the collection of detailed evidence, induction from this evidence and impersonal setting of the conclusions (Stang 23). Anton Chekov, Russian realist novelist, wrote in his letter to M. V. Kiselev in 1887, that “a writer must be as objective as a chemist: he must abandon the subjective line. . .” (qtd. by Travers 115). Naturalist writers offer that, in an industrial world, it is likely that there is competition and a struggle for survival, like Charles Darwin explained in his essay “The Evolution of Man” in 1854 (Travers 893). Literary critic, Conrad Alberti, in *The twelve articles of Realism*, also added that:

“since the laws of nature, which regulate mechanical events in the physical world, also determine all intellectual events and phenomena, so art is also subject to exactly the same laws as the mechanical world.

principles such as the struggle for existence, natural selection, heredity and adaptability to the environment are just as eternally valid in art and the history of art as they are in the physiological development of organisms.” (qtd. by Travers 76).

Thus, the subject matter of naturalist novels deals with those raw and unpleasant experiences which reduce characters to “degrading” behaviour in their struggle to survive. In support of this view, Anton Chekov also proposes that:

“Human nature is imperfect, and it would, therefore, be strange to find only righteous people on this earth. But to think that the task of literature is to gather the pure grain from the muck heap, is to reject literature itself. Aritistic literature is called so just because it depicts life as it really is. Its aim is truth, - unconditional and honest.” (qtd. By Travers 115)

Naturalist literature, like realism, aims at depicting the imperfections of life by creating characters who belong to the lower class who are also yearning to survive bypassing morals and decorum. In *Great Expectations*, characters like Compeyson dupe Miss Havisham as a way of acquiring wealth in order to survive. Fagin and his criminal gang in *Oliver Twist*, resort to a criminal life in order to have food on their table. Prostitution is another degrading behaviour in which Nancy in *Oliver Twist* engages in order to survive.

Although, the characters in naturalist novels are conditioned and controlled by environment, heredity, chance, or instinct, sometimes have compensating humanistic values which affirm their individuality and life (Pizer 62). This statement is further confirmed in *Hard Times* through the description of Sleary’s circus members who were illiterate and quite disorderly:

“They all assumed to be mighty rakish and knowing, they were not very tidy in their private dress, they were not at all orderly in their domestic arrangements, and the combined literature of the whole company would have produced but a poor letter on any subject.” (Dickens 31)

The circumstances of the members of Sleary’s company are obviously controlled by their environment; they are uneducated because they do not have the privileged rights to education due to their social class. However, like the middle class members, they also possess virtues:

“Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the every-day virtues of any class of people in the world.” (31)

Similarly in *Great Expectations*, Magwitch is a convict but he is Pip’s benefactor, a sign of his generosity, despite his social class or his employment.

The environment created by the Industrial Revolution inflamed every person’s desire to survive despite an economically changing world. The capitalists oppress the poor who work for them, so that they may gain huge profits out of industry. Ultimately, the poor are left to work harder and they are treated inhumanely. Furthermore, the lower classes live in slums, filled with bleakness and dilapidation which breeds characters who are sometimes brutal and coarse. The milieu in which the poor live is characterized by monotony and a dull round of daily existence as illustrated in *Hard Times*:

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful.

All the public inscriptions in the town were painted alike, in
severe characters of black and white. The jail might have been
the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall
might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything
that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. (19-20)

The passage demonstrates that the workers have been provided with a hospital, in case of injuries at work and a prison for correctional services. The jail signifies their bondage to their circumstances; they are prisoners of the machine and industrialisation. Additionally, the infirmary brings to the reader, images of sickness and death. Silhouetted against a vivid environment, the new industrial landscape of Coketown, the textile workers' lifelessness stands out in bold relief (Spector 365). Thus, Coketown serves as a model of the grimy factory town and as a demonstration of the power of Dickens' naturalism.

Similar to Thomas Hardy, Dickens is also concerned with nature and its influence on humanity. In *Hard Times*, the factory workers in Coketown are exploited through unbearable working conditions: "The atmosphere of those Fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoom: and their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert" (99). There is high pollution in the industrial town, therefore the rivers turn purple: "Down upon the river that was black and thick with dye. . ." (99). Due to the appalling living conditions in which the poor are forced to endure, they resort to alcoholism:

"Then came the Teetotal Society, who complained that these same
people would get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they did

get drunk, and proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine (except medal), would induce them to forego their custom of getting drunk. Then came the chemist and druggist, with other tabular statements, showing that when they didn't get drunk, they took opium. (21)

As a naturalist, Dickens presents the lives of the urban poor revealing his belief that industrialization devastates humanity and society just as it degrades the environment. Dickens' naturalism illustrates how the industrial machine demeans men, women and children, subjecting them to abject poverty, anguish and injustice. His presentation of the dehumanized characters comes from a reading of the new industrial scene that is based on the familiar assumption of both realism and naturalism, that men must be like their environment, the workers should be like the most striking and visible aspect of their lives, the machines (Spector 372). Thus the expectation that the workers will be a violent, unthinking mob is based explicitly on their contiguity with the violent, unthinking machines (372).

Naturalism places characters in a certain environment and shows how it influences the characters. In this case, Dickens has placed his characters in a world controlled by the industrial machine, a world where the industry is owned by the middle class capitalists, who oppress the poor. Moreover, naturalism confirms that people are shaped and influenced by the environment in which they live. Through a naturalist representation of his characters, Dickens explicitly shows that the working classes are poor because of the competitive world in which they live, as they are exploited by the capitalist industrialists. As a naturalist and a realist writer, he examines the impact of environment on human behaviour and realistically depicts the dehumanizing effects of the Industrial Revolution on the poor.

2.2 Feminism and Dickens' novels

In the introduction to Lizbeth Goodman's *Literature and Gender*, feminism is defined as the movement against the cultural and historical subordination of women and the struggle for economic, political and social emancipation (x). Feminism was an aesthetic that attained prominence and significance in the early twentieth century, which resulted in the rise of many female writers such as George Elliot, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Bronte and Elizabeth Gaskell (Travers 900). However, before the term feminism became a literary aesthetic, early Victorian writers like Jane Austen had already written works that were later recognized as feminist literature. Feminism is the women's quest for recognition, power and authority, and, it attempts to relocate women beyond the confines of their patriarchal society (901). Women fight for emancipation because "they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species" (Mary Wollstonecraft). Victorian feminism was the women's struggle for equality in the Victorian society in the political, social and economic aspects that regimented life. Victorian feminism plays a major role in impacting the writings of Victorian writers, both male and female. This section will provide an overview of the Victorian gender constructions and Charles Dickens' writings in perspective of Victorian feminism.

In the Victorian society, the home was an important sphere and it also outlined the relations between husband and wife in the domestic sphere, and on a larger scale, the relations between women and men. Mary Lyndon Shanley points out that "when most Victorians spoke or wrote about themselves, they testified to the importance of home and hearth in their constellation of values" (4). Therefore, domesticity was an important value in the Victorian society as it was inseparable from motherhood, and it was portrayed as sufficient for women and many middle

class women regarded motherhood and domestic life as a substitute for women's productive role (Abrams).

The ideology of the home was greatly emphasized by the Victorians and they also believed that it was important to preserve the identity of the home even at the cost of demeaning any claim by adult women, daughters and wives to social and legal equality, individuality or rights independent of the men they were attached to (Ruckert). The home was also sanctified as an island of tranquillity and obedience which was a blessing to the patriarchal rule of the male head who completely controlled the spouse and barred her from the public life of politics and economy. This tyrannical order sprang from the view of the natural sex difference which maintained that women's function in nature was child bearing and care providers; therefore, they had to be confined to private life. Liberal political theorists such as John Locke and David Wootton believed that nature was the realm out of which people evolved to become human, to form societies, governments, social contacts and the state, which created a class and gender distinction between men and women (263). It was such patriarchal beliefs that Victorian feminists had to challenge and overturn in order to form the fairer and more equal society that they envisioned. Therefore, Victorian feminism was a struggle against women's confinement to the private life and their yearning for belonging to the public world of politics and business.

In the Victorian society, the male figure was the symbol of authority, which shows the patriarchal nature of the society. Charles Dickens portrays this ideology in his works as noted at the beginning of *Great Expectations* when Pip is at the graveyard looking at his family's tombstones. The authority of Pip's father is confirmed by the way in which the inscriptions on the tombstones of his mother and siblings refer back to the fact that they are subject to him. Pip's father is the only one who is named and described as "late of this parish" while Pip's mother, is

described as “wife of the above” (*Great Expectations* 3-4). The tombstone text inscribes divisions of power within the family which are registered in Pip’s reading and the interpretation of the appearance of his lost parents accords with Victorian stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Waters 15). To speak of Victorian feminism is to refer to the fight against such stereotypes and to create equality between the masculine and feminine world.

Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the early British feminists, in her work *Vindication of the Rights of Women* established that “Girls marry merely to better themselves, to borrow a significant vulgar phrase, and have such perfect power over their hearts as not to permit themselves to fall in love till a man with a superiour fortune offers.” Due to the intensive industrialism, urbanization and social change, there emerged a massive competition within the new middle class who controlled the economy and this was a world controlled by men in which no woman could belong (Nead). In order to acquire economic stability, women were forced to marry men of a higher economic status as depicted by Jane Austen in her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which satirically depicts Mrs. Bennet’s pursuit of finding financially stable husbands for her daughters. However, Charlotte Bronte utterly repudiates marriages for inconveniences in *Jane Eyre* when Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane:

“Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automation?-a machine without feelings? And can you bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soul and heartless? You think wrong!- I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart. . .” (278)

Jane's rejection of Mr. Rochester's marriage proposal is an assertion of women's denial to marry for economic stability. Jane affirms her possession of feelings and shows that she will not marry a man who will treat her as a mere machine. Bronte's view of marriage is that of equality and mutual feelings, one of the key aspects which was being promoted by Victorian feminism. In this way, she rejects the traditional view of marriage in which a woman should marry a financially stable man, in place of love. Bronte once told her publisher that she perceives economic dependency as "the great curse of single female life" because it forces the woman to marry for economic reasons (qtd. by Zlotnick 3). In addition, the creation of an assertive character like Jane, who rejects a marriage proposal, is a sign of a "desire to escape the oppressive social order" (qtd. by Zlotnick 3).

Unfortunately, marriage did not entirely offer economic stability and independence for women since the Victorian society was very patriarchal. There were laws which forced women to be subservient to their husbands; for example, the common law doctrine of covertures, which the Victorians felt defined roles ordained by the natural and theological order, which meant that through marriage, man and woman became one person (Shanley 8). Therefore, married women could not independently sign contracts nor draft valid wills and any married woman's property legally belonged to her husband.

The struggle for women to be recognized as equal entities to men in society is further reiterated by Charlotte Bronte through the creation of the character Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* who is physically strong but banished from society because she is said to be "mentally disturbed." This is an indication of the belief that middle and upper class women were regarded as inherently sick if they tried to step beyond their prescribed roles (Flekke 28). In the Victorian society, it was

difficult to step out of the female boundaries and any woman who attempted or succeeded was immediately punished or became a social outcast. Charles Dickens also depicts this phenomenon in *Great Expectations* through the character of Mrs. Joe Gargery who is aggressive and authoritative, but she is immediately brought to her place through her attack by Orlick and becomes submissive and dependent.

The Industrial Revolution brought about change in focus on women's labour. Women had the opportunity to explore prospects outside the family establishment or even earn money (Beddoe 92). However, the Victorian society maintained the view that a working woman would make a potentially irresponsible wife and mother. Writers like Charles Dickens also portray this ideology in the novel *Bleak House*, through the creation of Mrs. Jellyby, who is preoccupied with the colonization in Africa. However, she is portrayed as an incompetent mother who is unable to manage her children and her household. Victorian feminism was largely concerned with emancipating women from the private world of domesticity and gaining equal rights and recognition in the public world dominated by men. In the Victorian society, a woman who attempted to step beyond her female boundaries was immediately punished and could also be ostracized from society. This idea was largely prominent before most laws that protected women's rights were passed. Most Victorian writers, both male and female, were greatly aware of feminism, but some male writers supported the patriarchal ideology that women were to be subservient to men. On the other hand, most female Victorian writers were in support of women's emancipation, thus their novels depicted heroines who were either independent or could step out of the man-made female boundaries.

Sherry Ortner notes that in every society: "the psychic mode associated with women seems to stand at both the bottom and at the top of the scale of human modes of relating" (qtd. by Gilbert

and Gubar 814). Ortner further explains that “both the subversive feminine symbols (witches, evil eye, menstrual pollution, castrating mothers) and the feminine symbols of transcendence (mother, goddesses, merciful dispensers of salvation, female symbols of justice) can appear from certain points of view to stand both under and over the sphere of culture’s hegemony”(814). Thus, male writers like Charles Dickens create two types of women in their novels, the “subversive feminine symbols” and “the feminine symbols of transcendence” (814). Therefore, “the woman is denied the autonomy, the subjectivity that the pen represents, she is not only excluded from culture, but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysteries and intransigent “otherness” which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing” (814).

Likewise, Dickens’ also creates characters who represent the extremes of cultural hegemony, the “pure woman” or the woman who is confronted by “fear” or “loathing”. The images of “angel” and “monster” have been so ubiquitous throughout literature by men and much preference is always given to the “ideal” woman who is usually an embodiment of true femininity as shaped by patriarchy (Gilbert and Gubar 812). The “monstrous” female characters are women who are searching for liberty, but Dickens kills the rebellious nature in them and creates vulnerable women as seen in Mrs. Joe Gargery and even the murderer Molly. However, John Ruskin affirmed that the woman’s “power” is not for rule, nor for battle and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for “sweet orderings” of “domesticity” (qtd. by Gilbert and Gubar 816). Even though Dickens is a male writer who conforms to the Victorian ideology of women, he strikes the reader as an author who is aware of the women’s plight and their yearning for significance and belonging in a patriarchal society which abuses and marginalizes them.

However, Dickens does not depict female characters who have economic liberty as those expressed by later feminist writers. His female characters are women who are yearning for financial freedom, unlike the modern women who are independent and self – sufficient as declared by Virginia Woolf that “The ordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman” (qtd. in Showalter 9). The Victorian women were economically dependent on men as a means of survival as noted in most Victorian novels particularly those by Jane Austen whose female characters are usually in search of propertied men.

The Victorian society denied any forms of sexual feelings in women and restricted the role of sex to a procreative one (Seidman 47). Women were supposed to suppress their sexual desires because the society valued purity in a woman. Victorian women were also supposed to maintain virginity until marriage. However, characters like Nancy in *Oliver Twist* become a prostitute and break the Victorian ideology of the woman as an angel or virgin because she has multiple sexual partners. On the other hand, Lady Dedlock also subverts the ideology on female purity by conceiving out of wedlock. Both characters are depictions of women in a quest for sexual freedom in a society which forces them to suppress their sexuality. Not only noted in *Bleak House*, but also in *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations*, and *Oliver Twist*, the radical subplots conflicting with conservative main plots do lead to ambivalences and ambiguities that highlight sexual injustices, also specifying legal, social and political injustices (70).

The Victorian Society denied women power and authority and confined them to domesticity which resulted in their marginalization. Dickens’ characters like Mrs. Joe Gargery and Molly in *Great Expectations* are also victims of an exploitative society. They realize their predicament in a society which does not recognize them as viable members. Charles Dickens focuses on the importance of the traditional roles of women by emphasizing what happens when traditional

female roles become altered. He includes Mrs. Joe Gargery and Molly as destructive women to reinforce the importance of Victorian patriarchy and domesticity (“Destructive Women Characters”). Mrs. Joe Gargery physically challenges her husband Joe and this behaviour represents a woman’s search for independence. She possesses a destructive personality and she does not see motherhood as anything she should enjoy (“Destructive Women Characters”). Furthermore, she despises motherhood and housewifery because she does not regard both as worthy roles. However, she is punished and eventually submits to the society’s constraints. Mrs. Joe Gargery is punished because she has deliberately stepped outside her prescribed role as wife and mother and she does not in any way resemble a traditional wife (“Destructive Women Characters”).

However, Dickens’ attention to the plight of abused or oppressed women indicates his recognition and sympathy towards them, yet he is forced to conform to the Victorian ideology that women’s place is only in the domestic sphere and any woman who fulfils that role automatically fulfils her responsibility. Moreover, Dickens’ novels portray a society in which a “grotesque patriarchal system of values – beyond the control or comprehension of any individual character – has now transformed the whole society into a gigantic parody of the corrupted family” (Barickman, Macdonald and Stark 64). Therefore, to say that Mrs. Joe Gargery “assumes the forms and emotional power of masculine despotism” is an indication of the destructive nature of patriarchy (60).

Although Dickens accepted the sexual conventions of his time, his novels expressed “the power of Victorian patriarchal society to distort and complicate sexual relations” (Barickman, Macdonald and Stark 18). Charles Dickens together with the other major male novelists such as Thackeray, Trollope and Collins regarded the “corruption of basic sexual identities and roles as

the chief abuse of the patriarchal social system” (60). This also means that the chief offense of the Victorian patriarchal system was economic injustice and this is particularly noted in Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* in which the character Becky exploits her femininity for economic reasons while Osborne’s marriage to Amelia Sedley has complications which arise from his economic and social ambitions (177-178).

In summary, a feminist study of Dickens’ female characters determines that Dickens as a male writer, was sympathetic with the plight of Victorian women. His representation of the female characters is a portrayal of the Victorian ideologies and perceptions towards women. Unlike the other novelists of his time who strongly promoted the Victorian gender constructions through their writings, Dickens subtly criticizes the treatment of women by the patriarchal society.

2.3 Perspectives on Dickens' works

Charles Dickens is one of England's greatest novelists who have played a great part in the development of the novel. He is known for his truthful depiction of life and even his creation of realistic characters. Dickens' works have been influenced by his experiences as a young boy, when he was forced to work at a blacking factory, a warehouse which manufactured, packages and distributed blacking polish for cleaning boots and shoes, in order to fend for his family and himself. Many critics have evaluated Dickens' works positively, thus increasing his literary credibility.

Others proclaim that Dickens' novels are masterpieces and one can tell that he is a creative writer and he is greatly aware of his social surroundings. As a social critic, his concern with human nature makes him a humanist, noticed in the way that he is concerned with people as part of society, and their actions and desires. Hippolyte Taine, one of Dickens contemporaries and critic says:

“Take away the grotesque characters, who are only introduced to fill up and to excite laughter, and you will find that all Dickens' characters belong to two classes-people who have feelings and emotions, and people who have none. He contrasts the souls which nature creates with those which society deforms. One of his last novels, *Hard Times*, is an abstract of all of the rest. He therefore exalts instinct above reason, intuition of heart above positive knowledge; he attacks education built on statistics, figures and facts; overwhelms the positive and mercantile spirit with misfortune and ridicule; and the aristocrat falls

foul of manufacturing towns, combats the pride, harshness, selfishness of the merchant towns of smoke and mud, which fetter the body in an artificial atmosphere, and mind in a factitious existence. He satirizes oppressive society; mourns over oppressed nature; and his elegiac genius, like his satirical genius, finds ready to his hand in the English world around him, the sphere which it needs for its development. . . . (qtd by Collins 341)

In accordance with Taine's assertion, Dickens is a satirical writer and he attacks the oppressive society and the rigid education system in *Hard Times*. Moreover, the depiction of the working class in *Hard Times* is an indication of Dickens' awareness of the urban slums and the living conditions of the poor and the oppressive system to which they were subjected.

John Ruskin applauds the realism of Dickens' works saying:

"The essential value and truth of Dickens' writings have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons, merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature. Allowing for his manner of telling them, the things he tells us are always true." (qtd. by Gilbert and Gubar 31)

Miller also says that Dickens' "object has been to present little pictures of life and manners as they really are" (qtd. by Lew 55). Both Miller and John Ruskin's comments are a confirmation of the assertion that Charles Dickens is a realist writer who achieves realism through caricature, for example, a character like Mr. Gradgrind in *Hard Times* is a caricature because of his obsession with "facts" and the education system he introduces.

George Elliot, acclaimed Victorian novelist says:

"We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering

the external traits of our town population; . . .his preternaturally virtuous poor children and artisans . . . or that the working classes are in a condition to enter at once into a millennial state of altruism, wherein everyone is caring for everyone else, and no one for himself.” (54-5)

George Eliot applauds Dickens’ artistry in realistically depicting the lower classes and their virtuous nature. Other than the poor, Dickens also portrays in his works, the aristocracy and the middle classes as attested by Lewes, “has proved his power by a popularity almost unexampled, embracing all classes” (qtd. by Wall 192). His ability to describe the poverty and hardships experienced by the poor is achieved by confronting the harsh reality of the English society. Dickens understands the needs of the lower class because of his childhood experiences, and he believes that the lower class will do away with its poverty once society becomes a place where selfishness does not exist; therefore he admonishes that every person should not only be concerned about his or her interests, but those of the people around him. Dickens’ novels portray the harsh reality of life juxtaposed against the backdrop of the Industrial Revolution, and also solutions for social change.

In addition, Dickens’ realism has been highly questioned by French criticism. Realism is associated with reproduction of the physical world, by accumulation of facts and details and continual reference to sense experience (Flibbert 23). As a realist in this sense, Dickens’ works have been found deficient in many ways and the clutter of details is a disruptive feature and contributes to a general impression of disorder in his work (Janin qtd. by Flibbert 23). Although to Charles, a French critic of Dickens works, claims that he uses facts as opposed to ideas which gives vividness to his descriptions, he goes on to say that “Dickens’ ability to reproduce the physical details and the peculiar quality of a scene does not compensate for the thinness of his

characters or for other weaknesses in his works” (qtd. by Flibbert 23). On the other hand, Dudley says that Dickens intentionally displays disorder in the lives of his characters to gain the reader’s sympathy for them and he does so by appealing exclusively to elements of terror and brutality which suggests an inability to analyze and depict inner moral conflict and disorder (qtd. by Flibbert 23). Despite the criticism on Dickens’ works, he still achieves his goal of depicting the poverty stricken workers and the industrial environment which leads to their exploitation and dehumanization.

The truth in Dickens’ works grows out of a talent for portraying the visible life of the present rather than the invisible realities of thought and emotion (Flibbert 24). Dickens is more concerned with the impact of the social world on the individual character which refutes Ermarth’s assertion that “Dickens commitment to social intelligibility has certain consequences for his conception of character, consequences which from his day onward, have been interpreted as signs that Dickens was incapable of portraying inner life” (182). Charles Dickens’ works were written during the nineteenth century, a period in which the England was undergoing socio – economic changes which affected the environment and also altered people’s lives. Therefore, Dickens comes in as a writer who adopts realism and naturalism, which are truthful portrayals of the turmoil and social upheaval experienced by the English society. One needs to understand that a portrayal of visible life is ‘realism’, a mode of writing common in the development of the nineteenth century novel. Therefore, the notion of truth in Dickens’ writings is viewed in the sense of fidelity to the actual conditions of life in contemporary England (Montegut qtd. by Flibbert 24).

Dickens' characters like Wemmick in *Great Expectations*, take on emblematic value in ways that distort the sense of ordinary relations central to realistic agreements (Ermarth 184). The almost mechanical inwardness of Dickens' characters, expressed through the representation of their development is most often a sign of impoverishment. Dickens' narrative technique stresses the unitary nature of consciousness and the common forms of experience seen from the margins, thus the narrator focuses not on the depths of personality, but on the depth of the social world taken as a whole (184). His work thus demonstrates the flexibility of realistic conventions. However, the deeply fractured personalities in Dickens' novels are effects traceable to social institutions that, having developed a life of their own, destroy the creative tension between private sense and public role (184).

Dickens has been accused of patriarchy because of his beliefs that a woman's place is in the domestic sphere, as evidenced by Ayres' comment that "Dickens' writing shows his belief in patriarchal shepherding" (66). His portrayal of the female characters either as conventional, for example, Biddy and Esther, or deviant as illustrated through Nancy the prostitute or Mrs. Joe Gargery, is an indication of the typical Victorian ideologies about gender which confined the woman to the home and within marriage. If ever a woman attempts to challenge a male or steps out of the boundaries laid for her, she is automatically a demon or a fallen woman. After reading Charles Dickens' texts, one is left with the impression that he is a patriarch because his texts translate the perception of women in nineteenth century English society. Hall suggests that the nineteenth century was a time of troubled gender relations, and Charles Dickens' works and those of other male writers of his time such as Alfred Tennyson, William Thackeray, Wilkie Collins and Anthony Trollope were "resistant, ambivalent or panicked responses to strong, rebellious and unnatural women" (185). Charles Dickens, as a Victorian male writer, seeks "to

fix patriarchy, to secure it and reform it,” in case it will be “emasculated by female aggression” (180).

From a feminist perspective, one could almost mistake Charles Dickens as one of the male writers who strongly uphold the Victorian ideology of domesticity as the only place where women belong. The confinement of women to household duties and her exclusion from political and economic affairs reaffirms the invisibility of women within the English society. Dickens wrote at a time when women were fighting to establish their human existence through the struggle for economic and social empowerment. The perception of women by men is characterized by criticism and cynicism, which is reiterated by Charles Dickens in the presentation of characters such as the spiritually dead Miss Havisham, who was once wealthy. When she is introduced in *Great Expectations*, she is a gothic figure whose life has halted due to her defeat by male supremacy. Other than Miss Havisham, there is also Mrs. Joe Gargery, who is authoritative, but she is represented as an aggressive figure, because the Victorian society could not accept women with the same commanding powers as men. The existence of powerful women in a patriarchal society brings threat and emasculation to the male figures, which is a fact noted in the works of Victorian male writers. However, Dickens’ presentation of some women as grotesque characters is a simple portrayal of his society’s attitude towards women who refuse to be submissive or adhere to society’s constructions.

Dickens’ works have also been read from a Marxist approach particularly *Great Expectations*. Vincent Blackshadow says that “Dickens wrote about class and he was undoubtedly motivated by his own social and economic experiences. His empathy with the experience of the proletariat greatly informed much of his work. Also the popularity of his work signified attitudes of and towards the proletariat.” Thus, from a Marxist perspective, *Great Expectations* advances the

classical anti-Hegelian Marxist theory that material circumstances shape ideas: ‘It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness’ (Marx 179). This is noted in *Hard Times* when The Hands held a strike, which was a sign of the awareness of their exploitation. Dickens’ and Marx’s picture of the working class seems to integrate with Engels examination of the conditions of working class in England (Blackshadow). However, it is difficult to fully say that Dickens writing is Marxist because he does not conform to the themes of Marxist novels whose characters are representatives of the philosophies expounded by Marx.

Dickens’ works have been highly accredited although they have also received some criticism. Some French critics have pointed out that his works are weak and his characters lack depth however, they failed to acknowledge that he is a realist writer; therefore, he places much emphasis on the depiction of the lower class people and their living conditions. Dickens cannot be discredited for failure to portray the invisible emotion and thoughts of his characters because this is a mode of writing that was introduced years after his death. Therefore, he does succeed in portraying the actual sordid and squalid lives of the poor. Other scholars have also suggested that Dickens’ works can be analyzed from a Marxist reading which is possible, but one has to bear in mind that his works cannot be grouped under Marxist novels because they do not conform to the philosophical portrayal of characters that defines a Marxist novel. In summation, Dickens is a greatly acclaimed English novelist whose works have been read for centuries and they have continued to uphold the fame which they had at the time of their publications despite the criticisms that have been laid against them.

CHAPTER THREE: The Poor in perspective

3.1. The Poor Law Act

The Poor Law Act of 1834 was a system of laws which was introduced in England and the rest of Britain to provide public relief under a system which required that all those who required assistance such as the widows, the sick and the unemployed, had to be accommodated at the workhouses. According to the Poor Law Act itself, there is no section which stipulated that the poor were to be harshly treated, but the commissioners of the Poor Laws were the ones who created the policy of brutality. Roberts stated: “These commissioners, three in number and with extensive powers to form and supervise the newly created poor law unions, wished local guardians to give relief to able – bodied paupers only if they entered a workhouse” (98). This raises concern for the sick who were most likely forced into labour despite their physical condition. Workhouses were institutions in which the poor were housed and they worked in order to receive some relief, thus it was called “indoor relief” (Roberts 98). At the workhouses one could find men, women, children, the old and sick who were allocated the specific workhouses by the parishes in the districts to which they belonged. For example, a poor man or family living in Boston was expected to be admitted to a Boston workhouse as directed by a parish council or “beadle.”

The rise of capitalism brought notable prosperity within the middle class, yet the Industrial Revolution was a period of immense poverty among the majority of the English citizens. Despite claims that industrialization created employment, one should also bear in mind that the transition from rural to urbanization could also economically affects a lot of people, as there is high competition to survive in a capitalist society. Some people managed to become members of the

middle class or the bourgeoisie, while others became skilled artisans, tradesmen and professionals. However, every member of society did not belong to the middle class, there were people who belonged to the lower class who were mostly unemployed, and the Victorian middle class labelled them “paupers.” This was a class of people who were receiving the poor relief as stipulated by the poor law. These “paupers” were usually people who were not only unemployed or sick, but received insufficient wages.

Prior to the Poor Law Amendment Act, relief was distributed to the poor citizens of the English society whether they were employed or not. However, in 1834, the Act implemented a new dimension whereby anyone who needed relief was required to become a member of a workhouse and they had to work in order to receive assistance. However, it is stated that outdoor relief still continued and the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws of 1832 – 1834 emphasized that outdoor relief to the able – bodied poor was a “master evil of the present system” (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws Report 279). From the orthodox poor law administrator’s perspective, aid in the form of wages was a serious crime because some of these people were employed; henceforth it upset the labour market (Rose 607). The Royal Commission stipulated that outdoor relief was to be stopped and assistance was to be given in “well regulated workhouses” (Royal Commission on the Poor Laws Report 262). The question still remains whether this was a plausible solution and besides, outdoor relief still continued, which shows the central authority for poor law administration’s failure to stop it. However, even though the allowance system continued, it was now “relief in aid of small and irregular earnings” (Rose 609).

The withdrawal of outdoor relief was further enforced by the government and the task was given to political Poor Law Commissioners who issued orders to Boards of Guardians, who were the custodians of poor relief. After a General Order was issued as the Outdoor Relief Prohibitory

Order in 1844, every able – bodied male or female was to receive relief only in the Union workhouse (Glen 208). Every person who received relief was not allowed to be employed anywhere else other than the workhouse. However, the question still remains whether the disabled and the old who were also required to work at the workhouses.

The Board of Guardians stated that it was more expensive to keep a “pauper” in a workhouse because they also became responsible of all the costs and need of the rest of the family, whereas outdoor relief consisted of lower wages which could be supplemented by other earnings from other private charities (Glen 209). Such a situation exposes the mistreatment and starvation to which the poor were subjected at the workhouses because there were not enough funds to cover clothing and food requirements for all the people in these shelters. Moreover, the allowance system demoralized the poor because “those who applied for reliefs were invariably given a meagre pittance which both they and the Guardians knew was insufficient to maintain them” (Rose 620). Thus, the poor law has also been described as a “harsh, repressive system shot through with notions of social control” (Webb and Webb 49). After receiving their dole, the poor had to find other means of surviving such as working long hours for low wages and unpleasant tasks, or worse, begging and stealing. Such circumstances raised concerns on the government’s duty to curb such abject poverty as the relief received by the poor was insufficient. However, some guardians justified the stringent conditions at the workhouses by claiming that the resources of the ratepayers were insufficient (King 366).

The most criticized aspect of the Poor Law Act was the administration of the workhouses. Roberts commented, “The principal cruelty of the New Poor Law was the workhouse” (98). Life in the workhouse was quite harsh as most of the Board of Guardians did not provide adequate care for the poor. The workhouse inmates were not given enough clothing and the clothes they

received on arrival were the same ones they wore every day of their lives, whether working or sleeping. Below is a sketch showing children in a workhouse during meal time:



Picture 1: “Eye Witness Accounts”

From the above drawing, one can also notice that most of the children were shoeless and their clothes were ragged. This realistic depiction of barefooted children being fed on bread and gruel reveals the lack of care that was given to workhouse inmates, especially the vulnerable children. As noted from the picture, these assailable children were not provided with adequate clothing to protect them from the cold English winter, which left them susceptible to austere living conditions. Such a representation is also an appeal to society to recognize the government’s failure to improve the unpleasant living conditions of the workhouse inmates.

The following is a testimony by an inmate Sarah Carpenter who was interviewed by The Ashton Chronicle on 23 June in 1849:

“Our common food was oatcake. It was thick and coarse.

This oatcake was put into cans. Boiled milk and water was poured into it. This was our breakfast and supper. Our dinner

was potato pie with boiled bacon it, a bit here and a bit there,
so thick with fat we could scarce eat it, though we were hungry
enough to eat anything. Tea we never saw, nor butter. We had
cheese and brown bread once a year. We were only allowed three
meals a day though we got up at five in the morning and worked
till nine at night.” (“Eye Witness Accounts”)

Other than being inadequately clothed, it is evident that the workhouse inmates were also malnourished, which further confirms the notion that the government was not providing enough funds to feed the poor, or they were misused by the Board of Guardians. One of the popular newspapers in the nineteenth century, *The Times*, was well known for its criticism of the poor law administration and the treatment of the workhouse inmates, and one of the newspaper correspondents wrote: “Is it not Sir, horrible, that you cannot now take up a newspaper on any day without finding one or more accounts of starvation” (qtd. by Roberts 98). The newspaper also reported that at the Bridgewater workhouse “a meagre diet and congestion killed off 41 percent of the average number of inmates” (qtd. by Roberts 98). Moreover, it was also discovered that at the Westthampnett workhouse two children died of starvation and another was forced to eat a mouse as there was no food (98). Below is a testimony from one of the Poor Law Guardians, Emmeline Pankhurst who further substantiated the unpleasantness and harshness to which the inmates were subjected:

“When I came into office I found that the law was being very
harshly administered. The old board had been made up of the
kind of men who are known as rate savers. They were guardians,
not of the poor but of the rates... For instance, the inmates were being

very poorly fed. I found the old folks in the workhouse sitting on backless forms, or benches. They had no privacy, no possessions, not even a locker. After I took office I gave the old people comfortable Windsor chairs to sit in, and in a number of ways we managed to make their existence more endurable.” (“My Own Story” qtd. in “1834 Poor Law”)

The inmates were treated inhumanely by the authorities and their survival could only be sustained by some of the Guardians who were sensitive and merciful like the renowned Emmeline Pankhurst. However the poor administration of the workhouses is also an indication of the lack of proper management by the board members who were the overseers of the workhouses. This also raises questions on the role of the English government in fending for the poor and its failure to administer the proper care for the poor.

Young inmates were even more vulnerable to malnutrition and winter diseases as their workhouse uniforms were not designed to withstand harsh English winters. Emmeline Pankhurst’s autobiography further reinforces this point as she describes the condition of the young children and the uniforms they wore:

“The first time I went into the place I was horrified to see little girls seven and eight years on their knees scrubbing the cold stones of the long corridors. These little girls were clad, summer and winter, in thin cotton frocks, low in the neck and short sleeved. At night they wore nothing at all, night dresses being considered too good for paupers. The fact that bronchitis was epidemic among them most of the time had not suggested to the guardians any

change in the fashion of their clothes.” (qtd. in “1834 Poor Law”)

Discrimination is also very evident in this passage as it shows that being young and also poor, subjects the children to cruelty and deprivation of basic needs such as warm clothing in winter, thus they suffered from illnesses such as bronchitis and worse still, pneumonia.

Not only were workhouse inmates victims of starvation, but they were also flogged and detained as if they were in prison. It is reported that at a workhouse in Bradford, a woman was “bared to her waist and whipped” while at Crediton, two inmates, Lock and Dart, “were confined to an unheated, damp, windowless, floorless, bedless outhouse and were, one day, taken to the courtyard, stripped naked and mopped with cold water” (Roberts 98). One wonders why life in the workhouses was harsh and brutal and the answer is provided by one of the assistant poor law commissioners, James Kay who said: “Our intention is to make the workhouse as like prisons as possible” (Hansard 1014). Below is a picture of two little boys, Robert Withers and Jonathan Cooke, who were punished for bed wetting and they were placed in a punitive outhouse:



Picture 2: “Fareham – Workhouse”

As one can see, the outhouse, was a stunted room, with grass or straw as the floor. It almost appears like an animal house and not meant for humans. The boys were also kept in the outhouse for ten days and probably without food and or blanket(s) in the evening for cover and warmth (“The Fareham Workhouse Scandal”). This account is not fictional, but it is a true incident because the evidence was extracted from the Westbury Manor Museum as an archives. One can also note that the workhouses were not as charitable as they were meant to be, but rather “shocking to every principle of reason and every feeling of humanity” (Webb and Webb qtd. by Halevi 284). Karl Polanyi also called them “places of horror” (qtd. by Trevelyan 641).

The Poor Law Act was after all, a harsh law which on the surface appeared as if it provided for the poor, yet it subjected them to dehumanization. Although it may have seemed as if the poor were sufficiently accommodated at the workhouses, they were actually oppressed while those who were not living in the workhouses were forced to work and they could no longer be provided with any aid. The authorities believed that the paupers were lazy and idle, yet they

failed to understand that they were poor because of lack of employment and if they did find any work at all, it was always low paying petty work like sweeping or repairing roads. Even though the Poor Laws were enacted to assist the poor, they did nothing to change their plight or improve their situation. As evidenced by the testimonies, the poor were further exploited through physical and emotional abuse.

3.2 The Living conditions of the poor

During the Industrial Revolution, the poor were living under squalid conditions, despite the economic boom that segments of the English society was experiencing. The early nineteenth to mid nineteenth century was a period in which the poor, as the lowest members of society and providers of the required labour, they did not benefit from the profit which they managed to generate through their hard work and toil. A great emphasis has been placed on the positive impact of industrialization, but one cannot ignore the distress and social anxiety among the poor. It was the middle class or rather the ‘bourgeoisie’ who consumed the profit while the working class sacrificed their humanity. It is also important to note that urbanization due to industrial developments was a double edged sword because of the “presence of abject poverty and its contrast with the affluence of the relatively rich, of the seeming degradation of the physical environment and massing of people into overcrowded cities; and of the worsening of relationships between poor and the rich...” (Altick 57). It was only towards the end of the century that the lives of the poor greatly improved as there were laws that monitored their living conditions and the health acts which improved the sanitation at the workers’ houses and these shall be discussed later in the last chapter of this research paper.

With the tide of the Industrial Revolution, towns grew very rapidly as factories encouraged rural – urban migration from different parts of Europe. It is estimated that in Manchester in the 1830s, between forty thousand and fifty thousand people lived in cellars due to lack of sufficient housing to accommodate the increasing numbers of inhabitants in the urban areas (Altick 44). As demand for accommodation vastly increased, houses were hurriedly built with poor standards and little regard for hygiene as stated by Richard Altick:

“...were long rows and blocks, newly built with the cheapest

of materials, or subdivided old houses, all designed to cram the most people into the least space. In Liverpool as late as the sixties, there were 66, 000 men, women and children for every square mile. ...These teeming slums were the sites of almost unimaginable degradation. (43)

The living conditions of the poor raises concern on the English government and its efforts to improve the housing system of the poor. Altick's comment implies that little land was allocated for the use of building houses for the workers while the rest of it was for economic purposes such as building more factories. Poor housing system for factory workers did not only exist within the Victorian society, but it also exists within modern society where the industrial workers live in small shelters with poor sanitation because that is what they can afford. Similarly in the contemporary South African society, for example in East London, areas like Duncan Village are swarmed with factory workers and the accommodation is extremely below substandard yet affordable. Thus, factory workers are considered as non-entities who do not deserve luxurious living conditions as their purpose in life is to be factory workers and to increase production. It is quite obvious that the slums are simply built specifically for the poor: "Here live the poorest of the poor, the worst paid workers with thieves and the victims of prostitution indiscriminately huddled together..." (Engels 70).

In their homes, the factory workers and their families led lives which lacked privacy: "Large families, even two or three families, occupied a single room. As many as seven or eight persons – children and adults of both sexes – slept in one bed (or, more likely, on a filthy collection of rags)...." (Altick 43). Industrial workers led lives which were no better than that of animals as a whole family or even more could be cramped into a minuscule room. One wonders about ethics

and the need for privacy if parents and children sleep in the same room, which is also noted in *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt: "Dad and Mam lay at the head of the bed, Malachy and I at the bottom, the twins wherever they could find comfort (59).

In many cities, large slums appeared in which houses were small, roads were narrow and services such as rubbish collection, sewage works and basic washing facilities were nonexistent:

"Cesspools, where they existed, constantly overflowed.

Efficient sewer piping had not yet been invented, and even if it had, there was no supply of continuously flowing water to carry away the waste. Open – air drains therefore sent the walkways and unpaved streets awash with filth, thus creating monstrous enlargements of the disease – breeding conditions which had prevailed in towns..." (Altick 44).

The poor were victims of unbearable living conditions because of their vulnerability and desperation to survive in an urban world which they believed was a place of opportunities for them. Moreover, they could not afford supplies such as clean water:

"If water was available at all, it came from a common tap in the courtyard which drew on a supply that was turned on only an hour or so every day, and it was usually the runs off from the drains and cesspools, reused without the intermediate benefit of recycling. (44).

Such conditions led to disease and ultimately to high death rates. It is estimated that outbreaks of cholera killed sixteen thousand, four hundred and thirty seven people in England while sixteen thousand died in London (44 – 45). It is quite obvious that the poor would die from water borne

diseases because of lack of funds to afford treatment and if the free hospitals were ever available, it is quite debatable if the underprivileged members of society were properly attended at all.

Considering such unhealthy living conditions, one tends to question the factory owners' and the government's role in providing suitable accommodation for the poor. It is also very alarming to learn that in an economically booming society such as England, where the middle class enjoyed lavish lifestyles, one could also find a great number of people living in abject poverty. However, one also has to bear in mind that in a capitalist society, individualism is highly noted and there is high competition among the bourgeoisie who are out to use the poor to gain more profit.

From a naturalist perspective, one can clearly note the influence of environment on human behaviour. The factory workers were mainly confined to their slums and the only forms of recreation were brothels and gin shops:

“...because the more the cities grew around them, the less chance they had to flee, on a Sunday or holiday, to open spaces. There were no parks or playgrounds until the middle of the century, and the only places to which they could repair for recreation of a sort were the taverns, gin shops, brothels, occasional cockfights...” (Altick 45)

The only activities that the poor are exposed to are drinking alcohol and exposure to prostitution at the brothels. Alcoholism defeats psychological growth and also causes lack of ambition as the alcohol drinker is always in a state of drunkenness. The poor lack a broad view of life as they are not exposed to opportunities such as education, because their lives revolve around the factory, the slum and the bar. They are not motivated to attain a better social status and if they fail to

secure employment at the factories, they resort to becoming thieves and the women become prostitutes.

It is evident that the living conditions of the poor during The Industrial Revolution were unpleasant and unbearable. Most of the working class people were exposed to disease and early death due to the poor sanitary and housing facilities at their squalid quarters. Some may argue that the Industrial Revolution greatly improved the lives of the poor, which is only noted towards the ends of the nineteenth century due to the social reforms that the government implemented in order to bring fairness and order to the living conditions of the poor. However, one cannot ignore the fact that prior to these reforms, the poor lived in overcrowded slums with poor ventilation leading to disease and starvation.

3.3 The poor in Dickens' works

Charles Dickens is one of the greatest Victorian writers that ever lived and he is greatly admired for his ability to realistically depict the poor during the Industrial Revolution. Dickens' novels such as *Hard Times*, *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations* and *Bleak House*, clearly illustrate the condition of the lower class juxtaposed against the lavish lives of the middle class and the aristocracy. Dickens uses fiction as an outlet for his enduring fascination with the darker side of human nature. The treatment of crime by Dickens was far more than an authorial device; it was a focal point for his deep concern with social problems and played a vital role in his attempt to understand these social ills. Dickens' novels are not only about crime, but they also raise questions on the Poor Law system and the living conditions of the working class.

Charles Dickens depicts the plight of the poor and their treatment at the workhouses particularly in *Oliver Twist*. Oliver Twist is orphaned at his birth and he immediately becomes a parish child. At the age of eight, he is removed from the church and taken to the poor house. The conditions at the workhouses were obviously unbearable as evidenced by Oliver's first experience:

“... on a rough hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep.

What a noble illustration of the tender laws of this

favoured country! They let the paupers go to sleep!” (13)

The description of the bed is a confirmation of the rigorousness of the poor houses as attested by the poor house Board of Guardians: “The workhouse conditions should be as harsh and less tolerable as those of a prison” (qtd. by Grant 10). The passage is also ironic because Dickens uses sarcasm by commending the “tender laws” of a “favoured country,” yet, he is criticising the government for its exploitation and treatment of the poor as marginal members of society.

Moreover, the passage evokes empathy in the reader as one visualises an innocent child suffering at the hands of the cruel. In this way, Dickens fulfils his aim; to emotionally engage the readers, so that they would be aware of the intensity of the conditions at the workhouses.

Additionally, workhouse inmates were also malnourished:

“... Oliver Twist and his companions suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months; at last they got so voracious and wild with hunger, that one boy, who was tall for his age, and hadn't been used to that sort of thing, (for his father had kept a small cook's shop,) hinted darkly to his companions that unless he had another basin of gruel *per diem*, he was afraid he should some night eat the boy who slept next to him, who happened to be a weakly youth of tender age.” (14)

Oliver Twist is chosen by his companions to ask for more food which indicates starvation and lack of sufficient food to sustain the workhouse inmates. He is punished for this act and one of the authorities is so horrified at the impertinence that he keeps saying that he will be hung. Hunger was prevalent in the workhouses as well as at the parish houses: “Oliver Twist's eighth birth-day found him a pale, thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference” (7). Oliver's stunted growth is obviously caused by under nourishment. The powerful pathos and visual imagery which Dickens uses in describing Oliver is a masterful creation to intensify the gravity of the circumstances in which Oliver finds himself. This further substantiates the harsh reality that the workhouse inmates were starving. The starvation of the poor at the workhouses was also a reflection of the hunger encountered by the paupers outside

the poor houses because after the passing of the Poor Law Act of 1834, they were no longer receiving any aid from the parishes unless they were inmates. Thus, in 1842, there was an attack on the workhouse at Stockportt and below is an image of the illustration in the *London News*:



Picture 3: “Attack on the Workhouse at Stockportt”

Such a stampede and scramble for food reflects a serious social problem. A whopping crowd of about twenty thousand unemployed people attacked the workhouse at Stockportt in search of food (Clapham 585). The protestors blamed the present state of the poor and the unemployed on the state and the Church of England and its Bishops (585). From Stockportt, it is said that the enormous pack turned out the workers from the hat – making mills and print works and went on to attack the Union workhouse in Shaw – Heath where they stole six hundred and seventy two loaves of bread and a large number of copper coins (585). Such an incident serves to reinforce

that Dickens' presentation of social problems was not mere fiction, but an undeniable record of real life events.

Charles Dickens does not only depict the harshness of the Poor Law Act, but also illustrates the working conditions at the factories. The novel *Hard Times* is set in the industrial north of England and its apparent obvious thesis is its opposition to industrialisation and capitalism (Pykett 139). Dickens vividly describes the conditions at the Coketown factory:

“Stokers emerged from low underground doorways into factory yards, and sat on steps, and posts, and palings, wiping their swarthy visages, and contemplating coals. The whole town seemed to be *frying* in oil. There was a stifling smell of *hot* oil everywhere. The steam-engines shone with it, the dresses of the Hands were soiled with it, the mills throughout their many stories oozed and trickled it. The atmosphere of those Fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoom: and their inhabitants, wasting with *heat*, toiled languidly in the *desert*.” (99) (Italics mine)

The description of the workers, whose faces are black with the oil and the effect of heat on them, is an indication of the inadequate facilities needed to create a conducive working environment. This is a description of the factories in which the working class laboured each day where “they were deafened by the noise of the steam engines and the clattering machinery and stifled in air that not only was laden with dust, but in the absence of ventilation was heated to as high as eighty five degrees” which is revelatory of the physiological debilitation (Altick 43). This is further confirmed in *Hard Times*: “as killing airs and gases were bricked in” (56).

Apart from the unpleasant working conditions to which the poor were subjected, they also lived under squalid conditions. Therefore, the living quarters were as bad as the factories they worked in, besides, they were both located in the same area to avoid long distances between the houses and the factories. However, such an arrangement was inhuman because the houses were too small and they were located within the industrial site such that the area was always cloudy with the smoke from the factories. The poor could not do anything to change their plight because they were desperate for accommodation as well as employment and they had to endure every sort of brutality to which they were subjected.

In *Bleak House*, the standards of living of the poor were also very appalling:

“... it was one of a cluster of wretched hovels in a brick-field,
with pigsties close to the broken windows, and miserable little
gardens before the doors, growing nothing but stagnant pools.
Here and there, an old tub was put to catch the droppings of
rain-water from a roof, or they were banked up with mud into
a little pond like a large dirt-pie.” (106)

The intense description of the brick maker's house is an illustration of the horrid lifestyle they led which was completely dissimilar and separate from that of the upper classes. The living quarters are surrounded by filth and carelessness. Humans and pigs share the same living quarters, which is an indication that the social status of the poor was no better than that of animals.

The workers are powerless to protest against their condition because they are grateful and content that they are employed and also have accommodation, which is probably better than

living in the streets and being unemployed. The working class embraces the inhumanity and exploitation, to which they are subjected because they are aware of the fact that they may lose their jobs at the will of the employer as indicated by Engels:

“He knows that every breeze that blows, every whim of his employer, every bad turn of trade may hurl him back into the fierce whirlpool from which he has temporarily saved himself, and in which it is hard and often impossible to keep his head above water. He knows that, though he may have the means of living today, it is very uncertain whether he shall tomorrow.” (70)

Therefore, the precarious condition of the workers is inevitable because of the poverty that leaves them vulnerable and desperate for any form of survival. However, the vulnerability of the factory employees was to be removed with the introduction of Factory Acts and trade unions, as shall be discussed in the later chapters of this research.

Although the workers are defenceless, Dickens portrays in *Hard Times*, employees who are conscious of their plight through the gathering by the Coketown workers:

“OH my friends, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown!
Oh my friends and fellow-country, the slaves of an
iron-handed and a grinding despotism! Oh my friends
and fellow-sufferers, and fellow-workmen! I tell you that
the hour is come, when we must rally round one another
as One united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors

that too long have battered upon the plunder of our families,
upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labour of our hands,
upon the strength of our sinews, upon the God-created
glorious rights of Humanity, and upon the holy
and eternal privileges of Brotherhood!” (123)

The passage conforms to socialist writing as it involves the workers becoming conscious of the oppression to which they are subjected.

Juxtaposed against an evil environment, the poor are presented as good people. Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times* was “a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity” (57). He has no choice but to work within a degrading system that has excluded him from his employer and fellow workmates (Karl 155). Like St. Stephen in the Bible, Stephen becomes a martyr to all that is bad in society and his refusal to be involved in Trade Unionism is an indication of his ability to choose in a society that limits personal choice (155). Although he is a just man, he is also a victim of industrialisation, and the “coal pit which had swallowed hundreds” (155). Due to his failure to either join capitalism or fight industrialisation, Stephen is defeated by the society in which he lives.

The members of Sleary’s circus are also poor yet good natured and innocent. The description of Sleary’s community is loaded with “overtones of art and entertainment which appeal directly to the heart” (Karl 150). Despite its physical dirtiness and ignorance, their world is innocent and fulfilling because it is outside the industrialised and mechanistic life of Coketown (150). Its world is synonymous to children’s, in the sense that it is filled with naivety.

In addition, Joe in *Great Expectations* is also another example of a poor person, untainted by the vice that characterises the nineteenth century:

“Joe was a fair man, with curls of flaxen hair on each side
of his smooth face, and with eyes of such a very undecided
blue that they seemed to have somehow got mixed with
their own whites. He was a mild, good natured, sweet-tempered,
easy going . . . (16)

Joe is innocent and gentle like the members of Sleary’s circus. Joe’s blue eyes and the white colour are symbols of peace and purity therefore, his humility, gentility of the heart and innocence is a reinforcement of the possibilities of peace, transparency and justness in an industrialised world.

The juxtaposition of Dickens’ characters from the lower class against a corrupt and industrialised world is an assertion that the world still has people who are not influenced by the evil of industrialisation. Some people have managed to maintain the pre-industrial virtues instilled in human nature. Dickens’ use of pathos in presenting his characters evokes the reader to be sympathetic and seek social justice for the oppressed.

CHAPTER FOUR: Children in Misery

4.1 Child Labour

Child labour is the employment of children under the age of eighteen working under conditions which harm them physically, mentally, morally and deprive them access to education (“Child Labor: Frequently Asked Questions”). Alexander Ganse and Dabin Chang, described child labour as the employment of children in industries (“Industrial Child Labour in Britain”). It was also a brutal system because it increased illiteracy, poverty and also caused diseased and crippled children (“Child Labour”). Child labour has been perceived as a product of the Industrial Revolution in Britain; massive industrial growth and productivity required a large amount of human labour and the cheapest available manpower was children who could easily be underpaid. In England, most of the child labourers were orphans or from poor families assigned to the workhouses. Consequently, child labourers were subject to exploitation, physical injuries and even death. In 1830, Richard Oastler vehemently wrote against Child Labour in *The Leeds Mercury*:

“Thousands of our fellow creatures are at this very moment existing in a State of slavery more horrid than are the victims of that hellish system Colonial Slavery. These innocent creatures drawl out unpitied their short but miserable existence. The very streets of our towns are every morning wet with the tears of innocent victims at the accursed shrine of avarice, who are compelled not by the cart whip of the negro slave driver, but by the dread of the equally appalling thong or strap of the overlooker, to hasten half – dressed, . . . to those magazines of British infantile slavery, the worsted mills of the town of Bradford.” (qtd. in “Styal Mill” 7)

The cruelty of child labour paralleled slavery, a system which brutally treated its subjects. It is evident that children were exploited: “chained, belted, harnessed like dogs . . . black, saturated with wet, and more than half – naked, crawling upon their hands and knees, and dragging their heavy loads behind them” (Yancey 34).

During the Industrial Revolution, most of the child labourers were forced to work in factories at the insistence of their parents or workhouse guardians (Hammond and Hammond 143). As an industrially developing nation, Britain needed an expansive amount of cheap human labour despite the age and gender, in order to bring productivity and development to the country. Although the British economy needed a boost, it was nevertheless inhumane to use child labour as a source of economic growth. Richard Oastler was sympathetic to the factory children’s victimization: “Poor infants! ye are indeed sacrificed at the shrine of avarice (qtd. by Driver 43). In addition, it is evident that ‘childhood was being sacrificed to the expansion of Britain’s textile industries’ (Nardinelli 740). The Hammonds also claimed that “during the first phase of the Industrial Revolution the employment of children on a vast scale became the most important social feature of English life, and the prosperity of the English manufacturers was based upon [children’s] helpless misery” (143).

During the Victorian period, most of the lower class members of the English society were marred by poverty such that children from the poor families were either forced, or felt obliged to work in the factories in order to supplement the family’s income. One should also note that “economic conditions forced poor children into working, sometimes as hard and long as their parents” (Cody). Moreover, the British Government also supported child labour as Altick conceded that the Parliament claimed: “. . . a child was more useful to his family working” (249). Moreover,

once the minors were employed at the factories, they were bonded: “most children began working at seven years of age and were not allowed to leave the factory until they were twenty – one. The children had to sign contracts called indentures that virtually made them the property of the factory owner” (“Styal Mill” 4)

The emergence of the Industrial Revolution in Britain brought the need for large labour pool in order to increase industrial development in the nation. During the Victorian period, children were good sources of labour as many factory owners believed that child labourers provided them with cheap labour. Minors “were a significant part of the labour force because they could be paid lower wages” (Cody). Most of these children were orphans who were taken from workhouses and they could be apprenticed by the factory owners: “To encourage factory owners to take workhouse children, people like Greg were paid between two pounds and four pounds by the workhouse for each child they employed” (“Styal Mill” 5). Moreover, it was quite easy to underpay the children because they were “powerless and would not revolt” (Yancey 33). Subsequently, the factory owners’ expenditure was quite insignificant to the revenue generated by the employees.

A minor working at cotton mills, usually as a “scavenger,” whose task was to brush and sweep under the spinners and the piecers, was under the danger of being run over or caught by the wheels of the machines. In addition, the job of “chimney sweeper” required a child to climb up the narrow tunnels of chimneys and sweep out the trapped dust and smoke: “So your chimneys I sweep and soot I sleep” (William Blake). It is evident from Blake’s poem “The Chimney Sweeper” that young children were employed to clear the soot from chimneys. Like “scavengers”, “chimney sweepers” had to be small enough to fit into confined space. Some of

the juveniles who worked in mines where they “were sent down to haul up loads of coal from cramped passages (Yancey 33), were under the risk of “cave – ins and explosions” (27). It was quite appalling to some citizens when it was reported that young children were employed at mines: “A shocked England learned, . . . that tiny children worked side by side with adults in the narrow corridors of coal mines; that five year old boys and girls were kept in solitary darkness, twelve hours a day, opening and shutting the doors upon which the miners’ safety depended (Altick 46). Besides chimney sweeping and mining, youngsters were also employed in textile industries as substantiated by Nardinelli: “. . . the most important being piecing together broken threads, could be performed efficiently by children” (744). Below is a table showing the number of children employed in the textile industry from early nineteenth century to late nineteenth century:

Table 1: CHILDREN EMPLOYED IN SILK FACTORIES

Year	Percent	Year	Percent
1835	29.5	1867	11.9
1838	24.6	1871	14.3
1847	17.5	1875	15.1
1850	16.8	1878	10.4
1856	14.4	1885	7.4
1861	13.4	1890	7.0

Source: Parliamentary Papers, Reports of the Inspector of Factories, 1835-78;
Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories, 1878-90. (Extracted from Nardinelli 744).

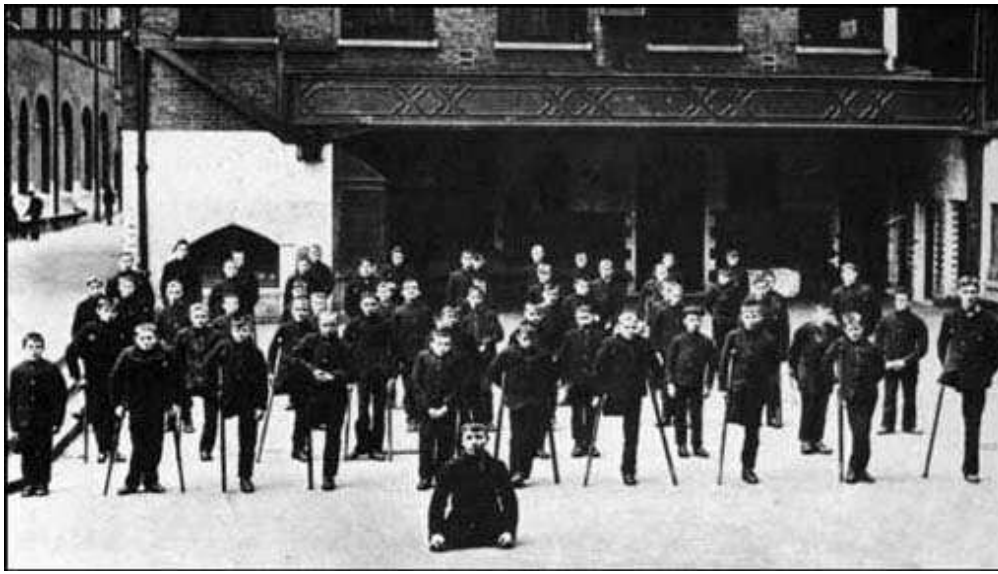
The table above is a statistical presentation of the percentage of children employed in silk factories from 1835 to 1890. In the early nineteenth century, as illustrated by the table above, 29.5% of the labourers were children, which is more than a quarter of the number of labourers.

However, towards the end of the century, it is evident that child labour declined due to reforms that prohibited this brutal system, obviously due to criticisms of the brutal system by authors like Charles Dickens.

The working conditions which the child labourers were forced to endure were quite unbearable. In the early eighteenth century to nineteenth century, minors as old as five or six years of age “could be made to work twelve to sixteen hours a day, six days a week” (‘Child Labour’). Richard Oastler also criticized the factory owners for subjecting the juveniles to long working hours: “. . . ye are compelled to work as long or the cold blooded avarice of your worse than barbarian masters *may demand!* . . . Ye are doomed to labour from morning to night for one who cares not how soon your weak and tender frames are stretched to breaking!” (qtd. by Driver 43). A report published in 1833 stated: “...most factories were dirty; low roofed; ill – vented; ill – drained; no conveniences for washing or dressing; no contrivance for carrying off dust and other effluvia” (qtd. in “Styal Mill” 16). Most of the employers neither took any precautions nor cared about the dangers to which the children were subjected. Sir Anthony Carlile, a doctor at Westminster Hospital stated: “labour is undergone in an atmosphere heated to a temperature of seventy to eighty degrees and upwards” and also pointed out that: “from a very hot room into damp cold air will inevitably produce inflammations of the lungs” (qtd. in “Styal Mill” 16). Other than long working hours, child labourers were also subjected to physical abuse such as flogging (see Appendix 1 adapted from “Styal Mill”).

Poor working conditions often resulted in accidents which led to physical injuries and even death: “. . .why many people opposed child labour was the number of accidents which killed and maimed children. They argued that many of these accidents occurred because the children were

too tired and none of the machines had guards. Dr Michael War visited Lever Street School and found that forty seven of one hundred and six children had been injured by machines in factories” (“Styal Mill” 17). Below is a picture of some of the boys who sustained disabilities due to accidents:



Picture 4: Extracted from “Styal Mill”

John Alen also reported that some minors lost their limbs or sustained other fatal injuries as a result of gruesome accidents encountered at the factories when he was interviewed by Michael Sadler and The House of Commons Committee on 21 May 1832: “I was an eye witness of one. A child was working wool, that is, to prepare the wool for the machine; but the strap caught him, as he was hardly awake and it carried him into the machinery; and we found one limb in one place, one in another, and he was cut to bits; his whole body went in, and was mangled” (qtd. in “Styal Mill” 12). Another report of a young girl named Mary Richards was also stated in John Brown’s *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, who was caught by a shaft and crushed to death (qtd. in “Styal Mill 12, see Appendix 2).

Besides injuries, child labourers were also prone to lung diseases, because of the smoke and dust they inhaled. The “dust from flax and the flue from cotton” inhaled by the juvenile labourers led Dr. Charles Aston Key to tell Michael Sadler and The House of Commons Committee on 16 July 1832 that: “this impure air breathed for a great length of time must be productive of disease, or exceedingly weaken the body” (qtd. in “Styal Mill” 16). Reports of “common occupational health risks and their principals causes’ were also made and these were: “eye inflammation from the use of tallow and Argand lamps, lung disease from breathing into cotton dust in badly ventilated rooms, deafness from long exposure to noisy machinery, cancer of the groin from the oil on the mule spindles, cancer of the mouth. . . . (“Styal Mill” 24).

In addition, John Reed who was a minor employee at Arkwright’s Cromford’s factory stated: “I gradually became a cripple, till at the age of nineteen I was unable to stand at the machine, and I was obliged to give up. The total amount of my earnings was about 130 shillings, and for this sum I have been made a miserable cripple as you can see, and cast off by those who reaped the benefit of my labour, without a single penny” (“Styal Mill” 17). Such a testimony reflects the paradox of the capitalist system which simultaneously empowered the middle class society yet destroyed the lives of many children.

Child labour was indeed a brutal and gruesome system which robbed juveniles of their childhood, health and even their lives. Reports of the unpleasant encounters of accidents, physical abuse and exploitation leave the reader sympathetic towards children who lived in nineteenth century Britain. Moreover, most of these children were also orphans and also members of the lower class, therefore they were economically desperate and they were forced to endure any means of survival, even if it meant accepting maltreatment. However, with the

numerous complaints about child labour and the wide readership, particularly of novels by Charles Dickens, who vehemently denounced child labour, sympathetic members of the Victorian society implemented new reforms against child labour and other forms of child exploitation.

4.2 Deprivation of education to the poor child

Education is vital for every human being as they go through the stages of development. Every minor has a mandatory right to receive education as this fosters mental and psychological child development as stated by Joseph F. Kett: “Schooling then, would ultimately introduce into the family wage economy a powerful new element in the socialization of children – for schooling defined and regulated childhood and youth as discrete, sequenced phases of preparation for adulthood” (qtd. in Lassonde 840). In Victorian England, it was believed that “the training to be obtained in primary and grammar school was thought to inhere as much in attitude as in the acquisition of skills fundamental to future employment” (840).

However, not every child has the opportunity to go to school or receive at least some form of education. Poverty is one of the major causes that deprives children the right to education. In the nineteenth century in Britain, there was a substantial number of children from poor families because the fees were too expensive. For example, there was a school which had “only eighteen scholars, half of whom came from outside Hernhill. The fees were 6d. a week for reading; 13s. 5d. a quarter (or about 1s a week) for reading, writing and arithmetic” (Reay 101). Moreover, “few labouring families chose (or were able) to pay for the education of their children: of fifty Dunkirk families interviewed by Liardet only ten paid for the schooling of their young” (qtd. in Reay 103).

Moreover, the education system offered to the poor was quite inefficient as illustrated by Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations*:

“Mr Wopsle’s great aunt kept an evening school in the village;
that is to say, she was a ridiculous old woman of limited

means and unlimited infirmity, who used to go to sleep from six to seven, in the society of youth who paid twopence per week each and Mr Wopsle had the room upstairs, where we students used to overhear him reading aloud in a most dignified and terrific manner. . . .” (49)

The parody of Mr Wopsle’s great aunt’s evening school is a satire of the education provided for the lower class. Pip also comments that he learnt the alphabet from Biddy and neither from Mr Wopsle nor his aunt which indicates that neither of them were doing their duty of educating the keen learners.

Another reason many children were unschooled is that the lower class generally did not acknowledge the importance of education: “To many working class parents, however, schooling appeared as a kind of idleness incongruous with the organizing principle of family life in the nineteenth century . . .” (Modell *et al* qtd. in Lassonde 840). The Victorian society, particularly the lower class members, believed that “education was not needed” (Altick 249). Moreover, “There was a feeling that school education, book learning, did little to mould a potential agricultural labourer. School might be a budding agriculturalist’s ‘general education,’ but labour was his ‘special education’” (Reay 104). It is quite evident that most of the children were deprived of education because their parents did not perceive schooling as a priority, but rather preferred that their offspring became labourers. A survey was carried out in Glasgow which revealed that “most boy labourers and learners (as opposed to bound apprentices) passed through at least six jobs between fourteen and twenty one, more often the figure was twelve jobs, while figures of twenty to thirty were not unheard of” (Childs 791). Most youth during their adolescent years had been employed more than five years, which indicates that most of these juveniles never

got the chance to attend school as they spent most of their time moving from one occupation to another.

Although some children went to school, their attendance always fluctuated as the boys would leave the classroom to earn money while the girls would do domestic chores. The nineteenth century British child was deprived of education because he or she was “removed whenever a job of work can be found for him. . .” (Liardet qtd. by Reay 130). This caused problems such as forgetting what he or she learnt before while few children had more than two or three years of schooling and “in 1840 only 20% of the youth population had any schooling at all” (Cody). In the nineteenth century, there was a minimum number of children who went to school because they believed that “working earned them money while school earned them nothing” (Altick 250). Out of forty two labourers’ children under the age of fourteen who attended school, only six could read and write, thirteen could read fluently while nine read very little and the rest could not read at all (Reay 131). This was a survey from the Hernhill census in 1871 calculated from the School Log Book in the nineteenth century. Such statistics reveal the level of literacy within the children of the lower class members of society who were deprived of education due to poverty and insufficient funds to pay the school fees.

Nevertheless, lack of education often perpetuates poverty within the circle of the socially disadvantaged. A poor child will never live a life better than his or her parents if one is deprived of formal education. Moreover, it is also difficult to be elevated in society if illiterate and uneducated: “Children without proper education will dim the future of their country. And as for children themselves, they will suffer from poverty and ill condition of the society after they grow up without any formal education. without proper education, the poor cannot change their

social status and will be the less privileged group” (Jiang 21). Due to deprivation of education, most of the socially disadvantaged people are consequently forced to be involved in crime and prostitution as means of survival as evidenced by *Oliver Twist*’s criminal friends, Fagin and his crew.

In the early nineteenth century, education was not accessible to the poor until the later half of the century when the Education Acts were implemented. Most of the pauper children were residents at the workhouse, where they did not receive formal education like the middle class offspring. The only education that the poor child received was either that of being beaten into submission by the workhouse authorities or employers: “In *Oliver Twist*, the reproach on children’s education is extremely apparent. Oliver, when raised by Mrs. Mann almost receives no education at all. What he knows is only to obey “the elder lady” if Oliver hopes to escape from her cruel ‘hands and sticks’ ” (Jiang 21).

The education that the paupers received was that of apprenticeship only, meaning that they were taught about the trade in which they were involved such as chimney sweeping, blacksmith or a locksmith, just as Pip was to be apprenticed to Joe. The Victorian society laid a clear cut boundary between the paupers and the children from middle class families who attended schools, and had governesses and tutors at home. Furthermore, in most parts of England there was no state-funded schooling available, especially for the poor, resulting in many of the lower class children not receiving any formal education or they attended evening school which was often not properly administered.

Education is important for psychological and even economic growth in every individual. Unfortunately, the poor are constantly caught in the web of poverty because of illiteracy which is caused by lack of proper and formal education. The poor child cannot live a better life than his or her parents if deprived of education, an opportunity to step out of the frontier zone that separates the poor and the rich.

4.3 Examination of the plight of children in Dickens' novels

Charles Dickens is a writer who is very sympathetic towards his child characters. He is personally aware of the exploitation to which the children are subjected because of his own history of workhouse incarceration, which parallels Oliver's workhouse experience (James 89). This explains the pathos in his novels, surrounding the uneducated and deprived orphans whose loss of childhood is echoed through their physical exploitation. Dickens' novels ultimately petition society to protect these assailed juveniles. However, the Victorian society is paradoxical because it perceived childhood as essential, yet most of its juveniles are not given the chance to safely experience growth and transition into adulthood. Gorham states: ". . . childhood had great symbolic importance, but many Victorians suffered from an uncertainty about the nature of childhood and the proper relationship of children to the structure of the family and the wider society. In the late – Victorian period, many people who were concerned about the welfare of children also found themselves uncertain about how the boundaries of childhood should be defined" (355).

Dickens' characters are representations of the actual world as Rosenberg remarks: ". . . the best Dickens' characters are examples of verisimilitudinous representation" (147). Dickens characters are not only representations of the world, but also reflections of existent beings, ". . . and assumed, by virtually all readers, to be representations of people" (148). Therefore, his child characters represent real children with actual experiences and backgrounds such as poverty, orphanage, neglect and deprivation of education.

Firstly, Dickens' child characters are usually orphaned or their parentage is unclear, for example Pip (*Great Expectations*), Esther (*Bleak House*), Oliver (*Oliver Twist*), Estella (*Great*

Expectations) and Sissy Jupe (*Hard Times*). Estella and Esther are initially introduced as orphans, but the reader later discovers that they are actually abandoned children as is Sissy Jupe. All the three characters are adopted, for example Estella is adopted by Miss Havisham, while Esther is adopted by John Jarndyce and lastly, Sissy is adopted by Mr Thomas Gradgrind. The three young ladies have a common background, that of lower class parentage, yet they are adopted by middle class guardians, therefore they eventually become members of that class. Charles Dickens' seems to suggest that a lower class member can never belong to the middle class unless the elevation into that upper class is generated by the middle class. Dickens' belief is that the lower class' dependency on the middle class is inevitable. To a larger extent, he is also suggesting that it is the middle class who can change the plight of the lower class and, therefore it is their responsibility to eradicate poverty.

Orphans are usually vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation and neglect, which is the case with Jo, the urchin in *Bleak House*. Unlike other Dickens' characters, Jo is the most pathetic child because of the abject poverty in which he lives and his early death from small pox makes his character even more pitiable. Jo is dehumanized almost to the point of non – existence. As a street child, Jo is a lonely beggar who has been deprived of both paternal and maternal love and the only other person with whom he shares a connection is Nemo, who also dies. The dysfunctionality of Jo's life as an orphan reflects the impaired lives of the people around him, which further translates into the disjointed social relationships of the nineteenth century Victorian society. However, the lack of a proper family structure in Dickens' characters shows the fragmentation of the nineteenth century family. The degeneration of the family is a symbol of the disintegration of the nineteenth century society, an issues greatly depicted by writers such as

T.S. Eliot in his poems “The Hollow Men” and “The Waste Land.” The isolation of Dickens’ child characters presents the reader with a yearning for family and social reform (Pykett 144).

Jo’s experience contrasts with Pip from *Great Expectations* who lives with his sister and her husband. Although, Pip receives familial care from his sister, she physically exploits him and he lives in perpetual fear of her:

My sister, Mrs. Joe, throwing the door wide open, and finding
an obstruction behind it, immediately divined the cause, and applied
Tickler to its further investigation. She concluded by throwing me – I
often served as a connubial missile. . . . (17).

His sister’s physical abuse highlights the vulnerability of children who lack proper care and protection. Ultimately, he is emotionally affected because he feels like a burden to his sister, whose presence appals him, yet she should be his surrogate mother: “I think my sister must have had some general idea that I was a young offender whom an Accoucheur Policeman had taken up (on my birthday) and delivered over to her, to be dealt with according to the outraged majesty of the law. I was always treated on being in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion and morality. . .” (*Great Expectations* 29). Moreover, Pip’s experience in a dysfunctional family unit also resembles the Pockets family whose children were “tumbling up” due to lack of proper maternal care from their mother Mrs. Pocket, who had surrendered the responsibility of caring for her children to servants and child minders.

Through the creation of Pip and Jo as orphaned children, Dickens portrays the dynamics and paradoxes experienced by both characters. Jo’s life is characterised by a world of marginalised existence, in an isolating society. Pip inhabits an ineffectual family unit with a violent sister and

a weak brother in – law who fails to nurture and protect him. Their behaviour parallels the exploitative nature of the workhouse authorities who were instructed to care for the orphans under their authority. Moreover, the parish clerk, Mr. Wopsle in *Great Expectations* says: “What is detestable in a pig, is more detestable in a boy” (33), which also reaffirms the harsh mentality of the church authorities who strongly believed that young children were not to be treated better than animals. If Mr. Wopsle thinks a young boy is more unbearable than a pig, then his statement accounts for the actions of the workhouse board of guardians.

Furthermore, Dickens’ traumatic experiences are immensely echoed in Oliver who is stripped of his new clothes bought by Mr. Brownlow, “. . . Oliver in Fagin’s kitchen, stripped of his ‘good’ clothes, deprived of Brownlow’s books, and laughed at by the urchins....” (James 89). This incident replicates Dickens’ own experience which: “. . . imaginatively embodies the humiliation of the sensitive middle class Dickens amid the working – class fellow – employees, one of whom was indeed called Fagin. On the other hand, fear of this environment was matched by his hatred of middle class parents, who had so promptly abandoned him into it” (James 89). *Oliver Twist* also mirrors Charles Dickens because they both belong to the middle class, but are abandoned into a workhouse. Although at this point the reader is not aware of Oliver’s membership in the middle class, his innocence and failure to join a gang of criminals is synchronous to Dickens’ exposure to the working class at the factory as a young boy of twelve.

The vulnerability of children and their subjection to child labour is further reflected in *Oliver Twist* when the man in the white waistcoat wants to sell Oliver to Gamfield as a chimney sweeper. Instead, Oliver is later sold to Mr. Sowerberry the undertaker and assigned the role of a funeral mute. The Industrial Revolution was a period in which many children were working at

the workhouses due to poverty like the orphaned Oliver who was assigned to pick oakum at six every morning (13). When Oliver is almost sold to Gamfield as a chimney sweeper, one is reminded of William Blake's poem "The Chimney Sweep" also echoes the effects of orphanage and child labour on juveniles. Eighteenth century poets such as William Blake also criticized child labour through his poem:

"And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury,
And are gone to praise God and His priest and king,
Who made up a heaven of our misery." ("The Chimney Sweeper")

The poem is about a little child protesting against exploitation and child labour. Dickens' sympathy towards child labourers is also noted in Blake's use of the child's voice to express discontent with harsh treatment.

Not only does Dickens portray young characters who are subjected to child labour, he also brings to the foreground that many children were deprived of education due to their social status. Jo, Pip and Oliver are abandoned children who receive no education in their early stages of life. Jo is a street urchin throughout the course of his life; thus his life does not elevate to a level which transcends poverty. Jo is uneducated:

"It must be a strange state to be like Jo! . . . To see people read,
and to see people write, and to see the postmen deliver letters,
and not to have the least idea of all the language-to be, to
every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb!" (220)

Through Jo, Dickens suggests that a poor child deprived of education will never rise in society; in actual fact; his or her life will be centred on material need and struggle for survival. The

‘blindness’ and ‘dumbness’ of Joe is representative of his lack of psychological growth as a character.

On the other hand, Pip is fortunate enough to receive an opportunity to be educated. Pip is raised by his sister and her husband Joe who later apprentices the minor into the trade of blacksmith; however, it is at this point that Pip’s life takes a successful turn. He is informed that a benefactor is sponsoring his education to become a gentleman. It is quite apparent from this turn of events that unlike the children from the poor families, those from the middle class are educated to become young gentleman and ladies. Pip’s life shifts upward from lower class to middle class. It is through the formal education that he receives in London that he becomes a gentleman, which is reflected through his manners. Pip’s access to education and resultant financial success illustrates that in order for one to defeat poverty, one has to be educated; thus, without education, one will always be poor. However, the paradox lies in that Pip’s benefactor, Magwitch, is not a member of the middle class, nor is he a gentleman. He is an ordinary man with manners and the speech of an uncivilised lower class member, but who has managed financial success to support Pip.

Pip’s endowment by Magwitch is an antithesis to Oliver’s adoption by Mr. Brownlow. Where Pip is adopted by the convict Magwitch, Oliver is rescued by a middle class member and ultimately it is later revealed that Oliver’s father was, in fact, a wealthy man. It is assumed that Oliver finally received education after his adoption by Mr. Brownlow. Dickens seems to suggest that the only way that one can access education and escape poverty is through the generosity of the middle class members. On the other hand, Dickens also proves that one does not need to be a

middle class member to possess a munificent heart, and this is shown by Magwitch who paves a way for Pip to become a gentleman.

Yet, Dickens also challenges the drudgery of education through the parody of Thomas Gradgrind who continuously demands facts from the school children. His rigid system of education has eliminated the innocence in his children and they have become like “remote controlled robots” who only act or think according to their father’s desire. Gradgrind’s system of education is also a reflection of the oppression of children in institutions such as the workhouses and factories; hence, Dickens has created a parallelism of the two institutions; education and industry. Mr. Gradgrind’s system of education inhibits the limitation of childhood impulses and promotes that children “must be judged by adult standards; and that feelings do not exist as knowledge and must therefore be ignored, or, better yet, not felt” (Karl 152). Mr. Gradgrind’s philosophy on education is destructive because it exploits the child, which is representative of the “injustice of society to its individual members, the injustice of government to its subjects and finally, the injustice of an economic system to its workers” (152).

Dickens’ amazing art of character creation can only be explained through his desire to reform a society that subjugates the juveniles. Children are susceptible to exploitation as they are very defenceless beings and Dickens successfully portrays the abuse of children in nineteenth century Britain and evokes reader sympathy to their plight.

CHAPTER FIVE: Tolerated and unaccepted women

5.1 The Victorian “Angel in the House”

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught, she sat in it - in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all - I need not say it - she was pure. (Woolf 168)

In addition to the saintly behaviour noted by modern feminist author, Virginia Woolf, the nineteenth century ideal woman was also called “Angel in the house”, a term coined by Coventry Patmore in reference to his wife, whom he regarded as the perfect woman (Patmore). It is quite interesting for a twenty – first century reader to note that the Victorian conventions of ideal womanhood were stipulated by the patriarchal system, therefore the angel in the house has been perceived as “a bloodless and famished creature, a patriarchal construction born of men’s needs, not women’s” (Stansell 466). The standards of perfect womanhood were enforced as a way of oppressing women and to keep the female species within the boundaries of subservience to the dominating sex. Therefore, “the inevitability of life in a closed and intimate female world smothered young women of ambition and spirit, sent others to their sickbeds, and fuelled the hatred of the first nineteenth – century feminists. . . .” (471).

Patmore’s poem “Angel in the House” clearly expresses the qualities of a woman:

Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman’s pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.

How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers;
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she's still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone. (Patmore 125 - 126)

The poem above clearly illustrates the characteristics of a typical Victorian wife: gentle, pitiful, self – recriminating, blaming herself for any misunderstanding with her husband, enduringly loving and loyal. The Victorian woman is the submissive wife “whose whole excuse for being was to love, honor, obey and amuse her lord and master” (Houghton 348). Therefore, a woman’s existence was completely different from man as indicated in Tennyson’s poem “The Princess”:

Man for the field, and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword, and for the needle she;
Man with the head, and woman with the heart;

Man to command, and woman to obey; (Tennyson)

The poem is definitely indicative of the patriarchal ideology from which it was written, as it illustrates that the woman is designed for domesticity. The juxtaposition of “man with the head” and “woman with the heart” is open for different interpretations. As a reader, one can understand it to mean that men are sensible and full of ideas while women act on emotions. It may also suggest that women lack the reason that men possess, therefore they are governed by sensibility and emotions. Furthermore, the poem also portrays men as authoritative and dominating and hence women are meant to obey their husbands’ command: “Man to command, and woman to obey.” From a feminist perspective, such characteristics create vulnerability in the women and leave them susceptible to oppression by their patriarchal husbands. In the Victorian society, what was termed as an “Angel in the house” was a woman who was submissive, passive and silent in a patriarchal system.

Throughout nineteenth century fiction, particularly written by male authors, female characters are portrayed as individuals whose lives are centred on the domestic domain. The woman’s role was not only to bear children, but to direct and perform household maintenance, caring for children, and sewing, cooking and cleaning (Shanley 5). According to Paul Lafargue: “The domestication of woman presupposes that she fulfils in the household certain numerous functions which absorb all her energy. . . .” The middle class gender construction placed men in the marketplace and women in the home where they were to provide a moral centre and a place of comfort for the husband. The home was a shelter from the “anxieties of modern life, a place of peace where the desires of the heart might be realized..., and a shelter for those moral and spiritual values which the commercial spirit and the critical spirit were threatening to destroy, and therefore also a sacred place, a temple (Houghton 343). Moreover, the “division between

male and female worlds had a religious connotation, for the marketplace was considered dangerously amoral. The men who operated in that sphere could save themselves only through constant contact with the moral world of the home, where women acted as carriers of the pure values that could counteract the destructive tendencies of the market” (Hall 74). Therefore, the “idea of virtuous womanhood” is realized through the woman’s possession of the ‘innate, God-given powers to uplift, regenerate and redeem” (Slater 309). Ultimately, it was the women’s responsibility to maintain the home as a place of comfort and protection from the destructive forces of the outside world in which their husbands were involved. Slater further states “For Dickens, ‘true womanliness’ was not a matter of nurture but of nature, something timeless and universal. It was complementary to ‘manliness’ in humanity and whilst he would have agreed with Tennyson that the two sexes must, for the sake of human advancement, each strive to acquire more of the qualities and virtues inherent in the other. . . .” (302). From Slater’s perspective, Dickens does not believe in the submission of women to male authority, but both women and men should work towards possessing the qualities in the other sex.

However, the Victorian status quo excluded the working class because most of its women were working mothers. Therefore, the Victorian cultural norms were constructed for the middle class, which is an indication of the lower class as the “other.” The marginalization of the working class is parallel to the marginalization of the middle class women from the men’s economic world.

The “Angel in the house” has been greatly depicted in most of nineteenth century writing and Charles Dickens is one of the significant writers who portray such a character. In *Great Expectations*, Biddy is one of the most agreeable characters created by Dickens. According to Pip, she “managed her whole domestic life, and wonderfully too” (124). Moreover, Biddy is

intelligent: “For, I called to mind now, that she was equally accomplished in the terms of our trade, and the names of our different sorts of work, and our various tools. In short, whatever I knew, Biddy knew. Theoretically, she was already as good a blacksmith as I, or better” (124). Pip is amazed at Biddy’s perfection and domestic skill, coupled with the business knowledge she possesses. It is a surprise to him because he does not expect a woman to be as intelligent as Biddy is; this is also outside the norm of the nineteenth century patriarchal construction. Although she is intelligent, she is passive and does not threaten male egos or dominance which is highlighted in her repeated statement: “You know best, Pip” (125). Like the typical nineteenth century virtuous women, Biddy is rewarded with marriage at the end of the novel. Although Biddy is portrayed as an insignificant character in the novel, she actually fulfils the Victorian perception of true womanhood despite the class to which she belongs. According to Dickens, Biddy is the perfect “Angel in the house” because of her domestic skills and her ability to perform the masculine trade in which Pip and Joe are involved.

Other than Biddy, Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* is also an “Angel in the House.” She becomes the caretaker of Bleak House and she manages the house wonderfully too. The reader is drawn to her as the “ideal, eternal feminine and archetypal femininity,” which proves Dickens’ success in creating her as a character. Likewise, she is rewarded with marriage and makes a choice out of two suitors, Jarndyce and Woodcourt and she eventually marries the latter. Moreover, Esther is also involved in charity work as she is shown continually visiting Tom-All-Alone’s society. Therefore, she reinforces the idea that the ‘Angel in the house’ was mainly concerned with the domestic affairs and if ever she was involved in any form of work outside her home, it was fending for the poor and the sick.

Despite the creation of the ideal womanhood in Biddy and Esther Summerson, Dickens also subverted this perception of true femininity through the comic portrayal of Mrs. Pocket in *Great Expectations*. Minor as she may seem in the novel as a whole, she actually provides a significant insight into Dickens' own reaction to the Victorian ideology of domesticity. Mrs. Pocket is depicted as an incompetent mother who fails to properly manage her household and her children who were "not growing up or being brought up, but were tumbling up" (178). Because of Mrs. Pocket's failure to fulfil her role as a mother and domestic manager, the Pocket family is quite a dysfunctional family as her life revolves around reading and does not have time for her children. The comical Pocket family serves as a satire of the Victorian home as a haven for comfort and bliss, and that it should be a 'temple and a school of virtue' (Ruskin). Therefore, the inadequate parent – child relationships serve as the paradigm for all the failures of social, economic and private life (qtd. by Myers 379).

Mrs. Pocket also resembles Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle in *Bleak House*. Both aptly named women are middle class members who are concerned with the outside world, yet they fail to manage their domestic lives. Mrs. Jellyby is more preoccupied with her project in the Niger Delta than her own family affairs to the extent that her daughter Caddy blames her for her husband's mental debilitation and bankruptcy: "What comfort is his family to him? His family is nothing but bills, dirt, waste, noise. . . confusion and wretchedness" (250). Due to the women's passivity and incompetence, The Jellyby household, like the Pockets', is a chaotic opposition of the ideal Victorian home. According to Barickman *et al*, Dickens' invariably draws the modern reader's attention to the debilitation of family life caused by a corrupt society (4). Likewise, Mrs. Pardiggle is also busy with charity work yet she fails to manage her own family. The three women are constructions of the subversion of the Victorian ideology of true femininity. The

creation of these characters reinforces the ideology that a woman's place is in the domestic sphere. Any attempt to step out of the domestic sphere, cripples her ability to exercise her female role within her household. On the other hand, Dickens' ideology is based on the feminist perception of the new woman who abandons her domestic role and involves herself with the outside world.

Dickens creates both the Victorian Angel in the house through the portrayal of Biddy and Esther Summerson, and also the subversion of true female identity through Mrs. Pocket, Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle. The three latter characters are in contrast with the former women, which is a realization of the abandonment of the traditional role of women and the adoption of a new role outside the domestic sphere. Dickens' creation of opposite characters is also parallel to the conflicting ideas of the nineteenth century perception of women such as the growing feminist movement.

5.2 The Rebellious Woman

The Victorian society strictly laid out boundaries for women in which any woman, who stepped outside of them, was labelled as rebellious. Charles Dickens, among other nineteenth century writers, took the liberty of expressing their perception of the society in which they lived through their writings. Brenda Ayres argues that Dickens both advocated and resisted patriarchy, overtly promoting the ideology of domesticity while covertly subverting that ideology, especially through his presentation of atypical women” (qtd. by Casey 704). Dickens’ artistic creation of characters who represented reality, indicates his social concern and the desire to speak for women, who were among the underprivileged members of society.

Among the rebellious women, there are the fallen women who lost control. Amanda Anderson argues that “the figure of the fallen woman expressed author’s anxieties about the power of environment over character and the possibility of self – control in a rapidly industrializing world. Women, supposedly submissive and selfless, were considered more susceptible to the lapses of control that defined one as ruined” (2). Mrs. Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations* perfectly fits into Anderson’s definition of the fallen woman. She is a woman whom we suppose is suffocated by demands of her society and the role she has to fulfill as a wife and surrogate mother to Pip. The reader is not informed of the reasons that lead to Mrs. Joe’s violence and masculine character, but one assumes that she is a woman whose lapses are a result of an oppressive and patriarchal society.

Mrs. Joe is another subversion of archetypal feminine woman. Instead, she is articulated as a despicable woman whose physical appearance is synonymous to her character:

“My sister, Mrs. Joe, with *black* hair and eyes, had such a prevailing

redness of skin, that I sometimes used to wonder whether it was possible she washed herself with a *nutmeg – grater* instead of soap. She was tall and *bony*, and almost always wore a *coarse* apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square *impregnable bib* in front, that was stuck full of *pins and needles*.” (*Great Expectations* 16)

Mrs. Joe’s black eyes and the apron that was always full of pins are apposite to her neglectful nature and failure to provide Pip with maternal love. The black eyes represent her lack of warmth while the pins also represent a violent and indifferent nature. She is an antagonistic contrast to the ideal gentle, kind and caring woman that should epitomize Victorian woman. Of course Mrs. Joe is an exaggerated character; her description serves to symbolize the role which she plays in *Great Expectations*.

Moreover, she despises the burdensome role of being a wife, which she continually reminds her husband by wearing the apron all the times: “She made it a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this apron so much. Though I really see no reason why she should have worn it all; or why, if she did wear it at all, she should not have taken it off every day of her life” (*Great Expectations* 16). An apron symbolizes domesticity; therefore, her reluctant but deliberate attire represents her bondage to domesticity, which she clearly points out herself: “I may truly say I’ve never had this apron of mine off, since born you were. It’s bad enough to be a blacksmith’s wife (and him a Gargery), without being your mother” (17). Mrs. Joe is burdened by the double yoke of oppression as an impoverished wife and shackled mother. She completely bemoans her burden of womanhood and her desire to escape this misery.

In her attempt to escape the burden, Mrs. Joe assumes a hostile nature which she lashes out at anything nearby as noted in her rough and aggressive performance of her domestic duties:

“First, with her left hand she *jammed* the loaf hard and against her bib – where it sometimes got a pin into it, and sometimes a needle, which we afterwards got into our mouths. Then she took some butter (not too much) on a knife and spread it on the loaf, in an apothecary kind of way, as if she were making a plaister – using both sides of the knife with a *slapping* dexterity, and trimming and moulding the butter off round the crust. Then, she gave the knife a final smart wipe on the edge of the plaister, and then *sawed* a very thick round off the loaf, *hewed* into two halves, of which Joe got one, and I the other.” (18) (Italics mine)

The italicized words “sawed” and “slapping” are violent gestures which can not be associated with the handling of food. Dickens’ deliberate use of such diction emphasizes the characterization of Mrs. Joe as a masculine character who does not possess any womanly traits. Her actions are similar to those of a man and she seems to be the head of the house, thus she has emasculated her husband who is silent and gentle.

Her masculinity is further reinforced by Pip: “My sister made a dive at me, and fished me up by the hair: saying nothing more than the awful words, ‘You come along and be dosed’” (19). She is a comic yet pathetic character, but Dickens’ humor is serious as it emphasizes the momentous concerns in relation to women of his time. Mrs. Joe escapes into violence and emasculation of her husband in order to abandon the oppressive role of domesticity and to assume authority in her life. However, she is silenced by Orlick who attacks her and almost leaves her for the dead.

She falls into paralysis and is not able to speak and walk. She loses the authority she had assumed for herself and eventually gives in to her death. From a naturalist perspective, Mrs. Joe becomes the product of a patriarchal environment as she is violently attacked by a male figure and becomes marginalized. Dickens is forced to punish her for subverting her role in society and by killing her; he also shows that she is not of any use in society, which reinforces the role of the traditional writers. Although he may seem to be patriarchal, Dickens sympathizes with Mrs. Joe and her plight as a woman in an oppressive world.

Apart from Mrs. Joe, another character who assumes a masculine role is Mrs. Stephen Blackpool in *Hard Times*. She lacks any sign of femininity as represented in her description: “A disabled, drunken creature. . . . A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy. . . .” (60). She is described as a creature and a drunkard, two terms which are not associated with the women of the nineteenth century. She abandons her husband and her role as a wife. The reader only encounters her once and she is always in a drunken state. Although short lived, her existence and presence in the novel stresses important aspects of the society in relation to gender roles and subversion of those duties. She expresses herself like a man: “Eigh, lad? What yo’r there?” (60), which is an indication of the emasculation of her husband. Moreover, she is an alcoholic, which is an insurrection of true womanhood. Mrs. Joe is similar to Mrs. Stephen because they are both victims of society and they both escape their plight by emasculating their husbands. Female alcoholism is also an indication of the new independent woman who could smoke and drink just like her male counterparts.

The earliest conception of the fallen woman in the Victorian society was the prostitute because of her loss of purity through sexual transgression. A young woman with multiple sexual partners

was an indication of rebellion. However, most of the women were involved in prostitution, as a means of surviving as further argued by Marilynn Wood Hill: “In a society where woman’s status was tied to that of the man on whom she was dependent and a woman with no connection to a man was almost invariably at that bottom of the social scale, class became a function of the gender system. Prostitution was taken up by a relatively broad group of women” (2). Furthermore, Hill also sets the choice to enter prostitution in the context of the limited possibilities available to nineteenth century women, and further emphasizes the “positive appeal and rewards of prostitution, especially for women better situated in the profession” (5). Although prostitution was a means of survival for most lower class women, the Victorian society perceived it as a sin, thus fornication, as affirmed by Holbrook that “the religious belief that there was no place for fornicators in the Kingdom of Heaven was the basis for the attitude that there was no place for fornicating women in the Victorian middle class society” (56).

Mary Wollstonecraft one of the earliest feminists wrote of the fallen woman:

I cannot avoid feeling the most lively compassion for those
unfortunate females who are broken off from society, and
by one error torn from all those affections and relationships
that improve the heart and mind. It does not frequently even
deserve the name of error; for many innocent girls become the
dupes of a sincere, affectionate heart, and still more are, as it
may emphatically be termed, ruined before they know
the difference between virtue and vice:-and thus prepared
by their education for infamy, they become infamous.
Asylums and Magdalenes are not the proper remedies

for these abuses. It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world!

She sympathized with the plight of the fallen women, more so, those who turned to prostitution. Charles Dickens's social concern particularly on prostitution, denoted in that era as the great social evil, is represented in *Oliver Twist* through the creation of Nancy. She is a member of Fagin's criminal gang and the reader supposes that she is involved in the gang and prostitution for economic reasons. Dickens' expressed concern and sympathy for someone like Nancy might have been influenced by his involvement in Urania Cottage in 1846, an asylum for fallen girls and he even wrote a letter to Miss Coutts, a religious woman who was determined to transform the fallen women's lives, stating that the institution should be "the formation of habits of firmness and self restraint. . . ." (qtd. by Rogers). Dickens explores the possible reasons for impurity in his novels, thereby entering fully into the mid-Victorian debate and allowing his readers to discuss their own concerns on the subject through the medium of his writing (Rogers).

Regina Kunzel also extends the analysis of impurity to unmarried mothers, an issue of great concern in the Victorian society. Unmarried mothers were forced to give up their babies for adoption, for example Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House* leaves Esther in the care of Miss Barbary, while *Oliver Twist*'s mother gives birth in a parish house where she dies immediately after labour. Lady Dedlock conceals her secret from her husband because of the strict patriarchal perception on pregnancy out of wedlock which automatically stripped the woman of her dignity and was regarded as shameful to her family and society. As confirmed by Holbrook: "to die or to emigrate seemed the only solution for a woman, once she had fallen to seduction. . . . she could never be received in polite society" (57). It is through Lady Dedlock that Dickens' questions of forgiveness and society's attitude towards fornication, especially for women who are

impregnated and abandoned. Similarly, Thomas Hardy in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* also raises the same concern with the rape of Tess by Alec D'Urberville and falls pregnant. Her baby dies and she later marries Angel, who fails to forgive her when he realizes that she has lost her purity. Both Dickens and Thomas Hardy are concerned with the plight of young women who are condemned for their impurity by an unforgiving society. However, Lady Dedlock is forgiven by her husband when he discovers that she had a child out of wedlock and it is an indication of Dickens' plea to society that fallen women deserve forgiveness, after all they are human.

Dickens rebellious characters are subversions of the "angel in the house." Moreover, these are characters who realistically represent the ideologies of Dickens' time, therefore they should be regarded as truthful and not mere fictional characters. One should also note that the depiction of rebellious women is not a reinforcement of Victorian patriarchy, but it is recognition of women who are yearning and those who are fighting for power and tolerance in a society which marginalizes women.

5.3 A Comparison of Dickens' female characters and those created by feminist writers

Charles Dickens among other male novelists such as Trollope, Thackeray and Collins, tends covertly to subvert his authoritarian male characters, but also compulsively punishes women who demonstrate power or independence. Women novelists, on the other hand, tend to ultimately ratify the myths of power and dependence, and thereby substitute conscious choice for routine submission and assertion of feminine power (Myers 379). Unlike male writers, “women novelists write under the burden of “otherness,” of being by definition in relational dependence to male traditions” (379). An interesting comparison can be made between Charles Dickens and other female novelists in light of the female characters in his novels and those within the women writers particularly Virginia Woolf and Charlotte Bronte.

In *Great Expectations*, Molly's violence and monstrosity is parallel to Bertha Mason's “madness” in *Jane Eyre*:

In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran
backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human
being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it groveled, seemingly,
on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal:
but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair,
wild as a mane, hid its head and face. (Bronte 250)

Similar to Bertha Mason who is Creole, Molly is also referred to as a “wild beast” and she is also said to be of some foreign descent: “. . .and I believe had some gipsy blood her” (*Great Expectations* 366). The description of both women is quite parallel and one can note the Victorian attitude towards them because they are of a different race. They are both very

passionate people; Molly's sexuality is referred as: ". . . hot enough when it was up, as you may suppose" (366), while Bertha's sexuality is described through inherited madness:

Bertha Mason is mad . . .she came of a mad family; --idiots
and maniacs through three generations! Her mother, the Creole,
was both a mad woman and a drunkard!-as I found out after I had
wed the daughter: for they were silent on family secrets before.
Bertha, like a dutiful child, copied her parent in both points . . .Oh!
my experience has been heavenly, if you only knew it! (Bronte 249)

The intense sexual passions of both women lead Molly to murder another woman in a fit of jealousy, while Bertha's outbursts of madness are an indication of jealousy at seeing Rochester with another woman. Molly is eventually tamed and becomes Mr. Jaggers' housekeeper, while Bertha is confined in a small room. Unlike Molly who is tamed and becomes submissive and silent, Bertha is still independent and "her courage is like a 'caged bird' and she seethes in submissiveness" (McPherson). The creation of Bertha shows Charlotte Bronte's portrayal of how women fit into the stereotype of Victorian society: dominated by the male figure and treated as inferior (McPherson). Both Dickens and Bronte are sympathetic towards repressed women; however the patriarchal ideology influencing Dickens has led him to create a submissive Molly while a feminist Bronte has created an unrestrained Bertha who attempts to murder Rochester and eventually commit suicide.

On the other hand, Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times* is a victim of a loveless marriage and when she explores her sexual feelings through an adulterous affair with James Harthouse, she suffers from guilt, loses her husband and is disinherited by her father. The consequences of her affair confirm the assertion that:

“The sexual instinct was not only a benevolent power but potentially a principal source of misfortune and evil. The individual becomes trapped in a life of sexual excess and perversion. He or she becomes unwittingly the ‘slave of his passions.’ The result is moral degradation, unimaginable suffering and personal ruin.” (Seidman 50)

The circumstance in which Louisa finds herself is inevitable because the Victorian society greatly repudiated immorality and adultery, especially if committed by a woman. However, Louisa is a victim of the constraints of her society because she did not choose her partner because of love, but for economic reasons. The suppression of her sexuality forces her to challenge the moral values of her society.

The violence and domineering nature of Mrs. Joe Gargery resembles that of Tante Sannie in *The Story of an African Farm*, who “comes across as a woman of great resilience, a huge matriarchal figure, devouring husbands. . .” (Gunner 141). Both women are overbearing and, in a Victorian context, they are repellant because of their authoritative nature. Both women are figures extracted from different societies, yet they fall under the same restrictive conditions established by patriarchal rule. Mrs. Joe expresses her anger and repulsion of her domestic role on her husband and brother while Tante Sannie also violates her husband and is generally feared in the whole community. They are both representatives of feminist ideologies who assert their independence by claiming male authority in a patriarchal society.

Dickens’ Biddy (*Great Expectations*) and Esther (*Bleak House*) resemble Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*. To a certain extent, Mrs. Ramsay is the “angel in the house” because of

her hospitality and subservient role in the whole community. She strives to be the perfect wife and through the exploration of her psyche, Woolf successfully portrays her as the ideal woman. Similarly, Biddy and Esther are also domesticated and marriageable because of their gentle and feminine nature. Dickens does not examine these characters' feelings or attitude towards domesticity, but the reader concludes that they are both best fitted for their role as pure women, who are also able to fulfill their domestic chores with perfection. However, modernist author Woolf explores Mrs. Ramsay's psychological creation. The reader is able to identify with Mrs. Ramsay's perspective on female identity within her society's constructions. It is through the stream of consciousness that the reader actually acquires the knowledge that she dislikes her duties and she envies Lily Briscoe, a single woman who is also a painter. Charles Dickens fails to give his female characters the power to express their opinions, and this is because he is a male novelist controlled by a literary tradition in which men were absolutely patriarchal in whatever they wrote. Therefore, he does not have the liberty to develop his perspective on the Victorian conception of womanhood although it will be proven he is sympathetic. On the other hand, Woolf as a modern feminist writer has the liberty to give a voice and a conscious mind to her female characters enables them to speak against patriarchy.

Dickens' concerns for the women of his time are definitely parallel to those of the feminist writers. Unfortunately, being a male writer limits his opportunity of portraying women with the same ability that the feminist writers possess because of their role of writing under patriarchal oppression. Charles Dickens' social comment on female oppression may seem passive and distanced, but one should not discredit the fact that being a male figure who has not experienced that exploitation, it is difficult to write with the same passion and anger used by women novelists.

CHAPTER SIX: The artist as a reformer, moralist and activist

*“Dickens always felt compassion for the poor, sick, deprived, and ill-treated, because he knew the problem in human terms: in terms of human suffering, loneliness, sickness, and waste.”
(Blount 343)*

George Eastman says: “Authors such as Charles Dickens had been writing about the plight of the urban poor as early as the 1830s in the hopes of stirring a sense of moral duty in the middle and upper classes of Victorian society” (qtd. by Blount 342). Charles Dickens is well known for attacking social institutions such as the education system, the Poor Law Amendment Act and the government’s failure to improve the lives of the poor. His writings create empathy in the reader and appeal to society to take action for social change. Although Dickens does not suggest any social reforms, this chapter will show that he was actively involved in changing the lives of the poor, prostitutes and even participated in the education of the poor children. Dickens cannot be perceived as a mere novelist, essayist or journalist, but his works have certainly proved to be more than fiction as he was also socially involved in helping the poor.

Dickens portrays the squalid poverty under which the lower class members of society live. His works are mainly concerned with the underprivileged in society and the workers are obviously among the group as confirmed by Blount: “Dickens always felt compassion for the poor, sick, deprived, and ill-treated, because he knew the problem in human terms, in terms of human suffering, loneliness, sickness, and waste” (341). The description of Tom-All-Alone’s in *Bleak House* as a slum dwelling is “an emblem of indifference, over-centralization, shelved responsibility, and lack of charity” (Blount 340). Dickens’ desire for social change is not only noted in his literary works, but through his speeches and practical activities. In the letter which

appeared in *Household Worlds* on 18 November 1854, he made an appeal for improving the living conditions of the workers:

“(Working men) never will save their children from the dreadful and unnatural mortality now prevalent among them (almost too murderous to be thought of), or save themselves from untimely sickness and death, until they have cheap pure water in unlimited quantity, wholesome air, constraint upon little landlords like our Westminster friends to keep their property decent under the heaviest penalties, efficient drainage and such alteration in building acts as shall preserve open spaces in the closest regions, and make them where they are not now. That a worthless Government which is afraid of every little interest and trembles before the vote of every dust contractor, will never do these things for them or pay the least sincere attention to them, until they are made election questions and the working people unite to express their determination to have them, or to keep out of Parliament by every means in their power, every man who turns his back upon these first necessities. (qtd. by Blount 341)

It is evident that Dickens blames the Government for lack of care and support for the poor. His letter is obviously aimed at those in power such as the politicians, whom he believes have the authority to do something about the plight of the poor. He also delivered a speech in London on 10 May 1851, which also highlighted the need for sanitary reform (see Appendix 6).

On 5 July 1849, a letter titled “A Sanitary Remonstrance” was published by *The Times*, sent by fifty four slum dwellers of St Giles Rookery, who made a plea to the Editor for his “protection and power,” to acknowledge the unpleasant living conditions under which they were living (qtd. by Blount 340) (see Appendix 3). It is such letters that highlighted the plight of the poor that led Charles Dickens to deliver a speech to The Metropolitan Sanitary Association in 1850, condemning slum landlords and politicians who ignored the needs for reform in public health. Moreover, his speech attempted to stir the emotions of those who were present and to urge them to take action:

“Fifteen years ago some of the valuable reports of Mr. Chadwick and Dr. Southwood Smith, strengthening and much enlarging my knowledge, made me earnest in this cause in my own sphere; and I can honestly declare that the use I have since that time made of my eyes and nose have only strengthened the conviction that certain sanitary reforms must precede all other social remedies, and that neither education nor religion can do anything useful until the way has been paved for their ministrations by cleanliness and decency.
(“Speeches: Literary and Social”)

Dickens also used his novels to raise public awareness of the slum dwellings as noted in his description of Tom-All-Along’s in *Bleak House*. In as much as his novels attempted to awaken the society about the abject poverty of the lower class, his speeches were a direct plea to those in authority and a criticism of their failure to improve the living conditions of the underprivileged.

Tom-All-Alone's is an "emblem of the dangers of neglect and irresponsibility," which represents the neglect of the poor by the authorities who have the power to change their plight (Blount 343).

Edwin Chadwick's publication in 1842 of the "Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain" brought public attention to the living conditions of the poor, which ultimately created disbelief among many middle class members. Chadwick's principal concern appeared to be with "the miasma" emanating from decaying matter, "the poisonous exhalations" which were the source of their physical, moral and mental deterioration (qtd. in "Victorian Social Reform in Britain"). Similar to Dickens' novels such as *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, the intention of Chadwick's report was "to arouse the consciousness and conscience of the middle class in order to promote specific reforms" ("Victorian Social Reform in Britain"). At this point, Dickens was also campaigning in "favour of parliamentary reform... and wrote several articles on public health. . ." ("Victorian Social Reform in Britain"). As a result, in 1848 and 1875, Public Health Acts were implemented to improve the squalid conditions of the poor, which meant that the literary works of Dickens and other writers portraying the desolate state of the poor were being considered.

Social reformers such as Beatrice Webb and Clara Collet were particularly interested in the:

. . . poverty of households headed by women and the connection
between below – subsistence – level wages and high infant
mortality rate. They placed their faith in social ownership,
economic planning and extensive measures by central and local
government to provide institutional and other relief to prevent
and cure poverty caused by unemployment, old age, sickness

and other causes of need. They were committed to pressing these

ideas upon leading politicians and civil servants (“Victorian Social Reform in Britain”).

Some of the social reforms were spearheaded through the influence of novelists such as Charles Dickens who also inspired other middle class citizens such as the Webbs to be actively involved in encouraging the government to work on social reforms.

Dickens suggests that the poverty to which the slum dwellers are subjected is due to the lack of love within society. Dickens shows that love is “self-propagating” (Blount 341). Therefore, *Bleak House* “realistically analyzes what human frailty is and is capable of, but offers, combined with it, a prescription for increased happiness and improved social well-being” (Blount 340). In other words, it is charity and good will that can improve the lives of the poor, as shown by Esther’s charitable works. In other words, “If this society is to be redeemed, Dickens insists it will be through the values represented by Esther Summerson. . . . the charity and warmth of Esther’s sympathetic love may be capable, if it becomes contagious, of illuminating this world and dissipating the fog” (“Charles Dickens”). According to Dickens, society can be saved through the transmission of order and love from people like Esther and Allan Woodcourt in *Bleak House*. Therefore, he believed that the basis of religious morals applied to everyday life would help achieve reforms (Loverich). Similarly, in *Hard Times*, Dickens also suggests that the exploitation to which the workers are subjected as a result of industrialisation can be diminished by love which is symbolized by the union of Sissy Jupe and Louisa Gradgrind when Louisa says to Sissy: “Let me lay this head of mine upon a loving heart” (*Hard Times* 202). However, authors like Changsheng Jiang postulate that Dickens believes that all “social evils come from thieves, mean persons, pickpockets and robbers. All of them have the origin of the low class, which means the poor bring about instability and insecurity to the society. But people with the

middle – class origin all seem to be well bred and well mannered. They are the supporters of justice and stability” (22).

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens suggests that the crime in which people like Fagin and Sikes are involved is caused by the poverty resulting from capitalism. Therefore Dickens suggests that the poor must be rescued from poverty, provided if they are morally upright like Oliver Twist, by the good hearted middle class characters like Mr. Brownlow. In as much as Dickens is a reformist, he is also as a moralist, who strongly believes in upholding good morals in society and if the world is full of people who are morally upright like Mr. Brownlow, then there would not be any crime. However, Dickens’ reform suggests that the middle class are always well bred as opposed to the lower classes who are either criminals like Fagin and Bill Sykes or lazy like Noah Claypole whose father was a drunken soldier and his mother a washerwoman. Even though Dickens seems to criticize the lower class for their behaviour, he also sympathizes with their plight and predicament caused by industrialisation and capitalism.

“As a novelist, Dickens is concerned about the victims of his society and the way in which their lots can be improved. He therefore chooses to construct representative victims of legal institutions such as the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. . . .” (Swifte). Dickens sympathises with the plight of children (see Appendix 7). Charles Dickens dismisses the Poor Law officials who are represented by characters like Mr. Bumble, the church beadle and Mrs. Mann who sell the workhouse inmates into child labour and misuse the funds sent to care for the children. Brian Wright states that *Oliver Twist* has “proven to be one of the most influential in the reform movement against London’s Poor Laws. Dickens also overemphasized the poor conditions of the workhouse under the new Poor Law to raise awareness of the atrocities committed against the

children and poor in England” (9 – 10). Therefore, Dickens’ intention in *Oliver Twist* was to bring the “shortcomings of the Poor Law amendment of 1834 to the public eye” (10). Dickens’ role as a reformer is noted in his attempt to expose the inefficiency and evils of the workhouse system which exploited children.

Dickens’ novels further raised awareness which led to reforms such as the Coal Acts which prohibited the employment of young children and women. The Factory Act of 1833 reduced the working hours of young children aged 9 – 12 to forty eight hours a week (Nardinelli 742). Moreover, the employment of children below the age of thirteen was prohibited by the Factory Act of 1819 which led to the decline of child labour (see Appendix 5).

Dickens’ novels also criticize the form of education offered to poor children as noted in *Great Expectations* when Pip attends Mr Wopsle’s great aunt’s night school, a model of a “Ragged School” (*Dickens and Education* 71). Dickens was concerned about children and education as he was removed from school at a young age and taken into a workhouse. His concern for the uneducated children led him to be involved with charities such as funding the Ragged Schools which were intended for “children of costermongers, pig – feeders, rag dealers, part – time dock workers, in fact all those whose work was menial, irregular and ill – paid (Schupf 162). Dickens believed that all children should have the opportunity to receive a good education and that “it was the responsibility of the church, of the parents, and of the state” (Santoni). Dickens’ social involvement was not only through his literary works, but also through charity practice and offering to help the needy by donating his own income gained from his writings, and his efforts over time, led to the execution of the Education Act in 1870 which emphasised on the compulsory education for all children (see Appendix 5).

The major issues surrounding the education of the poor that were highlighted in Dickens' novels obviously raised public awareness and led to churches to form schools for the underprivileged. "The first schools were founded by agents of the London City Mission Society, an Evangelical effort organized to bring the benefits of the gospel to the poor ("The Charities and the Poor of London" 436). The conditions of these schools were below standard and Dickens highlighted this issue in one of his letters to Angela Burdett Coutts:

"...The school is miserably poor, you may believe, and is almost entirely supported by the teachers themselves. If they could get a better room (the house they are in is like an ugly dream); above all, if they could provide some convenience for washing; it would be an immense advantage." (qtd. by Schupf 164)

In a speech on November 5 1875, Dickens completely dismisses the shortcomings and lack of uniformity of the schools with which he was familiar and even he even portrayed some of them through Mr. Gradgrind's teaching in a school of 'facts' (*Hard Times*). In his speech he said:

"I don't like that sort of school – and I have seen a great many such in these latter times – where the bright childish imagination is utterly discouraged, and where those bright childish faces, which it is so very good for the wisest among us to remember in after life, when the world is too much with us early and late, are gloomily and grimly scared out of countenance; where I have never seen among the pupil, whether boys or girls, anything but little parrots and small calculating machines. (qtd. by Meldrum 92)

Charles Dickens' speech explicitly indicates his disapproval of the education offered to the poor. Moreover, he promoted school reform because of the church's and state's indifference to the plight of children who were subjected to child labour, thus depriving them of the opportunity to attend school (Meldrum 93).

However, the education that was originally provided by the churches for the poor was the gospel, which was "not the provision of secular education but the saving of souls (Schupf 163). In 1870, the Education Act was implemented and the Ragged Schools were banned and local boards were permitted make sure of the existence of schools in areas where there was none or where the standards were poor. Later on, the system of education changed as elements such as history, geography or music were added by some of the schools. Dickens' social concerns did not end in literary form, but also extended to practical involvement with implementing reforms. His active involvement and concern for the plight of the poor led to the benevolence of Angela Burdett – Courtts and other contributors who ensured that new institutions with better standards were provided for the underprivileged (Schupf 164).

Apart from being involved in educating poor children, Dickens was particularly concerned about the treatment of children and their placement in society. These were children who were orphans who were exposed to abuse at home such as Pip in *Great Expectations*, who was perpetually physically assaulted by his sister Mrs. Joe, orphaned children such as Oliver Twist (*Oliver Twist*), Jo (*Bleak House*), and those who are neglected such as the Pocket children in *Great Expectations* or abandoned such as Esther Summerson (*Bleak House*). Dickens suggests that a complete family unit provides spiritual happiness and growth in these children. He also believes that it is the warm hearts of the middle class members who can welcome these orphaned or

neglected children into their homes as shown through Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Brownlow who take Oliver Twist into their own home, or Mr. John Jarndyce who also welcomes Esther Summerson into his house. Dickens places the responsibility on the middle class; he expresses through his writings that it is their duty to take care of the needy. Dickens “felt that children have certain needs: guidance in a nurturing home, to be free from emotional and physical abuse, to have good education, and to be allowed to use their imaginations” (Santoni).

Dickens is also a novelist concerned with the plight of women and their struggle to survive in a competitive world. He raises issues like prostitution which was regarded by the Victorians as a “serious social evil” (Gorham 353). In *Oliver Twist*, Nancy is a juvenile prostitute involved with a criminal gang. Dickens deliberately highlights such a serious issue because society needs to be aware of what is happening to the desperate lower class. Poverty obviously forces young girls into prostitution as reiterated by Dickens through the character of Nancy. Dickens became actively involved with the reformation of prostitutes as noted through the funding of Urania Cottage, a home for fallen women (Rogers). Moreover, he wrote a letter for distribution among women in police custody and he pleads with them to change their ways and advises them to go to a lady in town, probably Angela Burdett – Coutts to be accommodated: “There is a lady in this town who from the windows of her house has seen such as you. . . She has resolved to open at her own expense a place of refuge near London for a small number of females, who without such help are lost forever, and to make a HOME for them” (“An Appeal to Fallen Women” by see Appendix 4).

In the eyes of the reformers involved in combating child prostitution, it was a requirement for all people to support the “campaign for the protection of young girls” (Coote 15). “Had they

allowed themselves to see that many young girls engaged in prostitution not as passive, sexually innocent victims but because their choices were so limited, the reformers would have been forced to recognize that the causes of juvenile prostitution were to be found in an exploitative economic structure” (Gorham 355). Gorham further stipulates that the reformers should have laid more focus on the cause of prostitution, which was an economic reason, but more concern was placed on combating prostitution through the organized protest against the traffic of young English girls into state regulated brothels in countries such as Belgium, Holland and France (355).

It can be noted that Charles Dickens’ works played tremendous role in the implementation of policies that changed the lives of the poor. Apart from his works, Dickens’ active involvement in promoting social reforms raised public awareness in the fight against poverty, deprivation of education, child labour and prostitution.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown that Charles Dickens' life experiences played a major role in shaping his writings. At the age of twelve, he became a victim of child labour as he was forced to work at a blacking factory after his father was imprisoned for debt. Due to the painful experience as a child labourer, Charles Dickens was able to identify with the plight of minors subjected to factory work at a tender age. Judging from his biography, one can note that literary art mirrors the artist's life. Therefore, life experience influences the writings of many artists as evidenced through Charles Dickens. The negative impact has also been further substantiated by reference to historical records and testimonies of child labourers who sustained injuries and also testified to being exploited through physical abuse and unbearable working conditions. According to Nardinelli, the factories are described as “. . . hellish institutions for the destruction of childhood” (740). Due to child labour, most of the children lost their childhood as they were busy contributing to the growth and development of British textile industries. Due to Charles Dickens' activism against the oppression of children through his works, essays and speeches, factory acts were introduced which prohibited the employment of minors.

Apart from his life experience, it has also been noted that the Industrial Revolution also played a major role in impacting Dickens' works. The Industrial Revolution was a progressive phenomenon in the Victorian society as it brought technological developments and also created employment for many people. Urbanisation was also another positive result of industrialisation. However, Dickens' works, like those of many naturalist authors, focus more on the negative impact of industrialisation on the lives of the underprivileged in society. One of his novels, *Hard Times*, has been commended for its social criticism of industrialisation: “It had been studied, for

example, in relation to his beliefs about education, the Preston strike, disputes between capital and labour, and his general views on the quality of nineteenth – century urban industrial civilization” (Fielding and Smith 404). Through realism, Dickens skillfully creates characters who are truthful representations of the poor in society. He authenticates his characters by giving them a language that is associated with the lower class, for example in *Great Expectations*, Magwitch’s lack of education is noted in the pronunciation of words like: “ Lookee”(7), “pecooliar” (9), while Joe says “sot” (15) and “betwixt” (16) and also noted in *Bleak House* through Jo where he says to Mr Snagsby: “. . . and don’t want for nothink. I’m more cumfbler nor you can’t think, Mr Snagsby! I’m wery sorry that I done it, but I didn’t fur to do it sir.” (page 456). These characters are members of the lower class who are uneducated thus their language is different from the refined language of the middle class members. These characters are a reflection of the plight of the poor during the Industrial Revolution as George Bernard Shaw reflects in his play *Pygmalion* that language establishes people in their social and economic circles and limits their opportunity for advancement.

Apart from the lack of education, these people were subjected to squalid living conditions. Due to the rural to urban migration, the urban areas became densely populated and there was not enough accommodation for all the workers, therefore, they were forced to live under unbearable conditions with poor sanitation and lack of space. This research has confirmed that the working class lived under abject poverty as most of them had to squash the whole family into a small room with substandard sanitary conditions leading to fatal diseases such as cholera, typhoid, tuberculosis and high infant mortality as noted through the death of Pip’s siblings whom he never saw. Through the creation of Tom-All-Alone’s in *Bleak House*, Coketown in *Hard Times* and the forge in *Great Expectations*, in which Pip grows, Dickens’ novels have clearly depicted

the living conditions of the poor, and as a novelist, he criticizes the government and the capitalists who ought to change the situation of the underprivileged .

Charles Dickens' works greatly attacked the workhouse system because of its exploitation of the poor. As the number of the bourgeoisie increased, the number of the poor also increased and the government assigned church parishes to give aid to the poor. The introduction of the workhouse system meant that all those who needed aid had to live at the workhouses where they were required to work so that they would receive some money. However, as confirmed by Dickens' works and other historical works consulted for this research, the workhouses were horrible hell holes of exploitation. Moreover, children were the most vulnerable as they were separated from their families, underfed and could be sold into child labour as evidenced through Oliver in *Oliver Twist*. Authors like Charles Dickens used literary art as a weapon to expose such social ills which subjugated minors to severe injuries and even premature death. His works are instrumental in implementing social reforms which saw the Poor Laws revised as well as factory acts which prohibited the employment of children. This research has shown that through a realistic portrayal of characters who represent the underprivileged in society, Dickens' works played a major role in the British social reformation.

Dickens also criticised society for its deprivation of education to the poor and he sympathised with children because of their vulnerability and lack of access to education. His characters such as Pip in *Great Expectations*, Oliver in *Oliver Twist*, and Jo in *Bleak House* are all deprived of education. Unfortunately, Jo dies without receiving an opportunity to be educated unlike his counterparts Oliver and Pip. Oliver is rescued from a criminal life by the benevolent Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies who are related to his late mother. On the other hand, Pip is granted

the opportunity to be educated by the criminal Magwitch and they both receive middle class education. Through educating Pip who belongs to the lower class, Dickens challenges the Victorian ideology that children from middle class families were the only ones who should receive proper education, taught to be gentlemen and all forms of manners and decorum. On the other hand, the reader also assumes that Oliver will also be educated through the help of his new middle class family. Through the transformation of Pip and Oliver's lives, Charles Dickens has given the reader conflicting views of how social change can be implemented in the lives of the poor. Due to hard work and a generous heart, the lower class members can improve their own lives as evidenced by Magwitch who is Pip's benefactor. However, Dickens also suggests that it is the role of the middle class to give a helping hand to the poor. In other words, Dickens suggests that social reform lies in the hands of each and every individual, whether from the lower class or the middle class. His active involvement in sponsoring the Ragged Schools also shows that he takes what he says theoretically and puts it into practice, further substantiating the point that Dickens' novels were not just works of fiction, but they actually played a major role in the enactment of social reforms such as the reformation of the education system.

Apart from the deprivation of education to the poor child, Dickens has also shown sympathy towards orphaned and neglected children. Most of his child characters are neglected children for whom the reader is compelled to feel compassion. Pip in *Great Expectations*, Jo in *Bleak House* and Oliver in *Oliver Twist* are all orphans. On the other hand, there are abandoned children such as Estella in *Great Expectations*, Esther in *Bleak House* and Sissy Jupe in *Hard Times*. Pip and Oliver endure abuse from their guardians, Mrs. Joe Gargery and the workhouse authorities respectively. Unfortunately, Jo is a street urchin and he has no one to take care of him. The incompleteness of the child characters' lives and the fragmented family system is a reflection of

the disintegration of the Victorian society due to industrialisation. Dickens' compassion for the plight of children has been extended to his involvement in charities that sponsor orphaned children.

Even though Dickens is a Victorian writer who portrays the ideologies of his day, particularly the gender constructions, it does not mean that he upheld those ideas. Coming from a patriarchal society which oppresses women, Dickens is likely to be mistaken as a patriarch himself. The Victorian society strongly believed that a woman's place was at home, thus she was called "angel in the house." Fallen women, who lost their virginity before marriage or were impregnated out of wedlock such as Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House* or Molly in *Great Expectations*, were not tolerated at all. Charles Dickens successfully mirrors the Victorian gender construction through the creation of the extremes which represent female identity – the accepted and the despised. In so doing, he subtly criticises the Victorian society for its marginalisation and exclusion of women and its intolerance of those "fallen women."

Through a feminist reading of Dickens' characters, it has been concluded that the dramatic and sometimes grotesque representation of the women in his novels is an appeal to society to recognise the plight of women and change their predicament. He has been actively involved in the emancipation of women by seeking to reform prostitutes and "fallen women" by providing opportunities for a better life. One of the strongest attributes of Dickens is that he recognises the factors that lead women into prostitution, which are poverty and a yearning for economic emancipation. At the same time, he is also attacking the Victorian society for failing to include all women as viable members of society.

This research has shown that Dickens realistically represented the underprivileged in society as well as attacked the oppressive nature of the Victorian society and its failure to assist the poor. Dickens' works have also proved to be a major role player in the implementation of social reforms in Britain. A lot of research has been done on Dickens as a social critic and a sympathiser of the poor, therefore the researcher of this paper recommends further research to be done on Dickens and his attitude towards colonialism as "the nineteenth century's dominant genre of domestic fiction is also implicitly informed by colonial ideology". Although Dickens' novels and those of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Elliot focus on immediate British society, there is an implicit mention of overseas escapades expressed through the English people's mission to civilise Africans and even Indians. Colonialism is at the backdrop of some of the Victorian Literature which indicates the obstinate involvement of the British in the colonial enterprise ("Colonialism in Victorian English Literature").

Although Dickens' texts are not explicit on the issue of colonialism, the presence of the implicit mention of the phenomenon is recognizable, particularly in *Bleak House* through Mrs Jellyby who is preoccupied with "civilizing" the natives in Africa. Simultaneously, the colonial ideology is parallel to the presentation of the domestic class relations in which the lower class is portrayed as analogous to the colonized. However, further research on the post colonial reading needs to be conducted on Charles Dickens' works and attitude towards the colonial ideology as he subtly illustrates the rise of colonialism. Scholars like Lillian Nayder claim that Dickens was one of the profound critics of the African Expedition of 1841 which sought to convert Africans and oppress the native (690). Charles Dickens' resistance to colonialism is noted in *Bleak House* through the satirical representation of Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle who have placed their attention on

distant Africans and Indians rather than helping the English lower classes who are much closer.

This is also further confirmed by Charles Dickens' exhortation of the missionaries:

Believe it, African Civilization, Church of England Missionary,
and all other Missionary societies! The work at home must be completed
thoroughly, or there is no hope abroad. To your tents, O Israel! But see that
they are your own tents! Set them in order; leave nothing to be done there;
and outpost will convey your lesson on to outpost, until the naked armies of
King Obi and King Boy are reached and taught. (qtd. by Nayder 690)

As noted above and in *Bleak House* Dickens blames the imperial mission for the failure of social reform in England (Nayder 690). More research is needed to find out what other scholars have suggested in response to Dickens' criticism of colonialism. However, in *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, Dickens portrays the Indians as murderous, which is a typical colonial ideology. Therefore the debate surrounding Dickens' attitude towards the colonial ideology needs critical and thorough examination because at one point he portrays a skeptical and cynical attitude towards colonialism, yet on the other hand, he seems to uphold a racist attitude and representation of the Indians.

In addition to further research surrounding Dickens and the colonial ideology, extensive critical study is also recommended on the modernist approach of Dickens' writing. Characters like Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations* who are spiritually dead yet alive resemble T. S. Eliot's deranged and fragmented characters in the poem "The Hollow Men." Moreover, Miss Havisham also reminds the reader of some of Dickens' characters in *Our Mutual Friend* who are either physically disabled or faced with some form of abnormalities. In this way, Charles Dickens is

similar to the twentieth century modernist writers who have depicted the horrendous impact of industrialization on the human soul.

Although Dickens is highly recognized as a Victorian writer, it is quite evident that he greatly impacted the modernist writers who adopted the style of creating disfigured characters who represent the scarred and fragmented nature of the twentieth century human being. Further research needs to be carried out in order to substantiate this suggestion and also to show how Dickens is comparable to the modernist writers. Some of the modernists to whom Dickens can be compared are Russian authors like Nikolai Gogol particularly in his novel *Dead Souls*, in which he explores the condition of the spiritually dead human souls due to the Industrial Revolution. T.S. Eliot is another writer who also depicts the same issue in his poem "The Waste Land." The researcher of this paper suggests that a modernist reading of Dickens' novels will substantiate the assertion that his works greatly impacted the modernists' mode of writing.

APPENDIX 1

Source 7

Jonathan Downe was interviewed by Michael Sadler's Parliamentary Committee on 6th June, 1832.

When I was seven years old I went to work at Mr. Marshalls factory at Shrewsbury. If a child was drowsy, the overlooker touches the child on the shoulder and says, "Come here". In a corner of the room there is an iron cistern filled with water. He takes the boy by the legs and dips him in the cistern, and sends him back to work.



Source 8

Sarah Carpenter was interviewed about her experiences in The Ashton Chronicle (23rd June, 1849)

The master carder's name was Thomas Birks; but he never went by any other name than Tom the Devil. He was a very bad man - he was encouraged by the master in ill-treating all the hands, but particularly the children. I have often seen him pull up the clothes of big girls, seventeen or eighteen years of age, and throw them across his knee, and then flog them with his hand in the sight of both men and boys. Everybody was frightened of him. He would not even let us speak. He once fell poorly, and very glad we were. We wished he might die. There was an overlooker called William Hughes, who was put in his place whilst he was ill. He came up to me and asked me what my drawing frame was stopped for. I said I did not know because it was not me who had stopped it. A little boy that was on the other side had stopped it, but he was too frightened to say it was him. Hughes starting beating me with a stick, and when he had done I told him I would let my mother know. He then went out and fetched the master in to me. The master started beating me with a stick over the head till it was full of lumps and bled. My head was so bad that I could not sleep for a long time, and I never been a sound sleeper since. There was a young woman, Sarah Goodling, who was poorly and so she stopped her machine. James Birch, the overlooker knocked her to the floor. She got up as well as she could. He knocked her down again. Then she was carried to the apprentice house. Her bed-fellow found her dead in bed. There was another called Mary. She knocked her food can down on the floor. The master, Mr. Newton, kicked her where he should not do, and it caused her to wear away till she died. There was another, Caroline Thompson. They beat her till she went out of her mind. We were always locked up out of mill hours, for fear any of us should runaway. One day the door was left open.

Charlotte Smith, said she would be ring leader, if the rest would follow. She went out but no one followed her. The master found out about this and sent for her. There was a carving knife which he took and grasping her hair he cut it off close to the head. They were in the habit of cutting off the hair of all who were caught speaking to any of the lads. This head shaving was a dreadful punishment. We were more afraid of it than of any other, for girls are proud of their hair.



APPENDIX 2

Source 10

John Brown: A Memoir of Robert Blincoe (1828)

A girl named Mary Richards, who was thought remarkably handsome when she left the workhouse, and, who was not quite ten years of age, attended a drawing frame, below which, and about a foot from the floor, was a horizontal shaft, by which the frames above were turned. It happened one evening, when her apron was caught by the shaft. In an instant the poor girl was drawn by an irresistible force and dashed on the floor. She uttered the most heart-rending shrieks! Blincoe ran towards her, an agonized and helpless beholder of a scene of horror. He saw her whirled round and round with the shaft - he heard the bones of her arms, legs, thighs, etc. successively snap asunder, crushed, seemingly, to atoms, as the machinery whirled her round, and drew tighter and tighter her body within the works, her blood was scattered over the frame and streamed upon the floor, her head appeared dashed to pieces - at last, her mangled body was jammed in so fast, between the shafts and the floor, that the water being low and the wheels off the gear, it stopped the main shaft. When she was extricated, every bone was found broken - her head dreadfully crushed. She was carried off quite lifeless.

Source 11

John Allen started working in a textile factory when he was fourteen years old. Allett was fifty-three when he was interviewed by Michael Sadler and his House of Commons Committee on 21st May, 1832.

Question: Do more accidents take place at the latter end of the day?

Answer: I have known more accidents at the beginning of the day than at the later part. I was an eye-witness of one. A child was working wool, that is, to prepare the wool for the machine; but the strap caught him, as he was hardly awake, and it carried him into the machinery; and we found one limb in one place, one in another, and he was cut to bits; his whole body went in, and was mangled.

APPENDIX 3

THE EDITUR OF THE TIMES PAPER

Sur, - May we beg and beseech your proteckshion and power. We are Sur, as it may be, livin in a Wilderniss, so far as the rest of London knows anything of us, or as the rich and great people care about. We live in muck and filth. We aint got no priviz, no dust bins, no drains, no water-splies, and no drain or suer in the hole place. The Suer Company, in Greek St., Soho Square, all great, rich and powerfool men, take no notice watsomdever of our complaints. The Stenche of a Gully-hole is disgustin. We all of us suffer, and numbers are ill, and if the Colera comes Lord help us.

Some gentlemans comed yesterday, and we thought they was comishioners from the Suer Company, but they was complaining of the noosance and stenche our lanes and corts was to them in New Oxforde Street. They was much surprized to see the seller in No. 12, Carrier St., in our lane, where a child was dyin from fever, and would not believe that Sixty persons sleep in it every night. This here seller you couldnt swing a cat in, and the rent is five shillings a week; but theare are greate many sich deare sellars. Sur, we hope you will let us have our complaints put into your hinfluenshall paper, and make these landlords of our houses and these comishioners (the friends we spose of the landlords) make our houses decent for Christions to live in.

Preaye Sir com and see us, for we are living like piggs, and it aint faire we shoulde be so ill treted.

We are your respeckfull servents in Church Lane, Carrier St., and the other corts.

Teusday, Juley 3, I849.

John Scott	Hanna Crosbie	John O'Grady	Timothy Brian
Ewen Scott	Edward Copeman	Marie O'Grady	James Bryan
Joseph Crosbie	Richard Harmer	John Dencey	Philip Lacey
John Barnes	John Crowe	John Crowley	Edward brown
William Austin	James Crowe	Margaret Steward	Mrs. brocke
Elen Fitzgerald	Thomas Crowe	Bridget Towley	Nance hays
William Whut	Patrick Fouhey	John Towley	Jeryh fouhey
Ann Saunderson	William Joyce	Timothy Crowley	Jeryh fouhey [sic]
Mark Manning	Michal Joyce	John Brown	Marey fouhey
John Turner	John Joyce	Catherine Brown	Jerey Aies
William Dwyre	Thomas Joyce	Catherine Collins	Timthy Joyce
Mary Aiers	John Sullivan	Honora Flinn	John Padler
Donald Connell	Timothy Sullivan		
Timothy Driscoll	Cathrin Trice		
Timothe Murphy	James Ragen		

APPENDIX 4

AN APPEAL TO FALLEN WOMEN

Charles Dickens

(Dickens wrote this leaflet in 1849 for distribution among women taken into police custody, in the hope of directing them to a Home at Shepherd's Bush established by his friend Angela Burdett Coutts.)

You will see, on beginning to read this letter, that it is not addressed to you by name. But I address it to a woman--a very young woman still--who was born to be happy and has lived miserably; who has no prospect before her but sorrow, or behind her but a wasted youth; who, if she has ever been a mother, has felt shame instead of pride in her own unhappy child.

You are such a person, or this letter would not be put into your hands. If you have ever wished (I know you must have done so some time) for a chance of rising out of your sad life, and having friends, a quiet home, means of being useful to yourself and others, peace of mind, self-respect, everything you have lost, pray read it attentively and reflect upon it afterwards.

I am going to offer you, not the chance but the certainty of all these blessings, if you will exert yourself to deserve them. And do not think that I write to you as if I felt myself very much above you, or wished to hurt your feelings by reminding you of the situation in which you are placed. God forbid! I mean nothing but kindness to you, and I write as if you were my sister.

Think for a moment what your present situation is. Think how impossible it is that it ever can be better if you continue to live as you have lived, and how certain it is that it must be worse. You know what the streets are; you know how cruel the companions that you find there are; you know the vices practised there, and to what wretched consequences they bring you, even while you are young. Shunned by decent people, marked out from all other kinds of women as you walk along, avoided by the very children, hunted by the police, imprisoned, and only set free to be imprisoned over and over again--reading this very letter in a common jail you have already dismal experience of the truth.

But to grow old in such a way of life, and among such company--to escape an early death from terrible disease, or your own maddened hand, and arrive at old age in such a cannot describe. Imagine for yourself the bed on which you, then an object terrible to look at, will lie down to die. Imagine all the long, long years of shame, want, crime, and ruin that will arise before you. And by that dreadful day, and by the judgment that will follow it, and by the recollection that you are certain to have then, when it is too late, of the offer that is made to you now, when it is NOT too late, I implore you to think of it and weigh it well.

There is a lady in this town who from the windows of her house has seen such as you going past at night, and has felt her heart bleed at the sight. She is what is called a great lady, but she has

looked after you with compassion as being of her own sex and nature, and the thought of such fallen women has troubled her in her bed.

She has resolved to open at her own expense a place of refuge near London for a small number of females, who without such help are lost for ever, and to make a HOME for them. In this home they will be taught all household work that would be useful to them in a home of their own and enable them to make it comfortable and happy. In this home, which stands in a pleasant country lane and where each may have her little flower-garden if she pleases, they will be treated with the greatest kindness: will lead an active, cheerful, healthy life: will learn many things it is profitable and good to know, and being entirely removed from all who have any knowledge of their past career will begin life afresh and be able to win a good name and character.

And because it is not the lady's wish that these young women should be shut out from the world after they have repented and learned to do their duty there, and because it is her wish and object that they may be restored to society--a comfort to themselves and it--they will be supplied with every means, when some time shall have elapsed and their conduct shall have fully proved their earnestness and reformation, to go abroad, where in a distant country they may become the faithful wives of honest men, and live and die in peace.

I have been told that those who see you daily in this place believe that there are virtuous inclinations lingering within you, and that you may be reclaimed. I offer the Home I have described in these few words, to you.

But, consider well before you accept it. As you are to pass from the gate of this Prison to a perfectly new life, where all the means of happiness, from which you are now shut out, are opened brightly to you, so remember on the other hand that you must have the strength to leave behind you all old habits. You must resolve to set a watch upon yourself, and to be firm in your control over yourself, and to restrain yourself; to be gentle, patient, persevering, and good tempered. Above all things, to be truthful in every word you speak. Do this, and all the rest is easy. But you must solemnly remember that if you enter this Home without such constant resolutions, you will occupy, unworthily and uselessly, the place of some other unhappy girl, now wandering and lost; and that her ruin, no less than your own, will be upon your head, before Almighty God, who knows the secrets of our breasts; and Christ, who died upon the Cross to save us.

In case there should be anything you wish to know, or any question you would like to ask about this Home, you have only to say so, and every information shall be given to you. Whether you accept or reject it, think of it. If you awake in the silence and solitude of the night, think of it then. If any remembrance ever comes into your mind of any time when you were innocent and very different, think of it then. If you should be softened by a moment's recollection of any tenderness or affection you have ever felt, or that has ever been shown to you, or of any kind word that has ever been spoken to you, think of it then. If ever your poor heart is moved to feel

truly, what you might have been, and what you are, oh think of it then, and consider what you may yet become.

Believe me that I am indeed,

YOUR FRIEND

THE END.

APPENDIX 5

Chronology of British Social Reforms:

YEAR	PURPOSE
1802: Factory Act	Protected Pauper Apprentices
1819: Factory Act	Limited Child Labour
1820-25: Legal Acts	Reformed criminal codes
1832	Right to vote granted to the middle class
1833: Factory Act	Limited working hours for children
1834: New Poor Law Act	Changed public relief system
1842: Factory Act	Protected mine workers
1844: Factory Act	Protected women workers
1846: Corn Law Repeal	Repealed tariff on grain
1864: Contagious Disease Act	Compulsory medical examinations for prostitutes
1867	Male adult holders obtained voting rights
1870: Education Act	Ratepayers instructed to build schools for the poor
1871	Trade Unions legalized and workers granted the right to strike
1872: Secret Ballot Act	Voting became secret, thus landlords could not determine the outcome of elections
1875: Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act	Workers allowed to demonstrate peacefully, at their workplaces
1884	Farmers and labourers in the countryside allowed to vote
1911: Parliament Act	Ended veto of the House of Lords and MPs were paid under this Act

1906: Trade Disputes Act	Government declared that unions could not be sued for damages incurred during a strike
1906	Workers compensated for injuries at work
1907	Free medical treatment for children at schools
1908	Pension introduced for those over 70
1911:National Insurance Act	Insurance provided for sick workers
1918: Reform Act	Women over 30 allowed to vote

APPENDIX 6

SANITARY REFORM. LONDON, MAY 10, 1851

[The members and friends of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association dined together on the above evening at Gore House, Kensington. The Earl of Carlisle occupied the chair. Mr. Charles Dickens was present, and in proposing "The Board of Health," made the following speech:-]

There are very few words for me to say upon the needfulness of sanitary reform, or the consequent usefulness of the Board of Health. That no man can estimate the amount of mischief grown in dirt,--that no man can say the evil stops here or stops there, either in its moral or physical effects, or can deny that it begins in the cradle and is not at rest in the miserable grave, is as certain as it is that the air from Gin Lane will be carried by an easterly wind into Mayfair, or that the furious pestilence raging in St. Giles's no mortal list of lady patronesses can keep out of Almack's. Fifteen years ago some of the valuable reports of Mr. Chadwick and Dr. Southwood Smith, strengthening and much enlarging my knowledge, made me earnest in this cause in my own sphere; and I can honestly declare that the use I have since that time made of my eyes and nose have only strengthened the conviction that certain sanitary reforms must precede all other social remedies, and that neither education nor religion can do anything useful until the way has been paved for their ministrations by cleanliness and decency.

I do not want authority for this opinion: you have heard the speech of the right reverend prelate {27} this evening--a speech which no sanitary reformer can have heard without emotion. Of what avail is it to send missionaries to the miserable man condemned to work in a foetid court, with every sense bestowed upon him for his health and happiness turned into a torment, with every month of his life adding to the heap of evils under which he is condemned to exist? What human sympathy within him is that instructor to address? what natural old chord within him is he to touch? Is it the remembrance of his children?--a memory of destitution, of sickness, of fever, and of scrofula? Is it his hopes, his latent hopes of immortality? He is so surrounded by and embedded in

material filth, that his soul cannot rise to the contemplation of the great truths of religion. Or if the case is that of a miserable child bred and nurtured in some noisome, loathsome place, and tempted, in these better days, into the ragged school, what can a few hours' teaching effect against the ever-renewed lesson of a whole existence? But give them a glimpse of heaven through a little of its light and air; give them water; help them to be clean; lighten that heavy atmosphere in which their spirits flag and in which they become the callous things they are; take the body of the dead relative from the close room in which the living live with it, and where death, being familiar, loses its awe; and then they will be brought willingly to hear of Him whose thoughts were so much with the poor, and who had compassion for all human suffering.

The toast which I have to propose, The Board of Health, is entitled to all the honour which can be conferred upon it. We have very near us, in Kensington, a transparent illustration that no very great thing can ever be accomplished without an immense amount of abuse being heaped upon it. In connexion with the Board of Health we are always hearing a very large word which is always pronounced with a very great relish--the word centralization. Now I submit that in the time of the cholera we had a pretty good opportunity of judging between this so called centralization and what I may, I think, call "vestrylisation." I dare say the company present have read the reports of the Cholera Board of Health, and I daresay they have also read reports of certain vestries. I have the honour of belonging to a constituency which elected that amazing body, the Marylebone vestry, and I think that if the company present will look to what was done by the Board of Health at Glasgow, and then contrast those proceedings with the wonderful cleverness with which affairs were managed at the same period by my vestry, there will be very little difficulty in judging between them. My vestry even took upon itself to deny the existence of cholera as a weak invention of the enemy, and that denial had little or no effect in staying the progress of the disease. We can now contrast what centralization is as represented by a few noisy and interested gentlemen, and what centralization is when worked out by a body combining business habits, sound medical and social knowledge, and an earnest sympathy with the sufferings of the working classes.

Another objection to the Board of Health is conveyed in a word not so large as the other,--"Delay." I would suggest, in respect to this, that it would be very unreasonable to complain that a first-rate chronometer didn't go when its master had not wound it up. The Board of Health may be excellently adapted for going and very willing and anxious to go, and yet may not be permitted to go by reason of its lawful master having fallen into a gentle slumber and forgotten to set it a going. One of the speakers this evening has referred to Lord Castlereagh's caution "not to halloo until they were out of the wood." As regards the Board of Trade I would suggest that they ought not to halloo until they are out of the Woods and Forests. In that leafy region the Board of Health suffers all sorts of delays, and this should always be borne in mind. With the toast of the Board of Health I will couple the name of a noble lord (Ashley), of whose earnestness in works of benevolence, no man can doubt, and who has the courage on all occasions to face the cant which is the worst and commonest of all--the cant about the cant of philanthropy.

APPENDIX 7

LONDON, FEBRUARY 9, 1858

[At the Anniversary Festival of the Hospital for Sick Children, on Tuesday, February the 9th, 1858, about one hundred and fifty gentlemen sat down to dinner, in the Freemasons' Hall. Later in the evening all the seats in the gallery were filled with ladies interested in the success of the Hospital. After the usual loyal and other toasts, the Chairman, Mr. Dickens, proposed "Prosperity to the Hospital for Sick Children," and said:-]

Ladies and gentlemen,--It is one of my rules in life not to believe a man who may happen to tell me that he feels no interest in children. I hold myself bound to this principle by all kind consideration, because I know, as we all must, that any heart which could really toughen its affections and sympathies against those dear little people must be wanting in so many humanising experiences of innocence and tenderness, as to be quite an unsafe monstrosity among men. Therefore I set the assertion down, whenever I happen to meet with it--which is sometimes, though not often--as an idle word, originating possibly in the genteel languor of the hour, and meaning about as much as that knowing social lassitude, which has used up the cardinal virtues and quite found out things in general, usually does mean. I suppose it may be taken for granted that we, who come together in the name of children and for the sake of children, acknowledge that we have an interest in them; indeed, I have observed since I sit down here that we are quite in a childlike state altogether, representing an infant institution, and not even yet a grown-up company. A few years are necessary to the increase of our strength and the expansion of our figure; and then these tables, which now have a few tucks in them, will be let out, and then this hall, which now sits so easily upon us, will be too tight and small for us. Nevertheless, it is likely that even we are not without our experience now and then of spoilt children. I do not mean of our own spoilt children, because nobody's own children ever were spoilt, but I mean the disagreeable children of our particular friends. We know by experience what it is to have them down after dinner, and, across the rich perspective of a miscellaneous dessert to see, as in a black dose darkly, the family doctor looming in the distance. We know, I have no doubt we all know, what it is to assist at those little maternal anecdotes and table entertainments

illustrated with imitations and descriptive dialogue which might not be inaptly called, after the manner of my friend Mr. Albert Smith, the toilsome ascent of Miss Mary and the eruption (cutaneous) of Master Alexander. We know what it is when those children won't go to bed; we know how they prop their eyelids open with their forefingers when they will sit up; how, when they become fractious, they say aloud that they don't like us, and our nose is too long, and why don't we go? And we are perfectly acquainted with those kicking bundles which are carried off at last protesting. An eminent eye-witness told me that he was one of a company of learned pundits who assembled at the house of a very distinguished philosopher of the last generation to hear him expound his stringent views concerning infant education and early mental development, and he told me that while the philosopher did this in very beautiful and lucid language, the philosopher's little boy, for his part, edified the assembled sages by dabbling up to the elbows in an apple pie which had been provided for their entertainment, having previously anointed his hair with the syrup, combed it with his fork, and brushed it with his spoon. It is probable that we also have our similar experiences sometimes, of principles that are not quite practice, and that we know people claiming to be very wise and profound about nations of men who show themselves to be rather weak and shallow about units of babies.

But, ladies and gentlemen, the spoilt children whom I have to present to you after this dinner of to-day are not of this class. I have glanced at these for the easier and lighter introduction of another, a very different, a far more numerous, and a far more serious class. The spoilt children whom I must show you are the spoilt children of the poor in this great city, the children who are, every year, for ever and ever irrevocably spoilt out of this breathing life of ours by tens of thousands, but who may in vast numbers be preserved if you, assisting and not contravening the ways of Providence, will help to save them. The two grim nurses, Poverty and Sickness, who bring these children before you, preside over their births, rock their wretched cradles, nail down their little coffins, pile up the earth above their graves. Of the annual deaths in this great town, their unnatural deaths form more than one-third. I shall not ask you, according to the custom as to the other class--I shall not ask you on behalf of these children to observe how good they are, how pretty they are, how clever they are, how promising they are, whose beauty they most resemble--I shall only ask you to observe how weak they are, and how like death they are! And I shall ask you, by the remembrance of everything

that lies between your own infancy and that so miscalled second childhood when the child's graces are gone and nothing but its helplessness remains; I shall ask you to turn your thoughts to THESE spoilt children in the sacred names of Pity and Compassion.

Some years ago, being in Scotland, I went with one of the most humane members of the humane medical profession, on a morning tour among some of the worst lodged inhabitants of the old town of Edinburgh. In the closes and wynds of that picturesque place--I am sorry to remind you what fast friends picturesqueness and typhus often are--we saw more poverty and sickness in an hour than many people would believe in a life. Our way lay from one to another of the most wretched dwellings, reeking with horrible odours; shut out from the sky, shut out from the air, mere pits and dens. In a room in one of these places, where there was an empty porridge-pot on the cold hearth, with a ragged woman and some ragged children crouching on the bare ground near it--where, I remember as I speak, that the very light, refracted from a high damp-stained and time-stained house-wall, came trembling in, as if the fever which had shaken everything else there had shaken even it--there lay, in an old egg-box which the mother had begged from a shop, a little feeble, wasted, wan, sick child. With his little wasted face, and his little hot, worn hands folded over his breast, and his little bright, attentive eyes, I can see him now, as I have seen him for several years, look in steadily at us. There he lay in his little frail box, which was not at all a bad emblem of the little body from which he was slowly parting--there he lay, quite quiet, quite patient, saying never a word. He seldom cried, the mother said; he seldom complained; "he lay there, seemin' to woonder what it was a' about." God knows, I thought, as I stood looking at him, he had his reasons for wondering--reasons for wondering how it could possibly come to be that he lay there, left alone, feeble and full of pain, when he ought to have been as bright and as brisk as the birds that never got near him--reasons for wondering how he came to be left there, a little decrepid old man pining to death, quite a thing of course, as if there were no crowds of healthy and happy children playing on the grass under the summer's sun within a stone's throw of him, as if there were no bright, moving sea on the other side of the great hill overhanging the city; as if there were no great clouds rushing over it; as if there were no life, and movement, and vigour anywhere in the world--nothing but stoppage and decay. There he lay looking at us, saying, in his silence, more pathetically than I have ever heard anything said by any orator in my life, "Will you please to tell me what this means,

strange man? and if you can give me any good reason why I should be so soon, so far advanced on my way to Him who said that children were to come into His presence and were not to be forbidden, but who scarcely meant, I think, that they should come by this hard road by which I am travelling; pray give that reason to me, for I seek it very earnestly and wonder about it very much;" and to my mind he has been wondering about it ever since. Many a poor child, sick and neglected, I have seen since that time in this London; many a poor sick child I have seen most affectionately and kindly tended by poor people, in an unwholesome house and under untoward circumstances, wherein its recovery was quite impossible; but at all such times I have seen my poor little drooping friend in his egg-box, and he has always addressed his dumb speech to me, and I have always found him wondering what it meant, and why, in the name of a gracious God, such things should be!

Now, ladies and gentlemen, such things need not be, and will not be, if this company, which is a drop of the life-blood of the great compassionate public heart, will only accept the means of rescue and prevention which it is mine to offer. Within a quarter of a mile of this place where I speak, stands a courtly old house, where once, no doubt, blooming children were born, and grew up to be men and women, and married, and brought their own blooming children back to patter up the old oak staircase which stood but the other day, and to wonder at the old oak carvings on the chimney-pieces. In the airy wards into which the old state drawing-rooms and family bedchambers of that house are now converted are such little patients that the attendant nurses look like reclaimed giantesses, and the kind medical practitioner like an amiable Christian ogre. Grouped about the little low tables in the centre of the rooms are such tiny convalescents that they seem to be playing at having been ill. On the doll's beds are such diminutive creatures that each poor sufferer is supplied with its tray of toys; and, looking round, you may see how the little tired, flushed cheek has toppled over half the brute creation on its way into the ark; or how one little dimpled arm has mowed down (as I saw myself) the whole tin soldiery of Europe. On the walls of these rooms are graceful, pleasant, bright, childish pictures. At the bed's heads, are pictures of the figure which is the universal embodiment of all mercy and compassion, the figure of Him who was once a child himself, and a poor one. Besides these little creatures on the beds, you may learn in that place that the number of small Out-patients brought to that house for relief is no fewer than ten thousand in the compass of one single year. In the room in which

these are received, you may see against the wall a box, on which it is written, that it has been calculated, that if every grateful mother who brings a child there will drop a penny into it, the Hospital funds may possibly be increased in a year by so large a sum as forty pounds. And you may read in the Hospital Report, with a glow of pleasure, that these poor women are so respondent as to have made, even in a toiling year of difficulty and high prices, this estimated forty, fifty pounds. In the printed papers of this same Hospital, you may read with what a generous earnestness the highest and wisest members of the medical profession testify to the great need of it; to the immense difficulty of treating children in the same hospitals with grown-up people, by reason of their different ailments and requirements, to the vast amount of pain that will be assuaged, and of life that will be saved, through this Hospital; not only among the poor, observe, but among the prosperous too, by reason of the increased knowledge of children's illnesses, which cannot fail to arise from a more systematic mode of studying them. Lastly, gentlemen, and I am sorry to say, worst of all--(for I must present no rose-coloured picture of this place to you--I must not deceive you;) lastly, the visitor to this Children's Hospital, reckoning up the number of its beds, will find himself perforce obliged to stop at very little over thirty; and will learn, with sorrow and surprise, that even that small number, so forlornly, so miserably diminutive, compared with this vast London, cannot possibly be maintained, unless the Hospital be made better known; I limit myself to saying better known, because I will not believe that in a Christian community of fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, it can fail, being better known, to be well and richly endowed.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, this, without a word of adornment--which I resolved when I got up not to allow myself--this is the simple case. This is the pathetic case which I have to put to you; not only on behalf of the thousands of children who annually die in this great city, but also on behalf of the thousands of children who live half developed, racked with preventible pain, shorn of their natural capacity for health and enjoyment. If these innocent creatures cannot move you for themselves, how can I possibly hope to move you in their name? The most delightful paper, the most charming essay, which the tender imagination of Charles Lamb conceived, represents him as sitting by his fireside on a winter night telling stories to his own dear children, and delighting in their society, until he suddenly comes to his old, solitary, bachelor self, and finds that they were but dream-children who

might have been, but never were. "We are nothing," they say to him; "less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and we must wait upon the tedious shore of Lethe, millions of ages, before we have existence and a name." "And immediately awaking," he says, "I found myself in my arm chair." The dream-children whom I would now raise, if I could, before every one of you, according to your various circumstances, should be the dear child you love, the dearer child you have lost, the child you might have had, the child you certainly have been. Each of these dream-children should hold in its powerful hand one of the little children now lying in the Child's Hospital, or now shut out of it to perish. Each of these dream-children should say to you, "O, help this little suppliant in my name; O, help it for my sake!" Well!--And immediately awaking, you should find yourselves in the Freemasons' Hall, happily arrived at the end of a rather long speech, drinking "Prosperity to the Hospital for Sick Children," and thoroughly resolved that it shall flourish.

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