

قراءة لرواية شارلز ديكنز أوليفر تويست وفقاً لنظرية الانعكاس لجورج لوكاش: عمالة الأطفال والحراك الاجتماعي

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الملخص

تهدف نظرية الانعكاس لجورج لوكاش لتقديم انعكاس حقيقي وواقعي للبنية الاقتصادية والاجتماعية لمجتمع خلال فترة زمنية محددة كما أنها تولي اهتماماً كبيراً لدراسة البعد الأيديولوجي ومنهج الحياة ككل. تظهر هذه الدراسة محاولة تشارلز ديكنز عكس صور واقعية للبنية التحتية والفوقية للمجتمع في القرن التاسع عشر تحت ظل السيطرة الرأسمالية مركزاً على المشاكل والظروف المعيشية للطبقة العاملة وبخاصة عمالة الأطفال والحراك الاجتماعي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الانعكاس، الطبقة العاملة، أوليفر تويست، أيديولوجيا.

Reading of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* in Relation to Georg Lukács' Theory of Reflection: Child Labour and Social Mobility

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Abstract

Georg Lukács' reflection theory seeks not just to represent a faithful reflection of an economic and social structure of society but also to create a total ideological understanding of the full process of life should be included. This study attempts to investigate how Charles Dickens reflects in *Oliver Twist* the detailed and actual portraits of the nineteenth century infrastructure and superstructure under capitalism, focusing on the conditions and problems of the working class such as child labour and social mobility.

Key words: reflection theory, working class, Oliver Twist, ideologies.

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Introduction:

Viewed in the light of Lukács' reflection theory, *Oliver Twist's* reactions to social and economic issues reveal the ideological dimensions of the nineteenth century. Reflectionism is a literary theory presented by the Marxist critic Georg Lukács. In various autobiographical sketches, the Hungarian philosopher Lukács continually reflects on his theoretical development as my path towards Marx. Reflecting reality in literary works was not a new concept; yet, Georg Lukács was one of the Marxists who theorizes the relation between reality and literary works deciding to explore the ideological dimensions of a certain era through the study of its literary works.

Lukács establishes a straight-forward deterministic relation between base⁽¹⁾ and superstructure⁽²⁾ through affirming that the ideological factors of the superstructure, including the beliefs, values and practices and even literature is determined by the economic base of society. He argues as well that a work of literature cannot be understood on its own but as a reflection of its society's superstructure that emerges from the infrastructure, thus the superstructure of any era can be best comprehended by the study of its literary works. Ideology, for Lukács, is a class conception or worldview, and its validity and dominance imputed to its class. Social order made class distinctions seem sharper and more natural in the nineteenth century⁽³⁾.

Marx proclaims that nineteenth-century novelists' graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together.⁽⁴⁾ Such novelists play an important role in diminishing class-consciousness. They have published novels to bring about an awareness of the necessity of improving the conditions of working class, who struggle to survive against a merciless class system and to move socially upward. Many nineteenth-century novels can be studied as existing sources that detail the customs and mores of the upper and working classes of that period in history among which is *Oliver Twist*, which criticizes the harsh working conditions that the

¹Base includes the forces and relations of production, division of labour and property owning.

²Superstructure is determined by the base and includes the beliefs, values and the ways of men's living.

³Marx, K. 1969- **Theories of Surplus Value**. London: Lawrence and Wishart. 120.

⁴BAXANDALE, L., and STEFAN, M., 1973- **Marx and Engels on Literature and Art**. Telos Press, St. Louis. 178.

nineteenth-century workers have been forced to go through, such as strict discipline, harsh punishment, unhealthy working conditions, low wages and long work hours.

In the Marxist dialectical theory of reflection, factual reflection is one of the main requisites of good fiction; Lukács makes use of this theory in his reflection theory to focus on working-class fiction, which is characterized by its closeness to social reality. Since Lukács states that there is a relevance between the materialist approach and the study of working-class fiction, which approves that the mode of production of material life, superstructure, is conditioned by the infrastructure, he discusses in his theory that the development of working-class fiction reflects the development of society itself. Realistically speaking, *Oliver Twist's* portrayals of ideologies and characters are not only representations, but also reflections of existent beings, as Rosenberg remarks, "The best Dickens' characters are examples of verisimilitudinous representation."⁽¹⁾ Lukács considers the world of divided labour, oppression and exploitation of working masses with bitter irony and understanding.

Oliver Twist could be read as a Marxist text, since it appeals to Marxism in that its main protagonist, Oliver Twist, is demonstrated as an incarnation of the severe real exploitation conducted towards child labourers in the nineteenth century. A brutal and appalling system, which robs juveniles of their childhood, health and education, child labour has been perceived as a product of the industrial revolution in England, as massive industrial growth and productivity required a large amount of human labour, most of which are children. A victim of child labour himself, Dickens' bitter childhood experience is a recurrent theme in his novels. Dickens tries through the character Oliver to tell about the hard conditions he had to go through as a child labourer.

The theme of Child labour was mainly focused on in *Oliver Twist* since its major character Oliver is a young orphan who lived in a workhouse, where the story of his abuse had started. Childhood is seen as a unique time to be valued and indulged. However, nineteenth-century children, especially those of the poor, are truly burdensome creatures who had to be at early age habituated to hard work and obedience, in other words child labour is not in any sense an unusual

¹ROSENBERG, B., 1992- . **Character and Contradiction in Dickens; Nineteenth Century Literature**. University of Missouri, Colombia. 147.

aspect in that era. A nine-year-old astonished boy, Oliver is put to work as an oakum picker after the parish board decide that he should be taught a trade. One morning, Oliver has been called by the parish board to be told that time has come to be taught a trade, "Well! You have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade," said the red-faced gentleman in the high chair. 'So, you'll begin to pick oakum tomorrow morning at six o'clock.'⁽¹⁾

Throughout history children are looked at as profitable assets since they have been easy to control unlike adults and their pay is low, which explains the hunger for child workers by employers. Many writers discuss the issue of child labour invasion of the industrial process among which are Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Kingsley and the Hammonds who emphasize that, "children on a vast scale became the most important social feature of English life, and the prosperity of the English manufacturers was based on [children's] helpless misery"⁽²⁾. In other words, being a source of economic boost, child labourers have been sacrificed to the expansion of industries. Though it is one of the oldest social problems, child labour if to be discussed, the nineteenth century would be conjured up at first, as it was "portrayed by historians as little more than a social problem of the Industrial Revolution."⁽³⁾

Humphries strongly confirms that with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century, the number of child labourers starting at an early age reaches new extremes; they affirm that the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century witness a swell in young child labour. To be put differently, the Industrial Revolution is created by children at least as much as it is by male workers and factory owners.⁽⁴⁾ As most of these children are orphans and also members of the lower class, they are economically desperate and forced to endure any means of survival, even if it means accepting maltreatment.

Many literary works have done more than recounting the worst cases of exploitation and the ill-treatment children receive in factories and working areas in the nineteenth century. Factual examples of

¹DICKENS, C. 1839- **Oliver Twist**. Richard Bentley, London. 12.

²HAMMOND, B.; HAMMOND, J., 1978- **The Town Labourer, 1760 – 1832**. Richard Bentley, London .143

³KIRBY, P., 2003- **Child Labour in Britain 1750-1870**. Macmillan, New York. 184.

⁴HUMPHRIES, J., 2010- **Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution**. Cambridge University Press, US.167.

children working in extremely hazardous conditions are provided in those works. Moving to England to work, Friedrich Engels has the chance to witness the working conditions of the industrial working class. Engels' book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, does not only document how working people lived and worked in the nineteenth century but also it widely focuses on child labour and how developing factories have been hungry for the cheap labour of children, with which they replace the adults who demand higher wages.

Cases of six-year-old working children are not uncommon in Engels' factories inquiry mission; two-year-old child is documented by him in the same journey as well. Engels affirms that during the nineteenth century, the working class is seen helpless compared to the capitalists who owned all means of production describing them as "the slaves of their masters, by whom they were treated with the utmost recklessness and barbarity ... Gradually the increasing competition of free work people crowded out the whole apprentice system."⁽¹⁾ Particularly nineteenth-century novelists and poets are preoccupied with the conditions of child workers in industrial process, in a trial to curb the child labour problem and to reveal that what was being done in factories, mines and industrial areas "was sunk into a moral condition which was a scandal to the country and to the age."⁽²⁾

Literature of newly industrialized countries like the British novels and poem is rich in identifying a range of factors, which played an important role in augmenting the child labour. In eighteen thirty-one, about 40 percent of the population aged below fifteen so the children's participation in the economic field has increased.⁽³⁾ It has been stated that the children's economic contribution is undeniable in the economic stability of a poor family. The economic factor beside the restrictions facing people, and poverty imposed on them, forced families to utilize all various resources of labour power, including that of children, in order to meet their needs. *The Longman Anthology of*

¹ENGELS, F., 1993- **The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844**. Leipzig, New York. 159.

²HARDY, T., 1887- **Reign of Queen Victoria: A Survey of Fifty Years of Progress**. Smith and Elder, London. 59.

³HUMPHRIES, J., 2010- **Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution**. Cambridge UP, US. 14.

British Literature highlights the effects of industrial and urban development upon the structure of nineteenth-century families.⁽¹⁾

The increased number of families who are unable to support themselves has created a terrible child market, and the number of children as young as five who are apprenticed to trades or as domestic servants has increased. Over and above, the rapid industrial process in the nineteenth century has offered new and lucrative opportunities for working children; when a large-scale industrialization started the percent of child labour rose to sixty percent as Jane Humphries affirms⁽²⁾.

Thus, many nineteenth-century novelists repeatedly use the child as a protagonist in their writings, as Charles Dickens does in *Oliver Twist*. Dickens' use of children in his novels is discussed as a tool to show the dramatic increase of child labourers

Child protagonists featured in countless novels. The first child hero, Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837), was soon followed by ... a host of subsequent child protagonists in Dickens's own novels... The youthful characters who filled the pages of nineteenth century fiction several, in part as vehicles for the authors to come to terms with their own early years.⁽³⁾

Since literature stands in a conspicuous relation with society, Lukács focuses in his reflection theory to reveal that connection. With this theory, Lukács attempts to situate the works of art in their ideological dimensions, and to evaluate the rate of reflection in them and how the connection between superstructure and base was taken into consideration by writers. This rate rests largely on the writer's involvement in life and society of the same era he reflects in his literary works, his worldview of his surrounding world and how they are influenced by his class, experiences and the ideologies of that age can be clearly seen through his literary works' characters and situations.

The process of proletariat becoming self-conscious is not a theoretical insight, but it is the subject-object of history. The proletariat becomes the subject of the process of social reproduction, not an object

¹DAVID, D.; KEVIN, J; HEATHER, H., ed., 2006 - **The Longman Anthology of British Literature**. Pearson Longman, London. 1819.

²HUMPHRIES, J., 2010- **Childhood and Child Labour in the Industrial Revolution**. Cambridge University Press, US.14.

³DAVID, D., KEVIN, J., HEATHER, H., ed., 2006 - **The Longman Anthology of British Literature**.795.

of contemplation. Lukács affirms that the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its objects. He declares that the proletariat can overcome their bad conditions through engagement with totality, which results in Lukács' view that there can be overcoming of reification and class struggle resulting in a totally classless society. According to Lukács' theory of reflection, a work of art is considered as a tool to present humans with totality of objective reality as homogeneous medium. Such a medium makes it possible for a writer to single out the ideologies of a certain reality.

By looking at the distribution of economic resources across the population, determining the level of inequality in a society can be possible. Unequal distribution of income and capital gave rise to social hierarchy. In many eras, social standing is based on such personal attributes as educational attainment, income, and owning the means of production. Thus, the degree of mobility in a capitalist-dominated society depends on the extent to which individuals have access to the economic opportunities.

Social mobility is a process by which individuals economically or socially move upward or downward. They do this by entering or moving between occupations, or marrying from different classes. Even though, it has always been assumed that past societies were less mobile than those of the nineteenth century era are, the rate of social mobility in the nineteenth century wasn't high. Though economic development and technological advance in a competitive market environment fosters mobility, social mobility rates have always been low in England and were unaffected by the Industrial Revolution.

The question of social mobility raises more important issues as Patrick Joyce argues, when he refers to the overlooking of the links between geographical mobility and social mobility.⁽¹⁾ Machinery drives workers into cities after the industrialization of agriculture, and after they are driven from rural life into towns due to the centralizing tendency of capital, the workers have been tossed into a war of all against all through competition, which Engels describes as both the cause of the plight facing workers and the thing which they naturally unite against in order to survive.⁽²⁾

¹JOYCE, J., 2010- **The State of Freedom: A Social History of the British State Since 1800**. Cambridge University Press, New York. 134.

²ENGELS, F., 1993- **The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844**. Leipzig, New York. 87-88.

Many claims that geographical mobility creates employment, and enables some people to become members of the middle class or the bourgeoisie, while others became skilled artisans, tradesmen or professionals. The transition from rural to urbanization could also economically affect a lot of people. The competition in the capitalist-controlled cities makes it harder for people to survive. London has been described in *Oliver Twist* as a land of opportunities which no man has never dreamed to visit, " Oliver had often heard the old men in the workhouse say that no lad of spirit need want in London; and that there were ways of making a living in that vast city, which those who had been bred up in country parts had no idea of."⁽¹⁾ Yet on arrival to London, Oliver was welcomed by Fagin and his gang, and found nothing of what he had heard.

Seen as engines of social mobility, universities are predicted to alleviate the social stratification in the nineteenth century. Despite the growing numbers of young people entering universities, still few advantaged students are accepted into upper classes after gaining a qualification. The educational system in any era is of considerable impact on political and social life, ideologies and the development of labour power. The effect of the educational structures can also be studied in the social relations of production, the configuration of property and power in a society. Educational inequality reflects the structure of a capitalist-dominated class.

Goldthorpe disproves the presupposition that connects social mobility with increasing economic development, asserting that the implied structure of mobility chances remained unaffected by the fluidity of industrial movement in the nineteenth century, i.e., the resources available for working class individuals were poor, which didn't help them move socially upward.⁽²⁾ Secondly and more importantly barriers to this movement are imposed by the capitalists among which the deprivation of workers to own the means of production, and to own educational qualifications which enable people to enter into more advantaged classes. John Stuart Mill notes that strong demarcations between labourers and capitalists can be seen in the nineteenth century as an equivalent to an heredity distinction of caste. In effect, the bourgeoisie "agglomerated population, centralised

¹DICKENS, C., 1839- **Oliver Twist**. Richard Bentley, London. 374.

²GOLDTHORPE, J., 1985- **On Economic Development and Social Mobility**. Bobbs-Merrill, New York. 25.

means of production, and ... concentrated property in a few hands.”⁽¹⁾ He also asserts that the process of social mobility was under attack by capitalists concluding that "human beings are no longer born to their place in life."⁽²⁾

Goldthorpe affirms that despite expanding upward social mobility over the course of the decades of the nineteenth century, the underlying structure of social stratification is still unaffected. Rising rates of workers to means of production owners' are clear reflection of the expansion of the latter⁽³⁾. Declining industrial opportunities on one side and educational opportunities disappearing on the other were behind the fall in the rate of social mobility in the nineteenth century as described by Perkin "upward mobility for the working class was probably at its nadir."⁽⁴⁾

Ruthlessly exploited and extremely distressed, workers do not always rebel against their social betters in a trial to move upward, more often accepting appalling hardships with passivity and resignation. More accurately, they are not allowed to move up, part of the reason for this lies in the solidity of England's caste system. Moreover, in striving to be like their superiors, they actively reinforce the hierarchy itself. The realities of the working world in the nineteenth century contrast sharply with any chance available for workers to improve their caste. Overwork and anxiety debilitate the worker's ambition and imbue him with a fatalistic belief that it is best not to strive for anything above the station to which he had been born.

Oliver's actual fate in the novel is a nineteenth-century assertion that it is not possible for an individual to move up and change his social class. It is clearly important to believe that it was impossible for Oliver to escape his destiny and to overcome the taints of being a member of the working class unless he is a descendant of a genteel family. *Oliver Twist* appears to be a story of social mobility, the orphan, Oliver, enters the world of nothingness and workhouses with no paternal name, the outcast child dreams of a social uplift by setting

¹ BROWN, H.; KENNEDY, A., ed., 1995-**Images of the Human: the Philosophy of the Human Person in a Religious Context**. Loyola Press, US. 20.

²FISHKIN, J., 2014-**Bottlenecks: a New Theory of Equal Opportunity**. Oxford University Press, US.44.

³GOLDTHORPE, J., 1985- **On Economic Development and Social Mobility**. Bobbs-Merrill, New York. 25.

⁴PERKIN, H., 1972- **The Origins of Modern English Society**. Routledge, London. 352

off to London, the city of industrialization and job opportunities. The following diagram shows how downward mobility is in the first part of the nineteenth century:

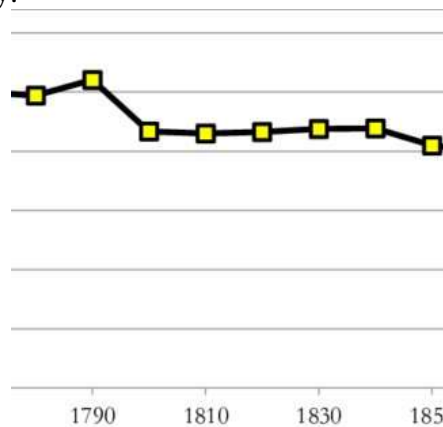


Fig. 1. England, 1710-1858 downward mobility

According to Lukács' theory of realism, the writer's involvement with life and society enables him to produce real characters and reflect factually on ideological dimensions of his era. He assures that real fiction should be created only by writers who themselves led a life rich in the same experiences reflected in their novels. Writers should also develop sense of community in order to be able to present real types. The question of community is crucial to a writer's vision; whether by community the writer identifies a small unproductive minority or sees the community of humanity as a whole; it is important because, it determines whether his attitude to life is contemplative or active and practical. The writer's experience, his capacity to create types of people he has seen through their characters, the connection between the evolution of the society he has lived in and the typical problems and characters that spring into being in the process are elements of considerable importance in the reflection theory. For Lukács, knowledge itself assumes a practical character, and truth is something that can be grasped only through practical activity. The writer's grasp of reality will thus depend on his involvement with the community.

The writer's worldview is largely influenced by his personal and social experiences, his class, position and the ideological climate and the socio-political forces of his age that he has chosen to depict. Among other novels, *Oliver Twist* reflects Dickens' early suffering as a child worker. Because of financial difficulties, Dickens had to work at

an early age with working-class men and boys in a factory that handles "blacking," or shoe polish. In his adult life, Dickens develops a strong social conscience, which colors his view of the world and is later reflected in a number of his novels.

Dickens' childhood and youth is the most important part of his life; in which he garners up the knowledge that he later used in his novels, "for he later gives us all that he saw and felt at that early period under innumerable disguises; and these personal memories he adapted in the most ingenious clever fashion to his stories."¹ His early hardships supply him with a knowledge, which his contemporaries do not have. Dickens pictures all phases of English life in his novels, but he is more interested in picturing the working class, although aspired to be and later makes his dream come true- the upper class. Seeking background of Dickens' novels directly shows a total picture of his life. Impressions of his childhood can be found in his novels as can be noticed in *Oliver Twist*.⁽²⁾

The story of Oliver is in some way the story of Dickens himself. It is a sublimation of Dickens' own desire to belong to a superior social caste. Dickens himself refers to his considerable emphasis on reality as a depiction of the workers' experiences; he also claims that the realistic literature should raise some form of social consciousness. Similarly Lukács' formulation of realism is a method of mapping out the capitalist social reality beyond fragmentation and reification; Dickens mentions that in the preface to *Oliver Twist*:

It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates ... to paint them in their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives; to show them as they really are, for ever sulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life... it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt something which was greatly needed, and which would be a service to society.⁽³⁾

¹ Wilson, A., 1970- **The World of Charles Dickens**. London: Martin Secker and Warburg. 67.

² MILES, A., & DAVID, V., 1993-**Building European Society: Occupational Change and Social Mobility in Europe 1840- 1940**. Manchester University Press, UK. 67.

³ DICKENS , C., 1839- **Oliver Twist**. Richard Bentley, London. 4.

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