

The Depiction of Orphanhood in Victorian and Uzbek Realist Literature: A Comparative Analysis of Charles Dickens and Gafur Gulyam

Sharipova Nargiza Shermat qizi

a master student of the department of English Literature at the Asia International University

Abstract: *This article explores the emergence and development of the realism genre during the Victorian era and its influence on both Western and Eastern literature. Focusing on the theme of orphanhood, the paper compares how this motif is portrayed in the works of English author Charles Dickens and Uzbek writer Gafur Gulyam. Through textual analysis, the study reveals that while both traditions use orphan characters to highlight issues such as poverty, social injustice, and disenfranchisement, their narrative tone and cultural context differ. In Dickens's works, orphanhood is often tied to industrial capitalism, systemic neglect, and urban misery, reflecting the dark side of the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, Uzbek literature emphasizes moral values, kindness, and the strength of traditional family structures in supporting orphans. The study sheds light on how different societies conceptualize vulnerability and social responsibility through literature.*

Key words: *Victorian literature, literary realism, orphan characters, Charles Dickens, Gafur Gulyam, Uzbek literature, social inequality, industrial revolution, child poverty, East-West literary comparison, postcolonial interpretation, cultural humanism.*

Introduction

The Victorian era is considered one of the most significant periods in literary history, shaped by profound socio-political changes, economic development, and the Industrial Revolution. During this time, the genre of realism emerged prominently, distinguished by its detailed social analysis and commitment to depicting life with accuracy and authenticity. Realist literature played a crucial role in highlighting complex societal issues such as inequality, poverty, and the plight of children, especially orphans.

Charles Dickens, a leading figure of Western literature, vividly portrayed social injustice and the theme of orphanhood in his works, reflecting the harsh realities of urban and industrial life in 19th-century England. At the same time, Eastern literature, particularly Uzbek realism, approaches the theme of orphanhood through the lens of national traditions and moral values, offering a distinctive perspective.

This article aims to comparatively analyze the representation of orphanhood in Victorian realism, focusing on the works of Charles Dickens and Uzbek writers. It examines the similarities and differences in how orphanhood is depicted, exploring the broader social inequalities, humanity, compassion, and other significant issues revealed through this theme.

Main Text

The Victorian era left a profound mark on literature and is considered one of the most significant periods. During this time, critical realism flourished. Writers strived to depict the hardships behind

revolutionary progress and the difficulties faced by ordinary people, and they succeeded in doing so. This genre spread widely across the world. While realism began to take shape in the West during the 19th century, it entered the East, particularly Central Asia, in the early 20th century.

Western literary realist writers Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Antony Trollope, and others vividly depicted in their works such problems as poverty, the suffering of orphans, moral depravity, women's disenfranchisement, the difficult life of workers during the Industrial Revolution, and the conflict between rich and poor. In Eastern literature, we can see such socio-political problems in the works of such writers as Abdulla Qodiriy, Cholpon, Fitrat, Gafur Gulom, Abdulla Qahhor.

The most common social problem in the works of realist writers is: orphanhood.

During the Victorian era, orphanhood emerged as one of the most frequently depicted social problems in the works of realist writers. This prevalence can be attributed to several interrelated social and historical factors.

The rapid industrialization and urbanization of the period led to widespread social disruption. As families migrated from rural areas to overcrowded cities in search of employment, living conditions deteriorated significantly. The resultant poverty, coupled with inadequate healthcare and unsanitary environments, contributed to high mortality rates among adults and children alike. Consequently, a considerable number of children were left orphaned.

Moreover, Victorian realist authors endeavored to portray society with unflinching accuracy. The plight of orphans—often emblematic of innocence abandoned and societal neglect—provided a poignant vehicle through which issues such as poverty, class inequality, and institutional failure could be explored. By foregrounding the experiences of orphaned children, writers highlighted the urgent need for social reform and the inadequacies of contemporary social welfare systems.

Literary works such as Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* exemplify this focus, where orphan protagonists navigate a hostile and indifferent society. Through such narratives, Victorian realist literature not only reflected the harsh realities of the time but also called attention to the moral and social responsibilities of the community.

The difference between the rich and the poor, the involvement of lower-class representatives in hard labor (working day and night in the mining plant), or the war left children either without a father, mother, or parents, and they suffered greatly.

We can clearly see this in Charles Dickens's "Oliver Twist." The case of Oliver Twist illustrates the situation of orphans in an entire nation.

"The children of Charles Dickens are immersed in darkness, the central theme of childhood intrinsically linked to negativity and evil. Dickens affords special attention to the many child characters that populate his novels, becoming a sympathetic 'caregiver', voicing their suffering and revealing their loneliness and anguish. In so doing, the author lifts them from the anonymity and invisibility they suffer in life. For Dickens, childhood is synonymous with abjection, monstrosity, trauma, sickness, neglect, hunger, ill treatment, guilt, abandonment, 'orphanhood', marginalization and death. His vivid heartfelt descriptions sweep away any attempt to censure the representation of deprived childhood".¹

In Western literature, orphanhood is society's cruelty towards it, following orphanhood into the worst vices. Orphanhood is a free labor force and a huge social problem.

B. Hofman "Orphans and themes of orphanhood are pervasive in the works of Charles Dickens, a recurring motif that reflects the social realities of the time and serves as a powerful narrative device. Dickens frequently used orphan characters, such as Oliver Twist, Little Nell and Jo, to explore themes

¹ M Bernardi - History of Education and Children's Literature: HECL ..., 2013 - torrossa.com

of poverty, social injustice and the harsh conditions faced by vulnerable children in Victorian London”.²

“No one is particularly ignorant of the establishment of the novel as a genre during the 18th century, specifically in England. Compounded with the concepts of imagination, feelings, love, and life context, the novel is characterized by a double projection, namely the first person and an uncertain narrator, imbuing it with both interiority and reality. Dominated by issues such as the gentry and nobility's concerns at the time, some attention is also given to the raising of social issues such as the role of women in a society that was dominated by men, the latter being a major aspect of Charles Dicken's novels”.³

In both Western and Eastern literature, there are several similarities in the expression of the symbol of orphanhood. In particular, both in the East and in the West, orphaned children suffer from hunger, poverty, and neglect by society. Another similarity is exposing injustice in society. In both literatures, through the image of an orphan, writers show the oppression and inequality in society. The next similarity is the purity of the image of an orphan. In both the East and the West, orphaned heroes are often portrayed as pure, honest, and sincere. They are contrasted with evil forces in society.

“Now let's look at the differences. In Eastern literature, that is, in Uzbek realism, traditions of kindness and mercy are strongly reflected. For example, although the hero of "The Naughty Boy" suffered greatly, there are people who are kind to him among the people. My brother-in-law and my aunt liked them very much. So I would not get bored there.

My aunt and brother-in-law welcomed me very kindly.

Come, my sweetheart, how you have decided to visit us, I thought my brother got healed and came back,-aunt said.

Well done, my son, I had been waiting for you for some days, - brother-in-law said.

I was very happy with their attitude towards me”.⁴

In Western literature, that is, in English realism, orphanhood is associated with the Industrial Revolution, capitalism, and the dark side of urban life.

For example, in Dickens's works, children are forced to live in factories, poverty homes, workhouses, and the criminal world. Because orphans could only bring benefit to society through manual labor.

“The workhouse authorities replied with humility, that there was not. Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be 'farmed,' or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week”.⁵

In Western literature, orphaned characters are often used as a tool of social criticism, the writer shows that society needs to be reformed.

Summarizing these thoughts briefly, the similarities of the image of orphanhood in Western and Eastern literature: they are shown as poor, disenfranchised children and serve to reveal the injustice in society. The difference lies in the fact that in the East orphanhood is connected with the fate of the nation, family values, and traditions of kindness. In the West, orphanhood is associated with the oppression of the industrial era, the lack of rights in capitalist society, and the injustice of the social system.

² <https://londonguidedwals.co.uk/oliver-twist-characters/>

³ <https://aithor.com/essay-examples/the-portrayal-of-orphans-in-charles-dickens-novels>

⁴ G. Gulom. A naughty boy. -Toshkent: "Yangi asr avlodi", 2017. -P.12

⁵ Ch. Dickens. Oliver Twist. -UK: "Vintage children's classic", 2013. -P.25

The comparative analysis of orphanhood in Victorian and Uzbek realist literature reveals both shared and distinct approaches to this poignant social issue. In both literary traditions, orphanhood symbolizes the broader themes of poverty, social injustice, and marginalization. Orphan characters serve as powerful tools for critiquing societal inequalities and evoking empathy towards the vulnerable.

However, the treatment of orphanhood differs in significant ways. Western literature, exemplified by Charles Dickens, often emphasizes the harsh realities of industrial capitalism, urban hardship, and the systemic neglect faced by orphans. Conversely, Uzbek literature integrates national values such as family, kindness, and communal support, portraying orphanhood within a framework of cultural compassion and moral responsibility.

Ultimately, the theme of orphanhood in both contexts highlights critical social concerns and reflects the respective societies' historical and cultural realities. This comparative study enriches our understanding of how literature functions as a mirror to social conditions and as a means of fostering awareness and reform.

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