

**SOCIAL INEQUALITY AS SEEN IN CHARLES DICKENS'S OLIVER  
TWIST: A BINARY OPPOSITION ANALYSIS**

**A GRADUATING PAPER**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Gaining  
the Bachelor Degree in English Literature**



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**2021**

## FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

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*Assalamu 'alaikum wr.wb.*

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Atas perhatiannya, kami ucapkan terima kasih.

*Wassalamu 'alaikum wr.wb.*

Yogyakarta, 8 Agustus 2021

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## ABSTRACT

This research is a library-based research. In the research process, the researcher uses a qualitative descriptive research method. The researcher uses the novel *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens as the object of research. The researcher uses binary opposition theory from Lévi-Strauss to analyze social inequality and opposing characteristics of Oliver's caregivers in treating him as an orphan. The researcher collects data indicating the existence of social inequality and opposing characteristics of the caregivers through the intrinsic elements contained in the novel. The purpose of this research is to find out two opposing things in the novel, both in terms of the characteristics of the characters and the setting of the place.

*Keyword: Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens, Social Inequality, Binary Opposition.*



## ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian berbasis pustaka. Dalam proses penelitiannya, peneliti menggunakan metode penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Peneliti menggunakan novel *Oliver Twist* karya Charles Dickens sebagai objek penelitian. Peneliti menggunakan teori binary opposition dari Lévi-Strauss untuk menganalisis ketimpangan sosial dan karakteristik yang bertentangan dari para pengasuh Oliver dalam memperlakukannya sebagai anak yatim. Peneliti mengumpulkan data-data yang mengindikasikan adanya ketimpangan sosial dan karakteristik yang bertentangan dari para pengasuh tersebut melalui unsur-unsur intrinsik yang terdapat di dalam novel. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menemukan dua hal yang saling bertentangan yang berada dalam novel tersebut baik dari sisi karakteristik dari para karakter maupun setting tempat.

*Kata kunci: Oliver Twist, Charles Dickens, Ketimpangan Sosial, Binary Opposition.*

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## MOTTO

*Qui craint le danger ne doit pas aller en mer*

*(French Proverb)*

*Ketakutan yang menenggelamkan, keberanian yang menyelamatkan*

*(Hujan Mata Pisau\_FSTVLST)*

*Ngandel, Kendel, Bandel, Kandel*

*(Raden Mas Soewardi Soerjaningrat)*



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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this research specially to my Grandfathers, Grandmothers, Parents, and Sister.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Assalamualaikum Wr. Wb.

All praises to Allah SWT who has been giving me mercies of my life and always guided me into the best way of life. To Prophet Muhammad SAW who has been outpouring his blessing to his ummat. Allahuma Sholli 'ala Sayyidina Muhammad.

I am really glad to be part of the English Literature Department 2014 which gives me a beautiful campus life. This campus life is going so crazy and gave me many lessons to the next chapter in my life. In finishing my graduating paper, many thanks and appreciation are due to:

1. Dr. Muhammad Wildan, M.A. as the Dean of Faculty of Adab and Cultural Science State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga.
2. Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S., M.Hum as the head of English Literature Department who gave her best guidance and always supported the researcher to finish this research.
3. Febriyanti Dwiratna Lestari, S.S. M.A. as the secretary of English Literature Department, thanks ma'am for the hard works to help us the survivors in administrative matters.
4. Dr. Danial Hidayatullah, S.S., M.Hum., as the researcher's academic advisor.

5. All lecturers of English Department: Ulyati Retno Sari, S.S., M.Hum, Dr. H. Ubaidillah Bachisan, M.A., Dr. Danial Hidayatullah, S.S., M.Hum, Febriyanti Dwiratna Lestari, S.S. M.A., Dr. Witriani, S.S., M.Hum., Aninda Aji Siwi, S.Pd., Nisa Syuhada, S.S., M.Hum., Harsiwi Fajar Sari, S.S., M.A., Rosiana Rizqi Wijayanti, S.S., M.Hum., (Almarhum) Jiah Fauziah, S.S., M.Hum., Dr. Arif Budiman, S.S., M.A., Fuad Arif Fudiyartanto, S.Pd., M.Ed. M.Hum. Ph.D, Dwi Margo Yuwono, S.Pd., M.Hum., and Bambang Hariyanto, S.S., M.A. Ph.D
6. My family.
7. All of English Department Chapter 2014, Thanks for the awesome memories.
8. All of my friends in Keluarga Kudus Yogyakarta Management chapter 2017/2019: Zeto, Ma'ruf, Syana, Rida, Zahroh, Teguh, Hanif, Affan, Risma, Febri, Hani, Indri, and Aulia, thanks for the militant process we built together.
9. The occupants of KKY's secretariat: Simbe, Amir, Zaki, Aulia, Zeto, Abdurrahman, Aziz, Aufa, and Ami, thanks for the crazy and meaningful life adventure.
10. The Raptor E-Sport's fighters: Bahar, Galih, Reza, Fredi, Dimas, and Abeh, you guys are GGWP.
11. My limit survivor friends in finishing this graduating paper: Ikhsan Baihaqi, Riza Fachruddin, Adam Nur Syifa, Rosyid Bayyin, Izzah

Attikah Fauziah, Rela Bela Pertiwi, and Ulvi Nisrina, finally this mission is complete guys!.

12. The uplifting, genius, beautiful melody bringers: Dream Theater, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Iron Maiden, Gojira, Megadeth, Deep Purple, Metallica, Scorpions, Avenged Sevenfold, Alter Bridge, Rage Against The Machine, Guns N' Roses, Nirvana, Burgerkill, Kelompok Penerbang Roket, Fstvlst, Ramengvrl, Snoop Dogg, Bring Me The Horizon, Opeth, National Arabic Orchestra, Umm Kulthum and Feyrouz, thanks for accompanied the researcher in writing this research through your melodies that broke the silence.


I realize that this research is not perfect, therefore I hope for much advices from all the readers in order to make this paper better. Hopefully, this graduating paper can be useful for education and can inspire everyone.

Wassalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.

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Yogyakarta, 1 August 2021

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Literature offers the most profound insights into human nature and the human condition that are available to us. Because of its profundity and its authenticity it offers us a vantage point from which to criticize the superficial, rationalized, and commercialized world we live in (Bertens, 2001:40). According to Leitch, Vincent B. (2001: 4), Literature can depict external and internal realities while at the same time disseminating valuable knowledge and clarifying emotions. Therefore, one of the ways to understand and analyze human culture in an era is by using literature.

Prose, poetry, drama, even film nowadays are part of literature. In this research, the researcher only focuses on prose. Prose is an inclusive term for all discourse, spoken or written, which is not patterned into the lines either of metric verse or free verse, Abrams (2009:288). The researcher chooses written prose rather than spoken prose. It is because according to Abrams (2009:288), written prose gets more “literary” whether its function is descriptive, expository, narrative, or expressive it exhibits more patent, though highly diverse, modes of rhythmic and other normal features. There are some parts of prose: short story, novel, and etc.

The novel is distinguished from the short story and from the work of middle length called *novelette*: its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots), ampler development of milieu, and more sustained exploration of character and motives than do the shorter, more concentrated modes, Abrams (2009:226). The researcher is interested with social issues novel such as *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. This novel contains social problem in Victorian era in England.





According to Hafizh M.A, Faruk, Juliasih (2016:76), Victorian literature also presented its existence in the other direction. The development of literature gave an influence as world moving to mirror and endorsed about social reality of the society which occurred in England. The novels that had created during the Victorian era were called “social problem novels”. Generally, the term social problem novels were used to English fiction in the mid nineteenth century. The novels were produced and tended for understanding social problems of society that concerned with the social condition of England. There are some novelists that give their critics to social condition of Victorian, one of them is Charles Dickens.

Charles Dickens is one of the social novelists who wrote actively about the social problems of Victorian society. He grew up his writing to face the current situation of England. His awareness toward poverty and social stratification of Victorian society are represented by his novels such as *Great Expectation*, *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, and *A Christmas Carol*, Stewart (2004:73). Dickens reveals the dark underbelly of English life during the Victorian era. Dickens’s shrewdness in reading social phenomena is able to bring himself to be one of the greatest literature figures in line with Robert Louis Stevenson, Victor Hugo, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, Alexandre Dumas, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

*Oliver Twist* is Dickens’s second novel after *The Pickwick Papers* 1836 which published in 1838. This novel tells the story of an orphan named Oliver. His mother is died after giving birth to him in a workhouse

while no one knows his father whereabouts. Oliver experiences the bitters and sweets of life.

Before Oliver meets Mr. Brownlow, his life is far from being worthy and filled with rude people, such as Mr. Bumble in workhouse, Mr. Sowerberry and his family, Fagin and the gang who force him to live in a building of slum poor village and trapped in criminal environment. After he meets Mr. Brownlow, he lives in full of joy, love, and so far away from criminal environment in Mr. Brownlow's luxury house. In sociology, this phenomena is called by social inequality.

Social inequality is an area within sociology that focuses on the distribution of goods and burdens in society. A good can be, for example, income, education, employment or parental leave, while examples of burdens are substance abuse, criminality, unemployment and marginalisation. A central topic in sociological research is social mobility through generations. This is the degree to which a person's social background, defined by their parents' social class or economic status, influences that person's opportunities in life, education, income, class status. Other central factors are gender and ethnic identity. A great deal of research conducted on social inequality focuses on the importance of individual values such as social background, gender and ethnic background, but the context that frames these elements is also important (<https://www.sv.uio.no/iss/english/research/research-areas/social-inequality>)

In islam, do something related social inequality is forbidden. As Allah forbids to do social inequality for human beings. As stated in Qur'an surah Al-Qasas verse 4:

إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلَ أَهْلَهَا شِيَعًا يَسْتَضِعُّ طَائِفَةً مِّنْهُمْ يُذَبِّحُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيِ نِسَاءَهُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ - ٤

The meaning: *“Truly Pharaoh (Fir'aun) has done arbitrarily in the earth and made its inhabitants divided, by oppressing a group of them, slaughtering their sons and leaving their daughters alive. Truly Pharaoh (Fir'aun) was one of those who did mischief (4).”*

From the example verse above, it can be understood that the term *mustadafun* (the oppressed) refers to the weak (inferior) groups born as a result of oppression or arrogance attitudes from the stronger (superior) people, both economically, and power, or the impact of an unjust social structure that causing structural poverty, unmanaged orphans that have the potential to make them homeless, beggars in the streets. This research is integrated-interconnected research, both english literature and islamic studies.

After read the novel, the researcher finds some opposing aspects among Oliver's life in workhouse, Mr. Sowerberry's house, Fagin's house, Mrs. Maylie's house and Mr. Brownlow's house. The opposing aspects are their opposing treatments to Oliver as an orphan. Oliver is treated with

love when in Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Maylie's house, in other side, Oliver is treated with hatred when in workhouse, Mr. Sowerberry and Fagin's house.

## **1.2 Research Question**

1. How the binary opposition is depicted in Oliver's caregivers when they treat Oliver as an orphan?
2. How social inequality is depicted through setting of places in Oliver Twist novel?

## **1.3 Objective of Study**

This research aims to analyze and explain social inequality and Oliver's caregivers characterizations through Oliver Twist's life journey in *Oliver Twist* novel by binary opposition theory.

## **1.4 The Significance of Study**

There are two significance of studies in this research. The first is to give explanation to the people that social inequality should not exist in this world, because the impact of social inequality in society can be in the form of: the public education quality is getting lower, higher crime rates, poverty, and moral decadence. The second is to give explanation about the importance of treating orphan in a friendly and loving manner.

## **1.5 Literature Review**

There are some prior researches that the researcher has read. They have similar theory but the main contents are so different.

The first is from Dwi Yanti's thesis, she explains that her research is purposed to find and describe the opposite mental and physical state of Thor and villains in each universe. Then Thor movie is important to be analysed because it emphasizes the mental concept of a hero. Thor movie also shows the God concept and human concept. This research is a qualitative study which applies the binary opposition of structuralism theory from Levi Strauss and film theory from Villarejo. This study concluded that Thor and Villains showed binary opposition in their own mental and physical characters, whether when living in the God universe or human universe. The difference in character showed that there was the main binary opposition which intended to be shown, that were natural x cultural. Thor's mental state that occurs in the human universe was affected by the culture of human universe, where Thor was exiled from the God universe. In the other hand, the physical state occurred in the God universe was because of his nature as God which was created to be the hero in Thor movie, Yanti (2019:V).

The second prior research is from Nurrochmah's thesis. She analyzes movie entitled *Coraline* movie, she describes that the problem that is found in this movie is that there are some contrasting aspects between the character of the Real and the Other Parents. This dualism causes a problematic thought for the character of Coraline. How Coraline

compare and contrast her judgment over her parents is an important matter because generally a child would only have their judgment of their parents only in the imagination. The presence of the both parents makes Coraline in a difficult position. The purpose of this research is to be one of the references for those who study literature, especially the binary opposition theory. This research is a qualitative research that aims to analyze the contrasting aspects between the real and the other parents' characters with the theory of binary opposition. Not only using the theory of binary opposition, but this research is also using the film theory by Amy Villarejo to help explaining the events from the *Coraline* movie, Nurrochmah (2017: V).

The third prior research that the researcher embrace is a *Lingua Didaktika Journal* entitled *Modern Racism: Binary Opposition of Black and White in The Novels of Jacqueline Woodson*. This paper is a result of library research toward a discourse about racism in the novels of Jacqueline Woodson. The research was conducted by using postcolonialism and deconstruction approach. This research is aimed at revealing: (1) how are the image about black and white are constructed in the novels of Jacqueline Woodson. (2) What are the binary opposition, decentering and fixation aspects in that novels. The conclusion of this research shows that language is still powerful in shaping ideas about racism, especially in keeping the issues of black and white as binary opposition, Hafizh M.A, Faruk, Juliasih (2016:74).



Although some researches above use same literature theory, but they take different research object. One of them also use secondary theory, such as in the last prior research that the researcher mention above. Beside using binnary opposition, they also use deconstruction approach and post colonialism to analyze racism between black and white issues. For the last prior research, he uses sociology of literature and historical approach.

Certainly, the researcher has different focus in this research, that is focus on the social inequality and the binary opposition which is depicted in Oliver's caregivers when they treat Oliver as an orphan.

The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, is one of the forefathers of structuralism whose works have inspired and influenced many of current modern thinkers. Binary opposition is one of many of his thoughts. This notion came up from his theory explaining that in fact in humans'



attempt at deriving conceptual meanings, their minds work by distinguishing the differences between things. Thus, Saussure basically suggests the idea that humans first logical operation is by discerning things through their relationships; one of Saussure's basic relationships is binary opposition, Putri A., Sarwoto P. (2016:82). Beside of Saussure, the other figure of Binary Opposition theory is Claude Lévi-Strauss. Both of them have an important connection to this theory.

The first anthropologist to see the potential of Saussure's analysis of language as a way of approaching the most diverse cultural phenomena was Lévi-Strauss, who, as I have mentioned earlier, met Jakobson in the 1940s in New York (the relevance of that encounter will become clear below). In the early decades of the twentieth century anthropology was still largely descriptive and functionalist: it sought to record the myths, taboos, rituals, customs, manners, in short, everything that was recordable, of the non-Western cultures that it studied and it tried to establish their function. Lévi-Strauss broke with that tradition in two major ways. The first way is indebted to Vladimir Propp's study of Russian fairytales, Bertens (2001:61). However, binary opposition is significant concept of structuralism.

Lévi-Strauss saw the possibilities of Saussure's notion that meaning is ultimately the product of difference for the study of discrete cultural phenomena. For the structuralism that Lévi-Strauss developed in a series of major anthropological publications, the almost countless discrete

elements that together make up a culture constitute a sign system. Eating customs, taboos with regard to menstruation, initiation and hunting rites, the preparation of food, the rules underlying so called kinship relations in short, everything that has a cultural origin and is not biologically determined counts as a sign. The discrete bits of culture that we can distinguish are not meaningful in themselves, but draw their meaning from the sign system in which they function and, more in particular, from their difference from other signs, Bertens (2001:61).

For Lévi-Strauss, the structure of primitive thinking is binary. Having acquired the rudiments of language, our ancestors must have started to categorize their world in very basic terms that always involved a presence and an absence – light/darkness, human-made/natural, above/below, noise/silence, clothes/naked, sacred/profane, and so on. Prehistoric men and women must have organized their experience around such +/- (that is, binary) oppositions, Bertens (2001:62). It can be concluded that binary opposition is about the opposition between two things that are structurally still related.

The theory explanations above become the researcher's basic references. Those help the researcher to complete the research. The researcher actually needs a theory that can discrete cultural phenomena as system of signs. It intends to analyze social in equality in *Oliver Twist* novel, and binary opposition is suitable theory for it, according to the researcher's argument.

## **1.7 Methods of Research**

This section consists of type of research, data collection technique, data sources, and data analysis technique.

### **1.7.1 Type of Research**

This research uses qualitative research. As cited in Creswell argument, qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem, (Creswell, 2009:1). According to the argument, there are no numeric and data such statistic exist in this research.

The researcher must interpret or explain the data they have found in their own version words, Creswell (2009:4). In qualitative research, it is a must to give and describe explanation by the researcher's personal way of words.

### **1.7.2 Data Sources**

There are some data sources in this research, primary and supporting data. In primary data source, certainly the researcher uses *Oliver Twist* novel by Charles Dickens. The researcher collects the data from story

backgrounds, plots, characters, characterizations, and dialogues of the novel that have social inequality and binary opposition indication. For the supporting data, the researcher takes some books, journals, and other scientific literature sources that relate to this research.

### **1.7.3 Data Collection Technique**

The researcher takes several steps to collect data in this research, such as: First of all is the researcher reads the Oliver Twist novel. The researcher looks for social inequality signs from story backgrounds, characterizations, characters, dialogs, plots of the novel, then analyze them by binary opposition theory. The researcher also pick some supporting datas up from scientific literature sources to strengthen the researcher's arguments.

### **1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique**

To analyze how social inequality is depicted in Oliver Twist's novel, the researcher firstly analyzes it through intrinsic elements such as characterizations, place settings, social conditions settings, and plots. Then the researcher connects them with the binary opposition theory to find out the parts that indicate social inequality in Oliver Twist's novel.

## **1.8. Paper Organization**

There are four chapters in this research. The first chapter contains background of study, research question, objective of study, significance of

study, literature review, theoretical approach, methods of research: type of research, data sources, data collection technique and the paper organization itself. The second chapter contains explanation of intrinsic element of *Oliver Twist* novel. The third chapter discusses analyses about the main topic of this research. The fourth chapter contains conclusion and suggestion of this research.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

After analyzing the *Oliver Twist* novel using the binary opposition theory, the researcher finds a depiction of social inequality and the opposing characterizations of Oliver's caregivers in treating Oliver as an orphan. Regarding the picture of social inequality in *Oliver Twist's* novel, the researcher chooses the setting of places as the data sources. As for the opposing characterizations of Oliver's caregivers, the researcher takes the characterizations in *Oliver Twist* novel as a data source. From this novel, a message can be picked is that in Treating orphan someone should uses a gentle and loving attitude.

Actually, there are many aspects that can be analyzed in this novel. Especially if it is associated with social criticism in the Victorian Era. The researcher suggests to the next researcher to use marxism theory, in which the next researcher can examine in more detail about the gap between the working class and the capitalists in *Oliver Twist* novel.

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