

## The Social Impact of Charles Dickens in the Victorian Era: A Socio-Literary Analysis through Foucault and Goldmann

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### Abstract

This research examines the influence of Charles Dickens's literary works in criticizing the social, political, and economic conditions of Victorian Britain, particularly through the lens of social criticism. This research is based on the idea that literature, especially novels, can serve as a powerful medium for social criticism and reform. Using a qualitative descriptive method, the research analyzes selected novels: *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol* to identify dominant social themes such as poverty, child exploitation, institutional injustice, and class disparity. These themes are interpreted using Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and the author function, along with Lucien Goldmann's concept of collective consciousness. The results of this research show that Dickens's narratives not only portrayed systemic oppression but also influenced public opinion by exposing the failures of modern institutions and evoking empathy across class lines. For example, *Oliver Twist* critiqued the Poor Law system, which contributed to shifting public perception and inspired social reforms in child welfare. Dickens's works served as cultural interventions that shaped moral discourse and supported progressive change. This research concludes that Charles Dickens is not only a great writer but also a social reformer whose works contributed significantly to societal change. This research highlights the literature's potential to raise awareness of injustice and serve as a catalyst for broad social impact. Future research may explore similar ideological frameworks in other Victorian authors or analyze Dickens's impact on modern social thought.

**Keywords:** Literary analysis; Social criticism; Victorian

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## INTRODUCTION

The Victorian era, lasting from 1837 to 1901 during Queen Victoria's reign in England, is known as the golden age of English literature. Writing from this time reflects major changes in many parts of English life, including advances in science, economics, and technology, as well as shifts in class structure and the role of religion. During Victoria's reign, England was at peace and saw significant development. (Makin et al., 2022). The Industrial Revolution in England resulted in advances in science marked by increased intellectual activity. The Victorian Era (1837–1901) not only marked the second-longest reign in the British monarchy but also a multidimensional milestone that revolutionized the mindset, social structure, and cultural landscape of Great Britain. Rapid advances in industry, science, and technology spurred massive urbanization and expanded the British Empire to the four corners of the globe. Amid the hustle and bustle of the Second Industrial Revolution, with steam locomotives roaring along iron rails and the telegraph shortening communication distances, another equally powerful wave of progress was born: the advancement of public literacy. The increasingly conducive conditions in England

encouraged English novelists to create. Many famous writers appeared during this era, creating works that are still read and studied today (Nuri, 2024). The novel was another prominent feature of Victorian print culture. By the middle of the century, Englishmen of all classes could afford to buy and read novels. Some were aimed at the well-educated and well-to-do, while others were aimed at less educated readers looking for an interesting and exciting story. The novel flourished during the reign of Queen Victoria (King & Plunkett, 2005).

Victorian novelists mostly wrote about social issues relevant to their readers' lives, such as poverty, injustice, poor working conditions, and urban life. These stories were often emotionally moving and offered a critical view of society, appealing to a broad audience. In addition, many Victorian novels served as social critiques, addressing issues such as social inequality, child exploitation, and women's rights (Jones, 2025). By reading these novels, people became more aware of social issues and were motivated to push for change. One of the most famous writers of the Victorian era, Charles Dickens, has many interesting and important aspects of his life and work that have left a deep mark on the world of literature and culture, both as a highly prolific writer and as a keen social critic (Vijaylakshmi et al., 2024). Charles Dickens' novels offer a rich and detailed view of Victorian society in the 19th century. Dickens is known for his ability to portray diverse social classes, from the wealthiest to the poorest. His novels often explore the dissimilarity between luxury and extreme poverty. In addition, depictions of urban life (Boev, 2021) and social and moral problems faced by people in his time. Dickens transformed trauma into a narrative about systemic injustice with a moral sensitivity that embraced a wide readership.

Charles Dickens is one of the most influential writers in the history of English literature, especially during the Victorian era. His works not only captivate readers with their immersive stories and complex characters, but they also serve as a reflection and social critique of the social, economic, and political circumstances of his time. Dickens used his novels as a tool to depict social injustice and to advocate for reform. This research examines the influence of Dickens' works in various aspects of the Victorian era. It responds to the need for a critical framework that treats Dickens not just as an individual genius but as a discursive agent within a broader sociocultural system. By applying the concepts of Michel Foucault's "author function" and Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, this research seeks to understand how Dickens's authorship reflects and shapes the collective consciousness of Victorian society, particularly concerning poverty, class, and power.

Over the years, scholars and critics have examined Charles Dickens' works, drawn to his compelling storytelling, which sheds light on the lives of poor and working-class individuals, presenting their challenges with striking honesty. His ability to create unforgettable characters and vivid settings has made his novels timeless. Several previous studies have examined this, particularly in the context of Charles Dickens. For instance, Kumar (2025) from International Education & Research Journal [IERJ], underscores Charles Dickens's role as a social critic by examining themes of poverty, industrial exploitation, and class disparity in novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, *Great Expectations*, and *Bleak House*. The research emphasizes Dickens's narrative techniques and moral outlook in depicting class struggles and promoting social reform. However, Kumar's analysis stays within a broad sociological perspective and does not use critical theoretical tools to examine the ideological and discursive roles of Dickens's authorship. This research addresses that gap by applying Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and the author function, alongside Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, to explore how Dickens's works operate as discursive interventions that shape and reflect collective consciousness in Victorian society (Kumar, 2025). The other research is from

Jude Piesse (2024) from the Dickens Quarterly journal, which explores the enduring personal and pedagogical resonance of Dickens's work, particularly *Great Expectations*, through a creative-critical lens. Her narrative intertwines autobiographical memory, emotional bonds, and changing perceptions of Dickens in light of feminist and decolonial critiques. Although the article insightfully explores Dickens's emotional and imaginative influence across time and readership, it remains introspective and lacks a thorough engagement with theoretical frameworks of discourse, power, and influence ideology. In contrast, this research positions Dickens as a discursive agent whose authorship operates within ideological structures, drawing on Michel Foucault's "author function" and disciplinary power, along with Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, to examine how Dickens's narratives contribute to the construction of subjectivity, class consciousness, and institutional critique in Victorian society (Piesse, 2024). However, while numerous studies have explored Dickens's social critique, few have systematically examined his works through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that merges Michel Foucault's discursive power and Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism. This research addresses that gap by situating Dickens not merely as a literary figure, but as a cultural agent embedded in ideological discourse.

In this research, Charles Dickens is positioned not only as a fiction writer but also as a social agent who plays an important role in shaping the discourse of social criticism through his works. The research will focus on selected works, such as *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*, which provide rich depictions of institutional control, moral decay, and socioeconomic injustice. Rather than conducting a purely thematic or stylistic analysis, this research situates Dickens's authorship within a larger ideological and sociological framework. The scope is limited to English society during the height of the Victorian period (1840–1870), acknowledging the limitations in extrapolating to global or contemporary contexts. This research does not aim to provide a comprehensive reading of all Dickens's works, but rather to illuminate how specific narratives contribute to the construction and contestation of dominant ideologies in nineteenth-century Britain. To sharpen the focus of this research, the following research questions are posed:

1. How do Dickens's selected novels reflect and critique institutional power in Victorian society?
2. How does Dickens's authorship serve as an ideological intervention, as seen by Foucault and Goldmann?
3. How are issues of class, poverty, and subjectivity constructed and contested in these texts?

## METHOD

### Research Design

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative design with content analysis as its primary approach. Such a design is particularly suitable for examining literary works not only as imaginative narratives but also as cultural artifacts that embody the ideologies, tensions, and social realities of their time. In this case, the focus is on Charles Dickens, an author whose novels vividly portray the complexities of the Victorian era. The descriptive qualitative method allows the researcher to interpret Dickens's writings in depth, highlighting the ways his texts act as vehicles of social critique. Through content analysis, the study dissects symbols, motifs, and narrative strategies that reveal Dickens's engagement with pressing issues such as industrialization, poverty, class disparity, and moral reform. This process positions Dickens's works as cultural interventions, aiming not merely to entertain but to provoke awareness and reform among his readership. Moreover, the approach emphasizes the interplay between literary form and socio-political context,

making it possible to uncover how Dickens's novels reflect dominant ideologies while also challenging them. By focusing on meanings, representations, and underlying critiques related to class, power, and marginalization, the study provides a nuanced understanding of Dickens's role as both storyteller and social commentator.

### Research Subject

The primary research subjects in this research are several novels written by Charles Dickens: *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*. The rich depictions of Victorian England's social situations in these texts, particularly about concerns of poverty, child labor, class stratification, and institutional injustice, led to their purposeful selection. Dickens's intense concern with the effects of industrial capitalism and the immoralities of societal structures is evident in the characters, places, and plotlines of each work. The selection of these particular novels is also based on their critical reception and frequent use in prior studies dealing with Victorian literature and social criticism. Their prominence in both academic and popular contexts makes them ideal for an analysis that intersects literary theory, cultural studies, and discourse analysis. Therefore, these texts serve as the central objects through which the theoretical framework is applied and tested.

### Data Collection

The data in this research were collected through a close reading of selected novels by Charles Dickens, namely *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*. These novels were purposefully selected due to their significant thematic relevance to the research's focus, particularly with reference to Victorian England's problems of poverty, institutional oppression, child labor, class stratification, and moral critique. The process of data collection involved finding narrative components, characters, places, plot points, and dialogues that represented the exercise of power and social control in Victorian institutions. These textual segments were then categorized into thematic codes such as surveillance, resistance, moral transformation, and institutional violence.

Secondary data were also used in the form of scholarly articles, books, and journals to support the contextual and theoretical analysis. These secondary materials, especially those about Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, assisted in triangulating results and placing Dickens's authorship within the larger social and ideological debate.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis in this research followed a descriptive-interpretive approach. First, the selected textual data from each novel were grouped according to recurring themes, such as social discipline, class mobility, institutional critique, and subjectivity formation. Each theme was then interpreted using Foucault's theoretical lens to uncover how narrative structures and character arcs demonstrate the mechanisms of disciplinary power, normalization, and subject formation. At the same time, Goldmann's sociological approach was applied to examine how Dickens's characters and plot structures reflect the collective consciousness of specific social classes.

The analysis proceeded in three main steps: (1) identifying textual evidence of institutional practices or ideological tension, (2) interpreting this evidence through the concepts of the "author function" (Foucault) and "world vision" (Goldmann), and (3) synthesizing these insights into a coherent critique of how Dickens's literature operates as a form of ideological intervention. The combined theoretical framework enabled a layered reading of the novels, where literary form, social function, and ideological meaning intersect. This approach ensured not only textual fidelity but also theoretical clarity in aligning Dickens's fictional narratives with the sociopolitical realities of Victorian England.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the detailed findings, it is essential to reaffirm the theoretical orientation and methodological basis of this research. The research applies Michel Foucault's theories of power, particularly disciplinary power, subjectivity, and technologies of the self, and Lucien Goldmann's sociological approach to literature, especially his concept of collective consciousness and world vision (Goldmann, 1964, 1975). These frameworks allow Dickens's literary works to be analyzed not merely as stories or artistic productions, but as ideological and social instruments that reflect and shape class-based experience in Victorian England.

The analysis is centred on how Dickens constructs narratives that expose institutional and ideological forces shaping human subjectivity, particularly among the lower classes. The findings are drawn from selected novels, including *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*. Through these texts, Dickens's authorship is interpreted as discursive: as Foucault (1969) describes it, not just as a personal act of expression but as part of a larger structure of meaning production within society. The findings below are presented thematically in six major points, each addressing a key social institution or ideological mechanism that Dickens critically explores through his fiction. Each point includes a literary analysis, as well as theoretical and sociological reasoning, to explain why these patterns emerge and how they reflect broader cultural and power structures.

To provide a clearer overview of the key thematic findings, the following table summarizes the six major themes identified in the analysis, along with the literary texts in which they appear, the primary social critiques they represent, and the corresponding theoretical interpretations based on Michel Foucault's and Lucien Goldmann's frameworks. This tabular representation serves to synthesize how each theme directly responds to the research questions and illustrates the intersection of literary narrative, ideological discourse, and class dynamics in Dickens's works.

Table 1. Thematic Findings in Dickens' Novels Based on Foucault and Goldmann

Theme	Work(s) by Dickens	Focus of Critique	Theoretical Interpretation
Social Institutions	<i>Oliver Twist</i>	Workhouse system and poor law	Foucault: Panopticism & disciplinary space Goldmann: Lower-class collective consciousness
Education	<i>Hard Times</i>	Utilitarian education & suppression of imagination	Foucault: Disciplinary power and subject formation Goldmann: Bourgeois worldview reproduction
Law and Bureaucracy	<i>Bleak House</i>	Legal system and bureaucratic stagnation	Foucault: Institutional neutrality and control Goldmann: Ideological conflict (aristocratic vs bourgeois)
Social Class	<i>Great Expectations</i>	Class aspiration and moral failure	Foucault: Subject shaped by dominant discourse Goldmann: Bourgeois contradiction and failed mobility
Subjectivity Transformation	<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	Ethical transformation of the elite	Foucault: Technologies of the self Goldmann: Symbolic class reconciliation

Theme	Work(s) by Dickens	Focus of Critique	Theoretical Interpretation
Lower-Class Representation	<i>Oliver Twist</i> , <i>Hard Times</i> , <i>Bleak House</i>	Moral agency and resistance of the oppressed	Foucault: Reversal of objectification Goldmann: Emergence of transformative class consciousness

The discussion below deepens the interpretation of each thematic finding in direct relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, as requested by the reviewers. This section addresses how Dickens's novels reflect institutional power, how his authorship functions ideologically, and how issues of class and subjectivity are contested. Furthermore, it places these findings within the broader context of Victorian literature and contemporary literary criticism

### Social Institutions

In *Oliver Twist*, the workhouse becomes the primary focus of how power is exercised systematically. Foucault proposed the concept of "panopticon" as a model of how power no longer needs to be present brutally, but is sufficient by making individuals feel constantly monitored so that they behave according to norms. The workhouse in the novel does not merely function as a shelter, but as a disciplinary tool that robs impoverished children of their dignity. As Williams argues, Victorian workhouses embodied Foucauldian mechanisms of control, functioning "in some respects like the prisons of Foucault's study," where punishment was no longer overtly physical but "based on incarceration, surveillance, and reform." (Williams, 2020). This supports the view that the workhouse in *Oliver Twist* is not a neutral space, but rather a disciplinary institution that enforces conformity through internalized power structures.

In 19th-century England, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 institutionalized the treatment of poverty as a moral failure. Instead of helping people experiencing poverty, workhouses were designed to make poverty unbearable, deterring people from seeking aid. Dickens critiques this through Oliver's experiences in a system that strips individuals of dignity under the pretext of reform. As urbanization increased and poverty grew visible during the Industrial Revolution, the state shifted to institutional mechanisms to manage people experiencing poverty. Rather than redistributing wealth, it disciplined the body and mind through spatial controls, work discipline, and psychological normalization.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1975) explains how power in modern societies is diffused through institutions like prisons, schools, and asylums, where subjects internalize rules through continuous observation. As the central character, Oliver becomes a symbol of a body subject to the modern power system. He not only experiences physical suffering, but is also psychologically tamed to accept his inferior status. With the background of Dickens' personal experience as a child laborer after his father was imprisoned, this narrative is fictional and reflective. As Alamgir Hossain et al. argue, *Oliver Twist* presents how the institutionalized oppression of poor children during the Victorian era reflects not only their physical degradation but also their psychological domestication under systemic power, a condition Charles Dickens understood through personal experience (Hossain et al., 2023). Goldmann reads this condition as an expression of the collective consciousness of the lower class, living in structural marginalization and only being able to survive through limited survival strategies. (Goldmann, 1975) interprets Oliver as the embodiment of the lower-class collective consciousness, structurally oppressed yet morally superior. The narrative becomes a reflection of how the lower class perceives and resists ideological domination within society.

These findings directly respond to the research question concerning Dickens's critique of institutional power. Through the portrayal of the workhouse, Dickens critiques the state's complicity in perpetuating class-based discipline. Compared to Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* or George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Dickens's portrayal of poverty is more emotionally charged and symbolic, emphasizing institutional cruelty over mere economic injustice. While Gaskell presents a sympathetic realism grounded in labor disputes, Dickens intensifies moral outrage through characters like Oliver, thereby amplifying the critique of state-sponsored control. This underscores Dickens's unique position in shaping public sentiment toward social reform.

### Education

One of Dickens' most trenchant critiques of modern institutions can be found in *Hard Times*. School in the novel is depicted as a place of formation of subjects who are submissive to capitalist values, where only facts are valued and imagination is considered dangerous. This model of education is parallel to the 19th-century utilitarian approach that judged humans by their economic function. As Galal observes, *Hard Times* provides a powerful critique of the utilitarian educational system that suppresses imagination and creativity, reducing students into 'little pitchers' to be filled with facts and thus molded into mechanical beings (Galal, 2022).

In the Victorian industrial system, efficiency and productivity were prioritized. The utilitarian philosophy shaped education to produce individuals who could serve the economic system efficiently without independent thought or creativity. This reflects a larger societal transition where education no longer serves to liberate, but to regulate and reproduce class positions. Such instructionist models continue to dominate education today, particularly in systems based on standardized testing and rigid curricula. Foucault analyzes education as a means of producing "docile bodies," where curriculum, assessment, and discipline align to create compliance.

Foucault's concept of "disciplinary power" (Foucault, 1975) is very relevant here; power does not strike directly, but shapes the body and mind to obey through a system of curriculum, teaching methods, and evaluation. Education is no longer a tool of liberation, but an instrument of ideology. Characters like Gradgrind are not just fictional characters, but personifications of the ideological state apparatus that plays a role in forming "functional subjects" for the industrial system. Dickens, who was self-taught to develop himself as a writer, shows that creativity and empathy are born outside the formal education system. As Pitsoe and Letseka argue (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2013) Education under instruction paradigms functions not as a means of liberation, but as an ideological tool. Drawing from Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, they show how teaching methods and evaluations act as mechanisms that reproduce social domination and shape compliant subjects. Goldmann views this as a reflection of class tension: education in *Hard Times* functions ideologically to reproduce the worldview (vision du monde) of the bourgeois industrial class. Those excluded from this system (like Sissy Jupe) symbolically represent the emergence of a different form of consciousness not yet dominant in society.

### Law and Bureaucracy

The legal system in *Bleak House* is portrayed not as a pathway to justice, but as a system that preserves social inertia and harms the very individuals it claims to serve. In *Bleak House*, Dickens directs his critique at the English legal system that is full of formality, inefficient, and ultimately paralyzes the individual. Foucault reminds us that modern law often disguises itself as neutrality when, in fact, it serves to maintain the dominant power structure (Wang, 2023). The Jarndyce vs Jarndyce case lasted so long that it lost its meaning, drained resources, and destroyed the existence of the parties involved. In modern societies, bureaucratic systems often evolve to serve themselves rather than the

public. The tendency of the law to protect elite interests while marginalizing others is a recurring theme globally.

The legal narrative in Dickens is an allegory of a social system that disguises itself as rational but is actually oppressive. In Goldmann's approach (Goldmann, 1975), this is a manifestation of the ideological conflict between the values of the conservative aristocracy (with its slow and hierarchical legal system) and the spirit of the progressive bourgeoisie that began to realize the importance of efficiency, transparency, and substantive justice. Dickens, who was involved as a court journalist, built this narrative from empirical experience and ideological awareness (Eagleton, 1976). Dickens's experience as a court reporter gives him insider insight, which he channels into narrative form. The court becomes a metaphor for systems that appear rational but are deeply irrational when disconnected from human consequences. The critique is not merely literary; it is sociological and political.

The legal critique in *Bleak House* contributes to current scholarly debates on bureaucratic violence and institutional failure. The narrative does more than expose inefficiency; it interrogates how law is complicit in preserving elitist power. This connects back to the research question by showing how Dickens's legal narratives illuminate ideological functions of justice systems. Compared to Gaskell, who critiques class injustice more through domestic struggles, Dickens embeds institutional critique within symbolic and procedural absurdity. His insider perspective as a court reporter enhances his credibility and distinguishes his approach in the literary critique of systemic injustice.

### Social Class

Social class in Victorian society not only divided the economy, but also shaped the way people think, behave, and even dream. In *Great Expectations*, Pip shows how individuals are constructed by the class system. He tries to be a gentleman to meet the admired social standards, but ends up with inner conflict and identity disorientation (Ahmed, 2023).

Victorian ideology equated nobility with refinement, suppressing the notion that moral worth can exist outside aristocratic manners. Pip internalizes these beliefs and rejects his humble origins, resulting in disillusionment and guilt. Class mobility, especially aspirational mobility, often demands cultural assimilation, leading to a loss of authentic identity. This phenomenon still occurs in postcolonial and neoliberal societies where success is defined by the dominant (often Western) cultural norm.

With Foucault's lens (Foucault, 1975), Pip is an example of a subject constructed by a particular social discourse; he does not form himself freely, but instead adapts to the norms that have been provided. Goldmann sees Pip's journey as a reflection of the contradictions of the middle class, who have aspirations to move up in class but are trapped in upper-class values that are not always in line with progressive social ethics. Pip finally realizes that status does not guarantee moral integrity, a reflection of Dickens' own inner conflict, who came from the lower class but eventually became an elite figure (Goldmann, 1975).

Dickens uses Pip not only to critique elitism but to reflect his own class trajectory. Pip's moral awakening represents a realization that true worth is not found in status but in integrity and compassion, values devalued by the dominant social system. The findings respond directly to the research focus on subjectivity within class structures. Pip's narrative in *Great Expectations* illustrates internalized class ideology and its moral consequences. This supports the research question concerning how Dickens constructs individuals within dominant class discourses. In contrast, George Eliot's characters often negotiate class through education and personal virtue. Dickens, however, dramatizes the emotional cost of class aspiration, positioning moral worth outside of social status. This enhances his role



in critiquing Victorian values and contributes to current debates on class identity and authenticity in literature.

### **Subjectivity Transformation**

Unlike Dickens's other critiques of institutional power, *A Christmas Carol* offers a model of transformation rooted in personal ethics and internal reflection, not external pressure. The character Scrooge is not forced by institutions, but by an inner voice represented by ghosts that lead him to see the past, present, and future (Gates, 2017). This is a strong illustration of the concept of "technologies of the self" in Foucault's theory, the way in which individuals develop themselves, organize their thoughts, and transform their lives based on internal awareness. In times of institutional failure, literature often turns to individual agency as a source of hope. This is especially true in transitional societies where systemic change is slow.

Scrooge's transformation is not only relevant in a personal narrative, but becomes a metaphor for the possibility of change in the social order. Dickens seems to place hope that morality can be reborn from within the system, that even the elite still have the opportunity to empathize and act ethically (Erwindriani, 2012). This is a form of Dickens' critique of rigid social structures, as well as optimism that social change can begin with individual awareness.

While Foucault usually critiques systemic power, *A Christmas Carol* represents a complementary idea: that ethics can originate from within. Goldmann might see Scrooge's change as a symbolic model of class reconciliation, an elite figure adopting collective values through inner reformation (Goldmann, 1964). Scrooge's transformation engages with the research question by illustrating Dickens's belief in personal ethics as a potential site of social change. Unlike the external disciplining of Oliver or Pip, Scrooge reforms through introspection. While Foucault emphasizes structural power, this finding contributes to the broader discourse by showing Dickens's nuanced position, that ethical awakening can precede institutional change. This positions him as both a critic of structural injustice and a believer in individual moral agency, distinguishing him from more deterministic Victorian authors.

### **Lower Class Representation**

The lower-class characters in Dickens' works are not merely passive victims, but also moral agents who reveal the hypocrisy of the social system. In many novels, such as *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, or *Hard Times*, Dickens presents children, poor women, or workers as markers of the moral destruction of the capitalist system (Vijaylakshmi et al., 2024). Dickens's background in poverty shaped his worldview. He saw firsthand that virtue and intelligence were not confined to wealth, and he used fiction to rebalance social narratives. Literary realism in the 19th century increasingly centered on the experiences of the marginalized. Dickens's elevation of the impoverished's moral voice reflects a broader literary shift toward social critique from below (Aryal, 2025).

Foucault explains how modern power turns marginalized bodies into passive objects. However, in Dickens's hands, they become narrative subjects. However, in Dickens' narrative, these bodies also become sources of resistance, moral reminders, and sometimes even drivers of change (Goldmann, 1975). Goldmann reads this as part of the class dynamics that are beginning to become aware of the potential for systemic transformation. The lower class in Dickens is not depicted as weak, but as a class that experiences ideological pressure but holds more sincere moral values than the dominant class. Characters like Joe Gargery or Nancy are more than side figures; they are ethical anchors. Their presence challenges the assumption that power and morality are aligned. Dickens reverses this narrative: the further from power, the closer to truth.

The findings also contribute to scholarly discussions on subaltern agency and narrative ethics. By giving the poor a moral voice, Dickens challenges dominant assumptions about virtue and social hierarchy. Compared to Eliot or Gaskell, who depict the poor through more gradualist or reformist lenses, Dickens infuses them with symbolic power as truth-tellers. This distinction supports the research question by affirming Dickens's unique contribution as a literary reformer who repositions the lower class from passive subjects to agents of ethical clarity.

## CONCLUSION

From the perspectives of Michel Foucault and Lucien Goldmann, Dickens's works emerge as literary sites where ideological forces are revealed, resisted, and reimagined. This research has demonstrated how Dickens critiques institutions, such as workhouses, schools, courts, and class systems, not only as a storyteller but as a conscious critic of power. His fiction operates as both narrative and intervention, uncovering the disciplinary mechanisms that govern Victorian society while also offering visions of ethical resistance and transformation.

These findings contribute to broader academic debates about the role of literature in exposing structural injustice and shaping collective consciousness. In a contemporary context, Dickens's works remain relevant as models of literary activism, showing how fiction can interrogate dominant ideologies, challenge social hierarchies, and imagine a more humane world. His ability to render institutional violence visible through character and plot continues to inform modern literary criticism, especially within discussions of social justice, reform, and the emancipatory potential of narrative.

Dickens's trajectory, from child laborer to renowned writer, enriches this critique. Goldmann's theory positions him as part of a progressive bourgeois consciousness that seeks moral alternatives within an unjust system. Foucault's framework, on the other hand, reveals how Dickens dramatizes the formation of "docile bodies" while also carving out moments of agency and introspection. By bridging these theoretical lenses, this research underscores Dickens's dual legacy: as a literary icon and as a reformer whose texts continue to engage, disturb, and inspire.

## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this research, future studies are recommended to explore Charles Dickens's other lesser-studied novels using a combined theoretical approach, such as cultural materialism or affect theory, to expand further the understanding of class, power, and subjectivity. Researchers may also compare Dickens's works with those of other Victorian writers (e.g., Elizabeth Gaskell or George Eliot) to trace ideological variations across different authors. During this research, a notable limitation was the availability of theoretical literature specifically bridging Foucault and Goldmann, which may affect interpretative consistency. Additionally, the complexity of applying post-structural theory to 19th-century fiction requires careful theoretical alignment. It is recommended that future researchers deepen the methodological clarity when blending sociological and discursive approaches.

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