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**ТЕМА ВАЖКОГО ДИТИНСТВА У РОМАНАХ «ДЖЕЙН ЕЙР»  
ШАРЛОТТИ БРОНТЕ ТА «ОЛІВЕР ТВІСТ» ЧАРЛЬЗА ДІККЕНСА**

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**THE THEME OF DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD IN CHARLOTTE  
BRONTE’S “JANE EYRE” AND CHARLES DICKENS’ “OLIVER  
TWIST”**

Bachelor’s Thesis

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	6
PART I GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND.....	9
1.1. An overview of political life in the era .....	9
1.2. Characterization of the literary life of 19th century Britain .....	11
1.3. An overview of social life in the era .....	14
1.3.1. The Victorian understanding of childhood.....	16
1.3.2. The education system and the education of children in 19th century England.....	17
1.3.3. Child labour in Victorian England .....	19
PART II HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE’S “JANE EYRE” AND CHARLES DICKENS’ “OLIVER TWIST” .....	21
2.1. Depiction of childhood in Charlotte Bronte’s “Jane Eyre” .....	21
2.1.1. Charlotte Bronte’s childhood and life as an inspiration to “Jane Eyre”.....	21
2.1.2. The plot and analysis of the novel “Jane Eyre” .....	25
2.1.3. Depiction of the theme of difficult childhood in Charlotte Bronte’s “Jane Eyre” .....	27
2.2. Depiction of childhood in Charles Dickens’ “Oliver Twist” .....	32
2.2.1. Charles Dickens's literary work in the context of 19th century English literature.....	33
2.2.2. The plot and analysis of the novel “Oliver Twist” .....	35
2.2.3. Oliver Twist's childhood: orphanhood, abuse and exploitation .....	38
2.3. Juxtaposition of Jane Eyre and Oliver Twist's childhood.....	44
PART III EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION .....	47
3.1 Participants of the research .....	47
3.2 Instruments of the research .....	48
3.3 Procedure of the research.....	48
3.4 Findings of the research .....	49
3.5 Discussion of the research results .....	61
CONCLUSION .....	62
REFERENCE LIST .....	64
PE3IOME .....	68
APPENDIX .....	70

## ЗМІСТ

ВСТУП.....	6
ЧАСТИНА I. ЗАГАЛЬНА ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКА СОЦІАЛЬНОГО, КУЛЬТУРНОГО ТА ІСТОРИЧНОГО КОНТЕКСТУ ВІКТОРІАНСЬКОЇ АНГЛІЇ.....	9
1.1. Огляд політичного життя епохи.....	9
1.2. Літературне життя 19-го століття у Великій Британії.....	11
1.3. Огляд соціального життя епохи.....	14
1.3.1. Вікторіанський погляд на дитинство.....	16
1.3.2. Система освіти та освіта дітей у 19-му столітті в Англії.....	17
1.3.3. Дитяча праця у Вікторіанській Англії.....	19
ЧАСТИНА II. ГОЛІСТИЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ РОМАНІВ "ДЖЕЙН ЕЙР" ШАРЛОТТИ БРОНТЕ ТА "ОЛІВЕР ТВІСТ" ЧАРЛЬЗА ДІККЕНСА.....	21
2.1. Зображення дитинства в романі "Джейн Ейр" Шарлотти Бронте.....	21
2.1.1. Дитинство та життя Шарлотти Бронте як джерело натхнення для "Джейн Ейр".....	21
2.1.2. Сюжет та аналіз роману "Джейн Ейр".....	25
2.1.3. Зображення теми важкого дитинства в романі "Джейн Ейр" Шарлотти Бронте.....	27
2.2. Зображення дитинства в романі "Олівер Твіст" Чарльза Діккенса.....	32
2.2.1. Тема дитинства в творах Чарльза Діккенса.....	33
2.2.2. Сюжет та аналіз роману "Олівер Твіст".....	35
2.2.3. Дитинство Олівера Твіста: сирітство, знущання та експлуатація.....	38
2.3. Порівняння дитинства Джейн Ейр та Олівера Твіста.....	44
ЧАСТИНА III. ЕКСПЕРИМЕНТАЛЬНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ.....	47
3.1. Учасники дослідження.....	47
3.2. Інструменти дослідження.....	48
3.3. Процедура дослідження.....	48
3.4. Результати дослідження.....	49
3.5. Обговорення результатів дослідження.....	61
ВИСНОВОК.....	62
СПИСОК ЛІТЕРАТУРИ.....	64
РЕЗЮМЕ.....	68
ДОДАТОК.....	70

## INTRODUCTION

As Shakespeare famously declared in Hamlet, the purpose of art is “to hold as twere the mirror up to nature” (Shakespeare, 2011, p. 78). And in the novels of Charlotte Bronte and Charles Dickens, we see this sentiment come to life. Bronte's "Jane Eyre" and Dickens' "Oliver Twist" are two masterful works of literature that hold up a mirror to the harsh realities of the Victorian era, revealing the struggles and hardships of children growing up in a society that often neglected their wellbeing.

Through their respective narratives, Bronte and Dickens shed light on the difficult childhoods of their young protagonists, giving voice to issues such as poverty, neglect, and abuse that were all too common during their time. "Jane Eyre" tells the story of a young girl who endures a lonely and oppressive upbringing at the hands of her cruel aunt and cousins before finding solace in a boarding school that is itself rife with suffering and hardship. In "Oliver Twist," we follow the eponymous orphan as he navigates a world of workhouses, gangs, and corrupt officials, all the while struggling to find a place to call home.

But these novels are not simply tales of woe and suffering. They are also works of great compassion and empathy, offering a nuanced portrayal of the complex lives of their young protagonists. Through their vivid and compelling characters, Bronte and Dickens demonstrate a profound understanding of the human condition, revealing the struggles and triumphs that define our shared experience.

The aim of the bachelor's thesis is to analyze and compare the depictions of difficult childhood in these two literary works, while also examining the historical, social, and cultural background of Victorian England that influenced their creation and investigate whether learning about them can develop critical thinking skills in students.

The tasks of the thesis are:

1) to provide a general characterization of the social, cultural, and historical background of Victorian England, that will enable the reader to better understand the themes and depictions of difficult childhood in the literary works of Charlotte Bronte's “Jane Eyre” and Charles Dickens' “Oliver Twist”.

2) to provide a detailed analysis and comparison of the depiction of the theme of difficult childhood in “Jane Eyre” and “Oliver Twist”.

3) to present an empirical investigation into the potential impact of studying literary works that deal with difficult themes, such as difficult childhood in “Jane Eyre” and “Oliver Twist”, on the critical thinking skills of students.

The objects of the thesis are Charles Dickens' novel "Oliver Twist" and Charlotte Brontë's novel "Jane Eyre".

The subject of the thesis is the theme of difficult childhood in the literary works of Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" and Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist".

The theoretical basis of the bachelor's thesis consists of the works of the following well-respected literary historians and literary scholars: A. Szerb (1941), G. K. Chesterton (2022), J. Pál (2012), K. Reynolds (2012), M. Paterson (2008), S. Mitchell (2008), N. Sherry (1970), and many others.

The practical value of this study lies in the potential insights it may offer into the effectiveness of using literature as a tool for developing critical thinking skills in students.

The theoretical value of the thesis lies in its exploration of the social, cultural, and historical context of two classic works of literature, and its analysis of the themes of difficult childhood that they depict.

The thesis employs historical, comparative, literary analysis and empirical research methods. Also, the synthesis of these methods allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the theme of difficult childhood in Victorian literature and its relevance to contemporary education.

The thesis consists of an introduction, three parts: a general characterization of the social, cultural, and historical background of Victorian England, a holistic analysis of "Jane Eyre" and "Oliver Twist," and an empirical investigation of the potential impact of studying these works on critical thinking skills. Additionally, the presented paper contains a conclusion, a reference list, a summary formulated in Ukrainian, and an appendix that accommodates the questionnaire, which is the main instrument of the empirical research.

The first part of the thesis provide an overview of the social, cultural, and historical context of Victorian England. This section include a discussion of the political and literary landscape of the era, as well as an exploration of the Victorian understanding of childhood, the education system, and child labor. Understanding the context in which these works were written is essential to fully appreciate the themes and motifs within them.

The second part of the thesis offer a holistic analysis of "Jane Eyre" and "Oliver Twist," focusing on the depiction of childhood in each work. The section on "Jane Eyre" explore Charlotte Brontë's life as an inspiration for the novel, provide an analysis of the plot and themes, and specifically examine the depiction of difficult childhood. Similarly, the section on "Oliver Twist" examine the theme of childhood in Charles Dickens' works, analyze the plot of "Oliver Twist," and explore the depiction of orphanhood, abuse, and exploitation in the novel. This part also concluded with a juxtaposition of Jane Eyre's and Oliver Twist's childhoods.

The third part of the thesis present an empirical investigation into the potential impact of studying literary works that deal with difficult themes on the critical thinking skills of 9th grade students.

The following hypothesis arises: Exposure to literary works that deal with difficult themes, such as difficult childhood in *Jane Eyre* and *Oliver Twist*, can lead to the development of critical thinking skills among students. This hypothesis is based on the assumption that reading and analyzing literature that deals with complex themes requires the reader to engage in critical thinking, which involves analyzing and interpreting information, drawing conclusions, and evaluating ideas.



# **PART I GENERAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND**

If we tell a person of today to imagine England in the Victorian era, a lot of things will surely come to mind. They recall what they learned in history and literature class at school, they remember Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol", in which everyone is happily waiting for the holiday, the richly laden festive table. There are those who, upon hearing nineteenth-century England, immediately think of films depicting that certain era, in which ladies go to balls in beautiful dresses and young men travel around the world as if they never run out of money. However, looking behind this slightly too idealized picture, we have to discover a lot of things that cannot be called ideal.

In the first part of the bachelor's thesis, I try to paint a realistic picture of the political, social and cultural conditions prevailing in Victorian England. We will pay particular attention to the perception of children and the educational system of the period.

## **1.1. An overview of political life in the era**

Before dealing with the beginning of the Victorian era itself, it is important to mention three very important events. The first was Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815. This triumph resulted in the birth of a hitherto unknown kind of patriotism among the English. The people came to be quite proud of themselves, their history, and their monarch. The Industrial Revolution was the second pre-Victorian event. It is vital to remember that England was the first country to transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy. The Industrial Revolution emerged in 1780, when an extraordinary rapid growth in industrial technology began, transforming people's lives not only in England, but eventually all across the world. (Mitchell, 2008)

A number of historians believe that the Victorian period began not with Queen Victoria's coronation in 1837, but with the implementation of electoral reform in 1832. Britain had a governance structure similar to the one we have now at the time. Parliament, which consisted of a House of Lords and a House of Commons, ruled the kingdom, important that the House of Lords was only available through hereditary succession. Furthermore, prior to the legislation in question, only males of property could vote in House of Commons elections. In addition, to be elected from a constituency, one had to conform to the old land tenure patterns. After the Reform Act, many more people, such as the middle classes, were allowed to vote. (Mitchell, 2008)

As described above, the coronation of the British Empire's second longest-serving monarch took place on June 20, 1837. The monarch's powers in Britain were severely limited by Parliament

at the time of the Queen's ascension to the throne, but she took a deep interest in the Kingdom's political affairs and her views were heard to some extent.

The early 19th century was marked by very great social and political change. Industrialisation, already mentioned, was proceeding at a very rapid pace. Whereas in the early 1900s most people lived in villages, by the middle of the century almost half the population had moved to the cities to work in factories. Food prices rose rapidly, many people became homeless and crime increased. Control was slowly slipping out of the hands of the police, and it was at this time that the London police created the first detective squad. (Paterson, 2008)

In the 1830s, the newly formed English working class launched the Chartist movement against the landlords and capitalists who controlled property legislation and taxation. The Chartists had many supporters across the country, but their petition to the House of Commons in 1839 was rejected. At this time, there were very strong protests, and representatives of the movement made further petitions. The English Parliament and the Queen's Bench itself feared that, as in many other countries in Europe, revolution would break out in Britain. However, the development of industry and technology did not stop during this time - the railways were born. Many new workers were needed to build new bridges, buildings, railway tracks, and with the advent of the railways, the mining industry also developed. People started to recover a bit, there were fewer unemployed people without money and the problem of the Chartists was solved. (Avery, 2014)

In 1854, Britain, the Ottoman Empire and France went to war with Russia in the Crimean peninsula, which later became known as the Crimean War. In the end, Russia suffered a very heavy defeat and was forced to conclude a peace treaty. (Mitchell, 2008)

The Reform Act of 1867, implemented by the Conservative Party-led government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, further granted widespread suffrage to the urban and industrial working class. The reform law of 1884 expanded the rights of rural voters. (Mitchell, 2008)

In addition to suffrage reforms, governmental reforms also had a significant impact on Victorian political life. The Corporations Act of 1834 allowed local authorities to elect their own leaders and thereby exercise greater control over local affairs. The guardianship law of 1858 created the institutional guardianship system, which greatly improved the quality of care for orphans and the poor. (Frawley, 2017)

Another important feature of Victorian political life was party competition. The two largest political parties of the time from the 1840s onwards were the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. The Conservative Party represented the interests of the ruling classes and showed resistance to reform and social change. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, stood for the principles of equality and freedom and supported reform and social change. (Frawley, 2017)

In the 1868 election, the Liberal Party won its first major victory and William Ewart Gladstone became Prime Minister. Gladstone implemented a number of important reforms, such as education reforms, electoral reforms and also tackled the Irish land question, one of the biggest political controversies of the period. The Irish suffered unfair treatment at the hands of the British and several Irish organizations campaigned for independence. Gladstone's government tried to resolve the situation by supporting both Irish landowners and Irish peasants. The Land Reform Act of 1870 allowed Irish peasants to buy their own land, thus increasing their economic independence. (Frawley, 2017)

The expansion of the British Empire during the 19th century was overseen by Parliament. The Kingdom doubled in size and it covered one-sixth of the Earth's land mass and even a quarter of the world's population. Britain was divided into settler colonies and "coloured" territories, and there was a constant state of warfare between Britain and various enemies. The rapid spread of British culture was facilitated by soldiers and administrators, and imperial subjects influenced British ways in language, diet, and literature. The 19th century was marked by an incredible expansion of British territorial acquisitions, therefore this had a significant impact on global affairs and the spread of culture. (Shea & Whitla, 2014)

In conclusion, the Victorian era in Britain brought major changes to political life. In addition to electoral and governmental reforms, economic and industrial development had a major impact on the political process. The rivalry between the two major political parties, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, has remained a defining aspect of political life. However, social problems and the lack of a political elite continued to challenge the period.

## **1.2. Characterization of the literary life of 19th century Britain**

The technological developments that rewrote the whole of the British economy up to that time also appeared in the press, and greatly influenced the print media and its functions. Mechanisation, steam power, advanced typesetting and telegraph technology radically changed the nature of the press and led to the growth of the periodical press. In 1855, the penny stamp duty on newspapers was abolished and a number of other economic measures were introduced, giving rise to a press that was affordable to many and soon became very popular. Many new publishers opened at this time and there was a real competition for readers. Cheap reprints of popular works of fiction were common, but there was also a tendency to turn works into series, such as Dickens' "Pickwick Papers". This made books available to a wider section of society, and thus brought people into reading in ever newer ways. The most popular reading material among Victorians eventually became magazines, such as Punch. These were a mixture of fiction and non-fiction publications, with many well-done illustrations. (Frawley, 2017)

In addition, it is important to note the development of children's literature in this period, which produced many classics such as “Alice in Wonderland”, “The Princess and the Goblin” and “The Water Babies”. At the beginning of the century, the most important publishers were the evangelical ones. In the second half of the century, illustration techniques such as John Tenniel's drawings for “Alice in Wonderland” and Kate Greenaway's nostalgic approach played an important role. Libraries also played a major role in the promotion of literature, the largest and most influential being that of Charles Edwards, known as Mudie. (Frawley, 2017)

In the 1820s and 1830s Byron and Shelley, Keats and Scott all died. Romanticism was wasting itself and was not replenished with new names. The 1830s in the history of English literature were marked by the emergence of new features in the genre structure of the novel, which was due to the historical and economic development of the country. (Давиденко & Чайка, 2009)

The age of realism entered English literature in the 1830s. Therefore, we can see that it coincides with the accession of Queen Victoria and the Victorian era we are researching. Victorianism is now seen as a cultural phenomenon that shaped the national identity of the English people, which is why it is often referred to as the golden age of Britain. We know that you can learn a lot about an era by reading its literature, and so it is with 19th century England. The aesthetic elements of English realism can be traced back to the ideology and literary traditions of the Renaissance (Marlowe, Johnson, Shakespeare) and the Enlightenment (Defoe, Swift, Richardson, Fielding). (Давиденко & Чайка, 2009)

As can be seen from the previous sub-chapter, the social and political life of England in the 1830s was characterised by various reforms. Educational reform was particularly important in the development of modern literature. Realist writers were keen to discuss the problems and shortcomings of the educational system in their works. It is important to note that in England, unlike other countries in Europe, capitalist changes had already taken place at the beginning of the 19th century and the working class was established. When the Chartist movement was formed in the 1840s, it attracted the attention and support of several literary figures of the time, including T. Carlyle, E. Jones, G. Massey and many others. (Avery, 2014)

The philosophy of positivism defined the nature of intellectual life in English society, and the leading philosopher of the time was G. Spencer. His philosophy was that there were many similarities between biological evolution and social evolution. He believed that human society was the result of the various functions that evolved during biological development, the laws of evolution working in the same way on human society. Spencer was an advocate of individual liberty and equality, limiting the role of the state to the establishment of public order and security. The philosophy of positivism proved useful at the time as it reminded working class people not only of their rights but also of their duties. (Тверітінова, 2020)

The Victorian era is often associated with the rise of the novel, with prominent writers such as C. Bronte, C. Dickens, W. M. Thackeray, A. Trollope, G. Eliot, R. L. Stevenson and T. Hardy. Although the novel as a genre was clearly not born solely from Dickens' work, his writings have contributed greatly to its popularisation and wider appeal. In the time of Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen and their contemporaries, novels about the upper classes were the most popular, while in the time of Charles Dickens and others, novels about crime and middle-class life were the most popular. The 1830s and 40s brought novels that focused on social problems. Inspired by Carlyle's social vision and idealism, Dickens and his contemporaries sought to respond to the problems of a newly urbanised and industrialised society, often writing about problems such as prostitution, drug addiction, hunger, slum conditions and crime. This is exemplified by the works of Frances Trollope ("Michael Armstrong", "The Factory Boy", "Disraeli's Sybil", "The Two Nations") or Elizabeth Gaskell's "Mary Barton". (Frawley, 2017)

In early Victorian literature, the tension between Romanticism and Realism was common, and Thackeray's literary work is a good example, such as the novels of the Bronte sisters, who began their writing careers in the late 1840s. Charlotte Bronte was very interested in novels about the raising of children, and it was her who created the female version of the Bildungsroman. The heroines in her novels struggled with the discrimination they had to endure in their time, as well as the battle of reason and emotion. (Frawley, 2017)

The novels of the period often had a didactic function, they taught morals through intrusive narrators and frequent moral messages, as exemplified by Thackeray's "Manager of the Performance" in "Vanity Fair". Many other Victorian novelists, including Dickens, Gaskell, Charlotte Bronte, and George Eliot, also emphasized moral teaching in their works. (Frawley, 2017)

In addition to the Victorian novel, Victorian poetry is also remarkable. Armstrong (2019) argues that Victorian poetry should not be seen simply as a transitional period between the poetry of Romanticism and Modernism. The Victorian poets were progressive, they were interested in the individual and its subjectivity. (Armstrong, 2019) A great example of Armstrong's observation is the poetry of Tennyson, in which the intense inner emotions of the individual play a major role, and are conveyed very vividly by the poet. Tennyson's poetry was as popular in its day as the work of Dickens. His poetry reflected the troubled relationship between the public and private spheres in Victorian literature, and the inner struggles of the people of his time. Tennyson's influence was significant, inspiring the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and fellow poet Christina Rossetti. (Frawley, 2017)

Poetic forms were very diverse in the Victorian era, thanks to the authors' willingness to experiment with them. In the mid-19th century, this led to the emergence of a sub-genre of

Victorian poetry, including Robert Browning's "The Ring and the Book", Tennyson's "The Idylls of the King" and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh". For instance, "Aurora Leigh" is a novel in blank verse that employs elements of the Bildungsroman genre to present the journey of a woman artist towards independence. (Frawley, 2017)

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that the Victorian era, which lasted from 1837 to 1901, was a period of great innovation in literary life and produced a very great legacy. Among the famous authors of the period were Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Elizabeth Gaskell and many others. The press played an important role in Victorian literary life. With the advent of cheap newspapers and magazines, the literary works of the period were increasingly available to the general public, and many authors owed their popularity to these publications. Literature for children was also important at this time, with many works that are still well-known and popular today. English literature in the 19th century produced a very large amount of fiction, which is still very popular with readers today. Realism and Romanticism were popular literary trends, often combined in the same novel. Overall, Victorian literature was a very complex, innovative and highly productive period. The works of the period are still the subject of debate in literary studies and linguistics.

### **1.3. An overview of social life in the era**

The fundamental aspect of everyday life in Victorian England was determined by social class and influenced by traditional practices in rural, urban, and suburban areas. Although some of the traditional class divisions were starting to fade by the conclusion of the nineteenth century, English society remained largely stratified. (Mitchell, 2008)

The triple division of Victorian society was the accepted one. Which social class a person belonged to often depended not on how much money they had, but which class they were born into. This division worked as a very good control mechanism - everyone knew their place and was expected to behave according to their social class. People of different classes, self-evidently, differed in behaviour, education, dress and, of course, opportunities. In the next sub-chapter we will look at the opportunities that children of different classes had in terms of their education. (Paterson, 2008)

Firstly, there was the lowest social class, which included people doing manual labour such as factory workers, servants, agricultural workers and many others. However, here also a distinction was made between those who had learned a trade and those who had no trade. Those in the first group were relatively better situated and had higher income, but they made up only

about 15 % of the class. The labourers usually worked for daily wages, sometimes receiving their wages weekly. (Frawley, 2017)

Poverty and homelessness at the bottom of society have increased dramatically as a result of the industrial revolution and other factors. A law to help the poor survived from the time of Elizabeth I, but this mechanism was not very effective and was not sustainable by the government. In 1834 the new Poor Law was passed, which consolidated the fifteen thousand or so parishes that existed in the kingdom into 643 unions. Each union was responsible for the establishment of a workhouse, these workhouses provided relief, and only those in need who moved into one of these workhouses could receive relief from the government. The state's unhidden aim in reorganising social assistance in this way was to ensure that as few people as possible would want to rely on benefits for their living. The conditions in workhouses were characterised by most writers of the time as comparable to a prison, with poor food, separation of families, hard (often pointless) work, and the wearing of uniforms. The new law finally had the desired effect: those who could avoid living on the dole tried to do so. As a result, the greatest number of workhouse residents were aged, ill, disabled or orphaned. C. Dickens' novel "Oliver Twist", that will be analysed in depth in the second part of this thesis, is an excellent example of workhouse critique. The Act in question was finally repealed in 1948, and it was only then that the last workhouses were abolished. (Frawley, 2017)

Secondly, there were people from the middle social class. Their numbers climbed the highest during the Victorian era. It is also worth noting that people did not become middle-class just because they had a particular quantity of money. For example, most of the time a craftsman earned much more than a poor village clergyman, yet the former would never have been classified as middle class, while the latter would have been all the more likely. Industrialisation has brought many new professions into this class, but originally it included priests, soldiers, clergy, teachers, doctors and others. The middle class admired honesty, religion, hard work, family values, and morals, whereas the aristocracy detested them for not doing any work. Compared to working class women, a middle class woman did not have to work for a daily wage, but her rights and opportunities depended first on her father's and later on her husband's marital status and occupation. (Frawley, 2017)

Thirdly, there were the aristocrats, who earned their income by renting out the land owned by their families. To enter this social class, one had to be born there, and the eldest son always inherited the property and title from his father. The highest title was duke, the lowest was baron. In the mid-19th century there were over half a hundred aristocratic families with titles in England. The titled heads of all these families were admitted to the House of Lords and enjoyed many other privileges unavailable to other members of society. Younger siblings also inherited some wealth,

but often chose careers in the military or the clergy. Here again, a woman's status depended on her husband's position in society, for example, if her husband was a duke, she was also called a duchess. (Frawley, 2017)

### **1.3.1. The Victorian understanding of childhood**

Childhood has always aroused the interest of people all around the world, and there have been several views regarding upbringing and education of children throughout history. The Victorian era is typically seen as the beginning of a process that finally led to the current understanding of childhood. (Reynolds, 2012)

The change for the better in beliefs about childhood began in the second half of the 18th century. Before that time, the Puritan belief that when a child is born he is already a sinner and that it is the task of adults to save the child's soul from damnation by guiding it in the right direction. (Reynolds, 2014)

Perceptions of children in the 19th century were influenced by a number of trends. First, the educational teachings of J. Locke, who rejected the idea that the child was a miniature adult. In his work, he stressed that education should be individualised and require a humane, respectful approach. According to him, the child's environment has a very strong influence on his or her later personality development, and the purpose of education is to prepare the child to survive and adapt. (Makhmudova, 2020)

Secondly, central to this was the work of Rousseau, who argued that the child is born inherently good and only later loses his innocence under the influence of the human world. In his utopian work, he allows Emil to develop freely, to follow his instincts, which goes completely against the strict upbringing that was accepted at the time, and the result of this raising is a well-balanced adult. (Reynolds, 2014)

Thirdly, the Victorian conception of the child was also influenced by Romanticism as an artistic movement. The great English poets of the Romantic period, such as W. Blake, S. Coleridge, W. Wordsworth, published an idealised Romantic image of the child close to God in their poetry. (Makhmudova, 2020)

Fourthly, there were Christian teachings which saw the child as inherently sinful, and that strictness and discipline were essential in education. (Makhmudova, 2020)

Evidence of the four concepts mentioned above can be found in many literary works of the period. For example, in the works of C. Dickens and C. Bronte, we can observe that the positive characters treat children as innocent creatures and have a very good relationship with them (Oliver and Rose, David and Peggotty, Jane and Miss Temple), while the negative characters see in



children only sin and want to break them at all costs (Jane and Mr. Brocklehurst, David and his stepfather, Oliver and Mr. Bumble). (Makhmudova, 2020)

### **1.3.2. The education system and the education of children in 19th century England**

During the Victorian era, Britain went through many changes, and as we have already seen, the structure and position of British society was greatly influenced by the Industrial Revolution. In this subchapter we will examine the structure of the education system and the changes that took place.

In Victorian England, a child's educational opportunities were influenced by many factors, differing according to their social class, gender, denomination or the education their parents could afford them. (Mitchell, 2008)

Because there was no regulation overseeing basic education in the first part of the 19th century, it was difficult to determine how many individuals in the lowest classes of society were illiterate. Often the only learning opportunity for children and adults was Sunday schools, where they learned to read the Bible. There were also so-called rag schools, funded through foundations. These schools offered free education, meals and clothing to working-class children. Religious organisations also ran elementary schools, not free but affordable for the working class. It was common practice in such schools to gather many children of different ages in a large classroom and have one teacher for all, with the help of assistants selected from the older, more able pupils. The school's task was mainly just to teach the pupils to read, write, count and basic Bible knowledge, and the girls had to be able to sew and embroider. Later, the British government also recognised the problem of uneducated and idle children and began to support the work of such religious organisations. (Mitchell, 2008)

The first Education Act, also known as the Forster Act, was introduced in 1870. The reasons for the Act were, firstly, that the expansion of the English economy created a demand for skilled labour and, secondly, that the activists of the day were fighting hard for public education. The law introduced compulsory primary education for children aged 5-12. The country was divided into school districts and the necessary number of new primary schools were created on this basis, with the British government taking over the maintenance of the schools. By the end of the 19th century, British primary schooling was divided into two levels: grade school, for children aged 7 to 12, and higher grade school, for children aged 12 to 14. In better cases, children of poor parents were educated until the age of 11. The first school committees were set up at this time to monitor education in schools and open new schools. By the end of the century, the training of primary school teachers was also being addressed, and colleges of education were opened. (Gillard, 2018)

Secondary education employed two types of schools throughout the second part of the 19th century. One was the public schools, where the pupils were from the wealthy sections of society and where tuition fees were very high, and the other was the middle class schools, which included all kinds of private and foundation schools. These schools were unthinkable for working class children. (Белова, 2021)

Classical Greek and Latin were the most essential topics to learn in public schools, although maths and science were also covered. Interestingly, the hours of study were not regulated, but depended on the pupil and his family. Pupils who attended these schools were those who were later destined for university, and were usually prepared for it after 5-6 years of study. To summarise the above, the aristocracy and nobility built and ran public schools, which were not especially in line with the economic and technical advancements of the time. (Белова, 2021)

Middle-class schools were schools for the middle classes. These schools were very different from one another, the curriculum varied from school to school, and in some cases the children who attended them did not even reach the level of primary school pupils. Different children attended these schools, such as children of rich middle-class families, children of bankers, children of businessmen and others. In general, middle-class schools did not teach subjects that would have prepared children for university, nor did they offer any vocational training. (Roach, 1971)

The education of girls was less important than that of boys in the Victorian era. Girls were expected to marry and run the household. Girls from the lower classes often started working at a very young age, looking after their younger siblings or helping out in the household. Girls from wealthier families were not sent willingly to boarding school, but it was customary to take in a governess in their own home. The governesses were expected to teach the girls English and French, geography, history, drawing, singing and piano. In a wealthy family home, governesses were not servants, but they were not equal to the owners of the house either; it was customary for them to eat with the children and spend most of the day with them. The governesses usually started teaching the girls when they were toddlers, until they were in their mid-teens. The daughters of the wealthiest families had several governesses in their private education, a specialist for each stage of life. The financial status of governesses was very poor, yet many middle-class women chose this career because it was often the only way for women without family support to earn a living. (Mitchell, 2008)

The reforms in primary and secondary education were all a precondition for reforms in higher education. At the beginning of the century, the only universities in the country were Cambridge and Oxford, but only boys who were unmarried and belonged to the Church of England were admitted. Finally, in 1826, University College London was founded for those who could not

get into the other two universities because of the requirements listed above. The two oldest universities in question were made up of different colleges, with admissions being handled by the college rather than the university itself. In general, applicants had to take an entrance examination, for which they were already prepared at secondary school. A large percentage of students at these universities came from clerical or gentry families and later served in the church. It is interesting to note that Oxford University specialised in classical studies, while Cambridge University specialised in science and mathematics. In 1871, legislation was passed to remove religious restrictions on admission to university and to reform the conditions and composition of education, resulting in a doubling of the amount of applicants in the following years. For their sons from elite families, their university years were a great opportunity to get to know those who were the future of the country's political, legal and social life, and so after a few years of university many of these boys did not graduate, as that was not their original aim with university. (Csinády, 2007)

### **1.3.3. Child labour in Victorian England**

As has already been discussed, in England in the early years of the Industrial Revolution, working class people lived in very poor conditions. Indeed, many children were born, but there was also high mortality in childhood and middle age. Around 50% of the country's population were children, many of whom were half-orphans or orphans. One survey in the 19th century showed that the average age of children in employment in and around Glasgow was under 10 years between 1805 and 1809, while another survey suggests that in Nottinghamshire more than half of working children were under 10 years of age. (Honeyman, 2007)

In 1802, the Apprenticeship Act was finally passed, which maximised daily working hours to 12 hours and abolished the night shift, but this law only applied to orphaned children working in textile factories. It also required the factory owner to provide some education for the children. By the middle of the century, other laws had been passed that applied to children working in other areas of industry. In addition to industry, many children also worked in mines, and at the beginning of the century boys and girls were sent to work in mines from the age of 5. Miners realised that such young children could work and navigate in narrow tunnels because of their size, and many very young children died in such mine work. Eventually, in 1842, a law was passed to regulate the employment of children in mines: only boys over the age of 10 could work in mines. (Elekes, 2020)

In 1833 the next law on children working in industry came into force. The law stated that children under 9 years of age could not be employed and set the daily working time at nine hours. It also introduced compulsory schooling - children aged 9-11 had to attend school for 2 hours a day. However, the law was only enforced in very few places. (Elekes, 2020)

From the second half of the 19th century onwards, laws were introduced to regulate the workplaces in which children could work, and the number of such places diminished over the years. By the end of the Victorian era, children could no longer be employed in factories, but only in other less strenuous workplaces, and a number of health and safety laws were introduced. Not only legislators but also some members of the aristocracy took a stand for the protection of children, and numerous associations and foundations were set up to support orphaned children. (Mitchell, 2008)

From what has been described in this part of the thesis, we can therefore conclude that political, literary and social developments in Victorian England were closely intertwined and had a significant impact on each other. It can be argued that 19th century Britain was marked by major cultural and economic changes, including changes in attitudes to childhood, education and child labour. The Victorian era was also characterised by a growing emphasis on individualism, rationality and scientific progress, which had a profound impact on social norms and cultural practices. Despite the many innovations and achievements of the period, Victorian society was characterised by significant inequalities and injustices, including high working-class poverty and inequality, class divisions and gender discrimination. However, all things considered, the legacy of Victorian culture has made a lasting contribution to the world, literature and education we live in today, transforming the world we live in.

## **PART II HOLISTIC ANALYSIS OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S "JANE EYRE" AND CHARLES DICKENS' "OLIVER TWIST"**

### **2.1. Depiction of childhood in Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre"**

Childhood is a crucial period in one's life that shapes their future identity and worldview. Charlotte Brontë's novel "Jane Eyre" presents a complex depiction of childhood, exploring the experiences and emotions that mold the protagonist's character. In this sub-chapter, we will examine the various aspects of childhood that are portrayed in the novel, such as the influence of family, social class, and gender roles, and their impact on the development of Jane's identity. We will also discuss the significance of Brontë's own life experiences as an inspiration for writing her novel.

#### **2.1.1. Charlotte Brontë's childhood and life as an inspiration to "Jane Eyre"**

"No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to cultivate happiness. What does such advice mean? Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in mould, and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us out of Heaven. She is a divine dew which the soul, on certain of its summer mornings, feels dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of Paradise." (Brontë, 2009, p. 329) This was C. Brontë's view of happiness in his novel "Villette", of which she had very little in her short life.

The most famous member of the talented Brontë family was born on 21 April 1816 in Thornton, the third of six children of Patrick Brontë, an Irish priest, and Maria Branwell. In 1820, his father got a job in Haworth and the whole family moved there. Patrick Brontë is known to have been educated at Cambridge University, and was also a highly educated man with an interest in literature and even wrote poetry on religious subjects. However, life in Haworth was not as good as it first seemed, the winters were very cold and the air was almost always damp. In later years, Charlotte often wrote in her letters about the bad effect this weather had on the family's health. Apart from the weather, the conditions in the village were extremely poor, with a very high mortality rate, partly due to the lack of a sewage system and therefore very contaminated drinking water. (Sellars, 1997)

The Brontë family's mother died of cancer in 1821, one year after they moved from Hartshead to Haworth and after she had given birth to six children. Afterwards, Patrick Brontë failed in his attempts to secure a new mother for his children, and it was his wife's sister Elizabeth Branwell who came to Haworth to look after all the children. She stayed until her death in 1842. (Sellars, 1997)

According to Taxner-Tóth (1984), Mr Bronte loved his children and could not be accused of failing in his paternal duties, but he could not fill the absence of a mother in his children's souls, and, tormented by the many family problems, and painfully aware of the failure of his stagnation, he became more and more melancholy, bitter and withdrawn as time went on. (Taxner-Tóth, 1984)

Nor could Aunt Elizabeth fully take on the role of mother in the Bronte household, though it is questionable whether she intended to do so at all. What is certain is that Charlotte retained her dislike of her aunt almost to the end, and some literary historians have suggested that she modelled the obnoxious figure of Mrs Reed on her in her novel *Jane Eyre*. That she could not replace the mother is no better proof than that almost all the heroines in Emily's, Charlotte's and Anne's novels are motherless orphans. (Taxner-Tóth, 1984)

Before they got interested in reading, almost all the children's entertainment was walking, exploring the village and its surroundings. Very soon, a closed world of children developed where the father had no access, but he usually didn't notice because he was preoccupied with his own clerical, economic and personal concerns. From time to time, however, his sense of duty awoke and he tried to involve himself in his children's lives. He had a very particular way of parenting: he concealed himself behind a mask and asked his children what he considered to be important questions, cloaking his curiosity in mystery. Patrick Bronte's remembrance of one such incident is captured.

“I began with the youngest (...), and asked what a child like her most wanted; she answered, 'Age and experience.' I asked the next (...), what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy; she answered, 'Reason with him, and when he won't listen to reason, whip him. (...) I then asked Charlotte what was the best book in the world; she answered, 'The Bible.' And what was the next best; she answered, 'The Book of Nature.' I then asked the next what was the best mode of education for a woman; she answered, That which would make her rule her house well.” (Gaskell, 1971, p. 36)

In 1826, Mr. Bronte gave his children a box of soldiers and dolls that eventually started the siblings on the path of story writing, after using the toys the Bronte children created a whole fairy tale world, which they named Angria. The toy characters they named were the names of famous people of their time, whose names they saw in the newspapers. (Taxner-Tóth, 1984)

Branwell's education was in the hands of the father himself, but he left the elementary education of his daughters to their aunt. He knew that if his daughters failed to marry, the only way they could support themselves would be to become governesses, but that would require a proper qualification. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the early Victorian school question was one of the unresolved issues of the age. It was at this time that the Reverend W. C. Wilson's school for the daughters of churchmen of modest incomes opened its doors. Although the

conditions of the Lowood School, described in Charlotte's novel "Jane Eyre", were largely modelled on her own memories of her own life, the serious accusations made in "Jane Eyre" are not entirely true, as the headmaster could not be accused of profiteering, as is shown by the fact that the school fees were so small that they barely covered the cost of feeding the pupils. However, the school conditions at Clergy Daughters' School and Lowood were very similar. Wilson's idea was that the children attending the school were all the children of poor parents, and therefore could not rely on dowry or wealth, so the school's most important task was to prepare them for the poor life that awaited them in the future. Girls should be taught thrift, modesty, simplicity, self-discipline. It is important that girls get used to cheap food, cold rooms, little sleep and hard work. That's why the girls had to sleep in cold rooms, two on each bed, why there was one washbasin for every six pupils, why they had to spend an hour outdoors in thin clothes even in winter. (Sellars, 1997)

Charlotte recalls these times in her novel: "I remember well the distracting irritation I endured from this cause every evening, when my feet inflamed; and the torture of thrusting the swelling, raw, and stiff toes into my shoes in the morning. Then the scanty supply of food was distressing: with the keen appetites of growing children, we had scarcely enough to keep alive a delicate invalid." (Bronte, 2009, p. 91)

School took away the self-confidence of many of the girls and developed lasting inhibitions. Sewing was the main 'women's science' at the centre of the curriculum, with very little taught in arithmetic, grammar and other real and human studies. (Taxner-Tóth, 1984)

In 1824, Patrick Bronte enrolled his two eldest daughters, Maria and Elizabeth, then Charlotte and Emily, at the Clergy Daughters' School. Cowan Bridge lies in a damp, badly ventilated valley. In the spring of 1825, some sources say typhoid fever struck, others say tuberculous fever infected a succession of ill-nourished, constantly freezing, weakened children. Maria was the first of the siblings to fall ill, followed later by Elizabeth. The headmaster later realised his mistake, but there was nothing he could do - the infection was spreading too fast. Patrick Bronte eventually took all four daughters home from school, but sadly Maria and Elizabeth died soon after. Their memory is commemorated by C. Bronte in the person of Helen Burns. After the incident, their father came to a grave conclusion: he was no longer willing to let his daughters go to school, and his only son not at all. (Sellars, 1997)

"That forest-dell, where Lowood lay, was the cradle of fog and fog-bred pestilence; which, quickening with the quickening spring, crept into the Orphan Asylum, breathed typhus through its crowded schoolroom and dormitory, and, ere May arrived, transformed the seminary into an hospital. Semi-starvation and neglected colds had predisposed most of the pupils to receive infection: forty-five out of the eighty girls lay ill at one time." (Bronte, 2009, p. 114)

In 1831, however, Charlotte resumed her schooling twenty miles from her home. The headmistress of the school was Miss Wooler, who quickly took a liking to Charlotte. According to Gaskell (1971), the headmistress was a very intelligent and kind-hearted woman, and her time here was spent in a family atmosphere. Later Emily also attended the school, but by then Charlotte was a teacher here, and in 1838 she had to leave her job because of illness. (Gaskell, 1971)

In 1839, Henry Nussey proposed to Charlotte, but because she had no feelings for him and knew he had none for her, and because she did not find him a good husband, she declined the offer. Between 1839 and 1841 she took several governess jobs not far from home, but this work did not make her happy, the position of governesses who were neither servants nor family members tended to make her feel excluded and alone. This lonely and bleak life of the governesses is later described in detail in “Jane Eyre”. (Sellars, 1997)

In 1842, Charlotte and her middle sister had a great opportunity to travel to the continent to C. Heger's boarding school, where they studied and passed their English and music skills. Here Charlotte learned German and honed her French, drawing and music skills. However, the girls' existence in Brussels did not last long, as they had to return home urgently for their aunt's funeral that same year. In 1843, the future writer returned, continuing her teaching at Heger's institution. In Charlotte Brontë's later letters we can find some hints and indications that she had tender feelings for the married Heger, but either way, it is certain that he served as a mentor in her life and an inspiration for her literary work. (Sellars, 1997)

A year later, the writer returned home with many new experiences, but most importantly, she already had a French teaching degree. She and her sisters had always dreamed of opening a girls' school together so that they would no longer have to be separated from each other to work, and now had the qualifications to do so, but the plan had failed, partly due to lack of money and connections. (Sellars, 1997)

In the years that followed, the sisters devoted all their free time to writing, which resulted in the self-publishing of a book of poems by the three of them, published under three pseudonyms. The book of poems was not at all popular, nor did it win critical acclaim. In 1846, all three sisters finally submitted a novel to publish, Emily's “Wuthering Heights”, Anne's “Agnes Gray” and Charlotte's “The Professor”, inspired by her staying in Brussels. As is well known, Charlotte's novel was refused by the publishers, whose suggestion was for her to write a story with a more engaging plot. Her sisters' novel, however, they were willing to publish. Charlotte took the advice of the publishers and the novel “Jane Eyre” was printed in the next year. Then, encouraged by its popularity, she quickly set to work on her next work, “Shirley”. The joy was not permanent as in September 1848, his brother, a severe alcoholic and drug addict, eventually gave up the struggle. Charlotte Brontë was deeply affected by her brother's death, but if that wasn't soon enough Emily's



health also deteriorated and in December of the same year she passed away because of tuberculosis. In the end of spring, the series of tragedies continued when Anne died. During the illness of her loved ones, she left her writing behind, but after they all died, she coped with her sorrow by writing and “Shirley” was printed in October 1849. After her novels became famous, Charlotte made some money to support herself and P. Bronte, who had in the meantime grown old, and even joined several literary societies in London. In the meantime, she worked hard on her fourth novel - “Villette” released in 1853. (Sellars, 1997)

In the same year she accepted an offer of marriage from A.B. Nichollson. Soon afterwards she threw herself into writing again, but later that year she fell ill during her pregnancy. On 31 March 1855, Charlotte Bronte went to her eternal rest. (Sellars, 1997)

### **2.1.2. The plot and analysis of the novel “Jane Eyre”**

According to Antal Szerb (1941), in 19th century England the novel was the most popular and the dominant genre, the soul, confined by social conventions and strong religious prohibitions, unfolded through novels. Even the institutions of the state could be discussed by writers in their novels, since the genre of the novel is characterised by the fact that what is described in it is more than just 'fiction'. Nowhere else in the world at this time were as many novels being written as in England, and reading became the main pastime of the Victorian age. Alongside outstanding male authors, women writers assumed a growing amount of significance. Women were beginning to be acknowledged and even appreciated for their intellectual ability, thus it was no longer surprising that a woman could write a novel as well as a man, even if women's lives were still very much tied up and much more so than in the century before. (Szerb, 1941)

Realist fiction often focuses on love, marriage, the situation of children, family relationships, themes that were close to the interests of a Victorian woman. By the end of the century, we can see that the dominant role in the genre of the realist novel was played by women writers, and more and more of the readers were of this gender. (Szerb, 1941)

The most outstanding and perhaps best known of Charlotte Bronte's novels is “Jane Eyre” (1847), which traces the fate of the protagonist from childhood to late adulthood. According to Pál (2012), Bronte created a female version of the Bildungsroman in this work. (Pál, 2012)

Individuality is one of the characteristics of the narrative mode of the novel, S. Bronte endows his narrator with a subjective form of narration, placing the story of the orphan Jane on the plane of personal experience. This same temporal distance from the events of her own childhood deforms the specificity of her child's worldview through excessive reflexivity and the copious commentary of an already mature woman. It is important to note, however, that in S. Bronte's novel the child creates her own narrative and does not function within someone else's. It

is also interesting to note that C. Bronte's subjective narrative form acquires the traits of objectivity by introducing into the structure of the narrative the opposing point of view represented by Jane's cousins and Aunt. The adherence to objectivity in the nature of the story, due to the presence of two points of view on the same events, is purely formal, the reader is on the side of the offended girl, since trust in the first person narrator is maintained. (Поліщук, 2007 )

The novel can be divided into four major structural units, subdivided by location: Gateshead, Lowood, Thornfield Hall and Marsh End. The first is Gateshead, where Jane spends part of her childhood under the tyranny of her heartless aunt, Mrs Reed. Here she encounters a sense of oppression and lack of love. In the second part, Jane is placed in Lowood, where she matures from a passionate little girl into a thoughtful, self-effacing woman. She owes this in large percentage to the oppressive, abusive and degrading education she received in the institution. The third part is Jane's complete mental fulfilment, when her emotions are reciprocated and she experiences the fulfilment of true love and the sense of love, the key to a happy life, the unity of loving and being loved. Yet he experiences another kind of helplessness, as Jane, his master, almost falls victim to his selfishness. The fourth scene's name is suggestive in itself: Marsh End. This can be explained by the fact that Jane finds a real home here, she finds people who love her and whom she can love, she is not considered to be of a lower rank and therefore her integration is easy, she finds a job that suits her. The protagonist undergoes an amazing spiritual development and maturation, she learns to value herself, she finds the balance between reason and emotion. By the end of the novel, she is in possession of these values and accepts her former employer as an equal, and social class and family background are no longer an obstacle. Without sentimental illusions, Bronte sees the world around her. The happy ending is not a triumph of love, but the result of the two protagonists' bitterly acquired self-knowledge and the consequence of a change in their social status. Rochester's social value is greatly limited by his blindness, while Jane's is increased by her unexpected inheritance, which means that the social distance between them is drastically narrowed. (Kakasy, 2017)

Gothic elements play an important role in the novel, and if we look at Jane's life, we find many examples, from her childhood when she believed she saw strange visions in the Red Room, to Thornfield Hall, the mysterious castle where the mad wife was held in secret, the pretended fortune-teller, the all-destroying fire, and even the weather. In the novel, dreams, hallucinations and unexplained twists and turns also play a major role. (Pál, 2012)

Szerb (1941), however, uses a double division of the novel: the first part he describes as a "didactic horror novel" and the second as a "sacrificial love novel". In his view, the secret of Charlotte's talent as a writer lies in the fact that she has succeeded in writing in a realistic novelistic form one of the fundamental legends of humanity, such as the story of Cupid and Psyche in

antiquity and Volter and Grizeldis in the Middle Ages. The basic theme of the novel is very elementary, but its development is melodramatic, such as the burning house or the blind, crippled Rochester. Rochester is presented as a Byronic hero, so well known to Victorian society of the time. Another important feature of the realist novel is passion, of which there is no shortage in “Jane Eyre”, as exemplified by Jane's passionate nature, which she has lost nothing of from childhood to adulthood. (Szerb, 1941)

As already mentioned, S. Bronte was a master of combining realistic and romantic elements in her novels. The descriptions of the landscape in the novel are influenced by the poetry of E. Jung, T. Gray, S. T. Coleridge and W. Blake. The story of the characters' meeting, their confession of love, the interrupted wedding, the heroine's dreams and the distant hearing of each other's voices is cloaked in a romantic glamour. The novel's leitmotif is the cold, stinging wind, a symbol of the speed of change and the power of emotion that governs the lives of the novel's protagonists. (Тверітінова, 2020)

By writing “Jane Eyre”, C. Bronte reformed English fiction as we know it, she was the first to put at the centre of her work a female protagonist who not only does not need the patronage of men, but who also courageously stands up for her own honour and justice, and chooses her own love. In this respect, her work had no equal in Victorian English literature - not in Dickens' novels, not in Thackeray's works, not in the Chartists'. (Тверітінова, 2020)

When everyone tried to convince her that a female character with such traits had no place or audience in the literature of the time, Charlotte simply replied: “I will prove to you that you are wrong; I will show you a heroine as plain and as small as myself, who shall be as interesting as any of yours.” (Gaskell, 2001, p. 247)

After the publication of Jane Eyre, many critics expressed their views on the novel. One such reviewer declared the work to be anti-Christian, disliking the way Charlotte described the hypocrisy and duplicity of the priests in the person of Mr Brocklehurst, or the description of St John Rivers as a religious fanatic.

### **2.1.3. Depiction of the theme of difficult childhood in Charlotte Bronte’s “Jane Eyre”**

Ch. Bronte's “Jane Eyre” offers the reader an extremely wide thematic diversity, with a sharp critique of the social problems of the Victorian era interwoven into the plot of the novel. Among the themes of the novel we must mention the family, church and religion, gender inequality, social classes, love, education, loneliness, the desire for independence and, of course, the difficult childhood we are examining. (Georgieva, 2009)

Literature about children has a long history and tradition in English literature. The theme was already present in Elizabethan poetry, and was later explored by Pope and Dryden. (Georgieva, 2009)

In 19th-century Victorian England, there was a great cult of novels about children, and even orphaned children, in the literature of the 19th century. Writers began to take a serious interest in the subject and wanted contemporary society to pay attention to the realities of orphans' lives. Childhood began to be identified not just as a period of life, but as a time when a person goes through a great change, when he or she is searching for himself or herself and his or her identity. In their works, writers began to challenge the Victorian notion that orphaned children were a danger to society and should be dealt with harshly. (Imansari, Putri, & Pramesti, 2021)

When "Jane Eyre" was published in 1847, it presented the theme of children from a completely different perspective, with the little girl in it having a passionate, determined, willful and angry personality. It cannot be argued that before Charlotte Bronte's novel, there were examples of passionate, rebellious children in literature, but their fate was to have their behaviour condemned, their rebellious character criminalised and crushed. In "Jane Eyre", however, the author clearly does not expect readers to condemn little Jane's behaviour, but through her narrative style, on the contrary, encourages them to empathise with her and to confront the bullying of children by adults. The author succeeds in creating this empathy in the reader from the very beginning of the novel, and thus Jane's childhood of trauma and injustice is not interpreted as a deserved punishment for the guilty child, but as the unjust suffering of the innocent child. (Shuttleworth, 2014)

If we want to analyse the difficult childhood in the novel, we have to start with the first pages of the story, where we learn that Jane's parents died when she was very little, and so she is presented as an orphan.

"After my mother and father had been married a year, the latter caught the typhus fever while visiting among the poor of a large manufacturing town where his curacy was situated, and where that disease was then prevalent: that my mother took the infection from him, and both died within a month of each other." (Bronte, 2009, p. 43)

Jane's name "Eyre" suggests its "insignificance" - invisible as air. As it has been discussed above, she cannot be called the ideal child of the Victorian era, since she does not portray an obedient girl, but one who asks too many questions and has a strong sense of justice. (Kakasy, 2017)

The child, who is completely helpless, is then placed under the patronage of a wealthy maternal uncle, who dies very soon afterwards, but promises his wife that he will look after Jane and treat her as her own. Sherry (1970) draws a direct comparison with Cinderella, the poor orphan

who, like the character in the tale, is abused and oppressed in the house of her wicked aunt. In addition to Mrs Reed, Jane is also abused by her cousins, who more than once make her feel that she does not belong in their house or in their family. (Sherry, 1970)

“You have no business to take our books: you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense. Now, I'll teach you to rummage my book-shelves: for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few years. Go and stand by the door, out of the way of the mirror and the windows.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 22)

This scene has many meanings, since the book Jane was reading before John Reed interrupted her was Bewick's “History of British Birds”. Jane says she felt really happy reading this book regardless of her unfortunate situation. According to Brennan (2010), we can understand the reading as an escape from real life and the content of the book as a reference to Jane's later adventurous life. Jane's comparison to a bird will also appear later in the novel, for example, in Mr. Rochester's birdlike parallel when he proposes to Jane. Another of the protagonist's favourite books is “Gulliver's Travels”, which has a similar symbolic significance to the former. (Brennan, 2010)

As punishment, John Reed eventually throws the book at Jane, causing her to fall badly and injure herself, but her feisty personality does not let the physical abuse go unpunished, calling his cousin a "murderer" and a "slave-driver". (Bronte, 2009, p. 22)

The reality of Jane's being outside and not in the Reed house was perceived not only by her cousins but even by the servants, Miss Abbot once told her:

“And you ought not to think yourself on an equality with the Misses Reed and Master Reed, because Missis kindly allows you to be brought up with them. They will have a great deal of money, and you will have none: it is your place to be humble, and to try to make yourself agreeable to them.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 25)

Bessie, who plays the role of nurse in Jane's aunt's house, is the closest thing to a mother she has had in her childhood, but the others' negative judgement of her makes even Bessie think of her as an uncontrollable, strange child. So, it can be said that there was no valuable emotional connection between Jane and the others in the house, no one to whom the protagonist could relate emotionally, look up to, or look to for any kind of guidance or help.

Jane, with her childish perception, could not understand why she was treated so badly in the Reed house, she felt that she was different from the others, but she did not understand why this caused the house to hate everyone in it.

“All John Reed's violent tyrannies, all his sisters' proud indifference, all his mother's aversion, all the servants' partiality, turned up in my disturbed mind like a dark deposit in a turbid well. Why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win any one's favour? Eliza, who was headstrong and selfish, was respected. Georgiana, who had a spoiled temper, a very acrid spite, a captious and insolent carriage, was universally indulged.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 28)

She later found an answer to this question:

“...but how could she really like an interloper not of her race, and unconnected with her, after her husband's death, by any tie? It must have been most irksome to find herself bound by a hard-wrung pledge to stand in the stead of a parent to a strange child she could not love, and to see an uncongenial alien permanently intruded upon her own family group.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 30)

The protagonist's difficult childhood in Mrs. Reed's house finally reaches its climax in the scene in the Red Room. The Red Room was a guest room in the Gateshead estate where no one ever went, a room so closed off that the servants only came in to dust sometimes. Apart from that, it was the most beautiful and largest room on the estate. It was decorated with a huge mahogany bed, covered with red damask curtains. There were two large windows in the room, but both were covered by blackout curtains. The carpet was also red, as the *sabah's* name suggests, and the table was covered with a crimson cloth. The wardrobe, dressing table and chairs were polished mahogany. Years ago Mr. Reed had died in this room, to which Jane's childish perception assigned the interpretation that the man's ghost still haunted it. After the aforementioned fight with John Reed, the little girl, barely ten years old, was locked in this room, where her disturbed state of mind led her to believe she had seen a ghost, and because her fears were not taken seriously and she was locked back, she even fainted. (Bronte, 2009)

“...at this moment a light gleamed on the wall. ... while I gazed, it glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head. I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern carried by some one across the lawn: but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down;” (Bronte, 2009, p. 31)

According to Botilca (2021), this scene can be interpreted as a trauma in Jane's life, which will reappear later in her nightmares, but it will be more vivid and frightening than the original one. (Botîlcă, 2021)

According to Laggat and Parkes (2006), the Red Room is the most horrifying instrument of Mrs Reed's tyranny, like a torture chamber where she locks Jane to make her admit her sins and

learn from the punishment, but her niece does not consider herself worthy of this punishment and therefore this method of punishment is ineffective. (Leggatt & Parkes, 2006)

After her terrible years at Gateshead, Jane looked with some hope to the institution where her aunt had her committed after the terrible Red Room incident. But her hopes were soon dashed.

“This is a sad, a melancholy occasion; for it becomes my duty to warn you, that this girl, who might be one of God's own lambs, is a little castaway: not a member of the true flock, but evidently an interloper and an alien. You must be on your guard against her; (...) if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sports, and shut her out from your converse. Teachers, you must watch her: keep your eyes on her movements, weigh well her words, scrutinise her actions, punish her body to save her soul. (...) this girl is a liar.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 100)

On the other hand, the conditions in the institution are appalling. Nevertheless, her strong convictions about the matters of life, which she had formed in Gateshead, remained strong, as the following extract from a conversation with Helen Burns proves:

“When we are struck at without reason, we should strike back again very hard; I am sure we should - so hard as to teach the person who struck us never to do it again”. (Bronte, 2009, p. 88)

Helen Burns, Jane's schoolmate, did not have an easy childhood either, her mother died early and her father sent her to Lowood and then he remarried. But in everything else, Helen is the opposite of the protagonist, never complaining, never defying and doing everything she is told. Jane's character development is very much influenced by the aforementioned girl, while Jane struggles in the beginning against her fate and the injustice of her social differences, Helen soothes the heroine's rebellions with her common sense, calms her down and gives her many useful pieces of advice, such as:

“It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you; and besides, the Bible bids us return good for evil.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 85)

“Would you not be happier if you tried to forget [Mrs Reed's] severity, together with the passionate emotions it excited? Life appears to me too short to be spent in nursing animosity or registering wrongs.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 89)

Helen becomes Jane's first and best friend in the institution, the first person with whom she becomes attached, and Helen will be remembered with reverence by the heroine later on. Soon, unfortunately, the heroine's childhood is once again overshadowed by tragedy when the epidemic at the institute begins, of which Helen is one of the victims. At first Jane doesn't realise the weight of it all, until one day she asks herself the following question:

“How sad to be lying now on a sick bed, and to be in danger of dying! This world is pleasant-it would be dreary y to be called from it, and to have to go who knows where?” (Bronte, 2009, p. 118)

But Helen accepts even the fact of death very calmly and wisely for her age. On her deathbed she tells Jane:

“We all must die one day, and the illness which is removing me is not painful; it is gentle and gradual: my mind is at rest. I leave no one to regret me much: I have only a father; and he is lately married, and will not miss me. By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 121)

An important role in Jane's childhood at Lowood is played by the headmistress of the institution, with whom Jane will become good friends when she becomes a governess. Miss Temple's person takes on the role of mother as well as mentor. Helen describes her as:

“Miss Temple is very good and very clever; she is above the rest, because she knows far more than they do.” (Bronte, 2009, p. 79)

The above shows that Jane rebelled against her fate as a child, but as an adult she comes to terms with her destiny, knowing her place in the world and how to start her path. When she later leaves the institution and takes a job in Mr. Rochester's house, she leaves as a determined woman, ready to shape her own destiny. Her looks are not attractive, but her education has given her many fine qualities: she is a good and patient teacher, a skilful player of the piano, speaks French and paints beautifully.

These good qualities cannot be said of her cousins, whose childhoods were easy compared to Jane's. When the heroine was about to leave Lowood, she was visited by her old nurse Bessie from Gateshead and Jane heard news of the people who had made her childhood so bad. According to Bessie, John Reed had become a young man with a profligate debt, even expelled from university, and the two sisters also had not fared well. (Bronte, 2009)

## **2.2. Depiction of childhood in Charles Dickens’ “Oliver Twist”**

Childhood is a recurring theme in Charles Dickens's literary works, with his characters often experiencing various forms of adversity and injustice during this crucial period. In this sub-chapter, We will focus on the depiction of childhood in Dickens's novel "Oliver Twist". This sub-section will be divided into three parts: Firstly, we will explore the theme of childhood in Dickens's literary works, providing an overview of his approach to this subject. Secondly, we will provide an analysis of the plot of "Oliver Twist", examining the background, the style, key themes, and characters in the novel. Finally, we will delve into the specifics of Oliver Twist's childhood,



discussing the challenges he faces as an orphan and the various forms of abuse and exploitation he experiences throughout the novel.

### **2.2.1. Charles Dickens's literary work in the context of 19th century English literature**

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) most frequently dealt with the social and material problems of early 19th century England, yet he was already very well known in international literature during his lifetime. According to Pál (2012), although Dickens is generally regarded as a realist writer, he could in fact be described as a mythical writer who created a non-real world. The stories he wrote were heavily influenced by his own sympathies and beliefs. Dickens liked to emphasise those things that were romantic, and in the stories he wrote he emphasised the poetic rather than the factual. He believed that the good nature of human beings was to be found in imagination and play, rather than in a commercial and self-fulfilling mindset. Dickens was most interested in the diversity of human nature and was keen to depict everyday life and its many different characters. His novels were usually published in serial form, and he also took account of the needs of his audience. (Pál, 2012)

Antal Szerb (1941) describes Dickens as a "writer of the heart" and his literary legacy as the culmination of philanthropic and moral sentimentalism. According to the great Hungarian literary historian, the aim of all Dickens's novels is to influence the reader's best moral feelings, and it is the emotions that make his novels vivid and real, and this is the reason why readers read his works with great interest to this day. (Szerb, 1941)

The writers of the century were all reformers and wanted to improve society, so in their works they pushed a particular character forward to play the role of trying to find solutions to the problem in his own way, Dickens was not like that, through his works the discontented masses, the people themselves, spoke. He told what the common man, the lower middle class, felt about the abuses of the times against them. The writer described how children suffered because of the disregard for their rights and the obsolescence of education, the conditions in the workhouse, using his own experience of his years there, the way the middle classes languished in the debtors' prison, which his father had personal experience of, the bleakness of daily life in the factory towns that had sprung up as a result of industrialisation. However, he offers no possible solutions to any of these problems, but only complains, as the people of his time did. The characters in his novels are almost one-sided, their personalities have only one characteristic trait, think of Sam Weller who is always saying proverbs, or Copperfield's aunt who is always chasing donkeys. Dickens's characters live in the Dickensian landscape of London, a city described by the author as a closed world, while the streets are foggy and inhospitable, there are warm fireplaces and welcoming

lamps in some houses. He was the writer who created the myth of London that people still know today. (Szerb, 1941)

His collection of writings, "Sketches by Boz", published in 1836, was enthusiastically received by critics. Of his early novels, the first, "The Pickwick Papers" (1837), stands out for its serene portrayal of humanity and humour; "Nicholas Nickleby" (1839), "The Old Curiosity Shop" (1841), is also a picaresque novel, but here the story is organised around plunder, innocent suffering and poetic justice. The "Christmas Carol" (1843) is a fairy tale of love's triumph - its incredible popularity continues to this day, and England still loves to indulge in it during the traditional Puritan Christmas celebrations. "Oliver Twist" (1838) and the autobiographical "David Copperfield" (1850) expose the callousness and cruel laws of adults through the plight of the helpless and outcast child. In 1848, Dickens spent five months in America and wrote of his disappointing experiences in "Martin Chuzzlewit" (1843-1844). His late novels show a gradual deterioration of his vision, a more ruthless tone, a more tragic portrayal of human nature, and a less naively obvious happy ending than in his early novels. (Szerb, 1941)

The originality of Dickens's style lies in the parodic juxtaposition of the spoken word and the subconscious. He frequently uses rhetorical devices, rhetorical figures, alliteration, assonance, regular rhythmic formulas in the composition of his sentences and paragraphs; his interior monologues follow the free-association technique of dream-writing. The language used by his eccentric characters is also outside the usual norms of behaviour: like figures of absurd drama, they narrate side by side. (Pál, 2012)

As we have seen above, the themes of his novels are rooted in the social problems of the time, yet it is the portrayal of a difficult childhood that is most often associated with Dickens. According to another English writer of Dickens' time, "Dickens, if any writer, has associated himself with the thought of suffering childhood." (Gissing, 1966, p. 7)

The writer's difficult childhood, as well as the desire to improve living, working, educational and upbringing conditions for children, led him to turn to the theme of childhood. The images of children - victims of an unfair life, dangerous turns in life, defenceless, but at the same time very strong in spirit - appear on the pages of Dickens' works throughout his career. The writer tells the stories of his characters' lives from the moment of birth, early childhood or to the moment of becoming an adult. The characters are brought up by life, go through numerous trials, but invariably overcome all difficulties, preserving their human dignity and the light that is in them. (Ведернікова, 2021)

To understand why this theme was so important for the writer, it is necessary to clarify the reasons for his interest in childhood and the position on the problems associated with this period of human life.

Robert Newsom (2001) has observed that “Thus the complication (...) of Dickens as the first great importer of the idea of the Romantic child into a central place in the novel reflects not just that he drew upon a very different but equally available tradition of thinking about childhood from the Wordsworthian (...) but reflects as well his own complicated and conflicted experience of himself as a child, an experience that he was forever returning to in his fictions and that he was through his fictions forever reinventing.” (Newsom, 2001, p. 103)

The question of what was the reason for Dickens' lifelong interest in children has been asked by many Dickensian scholars. Although the writer's predilection for childhood has been explained in various ways, it is necessary to take a comprehensive approach to the circumstances of the formation of Dickens's views on childhood. Let us touch upon some of the reasons.

The main reason cited is “obsession with childhood is a primary defect of Dickens’s world” (Wilson, 1970, p. 59) - was reflected both in the fact that a great deal of childhood remained in Dickens's personality:

“Dickens had all his life the faults of the little boy (...) Dickens was always a little too irritable because he was a little too happy. (...) he was splendidly sociable, and yet suddenly quarrelsome. (...) he was (...) genuinely affectionate and happy, and yet in some strange way fundamentally exasperated and dangerously close to tears.” (Chesterton, 2022, pp. 27-28), and in the fact that the ordeal of little Charles was in some way an inoculation and determined his kind and sensitive attitude towards childhood and children.

### **2.2.2. The plot and analysis of the novel “Oliver Twist”**

Charles Dickens's novel “Oliver Twist” was published in monthly instalments between 1837-39, and this fact had a great influence on the author's writing style. It was important for the author to capture the reader's interest after each installment so that they would buy the next one, so he used a variety of literary devices in writing the novel. As the reader finishes each chapter, he always notices a new plot development, which is intended to increase his or her curiosity for the next part, the most important role being played by Oliver, as the writer tries to maintain the readers' continued interest in the plot by building their hopes and sympathy for him. (Dickens, 1993)

In his book, Charles Dickens portrays the devastating impact of the Poor Laws on the impoverished, criticizing the government's neglect of the poor. The poor were confined to workhouses, deprived of food and subjected to mistreatment, leaving them with no alternative but to run away or turn to a life of crime. Despite the government's claims that the Poor Laws of 1834 would save money on feeding, housing, and clothing the poor, crime rates soared. Dickens illustrates the consequences of the Poor Laws through his depiction of London's criminal underworld and satirical humor. For instance, when Mr. Bumble and Mr. Sowerberry discuss the

meager prices paid by the parish board for coffins, Mr. Bumble's laughter reveals his and the public's apathy towards the appalling conditions that lead to children dying of neglect and starvation. Furthermore, Dickens ridicules authority figures' fear of the poor, exemplified by Oliver's imprisonment for daring to ask for more food. He urges readers to empathize with Oliver's plight and envision themselves in his position, eating food unfit even for dogs. (Smith, 2002)

Dickens's preface to the novel gives the background to his writing: there were many novels about criminals in his day, but all of them portrayed these villains in a positive light, and he wanted to portray the lives and fates of such people in a credible way. (Dickens, 1993)

Oliver Twist is Dickens' first social novel, in which the contradictions of English reality are presented much clearer than in "The Pickwick Papers". The "plain truth" Dickens wrote in the preface that it was the purpose of this book. In the preface to the novel, Dickens declares himself a realist, but immediately makes a statement that is directly opposite: "In this spirit, when I wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last – and when I considered among what companions I could try him best, having regard to that kind of men into whose hands he would most naturally fall." (Dickens, 1993, p. 22)

The paradox displayed in young Dickens' thematic declaration derives from the dichotomy that characterises the writer's perspective at the beginning of his creative activity. The author wishes to depict reality "as it is," but does so while ignoring the objective logic of life facts and processes and attempting to idealistically interpret its laws. Dickens, convinced in realism, could not renounce his didactic goals. Fighting one or more societal evils for him always entailed convincing, that is, educating. The author believed that the greatest approach to build mutual understanding between individuals and the humane organisation of human society was via proper upbringing. He honestly felt that the majority of people had a natural proclivity for good, and that the good principle may readily win in their hearts. (Dickens, 1993)

However, proving the idealistic notion that "good" always prevails over "evil" within the context of a realistic representation of the modern era's intricate paradoxes proved difficult. To complete the author's paradoxical creative goal, a creative approach that incorporated parts of realism and romanticism was necessary. (Dickens, 1993)

The novel tells the story of an orphaned child's birth, his childhood years of suffering, humiliation and eventual finding his place in Victorian England. The title character, Oliver Twist, is an illegitimate child. He was born to an unknown woman in a parish home. The mother dies in childbirth, so the child is raised in a poorhouse run by the heartless churchman Mr Bumble, who gives the orphans their names in alphabetical order, and the name "Twist" is his idea. At about the age of nine, Oliver is apprenticed to a coffin-maker. He escapes from there because of mistreatment and is taken into Fagin's band of robbers in London. There he is treated better than at the poor

school, but eventually he realises what the Fagins are really up to and protests against the dishonest way of life. At the first theft, the other boys take Oliver with them, but the protagonist is innocently caught by the police. Free of the thieves' circle, he is taken in by a charitable bookseller who treats him well and trusts him. However, the gang of robbers again kidnap Oliver in a dastardly way and take him to a big burglary, but the robbery is discovered. Events take a dangerous turn and the child is wounded, but is taken to the mistress of the house targeted for robbery, where his innocence is eventually revealed. After much complication, it turns out that Oliver is the heir to a large inheritance. The novel ends with full justice: the robbers are caught by the police, hanged, and Oliver is rich and happy with his benefactor. The inhuman clergyman, Mr Bumble, becomes impoverished, and eventually dies in the poorhouse. The final scene is an emotional vision: Agnes, Oliver Twist's mother, has a marble tablet in the village church in her memory. The author dedicates the final words to the memory of the mother: "But, if the spirits of the Dead ever come back to earth, to visit spots hallowed by the love--the love beyond the grave--of those whom they knew in life, I believe that the shade of Agnes sometimes hovers round that solemn nook. I believe it none the less because that nook is in a Church, and she was weak and erring." (Dickens, 1993, p. 433)

The Dickens' writing under consideration contains a large number of characters, each of whom is deeply explored, with particular emphasis on the social motivations that drive their behavior and shape their character traits. The characters are grouped according to a distinctive principle that stems from Dickens' worldview. Similar to the romantic writers of his time, Dickens divides his characters into "positive" and "negative" ones, representing the embodiment of good and the carriers of vice, respectively. This division is based on moral norms, which is why characters such as Edward Leeford (Monks), the son of wealthy parents, the head of the criminal gang Fagin and his accomplice Sikes, the beadle Bumble, the supervisor of the workhouse Mrs. Corney, and the orphanage educator Mrs. Mann are grouped together as the "evil" characters. (Dickens, 1993)

The author notes that critical tones are associated with both the characters responsible for maintaining order and legality in the state, and their "antipodes" - the criminals. Despite the fact that these characters occupy different positions on the social ladder, the author endows them with similar characteristics, constantly emphasizing their amorality. (Dickens, 1993)

In contrast, the "good" characters, such as Mr. Brownlow, the sister of the main character's mother Rose Fleming, Harry Maylie and his mother, and Oliver Twist himself, are depicted in the traditions of enlightening literature. These characters are portrayed as having an unshakable natural kindness, integrity, and honesty. (Dickens, 1993)

One of the major stylistic features of “Oliver Twist” is the employment of a range of literary techniques by Charles Dickens to portray the harsh realities of life for the poor in Victorian England. The novel's third-person narrative is largely filtered through the perspective of the young protagonist, Oliver, lending a sense of partiality and uncertainty to the events depicted. The book's mixture of tragedy and comedy, as well as its use of sentimental language and criminal slang, reflects the popular melodramatic style of the day. While some modern readers may find fault with the occasional "fine" passages of writing, these are often meant to be ironic and satirical. Throughout the novel, Dickens uses dialogue to differentiate the characters, each of whom has their own distinctive way of speaking. The setting, too, is vividly rendered, with Dickens employing precise verbs and nouns to bring the city of London to life. The novel's weather and architecture serve to symbolize the struggle between good and evil, with Mrs. Maylie's cottage representing heaven and the tenements of Fagin and Sikes representing hell. Through all these techniques, Dickens creates a world that is both fantastical and painfully real, drawing attention to the plight of the impoverished and disenfranchised. (Dickens, 1993)

### **2.2.3. Oliver Twist's childhood: orphanhood, abuse and exploitation**

From the very first pages of “Oliver Twist”, it is clear to the reader that one of the most important themes of the novel is Oliver's difficult childhood; it is C. Dickens' second novel and the first in English literature to have a child as its protagonist.

The novel begins with the motive of a mystery and ends with its unraveling. Oliver's mother was found in the street. The pregnant woman appeared literally out of nowhere and was heading nowhere, her clothes and shoes were badly worn. The observant doctor, seeing the missing ring on her left hand, remarked: “The old story, he said, shaking his head: no wedding-ring, I see. Ah! Goodnight!” (Dickens, 1993, p. 3) The child's origin story is a typical, national feature of the English upbringing novel. By 'old story' is meant the Victorians' established public opinion of such a lady - a young woman who has had a child in a common-law marriage. The terrible stigma of 'bastard' was attached to the child's honour and determined his social status and with it his future fate, where and by whom he would be raised. (Makhmudova, 2020)

To fully understand the further development of Oliver's early childhood, it is important to know that orphans at that time were cared for by the state. As J. Pearman (2017) describes, in the Victorian era, illegitimate children were sent to a "baby farm". These were private homes where nannies ("baby-farmers") took care of the children for a certain amount of money provided by parents, relatives or the state. Cruelty and violence, hunger and humiliation formed the basis of "upbringing" in such places. (Pearman, 2017)

Little Oliver was placed in a similar home with the awful and neglectful elderly 'caretaker' Mrs Mann until about the age of 9, "where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years." (Dickens, 1993, p. 9) The second chapter of the novel reveals that Mrs Mann cared for several children at the same time, receiving a quite reasonable weekly allowance from the church. But as Dickens describes her:

"The elderly female was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself. So, she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them." (Dickens, 1993, p. 4)

Conventionally, this period can be called the 'kindergarten years' of the hero, which were spent in humiliation, filth, cold, malnutrition and beatings. Although the author does not describe the process of the child's development, he vividly illustrates the environment that "brought him up" and the result of this upbringing. We also learn from the chapter that a large proportion of the children who were entrusted to the aforementioned "governess" did not survive to early childhood, due to constant deprivation and various domestic accidents caused by neglect. The author creates an image of an ordinary, battered, weak, unremarkable boy who possesses absolutely no high intellectual or creative abilities. Oliver is described as "pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature and decidedly small in circumference." (Dickens, 1993, p. 5) But in contrast to his inner characterisation "nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breasts" (Dickens, 1993, p. 5) and this "perhaps to this circumstance may be attributed his having any ninth birthday at all." (Dickens, 1993, pp. 5-6) He has an instinct for self-protection and self-preservation, an innate sense of conscience and honour. The episode when Mr Bumble comes to take Oliver away from the "farm" is psychologically authentic. The child is so depressed that he happily prefers contact with the outside unknown world than to remain in the place that serves as his 'home'. The threat of Mrs. Mann's fist has an immediate effect on the child, and he switches instantly from happy child to miserable, who has been taken away from his "mother". Romantic idealisation and the author's sentimental attitude towards the child cannot hide the boy's first signs of weakness:

"Young as he was, however, he had sense enough to make a feint of feeling great regret at going away. It was no very difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry; and Oliver cried very naturally indeed." (Dickens, 1993, p. 9)

After Oliver leaves "home", the years of childhood are replaced by "years of learning" first in the workhouse and then in the undertaker's house. According to Makhudova (2020), this process is comparable to how children transition from kindergarten to primary school today, when they

gradually leave the safety of their parents' close supervision and enter the adult world. There is a movement from innocence to an experience of contact with the outside world. (Makhmudova, 2020)

Similarly, Oliver Twist, along with other children, lived in a confined environment in Mrs Mann's so-called "kindergarten". And through his first experience of the "school" (the workhouse) there is the first realisation of his personal self, of his origins:

"Boy, said the gentleman in the high chair, 'listen to me. You know you're an orphan, I suppose?'

'What's that, sir?' inquired poor Oliver.

'The boy is a fool - I thought he was,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat.

'Hush!' said the gentleman who had spoken first. 'You know you've got no father or mother, and that you were brought up by the parish, don't you?'" (Dickens, 1993, p. 10)

As it was previously mentioned, Charles Dickens aimed to draw attention to the Poor Law of 1834 through this novel. His objective was to expose the mistreatment of orphaned children by government institutions and highlight their powerlessness. Specifically, Dickens focused on the workhouse, which was intended to care for orphans, but instead often exploited them for cheap labor. The following extract vividly illustrates this:

"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 to-morrow morning at six o'clock,' added the surly one in the white waistcoat.'" (Dickens, 1993, p. 11)

Through his portrayal of this reality, the author sought to raise awareness among Victorian society about the deplorable conditions faced by vulnerable children.

Further on in the novel, six months of a half-starved existence in a workhouse has driven Oliver to despair. His request for more porridge: "Please, sir, I want some more" (Dickens, 1993, p. 13) was perceived as a rebellion and resulted in punishment and expulsion from the "house":

"Oliver was ordered into instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the parish. In other words, five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling.'" (Dickens, 1993, pp. 13-14)

In the upbringing of children in the 18th and 19th centuries, obedience was considered most important and was based on religious dogmatism. For example, in "Jane Eyre", Mr Brockelhurst threateningly reminds Jane that disobedience is punishable by hellfire. A similar analogy can be seen in the novel "Oliver Twist", where the boy's request is perceived as thanklessness, a vice that leads directly to the underworld and then to the gallows, and from there,



respectively, to hell. This episode depicts the attitude of adults towards children as little sinners. The author again applies his didactic and pedagogical skill to show the role of society in the fate of the child. (Makhmudova, 2020)

The rebel child's "apprenticeship" continues at the undertaker's house. On the way to the new master's house, Oliver expresses his feelings openly to Mr Bumble for the first time:

“So lonely, sir! So very lonely!” cried the child. ‘Everybody hates me. Oh! sir, don't, don't pray be cross to me!’ The child beat his hand upon his heart; and looked in his companion's face, with tears of real agony.” (Dickens, 1993, p. 28)

The clipped phrases, repetitions, exclamations, in this quote, further heighten the emotional effect of the spoken words in despair, a state very familiar to the writer himself.

At the start of his apprenticeship, Oliver gains a lot of knowledge and Mr. Sowerberry capitalizes on his talent for participating in sorrowful processions. Mr. Sowerberry exposes Oliver to many such processions to hone his skills as an undertaker. Despite to this, Oliver's unfortunate situation continued to worsen during his time with the undertaker, as he was subjected to verbal and physical abuse by Noah Claypole, a beneficiary of Mr. Sowerberry's charity. In Victorian England, class divisions were a major preoccupation, and the relationship between Noah Claypole and Oliver serves as a prime example. Being born to impoverished parents, Noah was used to being ridiculed by those who were more well-off than him. He found some comfort in Oliver's company, who, as an orphan, was even worse off than he was. Oliver's outburst against Noah was a crucial moment in his character's evolution. It all started when Noah became envious of Oliver's rapid progress and criticized his deceased mother, which incensed Oliver. In retaliation, he confronted Noah in a fit of rage. Charlotte and Mrs. Sowerberry came to Noah's defense, and together they violently attacked Oliver before locking him up in the cellar:

“A minute ago, the boy had looked the quiet child, mild, dejected creature that harsh treatment had made him. But his spirit was roused at last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed, as he stood glaring over the cowardly tormentor who now lay crouching at his feet; and defied him with an energy he had never known before.

‘He'll murder me!’ blubbered Noah. ‘Charlotte! missis! Here's the new boy a murdering of me! Help! help! Oliver's gone mad! Char-lotte!’” (Dickens, 1993, p. 44)

This disturbing incident highlights the harsh realities faced by the less fortunate in Victorian society, where class and wealth determined one's position in life.

Summarising the above, we can see that Oliver's early years were characterised by constant abuse, ranging from physical to mental. In addition, we have so far seen two examples of child labour, the first when the protagonist was taken to work at the age of nine in the workhouse, and

the second when he was sold as a labourer to work as a helper alongside the undertaker. But even after all this, Oliver's hardships and exploitation by adults are not over.

Oliver's escape from the house, where he had been battered, humiliated, and slandered as a result of the conflict, marks a significant turning point in his journey towards personal growth and development. Such a pivotal moment of escape is a defining characteristic of the bildungsroman genre, where it serves as a catalyst for the protagonist's acquisition of worldly knowledge and self-awareness. Oliver's escape from the undertaker's house and his subsequent encounter with his friend Dick, represent a moment of immense importance in the narrative. This episode is noteworthy for its unique composition, intertextual references to the Romantic tradition, and its role in setting the tone and direction for Oliver's future growth and development:

“Hush, Dick! said Oliver, as the boy ran to the gate, and thrust his thin arm between the rails to greet him. ... You musn't say you saw me, Dick,' said Oliver. 'I am running away. They beat and ill-use me, Dick; and I am going to seek my fortune, some long way off. I don't know where.” (Dickens, 1993, p. 52)

Dick and Oliver share striking similarities, almost like they are mirror images of each other. The gate and fence of the house represent a symbolic barrier that separates the two children's, Oliver's past and present. The sickly and dying child - Dick represents the past, while the "new Oliver," waiting outside the fence, symbolizes the hope for a better future.

In London, Oliver discovers that he is being mistreated by an adult named Fagin, who harbors orphaned or vulnerable children and instructs them in thievery, constituting another example of child labor. Initially unfamiliar with stealing, Oliver is instructed by Fagin to do so, who conceals items in his pockets and challenges the children to pilfer them without detection. Unaware of the reality that Fagin compels the children to steal, Oliver perceives the activity as an amusing game:

“The merry old gentelman and the two boys played at a very curious and uncommon game, which was performed in this way. The merry old gentleman, placing a snuff-box in one pocket of his trousers, a note-case in the other, and a watch in his waistcoat pocket (...), He would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping all his pockets in turn (...) Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face.” (Dickens, 1993, pp. 65-66)

Oliver's positive treatment, typical for children, boosts his motivation greatly. Consequently, his training as a thief progresses smoothly and he proves to be a skilled boy instead of the "fool" label given to him at the workhouse. Oliver observes that the "old gentleman" punishes unsuccessful thieves by depriving them of dinner or physically hurting them. During his eagerly anticipated first foray into thievery, Oliver witnesses the entire process in awe and comprehends its gravity. This occurrence exemplifies the author's educational philosophy, which

asserts that a child must undergo an epiphany and acquire practical knowledge, a common characteristic of classic educational novels, to recognize their errors and mature. (Makhmudova, 2020)

Later in the novel, the protagonist is incarcerated, presenting him with another starkly contrasting reality: that of genuinely virtuous and morally upright individuals. Eventually, in court, the child is declared innocent and set free. Overwhelmed by the psychological trauma he endured, the boy faints, symbolizing the transient nature of his transformation and reflecting to some degree on the human psyche. The child's compassionate supporter, Mr Brownlow, takes him to his home, where the change of environment and kind treatment assist the boy in recognizing his mistakes. The once horrific past appears to the child as a distant and foggy memory:

“Weak, and thin, and pallid, he awoke at last from what seemed to have been a long and troubled dream (...) This is not the place I went to sleep in.” (Dickens, 1993, p. 80)

As we can see, the author dedicates considerable attention to detailing the criminal world, prisons, and the socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals who inhabit the lower echelons of London. Without placing blame on any one person or group in particular, a significant portion of the story is devoted to exploring the societal dynamics that support the emergence of criminal behaviour. According to Makhmudova (2020), the author recognizes that while environmental factors play a role in shaping a person's character, there are also innate qualities that contribute to an individual's disposition. Moreover, the narrative demonstrates how children may respond differently to identical adverse circumstances. The story serves as a poignant reminder of how an unfavorable environment can adversely affect the fate of individuals, as illustrated by the tragic transformation of Fagin's boys from innocent youngsters to hardened criminals. The author underscores the crucial role played by mentors, peers, and surroundings in shaping a child's life, which may exert either a positive or negative influence. (Makhmudova, 2020)

Upon initially encountering Oliver, Mrs. Maylie and her niece Rose were taken aback by what they saw. As Rose notes, rather than encountering the menacing and unkempt figure they were expecting, they were instead met with a "mere child". It was as if a veil of wickedness surrounding Oliver had been lifted, revealing his true nature. No longer was he viewed as a common thief or an orphan; rather, he was seen as a child who had suffered greatly in his past. This transformation in perception occurred among the middle-class characters in the novel, and it is not inconceivable that the author intended to challenge their assumptions of superiority over the lower classes and appeal to their emotions. Indeed, Rose states that rescuing someone from the depths of despair described by Oliver's circumstances would bring her "unspeakable pleasure". By portraying helping others as a blessing, the author may have sought to motivate readers to extend aid to those in need and view it as a moral imperative. This feeling is emphasised when Rose

makes an assumption about Oliver's circumstances and mentions that he might not have ever known the affection of his mother or the luxuries of a secure home. His association with individuals that compelled him to devote himself to stealing may have been motivated by the terrible realities of his existence, such as abuse, neglect, and starvation.

“He may have never known a mother’s love, or the comfort of a house; that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt.” (Dickens, 1993, p. 225)

Based on the above, we can therefore conclude that Charles Dickens’ “Oliver Twist” is a cyclical novel of education and maturity. The novel's ideological and thematic content is established through the protagonist's difficult childhood, presented chronologically from birth to teenager years. Throughout the novel, the character of Oliver evolves from innocence to self-realisation, with the secondary characters and their storylines contributing to the discovery of personality. The novel assimilates the traditions and philosophy of the Enlightenment and Romanticists in the artistic expression of the character of the innocent child. Dickens enriches the psychological characteristics of the hero by reflecting his life in an active interaction with the environment. Through different situations and people, the author tests and educates the character. As a chronicler of the life of a child, Dickens seeks moral and didactic impact on the reader. The image of the child becomes central to the novel, with the author managing to create a realistic authenticity that confronts the reader with the harsh realities of life.

### **2.3. Juxtaposition of Jane Eyre and Oliver Twist's childhood**

Based on the information provided thus far in this chapter, it can be inferred that there are similarities present in different aspects of the plots of both “Oliver Twist” and “Jane Eyre” novels.

Firstly, both of the novels showcase similarities in terms of the characters that surround their protagonists. Both Dickens and Bronte introduce the beginning of their protagonists' lives with the presence of an unsympathetic woman. In “Oliver Twist”, Mrs. Mann is depicted as a hypocritical and sycophantic character who presents herself as a kind-hearted caretaker, but in reality, she is far from it. Likewise, in “Jane Eyre”, Jane is allowed to reside with Mrs. Reed's family in Gateshead despite enduring constant bullying from them. However, both protagonists encounter individuals who show kindness and provide much-needed support during their difficult times. Oliver is reunited with a benevolent relative and receives love and care from Mrs. Maylie and Rose, who are portrayed as kind-hearted characters. Similarly, Jane forms a close bond with Helen and Miss Temple at Lowood, who provide her with the love and support she lacks in her childhood life.

Secondly, in addition to the similarities in the characters' surroundings, both "Oliver Twist" and "Jane Eyre" novels explore the theme of social class. "Oliver Twist" tells the story of a runaway orphan from a workhouse who is coerced into a life of crime by those around him. Despite his circumstances, it is later revealed that Oliver belongs to a respectable family. Similarly, in "Jane Eyre", Bronte presents the character of Jane as an orphan who also belongs to a respectable family. Her circumstances force her to work as a governess and endure societal prejudices due to her social class. Through Jane's experiences, Bronte highlights the challenges that individuals face when they are not born into a higher social class. Despite the different paths that Oliver and Jane's lives take, both novels demonstrate the impact of social class on their protagonists' lives and the challenges they face because of it.

Thirdly, both Oliver Twist and Jane Eyre have a common theme of institutionalization during their formative years. In "Oliver Twist", Dickens describes the workhouse where Oliver was born as a place of extreme hardship and oppression for the poor. Similarly, Jane Eyre begins her life at Mrs. Reed's house, where she is mistreated by her cousins and locked in a terrifying red room by her aunt. Later, Jane is sent to Lowood, a bleak institution that is notorious for its austere conditions and the early deaths of many of its pupils. What sets the two works apart is the way in which the institutions are depicted. While the workhouse in "Oliver Twist" is portrayed as a place of pure misery and suffering, Lowood in "Jane Eyre" is shown to be a place of both suffering and growth.

Fourthly, the protagonists of the novels under consideration share a common experience of being subjected to social injustice due to unjust perceptions held against them. In chapter two of "Oliver Twist", when Oliver asks for more food, the workhouse board deems him dangerous and thankless and punishes him. The board never sees the boy as a good child and judges him unfairly. Similarly, in Bronte's writing, when Mr. Brocklehurst meets Jane for the first time, Mrs. Reed had already told him that Jane is a naughty child. Mrs. Reed always paints a negative image of her niece, leading to her being unfairly punished when she is sent to Lowood to become a courteous girl. From these examples we can see that, as poor children, both Oliver and Jane are judged unfairly despite not having done anything wrong.

The common theme of social injustice in these works highlights the prejudiced attitudes and unfair treatment faced by individuals from lower classes. It also shows the negative impact that such unjust treatment can have on their lives.

Lastly, an important similarity in the fates of the two protagonists is that they have both found their place in the world, having achieved happiness by the end of the novel. The difference is that while Oliver's fate turned out for the better in childhood and he found a family, Jane's did

not do so quickly, and only managed to settle down to a full, loving family with her husband and children in early adulthood.

## **PART III EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION**

In the modern era of technological advancements, the Internet has become a vast and easily accessible source of information. With just a few clicks, students can enrich their knowledge about a variety of subjects. However, the credibility of the information found online cannot always be guaranteed. In the current information age, spam, fake news, and phishing have become a common phenomenon, making it increasingly challenging for students to differentiate between what is authentic and what is not. This has led to the need for students to develop critical thinking skills to analyze the information they receive, compare facts, and make sound conclusions. It is essential to focus on the development of critical thinking skills in students, especially when it comes to literature. The New Ukrainian School's educational standards have defined ten key competencies, including the ability to read and understand texts, express opinions both orally and in writing, work collaboratively, and think critically. In this regard, the technology of critical thinking has become one of the leading educational tools applied in classrooms to equip students with the necessary skills for effective communication, self-education, and decision-making. (Гриневич, et al., 2016)

According to the Commonwealth of Learning organization, the teacher of a Literature class can involve students in conversing about the concepts present in literary works. This activity is advantageous for students in two aspects. Firstly, it allows them to articulate their own perspectives on various topics such as life, relationships, values, beliefs, interests, and dislikes. Secondly, it compels them to utilize more intricate sentence structures and an extensive vocabulary range, that is why it can also be useful in foreign language learning. (Olaofe & Bello, 2012)

The present research aims to examine whether and how learning about difficult themes, in our case about difficult childhood, in literary works can aid in developing critical thinking skills among students.

### **3.1 Participants of the research**

Concerning the respondents, 27 9th grade students from different schools in Transcarpathia participated in the survey. The average age of students was 14-15 years, there was no question on their gender in the questionnaire, as the role of this factor is not reflected in any way in the survey results. It is important to note that Charlotte Bronte's novel "Jane Eyre", previously only included in the list of recommended/optional literature, was included by the Ministry of Education of Ukraine in 2022 in the 9th grade curriculum of the subject World Literature. Therefore, the students who are studying in the 9th grade in the current 2022/2023 school year, are the very first year group to study the novel in question in the framework of the subject World Literature. Taking this information into account, I considered it appropriate to choose children studying in this year

group as the subjects of my research in order to obtain objective results. However, Charles Dickens's "Oliver Twist" is not on the compulsory reading list for World Literature in any year group, but it is on the recommended/optional reading list for 7th grade. Dickens' name should, on the other hand, be familiar to 9th-graders, since, in grade 6, Dickens' novella "A Christmas Carol" is a compulsory reading.

### **3.2 Instruments of the research**

The main instrument of the research was a questionnaire consisting of 17 different types of questions, which was given to the students in printed form. They were not required to write any identifying information on the paper, thus guaranteeing the anonymity of all participants. The language of the questionnaire was entirely English. The questions in the questionnaire can be divided into 3 groups. In the first group there are questions that refer to the age or reading habits of the students, in the second group there are questions that ask about the students' background knowledge of the authors and their novels, and finally there are questions that ask for the students' independent opinions. It is important to note that our main aim with the questionnaire was not to test the knowledge of the participants about the literary works, but to ask questions about the works that would encourage critical thinking and the expression of independent opinion, which is why most of the questions do not have one correct answer.

The questionnaire contains, among other things, an extract for reading comprehension with three questions. In order to achieve the most realistic result, I have not used the original Dickens text, which may be difficult for 9th graders to understand, but have borrowed the text from a graded reader written directly for ESL learners.

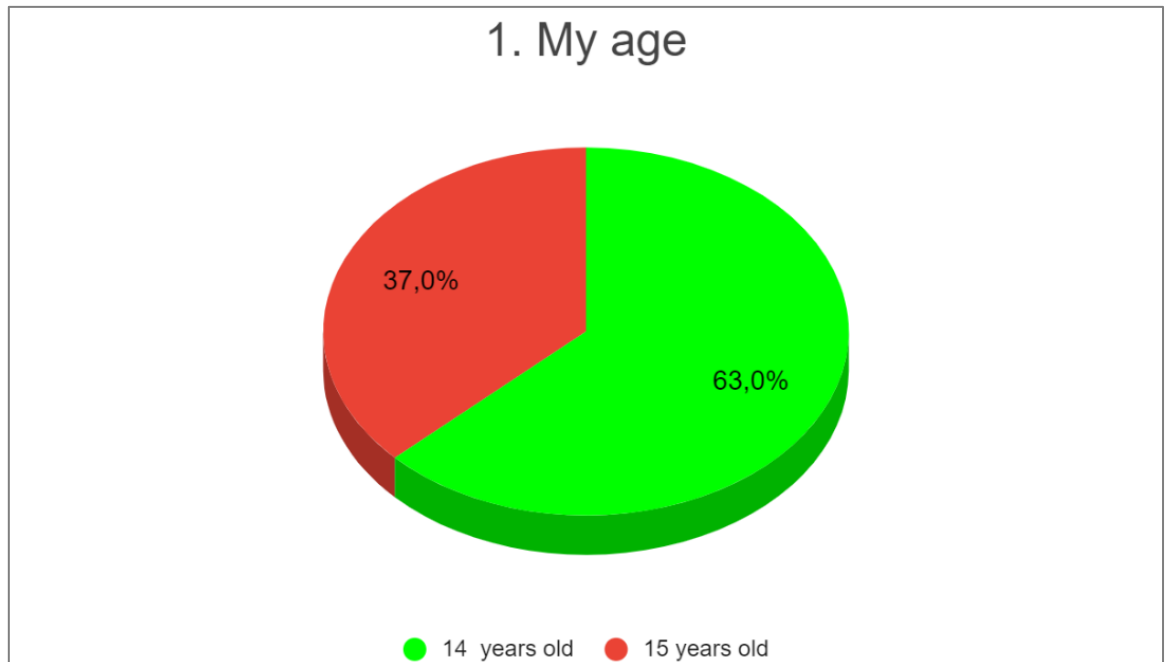
### **3.3 Procedure of the research**

As "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Bronte is part of the curriculum for the first semester of the 9th grade, the research was conducted in the spring of 2023. One of the reasons why I chose to have the questionnaire filled out in printed form, rather than online, was because I wanted the participants to not use any other information-providing tool beyond their own knowledge and to really think individually about the given questions. This goal was achieved by asking all students to refrain from using the Internet while answering the questions and by supervising the process. Since the language of the questionnaire was in English, students were allowed to ask questions before and during the filling out process if anything was unclear to them, but before the questionnaire was given, they were given clear explanations and instructions about the questions.



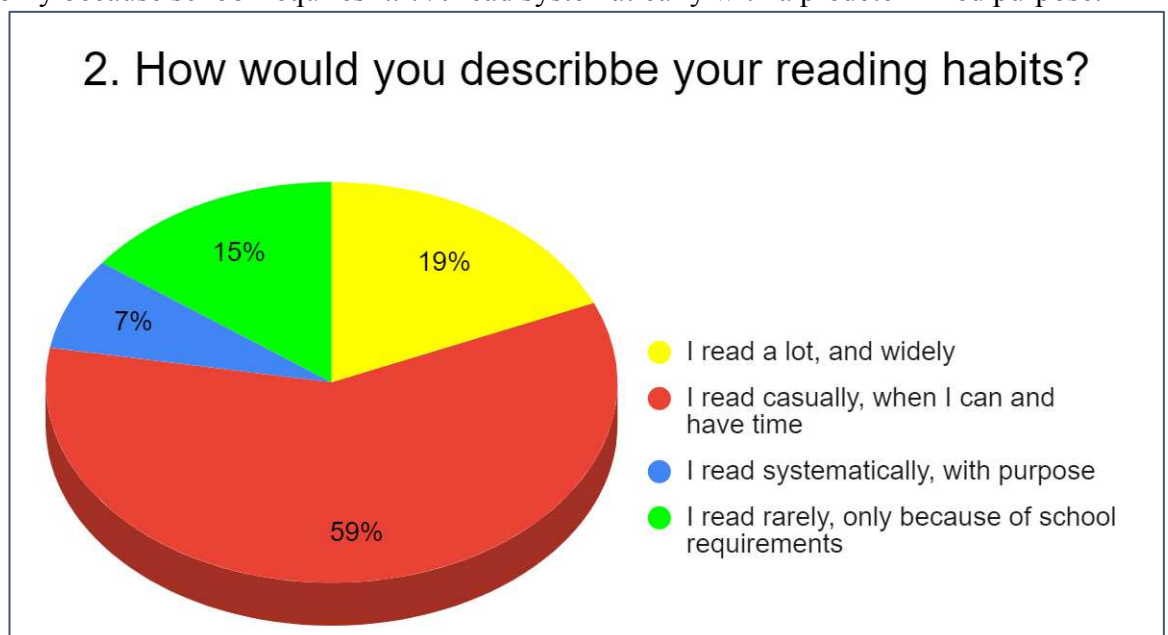
### 3.4 Findings of the research

The first question of the questionnaire aimed to determine the age of the participants. Out of the 27 students, 17 were 14 years old and 10 were 15. In terms of percentage, this looks like 37% and 63%, respectively.



**1. Figure**

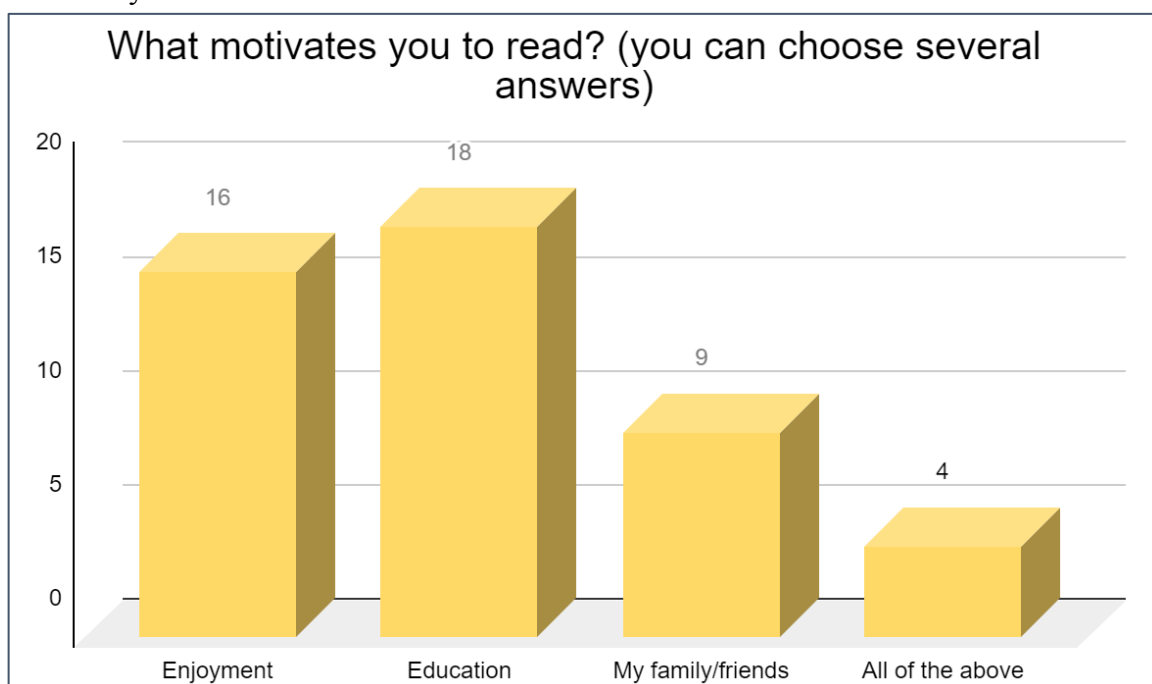
From the answers to the second question, we can find out how frequently today's students read. The question had 4 pre-formulated answers. The majority of respondents, 59%, said that they read casually, when they have time. 19% replied that they read a lot, while 15% said they read rarely only because school requires it. 7% read systematically with a predetermined purpose.



**2. Figure**

Based on the responses of 27 students, to the third question about what motivates them to read, it appears that both enjoyment and education are the primary motivators for reading. Education was chosen 18 times, which indicates that a large number of students read in order to learn and expand their knowledge. Meanwhile, enjoyment was chosen 16 times, which suggests that many students read for pleasure, entertainment, or to escape into a different world.

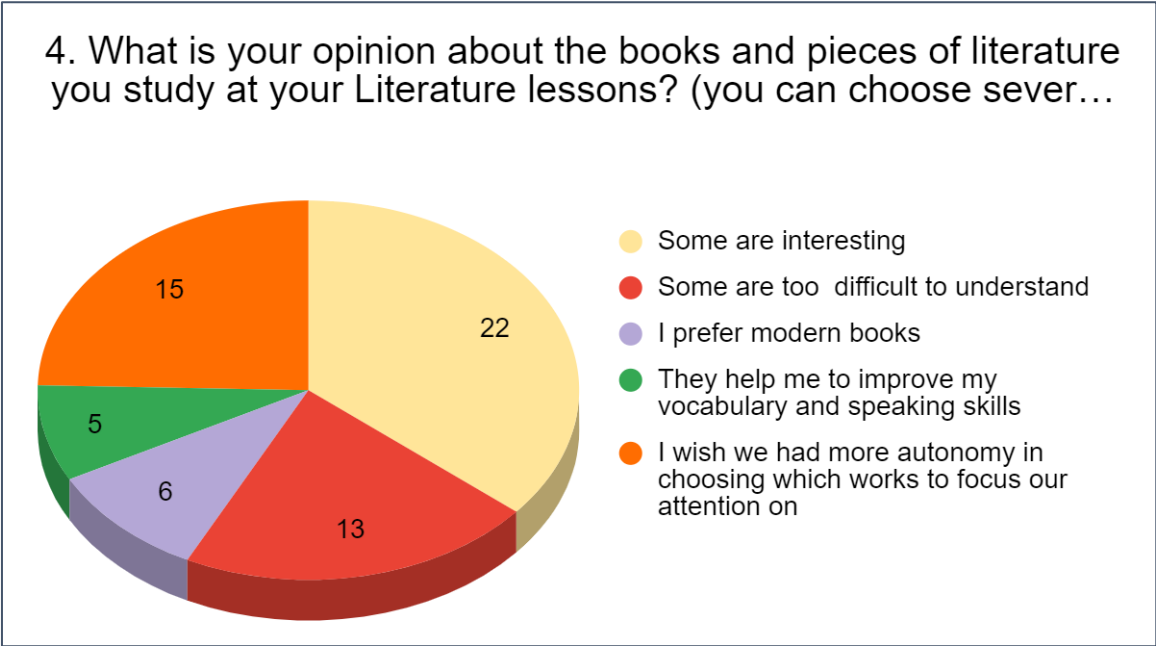
The option of "my family/friends" was chosen only 9 times, indicating that external factors are not as significant a motivator for reading among this group of students. Finally, only 4 people chose "all of the above" as their answer, suggesting that for many readers, their motivation to read is primarily driven by either education or enjoyment, rather than a combination of both or external factors like family and friends.



**3. Figure**

The fourth question is an especially interesting one, it asks the students' opinion about the literary works they study at literature classes. According to the answers, it can be concluded that the majority of the students find the literature pieces studied in their literature lessons interesting (81% or 22 out of 27 students). Additionally, around half of the students (48% or 13 out of 27) find some literature pieces too difficult to understand.

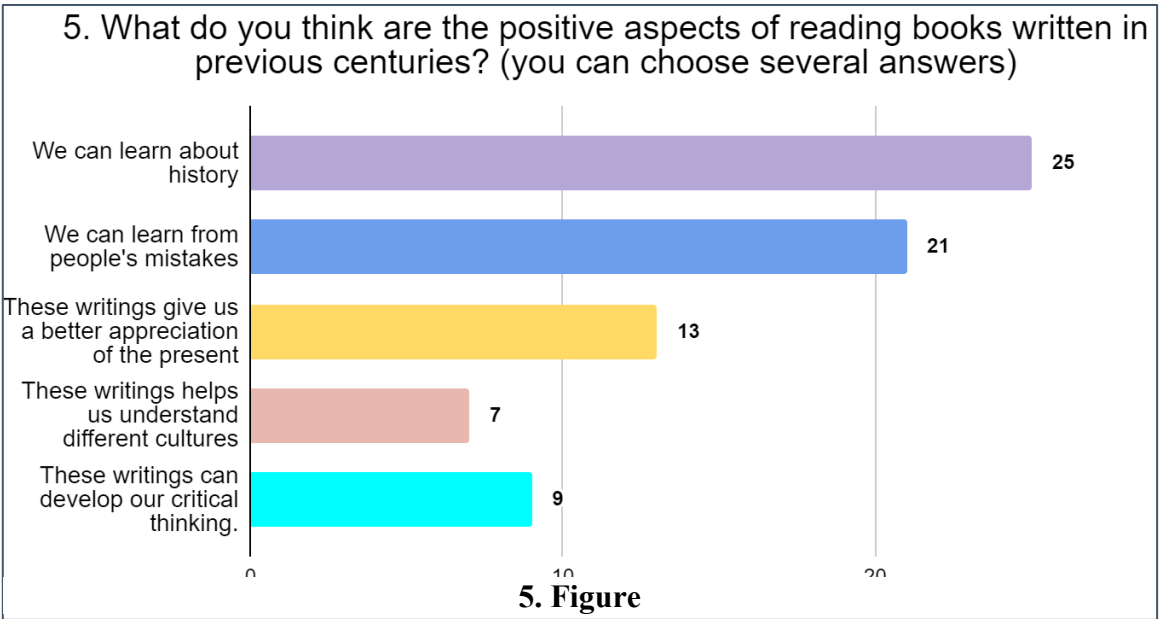
On the other hand, a smaller number of students prefer modern books (22% or 6 out of 27) and find that the literature pieces studied help them improve their vocabulary and speaking skills (19% or 5 out of 27). Furthermore, a significant number of students (56% or 15 out of 27) expressed a desire for more autonomy in choosing which works to focus on.



4. Figure

The next question was formulated in order to find out the opinions of the students about what do they think are the positive aspects of reading books written in previous centuries. In accordance with the results, it can be can stated that the majority of the students recognize the positive aspects of reading books written in previous centuries. Specifically, the vast majority of students (93% or 25 out of 27) believe that reading such books helps us learn about history, while 78% (21 out of 27) believe that we can learn from people's mistakes by reading these books.

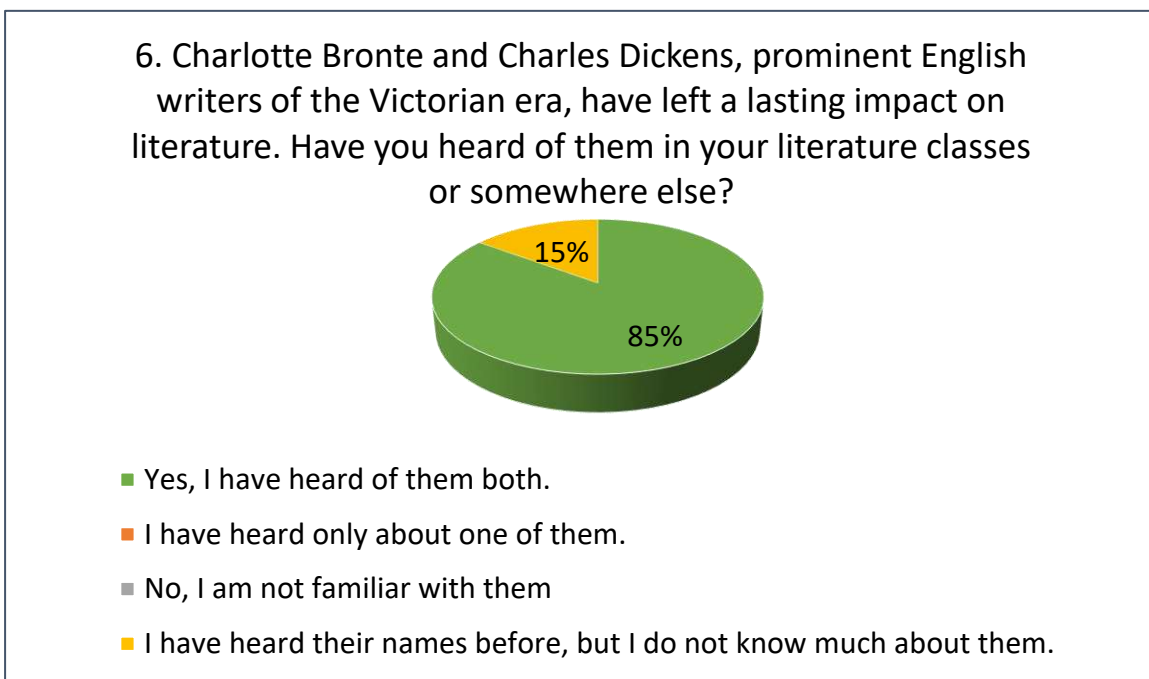
Additionally, about half of the students (48% or 13 out of 27) believe that reading books written in previous centuries can give us a better appreciation of the present, while a smaller percentage (26% or 7 out of 27) think that such writings help us understand different cultures. Only a few students (33% or 9 out of 27) believe that reading books from the past can develop our critical thinking skills.



5. Figure

Based on the data of the answers to the sixth question, it can be observed that all respondents have at least heard of either Charlotte Bronte or Charles Dickens, with 23 out of 27 respondents indicating that they have heard of both authors. None of the respondents have heard of only one of the authors, while 4 respondents have heard of their names but do not know much about them.

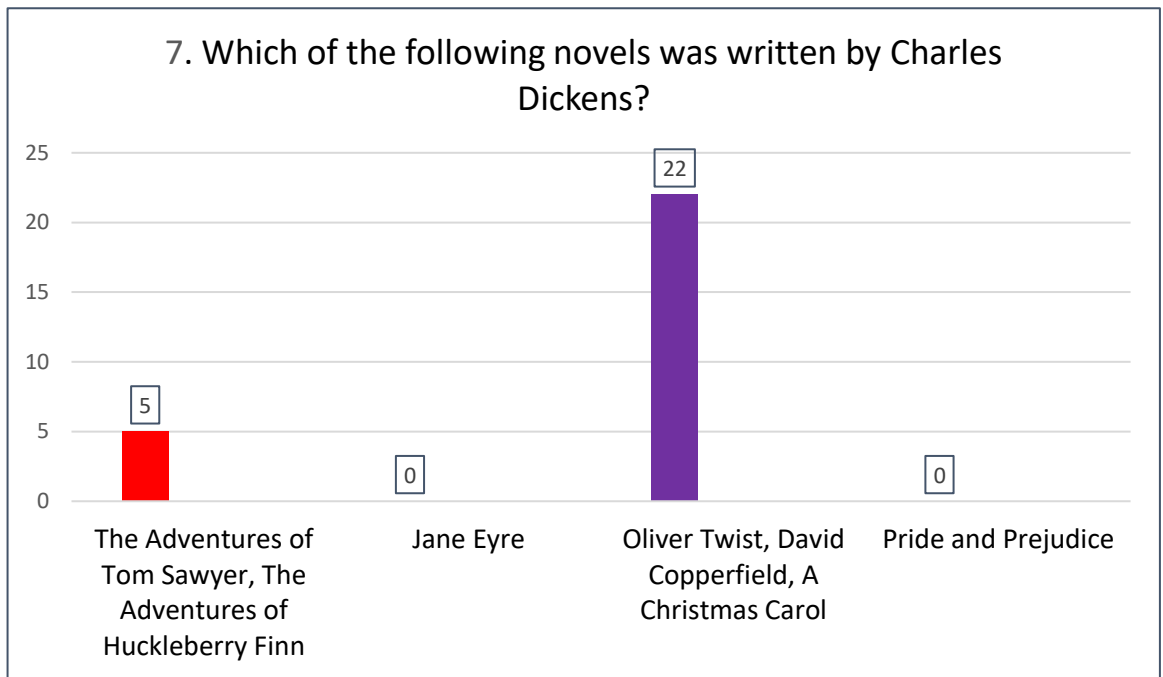
In terms of percentages, 85.2% of the respondents have heard of both authors, while 14.8% have only heard their names but do not know much about them.



**6. Figure**

Based on the answers for the seventh question, a majority of 22 (81.5%) correctly identified that “Oliver Twist”, “David Copperfield”, and “A Christmas Carol” were written by Charles Dickens. None of the students selected “Jane Eyre” or “Pride and Prejudice”, which were written by Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen, respectively.

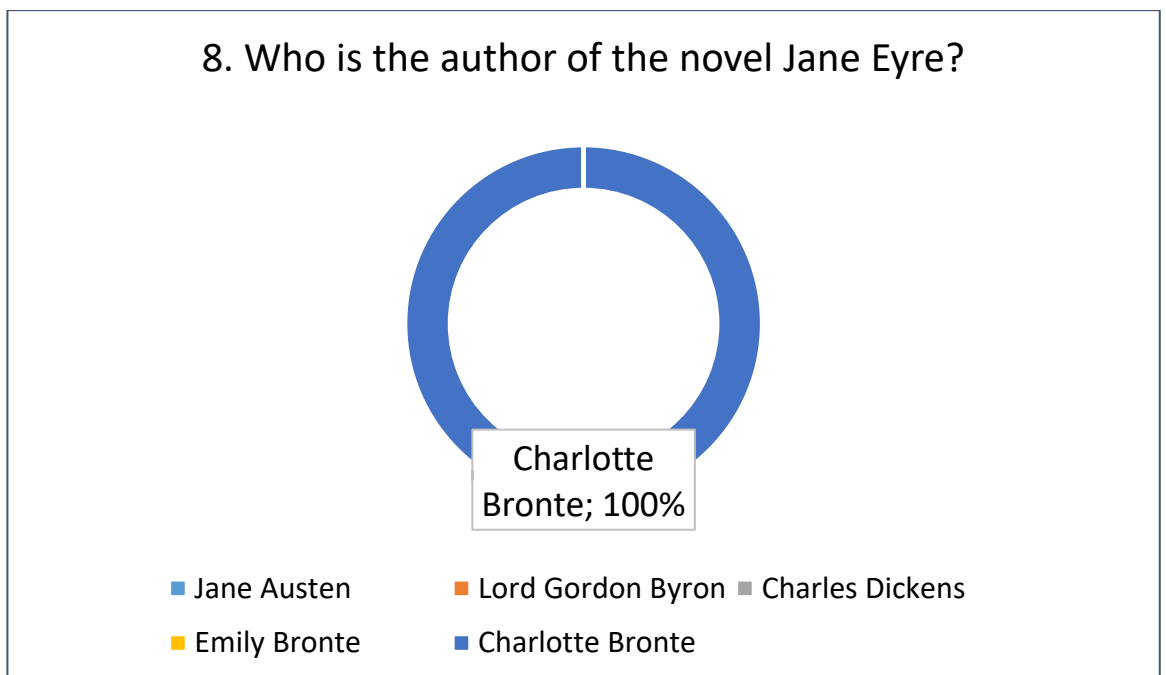
However, 5 students (18.5%) selected “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” and “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn”, which were written by Mark Twain and not by Charles Dickens. The results indicate that most students have a basic knowledge of classic English literature and are familiar with the works of Charles Dickens, only a small number of students may need to improve their understanding of literary authors and their works.



**7. Figure**

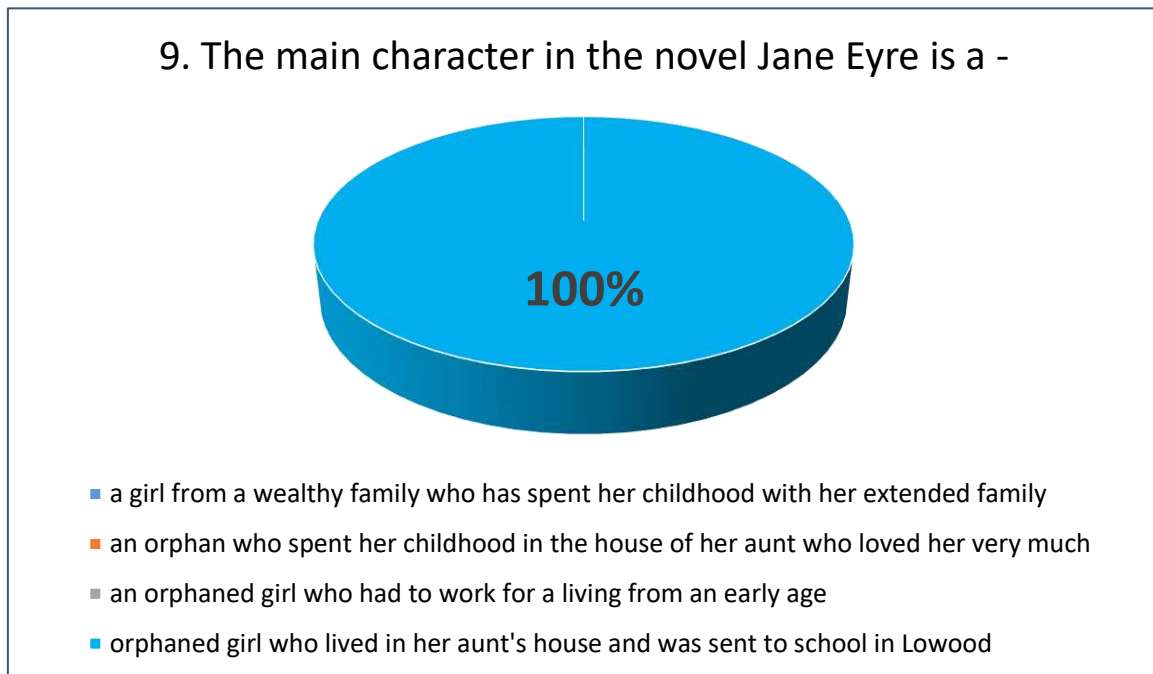
In the next question, I was curious about whether the students remembered what they had learned in the previous semester, and whether they were able to identify the author of the novel „Jane Eyre”. All of the participants correctly identified that Charlotte Bronte is the author of the novel “Jane Eyre”. This represents 100% of responses.

None of the students selected Jane Austen, Lord Gordon Byron, Charles Dickens, or Emily Bronte as the author of “Jane Eyre”. This suggests that the students have a good understanding of the literary works and their respective authors.



**8. Figure**

Based on the data provided, out of 27 students who answered the question, all of them correctly identified that the main character in the novel “Jane Eyre” is an orphaned girl who lived in her aunt's house and was sent to school in Lowood. This represents 100% of responses. None of the students selected the other options which suggests that they have a good understanding of the plot of the novel “Jane Eyre” and are able to identify the main character correctly.

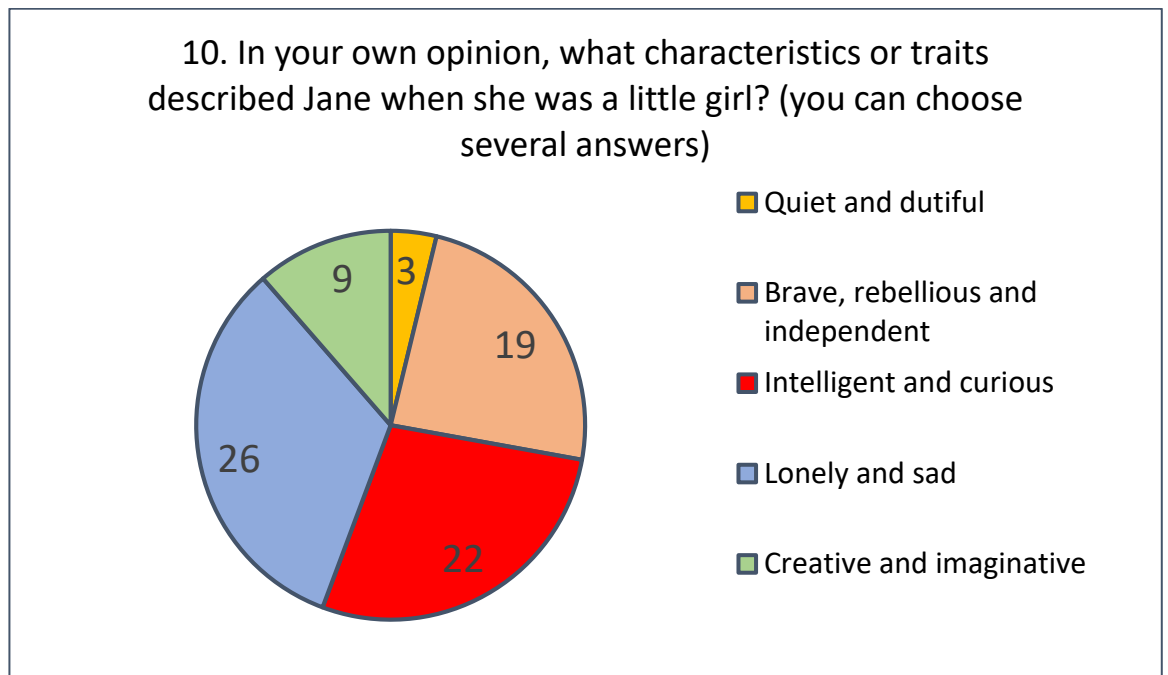


**9. Figure**

In the tenth question there was no just one correct answer, because students were asked to express their own opinion about Jane Eyre personality as a little girl. This question encouraged students to think critically because it required them to reflect on and analyze the character traits of Jane Eyre as a little girl, based on their own understanding of the novel. It also allowed for multiple possible answers, which required students to consider different aspects of Jane's personality and behavior in order to arrive at their own conclusions. By asking students to provide their own opinions on the characteristics or traits of Jane as a child, the question promoted critical thinking by encouraging students to engage with the text on a deeper level, and to use their own insights and interpretations to construct a nuanced understanding of the character. This required them to not only remember specific details from the novel, but also to evaluate and analyze those details in order to form a reasoned and well-supported opinion.

Based on the data provided, out of 27 students who answered the question, the majority of 26 (96.3%) believed that Jane was lonely and sad when she was a little girl. 22 students (81.5%) also believed that Jane was intelligent and curious, while 19 students (70.4%) thought that she was brave, rebellious and independent. Only 9 students (33.3%) chose the option that Jane was creative

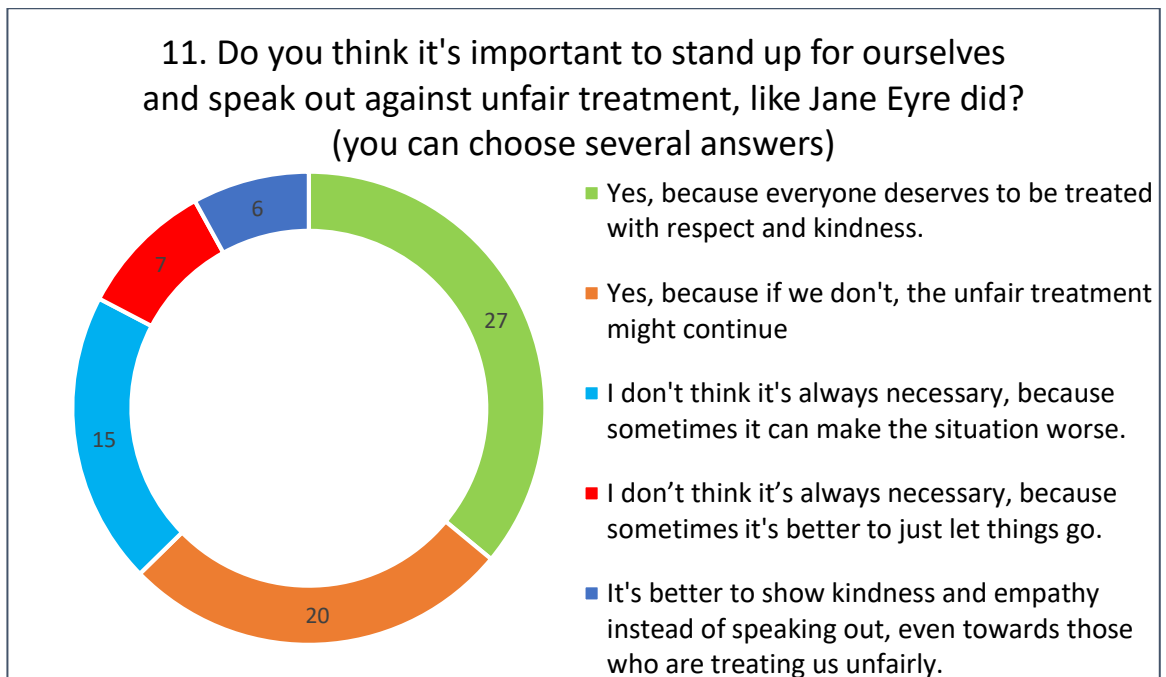
and imaginative, and just 3 students (11.1%) selected the option that Jane was quiet and dutiful. These results suggest that the students have a good understanding of the character traits of Jane.



10. Figure

The next question asked students about their opinion about the importance of standing up for ourselves and speaking out against unfair treatment, all of them agree that it is important to stand up for ourselves and speak out against unfair treatment. This suggests that the students understand the significance of standing up against injustice and discrimination, similar to Jane Eyre in the book. Moreover, 74% of students (20 out of 27) believe that if we don't speak up, the unfair treatment might continue. This shows that the students are aware of the consequences of staying silent and are willing to take action to prevent future mistreatment. However, a significant portion of students (22%) have a different perspective. 15 out of 27 students believe that speaking out may not always be necessary and can make the situation worse. Additionally, 7 out of 27 students believe that sometimes it's better to let things go. This suggests that some students may prefer to avoid conflict and prioritize maintaining harmony over addressing mistreatment. Finally, 6 out of 27 students (22%) believe that it's better to show kindness and empathy instead of speaking out.

Overall, this question seems to have made students think critically about the importance of standing up against unfair treatment, as reflected by the varied responses and reasoning behind them.



**11. Figure**

The twelfth question was an open answer one. The participants had to form their own opinion about the nature of Jane's childhood experiences. Below 3 examples of these answers are provided:

„After we studied Charlotte Bronte's book Jane Eyre, I think Jane's childhood was mostly bad. When she was a child, her family didn't treat her well and she wasn't allowed to do the same things as her cousins. She was sent to a school called Lowood where things were really hard. She got sick, was hungry a lot, and her only friend Helen Burns died.”

„I think Jane's childhood experiences were more negative because she didn't have a loving family and she was a lonely girl.”

„Jane's childhood experiences were a mix of good and bad experiences, but I think she had more bad memories.”

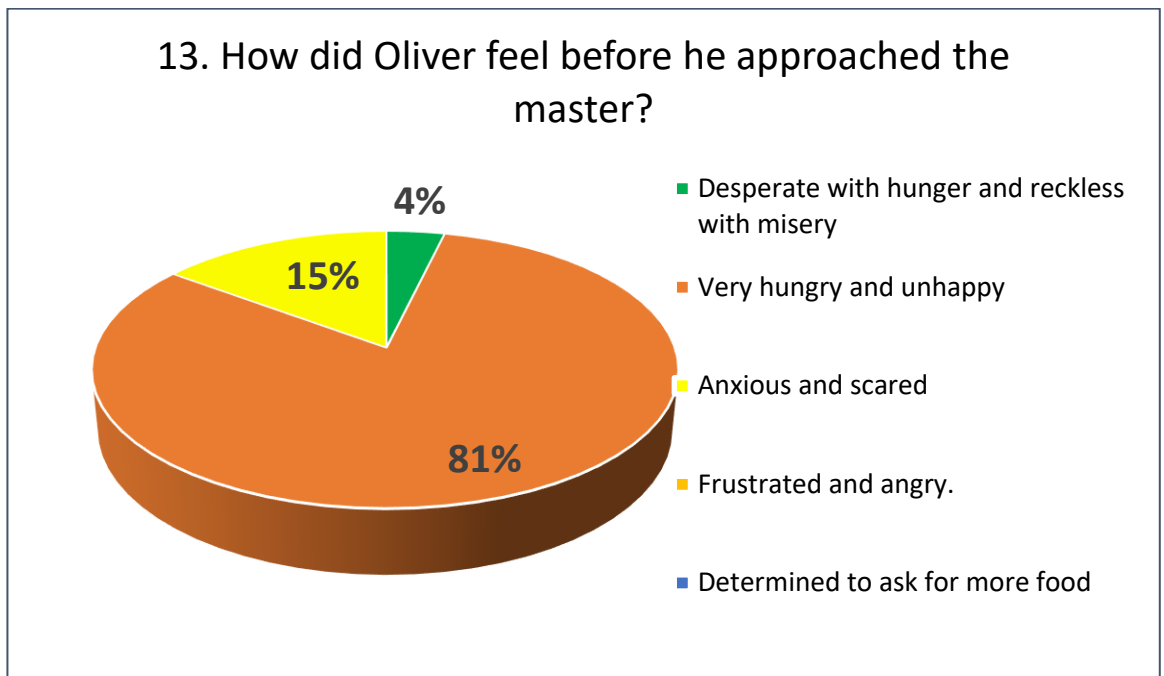
According to the answers, it appears that the majority of students believe that Jane's childhood experiences were more negative than positive. The reasons given by the students include the fact that Jane did not have a loving family and was treated poorly by her relatives, as well as her experiences at the harsh Lowood School.

This question appears to have encouraged students to think critically about Jane's experiences in the novel and to analyze the various factors that contributed to her childhood. To answer to this question, they had to carefully consider the events and circumstances described in the book and weigh the positive and negative aspects of Jane's experiences. This type of critical thinking encourages students to go beyond surface-level analysis and to dig deeper into the themes and motifs of the novel.



Before answering the thirteenth question students had to read a short extract from “Oliver Twist”, since as it was described above, this novel is not included in the compulsory reading list. The text was the famous scene, where Oliver asked for more food in the workhouse. To the question how did Oliver feel before asking for more food, 22 students chose the answer "very hungry and unhappy," while one student chose "desperate with hunger and reckless with misery," and four students chose "anxious and scared." None of the students chose "frustrated and angry" or "determined to ask for more food."

To answer this question the participants needed to think critically, as the question requires students to analyze the text carefully and draw conclusions based on the character's actions and emotions. It also requires students to pay attention to the details and nuances of the text to accurately answer the question.



**12. Figure**

The next question was about what students think about the problem of starvation. Some examples provided below:

„I think it's not right for people and children to be hungry when others have have a lot of food. Everyone deserves to have enough food to live and be healthy. It's not fair that some people have more than enough while others are starving. We need to work together to solve the problem of hunger.”

„No, it is bad that there are people in the world who have no food. It is very sad that some children can’t eat enough to be healthy.”

„It’s not right, if we see people like that we should help them.”

The findings suggest that the majority of the students believe that it is not right for someone to have a lot of food while others are starving. They think that everyone deserves to have enough food to live and be healthy, and it is unfair that some people have more than enough while others are suffering from hunger. Some students also express empathy towards those who are hungry and believe that they should be helped.

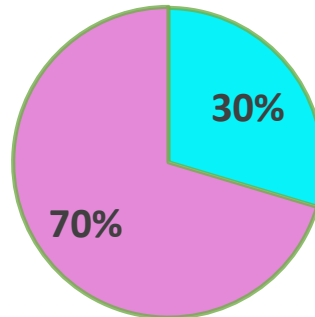
This question made students think critically about the issue of hunger and inequality. By reading the extract from “Oliver Twist” and reflecting on the situation described in the story, the students were prompted to consider their own values and beliefs about the distribution of resources in the world. They were encouraged to reflect on the social and economic factors that contribute to hunger and the ways in which we can work together to address this issue.

The fifteenth question sounded as the follows: “What is a 'rebel'? Do you think Oliver was a rebel?”. According to the data, 8 out of 27 students (29.6%) think that a rebel is someone who resists authority or rules and believe that Oliver could be considered a rebel because he defied the authority of the master by asking for more food. On the other hand, 19 out of 27 students (70.4%) do not think Oliver was a rebel because he was simply asking for something he needed (more food) and was not intentionally defying authority or causing trouble. None of the students chose the option that a rebel is someone who fights against a government or system, and therefore, they agree that Oliver cannot be considered a rebel by this definition.

This question encouraged students to think critically by analyzing the different aspects of the term "rebel" and the context in which Oliver asked for more food. They had to consider whether Oliver's actions were intentional or unintentional, whether he was challenging the authority of the master, and whether his actions were a form of resistance against a system or government. The students had to use their knowledge of the English language and the literary context of the novel to provide a well-reasoned response to the question.

### 15. What is a 'rebel'? Do you think Oliver was a rebel?

- A rebel is someone who resists authority or rules. Oliver could be considered a rebel because he defied the authority of the master by asking for more food.
- A rebel is someone who fights against a government or system. Oliver might not be considered a rebel by this definition since he was not fighting against a government or system.
- Oliver was not a rebel because he was simply asking for something he needed (more food) and was not intentionally defying authority or causing trouble.



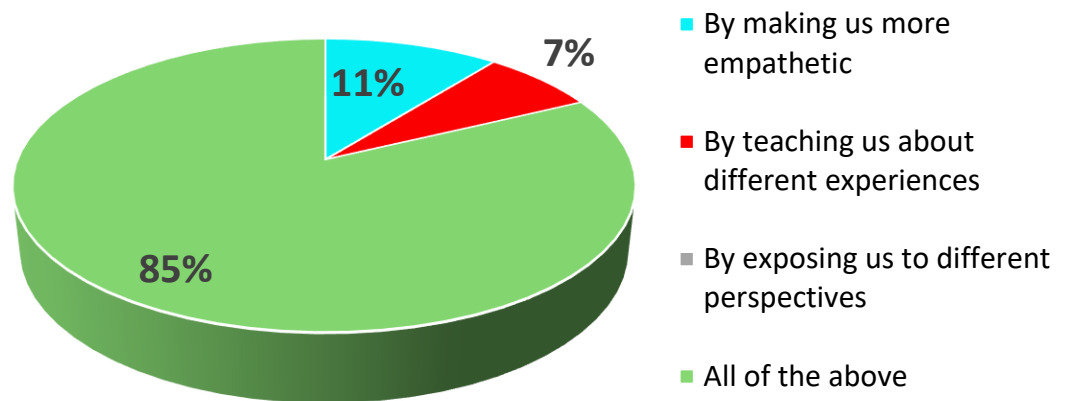
13. Figure

In the sixteenth question students were asked about how reading about difficult topics, such as those presented in “Jane Eyre” and “Oliver Twist”, can help us understand the world better. Out of 27 students, 23 students (or 85%) believe that reading about difficult topics can provide multiple benefits such as making us more empathetic, teaching us about different experiences, and exposing us to different perspectives. This result highlights that the majority of the students recognize the importance of engaging with challenging content to gain a better understanding of the world. By reading about difficult topics, readers can develop empathy towards others, learn about different experiences, and broaden their perspectives on the world.

Only 3 students (or 11%) believed that reading about difficult topics can make us more empathetic, while 2 students (or 7%) believed that reading about difficult topics can teach us about different experiences. It is interesting to note that no students selected only the option of reading about difficult topics exposing us to different perspectives.

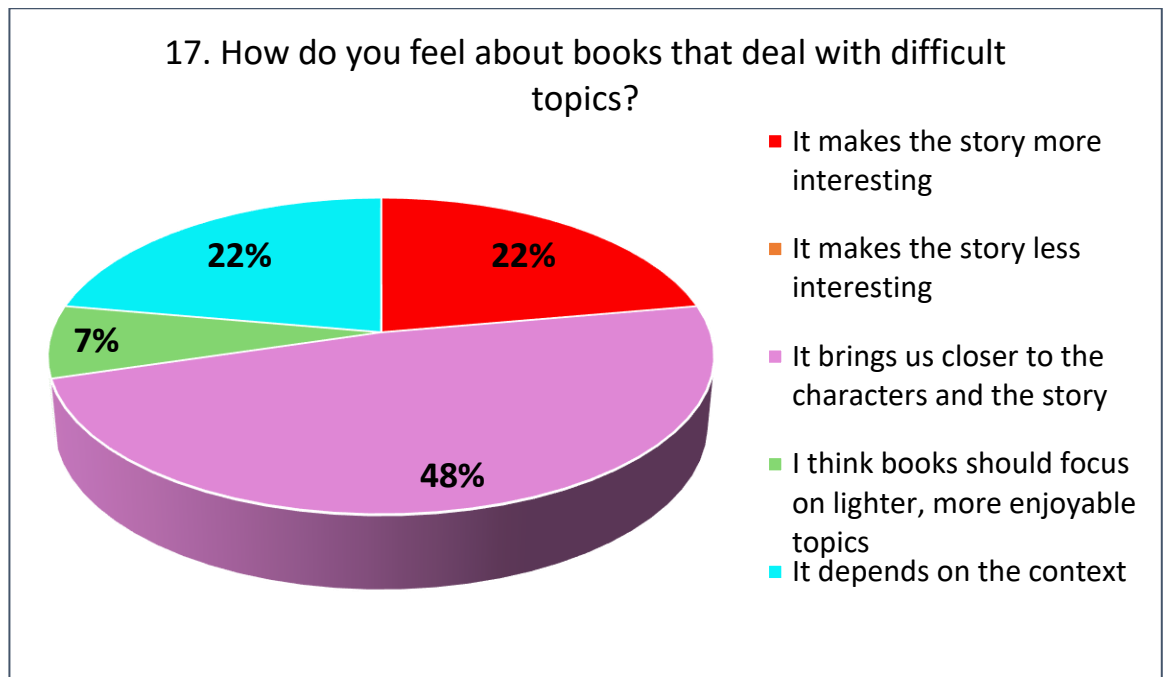
The findings demonstrate that the students acknowledge the significance of reading about difficult topics to better understand the world. The results suggest that, according to the participants, through reading such challenging content, we can expand our knowledge, enhance our empathy, and gain a more nuanced understanding of the diverse experiences of people.

16. How do you think reading about difficult topics such as the topics of difficult childhood in Jane Eyre and Oliver Twist can help us understand the world better?



14. Figure

Finally, the last question focused on how students feel about books that deal with difficult topics. Based on the responses of 27 students, the majority (48%) believe that books that deal with difficult topics bring them closer to the characters and the story. A significant minority (22%) believe that it depends on the context, while 22% found it more interesting when the story deals with difficult topics. Only a small percentage (7%) think that books should focus on lighter, more enjoyable topics. These results indicate that the majority of students appreciate reading books that tackle difficult topics as it helps them connect with the characters and the story. However, there are still some who prefer books that focus on lighter and more enjoyable topics. The finding that 22% of students believe that it depends on the context suggests that the type of difficult topic, as well as the way it is presented in the story, can significantly impact the reader's enjoyment of the book. This highlights the importance of careful consideration and skillful handling of difficult topics in literature.



15. Figure

### 3.5 Discussion of the research results

Based on the results of the research conducted among 9th grade students on the effect of studying literary works dealing with difficult topics on critical thinking skills, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the majority of the students have a good understanding of classic English literature and are familiar with the works of Charles Dickens and Charlotte Bronte. Secondly, the students have a good understanding of the literary works and their respective authors. Thirdly, it can be stated that literary works studied during Literature class, which showcase complex and difficult themes, along with pertinent and well-crafted questions, have the potential to encourage deeper contemplation among children. Consequently, this can support the advancement of their critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities. Lastly, it has been revealed that despite their young age, students are already aware that learning about literary works which tackle difficult topics can teach them a lot about the world and how it operates. Therefore, literature has a very important function beyond entertainment, which is knowledge dissemination and education.

## CONCLUSION

By means of the research undertaken in this thesis, it has been demonstrated that the theme of difficult childhood holds a prevalent and significant position in the literary works of Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre" and Charles Dickens' "Oliver Twist". Through the detailed analysis of these two novels, we have gained insight into the harsh realities of Victorian England, particularly in regards to the treatment of children. The contrasting depictions of the protagonists' upbringings in the novels, while vastly different, both illustrate the challenges that children faced during this era.

Through our research we also demonstrated the importance of historical and cultural context in the analysis of literature. Through our examination of the social, cultural, and historical background of Victorian England, we have gained a greater understanding of the motivations and themes present in "Jane Eyre" and "Oliver Twist". It is evident that literature does not exist in isolation, but rather is a product of the broader societal influences and contextual factors that prevail during its creation.

To achieve the goal set in the introduction of this study, several tasks were performed, including providing a general characterization of the social, cultural, and historical background of Victorian England, conducting a detailed analysis and comparison of how the theme of difficult childhood is depicted in "Jane Eyre" and "Oliver Twist" by analyzing 15 quotes from "Jane Eyre" and 17 quotes from "Oliver Twist", and presenting an empirical investigation into the potential impact of studying literary works that deal with difficult themes, such as difficult childhood in "Jane Eyre" and "Oliver Twist", on the critical thinking skills of students.

Through this analysis, it was found that the depiction of difficult childhood in both novels reflects the harsh realities of Victorian England, where children faced numerous challenges due to poverty, societal norms, and limited opportunities for education. Despite these challenges, the characters of Jane and Oliver demonstrate resilience and perseverance, inspiring readers to find strength in the face of adversity.

Concerning the hypothesis determined in the introduction, the empirical investigation revealed that exposure to literary works that deal with difficult themes, such as difficult childhood in "Jane Eyre" and "Oliver Twist", can lead to the development of critical thinking skills among students. By engaging with complex themes, students are challenged to think deeply, analyze information, and draw connections between the text and the world around them.

Overall, the aim of our study has been achieved, the thesis highlighted the significance of literary works as a tool for critical thinking and social awareness. By examining and analyzing the works of authors such as Charlotte Bronte and Charles Dickens, we gain valuable insight into historical contexts and cultural issues that are still relevant today. The findings of the research

were approved during the II International Scientific Conference of Students and Young Researchers themed “Language and Culture Integration” on May 10, 2023. Through our research, we hope to encourage further exploration of difficult themes in literature, as well as the continued study of Victorian England and its lasting impact on modern society.

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## РЕЗЮМЕ

За допомогою дослідження, проведеного в цій дипломній роботі, було продемонстровано, що тема важкого дитинства посідає важливе місце в літературних творах Шарлотти Бронте «Джейн Ейр» та Чарльза Діккенса «Олівер Твіст». За допомогою детального аналізу цих двох романів, ми набули розуміння жорстоких реалій Вікторіанської Англії, зокрема стосовно поводження з дітьми. Незважаючи на те, що портрети виховання головних героїв у цих романах суттєво відрізняються, обидва романи ілюструють складнощі, з якими діти стикалися в той час.

Наші дослідження також демонструють значимість історичного та культурного контексту для аналізу літератури. Шляхом аналізу соціального, культурного та історичного фону Вікторіанської Англії, ми набули глибшого розуміння мотивів та тем, які відображені в романах «Джейн Ейр» та «Олівер Твіст». Очевидно, що література не може існувати окремо від ширшого соціального та контекстуального впливу, який домінує під час її створення.

У даному дослідженні було реалізовано декілька завдань, спрямованих на досягнення мети, викладеної у вступі. Зокрема, проведено загальний огляд соціального, культурного та історичного контексту Вікторіанської Англії, детально проаналізовано та порівняно зображення теми важкого дитинства в романах «Джейн Ейр» та «Олівер Твіст». Було також реалізовано емпіричне дослідження з метою виявлення потенційного впливу вивчення літературних творів зі складними темами, такими як важке дитинство в обох романах, на критичне мислення учнів.

В результаті аналізу стало очевидним, що зображення важкого дитинства в обох романах відображає жорстоку реальність Вікторіанської Англії, де діти стикалися з численними викликами через бідність, соціальні норми та обмежені можливості отримати освіту. Незважаючи на ці труднощі, герої Джейн та Олівер демонструють стійкість та наполегливість, що надихає читачів на знаходження сил у вирішенні складних життєвих ситуацій.

Узагальнюючи наші результати, можемо стверджувати, що література є цінним інструментом для розвитку критичного мислення та соціальної свідомості. Аналізуючи твори відомих авторів, зокрема Шарлотти Бронте та Чарльза Діккенса, ми здобули глибокі уявлення про історичний та культурний контексти, що залишаються актуальними й донині. Результати нашого дослідження дають можливість рекомендувати подальше вивчення складних тем в літературі, а також дослідження вікторіанської епохи та її впливу на наше сучасне суспільство. Ми сподіваємося, що наші висновки сприятимуть розвитку подальших

досліджень у цій області, та привернуть увагу до значущості літератури як важливого джерела знань та інформації. Результати нашого дослідження були представлені на II Міжнародній науковій конференції студентів та молодих дослідників «Інтеграція мови та культури» 10 травня 2023 року.

## APPENDIX

Dear Students!

My name is Bettina Lupcsó, I am an English Language and Literature major graduate student at Ferenc Rakoczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College of Higher Education. By answering the questions below, you can help me a lot in writing my thesis. You do not have to write your name or any identifier on the page, so anonymity is guaranteed. Thank you for your participation in my research!

**1. My age...**

- a) 14 years old
- b) 15 years old
- c) 16 years old

**2. How would you describe your book reading habits?**

- a) I read a lot, and widely.
- b) I read casually, when I can and have time.
- c) I read systematically, with purpose.
- d) I read rarely, only because of school requirements.

**3. What motivates you to read? (you can choose several answers)**

- a) Enjoyment
- b) Education
- c) My family/friends
- d) All of the above

**4. What is your opinion about the books and pieces of literature you study at your Literature lessons? (you can choose several answers)**

- a) Some are interesting.
- b) Some are too difficult to understand.
- c) I prefer modern books.
- d) They help me improve my vocabulary and speaking skills.
- e) I wish we had more autonomy in choosing which works to focus our attention on.

**5. What do you think are the positive aspects of reading books written in previous centuries? (you can choose several answers)**

- a) We can learn about history.
- b) We can learn from people's mistakes.

- c) These writings give us a better appreciation of the present.
- d) These writings help us understand different cultures.
- e) These writings can develop our critical thinking.

**6. Charlotte Bronte and Charles Dickens, prominent English writers of the Victorian era, have left a lasting impact on literature. Have you heard of them in your literature classes or somewhere else?**

- a) Yes, I have heard of them both.
- b) I have heard only about one of them.
- c) No, I am not familiar with them.
- d) I have heard their names before, but I don't know much about them.

**7. Which of the following novels was written by Charles Dickens?**

- a) The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
- b) Jane Eyre
- c) Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, A Christmas Carol
- d) Pride and Prejudice

**8. Who is the author of the novel Jane Eyre?**

- a) Jane Austen
- b) Lord Gordon Byron
- c) Charles Dickens
- d) Emily Bronte
- e) Charlotte Bronte

**9. The main character in the novel Jane Eyre is a -**

- a) a girl from a wealthy family who has spent her childhood with her extended family
- b) an orphan who spent her childhood in the house of her aunt who loved her very much
- c) an orphaned girl who had to work for a living from an early age
- d) orphaned girl who lived in her aunt's house and was sent to school in Lowood

**10. In your own opinion, what characteristics or traits described Jane when she was a little girl? (you can choose several answers)**

- a) Quiet and dutiful
- b) Brave, rebellious and independent.
- c) Intelligent and curious.
- d) Lonely and sad.
- e) Creative and imaginative.

**11. Do you think it's important to stand up for ourselves and speak out against unfair treatment, like Jane Eyre did? (you can choose several answers)**

- a) Yes, because everyone deserves to be treated with respect and kindness.
- b) Yes, because if we don't, the unfair treatment might continue.
- c) I don't think it's always necessary, because sometimes it can make the situation worse.
- d) I don't think it's always necessary, because sometimes it's better to just let things go.
- e) It's better to show kindness and empathy instead of speaking out, even towards those who are treating us unfairly.

**12. Do you think Jane's childhood experiences were more positive or negative overall? Why? (Own answer)**

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"Oliver Twist and his companions suffered starvation for three months. At last they got so wild with hunger, that one big boy said that unless he had another basin of gruel (каша, zablása) each day, he was afraid he might some night happen to eat the small boy who slept next him. He had a wild, hungry eye, and they believed him. A meeting was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver.

The evening arrived; the boys took their places. When the gruel disappeared, the boys whispered to each other, and looked at Oliver; while his next neighbours touched him. He rose from the table and went up to the master, with his basin and spoon in his hand. He said: 'Please, sir, I want some more.'

The master was a fat, healthy man, but he turned very pale. 'What!' he said at last, in a faint voice. 'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.'

The master hit Oliver on the head with the ladle and called aloud for the beadle." (Dickens & Feng, 2022, pp. 7-8)

**This short extract is from Charles Dickens' novel Oliver Twist. After reading it answer the question below:**

**13. How did Oliver feel before he approached the master?**

- a) Desperate with hunger and reckless with misery.
- b) Very hungry and unhappy.
- c) Anxious and scared.
- d) Frustrated and angry.
- e) Determined to ask for more food.

**14. Do you think it's right for people to go hungry when others have plenty to eat? Why or why not?**

Own answer.



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**15. What is a 'rebel'? Do you think Oliver was a rebel?**

- a) A rebel is someone who resists authority or rules. Oliver could be considered a rebel because he defied the authority of the master by asking for more food.
- b) A rebel is someone who fights against a government or system. Oliver might not be considered a rebel by this definition since he was not fighting against a government or system.
- c) Oliver was not a rebel because he was simply asking for something he needed (more food) and was not intentionally defying authority or causing trouble.

**16. How do you think reading about difficult topics such as the topics of difficult childhood in Jane Eyre and Oliver Twist can help us understand the world better?**

- a) By making us more empathetic
- b) By teaching us about different experiences
- c) By exposing us to different perspectives
- d) All of the above

**17. How do you feel about books that deal with difficult topics?**

- a) It makes the story more interesting
- b) It makes the story less interesting
- c) It brings us closer to the characters and the story
- d) I think books should focus on lighter, more enjoyable topics.
- e) It depends on the context.

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