

An Analysis of Materialism as the Reflection of England in 1837 in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*
(Analisis Materialisme sebagai Gambaran tentang Keadaan yang Terjadi di Inggris pada Tahun 1837
dalam Novel *Oliver Twist* Karya Charles Dickens)

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Abstrak

Oliver Twist adalah novel karya Chales Dickens yang menceritakan tentang seorang anak yatim piatu dimana kondisi menuntutnya untuk menjadi seorang buruh. Ia hidup dalam kemiskinan. Novel *Oliver Twist* berhubungan dengan revolusi industri dimana hal tersebut erat kaitannya dengan kemiskinan. Dalam kondisi seperti itu, orang-orang tergerak untuk memperoleh uang sebanyak-banyaknya, yang pada akhirnya memicu timbulnya materialisme. Manusia dituntut untuk terus selalu memenuhi kebutuhan hidupnya, dan aktifitas tersebut terus berkembang menjadi lebih besar seiring berjalannya waktu. Pemenuhan kebutuhan yang terus selalu bertambah dan tiada habisnya tersebut mengakibatkan memunculnya sifat materialisme. Materialisme adalah suatu kepercayaan dimana hanya uang dan barang-barang berharga yang paling penting dalam hidup manusia. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menunjukkan spirit materialisme didalam novel *Oliver Twist*. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori Janet Wolff dalam menganalisis hubungan antara revolusi industri dan materialisme didalam novel.

Kata Kunci: Revolusi industri, Materialisme

Abstract

Oliver Twist is Charles Dickens' novel which tells about an orphan who becomes children labor forcing by the condition. He tries to stay alive in poor condition. *Oliver Twist* related to the industrial revolution in which it deals with poverty. Industrial revolution motivates people to find the way out of the problem by getting much money. Human activity is to fulfil their own need continuously. Then it develops and tends to fulfil the needs be higher and higher. This condition leads into the materialism. Materialism is the belief that having money and possessions are the most important thing in life. This research aims to find out the spirit of materialism in *Oliver Twist* novel and materialism as the reflection of the social condition in *Oliver Twist*. This thesis uses Janet Wolff's theory in analysing relation between industrial revolution and materialism in the novel.

Key words: Industrial revolution, Materialism

Introduction

Oliver Twist is Charles Dickens literary work published in 1837. It focusses on an orphan, *Oliver Twist* who, for the early years of his life has to live in a workhouse set up for children by the church. He tries to stay alive with poor condition. He must fight alone to cope his own life. Oliver is surrounded by bad people. He was born in a workhouse and became one of children labours. Oliver became an orphan because his mother died after his birth. The people around him jeer at him because he is just someone from a workhouse. With his brave, he goes to London and meets a wrong person. He is adopted by a gang of criminals. He is exploited to get money trained to

become a pickpocket, under Fagin orders. Fagin is the head of the pickpocket's gang. Oliver is a primary example of poor life during the industrial revolution era. Charles Dickens describes some issues that occurred during the industrial revolution. *Oliver Twist* describes a society with its problem of life during industrial revolution. The social issues such as the poor law, workhouse, class differences, child labour, and the recruitment of children for criminal work are told in the novel.

The characters in *Oliver Twist* deal with materialism. In which, as Karl Marx said that human activity tends to fulfil their own need continuously. This activity becomes higher and higher. Needs are the

basic motivation in the economic that leads into the materialism (Ritzer and Goodman, 2011:65-67). Materialism as the conclusion is a perspective which looks at condition of human existence related to the satisfaction on economic and material needs in which many people adapt it as natural sense of human.

Literature teaches us to know many human experiences about history, culture and human life, like what Charles Dickens has done in his literary work. Janet Wolff, in her book, *The Social Production of Art*, says that art and society relate each other (1993:9). Literary work is an Author's product and his society. The condition of society can influence the author thinks. It is presented in literary work. The thought or idea which is influenced by society is processed in human brain in unconsciousness condition. It can produce the thinking of materialism. The industrial revolution motivates people to have a better life although their hope is against the reality. It forces them to fulfill their needs higher and higher. The overstepping of "fulfilling needs" makes them become a materialist.

As the explanation above, this thesis aims to answer the following questions;

1. How is materialism reflected in *Oliver Twist*?
2. How does materialism in *Oliver Twist* reflect England?

Research Methodology

This research deals with the qualitative research that needs library research. It gives more information about historical record. I want to analyze the phenomena of industrial revolution in *Oliver Twist* to know the representation of materialism, to catch the achievement of the analysis then all of the data obtained from the library.

Primary data are as information and facts that shows industrial revolution in the novel. It is described through the element of literature: setting and the character. It concerns about industrial revolution as the reflection of Dickens experienced and materialism in *Oliver Twist*. The secondary data are taken from books, journal, articles, internet-browsing, e-books and other sources which related to materialism as the reflection of industrial revolution. They are; history of industrial revolution, the historical background of the authors and other information related to industrial revolution and materialism. The first step is to collect the written data from the novel and classify into two groups. The first one presents about materialism which is shown by the daily activity of the characters in the *Oliver Twist* novel. The second is about industrial revolution which is as the background of social condition in the novel. After collecting data I start to

analyze by applying Janet Wolff's theory of *The Social Production of Art*.

This thesis uses inductive method in which the problem moves from the specific to the general. It begins with the analysis of character in *Oliver Twist* which shows the spirit of materialism. Furthermore, I represent the condition of England in the novel.

This thesis, as the explanation above, uses Janet Wolff's concepts about the production of art. It breaks the analysis about materialism in *Oliver Twist* which is influenced by the social condition of the England (industrial revolution). Wolff said that art comes from the historical background of the author, and society influence in producing the art (1981:27-32). Social condition gives contribution in the production. It influences the concept of an artist. The historical background of the artist is the possible influence in producing the art. Communication and interaction are as the tools for people to think and then act according to what they believe. Therefore, it is as one of the components which can influence author's perspective.

Result

The result finds that *Oliver Twist* is the reflection of industrial revolution. Its society deals with the poverty and affects the people to be a materialist. People will do anything to recover from their economic condition. They try to get the money as much as they can. Dickens as the author wants to criticize about the condition of England related to the children labour and poverty.

Discussion

Oliver Twist is Charles Dickens' literary work that presents industrial revolution. The story tells the orphan boy born in a workhouse without parents. He is forced to struggle for the life. Many problems of the industrial revolution relate to the life in society. Human relationships are contaminated by economic factors. The influence of the industrial revolution in England is seen by the highest number of urbanization in the cities of industry. People are interested to stay and make a living in England. As a result, unemployment and crime appear and increase. All of the problems are covered by the needs for human's happiness. Man will always continue to live in the realm of necessity "the more human he becomes, the greater the number of his human needs" (Wolff, 1981:16). The increasing of human need is human instincts. This situation is a possible reason of the changing idea in the society. they fulfill their own possession of needs by overriding the spiritual value. Then, it causes the idea of materialism.

Materialism is as the effect of the social change which influences the changing of human thought toward material. Marx said that material uses for fulfilling human needs. Social relation is needed for developing production. This relation develops the demand for human need which tends to product many more. Needs become higher and people's satisfactions never end. These conditions lead them to become materialist (2011:66). One of characteristics of materialism is self-satisfaction. Self-satisfaction is human instinct to live comfortably without having much effort. Dickens shows this phenomenon in *Oliver Twist*. Some people indicate that they attempt to stay in comfort zone.

Oliver meets Mr. Brownlow and stays in his home. He and his housekeeper, Mrs. Bedwin, are very kind toward Oliver. They provide food and clothes for him. Oliver feels comfort in that home.

“Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly; everybody so kind and gentle; that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like Heaven itself. He was no sooner strong enough to put his clothes on, properly, than Mr. Brownlow caused a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes, to be provided for him” (Dickens, 1954:108).

This condition makes him unwillingly to leave that house. He will do anything to stay with them. He cannot imagine how life is when he comes back to his previous wretch life.

“Oh, don't tell you are going to send me away, sir, pray!” exclaimed Oliver, alarmed at the serious tone of the old gentleman's commencement! ‘Don't turn me out of doors to wander in the streets again. Let me stay here, and be a servant. Don't send me back to the wretched place I came from. Have mercy upon a poor boy, sir!’” (Dickens, 1954:109).

Oliver is one of the forms of materialism. When he lives in Fagin Place, that old man gives him enough food. Fagin also treats Oliver well. It shows when Oliver arrives in London and Fagin orders Dodger to give him a food. “Dodger, take off the sausages; and draw a tub near the fire for Oliver” (Dickens,1954:72-73). Fagin knows that Oliver needs food and water because he has been in a long journey. Therefore, he gives him a gin mixing with water. “Oliver ate his share, and the Jew then mixed him a glass of hot gin-and-water”(Dickens,1954: 73). In Mr. Brownlow's place, the food is more than enough. He is a rich man and has so much food supplies.

“the old lady applied herself to warming up, in a little saucepan, a basin full of broth: strong enough, Oliver thought, to furnish an ample dinner, when reduced to the regulation strength, for three hundred and fifty paupers, at the lowest computation” (Dickens,1954: 95).

Oliver feels comfortable to stay in Mr. Brownlow's. He enjoys his life with existing pleasant facilities at Mr. Brownlow's house. “In three days' time he was able to sit in an easy-chair, well propped up with pillows” (Dickens,1954: 94). Fagin has an opposite house to Mr. Brownlow's. “The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt” (Dickens, 1954:72). It shows that it is unfit house. Therefore, he prefers to stay in Mr. Brownlow's home. It is better than he backs to her previous life (Fagin's house). He wants to live comfortably by taking advantages from Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin and refuses to live in the streets. There are some ways used by people for fulfilling their self-satisfaction and achieving their happiness. The satisfaction involves material in which in this case is about money. Some people believe that money can lead them to the happiness. Because of that reason, the thinking of getting money emerges and drives them to collect the money as much as they can.

Baby Oliver lives without his parents. His mom died after having birth of him. The hungry and destitute situation of the orphan forces him to live in a workhouse. There, a parental woman takes care of Oliver and twenty or thirty other juvenile. Everyone lives with seven pence-half penny per week. It is better than living on the streets. But unfortunately, the parental woman just gives them the smallest possible portion of food and the rest of the money she saves for her own sake.

“..... 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,1954: 22)

The orphans is relied on the parental women. Dickens describes a woman with her money possession. The parental woman appropriates the great part of money weekly stipend meant of the children for her own. The children are fed only once a day with malnutrition food. She does not feed the children well. As a mother, she should nurture her children well and provides food which full of nutrition. She should maintain and take care of the children to grow

healthily. In fact, she is away from the name of “mother”. She seems to have taken some children fund for herself. As the consequences for what her doing, the children will get sick and have no enough clothes that make them cold. Sick and cold make the children losing their concentration and cause negligence and endangering themselves.(Dickens, 23:1954).

Materialism can be seen in the parental women character. She as the actor of corruption saves children funds for herself subtracting children's meal. Materialism is a tendency to value toward material needs, self satisfaction, and enjoyment the pleasure of the world (Neni,1999:15). This means that the parental women just thinks about material needs for herself upon the pleasure in the world. She is indicated as a materialist. As the explanation above, for fulfilling their own needs and self satisfaction, they reject the spiritual and moral value.

Oliver's friends who become pickpockets are also mistreated by Fagin. He as the receiver of the stolen goods will give them punishment when they have nothing to take home.

“Whenever the Dodger or Charley Bates came home at night, empty-handed, he would expatiate with great vehemence on the misery of idle and lazy habits; and would enforce upon them the necessity of an active life, by sending them supperless to bed. On one occasion, indeed, he even went so far as to knock them both down a flight of stairs” (Dickens,1954: 80).

Fagin just orientates toward money. He does not care about the children. He becomes inhumane when the problem is about money. Another problem of inhumanities is discrimination. It happens because there are stratification in society.

Dickens clearly describes in *Oliver Twist* the Mr. Bumble character. He wants people to respect and honor toward him as a God. When he visits Ms. Mann, he behaves badly. He becomes arrogant. In the other side, Ms. Mann honours him because he is a beadle who has power in that village. She sees Mr. Bumble as a man who is healthier than her.

“Now, Mr. Bumble was a fat man, and a choleric; so, instead of responding to this open-hearted salutation in a kindred spirit, he gave the little wicket a tremendous shake, and then bestowed upon it a kick which could have emanated from no leg but a beadle's.....‘Do you think this respectful or proper conduct, Mrs. Mann,’ inquired Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane, ‘to keep the parish officers a waiting at your garden-gate, when they come here’” (Dickens, 1954: 24)

Dickens describes Mr. Bumble as a fat man. It means that he has an abundance of food to eat which means he is a rich man. Because of that reason, Ms. Mann honours him. A person who reveres the glory also can be called materialist. It is because what she sees is just money. Glory relates with money and position. The condition of the society gives contribution on human act.

Dickens criticizes the phenomena of industrial revolution and conforms to the writing conventions of that period. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens chooses the subject matter that focus on children's life. His vision of childhood is haunted by a mythic struggle between the forces of good and evil (Davis, 1998:281). Dickens shows the society in England when it is in industrial revolution era. *Oliver Twist* is as his tools for expressing his own bitter experiences when he was young. Wolff said that “ ... activity and creativity are in mutual relation of independence with social structures” (1981:9). Charles Dickens creates his literary work, *Oliver Twist*, according to his experiences in his young age. His experience is an activity where the structure of society involves. The society at that time is about workhouse and children labor. Charles Dickens focuses on the story of his childhood where at a young age he must do some work. Then, the story of *Oliver Twist* is focused on children's life. *Oliver Twist* connects to the industrial revolution through the multitude of orphans. These show the problems facing society in England at that time. Many people are having children and cannot afford it. People will abandon their children and end up having to work in a workhouse until they are kicked out or die. Oliver lives in a workhouse. He is forced to work in very long hours and always left hungry. Dickens uses Oliver's life story in the workhouse to point out the flaws in the workhouse system. People with no means of support are sent to workhouse. The system is designed with the idea that the workhouse will be unpleasant.

“.... he was brought up by hand. The hungry and destitute situation of the infant orphan was duly reported by the workhouse authorities to the parish authorities The parish authorities inquired with dignity of the workhouse authorities, whether there was no female then domiciled in ‘the house’ who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist, the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need. The workhouse authorities replied with humility, that there was not. Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved, that Oliver should be ‘farmed,’ or, in other

words, that he should be dispatched to a branch workhouse” (Dickens, 1954: 22).

Art and society relate each other. The creativity in producing art is affected by sociological point of view of the author toward society. Society gives contribution in the production of art. The art is affected by social structures. The concept of creativity portrays human tragedy and it is not produced in isolation of social group. “..... all action, including creative or innovative action arise in the complex conjunction of numerous structural determinant and condition” (Wolff, 1981: 9). Activity and creativity are in mutual relation with the social structures. *Oliver Twist* is the product of Dickens creativity which industrial revolution affected Dickens idea. “..... man produces objects that express him, that speak for and about him” (Vazquez in Wolff, 1981: 16). People produce a work to reflect his feeling based on his own history, environment and experience. Dickens’ work have been influenced by his experiences as a young boy. He uses his novel to point out the truths about Victorian England.

Conclusion

Art and society connect each other. The concept of art is an image of the real life of history. The most moral characters in the novel are affected by the existing of money. Industrial revolution makes the poorer became worse. This condition force them to get the money in any ways. What people does is for getting out of poverty which lead them become materialist. Money is a basic reason for people in *Oliver Twist* to make happiness.

People live in a community of the society. The first thing people want to improve in life is their economies. The changing of the social condition influences people’s think in any ways. Then, it leads them to change their behavior become materialist. People’s point of view toward money is based on the condition where they live in. They force themselves to become equal between the poor and middle-class. Money is as the tool for fulfilling their possessions and having self-satisfaction. The way of life in the story of *Oliver Twist* believes that the most important thing in life is just money.

Oliver, in the end of the story, is the child who is healthy. His father is rich. He finds his relatives and becomes a rich man. The story exposes the thinking of bourgeois. They are the middle-class family which secures themselves with money. It is a closely thought of the ideology of materialism. The end of the story is Dickens’ inability to achieve in his youth. The tendency for having money is as the way to get out of poverty. *Oliver Twist* gives criticism in a form of

direct appeal to society to take action against poverty. Dickens captures this condition as the effect of the industrial revolution.

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