



## MAGNIFYING CHILD LABOUR FROM LITERARY ASPECT

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### ABSTRACT:

The exploitation of children through labour has always been a prevalent issue across the ages, and literature has contributed as a complex medium for revealing its brutal realities. This study investigates at how different writers, especially those from the Romantic and Victorian periods, have used their writing to highlight the suffering of child labourers, question societal norms, and push for change. In order to humanize the subject and connect with public opinion against child labour, the present paper analyses important literary works and illuminates the way authors used in their vivid imagery, emotive appeals, and social critique. The study concentrates on how literary depictions went beyond simple documentation and made a remarkable contribution to highlight the moral discussion surrounding child exploitation both in the past and today.

### KEYWORDS:

**CHILD LABOUR, EXPLOITATION, BRUTAL, ROMANTIC, VICTORIAN, HUMANIZE, LITERATURE, SOCIAL CRITIQUE.**

**PAPER ACCEPTED DATE:**

**28<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**PAPER PUBLISHED DATE:**

**31<sup>st</sup> July 2025**

### INTRODUCTION

Child labour, defined by the International Labour Organization as "work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development," has been a global concern. While economic and sociological factors are crucial to understand child labour, The literary lens provides a distinct viewpoint on the human cost of child labour. Literature was crucial in bringing the unseen misery of working children to the public's attention, especially during times of major industrial transformation like the Victorian era. As catalysts for social change, authors exposed the "dark satanic mills" and other exploitative settings using their artistic platforms (quoted in Child Labor in English Literature). This paper highlights the case that literary representations of child work played a significant role in influencing public opinion and eventually served to bring about the ultimate implementation of child labour regulations. A comparative literary analysis will be used in this research paper, referencing a wide variety of literary works from both historical and modern eras, as well as from different geographic locations, such as novels, short tales, poetry, and possibly plays. Possible readings might include classics like Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "The Cry of the Children" or Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, which both graphically portrayed child labour during the Industrial Revolution, as well as more recent works that examine how it manifests in developing countries like South Asian brick kilns or African mines. This study attempts to shed light on the complex nature of child labour as a human

tragedy and a significant social injustice, as perceived and conveyed through the special ability of literary expression, by analyzing narrative tactics, characterization, symbolism, and theme development.

### THE ROMANTIC AND VICTORIAN VOICES OF PROTEST

In English literature, the Romantic and Victorian eras saw a potent creative reaction to the growing Industrial Revolution, which made child labour increasingly prevalent and terrible. The moral decay that results from taking advantage of children's innocence for financial advantage was acknowledged by the poets and novelists of this time. The suffering of child laborers was vividly depicted by William Blake, a pivotal figure in the Romantic movement, in his collection *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Using vivid imagery, his poem "The Chimney Sweeper" depicts the lives of young boys compelled to engage in hazardous and unpleasant labour. The moral inadequacy of a system that permits such abuse is highlighted by the poem's juxtaposition of the children's vulnerability with society's passivity.

Child labour was the subject of much more explicit criticism during the Victorian era, which was marked by sharp social inequality and fast industrial development. A mastermind of social criticism, Charles Dickens frequently revealed the harsh reality that working children had suffered. Dickens highlights the systematic violence and deprivation imposed against poor kids in *Oliver Twist* by using the workhouse and Oliver's character. Public outcry

was sparked by his books, which, despite being fictional, gave a realistic and emotionally exciting portrayal of child exploitation.

"*The Cry of the Children*" by Elizabeth Barrett Browning is a forceful critique of child labour in industrial 19th-century England. The poem, which was first published in 1843 and has since seen numerous revisions, exposes the individuals and social structures that support child labour as a practice and highlights the immorality of using children as laborers. The poem was criticized at the time and is still occasionally seen as a very sentimental piece of writing that uses graphic accounts of children's suffering to try to touch readers' emotions. A society that sacrifices its youngest members for financial gain is powerfully indicted by Browning's striking depiction of youngsters working in mines and factories. Despite this, the poem was a huge hit, not only because it exposed the exploitation of working-class children but also because it increased public support for legislation aimed at ending child labor in industrial England.

### LITERARY ANALYSIS

A number of important subjects can be examined through the literary investigation of child work. First of all, it provides a potent way to humanize the victims by turning impersonal statistics into unique accounts of hardship, resiliency, and frequently lost innocence. Character development, narrative voice, and vivid imagery are used by authors to illustrate the emotional anguish, developmental arrests, and physical risks faced by child laborers. Second, literature regularly explores the socioeconomic and political factors that contribute to child labour, showing how exploitative systems, poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and conflict push children into the workforce. This entails investigating the moral concessions made by families and communities as well as the collusion of societal organizations. Thirdly, whether child work idealized or not, literary texts frequently highlight the moral considerations and cultural attitudes around it.

Several literary techniques were used by authors to "magnify" the problem of child labour and evoke sympathy in their audience. One of the main tactics was to describe the working circumstances in great detail. By thoroughly describing the long hours, poor pay, and dangerous working conditions, the authors turned inanimate numbers into terrifying tales.

Additionally, the authors humanized the victims of child labour through character development. By developing likable young heroes, they inspired readers to look past the "working poor" image and acknowledge the lives being ruined on a personal level. Dickens arouses intense empathy and outrage with his depictions of characters

who endure difficult working conditions, such as David Copperfield or *Oliver Twist*.

Finally, the existing status was directly challenged by social criticism woven into the stories. The moral underpinnings of a culture that valued industrial advancement over human welfare were questioned by authors through their works. This literary criticism, which was frequently delivered through character dialogue or the author's own narrative voice, was essential in influencing public opinion and promoting legislative reform (Child Labor in Victorian Novels).

### CONCLUSION

English literature has been instrumental in elevating the topic of child labour from a widespread social concern to one of moral significance. Through the writings of authors like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Dickens, and William Blake, the brutal reality of child trafficking was made public. In addition to offering historical documentation of the hardships faced by working children, these literary depictions were effective vehicles for social criticism and advocacy. In the past, literature has helped combat child labour by providing a voice to the voiceless. It also serves as a constant reminder of the importance of maintaining constant watchfulness and safeguarding children's rights.

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