

# An Analysis of Nancy's Character Images in "Oliver Twist"

Yincheng Wang

School of Foreign Languages, China Three Gorges University, Yichang, Hubei, China

**Abstract:** *"Oliver Twist" is a realistic literary work created by the famous British writer Dickens, in which the image of Nancy is the most commendable. In addition to the distinctive character characteristics, the author's observation and reflection on British capitalist society implied by Nancy's characters has also become an important factor in the popularity of the novel in the world and becoming a classic of the generation. Nancy's fragile, kind, and cowardly personality traits are a true portrayal of the millions of ordinary people in British capitalist exploitation, and also the final lament of ordinary people when they are unable to resist capitalist exploitation. By analyzing the image of Nancy, we can more clearly observe the real environment of British society during the post industrial revolution period of the 19th century, and more accurately criticize the exploitative society in Britain.*

**Keywords:** Oliver Twist; Dickens; Nancy; British society.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nancy comes from the novel "Oliver Twist" created by the famous British writer Dickens. In this novel, Dickens presents all the human tragedies in the 19th century British social life background through precise brushstrokes and vivid character depictions, making the entire novel a realistic play that showcases the corruption and oppression of bourgeois society. As one of the representatives of many oppressed and exploited individuals, Nancy's cruel social reality and her own kind and mature personality form a strong contrast, which has also become a highly exciting dramatic tension in the novel itself.

## 2. NANCY'S PERSONALITY TRAITS

Nancy cannot be defined by a certain set of values in her novels. From a macro perspective, Nancy is a good person with a very distinct image of kindness in her personality. In the novel, Nancy's background is very tragic. She lives among thieves, but still maintains a pure and kind-hearted belief, and the appearance of Oliver awakens her conscience in her heart. Due to her past tragic experiences, she did not want Oliver to repeat her tragedy. In order to stop the torture of Oliver by Fagin and others, as a woman, she even bravely fought against Fagin and others, sacrificing herself to protect Oliver from the blows of the stick. Her kindness and determination to protect Oliver were touching. But at the same time, there is also an evil side to Nancy's personality. After helping Oliver escape from the group of thieves, the gang was unwilling to let Oliver go, so she requested Nancy's help. Nancy struggled and lagged inside for a while, and finally decided to help the thief. This decision also directly affected Oliver's second half of his life, leading him towards the path of crime in the end.

The interweaving and struggle between good and evil in Nancy's personality is an important factor that makes her character more three-dimensional in the audience's minds. However, this struggle has also become an internal cause of Nancy's tragic fate. Whether it is the weakness in her personality, the determination in facing love, and the subjective wavering and unwillingness to resist when facing the thief gang, all shape Nancy's fate. It indirectly led to Nancy's own death at the hands of Sikes.

## 3. A MISERABLE PERSONAL BACKGROUND

The role of environment in shaping people is very powerful. In his creation of "Oliver Twist," Dickens escaped from the perspective of a simple person and used the window of a person to examine the entire society. This examination made social value a key factor in influencing or even determining people. Similarly, Nancy's character and destiny were ultimately formed in such a social situation.

The reason why Nancy was willing to protect Oliver was because she had a very similar background to Oliver. Nancy also lost her parents from a young age and became a victim of bullying. Orphans were eventually taken in by a gang of thieves and entered the group of thieves. After growing up, Nancy became the lover of the thief leader Sikes, and her fate was held in Sikes' hands. Sikes doesn't really love Nancy, it just comes from a desire to possess. Therefore, Sikes often beats and scolds Nancy, but Nancy never resists, and even after enduring the beating and scolding, she still chooses to return to Sikes' side. Nancy didn't have the courage to leave, nor did she have the courage to resist. She was always in a state of oppression. Even though she repeatedly hoped to have the opportunity to speak for herself, Sikes and his gang of thieves were always able to use authority to oppress her, forcing her to choose silence and obedience.

For Sikes, Nancy has never been a true person, but only a slave and plaything possessed by desire, a commodity that can be traded at any time. Nancy's own environment did not give her the right to resist, and she could only choose to obey under day

after day of oppression. Even when Miss Ross proposed to save her from fleeing the Thief's Nest and embracing a new life, despite Nancy's obvious wavering vision, she was unable to escape Sikes amidst day after day of oppression, and ultimately chose to give up this only opportunity to escape, ultimately leading to her tragic fate.

#### **4. THE SOCIAL REALITY REFLECTED BY NANCY**

The portrayal of Nancy's image is not only a tragic portrayal of the characters in the novel, but also a microcosm of capitalist society in 19th century England. The Victorian era in which Britain lived in the 19th century had just experienced the Industrial Revolution, which brought about a big machine production era that changed people's living habits and promoted unprecedented prosperity in the social economy. At the same time, the emergence of the steam engine has made Britain a real maritime overlord and accomplished the great feat of the the empire on which the sun never sets, but the natural and social hidden dangers brought about by the industrial revolution are also growing secretly. The foggy city in "Oliver Twist" is precisely a true portrayal of the urban environment of London in the post industrial revolution era, and also metaphorically represents the ambiguous, dark, and humid social atmosphere. The rise of capitalism has led to extremely serious social wealth differentiation, gradually widening the gap between rich and poor, and the prevalence of money worship. The contradiction between capitalists and the poor is gradually intensifying, and the life of the lower class is in a state of disrepair.

On the back of the magnificent capital society is the suffering of impoverished civilians, and the "cannibalism" essence of capitalism is fully reflected in the exploitation of capital. As Marx said, capitalism came to the world with blood. Capitalists in British society only frequently and recklessly engage in class exploitation, constantly enriching their wealth, without any regard for the well-being of the lower class. The image of Nancy in the novel is precisely one of the millions who are exploited and oppressed. They are homeless and unable to choose their own way of survival, Not even able to live with dignity. Nancy had no other choice but to choose to cling to a wicked person, because in her heart, even though the thief Sikes had all kinds of sins, he was still better than the outside world. The lesser of the two evils, Nancy had no choice but to truly escape the "prison" set for her by society. Even though she still had a yearning for beauty and an indelible conscience in her heart.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

In our social environment, there is no place for her to shelter, and in the end, she can only associate with evil and choose to coexist with death. And this is precisely the bloody and real situation of the countless living beings in the real world, which is the bloody and cannibal fangs dripping behind the hypocritical face of capitalism that the author Dickens hopes to completely tear away.

#### **REFERENCES**

- [1] Feng Lu. This is the best city, this is the worst city. "Oliver Twist" and Dickens' Literature London [J]. National Human History, 2021 (08): 78-89
- [2] Du Rui, Ning Mei. Interpreting Nancy's personality growth in Oliver Twist from the perspective of Freud psychoanalysis [J]. English Square, 2020 (23): 7-10
- [3] Zhang Huizhen. A Comparative Study on the Images of Underclass Children between Lu Xun and Dickens -- Taking "Shouting", "Wandering", and "Oliver Twist" as Examples [J]. Journal of Tangft Normal University, 2020,42 (04): 25-32