

# Analysis of the Main Characters' Needs in *Oliver Twist* from the Perspective of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Haiyun Zhao\*

College of Foreign Studies, Guilin University of Technology, Guilin, China

\*zhumeng1020220912@163.com

## ABSTRACT

*Oliver Twist* tells us about the tough experiences of the main characters and faithfully depicts the underworld of the UK during the Victorian reign. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory classifies human needs into five hierarchical levels. The gradual realization from low-level needs to high-level needs is a process to pursue life values. Nancy and Oliver have similar life experiences, but their final fates are different. The reasons lie in the realization of the five-level needs during their formative years. This paper focuses on the life experiences of Nancy and Oliver and the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of their five-level needs in the light of Maslow's hierarchy of needs and reveals the underlying reasons for their disparate fates, so as to enhance the understanding of the connotation of this novel. Through the research, we can come to realize the wide applicability of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. When an individual's basic material and survival needs are met, he would gain impetus for higher level needs. The gradual realization from low-level needs to high-level needs is a process to pursue life values. By reading *Oliver Twist*, we can come to recognize Dickens's belief that the poor and the disadvantaged could get rid of their tragic fate with the benevolent help of the morally noble ones from the upper class, but he didn't pay adequate attention to the crux of the social problem, that is, the lower class often fail to meet their hierarchical needs due to personal and external factors. Therefore, analyzing the main characters' needs in *Oliver Twist* with Maslow's hierarchy of needs can provide the readers a new perspective to understand this novel and help to testify to the importance of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in understanding the causes of social problems during the Victorian reign.

## KEYWORDS

*Oliver Twist*; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Main Characters' Needs; Oliver; Nancy.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Research Background and Significance

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, human needs can be classified into five basic levels. The gradual realization from low-level needs to high-level needs is a process to realize life values. Nancy and Oliver, the two main characters in *Oliver Twist*, share the similar life experiences while face disparate fates.

This paper focuses on the life experiences of Nancy and Oliver and the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of their five-level needs in the light of Maslow's hierarchy of needs so as to reveal the underlying reasons for their fates and enhance the understanding of the connotation and the social realities reflected in this novel.

## 1.2. The Author and the Work

### 1.2.1. Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens is a famous British writer of critical realism. He wrote 14 novels in his lifetime, as well as numerous medium-length novels and short stories. His works focus on the life experiences of the obscure living at the bottom of British society. They profoundly reflect the complex social realities in British in the 19th century. Charles Dickens has made outstanding contributions to the development of British critical realism literature.

Karl Marx once acclaimed him along with Thackeray, Charlotte, and Lady Gaskell as “a group of outstanding novelists in modern England”. At the same time, Marx also praised that “Dickens revealed more political and social realities to the world in his excellent and vivid depictions than all professional politicians, political commentators and moralists combined.” The sufferings and struggles experienced by the characters in his novels and their innermost voices, innocent or vicious characteristics, joys and sorrows have conspired to arouse feelings of sympathy, pity and love from readers, showing a strong appeal and sense of shock.

### 1.2.2. Oliver Twist

*Oliver Twist* is a long novel of critical realism written by Charles Dickens and published in 1838. The work introduces its readers a world of poverty, oppression and the threat of death. Set in London, the city of fog, the novel depicts the tragic story and experiences of an orphan. The protagonist Oliver is obliged to grow up in the orphanage, experience an apprenticeship in the undertaker's and unfortunately fall into the den of thieves. He is unwillingly compelled to go through countless hardships since an early age. But, luckily, with the help of kind-hearted persons, he finally ascertains his family background and regains the long-lost happiness and felicitities. When describing the life experiences of the main characters Nancy and Oliver, the author reveals the pervasive social problems in Victorian England and the harsh realities that the British people faced during the 19th century. At the same time, the author eulogizes the brilliance of human nature in the confrontation between the kind and the evil.

## 1.3. Literature Review

At present, there is few precedents for analyzing the characters in *Oliver Twist* from the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The existing Chinese literature on *Oliver Twist* mainly focuses on the following perspectives:

Song Xufang & Si Xiaofang[1] and Liang Yonghua[2] believed that it is of great importance to analyze Nancy and Oliver from the perspective of Freud's theory of personality, that is, id, ego and superego. The protagonist Oliver, born of humble parentage, has experienced a tragic fate in his early years. He is also very lucky because he maintains a superego personality despite his early sufferings, and his conscience and behavior have not changed in the face of harsh reality. The authors of the above-mentioned thesis summarize that the depiction of Oliver is laden with Dickens's hope for human nature.

Nancy has also experienced hardships from birth to her later upbringing. However, her incomparably complex inner world is a contradiction. As a representative of the lower class, she yearns for a bright life but is engulfed by the merciless social reality. This tragedy does reflect the alienation effect of the ruthless capitalist society on human nature.

In a society where material worship prevails, money and interests will undoubtedly drive people to the evil of indifference and selfishness, and gradually move away from the kind-hearted nature. A vulnerable woman at the bottom of society has the opportunity to change her fate, but she is unable to fight, so she could only drift with the tide and succumb to her fate, which deeply revealed Dickens's

whipping of social reality. The thesis has probed deeply into human nature and shed light on the thesis writing.

Tang Yunke & Yang Zhenghe[3], Liu Xinying[4] and Chen Jie[5] have focused on analyzing social background and stratum of the characters. They analyze the images and fates of Nancy and Oliver by referring to the historical environment, social background and stratum in the 19th century of the British society. Their research mainly concentrates on the role the external environment plays in shaping individuals' characteristics. The apparent defect of these research lies in their insufficient reference to inner factors which serve to influence a person's upbringing and fate.

Huang Juan[6] and Zhang Liangyu[7] analyze the main characters in the *Oliver Twist* in terms of writing techniques. Huang Juan[6] points out that the author Dickens has used exaggeration and Gothic writing techniques to make the work full of criticism for social realities, thus brings shock to readers. Zhang Liangyu[7] investigate the orphan image written by Dickens by new historicism, and interprets each orphan from the perspective of the text, the author's psychology and the background of the times.

There are some researches on the *Oliver Twist* in foreign literature, such as Holmes, Thomas & Iain Sinclair[8], Seaman, L.C.B[9] and Li Dan[10] reveal that the experiences of the characters depicted by Charles Dickens have their social, historical and moral roots.

Generally speaking, most studies mainly focus on the social background, the author's writing intention and the analysis of characters, but seldom involve the scientific field of humanism especially from the perspective of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The influence of humanism on the fate of characters is mainly reflected in the benign interaction between the satisfaction of external conditions on the needs of the subject and the dynamic role of the subject.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is one of the core theories of humanistic science. The process of the gradual realization from low-level needs to high-level needs is the process during which the life values of individuals are fulfilled. Based on the social background at that time, the thesis will approach the two characters in *Oliver Twist* from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs with the aim to offer the readers a new perspective to have a better understanding of the protagonists' fates and the central theme of the novel.

## **2. MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS**

Abraham Harold Maslow (1908-1970) was an American social psychologist who is regarded as the pioneer and thinker of modern American humanistic psychology. The Hierarchy of Needs hypothesis he developed is well-known in the field of psychology. Compared to early psychological investigations, he strategically inherits the principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Watson's behaviorism. In his hypothesis, the subjects of research are mentally sound people, and he investigates how these people achieve self-actualization in various phases, from the lowest to the highest needs. Nowadays, the theory of hierarchical needs is applied to many facets of life, which has practical implications for understanding how people behave. Furthermore, his idea is applied to literary criticism. Some researchers and scholars interpret literary masterpieces using this technique, and it offers us with a new perspective to understand their literary values. During his career, Maslow authored several publications on humanistic psychology. Maslow initially proposed the notion of hierarchical needs in 1943, when he published *A theory of Human Motivation* in the *Psychological Review*. He further developed and demonstrated the notion in his final thesis. The hierarchy of needs hypothesis consists of five categories of needs, arranged in a pyramidal structure, which are the physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. "According to Maslow, the needs can be divided into two categories: one is lacking needs, the other is growth needs" [11]. The self-actualization can be actualized only when one fulfills the first four basic needs.

The theory also contains the following connotations:

Firstly, physiological needs and safety needs are the basic survival needs, and only when they are met to a certain extent can other needs gradually become new motivators. These relatively satisfied needs will also greatly weaken the intensity of stimulating behaviors;

Secondly, if any of the five levels of needs are not met at all, people's physical and psychological functions will be interrupted, and people's lives be threatened;

Last but not least, while a person may have several needs at the same time, one among them undoubtedly plays the dominant role in shaping one's characters and behaviors. None of the needs will disappear as a result of the actualization of higher-level needs. All levels of needs connect to and overlap with each other. When the higher-level needs are met to some extent, the lower-level ones remain, but their impact on human's behavior is significantly diminished.

### **3. MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS REFLECTED IN THE CHARACTERS**

#### **3.1. Main Characters in *Oliver Twist***

##### **3.1.1. Nancy**

Nancy is the most controversial character in the *Oliver Twist*. She is compelled to become a pickpocket for living or she would be starved to death. So, it can be said that Nancy has to face the choice between committing crimes and confronting death from an early age.

Being a thief and the main culprit for Oliver's tragic fate seem to indicate that Nancy's life is laden with sins and crimes and the view that she is a wicked woman without any moral principles is impeccable, but when we probe deeply into her behaviors when helping Oliver, we may come to realize that she is not bad in nature as she appears to be because she still retains the purest kindness in her heart. At the first presence of Oliver in the den of thieves, all the purity and goodness in her heart are awakened. When Nancy learns about Oliver's origins, she regrets having got Oliver involved into the den of thieves and made him compelled to committing crimes, so she tries to help him in times of urgency and even at the cost of her precious life. Nancy is not evil in nature, but the environment in which she grows up exerts an indelible impact on her characters. Her tragic fate is a vivid depiction of the sufferings the lower classes of capitalist society have experienced.

In the novel, Nancy's unwavering love for Sykes leaves a deep impression on the audience. Even though she has suffered physical abuse and mental insults, she still believes that Sykes loves her, because she has always stubbornly believed that love is far more important than money and fame. She endures the torture of Sikes and devotes her youth and heart to him. When Miss Rose offers to help Nancy get rid of her sinful life and points out that the villains, including Sikes, would be punished as they deserved, Nancy refuses Miss Ross's invitation on the grounds that she could no longer leave Sikes and the gang of thieves who have provided her with a so-called sense of belonging, and finally chooses to come back to Sikes and gets mercilessly killed by him. Nancy's devotion to love makes her characters more vivid. The whole work presents us with a humble image of Nancy who is witty, brave and dares to love and hate. After reading the description of Nancy's experiences and her concept of love, we may feel strongly sympathized with her.

##### **3.1.2. Oliver**

Like Nancy, the protagonist Oliver has experienced a miserable childhood. In his childhood, he lives a life of fear from the workhouse to the coffin shop to the gang of thieves in London, and experiences indifference at an early age. Although his living environment has changed several times, he has always maintained his kindness, sincerity and integrity.

Oliver, who suffers from hunger and cold from an early age, comes from a humble background and with no formal education, but his language is civilized and his manner modest and prudent, which would not have been achieved for such an uneducated and suffering child as Oliver. Although he suffers abuse from an early age, he doesn't form the mentality of inferiority or hatred of society, he maintains his kindness and benevolence.

When he is young, he comes into contact with many malignant persons, such as the vicious and hypocritical Mrs. Mann, the cruel Mrs. Noah and Mrs. Sowerberry, the evil and greedy Fagin, Sykes, and so on. These complex and painful experiences during his childhood does not affect his kind and innocent nature. With his own perseverance and the help of warm-hearted people such as Nancy, Rose and Brownlow, he obtains a happy life he deserves.

### **3.2. Unsatisfied Needs of the Main Characters**

#### **3.2.1. Physiological Needs**

“According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: the physiological needs, including some basic aspects, such as oxygen, food, water, clothing and sleep are the most primitive needs for human beings” [12]. To put it more precisely, physiological needs mainly refer to material satisfaction.

If the basic physiological needs are not met, people's lives may be threatened to some extent, which will have a negative impact on people's livelihood. “When physiological needs remain to be satisfied, people tend to acquire some useful skills to survive”[12]. In fact, Oliver’s physiological needs have been difficult to meet since his birth.

“Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none” [13].

Oliver was born into a workhouse and lost his mother when he came to the cruel world. Since then, he was regarded by the parish as a new burden because they had an extra mouth to feed. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on the pretext of relieving the poor, the workhouses in Britain rode roughshod over the basic rights of the impoverished. They were provided with pitifully scanty food, but assigned heavy workload. For the poor who have no ability to survive independently, they have to silently resign themselves to the cruel oppression and exploitation of the people who provide them with survival materials. Oliver doesn't have enough to eat all day long and is always accompanied by hunger, coldness and malicious abuse. He has to bear the malice of the world on his own since childhood.

Driven by hunger, Oliver plucked up the courage to beg the workhouse for an extra bowl of porridge. His action was regarded by the head of the workhouse as an unorthodox crime of tarnishing the gods, as a result, he was detained alone, facing darkness and fear he has never experienced before. His so-called unorthodox crime has led him to be transferred by the workhouse to the chimney sweeper Mr. Gamfield and the undertaker successively, but with the plaintive request of Oliver, he was finally consigned to the undertaker.

If Oliver wants to survive, he must learn a skill as soon as possible, so that those who are willing to take him in mercifully can see his usefulness and give him some leftovers to live on. This simple need for food and clothing was an extravagant hope for Oliver, and he even thought that death may be the best relief in his life. Where there is oppression, there is resistance. When Oliver escaped from the undertaker's coffin shop to London in search of a new way to survive due to unbearable sufferings, he simply plunges himself into another place of torment. When he strayed into the gang of thieves, Oliver was forced to face the theft he despised, and the hardship of survival was always with Oliver.

As far as the author is concerned, under the special circumstances at that time, it is fortunate for Oliver to be born into a workhouse. In comparison, Nancy is far less lucky than Oliver. By the time she was less than half the age of Oliver, she was forced to commit crimes of theft. “It is my living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home” [13]. Nancy has been forced to roam the streets and alleys every day for burglary since her childhood. In the gang of thieves, the provision of basic means of livelihood is based on the number of things stolen. To get her daily bread and butter, Nancy has been trying her best to show her “ingenuity” and perform tricks so as to win a foothold for herself to survive in this den of thieves.

### 3.2.2. Safety Needs

“When physiological needs are gratified and no longer control mind and behavior, the second level of needs—the safety needs are activated”[12]. Maslow believes that the failure of a relationship may make people feel “an acute sense of loneliness, alienation and uneasiness, and they can only get rid of the negative feelings by fostering close relationships or interactions with others” .[14].

Considering that the basic physiological needs of Oliver have not been met, his safety needs cannot be satiated to a large extent. He lived in the hostile environment and led a precarious life, with evil forces and crimes haunting him day and night in his childhood. He was forced to wander between life and death at a young age. He was not surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom. It was through the struggle with nature that he was able to survive.

“For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception” [13]. In the workhouse, Oliver, the parish child, “had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire by neglect or the half-smothered to death by accident or had been overlooked in turning up a bedstead and inadvertently scalded to death when there happened to be a washing” [13]. We can draw from the vivid description that dangers are always likely to lurk from some place unknown and the appalling and precarious environment in which Oliver has lived gives him an intense sense of insecurity.

Oliver has experienced ups and downs from an early age. When he was unknowingly taken by two young thieves from the gang and got wrongly accused of being a thief who had stolen the handkerchief of an old gentleman, he tried to get rid of those who chased him, trying to prove that he was innocent, but he was still wounded by people who didn’t know the truth and regarded as a hooligan and a stubborn scoundrel and then sent into confinement. Unluckily, he became the scapegoat of two other thieves who were the real culprits of the crime. This experience has somewhat deprived him of the hope of gaining a sense of security from the gang of thieves.

When Oliver was forced to engage in the second burglary, he was almost mad with grief and fear. He begged that he didn’t want to be arranged to do such an abominable thing, but what he received were nothing more than scolds, curses and the intimidation of a shooting on his head from Sikes. Their deeds of burglary were unluckily discovered, and Oliver got a shot in his arm by the person who had discovered their acts of burglary. The so-called accomplices of Oliver fled themselves and left Oliver in the gutter. He must have been overwhelmed with fear and a sense of helplessness when he was abandoned in the wild.

Since his childhood, Oliver had been constantly confronting himself with dangers and challenges. Different living environments he faced such as the workhouse, the undertaker's and the den of thieves, and people he came into contact with including vicious and hypocritical Mrs. Mann, the cruel Mrs. Noah and Mrs. Sowerberry, the evil and greedy Fagin and Sykes have brought him with fear and anxiety.

Yet Nancy’s safety largely depends on the stealing which she has to engage in for survival. She spends her days stealing on the streets. Her stealing process is full of risks and challenges. She has to ensure

that the theft is successful on the one hand, and that she will not be discovered and arrested by the police on the other hand, otherwise, she would be imprisoned and hanged by the gallows overhead. Security amounts to a wild wish for Nancy. In front of Sikes, she also feels uneasy from time to time. She would be beaten, scolded and punished by this alcoholic man for whatever reasons.

### 3.2.3. Love and Belonging Needs

“According to Maslow, love and belonging needs are about giving love and receiving love. Maslow also holds that the care from parents or a stable and normal family plays an important role in a child’s life” [12].

When Oliver was born into this world, his mother died, and his origins remained unknown. Therefore, we can safely draw the conclusion that Oliver has not enjoyed the care of his parents and the warmth of family since his childhood. The threats of hunger, oppression and death are always with him. Mr. Brownlow went to the police station to acquit Oliver and save him from torture. In order to repay Mr. Brownlow’s life-saving grace, Oliver offered to help him return the books. He was very happy that he could have the privilege to help his benefactor. Unfortunately, on the way to returning the books, Oliver was caught again by the gangs and forced to return the den of thieves. “They belong to the old gentleman,’ said Oliver, wringing his hands; to the good, kind, old gentleman who took me into his house, and had me nursed, when I was near dying of the fever. Oh, pray send them back; send him back the books and money. Keep me here all my life long; but pray, pray send them back. He’ll think I stole them; the old lady: all of them who were so kind to me: will think I stole them”[13]. Oliver begged the gang of thieves for their understanding, but received no response. At the same time, Mr. Brownlow’s friend was already furious, and firmly believed that Oliver could never return. “‘No,’ he said, smiting the table with his fist, I do not. The boy has a new suit of clothes on his back, a set of valuable books under his arm, and a five-pound note in his pocket. He’ll join his old friends the thieves, and laugh at you. If ever that boy returns to this house, sir, I’ll eat my head.” [13]. How sad Oliver would be to hear such comments, he never thought of letting Mr. Brownlow down in any way.

Compared to Oliver, the love that Nancy received was so pitiful and humble. She had lived in a den of thieves since her childhood. Indifference, greed, filth and depravity were the only companions in her life. Her love for husband is pure and deep, but blind and humble. When Oliver first appeared at Fagin’s house, her conscience was awakened. She helped Oliver get out from being beaten by the thieves several times. When she accidentally learned about Oliver’s family background, she tried her best to help Oliver regain his own happy life. In order to help Oliver get rid of the life that he was being forced to experience, Nancy and Miss Rose met twice to discuss specific details. Each time, Rose offered to help her break away from the life of sin and provide her a bright future, but Nancy refused repeatedly on account of her attachment to her husband and the gang of thieves, and even requested not to report on her husband.

Facing her husband’s cruelty, she still believed in her love for her husband and said: “Bill, dear Bill, you cannot have the heart to kill me. Oh! think of all I have given up, only this one night, for you. You shall have time to think, and save yourself this crime; I will not lose my hold, you cannot throw me off. Bill, Bill, for dear God’s sake, for your own, for mine, stop before you spill my blood! I have been true to you, upon my guilty soul I have!” [13]. She chooses to believe in love until the last moments of her life, but she could never receive the love she has expected.

### 3.2.4. Esteem Needs

Maslow holds that everyone in society has the right to be respected, regardless of their social status. Since birth, Oliver has not been supported by his identity and social status, so he needed to face the malice of society alone, and became a person who is labeled as a child of the parish, an orphan in a workhouse, and a miserable person with low social status. He is a person despised by everyone, a poor creature who received no sympathy. Once a person is labeled with some unequal titles, he may

live in the shadow of the labels created by the social environment unless there are some changes in identity and status, and it is also difficult for him to extricate himself.

During his childhood, Oliver could not get even the basic respect from society. He could only be subjected to the prejudice of people with biased opinions that he is a lowlife of the society who deserves no respect, so he lived a humble, anxious and fearful life all day long. When he served as an apprentice in the undertaker's, he was humiliated by another presumptuous apprentice from the charity school who regarded himself as a man nobler than Oliver. "Yer don't know who I am, I suppose, Work'us?" said the charity-boy, in continuation: descending from the top of the post, meanwhile, with edifying gravity. 'I'm Mister Noah Claypole,' said the charity-boy and you're under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian!" [13]. Noah was a charity boy who could trace his genealogy all the way back to his parents. The shop-boys in the neighborhood had long been in the habit of branding Noah with insulting epithets in the public streets. Noah had borne them without reply. But, when Oliver, a nameless orphan, at whom even the meanest could point the finger of scorn appeared before Noah, he retorted on him with interest. Noah turned his hatred of society to his abuse against Oliver. He viciously attacked Oliver, taunted him as an illegitimate child, slandered and insulted Oliver and his dead mother, which have deeply hurt Oliver's self-esteem.

Like Oliver, Nancy did not get the warmth from her family, parents and relatives as well. She lived with the gang of thieves since her childhood, and made a living by stealing all day long. She keenly felt the sinful side of the world.

She is accompanied by thieves all day long, wandering in the gutter, the most secretive and dirty corners, and the most despised crevices of society, enduring the disgust and rejection of people from other classes. The already tragic fate combined with the sinful trade she has engaged in and the stereotyped thinking that people hold about thieves have bound Nancy's heart, despite the fact that she has a kind heart and a clear conscience and has struggled desperately to get rid of the sins she has already conducted. She could hardly escape from the contempt and humility imposed on her by the malicious world at her times.

Meanwhile, Nancy also lacks self-esteem. When Miss Rose offered to help her escape from the troubled life and provide her with a bright future, but Nancy said it was too late for her to be redeemed, which shows that, in her own heart, she is already too humble and hopeless to accept the benevolence. She said to Miss Rose: "'You would serve me best, lady,' replied the girl, wringing her hands, if you could take my life at once; for I have felt more grief to think of what I am, to-night, than I ever did before, and it would be something not to die in the hell in which I have lived. God bless you, sweet lady, and send as much happiness on your head as I have brought shame on mine" [13]. Looking back on the sinful acts she had committed for the gang of thieves in the past, and the fact that she was the main culprit who dragged Oliver into a life of misery, Nancy felt that she had become so wicked that she was shameful to face herself, and to start a new life.

### 3.2.5. Self-actualization Needs

"In Maslow's opinion, one characteristic of self-actualizing people is autonomous". [12]"Another meaning of autonomy is self-decision, self-government, being an active, responsible, self-disciplined, deciding agent rather than a pawn, or helplessly 'determined' by others, being strong rather than weak"[14]. It connotes that people can actually make up their own minds, make their own decisions and willing to be responsible for themselves and their destiny.

Before the revelation of Oliver's background, Oliver had no guarantee of survival, the sense of security and respect from others. He was born into a workhouse, and became an apprentice in a coffin workshop before he was forced to become a member of the den of thieves. Every step of his life road seems unmanageable for him. Various labels, cynicism, insults and abuses have made Oliver's personal destiny largely subject to external arrangements since his birth, and he has no liberty to choose his own way of life.

Before helping Oliver find out his origins, Nancy has been manipulated by the leader of the thieves and had to make a living by burglary. She once detested what she had done, but got accustomed to succumbing to her own destiny. She fails to get rid of the sins of her life until her death. It can be said that Nancy's life is tragic and she fails to fulfill self-realization.

### **3.3. Satisfied Needs of the Main Characters**

#### **3.3.1. Physiological Needs**

“According to Maslow, people can get rid of the negative emotions of alienation and anxiety by building intimate relationships or fostering close connections with others” [12]. Humble origin has led to Oliver's tragic childhood. Thanks to the help of the warm-hearted persons such as Nancy, Miss Rose and Mr. Brownlow, his fortunes took a turn for the better, and the wishes that he had once cherished were fulfilled one by one. When Oliver met Mr. Brownlow and Miss Rose for the first time, he started to appreciate the joy of life. Living by their side, he can rest peacefully and show no worries about food and clothing. He can also take a walk with these kind people in the morning to enjoy the sun, and learn to read and write. All of these experiences demonstrate the fulfillment of Oliver's physiological needs when he encounters the turn of his destiny.

#### **3.3.2. Safety Needs**

It was during the time when he lived with Miss Rose and Mrs. Merry that Oliver first enjoyed a sense of security and harmony. He lived peacefully during the day and without fear and anxiety at night. He was also free from the melancholy and depression he had experienced in the appalling prison and didn't need to associate with those who may bring the harm. He enjoys nothing but pleasant experiences.

#### **3.3.3. Love and Belonging Needs**

With the careful attendance of Miss Rose and Mrs. Maylie, Oliver has gradually recovered and became stronger than ever before. Meanwhile, Oliver strove to bring joy to them with a grateful heart. When Miss Rose was ill, he was worried and prayed for her all day long. He picked flowers for Miss Rose every day and consulted the doctor for help, hoping that Miss Rose would recover as soon as possible.

When Oliver was in the den of thieves, he was always protected by the female thief Nancy in time; when he was mistaken for the thief who had committed the burglary for the first time and got injured, he got care from Mr. Brownlow and Bedwin, the housekeeper. On his way from the undertaker's coffin shop to London, Oliver received sincere wishes from his bosom friend Dick who was dying of illness, which were the first blessings that he had got since his childhood. The friendship from Dick and the care from the benevolent men gave Oliver a sense of love and belonging.

“According to Maslow, love needs are about giving love and receiving love” [12]. In view of the life experience of Nancy, she has fulfilled the needs of giving love. Out of conscience and sympathy for Oliver, she stepped forward to save him when he faced the cruel abusers Fagin and Sikes. On learning about Oliver's genealogy, she tried every means possible to help him regain the life he deserved. The brilliance of humanity in Nancy and her love and dedication to Oliver show that Nancy's need for giving love has been fulfilled.

#### **3.3.4. Esteem Needs**

“When the love and belonging needs are satisfied, the needs to gain esteem and recognition become more significant”[14]. The respect from others refers to a situation in which one shows the desire for reputation, prestige, status, fame, recognition and appreciation.

Oliver had experienced twists and turns. No matter how difficult his life was or how bad the environment was, he was never influenced by violence and evil and maintained his kind nature.

Nancy's kindness was recognized successively by Miss Rose and Mr. Brownlow who both offered to help Nancy get rid of her sinful situation and promised to send her abroad and away from her past. When Miss Rose offered to give Nancy money, Nancy replied firmly: "'No!'", replied the girl. 'I have not done this for money. Let me have that to think of' [13]. She was eager to be respected and recognized for her act of helping Oliver. At the same time, Nancy also deeply felt the sympathy, kindness and respect given to her by Miss Rose and Mr. Brownlow.

### 3.3.5. Self-actualization Needs

Oliver's self-realization can be summarized in two aspects: on the one hand, he has always maintained his persistence, integrity and kindness and remained immune from corruption and degeneration.

On the other hand, with the help of Mr. Brownlow and others, his family background was finally revealed, and his life took a turn for the better. He not only regained his kinship, but also regained his wealth, reputation and status that belonged to him.

## 4. SOCIAL REALITIES REFLECTED IN THE CHARACTERS' NEEDS' SATISFACTION

### 4.1. The Social Realities Reflected by the Unsatisfied Needs of the Main Characters

Oliver and Nancy are representatives of the lower class in the British society during the Victorian era. They have faced dire straits, wandered between life and death every day and could not even meet the most basic needs of survival. Hunger and poverty make it impossible for them to choose their way of life. Exploitation and oppression, humiliation and helplessness make them feel the indifference and cruelty of society. The experiences of Oliver and Nancy have made us see problems existing in British society at that time, such as: the employment of child labor in workhouses, gangs instigating youth to participate in crime, etc., all of which show that exploitation and oppression are pervasive during the Victorian reign.

### 4.2. The Social Realities Reflected by the Satisfied Needs of the Main Characters

Even in the face of harsh social realities, we can see the brilliance of humanity in Oliver and Nancy. What is good and upright will never be annihilated by the evil things. With the constant struggle and the help of the upright and benevolent persons, Oliver is able to witness the turning point of his fate. This shows us that people living at the bottom of British society need unremitting struggle to break free from the shackles of fate. The so-called social prosperity of the Victorian era in which Nancy and Oliver live belongs to only the upper classes of British society at that time. Oliver can enjoy a life of comfort and satisfaction only after he finds out his background and regains his wealth and status. His hierarchical needs are therefore guaranteed.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It is no accident that Oliver has finally reached the turning point of his fate despite the ups and downs he has experienced in his childhood. It tells us that whatever the situation is, it takes efforts to fulfill the physiological and spiritual needs. We need to uphold justice, pluck up courage and maintain kindness and a positive attitude towards the reality in the pursuit of good things in the world. Nancy's depravity, limitation of self-knowledge, compromise in the face of reality and the abandonment of herself have led to her lack of hierarchical needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a powerful theory, which is probably applicable to everyone, regardless of his family background, volume of wealth, social status, age and gender and the circumstance he is in. When an individual's basic material and survival needs are met, he would gain

inexhaustible impetus for higher level needs. The gradual realization from low-level needs to high-level needs is also a process to pursue life values.

The novel presents us a picture of the world of the poor and that of the rich. In the world of the poor, we can see the different miserable life between children and adults. In that of the rich, we can observe the different rich people who are benevolent or indifferent. “As for the writer, he is willing to express his hope that the rich should be gentle and contented, and the poor become reconciled”. In brief, the novel illustrates that the miserable life of the poor is insurmountable and inextricable. Charles Dickens also strives to break the shackles on the poor. He gives us the wrong impression that the problem can be resolved if the poor can get the help from the rich with noble minds. In fact, the problem is so complicated that it cannot be solved unless the crux of the problem, that is, the lower class often fail to meet their hierarchical needs due to personal and external factors are taken heed of.

By creating typical characters in typical settings, Dickens, one of the greatest novelists, provides us and later generations with a mirror through which we can have a glimpse of social realities during Victorian reign in the UK.

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