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Schooling as an Oppressive Mechanism in *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace
Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler

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İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı
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SUMMARY

The Victorian era (1837-1901) was a period in which significant transformations took place in various fields such as culture, education, and working conditions. This period also saw key educational reforms, leading to notable changes at schools and overall approach to learning. The Victorian education system reflected and maintained the social norms and class stratifications of the time. In society, education was seen not only as a path to personal development but also as a mechanism to maintain societal order and class distinctions. Public schools played a crucial role in maintaining aristocratic values and the unequal distribution of power, integrating new wealthy classes into higher societal strata. The role of family in educational process was significant, particularly among wealthy families, where education was viewed as a means to preserve high social status. However, this study suggests that this emphasis on education also led to oppressive school experiences. Furthermore, schooling which is often regarded as a means of development and advancement could also function as a means of oppression, especially for marginalized individuals. The selected literary works in this study, William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, illustrate how education in this era could be used as a tool of societal oppression. The function of schools in shaping individuals' lifestyles and personalities, and the influence of social expectations and family pressures on students' experiences can be considered oppressive aspects of the Victorian education system. Thus, this thesis focuses on the oppressive elements within educational settings, including the behaviours of educators, school administrators, and the overall schooling system. It acknowledges that while education was a sign of privilege and discipline, aiming to elevate social standing, it also had a negative impact on children's personal freedom and development. In this respect, the research provides a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted role of education and schools in the Victorian period. The study also emphasizes the complex and systematic nature of this oppression at schools examining the educational experiences of the characters in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*.

Keywords: education, schooling, public schools, oppression, Victorian period, *Vanity Fair*, *The Way of All Flesh*

ÖZET

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY'NİN *GURUR DÜNYASI* VE SAMUEL BUTLER'İN *TÜM İNSANLAR GİBİ* ADLI ESERLERİNDE BASKICI BİR MEKANİZMA OLARAK EĞİTİM

Viktorya dönemi (1837-1901) kültür, eğitim ve çalışma koşulları gibi çeşitli alanlarda önemli dönüşümlerin yaşandığı bir dönemdir. Bu dönem aynı zamanda, okullarda ve öğrenme yaklaşımında önemli değişikliklere yol açan temel eğitim reformlarının da ortaya çıktığı bir dönemdir. Viktorya dönemi eğitim sistemi, dönemin toplumsal normlarını ve sınıf ayrımlarını yansıtmış ve sürdürmüştür. Bu dönemde eğitim, kişisel gelişimin yanı sıra toplumsal düzeni ve sınıf ayrımlarını koruma mekanizması olarak da görülmüştür. Özel okullar, aristokratik değerleri, güç ve servetin eşitsiz dağılımını sürdürmede önemli bir rol oynayarak yeni zengin sınıfları toplumun daha yüksek katmanlarına entegre etmeyi amaç edinmiştir. Ailenin eğitim süreçlerindeki rolü, özellikle eğitimin yüksek sosyal statüyü koruma aracı olarak görüldüğü varlıklı aileler arasında oldukça önemlidir. Ancak bu çalışma, eğitime yapılan bu vurgunun aynı zamanda baskıcı okul deneyimlerine de yol açtığını öne sürmektedir. Ayrıca, çoğu zaman bir gelişme ve ilerleme aracı olarak görülen eğitim, özellikle ötekileştirilmiş bireyler için bir baskı aracı olarak da işlev görebilir. William Makepeace Thackeray'nin *Gurur Dünyası* ve Samuel Butler'ın *Tüm İnsanlar Gibi* adlı edebi eserleri, bu çağda eğitimin nasıl toplumsal baskı aracı olarak kullanılabileceğini göstermektedir. Okulların bireylerin yaşam tarzlarını ve kişiliklerini şekillendirmedeki işlevi ve sosyal beklentilerin ve aile baskılarının öğrencilerin deneyimleri üzerindeki etkisi, Viktorya dönemi eğitim sisteminin baskıcı yönleri olarak değerlendirilebilir. Bu çalışma ailelerin, akranların, eğitimcilerin, okul yöneticilerinin davranışları ve genel olarak eğitim sisteminin kendisi de dahil olmak üzere, eğitim ortamlarındaki baskıcı unsurlara odaklanmaktadır. Bu dönemde okullarda verilen eğitim, lüks ve disiplin simgesi olarak kabul edilirken, aynı zamanda öğrencilerin kişisel özgürlüğü ve gelişimi üzerinde olumsuz bir etkiye sahiptir. Bu yönüyle araştırma, Viktorya döneminde eğitim ve okulların çok yönlü rolü doğrultusunda detaylı bir analiz sunmaktadır. Bu araştırma aynı zamanda okullardaki bu baskının karmaşık ve sistematik doğasını, William Makepeace Thackeray'nin *Gurur Dünyası* ve Samuel Butler'ın *Tüm İnsanlar Gibi* adlı romanlarındaki karakterlerin deneyimleri üzerinden inceleyerek vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: eğitim, okul, özel okullar, baskı, Viktorya dönemi, *Gurur Dünyası*, *Tüm İnsanlar Gibi*

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INTRODUCTION

Education and the importance of formal schooling were crucial to the Victorian Era as a means of establishing a set of societal ideals. Education is one of the foremost means that can be used for internalising specific roles determined by others. However, some educational practises implemented in nineteenth century England and their criticism are also apparent in various literary works. For instance, Charles Dickens in *Bleak House* (1852), William Makepeace Thackeray in *The Irish Sketchbook* (1879), *Pendennis* (1848) and *Adventures of Philip* (1861), Benjamin Disraeli in his novel *Coningsby or the New Generation* (1844) and Charles Reade in his *Hard Cash* (1863) depicted different aspects of school life and touched upon subjects such as tyranny, humiliation, brutality, and class discrimination among students at public schools of the era. John Reed (1974: 60-61) claims that discipline problems, sexual discrimination, uncomfortable conditions at schools due to bullying and the education system, and the attitudes of school managers and families could be considered among the reasons for resistance to schooling. Aristocratic and typically wealthy families in this era exerted intense oppression over their children to maintain control, primarily by enrolling them in educational institutions. Moreover, the imposition of specific roles in choosing a profession or spouse can be viewed as another method employed by these aristocratic families within social systems.

It would be appropriate at this point to begin with describing the fundamental differences between education and schooling, even though these two concepts might be used interchangeably. Schooling is the first stage of a formal education, whereas education incorporates both official and informal learning environments. Ken Osborne (2009: 22) defines education as a comprehensive and general concept that includes the learning of critical skills which are considered to be crucial in a particular community. These skills can be imparted via many means, including formal educational institutions as well as non-traditional settings. Therefore, it is important to note that the notion of 'education' is distinct from and has a broader scope than the concept of 'schooling', despite the frequent conflation and interchangeable usage of both terms. Clara R. Jorgensen and Julie Allan (2020: 509) define schooling as "a formalised and institutional process taking place within a particular setting and which is situated within a local, national and time context". Robert Serpell and Giyoo Hatano (1997: 341) focus on the structure of schooling declaring that it is structured in a hierarchical manner in numerous modern societies. It typically begins with a primary or elementary curriculum that aims to provide students with fundamental literacy skills. This is then followed by a secondary or high school curriculum, which aims to expand upon the foundational knowledge while exposing

students to diverse areas of cultural knowledge, including the natural sciences, artistic and philosophical literature, history, and social or civic studies. On the other hand, education has become a theoretical framework for strategically managing the progression of human development in accordance with the economic objectives and cultural principles of a particular society. Serpell and Hatano (1997: 341) also declare that education in the modern period is commonly seen as an ongoing procedure consisting of two main stages. The first stage involves the initial development of fundamental literacy abilities, which are then used by individuals in a secondary or foundational high school curriculum that will develop these skills further. The second stage involves the acquisition of advanced cultural knowledge and comprehension (Serpel and Hatano, 1997: 341). To explain briefly, schools may be seen as physical institutions, but education encompasses a broader concept that covers both a process and a conceptual framework. Schooling is the first stage of formal education, although education as a whole includes both formal and informal ways of gaining knowledge. Education is a broad concept that incorporates all these different ways of learning. Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, in this thesis, the term “education” will be used to refer to learning in different ways, including both family and social environments, whereas the term “schooling” will be used to refer only to the learning environments that the characters experience while they are in the school setting.

Education is a prevalent and recurring motif within the context of Victorian fiction. Moreover, the significance of education in shaping one’s character also emerges as a key thematic element of Victorian writings. In numerous literary works, the protagonist is depicted as an individual who has had a certain form of education, which significantly influences their personality and aptitude for manoeuvring through numerous circumstances both favourably and unfavourably. The impact of education on an individual’s life can be either beneficial or detrimental. This matter has been discussed over in literary works such as *Bleak House* by Dickens, *The Irish Sketchbook*, *Pendennis* and *Adventures of Philip* by Thackeray and *Coningsby or the New Generation* by Disraeli. Paying for education at schools during the Victorian era was a luxurious and costly circumstance. The schools during that era are famous for their strict education. Graduates from these institutions are presumed to obtain a highly comprehensive education and ascend the social hierarchy. However, the works analysed in this thesis, *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler present a different perspective. Although there is a general tendency to see educational experience as a crucial factor in shaping an individual’s character, these literary works portray a picture where students face challenges that prevent them from achieving their goals since their

independence is restricted. This limitation also affects the careers they choose, preventing them from pursuing their own passions and from becoming who they really are. Therefore, instead of presenting unique characteristics, people may discover that they are adopting unfavourable traits that are more typical of the general population. In fact, schooling does not elevate them; rather, it results in a more unacceptable condition. This condition may show up as following societal norms over one's own uniqueness which may restrict the development of one's own qualities and prevent personal progress and satisfaction. To illustrate from a representative novel of the era, in the novel *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens, the central character Pip undergoes an educational experience facilitated by his supporter, Miss Havisham. This process significantly influences Pip's comprehension of the surrounding world and his own position within it. For instance, thanks to his encounters with Miss Havisham and Estella, her ward, Pip learns about etiquette, social norms, and the concept of "courtesy". As a result of this experience, Pip is driven to better himself and strive for a higher social position. On the other hand, the negative consequences of this educational experience become clear as Pip experiences a growing sense of dissatisfaction with his modest beginnings and a sense of shame for his ordinary ancestry. Because of his ambition to rise in society, he develops feelings of shame and inferiority. As can be observed in this example, educational experiences may not only enhance the individual's life but may also have reverse effects on it.

Additionally, education has been employed as an instrument to examine the existing class stratification in Victorian society. Numerous literary works depict a scenario wherein education is seen as a privilege reserved for the highest layers of society, while the lower strata are systematically deprived of such opportunities. In Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times* (1854), the lower-class individuals depicted in the narrative are systematically deprived of educational opportunities and compelled to struggle within the boundaries of industrial settings. In addition, education is employed within Victorian novels as a means to provide commentary on the prevailing societal conditions of that era. Education is frequently shown in several books like *Pelham* (1828), *Pendennis*, (1848), *David Copperfield* (1849), *Bleak House* (1852) as a mechanism for social advancement, enabling individuals to transcend their modest origins and attain prosperity within the societal framework (Reed, 1974: 61). In the Victorian period, the image of schools was highly valuable in the eyes of families, offering high-standard, strict and disciplined education opportunities to students (Allen, 1982: 90). However, at schools, students experienced various problems like limited opportunities for personal development, social pressure and bullying, strict discipline and corporal punishments, class distinctions, limited curriculum and oppressive headmasters and educators (Reed, 1974: 60). Considering these

diversities, the purpose of this study is to examine the oppressive side of education, specifically schooling that is imposed on students and to scrutinise the opposition to schooling and its detrimental impacts on individuals by analysing the lives of the main characters in two prominent literary works that portray the time period at issue, *Vanity Fair* (1848) by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) by Samuel Butler.

In this study, schooling in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, namely Victorian period, and the impacts of this education on individuals will be questioned. Additionally, the role of parents who use their power to ensure the uttermost standards of education by paying money for their children's schooling will also be a part of the discussion. This study aims to analyse how public-school education affected the lives of the main characters of *Vanity Fair* (1848) by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) by Samuel Butler. In both novels, the main characters experience similar oppressions and restraints, and they have similar families in terms of having oppressive characteristics. Therefore, how education is used as a means of oppression to dominate the preferences of individuals will be brought into questioning. This study is not an Althusserian reading of selected literary works. Louis Althusser (2006), in his theory of ideological state apparatus, claims that a state has repressive state apparatuses such as the army, the police, the courts, the prisons, etc., which function by violence or repression, and ideological state apparatuses such as churches, schools, political parties, the press, radio and television, literature, the arts, sports, etc., which function by ideology. In this study the main focus is on the oppressive side of schools caused by different factors such as school system, educators and headmasters, family, social class, peers, etc. The schools in the novels are not state-run educational programmes; rather, they represent the characteristics of a particular group. While the main analysis of the books examined in this thesis seems appropriate for an Althusserian interpretation, this approach creates a digression from the subject.

This thesis consists of an introduction section, three chapters, and a conclusion section. Initially, in the introduction part, the complex role of education and schooling in the Victorian era has been illustrated, considering both its societal value and its potential for oppression by distinguishing between 'education' and 'schooling'. Then, the hierarchical structure of schooling and the role of education in the Victorian era as a privileged and a strict discipline, with graduates expected to ascend the social hierarchy have been discussed in the first part of the introduction. Additionally, the subject of education as a tool for class stratification in Victorian society has been examined.

The first chapter of the study provides a comprehensive overview of the educational landscape during the Victorian era in England. The chapter is structured to discuss various forms of schooling and the evolving nature of education during this period, with a specific focus on how these factors influenced social norms and personal development of individuals. The chapter also highlights the differing perspectives on schooling in the nineteenth century, especially regarding the education of boys and girls. It notes how social class, power, and public opinion influenced school rules and morals. Further, the pivotal role of public schools in the “mid-Victorian compromise”, a concept promoting harmony and integration across social classes has been introduced by drawing upon the other forms of education such as apprenticeships and parish workhouses. The analysis also covers the rise of Ragged Schools, aimed at teaching the poor to read the Bible. Additionally, it touches upon the role of religious institutions in education, with church schools emerging as significant players. The latter part of this chapter critically examines the oppressive nature of the educational system, arguing that formal education could also function as a means of oppression, particularly for marginalized communities.

The second chapter presents William Makepeace Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* as a critical examination of the Victorian education system, portraying it as a tool of social oppression. The novel highlights how education, influenced by societal norms and values, can limit personal growth, and perpetuate class-based inequalities. For this purpose, Becky Sharp’s experiences in the novel exemplified the struggle against these oppressive educational norms, showcasing her desire for autonomy and resistance to societal expectations. The first part of chapter two delves into the theme of schooling as an oppression through social status. This section explores how the educational system in Victorian England perpetuated class inequalities and constrained individual freedom. The schooling experience of characters like Becky Sharp and William Dobbin reveals the oppression through social status, showing how education in this era was intertwined with class structure, limiting personal growth, and perpetuating societal inequalities. The second section of this chapter examines how schools, particularly those of the Arnoldian type in the nineteenth century, can become instruments of oppression through peer influence. Bullying, social hierarchies, and the acceptance of violence and discrimination as normal parts of the school experience demonstrate the systemic oppression faced by the students. This aspect of oppression at schools is explored through the experiences of characters such as William Dobbin and Cuff at Dr. Swishtail’s School. The last section of the same chapter demonstrates the oppressive nature of the Victorian education system, particularly focusing on the experiences of the main characters, Rebecca Sharp (Becky) and Amelia Sedley, at Miss

Barbara Pinkerton's girls' school. The societal expectations, strict disciplinary measures, and the authoritative role of school administrators contribute to an environment that stifles individuality and personal growth. The lasting psychological impact and the resistance against these oppressive norms have been discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The third chapter of this study analyses the role of schooling as an oppressive mechanism in *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler through the experiences of the protagonist, Ernest Pontifex, and his father, Theobald Pontifex. Butler uses the semi-autobiographical narrative to explore the impact of familial expectations, authoritarian parenting, and rigid educational systems on the development of individual identity. Reflecting the ideological challenges of the Victorian era, particularly in the realm of education and family dynamics, Ernest's story serves as a commentary on the restrictive and damaging effects of these oppressive systems on personal growth and self-discovery. The first section of chapter three explores the theme of oppressive parenting and its impact on children. The focus is on the protagonist Ernest Pontifex and his experience under the strict and authoritarian parenting style of his father, Theobald Pontifex. The negative consequences of strict, authoritarian parenting on a child's emotional and psychological development have been discussed. The section two of chapter three explores the complexities of Victorian-era education, particularly focusing on the financial costs of education and how the societal pressures it generates can lead to psychological oppression, affecting familial relationships and individual autonomy. The last section of this chapter delves into the oppressive dynamics within Victorian-era educational institutions, focusing on the role of bullying, the influence of school management and teaching methods, and the overall structure of the schooling system. It highlights the detrimental effects of bullying, the authoritative and rigid management of schools, and the inflexibility of the schooling system, all contributing to a repressive and harmful educational environment.

The thesis concludes by shedding light on the oppressive nature of the Victorian era's education system, as portrayed in literary works *Vanity Fair* and *The Way of All Flesh*. It critically points out that a combination of bullying, authoritarian, and strict school management, alongside an inflexible educational framework, contributed to creating a harmful and repressive educational climate. Although graduates from public schools were traditionally seen as well-educated and distinguished, possessing a wealth of knowledge in culture, science, and the arts, the thesis uncovers a significant limitation on their freedom to choose their career paths. This limitation was primarily due to the oppressive influences present in both their family lives and school environments, influenced by school authorities, teachers, and peers, ultimately restricting their choices, and hindering personal growth.

CHAPTER ONE

SCHOOLING IN NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITAIN

During the Victorian era, different kinds of schools were built. At first, religious and charity organisations conducted education without an integrated structure. It is possible to begin describing the nineteenth century educational scene with the establishment of church schools and the Lancaster system. The Church of England and other non-conformist groups set up schools to teach children the basics. In 1846, trained educators replaced the Lancaster method, which relied on students teaching one another (Lukáčová, 2016: 61). Ragged Schools were a well-known type that emerged out of Sunday Schools, where children learned to read (Picard, 2009: 1). Sunday schools offered a fundamental religious education influenced by the late eighteenth-century focus on salvation through faith, which was greatly influenced by Methodism. They also taught some non-religious subjects in addition to basic reading and writing (Snell, 1999: 129). The main goal of these schools was to teach poor people how to read and write so that they could read the Bible since there were not many books available (Picard, 2009: 1). Along with Ragged Schools, apprenticeship was another form of education common to Victorian England. A master trains an apprentice in the ways of their trade in exchange for the trainee's work or service (Myers, 1924: 1214). Children who were not eligible for apprenticeships could attend one of many parish schools that were a component of the parish workhouse system. Felix Driver (1989: 284) states that helping homeless individuals and supporting their independence were two goals of the workhouse system.

The education of children was mostly the responsibility of the family in the early Victorian period. Wealthy parents enrolled their children in private schools, prioritising boys. In this era, despite the lack of a unified organisational framework in education, public schools had a significant impact on defining Victorian society. Edward A. Allen (1982: 87) expresses that these schools promoted the “mid-Victorian compromise” which attempted to achieve peace and harmony. Public schools were seen as playing a crucial role in shaping the identity of “English gentlemen” throughout the Victorian era (Allen, 1982: 87). They rapidly gained popularity and became popular choices due to their exclusive nature despite their high cost. In public schools, “Muscular Christianity” became popular which was a new style of teaching combined organised sports, religious studies, and ancient books to help students grow in all areas, including their minds, bodies, and morals (Stanworth, 1980: 55). Thomas Arnold was regarded as the pioneer of this new paradigm in the field of education by placing equal emphasis

on the development of personalities and intellectual skills. Public schools, served as a symbol of social prestige being both elite and expensive (Stanley, 1844: 397). However, among the other type of schools, they were regarded as the best alternative.

Additionally, girls' private schools were the only way for Victorian-era women to receive an education. These women-owned, commercial schools provided basic education in arithmetic, reading, writing, geography, history, needlework, and religion in addition to other subjects. Compared to men, women's education was considered as less significant among the upper class. However, modern curricula were offered by private and specialised schools in response to the growing demand for education (Pedersen, 1979: 64). An important turning point was the Education Act of 1870, which established primary schools governed by elected boards, required attendance for children aged five to thirteen, and placed a strong emphasis on basic education for everyone (Middleton, 1970: 169). By addressing the educational gap and establishing the foundation for a more equal and wide-ranging education system in the United Kingdom, this law demonstrated the government's commitment to education.

There are numerous points of view on schooling in England in the nineteenth century. Also, the education of boys and girls in the Victorian era is another literary subject which reveals how social class, power, and friend groups and public opinion affected school rules and morals in different ways. Taking these considerations into account, the objective of this thesis is to analyse the limitations imposed on young people by oppressive authorities in their schools and homes. By analysing the characters in two Victorian-era novels, *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler, it will be argued that children's agency was restricted while making free career decisions.

1.1. Schooling in the Victorian Era

The Victorian Era, named after Queen Victoria, who was the monarch of the United Kingdom from 1837 to 1901, was a period of significant social, economic, and political changes, and education was one of the fields that had substantial growth during this time. In the early Victorian era, individual families were mostly in charge of their children's education, and it was often only available to wealthy individuals. Throughout the majority of the nineteenth century, education was a relatively costly commodity that had to be acquired on a competitive market (Gardner, 2004: 353). The wealthy individuals who were already prosperous were not hurt by this because they had long-standing ties to well-known public schools for boys' classical education and to a huge number of home tutors for girls. In this context, the first "public" schools were founded, mainly for the boys of the aristocratic classes. These institutions, like

Eton and Harrow, were created to help pupils become ready for college (Allen, 1982: 90). However, they were extremely expensive and out of reach for the vast majority of people. Jane Hamlett (2019: 80) demonstrates the importance of public schools in the Victorian period and sorts out the great public schools that are accessible to the wealthy as follows:

Public schools have long been recognized as a significant force in modern British history, not least because they shaped the characters of the men who went on to govern the nation and produce the nineteenth century state. The nine great public schools alone—Eton, Harrow, Winchester, Charterhouse, St. Paul's, Westminster, Shrewsbury, Merchant Taylors', and Rugby—turned out hundreds of young men every year who then went off to university, government, and empire.

As seen in the above explanation, public schools had a significant impact in British history, and Hamlett (2019: 80) emphasises its crucial role in not only imparting education but also developing the future leaders and influences of British society. These mentioned schools established a long-lasting influence on the personal characteristics, educational pursuits, and professional paths of their students enrolled, hence playing a crucial part in the advancement of the British society during the nineteenth century.

Public schools were the most elite and expensive educational institutions in the United Kingdom. In the nineteenth century, there was a sudden explosion of new foundations, reflecting the ambitions of the middle classes to the status symbols of the gentry and aristocracy. They promoted the value of good sportsmanship and a kind of Christianity that would eventually come to be known as "Muscular Christianity". Philip Stanworth (1980: 55) defined this term as: "the combination of institutionalized sport, chapel, and the classics- so aptly dubbed 'Muscular Christianity' – that gave such distinct character to English public- school education". Seen through this lens, "Muscular Christianity" was the incorporation of organised sports, religious studies, and the study of classical texts into the curriculum of English public schools. This particular mix of components was thought to be unique and helped pupils grow holistically, resulting in people who were not only intellectually well-educated but also physically and morally stable.

It may be helpful at this point to describe the role of public schools in the nineteenth century. Edward A. Allen (1982: 87) emphasizes that the establishment of public schools had a pivotal role in shaping Victorian society. These institutions were crucial in formulating the "mid-Victorian compromise" which promoted a sense of harmony, balance, and accommodation throughout the mid-nineteenth century (Allen, 1982: 87). The significance of public schools rests in their role of facilitating the integration of individuals from established descendants with those from emerging middle-class backgrounds. This process of assimilation fosters a social combination that effectively unifies formerly distinct governing groups, thus

strengthening social unity. Furthermore, the integration in discussion revealed itself as an exclusive archetype known as the “Christian Gentleman” which emerged as a consequence of a comprehensive cultivation of moral values and virtues. J. R. Darling (1931) explains the impact of religion on public schools stating that the central point of the issue was religious, as it should be for all issues throughout that period. Public schools were also established as religious institutions. Darling (1931: 29) points out how crucial the role of religion on being a headmaster of a public school as follows: “It is not possible to be headmaster of a public school unless one is strongly convinced of the importance of religion in education and even of the value of the forms of religion as practised in churches”. Additionally, social amalgamation process in public schools of the Victorian period in order to create an elite type of “gentleman” is expressed by Allen (1982: 87-88). In the first stage of this procedure, the educational institutions largely appealed to those who belonged to the aristocratic, landed, and skilled occupational groups. After that, the individuals referred to as the “offspring of influential figures in the business sector” were, similar to the previous generations of young men, they assimilated with individuals with various backgrounds, resulting in an expanded understanding of the notion of a refined and respectable man.

During the nineteenth century, there was an increasing need for educational institutions that catered to the education of not only the privileged sons of the upper classes but also the affluent members of the middle classes. The nine prominent public schools experienced significant growth, while several additional institutions were founded based on the public-school framework. These include Cheltenham, Marlborough, Rossall, and Wellington. Public schools were in charge of educating the notable individuals of their time who went on to have major impacts on history (Hamlett, 2019: 83). At this point, Thomas Arnold is regarded as a significant figure of education in England in the nineteenth century. He served as the headmaster of famous Rugby School, one of the greatest schools in England at that time and gained recognition for his significant contributions in revolutionising the traditional education system. Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1844: 397) explains the educational strategy he employed as prioritising the development of his students’ cognitive abilities alongside the elimination of negative behaviours. Public schools were the most “he would change the plan of education all through the public schools of England” (397). His contributions at Rugby School made a significant influence on the educational framework in England, placing much emphasis on the cultivation of character in conjunction with the acquisition of intellectual knowledge.

There were an increasing number of private and specialised schools and colleges to choose from. Many of them offered more modern curriculum with a focus on technology or

science. This was very desirable, and the school payments did not present any problems for new industrial wealthy individuals. However, obtaining an education has generally been extremely challenging for most people, especially those whose schooling needs were met by the government by 1870 (Gardner, 2004: 353). On the other hand, the need for a highly educated workforce became evident as the population grew and the Industrial Revolution increased the number of manufacturing positions. Children between the ages of five and thirteen were required to attend school when the government approved the Education Act in 1870. The significance of this law, also known as Forster's Education Act, is emphasised by Nigel Middleton (1970: 169), claiming that it was the first time that the government got involved in education. The government set up a system of basic schools run by elected school boards. It developed an elementary school system with elected school boards in charge. The schools were to offer a fundamental education in reading, writing, and mathematics to all pupils, regardless of their financial position. This development represents a significant change in education policy since it makes attending school obligatory for a certain age group. This significant development is of vital importance as it signifies the government assuming responsibility for the educational system, which had previously been predominately private. The law regulated the creation of a primary school system, indicating that it aimed to provide children with a foundational education (Middleton, 1970: 169). The dedication to providing education for all individuals was a notable advancement. In conjunction with this legislative measure, the government additionally created elected school boards to assume the responsibility of overseeing the procedure mentioned above. Middleton (1970) asserts that the legislation established the groundwork for a British education system that is characterised by greater diversity and accessibility.

In the United Kingdom, education underwent significant upheaval throughout the Victorian era. The government's implementation of compulsory attendance policies for elementary and secondary schools ensured that all pupils had the opportunity to get a fundamental education. The establishment of an inspection system made it possible to ensure that educational standards were identical across the country. Towards the end of the Victorian era, the government started opening secondary schools to students from all social strata (Gardner, 2004: 120). Children who could not afford to attend the overpriced public schools were supposed to receive a secondary education at these so-called "board schools". On the other hand, a significant educational gap emerged between England, the United States and Germany throughout the Victorian Era. This gap shows that compared to other industrialised countries, England's educational system falls behind. Sanford Radner (1957: 14) focuses on two major

problems in education in late Victorian England: “the provision of technical education on a large scale and the extension of elementary education to the masses of people”. Long (2006: 1028-1029) remarks on the requirement of building up a national public school system in the Victorian period by comparing English, American and German education systems in the nineteenth century, as given below:

The education gap was opening between England on the one hand and the United States and Germany on the other. England was decades behind the United States in the establishment of a national system of primary education, and even further behind in achieving high rates of school attendance and literacy. The gap relative to Germany was greater. Prussia established compulsory education in 1763, more than a century before England. [...] Not until the Education Act of 1870 did England create a system of universal elementary education.

As can be seen in the quotation, the establishment of compulsory schooling in Prussia was in 1763 and from the historical perspective by drawing a comparison between the educational advancements of England, the United States and Germany, one can conclude the delayed adoption of comparable policies in England. Therefore, the subject of schooling was of significant concern to the policymakers of the Victorian era. In order to establish a nationwide public school system, it was imperative to develop a comprehensive and well-structured primary education framework with government support. Before the Education Act in 1870, school attendance in England was entirely optional. Elementary education was made available to those who desired it through a combination of private initiatives, limited government support, religious institutions, and various forms of philanthropy (Middleton, 1970: 169). England was unable to establish a system of universal primary education until the enactment of the Education Act of 1870 (Radner, 1957: 14). This implies that the establishment of a considerable legislative measure was crucial in order to address the educational disparity and establish a complete system of public schools.

The types of schools that were established during the Victorian Era were defined by Liza Picard (2009: 1). The first of them was Ragged Schools, which were originated in Sunday School, in which the children were only taught to read. Ragged schools were established with the aim of providing literacy education to individuals from impoverished backgrounds, primarily with the intention of enabling them to engage in the act of reading the Bible. Due to the limited availability of books at that time, the Bible served as the primary literary resource, leading to youngsters exclusively engaging with its content. Thom Gehring and Fredalene Bowers (2003: 116), in their article titled “Mary Carpenter: 19th Century English Correctional Education”, demonstrate the role of Mary Carpenter in the development of Ragged Schools and her contribution to English education system. They explain that in 1846, Mary Carpenter took

the initial steps towards establishing her first Ragged School within a building that was rented for the purpose. This educational institution was structured in a manner reminiscent of a Sunday school, and the institution started its activities with an estimated enrolment of around two hundred students. A Ragged School Union, led by Lord Shaftesbury, was established in 1844 when nineteen Ragged Schools grouped together. By 1861, they were instructing more than 40,000 youngsters in London, including those who had been abandoned orphans, drunken stepparents, prisoners, and poor Roman Catholics who did not object to their kids' reading the Bible.

Apprenticeship was another form of education that was available, in addition to Ragged Schools. George E. Myers (1924: 1214) gives a brief definition of the concept as follows: "Apprenticeship is a method of training for an occupation, a method by which one party, already a master of the occupation, imparts to the other its knowledge and skill in return for service or labour." An alternative interpretation of the concept was provided by Liza Picard. In accordance with Picard's explanation (2009: 2), apprenticeship was a program in which a master or mistress of a profession would train a young person for a set period of time, often seven years, so that he could make a career at that skill. The system was used by everyone in society. The prices charged by the parents of eager apprentices generated large profits for wealthy merchants, goldsmiths, and bankers. Krista Cowman (2014: 1) focuses on the application of apprenticeship system in Britain highlighting the mutual agreement between the employers and apprentices. Cowman states that the apprentices were required to complete their term of service, often lasting a minimum of seven years, until they reached the age of 24 (which was later decreased to 21 during the seventeenth century). The obligations placed upon apprentices and their masters or employers were bound by law and defined in a formal agreement known as "indenture". Apprentices were required to fulfil a certain duration of service, during which they resided in the residence of their employer or master and were provided with accommodations and food (Cowman, 2014). In exchange, these children would be given instruction in a useful skill.

The historical progression of apprenticeship can be characterised into three distinct periods as pointed out by K. D. M. Snell (1996: 303). The first phase, sometimes referred to as "guild apprenticeship," continued from the twelfth century to 1563. During this period, the practise of apprenticeship was subject to regulation by guilds, which were professional associations. Additionally, the state had a role in giving support for apprenticeship endeavours. The establishment of guilds entailed the crucial role of establishing and enforcing standards, as well as supervising the apprenticeship training process. The period spanning from 1563 to 1814

is characterised by an increase of statutory apprenticeship. The collapse of guilds was accompanied by the establishment of statutory regulations governing apprenticeship. Employers and trainees entered into apprenticeship agreements and the state was in charge of controlling and enforcing these agreements (Snell, 1996: 306). The third phase, spanning from 1814 to the present day, is distinguished by the adoption of a more voluntary model of apprenticeship. The prevalence of agreements between employers and unions increased, leading to a greater diversity in the forms and practises of apprenticeship (Snell, 1996: 315). According to William Knox (1986: 168), the persistence of apprenticeship in England can be attributed to its economic rationality for both employers and apprentices. Employers found it advantageous to provide thorough training to apprentices in order to benefit from their skilled labour at lower wages. On the other hand, apprentices were motivated to acquire a valuable skill that would secure their future earnings and employment upon completion of their apprenticeship. Knox (1986) claims that the apprenticeship system underwent several transformations during the nineteenth century in Britain. First, apprentices evolved into learner-employees by gaining expertise in various trades. This trend towards specialization required training to be successful in more specialized procedures. Besides, even though people were becoming less skilled and more specialized, both capital and labor became more concerned with how to train and regulate students. These changes caused progressive businesses to offer technical education and set up joint industry committees to create a unified national system of training and rules. To sum up, during this time, trade union influence, changing capital requirements, and changing industry occupational structures all had significant effects on how apprenticeships changed. Both the demand for full-time vocational education and changes in employment had a role in the decline of occupations. Nevertheless, apprenticeship continues to retain its significance as a crucial mode of vocational education in several sectors. While the trend towards de-skilling was prevalent in many industries, there were still sectors where apprenticeship played an important role. Some of the sectors were plumbing in which indentured apprenticeship was extensively used during that period, printing, and shipbuilding (Knox, 1986). These sectors demonstrate that apprenticeship continued to have significance in certain industries.

Besides apprenticeships, during the Victorian era, Parish schools were another type of educational institutions. They were parish workhouses and the intention of these type of schools was to provide education for the children under their supervision who were unable to be placed as apprentices. However, this duty was not consistently fulfilled (Lukáčová, 2016: 61). Driver (1989: 284) investigates the structure and development of the parish workhouse system in

England and Wales over a period of fifty years following its foundation in his article titled “The historical geography of the workhouse system in England and Wales, 1834-1883”. Driver (1989) points out the objectives of this school system and criticism that workhouse system faced over time. He states that poor people in England were given access to a system of charity and aid known as the “workhouse” in 1834. Union workhouses, extensive places that sheltered the homeless and jobless poor in return for labour, were established as part of this movement. The goal of the workhouse system was to help people in need while discouraging dependency and encouraging independence. Local governments were responsible for supervising the system, which was heavily regulated, but the federal government retained considerable authority over its management.

The workhouse system was criticised mainly by the scholars for its failure to respond to the diverse requirements of different kinds of poor people and for its bad reputation since it was associated with bureaucratic rules and regulations. The system changed throughout time as a result of policy modifications and the construction of distinct facilities for various poor groups. M. A. Crawther (2016: 55) explains the system of parish workhouses in a historical context. Crawther (2016) states that the workhouse system was a social institution in England that was functional from 1834 until 1929. The policy of help to the impoverished was instituted by the legislation of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The primary objective of the approach was to deal with societal problems that are primarily influenced by environmental causes, as opposed to individual elements. This approach was perceived by the society as a means to both rehabilitate and discipline, relieve, and stigmatise those who were physically capable but poor. The workhouse was regarded with significant concern as a permanent residence for the elderly, those with serious illnesses, and youngsters without familial support. Although temporary residents saw a gradual improvement in their living situations, these vulnerable groups suffered more harm when they were linked to the stigma of poverty and the hardships of institutional life. In general, the workhouse system in nineteenth century England was considered a complicated and contradictory strategy for resolving social problems and poverty.

In the nineteenth century, church schools emerged as an additional educational institution. These schools were established by both the Church of England and the non-conformist movement, providing primary education. The Lancaster system, which was used at these educational institutions was organised and appeared to be effective on the surface but was prone to errors. In this method, the student with the highest level of competence, instructs a group of classmates on what he has learned, who in turn transmit the knowledge to others, and so on. In 1846, the method was replaced by fully qualified teachers. Universities were

established for teacher education, giving their graduates access to positions as qualified, competent educators (Lukáčová, 2016: 61). The Jews Free School in London's East End first opened its doors as an alternative school to Christian schools. The establishment of the Jewish school in London occurred in the year 1817. In the year 1822, the school had a total enrolment of 600 students. It provided Jewish boys and half as many Jewish girls with "a religious, moral, and practical education". It was often referred to as the "Monster School" and was renowned for its provision of education to underprivileged children. The term was derived from the substantial student population, which numbered approximately 1,000 individuals. Moses Angel, a bright polymath with a flair for teaching, served as its leader from 1842 until 1897 (Picard, 2009: 2).

Salmond S. Levin (1955: 104) expresses the requirement of opening a religious school considering the Jews in England and asserts that: "The Jews' Free School, a charitable establishment, was founded in the year 1812 in London, England by Solomon Hirschell, who was the Chief Rabbi of the Great Synagogue in London at the time." The establishment of this educational institution was motivated by the objective of offering free education to Jewish children, as a direct response to the endeavours of Christian missionaries aimed at converting Jewish students. The establishment of schools by missionaries specifically aimed at Jewish children has generated apprehension among the Jewish community over the preservation of their religious and cultural heritage. Hirschell and other members of the Jewish community recognised the need to counteract the impact of the Christian missionary schools and thought that offering a moral education to Jewish students would assist to elevate the Jewish community. The educational institution encountered initial difficulties in persuading parents from economically disadvantaged dwellings to enrol their children, as a significant number of these parents depended on their children's labour and financial contributions to support the family. The Duke of Kent, who was Queen Victoria's father and one of the school's most powerful sponsors, helped the institution acquire popularity and expand over time (Levin, 1955: 113).

During the Victorian Period in England, the administration of education was mostly directed by religious institutions and charitable organisations, resulting in the absence of an integrated educational framework. It is notable to acknowledge that among prosperous groups of people, there was a prevailing preference for boys' education over that of girls. Consequently, young females were often instructed in activities such as sewing, needlework, drawing, and singing, which were seen more suitable for their gender, while their male counterparts received education focused on more intellectually oriented subjects. Joyce Senders

Pedersen (1979: 63) provides an account of the educational experiences of females throughout the Victorian era, focusing specifically on the context of girls' private schools: "Girls' private schools were, as the name suggests, the private property of the women who kept them. Such schools were conducted for personal profit and were totally dependent for their income on student" (Pedersen, 1979: 64). Within such educational institutions, a daughter of a clerk or small tradesman would come together with ten or twenty other similar students to learn basic maths, reading, and writing skills, as well as some geography and history, needlework, and religion. If her parents were willing to pay the additional cost for French instruction, the students would also likely learn a little bit of the language. Therefore, it can be inferred that in comparison to their male counterparts, the upper class held a lower respect for the relevance of education in the context of women. According to Lukáčová (2016: 61-62), women were subjected to various societal expectations after marriage. These expectations included carrying out familial obligations, childbirth, organising social events for their husbands' social circle, and preserving a visually pleasing appearance. If a woman was unable to find a male companion, her foremost objective would be to complete her obligations towards her parents or the children of her siblings. Women would benefit from activities like flower arranging, singing, and playing the piano. They had to work on several occasions, generally in some sort of teaching or caring position. This became no longer appealing to intelligent women. However, their future got better when Queen's College was opened in 1848 on Harley Street in London to give governesses an education that was recognised and valuable. After ten years, Cheltenham Ladies' College was opened. After that, more public schools for girls emerged. Voting demands increased as a result of women's higher academic achievement. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was founded in 1897 and faced strong criticism from the Queen, who, due to her great position of power, unable to comprehend the motivations behind women's desire to vote (Pickard, 2009: 3).

Technical advancements had a profound effect on the social and economic roles of women in nineteenth century England, leading to a divergence in the life experiences of women who were employed and those who were not. Joan N. Burstyn (1980: 30-31) provides a brief overview of women's perspectives, highlighting the significance of these advancements as can be seen in the following quotation:

In cities, where families could no longer provide subsistence for themselves, wages became the sole means of support for most families. Among the lower classes, women, like men, spent most of their day earning money for the family's subsistence. They worked either at home on materials supplied by their employers or in workshop, mill, or factory. By mid-century many women of the lower classes left home each day to earn money. Women of the middle classes, on the other hand, remained at home and became

consumers only. The pressures on middle-class women not to work developed because their families came to measure success by the amount of leisure afforded women members of the family.

As described above, in metropolitan regions, many households were forced to rely on earnings to maintain their standard of living. As a result, women from lower social strata were forced to work alongside males, either at home or in factories. In contrast, middle-class women were discouraged from working since their family's standing was frequently decided by their capacity to offer leisure for women, which made them consumers rather than income workers. This lifestyle emerged as the societal ideal for the entire population. This meant that women in this class were more likely to be seen as consumers than money earners. During the nineteenth century, this shows the shifting dynamics of women's economic roles across a variety of social groups. In the context of schooling, young women expressed an intention to support their own development on several stages. Burstyn (1980) explains young women's desire of education as "faced with an increase in leisure and the need to behave with elegance in order to make the best possible marriage, many young women in the early nineteenth century sought an education in accomplishments not household skills" (Burstyn, 1980: 36). There was more freedom for young women to explore their interests outside of home and pursue their own personal growth during this time compared to earlier periods. Therefore, in terms of education, young women of the era acquired proficiency in several forms of artistic expression, including dancing, piano performance, and the delicate aspects of social etiquette within formal settings to be an ideal woman before marriage.

It would be helpful to examine the literature of the time, as it may provide insights into the general opinions and practices towards schooling and education through that era. The literature of the time shows the reflections of schooling and education in nineteenth century England. The representation of education and public schools in Victorian literature is examined in the article titled "The Public Schools in Victorian Literature" by John Reed (1974: 73). The article examines the concept of innocence and the influence of public schools on the development of boys' character in the nineteenth century. The analysis argues that authors such as Benjamin Disraeli and William Makepeace Thackeray depicted public school life in a nostalgic way, admitting both the appealing factors and antipathy associated with their personal educational encounters. The article also discusses the perspectives of Thomas Arnold and Frederick W. Farrar, who believed that children had a lack of knowledge rather than innate innocence, and that the primary objective of educational institutions is to facilitate their development towards maturity and accountability. However, due to the possibility of unfavourable influences and the absence of effective communication between students and

instructors, public schools were perceived as flawed educational settings. The primary concern addressed in the study is the inherent conflict between sacrificing one's innocence and the essential acquisition of information and guidance in an educational setting. Another focus of the research was the accessibility of education which emerged as a significant topic prompting debates over the advantages and disadvantages of extending educational opportunities to individuals of different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Stone (1969: 70) examines the arguments for granting impoverished people access to education with a particular focus on fundamental literacy. This study is conducted through an examination of the educational framework in England spanning the years 1640 to 1900. Among the reasons given are the necessity of maintaining societal order and stability, the possible financial advantages, the promotion of moderation and austerity, and the advancement of morality. The study also implies that there were arguments against teaching the impoverished, such as the idea that an education could make them unsuitable for physical labour. In addition to the availability of education, the impact of class-based education and its implications for societal dynamics and individual perspectives have been the subject of studies. Kenneth O. Morgan (1988: 544) describes class-oriented education and its manifestations in the context of British history. He claims that the upper middle classes, comprising individuals such as doctors, attorneys, and government servants, had a similar characteristic of having received a formal education at public schools. The practise of enrolling pupils in boarding schools resulted in an expansion of the class's national perspective while simultaneously diminishing their connections to local communities. The educational curriculum for those belonging to the professional classes mostly revolved around the study of Greek, Latin, and ancient history. Additionally, the moral aspect of their education was influenced by the teachings of Broad-Church Anglicanism (Morgan, 1988: 544). The professional courses were characterised by their emphasis on education, recreational activities, and a moralistic perspective, rendering them commendable although rather lacking in vitality (545).

In another study about education in Victorian England, Stanford Radner (1957: 16) suggests that the goal of education may be understood through an analysis of George Meredith's literary works, which reveal an aristocratic perspective on education. According to Radner (1957), this perspective emphasises the formation of people who represent the ideals and principles associated with the concept of a gentleman. Radner also states that Meredith's subsequent works put out the idea of promoting equal educational possibilities for men and women. However, it is argued that his general perception of education remains rooted in an aristocratic viewpoint. Furthermore, throughout the nineteenth century, scholars directed their

attention not just towards boys' education but also towards girls' education. Pedersen (1979: 80-84) focuses on the comparison of private schools and reformed public schools which were opened during the latter part of the nineteenth century for girls, specifically in relation to social class dynamics and the distribution of authority. While public schools were concerned with creating an environment of equality and autonomy where differences were made based on character, knowledge, and capacity rather than socioeconomic status, private institutions were frequently impacted by the social position and expectations of the parents. Additionally, public schools demonstrated the significance of peer group influences and general opinion in maintaining discipline and morality. According to Pedersen (1979: 83), peer pressure and voluntary individual compliance were the main ways that students achieved conformity at public schools as opposed to private institutions, where they were constantly under adult observation. Even if they did not always promote a great deal of personal freedom, the new schools accomplished this by encouraging pupils to rely on themselves more.

One of the primary subjects of debate for this thesis will be the development of "English gentlemen". The role that public schools play in this process has a big impact on it. Edward A. Allen (1982: 90-91) in his article "Public School Elites in Early-Victorian England: The Boys at Harrow and Merchant Taylors' Schools from 1825 to 1850" discusses how public schools play a crucial role in producing "English gentlemen". Allen (1982) examines the function of public schools within Victorian society, questioning the common belief that these institutions played a crucial role in promoting social integration and the formation of a new ruling class. Additionally, he discusses the impact of Thomas Arnold and his reforms, implying that they were intended to promote class dominance as: "The public schools took the sons of the new professional class, assimilated them with the sons of the aristocracy, and produced a generation of synthetic gentlemen who were also largely professionals" (Allen, 1982: 88). Philip Stanworth (1980: 57-58) also discussed public-school education and the Victorian concept of a "gentleman". Stanworth (1980: 46) claims that the industrial bourgeoisie in Britain encountered difficulties in building a recognisable identity and social standing among the upper strata of society. This was due to their reliance on wealth and income which derived predominantly from land ownership and mercantile pursuits, rather than direct involvement in industrial enterprises. These members of industrial aristocracy encountered difficulty in establishing their own self-identity, as they were assimilated into the upper levels of society according to the conditions set out by those who held doubts and even antipathy for industrial initiatives (Stanworth, 1980: 61).

The period between the publication of *Vanity Fair* (1848) by Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* (written between 1873 and 1884 but published posthumously in 1903) by Butler was marked

by significant changes in education as well as in social and political aspects in England. Although there was nearly a forty-year time period between these literary works, they were chosen to analyse different characteristics that they exemplified. For instance, *Vanity Fair* primarily explores the educational experiences of female and male characters without touching upon familial oppression, while *The Way of All Flesh* delves into the social and familial oppression that male characters were exposed to. Furthermore, both novels touch upon the oppressive schooling environments dealing with peer pressure and school administrators' attitudes. Thus, analysing these two literary works offers a more comprehensive insight into both boys' and girls' educational experiences throughout the Victorian era. This section will provide an overview of significant advances throughout this century and their impact on education.

There were many social reform groups in the Victorian era, such as those that fought for women's rights, rules against child labour, and better working conditions. In response to societal demands, these movements influenced educational policies by introducing compulsory education and implementing curriculum reforms (Frost, 2009: 55-56). However, significant gaps persisted in educational access even after efforts made to broaden it. Wealthier children had more exclusive educational options, such as private tutors and boarding schools, while working-class children often received a basic education that focused on basic skills. Moreover, there were gender disparities; girls had fewer educational opportunities than boys. However, educational options expanded, and females sought more economic independence, as the Victorian family dynamic shifted. Lawson and Silver (1973: 306) draw attention to this process by stating that the governess system was the centre of change in the 1850s. In the 1860s, it became an immense activity, and in the 1870s, visible outcomes had been achieved with the Married Women's Property Acts and Matrimonial Causes Acts (341). Besides, in this period, England rapidly became more urbanised and industrialised, which raised the need for schooling as the economy changed from farming to manufacturing. As a result of this, the labour market needed more skilled workers, which led to more technical and vocational education (Hobsbawm, 1999: 115). In response to the demands of an industrialised society, the educational system shifted its focus from classical disciplines to more practical ones. Schools began to train students not just for clerical and professional occupations but also for citizenship, establishing qualities like discipline and punctuality that were believed vital for the modern workplace.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, education went through changes to broaden access and increase its quality. Prior to this period, education was mostly the responsibility of private institutions, charities, churches, and charitable organisations. Increasing worries over social welfare and the necessity for a skilled workforce resulted in expanded government participation in

education. David Cannadine (1990: 244) claims that in the earlier period of this era, public schools like Eton, Harrow, and Rugby became more widespread, mostly serving the upper class. The institutes focused on classical education and moral growth, which maintained social structures and elitism. However, England approved a number of Education Acts in the middle of the nineteenth century to make it easier for people to go to school. The most important was the Education Act of 1870, also called the Forster Act, which created the structure for government-funded primary education for children. This act initiated governmental participation in education and led to higher literacy rates among the working class (Middleton, 1970: 169). The Education Act of 1902 and subsequent legislation encouraged the establishment of secondary schools and increased governmental involvement in the field of education (Stephens, 1998: 77). As a result of these changes, education became more widely available to a broader section of society. Literacy rates improved and education began to be viewed as a right rather than a privilege.

From a social and political standpoint, Simon (1965) expresses the political changes of the era and says that the two major political parties of the time, the Liberals and the Conservatives, had contrasting strategies on education. Both parties agreed on compulsory education but differed on the level of state participation and the mix of public and private services. Liberals supported increased state engagement and expanding educational options, while Conservatives preferred a less state role and highlighted the significance of volunteer and religious organisations in education (Simon, 1965). Furthermore, Darwinism and scientific progress also affected the educational landscape of the era. After Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859, conventional religious beliefs were brought into question, and evolutionary theory was accepted. There was an increasing emphasis on science education and the introduction of evolutionary ideas into educational programmes, though this was met with opposition from religious groups. (Desmond and Moore, 1991). These changes in education and society throughout the Victorian era had a significant impact on the representation and criticism of schooling in literature. In literary works *Vanity Fair* and *The Way of All Flesh*, Thackeray and Butler delved into subjects such as social class, morality, familial connections, and the restrictive aspects of schooling, mirroring the complicated structures of Victorian society.

To sum up, there were several different kinds of schools founded in the Victorian era. One well-known example was the Ragged Schools, which aimed to teach reading to those from low-income families, so they could read the Bible (Picard, 2009: 1). In addition to Ragged Schools, another type of education was apprenticeship. It is described as a process of preparing someone for a job in which an apprentice receives knowledge and expertise from a master in exchange for work or service (Myers, 1924: 1214). Parish schools, which were a component of

the parish workhouse system, provided education for children who could not be apprenticed in addition to apprenticeships. In addition to being viewed as a means of rehabilitating, disciplining, relieving, and stigmatising economically poor people, it attempted to solve societal issues caused by environmental reasons (Driver, 1989: 284). Primary education was also offered throughout the period by non-conformist groups and Church schools founded by the Church of England (Lukáčová, 2016: 61). At first, education was an expensive good. Rich people might send their sons to prestigious public schools and their female students to private tutors. When public schools like Eton and Harrow opened their doors, they catered primarily to boys from the upper classes. Public schools were costly and privileged, status symbols (Gardner, 2004: 353). However, they were seen to be an excellent option in comparison to other kinds of schools.

During the Victorian era, those who completed their education at public schools were renowned for their extensive knowledge, polished manners, and adeptness in both artistic and scientific pursuits (Serpel and Hatano, 1997: 341). In addition, they were recognised for their creative talents. However, these graduates were subjected to tyranny within educational institutions, stemming from several factors including instructors, peers, parents, and school systems itself. Consequently, these graduates were unable to acquire the aforementioned skills after completing their education. Conversely, they encounter and experience challenges in their lives as a result of the greater expectations imposing pressure on them (Joseph and John, 2008: 20). Thus, this thesis examines the circumstances under which young individuals were constrained in their ability to independently select a career path. Specifically, by examining the main characters of two representative literary works of the Victorian era; *Vanity Fair* (1848) by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) by Samuel Butler, it will be argued that these individuals experienced a lack of agency as a result of the oppressive influences they encountered, both within their familial contexts and within the educational environment, including school authorities, instructors, and even their peers.

Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* are recognised as two of the representative literary works of the nineteenth century. The main objective of this thesis is to analyse these prominent literary works that reflect the oppressive conditions that young people encountered inside the Victorian educational system. Researchers have examined these books from different perspectives. The academic works regarding *Vanity Fair* by Thackeray may be classified into distinct categories. The first category may consist of studies that are connected to the character analysis of the work as well as the philosophical topics that can be inferred. For instance, Cemiloglu (2021: 41) analysed selected characters of these two literary works to

identify whether or not certain *Vanity Fair* characters may be viewed as Carlylean heroes, as well as whether or not the protagonist of *The Way of All Flesh* can be viewed as a Nietzschean *Übermensch*. In another study, Yang and Zhong (2022: 2260) conduct an analysis of Thackeray's portrayal of commodified interpersonal interactions in the novel, with a particular focus on the character Becky. The researchers go into the examination of the position of women in *Vanity Fair*. In this thesis Becky Sharp's educational experiences as an oppressive mechanism in her life will be studied. Yang and Zhong (2022) assert that the novel's depiction of commodified relationships is shaped by Becky's belief in commodities as a way to climb the social ladder and her ability to use interpersonal connections for her own benefit, both of which stem from her upbringing and her educational background. In addition, Becky's view of friendship is shaped by her background and the things she learned at school. Amelia Sedley is the one person Becky honestly treats out of all the people she meets while trying to move up on the social ladder.

In his work, Jasim (2018: 13) examines the theme of social mobility and class stratification as shown in *Vanity Fair*, using comparisons to two other novels from the mid-nineteenth century; *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. The study provides perspective on the depiction and critique of societal transformations and social inequalities by Victorian authors during this period. Newberry (2017: 157-158) analyses the overeating body as an alternate depiction of hunger, which has typically been addressed by the Victorian body by closely interacting with Jos Sedley, a character created by William Thackeray for *Vanity Fair*. Jos Sedley represents the archetype of the "English gentleman" that Victorian public schools attempted to educate. Jos Sedley's role as an overeating figure in *Vanity Fair* reflects the ideal English gentleman the other way around, since his excessive consumption in food and other pleasures fits the stereotype of the spoiled, self-centred aristocracy.

In another study including character representation, Bolchi (2015: 165) analyses the female characters of *Vanity Fair* from a meta-phonological point of view and their representation in the book to imply how the speech acts of the female characters in the book illuminate their place in the story and how these characters view society. Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley are two of the book's major female protagonists, from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In this thesis, their perception of education is going to be examined. Hagan (1975: 480) discusses the attitude of Thackeray towards his most notable character, Becky (Rebecca) Sharp, in the article titled *Vanity Fair: Becky Brought to Book Again*. Hagan (1975), by giving

place to various contrary views of critics on this issue, demonstrates the sympathy of the author towards the main character by analysing her.

The second category of academic works regarding *Vanity Fair* might be sorted in terms of symbolism and analysis of the names in the literary work. In his analysis, Segar (2021: 25-26) uses an analytical approach to suggest that the novel lacks a conventional hero. Segar (2021) examines William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* and how the novel depicts heroism. Despite the lack of a typical hero in *Vanity Fair*, the study finds that the novel's principal characters demonstrate varying degrees of heroism. The research delves into the contrasting paths taken by Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp, revealing insight on the numerous aspects of their personalities beyond a black-and-white morality issue. Manova-Georgieva (2020: 54) examines the relevance of names and their symbolism in the novel *Vanity Fair*, demonstrating how the names of the characters relate to their characteristics and the symbolism that exists in the story. These literary studies present a comprehensive examination of *Vanity Fair*, including many aspects such as character development societal criticism, symbolic imagery, and the opinions of the author. Different from the mentioned studies, this research can provide valuable perspectives into the ways in which the book serves as a reflection of the socioeconomic and educational landscapes of the Victorian era, as well as the oppressive powers that shape the experiences of its protagonists.

The Way of All Flesh by Samuel Butler, written about the same time as William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, has also been examined from a number of different perspectives. Samuel Butler's ideas on education and academicism are clarified by Cavenagh (1922: 311) in his article "Samuel Butler and Education". In the article, Butler's remarks on the value of learning by doing rather than learning how to do something and his consistent objection to the classical way of teaching and learning activities at universities and schools are emphasized. According to Cavenagh (1922), academic learning methods that include regulations and restrictions are less valuable than apprenticeship, or learning by real performance, as suggested by Butler. In the article, Butler's advice for "the treatment of a lazy boy" is described and the apprenticeship system is thought to be more fruitful. This research offers significant insights into Butler's educational theory and its relationship with the Victorian schooling system. This claim reinforces the examination of oppressive educational practises as presented in this thesis. Apprenticeships are presented as the foremost part of the education system in Butler's ideas on education. Moreover, Epstein (1969) touches upon the familiarities between the book and the works of James Joyce, namely *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. He argues that Joyce's introduction to *The Way of All Flesh* and its

protagonist Ernest Pontifex might have had an effect on his later works, like how he wrote about schooling and rebellion in figures like Stephen Dedalus in *The Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*.

Additionally, Carter (1976) presents an in-depth analysis of Butler's literary work, which serves as the central focus for his critical examination of Victorian society. He asserts that the story in the novel appears to be an examination of society, and the main character, Ernest Pontifex, is demonstrated to be affected and ruled by those who are in power in society. It puts forth the central argument that individuals must be liberated from the constraints imposed by social determinism. Carter's study is consistent with the central theme of this thesis, which examines the oppressive nature of the Victorian schooling system and its effects on many individuals, especially Ernest. Furthermore, Marshall (1963: 583) focuses on the dual function of the narrator of the story, Edward Overton, suggesting that Samuel Butler effectively incorporates both objective and subjective perspectives in his novel *The Way of All Flesh* through using a narrator who recounts the experiences of the protagonist, Ernest Pontifex. Although this research may not have a clear correlation with educational features, it is helpful in examining the manner in which the book uses narrative strategies to depict the oppressive characteristics of Victorian society. Lastly, Rita Yeasted (1979: 23) examines Butler's portrayal of the "Handelian quality" in *The Way of All Flesh*. Yeasted argues that Butler extensively incorporated references to Handel and musical notation in his published works and notebooks. She contends that comprehending Butler's utilisation of the musical metaphor in *The Way of All Flesh* is essential for grasping the novel's essence and its protagonist, Ernest Pontifex. This understanding elucidates Pontifex's evaluations, biases, modest accomplishments, and his ultimate inability to embody Butler's conception of the "ideal man". This research presents a distinctive viewpoint on the use of artistic components to express the themes of the novel which might have an impact on how the characters interact with the school system.

As well as being analysed from several viewpoints, *The Way of All Flesh* also presents a critique of the existing cultural standards and attitudes that were oppressive during the Victorian era. In his article, Wisenthal (1979: 17) asserts that Butler had little respect for the Victorians and none of the Victorians can be seen as representing the values that Butler's work aims to question. Wisenthal (1979) says the book does a great job of criticising moral absolutism, puritanical asceticism, rigid fidelity to principles, indestructible faith in justice, and an emphasis on obedience, respectability, and morality that no other famous writer of the 1800s did. According to Wisenthal (1979), the well-known Victorians of the era represented in *The Way of All Flesh* were actually the upholders of harsh standards rather than the embodiment of

Victorian ideals. Besides, Yarbrough (1971: 22-23), in his article titled “Autobiography and Artistic Sensibility in Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh*” emphasises that Thomas Wolfe and Samuel Butler are often mentioned as the writers who most commonly transformed autobiography into artistic expression. He states that within the context of this literary work, the characters are carefully shaped to reflect certain ideals which create conflicts in its fictional world. The author concludes that since the characters’ main function is to emphasise the unified elements that form the novel’s structure, they lack the complexity and uncertainties that are associated with real individuals. Yarbrough’s research is significant in terms of understanding the process of character development within the novel, as well as assessing the extent to which these characters serve as representations of the negative consequences of an oppressive schooling system.

In another study, Rosenman (1982: 77) directs his attention towards the evangelical perspective of the novel, which is mostly explored through the works of Samuel Butler, who is considered one of the most noteworthy authors on the subject. As Rosenman (1982) claims, the primary focus of *The Way of All Flesh* revolves around the dynamics between parents and children within the context of the Church of England. However, it is argued that this aspect has not been thoroughly examined or duly acknowledged as an Evangelical treatise written from the standpoint of an individual who was raised under the influence of Evangelicalism and subsequently criticised it. Considering the value of religious education and its influence on students, this study expresses the complex relationship between religious and moral factors and the oppressive educational structure shown in the novel.

To sum up, *Vanity Fair* (1848) by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) by Samuel Butler have been analysed from numerous aforementioned perspectives. However, this study aims to further explore a particular aspect that is present in both works, focusing on a topic that had major consequences in the lives of the people in the Victorian era: education and its oppressive impact on the characters. In the nineteenth century, education was essential for individuals to effectively fulfil their societal responsibilities. Throughout the nineteenth century, aristocratic families and other institutions of society developed the tradition of deciding on particular responsibilities such as choosing a career or a partner. This tradition had a significant impact on the lives and decision-making processes of individuals.

The primary objective of this thesis is to analyse the complex interactions between education, societal roles, and the characters’ actual experiences in the novels *Vanity Fair* and *The Way of All Flesh*. The study will specifically concentrate on the writers’ criticisms of

public-school education during the era in which these works were written. Charles Dickens, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Samuel Butler were some of the writers who criticised Victorian education. Consequently, it could be stated that the resistance to public-school education became widespread and reflected the societal problems at that time. This thesis will analyse the opposition to public-school education and its criticism in *Vanity Fair* (1848) by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* (1903) by Samuel Butler. Besides, through a comparative analysis of the main characters of the literary works, this study aims to examine schooling during the Victorian era to exercise the oppression of parents and schools over students by restricting their free will while they are on the verge of making vital choices for their future.

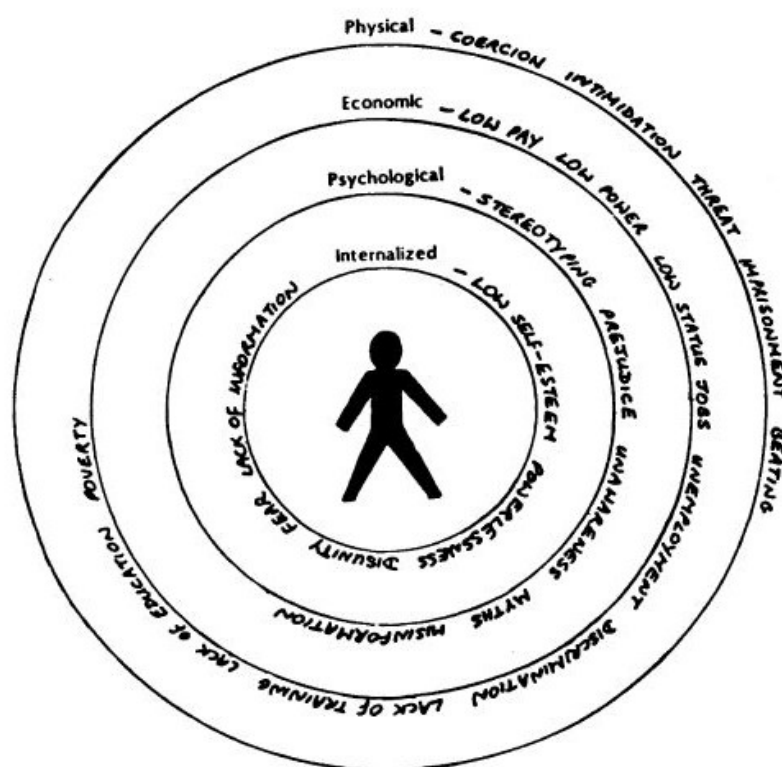
1.2. Schooling as an Oppressive Mechanism

Formal education has been a fundamental component of social structure, designed to provide information and offer individuals required skills and abilities to handle the future challenges. However, the conventional educational system can also function as an oppressive apparatus, specifically targeting marginalised communities. The effects of these oppressive systems can have significant consequences for both individuals and society in general. For instance, people who do not receive an education that is comprehensive and adaptable to their own requirements may face reduced prospects of achieving success in their academic pursuits and careers. This condition may result in an absence of possibilities and an increased probability of experiencing poverty and unemployment.

It could be useful to start with identifying the concept of oppression before starting on a comprehensive analysis of schooling as an oppressive system. The term “oppression” refers to a social phenomenon in which some identities or groups receive particular advantages, while others are marginalised or positioned at a disadvantaged status. It is a state characterised by inequality and discrimination on the basis of some characteristics, such as identity, resulting in disparate treatment of groups or individuals within society. Pittman (2010: 184) states that “oppression refers to both the system of obstacles and the individual acts that maintain the privilege and authority of the dominant group”. According to Pittman’s description, oppression is made up of two parts: systemic structures and individual actions that work together to keep the ruling group’s power and advantage. Oppression is not something that simply occurs; it is a planned and organised set of obstacles that are meant to make things hard for some groups. In addition to the structures of the system, the behaviours, and habits of people in the majority group also help to keep power and status in place. Another author underlining the systematic

aspect of oppression is Sean Ruth. Ruth (1988: 434) defines oppression as “the systematic mistreatment of the members of one group by the members of another group or by the society as a whole”. He argues that as it is a component of society, mistreatment could be reflected through courts, media, traditions, etc. Everyone is a contributor to this systemic issue, and it is not unintentional. Simon, Boyd, and Subica (2022: 3) point out that the act of subjugating, exploiting, and marginalising a group of individuals who deviate from society standards is considered oppression. This practice provides benefits to members of a dominant group that performs these principles. Here, giving benefits to a powerful group is the main result, which shows how power functions and how exploitation occurs in society as a whole.

Since oppression occurs in a process following a set of controlling mechanisms, explaining the process of oppression would be helpful at this point by referring the circles of control in Figure 1. As seen in the Figure 1 (Ruth, 1988: 435), there are four main circles of control and physical control is the top level of the four degrees of control. Ruth (1988) emphasizes that various types of oppression are thought to originate from this circle which includes both threats and physical punishment. Keeping oppressed people weak through low-status, low-income jobs, lack of training and unemployment represents economic control of the circle. The next step is psychological control, which aims to impose societal norms and standards of behaviour including prejudices, myths, stereotyping, and misinformation. The last circle is internalised control and as Williams (2012: 25) states, in this control type people think they are useless and inferior having low self-esteem, feeling powerlessness and disunity. Consequently, those individuals consent to being oppressed.



1

In society, there are various types of oppression which are complex and interconnected, and they frequently integrate to make new kinds of oppression (McCall, 2005: 1776). Adams (2014: 259-260) points to several forms of oppression, including ageism (the marginalisation of older individuals) and adultism (the marginalisation of young individuals), alongside other expressions such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, transgender oppression, religion oppression, and disability oppression. Pierre W. Orelus (2012: 42) expresses that there exist certain types of oppression which are actually unnamed because they frequently have a number of layers that are not easy to identify. However, the main types of oppression could be categorised in three groups: gender-based, racial and class oppression. Carrie S. Klima (2001: 286) explains that gender-based oppression is one of the most basic types of social oppression and the fundamental cause of other types of oppression, such as financial and racial oppressions. Bailey et al. (2022) focus on racial oppression as another type of oppression which include ecological elements that may be exemplified by the experiences of black individuals and racism. Additionally, class oppression refers to the systematic mistreatment and marginalisation of individuals in relation to their socioeconomic status (Berberoglu, 1994: 69). Lani Roberts (1997) states that even though the categories of people who are oppressed in a different way and although a lot of people are oppressed in more than

¹ Figure 1. Ruth, S. (1988). "Circles of Control".

one way, oppression is a unique issue in general. For instance, youth oppression is the deliberate subjugation of younger individuals as a particular age group, resulting in limited opportunities to exert social influence (DeJong and Love, 2015: 490). This is achieved through the imposition of restrictions on their access to societal resources, services, and privileges, as well as the denial of their involvement in the economic and political spheres of society. In conclusion, while there exists a wide range of forms of oppression, it is challenging to identify them all as individuals may not be aware of the several complex levels of oppression. Roberts (1997: 41) expresses this state as: “Perhaps there is only one monster with several heads, rather than many monsters hiding in our communal closet”.

Educational institutions could also be associated with oppression and may exhibit oppressive elements through the actions of instructors, headmasters, educational systems, and student attitudes. As stated by Kumashiro (2000: 26), oppression at educational institutions includes several forms of mistreatment, such as discrimination, harassment, physical and verbal aggression, as well as exclusion and isolation, which are encountered by students. Kumashiro (2000) also asserts that educational institutions are environments where individuals who are perceived as different or belong to a marginalised group (other) are subjected to detrimental treatment. Occasionally, negative consequences arise as a result of behaviours exhibited by fellow students or even educators and staff. Ivan Illich (1970: 15), in *Deschooling Society*, emphasizes the crucial role of teachers at schools as restricting the freedom of children while making choices and states that: “Schoolteachers and ministers are the only professionals who feel entitled to pry into the private affairs of their clients at the same time as they preach to a captive audience”. He draws attention to the operation of power within schools, where teachers are in charge of their students and act as doctors, judges, and ideological leaders. Illich thinks this has much greater influence on the child’s development than the laws that restrict his rights. A deformation of society’s fundamental character may result from teachers having excessive authority. Illich (1970: 15) thinks that the excessive power of teachers creates an oppression on students as follows: “Defining children as full-time pupils permits the teacher to exercise a kind of power over their persons”. He believes that a free society could not be built on the modern school. Due to the limitations of teachers, the personal autonomy disappears when a teacher interacts with a student.

Students have exhibited diverse reactions to these oppressive practices and dispositions. According to various scholars, different individuals have responded to societal pressures in distinct ways. Willis (2016: 77) points out that some individuals have resisted the prevailing values and norms of school and society. Some of them have engaged in excessive academic,

extracurricular, and social activities as a means of compensating for perceived inadequacies. As Margaret A. Gibson (1988) states, some of these individuals have managed to succeed academically while maintaining a strong connection to their ethnic culture and community. Certain individuals have also experienced various psychological harms, such as the internalisation or resistance of stereotypes, resulting in what has been termed “hidden injuries” (Osajima, 1993). Lastly, there are those who have endured depression and engaged in self-destructive behaviours, including drug abuse, self-starvation, self-harm, and even suicide attempts or completions. Therefore, certain students are perceived as achieving academic success, while others experience marginalisation, failure, and ultimately drop out. Meanwhile, there are other students who do not display any obvious characteristics that set them apart from the most of their peers (Kumashiro, 2000: 27). However, despite the observable disparities between students who achieve success and those who fail or struggle to stand out, it is important to recognise that all students encounter forms of oppression.

During the mid-Victorian century, the majority of public schools maintained a conventional classical curriculum and a disciplinary system characterised by “allowed-to-do” principles. This system, closely linked to Eton, involved masters who upheld boys’ self-governance and “liberties” by providing minimal adult oversight (Weaver, 2004: 456). As a result of this system, at schools, different aspects of oppression occurred among older and younger students. Moreover, these schools were generally depicted as headmaster-centred schools, and it also led to discrimination among students as the social status and family relations of each student was distinctive. Hederman (1982: 60) argues that parents, teachers, and society at large were subjected to and complicit in a systematic framework of oppression. As the level of authoritarian dynamics between parents and children becomes more pronounced, children are progressively internalising parental authority. Paulo Freire (2005: 155) emphasizes this internalisation of parental power as follows: “Internalizing parental authority through the rigid relationship structure emphasized by the school, these young people tend when they become professionals [...] to repeat the rigid pattern in which they were miseducated”. The imposition of a strict relationship structure within the school environment leads students to internalise parental authority. The word “rigid” suggests an organised, authoritarian learning atmosphere. Freire (2005) also discusses possible effects of this internalisation, since those who receive this sort of schooling could take these restrictive traits into their careers.

Understanding the restrictive characteristics of the Victorian educational system clarifies the societal factors influencing the experiences of fictional characters. Therefore, this thesis aims to analyse the oppressive nature of the Victorian educational system and its role in

imposing oppressive influences on the characters portrayed in the novels *Vanity Fair* and *The Way of All Flesh*. The main objective is to develop an argument on the educational and societal aspects contributing to the oppression the characters encounter in the novels, by referring research relevant to oppression and education at that time. Furthermore, this study goes beyond a basic criticism of public education to investigate the idea of education in general throughout the Victorian era. It aims to demonstrate the barriers to students' freedom that educators and parents put upon them while they were about to make decisions that would have a significant impact on their lives. This research will also reveal how the Victorian schooling system acted as a powerful force, affecting the lives of the characters, and reflecting the norms and restrictions of the era through an examination of the characters' interactions within the educational environment. The final objective of this study is to get a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the characters and the moral challenges they encountered. This analysis focuses on how Victorian education impacts individuals and society, highlighting the connection between personal challenges and broader societal issues.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ROLE OF SCHOOLING AS AN OPPRESSIVE MECHANISM IN *VANITY FAIR* BY WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

Vanity Fair (1848), authored by William Makepeace Thackeray, is a work of satirical fiction set in early nineteenth century England, wherein it delves into the examination of societal structures and organisations, with a particular focus on the educational framework. *Vanity Fair* does not centre its narrative on the singular development of a protagonist, although it incorporates characteristics of a bildungsroman by chronicling the journeys of multiple characters from their adolescence to middle age. However, it does not offer these narratives as indicative of the steady evolution of an individual's personal existence. In his novel, Thackeray revealed the hypocrisy prevalent within the middle class. The narrative presents a critique of the superficial values inherent in Victorian society, characterised by its emphasis on material wealth and outward appearances. Thackeray's critique of the Victorian era educational system is apparent through his depiction of characters and their experiences, emphasising the rigid and superficial nature of the system. At this point, it could be useful to include a plot summary of the *Vanity Fair* for a better understanding.

William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* delicately integrates the lives of two main characters, Rebecca Sharp (Becky) and Amelia Sedley. Becky, an orphan distinguished by her intelligence and self-reliance, presents a contrast to the obedient and innocent Amelia, who is the daughter of a middle-class investor. The narrative follows Becky's planned rise in social status, exploiting Amelia's friendship as a means to achieve her goals. After finishing school, Becky goes to the Crawleys' house, where she becomes a childcare provider. However, before she goes there, she spends a few days with Amelia in her house, in London where she meets Amelia's fiancé, George Osborne, William Dobbin-a friend of George Osborne and Amelia's brother, Joseph (Jos) Sedley. Becky tries to gain control over and marry Jos as he has a prestigious job in India, but George prevents this. Becky goes to the service of Sir Pitt Crawley as a governess and in the end, she gets married to Rawdon Crawley, the youngest son. Becky's life is marked by financial difficulties, illegal relationships, and betrayals from her family, despite her social advancement. Meanwhile, Amelia experiences significant changes in her life due to her father's financial downfall and her fiancé George Osborne's death in battle, while William Dobbin's unrealized love for her. The combination of these events significantly

impacts the protagonists' fates, reflecting the novel's criticism of the cultural framework of the era.

This analysis delves into the function of schooling in the novel, specifically focusing on Becky Sharp's experiences. Becky's rise highlights the pragmatic perspective of education as a means for advancement in society. Thackeray critically examines and analyses the educational system's prioritisation of superficial accomplishments rather than real intellectual growth. The depicted system prioritises social status over the pursuit of genuine knowledge, a contrast that Becky manages by engaging in self-directed and experiential learning. This critique of the Victorian educational system, which prioritised appearance over substance, reflects the predominant cultural ideals of that era, when the perception of knowledge and social standing sometimes held more importance than their real content. Thus, the novel not only tells the story of its characters but also reflects on the broader implications of education as a societal construct in the Victorian era.

This section of the study will analyse excerpts from *Vanity Fair* in order to look at the oppressive characteristics of Rebecca (Becky) Sharp's school experiences as well as those of the other main characters, Amelia Sedley, William Dobbin, and George Osborne. The classification of the oppressive elements in education will include oppression through social status, the oppressive aspect of peer influence in the educational setting and the oppression of school administrators, instructional strategies, and the educational system. The book explores themes such as peer pressure and the pointless pursuit of academic achievement at schools, as well as the desire for social progress and the repressive atmosphere created by headmasters and educators inside the education system. Hence, an analysis will be conducted to explore the impact of Becky and other characters' educational experiences on their struggles to deal with the societal and ideological complexities of the Victorian era.

2.1. Schooling as an Oppression Through Social Status

Thackeray's work opens with an introductory scenario, that highlights the restrictive nature of education and the influence of schooling on social standing. Pedersen (1979: 63) focuses on the context of girls' private schools of the Victorian era and states that: "Girls' private schools were, as the name suggests, the private property of the women who kept them. Such schools were conducted for personal profit and were totally dependent for their income on student". Miss Barbara Pinkerton is the headmistress and owner of a famous girls' school. She is a stingy woman trying to praise her school all the time as she needs the money coming

from parents. She sends a letter, written with exaggerated language, to a family presenting their daughter after her graduation as follows:

After her six years' residence at the Mall, I have the honour and happiness of presenting Miss Amelia Sedley to her parents, as a young lady not unworthy to occupy a fitting position in their polished and refined circle. Those virtues which characterise the young English gentlewoman, those accomplishments which become her birth and station, will not be found wanting in the amiable Miss Sedley, whose industry and obedience have endeared her to her instructors, and whose delightful sweetness of temper has charmed her aged and her youthful companions (Thackeray, 1993: 2).

As can be noticed from the quotation, the parents' hopes for their daughter, Miss Amelia Sedley, are emphasised in the letter. It implies that Amelia's parents are members of a socioeconomic class that places a high importance on refinement, polish, and conformity to social standards. Moreover, people in this social circle are highly respected and seem to be expected to live up to certain ideals. The excerpt above also refers to the norms of the period for the education and social behaviour of upper-class young women. Burstyn (1980: 36) highlights the skills that are required to be a lady at that time as: "They learned to dance, to play the piano, and they mastered the fine details of drawing-room etiquette". At girls' schools, these skills were taught students besides classics and language skills to prepare them to the high society. Pedersen (1979: 64) also expresses that within such educational institutions, a daughter of a clerk or small businessman could learn arithmetic, reading, writing, geography, history, needlework, and religion alongside ten or twenty other similar students. The students could study French if their parents pay more for it. The focus of these institutions is to characterise the young English gentlewoman regardless of the students' own interests. Individual freedom and agency were frequently repressed as people were expected to live according to a rigid set of social standards and beliefs. Amelia Sedley and other girls in her age are expected to have an education that helps them maintain their social standing and prepares them for their responsibilities in society.

The function of education is characterised as providing students the values and achievements associated with a young English "gentlewoman", which are social constructions valued highly by the upper class of society. This institutionalised schooling system is oppressive since it prevents students from growing as unique individuals. Becky Sharp, the protagonist of the novel, was also a student in Miss Pinkerton's School yet compared to Amelia, her position was completely different. Becky Sharp is described as a member of a lower social class and has been forced into an apprenticeship at the school by teaching French in exchange for being a scholarship student. Becky and Amelia's societal difference can be seen in these remarks: "Miss Sedley's papa was a merchant in London, and a man of some wealth; whereas Miss Sharp was an artiled pupil, for whom Miss Pinkerton had done, as she thought, quite enough" (Thackeray,

1993: 3). Those in higher social strata have more access to educational opportunities and resources because of their socioeconomic standing. Becky's schooling experience demonstrates the systemic class-based inequality that exists within the Victorian education system. Becky, who comes from a disadvantaged socioeconomic background, is depicted as getting schooling not as a natural right but as a charitable favour from Miss Pinkerton, the school headmistress. This patronising generosity exemplifies a cultural norm in which education for the underprivileged is perceived as an act of charity rather than a fundamental right for all.

The novel reveals how students, according to their social status, were exposed to a hierarchical educational system that matched the general social stratification of the nineteenth century. In girls' private schools, if parents accept to pay more money for French lessons, it is possible that the students also learn French. Becky was responsible for giving these French classes to the other girls in exchange for her staying at that school. She was not only a student with a scholarship, but also the apprentice of Miss Pinkerton. However, as an employee, she was exposed to the oppressive treatments of the headmistress through her stay at school. The interaction between Becky and the institution she works for exemplifies the methods of regulation and obedience imposed by educational authorities at that period. The examination of hierarchical power in institutions by Michel Foucault provides a crucial perspective for comprehending Becky's experiences at Miss Pinkerton's school. Foucault (1995: 129) explains how power dynamics in institutions such as schools establish discipline by employing subtle and systematic methods to ensure compliance, rather than relying on explicit coercion.² According to Foucault (1995: 129), the goal of "the training of behaviour" was to reorganise the social body in a way that was both less expensive and more strategically effective. Within this framework of discipline, institutions such as schools performed important roles by using disciplinary and corrective measures to help shape "the right individual". This structure of disciplinary authority that Becky experienced illustrates the institutional inequality that was

² Michael Foucault explains the sources and the operation of power by focusing on three concepts. The first one, sovereign power refers to the authority of the state to exert control over its population by means of coercion and penalization. Disciplinary power is the second concept, and it is related to the authority used by institutions like schools, prisons, and hospitals to regulate and direct the behaviours of individuals by methods such as monitoring, standardisation, and punishment. The third power concept is biopower, the dominant type of power in contemporary Western cultures, refers to the authority of the state to rule and manage the biological dimensions of existence, including health, sexuality, and reproduction, with the aim of maintaining specific modes of life (Alm, 2019: 17).

common in Victorian school systems. To sum up, Becky's dual status as a scholarship student and an apprentice at the school demonstrates how social stratification penetrated nineteenth century educational environments, as Foucault explains the mechanics of discipline and control inside institutions. Becky's example reveals how school administrators controlled both students and workers, changing their behaviour and making them follow the rules in subtle but effective ways.

Miss Jemima was the sister of school headmistress, and she was not as authoritarian as her elder sister. She intended to offer a dictionary to both young girls, Amelia and Becky, as they were leaving the school, but it was only available to elite students, and Becky was a scholarship student. Inequality in education can be seen in the following sentences: "Miss Jemima had already whimpered several times at the idea of Amelia's departure; and, but for fear of her sister, would have gone off in downright hysterics, like the heiress (who paid double) of St. Kitt's. Such luxury of grief, however, is only allowed to parlour-boarders" (Thackeray, 1993: 4). Miss Jemima was so afraid of her older sister that she did not even dare to cry for Becky's departure as this behaviour was seen as a privilege for only students who are a part of a certain social status. Girls' private schools were entirely owned by the women who managed them. These schools were run with the intention of making a profit and relied entirely on student fees for their funding (Pedersen, 1979: 64). In this respect, these institutions needed the money provided by the families of the students. Thus, within the school, there exist social and hierarchical divisions that may result in different educational experiences as can be seen in the example of Becky's experience as both a student and apprentice and Amelia and other girls' experiences. The way students feel and what they expect may be affected by their social standing, which can lead to a sense of comfort or oppression.

The subject of oppression through social status is clear in the remarks of Becky Sharp. She portrays the social inequality that she faced at school as: "For two years I have only had insults and outrage from her. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen" (Thackeray, 1993: 8). Becky's depiction of herself as "being treated worse than a servant in the kitchen" highlights the existence of a social hierarchy and reflects the perception of her as being inferior despite her status inside the school. Becky was a kind of apprentice at school as an orphan girl. She had a mission which is to teach French to the other girls. In return, she stays at school and eats there. She has to put up with Miss Pinkerton and her insults as she has to complete her duty as an apprentice. Despite her desire to resign, she is obliged to stick to the arrangement until she completes her education at this institution. The fact that she cannot escape from this restrictive environment until she finishes her schooling exhibits the limitations

imposed on her because of her financial status. Krista Cowman's (2014) analysis of the apprenticeship system during the Victorian era sheds light on Becky's predicament, revealing how apprentices were often bound to their masters or employers, who provided basic needs in return for their service. The historical background provides a deeper comprehension of Becky's situation, demonstrating that her socioeconomic position is not only an individual struggle, but rather a systematic exploitation deeply rooted in the educational system of that era. Berberoglu (1994: 76) further expands on this by defining this experience as a manifestation of class oppression, characterized by the deliberate and organized exploitation and marginalization of individuals based on their socioeconomic standing. These analyses provide a critical perspective to understand Becky's narrative, changing her personal challenges into an examination of the broader societal and educational systems that maintain such forms of oppression.

Becky Sharp was not an ordinary student who has a right to get education in Miss Pinkerton's school at Chiswick. Becky's situation is described as: "She was bound over as an articulated pupil; her duties being to talk French, as we have seen; and her privileges to live cost free, and, with a few guineas a year, to gather scraps of knowledge from the professors who attended the school" (Thackeray, 1993: 10). The title given to Rebecca is "articled pupil". This term implies that she has entered the school with an employment contract and is not a student in the conventional sense. Frequently, individuals who were unable to afford a conventional education are obliged to serve as apprentices or, as in the present instance, articulated pupils. Simon Carpenter (2019: 210) explains the articulated pupil system as "a contractual relationship between master and apprentice involving reciprocal obligations on the part of both parties. [...] The master exercised the same rights and was liable to the same obligations as a father". Thus, there was a contract between Miss Pinkerton and Becky at school and the headmistress had a right to treat Becky as she wished during this process. Rebecca's social standing or financial circumstances prevented her from taking advantage of the educational options. Because she is obligated by some responsibilities like giving French classes, the demands of the school limit and shape her educational experience. One of Rebecca's duties is to get pieces of information from teachers. This suggests that she has learned things by herself rather than systematically. Her educational opportunities are limited and may not be sufficient which could be regarded as oppressive.

After leaving school, Becky stays with Amelia's family for a few days and then she is sent to Sir Pitt Crawley, a wealthy man, as a caretaker. Then, she becomes the governor of the house in a short time and Mrs. Crawley, Sir Bute Crawley's wife, sends a letter to learn more

about her to Miss Pinkerton, the headmistress. In her answer, Miss Pinkerton describes Becky as follows:

The Miss Sharp was a pupil of mine, and I have nothing to say in her disfavour. Though her appearance is disagreeable, we cannot control the operations of nature; and though her parents were disreputable (her father being a painter, several times bankrupt, and her mother, as I have since learned, with horror, a dancer at the Opera) [...]. My dread is, lest the principles of the mother—who was represented to me as a French Countess, forced to emigrate in the late revolutionary horrors; but who, as I have since found, was a person of the very lowest order and morals —should at any time prove to be hereditary in the unhappy young woman whom I took as an outcast (Thackeray, 1993: 88).

The excerpt above can be summarised as a declaration of the oppressive side of schooling through social status. Despite being a wealthy and well-known member of parliament, Sir Pitt Crawley has a miserable life. Becky, a smart girl, fully reorganises his life and gains control over every aspect of it. This situation did not sit well with Bute Crawley, Sir Pitt's son, and his wife. They decide to learn more about this girl and send a letter to Becky's former headmistress of the school. Becky is described by Miss Pinkerton as the daughter of a painter, a career that was not regarded as socially prominent. At this point, her opera-dancing mother and other parents are depicted as untrustworthy individuals in the story. It emphasises that Miss Sharp comes from a lower social level and an unusual familial history. As Berberoglu (1994) asserts, class oppression is not only deliberate but also organised abuse and marginalisation of individuals on the basis of their socioeconomic status. Miss Pinkerton expresses worry over the potential genetic transmission of the principles of Becky's mother, who was reputed to possess questionable moral character. This reflects the general public's concerns that unpleasant characteristics or behaviours may be inherited by future generations, especially by people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, in the quotation above, social oppression in the context of education is demonstrated by illustrating the dichotomy between Miss Sharp's disadvantaged socioeconomic position and her exceptional skill, which is acknowledged by her former headmistress, Miss Pinkerton.

Beside the female characters, male characters' school experiences are also depicted in the novel in terms of social hierarchy and inequality. For instance, in *Vanity Fair* the name of the typical Victorian or in other words, Arnoldian school was Dr. Swishtail's School. According to Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1844: 386), the approach of these schools to teaching was to focus on helping students improve their cognitive capacities while discouraging bad habits. It was a superiority to be educated in this type of a school. However, the atmosphere inside the school was quite different from as presented to the society. The oppressive atmosphere through the social status students could be seen as follows:

Cuff's fight with Dobbin, and the unexpected issue of that contest, will long be remembered by every man who was educated at Dr. Swishtail's famous school. The latter youth (who used to be called Heigh-ho Dobbin, Gee-ho Dobbin, and by many other names indicative of puerile contempt) was the quietest, the clumsiest, and, as it seemed, the dullest of all Dr. Swishtail's young gentlemen. His parent was a grocer in the city: and it was bruited abroad that he was admitted into Dr. Swishtail's academy upon what are called 'mutual principles'—that is to say, the expenses of his board and schooling were defrayed by his father in goods, not money; and he stood there—almost at the bottom of the school—in his scraggy corduroys and jacket, through the seams of which his great big bones were bursting—as the representative of so many pounds of tea, candles, sugar, mottled-soap, plums (of which a very mild proportion was supplied for the puddings of the establishment), and other commodities (Thackeray, 1993: 34).

As described above, there was a social hierarchy among the students at Dr. Swishtail's school. William Dobbin, belonging to a lower social status than the others, was called by insulting nicknames, reflecting the bullying and social marginalisation that might affect children from various backgrounds or with lesser social standing. Kumashiro (2000) remarks that educational institutions are places where people who are seen as different or who are part of an excluded group (the other) are treated badly. Negative events can happen sometimes due to the actions of other students or even teachers and staff. It can be concluded that Dobbin is not seen as a part of that social strata by the other students. Dobbin's father was a grocery store owner, but his classmates come from wealthier backgrounds. His father's capacity to pay for his son's schooling reflects the vastly different socioeconomic situation from which he comes. As can be seen from the quotation, students from wealthy families oppress those who are different through the use of insulting terms and ridicule, further emphasising the subject of oppression by social position. Dobbin's socioeconomic background is presented as a cause of oppression in the educational environment. To conclude, *Vanity Fair* draws attention to the disparities and biases that exist between pupils according to the financial condition of their families and the system of school financing.

2.2. The Oppressive Aspect of Peer Influence in the Educational Setting

Bullying and social isolation are two ways in which school may turn into a tool of oppression. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray portrays an Arnoldian school type of nineteenth century which is called Dr. Swishtail's School. In these type of educational institutions at that time, the combination of the educational framework with incidents of bullying and peer ridicule would result in the emergence of oppressive conditions, particularly targeting students who are viewed as divergent or less accomplished academically. As stated by Kumashiro (2000: 26), students are subjected to various types of abuse at these educational institutions, including discrimination, harassment, physical and verbal brutality, as well as alienation and isolation.

These are all examples of oppression that they experience. William Dobbin was one of these students at Dr. Swishtail's School. The experiences of Dobbin inside the school setting are stated as follows:

William Dobbin, from an incapacity to acquire the rudiments of the above language, as they are propounded in that wonderful book the Eton Latin Grammar, was compelled to remain among the very last of Doctor Swishtail's scholars, and was "taken down" continually by little fellows with pink faces and pinafores when he marched up with the lower form, a giant amongst them, with his downcast, stupefied look, his dog's-eared primer, and his tight corduroys. High and low, all made fun of him. They sewed up those corduroys, tight as they were. They cut his bed-strings. They upset buckets and benches, so that he might break his shins over them, which he never failed to do. They sent him parcels, which, when opened, were found to contain the paternal soap and candles. There was no little fellow but had his jeer and joke at Dobbin; and he bore everything quite patiently and was entirely dumb and miserable (Thackeray, 1993: 35).

Dobbin is a student who finds it difficult to learn even the basic aspects of Latin since he cannot comprehend the Eton Latin Grammar. Due to his academic difficulties, he is one of the least successful students at school. Because of this, Dobbin frequently becomes the victim of bullying and mockery by his peers. As Smith et al. (2008) noticed, bullying is an action that is aggressive and intentional, and it can be carried out by an individual or a group. It is characterised by its frequency over a long period of time. The person that is bullied is often someone who is unable to easily defend himself against the bully. These negative experiences serve as an example of the emotional and physical disadvantages that can arise from going through oppressive circumstances. Gini and Pozzoli (2013) state that it is common for people who are bullied by their peers to have negative psychological consequences such as increased levels of anxiety, feelings of despair, and a lower sense of confidence. These adverse effects appear in the form of unhappiness and a sense of social alienation in an oppressive schooling atmosphere for Dobbin. It can be concluded that the educational system creates a hierarchical structure within society, which tends to end up with social marginalisation and oppression for those who differ from societal norms or encounter educational challenges.

Additionally, Cuff, another student in Dr. Swishtail's school, is described as "the great chief and dandy of the Swishtail Seminary". Among the other students, he has a dominancy at school. It is evident that some students possess considerable authority and have a substantial impact on their peers. As William N. Weaver (2004) claims, most public schools in Victorian period used a classical curriculum and an "allowed-to-do" disciplinary framework. Under this system, masters protected older boys' liberties and self-governance by exercising little adult supervision on them. This structure led to a type of peer oppression among older and younger students in schools. It is not only about the power, but also Cuff has certain priorities like: "He

smuggled wine in. He fought the town-boys. Ponies used to come for him to ride home on Saturdays. He had his top-boots in his room, in which he used to hunt in the holidays. He had a gold repeater: and took snuff like the doctor” (Thackeray, 1993: 35). It is clear from this excerpt that within the context of the educational environment characterised by oppressive dynamics, students who occupy the higher levels of the social hierarchy, frequently enjoy a certain degree of autonomy to control or disregard established regulations without bearing any kind of penalty. On one hand, Cuff stands as a charismatic leader of the school who has a right to break rules but on the other hand, Dobbin stands at the lowest part of school hierarchy as the victim of bullying. This is an example of oppressive educational inequality and social division at schools in Victorian era.

In a school environment, interactions between peers tend to appear as an act of oppression when a leader student forms and imposes a hierarchical structure, performs bullying behaviours, and generates an atmosphere characterised by obedience and unfairness among his peers. In Dr. Swishtail’s School, Cuff represents the above-mentioned profile and his influence on the other students is expressed as:

Cuff, the unquestioned king of the school, ruled over his subjects, and bullied them, with splendid superiority. This one blacked his shoes: that toasted his bread, others would fag out, and give him balls at cricket during whole summer afternoons. “Figs” was the fellow whom he despised most, and with whom, though always abusing him, and sneering at him, he scarcely ever condescended to hold personal communication (Thackeray, 1993: 36).

Students who are under Cuff in the social chain of school, are subject to his abusive behaviours because of his privileged ranking at school. Cuff is so powerful that he bullies and takes advantage of his friends. They suffer from his splendid superiority and have to do things for him, like blacking his shoes, toasting his bread, or running errands. When students act in this way, they build an oppressive and obedient atmosphere where they are expected to bow to the demands and wishes of their superior leader. Ann E. Cudd (2006: 164) remarks that through hate speech, collective defamation, bullying, apathy, social distrust, and victimisation, oppressed people are directly devalued and humiliated. “Figs” is the nickname given to William Dobbin by his classmates. Cuff may be cruel and bullying, but he seldom challenges “Figs” face to face. Figs symbolises an individual who experiences the effects of this systemic oppression and exclusion within the educational institution. Dan Olweus (1993) says that bullying happens when there is a clear difference in power between the person doing the bullying and the person being bullied, the action is done with the intent to hurt, and it happens over and over again. Thus, to fit in with the dominating peer’s expectations and put up with oppressive behaviour, students may feel pressured to do so in order to be accepted by others or

to keep from being bullied themselves. The errand given by Cuff was not always easy to do. Cuff once forced a weaker student, Osborne to break the rules of the school and bring a bottle of whiskey as he had broken Cuff's whiskey bottle. The commands given to little Osborne were as follows:

The boy had been instructed to get over the play-ground wall (at a selected spot where the broken glass had been removed from the top, and niches made convenient in the brick); to run a quarter of a mile; to purchase a pint of rum-shrub on credit; to brave all the Doctor's outlying spies, and to clamber back into the playground again (Thackeray, 1993: 37).

The aforementioned tasks exhibit characteristics of oppression, since they include behaviours that not only violate existing laws but also have the ability to bring about hazard and damage. There's no doubt that the boy does not have much choice but to follow these directions. It is also known that the people in charge at the school are aware of these actions as they have spies among students. This suggests an environment where rules are often broken, letting some students or groups act in an abusive manner without getting in trouble. For the other students, these schooling environments seem to be oppressive. As Rose et al. (2009) claim, bullying, which refers to the ongoing actions of hostility, coercion, or intimidation by one or more individuals against a victim, can cause many harmful consequences for the targeted children. These kinds of actions can make the school an unfriendly and oppressive place where students may feel like they have to do dangerous or wrong things to fit in or avoid getting in trouble.

Things that might be thought of as cruel were often used as teaching tools in public schools, especially during the Victorian era. This shows that the way schooling is conducted is tough and authoritative, causing students to experience either mental or physical discomfort. For instance, William Dobbin cannot stand Cuff's tyranny to little Osborne and surprisingly challenges Cuff to fight. The widespread use of torture inside educational institutions can be seen in these sentences: "I cannot tell what his motive was. Torture in a public school is as much licensed as the knout in Russia. It would me ungentlemanlike (in a manner) to resist it. Perhaps Dobbin's foolish soul revolted against that exercise of tyranny" (Thackeray, 1993: 38). The term "licenced" gives the impression that these kinds of behaviours were not only permitted but also officially sanctioned by the administration of the schools as well as by society as a whole. This provides more evidence of the systematic character of the tyranny that exists throughout the school system. DeJong and Love (2015: 490) define youth oppression as the deliberate subjugation of younger individuals as a particular age group, resulting in limited opportunities to exert social influence. This is achieved through the imposition of restrictions on their access to societal resources, services, and privileges, as well as the denial of their involvement in the economic and political spheres of society.

The oppression of students comes from the system itself, which normalises submission. However, Osborne does not like Dobbin's decision to fight against Cuff as he thinks "Figs" does not have any chance to win against him. While trying to put Dobbin off the fight, he accepts the oppression that everyone at that school normalised with these remarks: "What a licking I shall get when it is over," young Osborne thought, picking up his man. "You'd best give in" he said to Dobbin; "it is only a thrashing, Figs, and you know I'm used to it" (Thackeray, 1993: 39). As noticed, little Osborne is anticipated to receive a physical beating or thrashing. Physical punishment, according to Osborne, is a frequent and anticipated component of the educational process, and one should welcome it. As a normal part of their education, kids are taught to accept injustice and violence. When students accept this kind of treatment as the standard, they are subjected to a kind of psychological oppression.

Regarding the school's punishment system and the practise of giving nicknames to students, Sir Pitt Crawley's son Mr Pitt Crawley recalls an incident from his school days. Those days are stated in the novel as: "At Eton he was called Miss Crawley" (Thackeray, 1993: 74). Bullying and the use of offensive nicknames are evident in this educational setting. It gives the impression that he was insulted or humiliated due to a perceived distinction or fragility in his character. However, due to the fact that Mr. Pitt Crawley was not a mischievous student, he was not subject to any of the school's disciplinary measures. His school years are mentioned as: "During eight years at school, to be subject to that punishment which it is generally thought none but a cherub can escape" (Thackeray, 1993: 74). As can be concluded, Mr. Pitt was able to escape being punished, which was a notable accomplishment given that punishment was a frequent and anticipated event in the school. In doing so, it highlights the oppressive character of the disciplinary system that is in place inside this institution.

Oppressive environment of the school can also be seen from Sir Pitt Crayley's younger son Rawden's educational experiences. Rawden respects school like all English gentlemen though he only remembers physical punishments there. His schooling experiences are demonstrated as: "Though the only book which he studied was the racing calendar, and though his chief recollections of polite learning were connected with the floggings which he received at Eton, had that decent and honest reverence for classical learning which all English gentlemen feel" (Thackeray, 1993: 501). The use of floggings as a kind of physical punishment in schools suggests a strict and authoritarian atmosphere. In the excerpt, it is also made clear that people, especially English gentlemen, are expected to respect and value traditional education. It may be due to the function of Victorian public schools of the nineteenth century. As noted by Edward A. Allen (1982: 90-91), public schools operated in a systematic manner to train a particular kind

of gentleman, and suggests that this particular process, in fact, served to maintain the dominance of the aristocracy. According to Titus Stahl (2017: 477), “oppression constrains members of the respective groups such that they face obstacles when they want to change or leave that relation”. Individuals like Rawden Crawley are forced to follow certain cultural and educational norms, even if they had bad experiences in school, which could be seen as restrictive and oppressive.

2.3. The Oppression of School Administrators, Instructional Strategies, and the Educational System

Vanity Fair starts with the schooling experiences of two main characters, Rebecca Sharp and Amelia Sedley at girls’ school of Miss Barbara Pinkerton. At the beginning part of the novel, the oppressive side of schooling could be understood through the letters sent to parents from school. According to Bert Rice (2013: 143), people who have the authority believe that they possess superior knowledge and judgement compared to the younger individuals so that they have a right to decide what is most advantageous for children. There seems to be societal expectations which were placed on young students regarding the education that they get from schools. These expectations can be seen from these remarks of the headmistress:

In music, in dancing, in orthography, in every variety of embroidery and needle-work, she will be found to have realised her friends’ fondest wishes. In geography there is still much to be desired; and a careful and undeviating use of the backboard, for four hours daily during the next three years, is recommended as necessary to the acquirement of that dignified deportment and carriage, so requisite for every young lady of fashion (Thackeray, 1993: 37).

Miss Sedley is supposed to be very good in singing, dancing, spelling, and needlework. These standards may be oppressive since they force people into predetermined positions and limit their opportunities for growth and development. Language and writing proficiency are also subject to strict requirements. Also, young women are expected to be very good at these things, which creates stereotypes based on gender about what women should and should not do. It is especially harsh to advocate using the backboard for four hours a day for three years. The backboard was a real tool for maintaining a straight posture and was thought to be essential to learning demanding attitude and posture. This is a good example of how young girls are physically disciplined in order to shape them into a particular stereotype of “young ladies of fashion”. It can be concluded that the physical demands of this method are oppressive and painful.

Considering the psychological effects that schooling may have on its sufferers, such as Becky and Amelia, the idea of schooling and its long-term consequences are depicted as potentially oppressive. The act of leaving school does not always mean that its effect has come

to an end. As two young girls leave school, the idea in Becky's mind was as follows: "She had left school, and the impressions of six years are not got over in that space of time. Nay, with some persons those awes and terrors of youth last for ever and ever" (Thackeray, 1993: 7). The memories and impressions from Becky's six years of study continue to follow her even after she has graduated. This exemplifies the notion that one's formal education may have lasting impacts, both good and bad. It is possible that Becky found certain parts of school to be oppressive or restrictive. Because her anxieties keep affecting her even after she leaves school, we may say that they are a kind of psychological oppression.

After leaving the school, during a conversation on the road to Sedleys' house, Becky makes fun of Miss Pinkerton, the headmistress of the school. Amelia warns her not to talk about her however Becky replies as: "Why, do you think Miss Pinkerton will come out and order me back to the black hole? said Rebecca, laughing" (Thackeray, 1993: 8). Being the headmistress of the school, Miss Pinkerton exemplifies the discipline and power that are commonly seen in educational institutions of the Victorian era. Disciplinary measures, including perhaps severe penalties like solitary confinement or imprisonment, are within Miss Pinkerton's power to manage. There are severe restrictions and consequences for students who disobey them, which might be viewed as oppressive. Rebecca's response on the way out of the school suggests that some students could rebel against the restrictive atmosphere there by acting humoristically or by disobeying rules. Miss Pinkerton firmly disapproves of any acts of rebellion from her students, positioning herself as the one and only authority figure in her school. Rebecca Sharp (Becky) was not a fully obedient student like the other girls at school. According to Robin DiAngelo (2016: 86), educational institutions play a vital role in maintaining injustice. DiAngelo (2016) defines oppression as the combination of prejudice from the dominant group and the institutional ability to preserve and enforce that prejudice. This observation suggests that the institution promotes a degree of homogeneity and limits the range of perspectives, which could be interpreted as potentially oppressive.

Miss Pinkerton, as a headmistress was not pleased with the position of Becky at school however, because of the agreement that they had previously, she tries to tolerate her as: "The idea, even, of such an eagle in the Chiswick dovecot caused a great flutter in the breast of Miss Pinkerton, who would have sent away Miss Sharp, but that she was bound to her under a forfeit" (Thackeray, 1993: 10). Miss Pinkerton has the position of authority in the school and possesses the authority to make determinations regarding the students, including the potential option of expelling them. Illich (1970: 22) argues the power dynamics that exist in the educational system and claims that instructors have authority over students, and they act as judges at schools.

Rejecting any other potential authority, they try to be the only controller of the school. Rice (2013: 141) states that “oppression is defined not by degree of harm but by the exercise of power over others, which lessens their freedom”. The oppressing environment within the school is a result of Miss Pinkerton’s dominance and power over the children. In another demonstration of schooling atmosphere, Becky is depicted as a “dangerous bird” and the school is likened to a “cage” as: “Why did Miss Pinkerton let such a dangerous bird into her cage?” (Thackeray, 1993: 10). Metaphorically describing Miss Pinkerton’s school as a cage and Miss Sharp as a dangerous bird, both emphasise how oppressive and controlling the atmosphere inside is. It can be concluded that Miss Pinkerton’s institution is characterised by rigid regulations and authoritarianism, restricting students from developing their autonomy and self-expression.

Prior to her enrolment in Miss Pinkerton’s school following her father’s death, Rebecca Sharp used to visit the school as a visitor accompanying her father. During those moments, she projected a happy demeanour, like that of a kid more than that of a young lady, with her abundant good humour. The oppressive school atmosphere was not for her and after the death of her father she had to move to this school in order to survive. This obligation is portrayed as: “The catastrophe came, and she was brought to the Mall as to her home. The rigid formality of the place suffocated her: the prayers and the meals, the lessons and the walks, which were arranged with a conventual regularity, oppressed her almost beyond endurance” (Thackeray, 1993: 11). The strict rules, ceremonial practises, and proper behaviour linked to the institution were so inflexible that they suppressed personal uniqueness and independence of Becky. Hederman (1982: 59) explains the mentality of the oppressed as, the young person is exposed to a cultural and psychological environment that makes them think like everyone else who is dependent on a stronger and more dominant authority at school. However, the strict atmosphere of the school and a kind of exposure to authority and dependence does not suit Becky. The text closes by asserting that Becky finds this setting extremely intolerable which could be regarded as the reflection of the oppressive atmosphere at school.

Miss Pinkerton’s school was always like a prison for Becky, and she was not eager to stay there. Becky tried to find the ways of escaping from this environment as: “She determined at any rate to get free from the prison in which she found herself, and now began to act for herself, and for the first time to make connected plans for the future” (Thackeray, 1993: 12). Becky experiences a sense of restriction or limitation due to her present circumstances at school. During that time period, schools frequently imposed rigid societal standards, and young women were generally educated to live according to these norms and assigned responsibilities. As Becky keeps disregarding educational and social norms in the search for autonomy, this section

marks an important phase in her story. She hopes to break free of the gender norms of her day. Becky always rejected Miss Pinkerton's school environment as can be seen from these remarks: "I hate this place and want to leave it. I will do nothing here but what I am obliged to do" (Thackeray, 1993: 12). The oppressive atmosphere of the school, where students are frequently pressured to conform to rigid norms and regulations, may have pushed Becky to rebel. Ivan Illich (1970: 33) claims that using a standardised curriculum and evaluation system, schools force children to follow to a set of established knowledge and abilities. Personal autonomy and originality are restricted by this standardisation. The remarks of Becky give the impression of a strong desire to fight against and get away from the limitations and requirements of this standardised educational environment.

Becky Sharp's hatred of Miss Pinkerton is due to the inequalities she experienced during her school years. Individuals such as Becky Sharp, who are not part of the appreciated social classes, encounter oppression and discrimination in a culture like Miss Pinkerton's school that places importance on social position. Becky describes her situation at school as: "For two years I have only had insults and outrage from her. I have been treated worse than any servant in the kitchen" (Thackeray, 1993: 8). Becky's experiences exemplify the obstacles and societal marginalisation encountered by those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Becky has experienced unfair treatment under the direction of Miss Pinkerton. The atmosphere at school cannot be identified as just typically disciplined; it is also cruel and brutal. However, the behaviours of the headmistress were not the only problem at that school. Besides Miss Pinkerton's authority and arrogance, elder students' chats and lack of warmth and support at school could be seen among the other factors that affect Becky negatively. These factors are portrayed as: "The pompous vanity of the old schoolmistress, the foolish good-humour of her sister, the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls, and the frigid correctness of the governesses equally annoyed her" (Thackeray, 1993: 11). From Becky Sharp's perspective, this text depicts a school setting that is characterised by harsh conditions. According to Jason Chen (2017: 421), "the main harm of oppression is the deprived capability to develop one's capacities". Therefore, the presence of vanity, superficial cheerfulness, trivial gossip, and emotional disconnection among students and their instructors implies that the culture of the school may not have generated a supportive or intellectually challenging environment. On the other hand, despite this negative atmosphere at her school, Barbara Pinkerton feels intense hostility towards Becky as she was rebellious to the expected norms of the school. From Barbara Pinkerton's point of view, Becky is seen as: "In order to maintain authority in her school, it became necessary to remove this rebel, this monster, this serpent, this firebrand" (Thackeray, 1993: 13). The schoolmistress

perceives Becky as a potential challenge to her authority and the overall discipline of the school. In order to retain control and order in her school, Miss Pinkerton feels obligated to take tough measures.

The schoolmistress, Barbara Pinkerton has prejudiced and discriminating viewpoint on Becky Sharp, focusing on her physical appearance and familial background. She gets a letter from Sir Pitt Crawley's house where Becky works as a governess after school, asking extra information and reference about Becky. Miss Pinkerton's judgemental assessment of her former student is as follows:

P.S. The Miss Sharp, whom you mention as governess to Sir Pitt Crawley, was a pupil of mine, and I have nothing to say in her disfavour. Though her appearance is disagreeable, we cannot control the operations of nature; and though her parents were disreputable (her father being a painter, several times bankrupt, and her mother, as I have since learned, with horror, a dancer at the Opera); yet her talents are considerable, and I cannot regret that I received her out of charity. My dread is, lest the principles of the mother—who was represented to me as a French Countess, forced to emigrate in the late revolutionary horrors; but who, as I have since found, was a person of the very lowest order and morals—should at any time prove to be hereditary in the unhappy young woman whom I took as an outcast (Thackeray, 1993: 88).

Miss Barbara Pinkerton depicts Becky's father as a painter who encountered financial ruin on many occasions, while her mother is portrayed as a dancer at the opera. She expresses a strong dislike as she characterises Becky's parents as "disreputable". This reflects the cultural biases and prejudices that were common in Victorian times when people were frequently assessed according to their family history. According to Robin DiAngelo (2016: 86), oppression refers to the combination of prejudice from the dominant group and the institutional authority that is used to maintain and enforce that prejudice. Thus, Miss Pinkerton, as the only authority in her school, has prejudices because of Becky's familial background. Additionally, she says that she got Becky out of charity, implying that Becky Sharp came from a difficult or disadvantaged household and that the schoolmistress's kindness enabled her to go to school. Even though she praises Becky Sharp's skills and points out that she was kind to teach her, the tone of her speech shows unfair class differences and hard judgements. It could be concluded that, education, even when provided as charity, could be full of judgement and bias and this shows how the educational system can be brutal and oppressive.

CHAPTER THREE

SCHOOLING AS AN OPPRESSIVE MECHANISM IN *THE WAY OF ALL FLESH* BY SAMUEL BUTLER

Samuel Butler's literary work, *The Way of All Flesh*, offers a critical examination of the inflexible and repressive educational system prevalent during the Victorian Era. The narrative revolves around the protagonist, Ernest Pontifex, as he grapples with the stringent demands and regulations imposed by his father's scholastic aspirations for him. Butler draws attention to the negative impact that an authoritarian and strict educational system has on an individual's capacity to discover themselves and build their identity through the stories of the characters. As Butler's literary work is a semi-autobiographical work, at this point, it would be beneficial to provide a brief overview of Samuel Butler's biography and the influence of his familial ties on his life.

English author, essayist, and satirist Samuel Butler (1835–1902) is most recognised for his controversial writings which frequently question cultural norms and traditions. *Erewhon* (1872), a satirical utopian book about Victorian society and institutions, is one of his most prominent literary works. Butler's subsequent and semi-autobiographical novel, *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), was published after his death, also reveals the complicated relationships between religion, family, and society norms. Samuel Butler's father, Thomas Butler was a rector. Dr. Samuel Butler, his grandfather, was the famous headmaster of Shrewsbury School. At this school, his father, Thomas Butler started his formal education. He entered Cambridge University, where he received his bachelor's degree in 1829 after graduating from Shrewsbury School. Then, Thomas Butler received the priesthood the following year (Jones, 1919). This aspect is crucial as Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* has a family-centred narrative and an identical way of organising the characters. Carter (1976: 2-3) asserts that "for Butler, the influence of his grandfather is extremely important. With the emphasis on educational discipline that Dr. Butler instituted at Shrewsbury, his son endured great deal of punishment with his father as headmaster". Carter (1976: 2-3) continues that, due to this discipline, Thomas Butler "made his son, Samuel live under more strict environment than he ever had to experience". Samuel's parents placed significant pressure on him to pursue a career in the church, similar to the example of Ernest in the novel. Paulo Freire (2005) says that the dynamic between parents and children in a family is often an example of the larger social structure's objective cultural circumstances. There will be an even more oppressive atmosphere at home if the outside world

is authoritarian, harsh, and dominating. The challenging environment serves as a distinctive framework for Butler's literary work. To summarize, the novel is a direct reflection of Samuel Butler's life with the same parental portraits. Similarly, his parents compelled him to pursue a career in the priesthood, following in the footsteps of his father. However, he rejected and in his literary works criticised the societal expectations and repressive cultural norms of his era.

The Way of All Flesh is about Pontifex family, a typical Victorian family. The story is centred on the four generations of this family, starting with Old John Pontifex, a kind and skilled carpenter in a village named Paleham. George Pontifex is John's son and represents the second generation of the Pontifex family. He becomes a wealthy and tyrannical publisher with the help of his uncle after completing an apprenticeship in his publishing house. George's son, Theobald, is compelled to join the Anglican priesthood and marries Christina in accordance with the expectations of his family. Theobald's dictatorial parenting style has a bad effect on his eldest son, Ernest, who experiences both physical and emotional cruelty at home. At his point, the main plot of the book until the end, centres on the life of Ernest Pontifex in a mostly biographical description. As a sensitive boy deprived of familial love, Ernest Pontifex turns into a grown-up who rejects both his father's authoritarian style of Christianity and the fundamental values of his formal education. When Ernest is twelve years old, he enrolls at Roughborough School, where the headmaster, Dr. Skinner, is very similar to his father, Theobald in his treatment of the students. Ernest has an unpleasant and hostile relationship with his parents and Dr. Skinner at school. His aunt Alethea realises this, but she dies before she achieves her goal of protecting Ernest from the toxic influence of his parents and school. But just before she dies, she leaves an amount of money to Overton, who is a friend of Ernest's father and acts as a protective father to Ernest through the novel. However, Ernest will be able to get it when he turns twenty-eight. As Ernest gets older, his spiritual journey from Evangelical Christianity to the High Church is portrayed. He becomes a clergyman after university and decides to live among the poor to regenerate their religious beliefs. After a misunderstood act of sexual attack to a woman he is imprisoned. This leads to his parents' disapproval and his health gets worse. After getting out of jail, Ernest gives up his Christian faith, starts working as a tailor, and marries Ellen, a woman who is also going through hard times. Overton learns about Ellen's alcohol addiction and previous marriage. He takes Ernest on a trip through Europe after his divorce. Ernest inherits his aunt's money when he turned twenty-eight. In the end, he turns into an intelligent critic who challenges social rules of his time.

In this chapter of the study, oppressive aspects of educational experiences of the protagonist, Ernest Pontifex and his father Theobald Pontifex will be examined through the

analysis of excerpts from *The Way of All Flesh*. These oppressive elements of schooling will be categorised under the titles of oppression through social status within the context of parenting and family dynamics, schooling as a form of psychological oppression and oppression within educational environments through educators or school managers, teaching methods and schooling system. Conflicts among families, struggles at school, and a search to find one's own character are some of the subjects explored in the book. Therefore, it will be examined how Ernest's journey affected his life in trying to adapt societal expectations, expressing the ideological characteristics and challenges of the Victorian period.

3.1. Oppression Through Social Status Within the Context of Parenting and Family Dynamics

Samuel Butler's novel *The Way of All Flesh* serves as a reflection of the predominant cultural ideas at that era, particularly in relation to the upbringing of children. Furthermore, it highlights the issue of oppression within the dimension of parenting and disciplinary practises. The effect of home dynamics and parental expectations increased the oppression encountered by young children, therefore affecting their interactions within the public-school environment. In the framework of Victorian England, it is called authoritarian parenting, and it was defined by rigid rules, high expectations, and a lack of reaction. Pong et al. (2009) suggest that children's emotional control, academic performance, and psychological health can all suffer under authoritarian parenting. Peiyao Ning (2022) asserts that, children raised by authoritarian parents may have a lesser degree of creativity, confidence, and problem-solving skills. In the novel, it was characterised by the notion that refraining from physical discipline would result in the child being spoiled. Furthermore, Hederman (1982: 60) argues that children are gradually internalising parental authority as the level of authoritarian dynamics between parents and children gets stronger. As can be seen from the following quotation, parents like Mr. Pontifex were encouraged to use these dynamics in order to shape their children's behaviour:

At that time, it was universally admitted that to spare the rod was to spoil the child, and St Paul had placed disobedience to parents in very ugly company. If his children did anything which Mr. Pontifex disliked, they were clearly disobedient to their father. In this case there was obviously only one course for a sensible man to take. It consisted in checking the first signs of self-will while his children were too young to offer serious resistance. If their wills were "well broken" in childhood, to use an expression then much in vogue, they would acquire habits of obedience which they would not venture to break through till they were over twenty-one years old (Butler, 1995: 26).

These remarks refer to a rigid style of parenting known as authoritarian, characterised by a strong focus on compliance and punishment. It is implied that children are being physically

punished or given harsh discipline to stop them from expressing themselves and following their natural desires. This way of doing things can be oppressive and hurtful to feelings of individuals. As Salim and Preston (2019) claim, the children of authoritarian parents are subjected to a great deal of pressure and are rarely shown sympathy. Here, Mr. Pontifex's objective is to diminish his children's autonomy and shape them into obedient people. This procedure is considered essential in the fight against disobedience towards parents. A child's uniqueness and mental health may be suppressed by this method, which might cause them to feel oppressed and lacking in autonomy during their formative years.

Societal expectations regarding the outcomes of educational advantages of individuals can be identified as a means of oppression that families put upon their children. Mr. Pontifex makes a comparison between the conditions of his children and his own in the following sentences: "What should I not have done if I had had one half of your advantages? You should become dukes or found new empires in undiscovered countries, and even then, I doubt whether you would have done proportionately so much as I have done" (Butler, 1995: 29). Mr. Pontifex's lines represent a contrast between people with varying privileges and the expectations society places on them, and it may be examined through the lens of oppression. He thinks that his children have unlimited advantages compared to his own childhood and education. Therefore, as they are given more opportunities, they are presumed to make larger contributions to society and enjoy more prosperity as a result. This exemplifies the expectations placed on them to perform well while advancing their personal growth. Individuals who have certain advantages are often faced with criticism or responses of dissatisfaction when they fail to meet the high standards associated with their privileged position. This might be considered oppressive since it puts excessive pressure on them.

The social expectations placed upon students throughout the nineteenth century were characterised by their oppressive nature, since the educational system served as a means of putting particular values and societal standards upon individuals. For instance, clothing standards at schools could be regarded as one of these rigid social standards. Thus, students were required to follow the school dress standards that were heavily influenced by social standards and norms of the period (Ubelejit-Nte, 2023). Rebecca Raby (2008: 71) states that public school clothing standards and dress codes functioned as a means of controlling youth, reflecting societal demands that children had to respect. In the novel, social expectations from the protagonist, Ernest Pontifex creates a pressure on him through "education". At the very beginning of the novel, societal oppression on a schoolboy is described as follows:

He now wore more fashionable clothes than he had yet been accustomed to, and any little rusticity of gait or pronunciation which he had brought from Paleham, was so quickly and completely lost that it was ere long impossible to detect that he had not been born and bred among people of what is commonly called education (Butler, 1995: 13).

This may be examined via the lens of social conformity and the influence to fit into a specific cultural or societal archetype. The passage implies that Ernest Pontifex has adapted to societal norms by embracing a trendier clothing and modifying his voice and behaviour. This observation highlights the societal expectation for individuals to stick to predetermined standards and practises. It is possible to read his sudden and complete removal of any rustic expression in his walking or speech style as a sign of societal pressure to adapt to social norms and join in the rest of the community. The paragraph also emphasises Ernest's assimilation into a certain social class or group, namely those distinguished by their education. This process may include giving up certain elements of his original identity in order to blend in with the current culture.

Individuals, especially those with a comprehensive education and rigid moral upbringing, were subjected to an ideal of perfection due to the relationship between ethical control, societal standards, and educational discipline. In addition to limiting personal expression and development, this restrictive atmosphere created a culture of moral criticism and blame, particularly directed at individuals who were supposed to represent the highest ethical standards (Rimke and Hunt, 2002). An example of this type of criticism can be seen in the judgement of Ernest, as a form of societal and moral oppression through blaming a highly educated man who was raised with strict values. The paragraph below exemplifies a manifestation of societal and moral subjugation. Ernest Pontifex, the protagonist, faces severe criticism from the magistrate due to his perceived inability to abide by the ethical principles instilled in him via his upbringing and education as follows:

The magistrate spoke as follows: "Ernest Pontifex, yours is one of the most painful cases that I have ever had to deal with. You have been singularly favoured in your parentage and education. You have had before you the example of blameless parents, who doubtless instilled into you from childhood the enormity of the offence which by your own confession you have committed. You were sent to one of the best public schools in England. It is not likely that in the healthy atmosphere of such a school as Roughborough you can have come across contaminating influences; you were probably, I may say certainly, impressed at school with the heinousness of any attempt to depart from the strictest chastity until such time as you had entered into a state of matrimony (Butler, 1995: 249-250).

The magistrate places a great deal of disgrace on Ernest, emphasising that his situation is one of the most traumatic cases that the magistrate has encountered. The act of publicly shaming and passing moral judgements can have a destructive impact on individuals, leading to feelings

of oppression and emotional harm. It is also emphasised that Ernest came from a wealthy and ethically virtuous upbringing, characterised by the presence of “blameless parents” and a comprehensive education. This familial background contributes to the perception of oppression as it establishes high expectations of him and suggests that he has not succeeded in meeting these standards.

Additionally, Galbally and Lewis (2017) emphasise that the psychological and emotional well-being of children can be influenced by parental expectations. Furthermore, excessive expectations may result in higher stress levels and a decrease in the value of the parent-child interaction. As noticed, elements of tyranny and oppression are apparent in the novel’s third generation of Pontifex family members, particularly in relation to Mr. George Pontifex’s ambitions for his son, Theobald Pontifex. Mr. Pontifex has high standards for his son, who he hopes will study to become a fellow at a college before entering the priesthood. This demonstrates the extent to which Theobald’s parents influenced and monitored his decisions. Each phase of Theobald’s life is fundamentally shaped by the ambitions his father holds for him. Theobald’s limited freedom of choice can be seen in this excerpt:

Mr Pontifex had set his heart on his son’s becoming a fellow of a college before he became a clergyman. This would provide for him at once and would ensure his getting a living if none of his father’s ecclesiastical friends gave him one. The boy had done just well enough at school to render this possible, so he was sent to one of the smaller colleges at Cambridge and was at once set to read with the best private tutors that could be found. A system of examination had been adopted a year or so before Theobald took his degree which had improved his chances of a fellowship, for whatever ability he had was classical rather than mathematical, and this system gave more encouragement to classical studies than had been given hitherto (Butler, 1995: 35).

The course that Theobald will take is, to a large extent, decided by the goals that his father has for him. It is possible that his own hopes and aspirations have not been taken into consideration, yet he is nevertheless expected to comply with his father’s wishes. To fulfil his father’s ambitions, Theobald is sent to Cambridge University and is trained by private teachers. He might not have had the freedom to select his own academic route; thus, this great pressure to perform well in school might be perceived as a sort of oppression. Stone (1969) claims that in England, during the nineteenth century there was an emphasis on the study of classical subjects, which aimed to prepare students for admission into universities and for prestigious positions within society. As can be seen from the quotation, the reference to a new test format that prioritises classical subjects raises concerns about a potentially oppressive educational system that may not consider each student’s unique interests and capabilities. The excerpt serves as a demonstration of how the constraining societal demands imposed by Mr. Pontifex restrict

Theobald's agency and autonomy, compelling him to conform to a predetermined trajectory that fits with his father's aspirations.

The idea of parental authority and social pressure is a recurring motif in *The Way of All Flesh*, serving as a manifestation of familial and educational oppression. Freire (2005) states that when young individuals internalise parental control through the strict relationship structure, they often continue to follow the same behaviour when they become adults. Theobald Pontifex not only sets goals for his children in terms of their education but also, he illustrates an example of strict, authoritarian parenting while raising his children. His discipline in the context of "education" can be observed in these lines: "After some years have gone by, he hears his children their lessons, and the daily oft-repeated screams that issue from the study during the lesson hours tell their own horrible story over the house" (Butler, 1995: 67). These remarks suggest that the children are being subjected to an unsettling and oppressive atmosphere. The parenting style of Theobald Pontifex is a striking example of Freire's depiction. His harsh, authoritarian approach entails imposing discipline via education, which frequently results in an environment filled with his children's screams during classes, suggesting severe possibly abusive teaching practices. These instances demonstrate the children's emotional and psychological oppression as they are forced to endure unpleasant and painful experiences.

In Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, Theobald and Christina Pontifex are portrayed as an extreme form of authoritarian parents. Their parenting approach is characterized by harsh discipline and an unchangeable demand for obedience. Their belief in their moral obligation to rigorously shape their children's development from a young age is an obvious representation of this parenting style. This depiction is consistent with Diana Baumrind's (1991: 62) definition of authoritarian parenting, in which she identifies severe punishment, strict discipline, and high expectations for compliance as the main traits of this approach.³ Baumrind's research provides a deeper comprehension of the dynamics of the Pontifex family, where the parents' strict and

³ Baumrind (1991: 62) identifies three main parenting styles: Authoritative parents express sensitivity towards their children's needs, establish explicit and rational expectations, and enforce rules with warmth and empathy. Authoritarian parents are another parenting type who portray a demanding and directive parenting style, characterised by having high expectations for compliance and obedience. However, they tend to be less responsive to their children's emotional needs. Permissive parents are the ones who exhibit a caring and welcoming attitude towards their children, yet impose little expectations or controls, hence allowing children significant autonomy in decision-making. Each style has distinct characteristics that might influence the development and behaviour of children.

demanding parenting style emerges from their belief that complete authority is crucial. They frequently employ physical punishment or verbal abuse to enforce their rules, and they are less receptive to their children's desires and feelings. Authoritarian parents might not give their children a great deal of love or emotional support, but they frequently have high standards for their behaviour and academic achievement. This is typical in authoritarian households, where children are subjected to rigid rules and punishment and given little freedom to make decisions on their own. In this context, another example of oppressive parenting can be observed as follows:

The practical outcome of the foregoing was a conviction in Theobald's mind, and if in his, then in Christina's, that it was their duty to begin training up their children in the way they should go, even from their earliest infancy. The first signs of self-will must be carefully looked for, and plucked up by the roots at once before they had time to grow. Theobald picked up this numb serpent of a metaphor and cherished it in his bosom (Butler, 1995: 85).

Suppression of self-will is another theme in conjunction with authoritarian parenting in the excerpt above. Parents who discuss quickly eliminating the initial signs of self-will, preventing them from developing, demonstrate a tendency towards controlling actions. It suggests that children's natural curiosity and drive to explore the world on their own are to be suppressed rather than fostered as essential to their healthy growth. The parental methodology might be characterised as repressive, since it restricts the children's autonomy in decision-making, self-expression, and experiential learning. It imposes a strict obedience to parental expectations. Theobald and Christina are keen on having a great deal of influence on their children and shape their behaviour from a young age. As Mary V. Joseph and Jilly John (2008: 17) suggest "authoritarian parents often fear losing control over children, and they discourage open communication". In Pontifex family, authoritarian and strict parenting can be seen in terms of early education of their children. Although Theobald faced oppression through his father, George Pontifex, he continues this tradition of cruelty combining it with physical punishment under the concept of "teaching" by forcing his son, Ernest to learn some academic activities at a very early age as illustrated in the following sentences:

Before Ernest could well crawl, he was taught to kneel; before he could well speak, he was taught to lisp the Lord's prayer, and the general confession. How was it possible that these things could be taught too early? If his attention flagged or his memory failed him, here was an ill weed which would grow apace, unless it were plucked out immediately, and the only way to pluck it out was to whip him, or shut him up in a cupboard, or dock him of some of the small pleasures of childhood. Before he was three years old, he could read and, after a fashion, write. Before he was four, he was learning Latin, and could do rule of three sums (Butler, 1995: 85).

The paragraph highlights the expectations placed upon Ernest to acquire religious prayers and engage in scholarly pursuits such as reading, writing, and acquiring proficiency in the Latin language from a very young age. A child is subjected to significant pressure by this intensive and demanding educational schedule, depriving him of the spontaneity and freedom of early life. Any time the child showed signs of attention or memory deficits, the text states that they would “whip him, or shut him up in a cupboard”. As a disciplinary tactic, physical punishment and imprisonment are obvious examples of repressive parenting. Toker (2023: 181) asserts that when it comes to controlling their children’s behaviours, authoritarian parents are extremely severe and often turn to physical punishment. The demands of their child are disregarded by these parents. Ernest Pontifex is being made to do homework that could be too advanced for him. As the child’s normal growth phases are ignored and adult demands are imposed, this may seem oppressive. Instead of encouraging his natural curiosity and excitement for learning, this method might cause him mental turmoil and deprive him of his youthful innocence by enforcing severe conformity and discipline. Beside paternal authority, Ernest is also exposed to maternal authority. His mother, Christina Pontifex used the same methods as Theobald in terms of educating her son as she believed that it is the only thing to do:

Christina did not remonstrate with Theobald concerning the severity of the tasks imposed upon their boy, nor yet as to the continual whippings that were found necessary at lesson times. Indeed, when during any absence of Theobald’s the lessons were entrusted to her, she found to her sorrow that it was the only thing to do (Butler, 1995: 85-86).

As seen from these lines, Christina did not raise any objections to her husband’s harsh treatment of their child, including the regular use of the whippings. Her seeming approval of such severe methods is indicative of a lack of intervention or protection for the child in an oppressive pedagogical environment. When Theobald is not there, Christina is seen to be prepared to go on with the harsh discipline, implying that she is just as determined to uphold the strict rules. It suggests that she was involved in the repressive practises, as she shares responsibility for them. Joseph and John (2008: 16) observe that one’s parenting style is significantly influenced by the impact of their own parents. Style of parenting is influenced by factors including personality, schooling, cultural background, social situation, and the impact of one’s spouse. Therefore, it can be concluded that Christina is indifferent from her husband in terms of child’s physical and mental abuse, she follows the same path as Theobald Pontifex.

Samuel Butler (1995: 88) gives an example of whipping: “When Ernest was in his second year, Theobald, as I have already said, began to teach him to read. He began to whip him two days after he had begun to teach him.” Theobald’s treatment of his son, Ernest is a clear example of oppression as he uses physical force as a form of punishment. Teaching

someone to read that includes physical punishment is not only harsh but also repressive. This behaviour demonstrates a significant deficiency in patience, empathy, and understanding, potentially leading to long-term detrimental impacts on a child's developmental trajectory. This representation in the novel draws attention to the harsh and repressive upbringing that some children experienced in the past as a result of rigid and authoritarian parenting techniques. Physical abuse that Ernest is exposed to is portrayed in another chapter in his father Theobald's lines: "I have done my best to save you, but if you will have it so, you will and he lugged the little wretch, crying by anticipation, out of the room. A few minutes more and we could hear screams coming from the dining-room, [...] and knew that poor Ernest was being beaten" (Butler, 1995: 92). Ernest's father gets so angry that he grabs his son by the shoulder and drags him out of the house. An act of physical violence is a kind of oppression, especially when it is committed against a child. In this case, Ernest is being physically punished due to a simple pronunciation error. Ernest suffered from harsh and harmful treatment, as indicated by the screams that accompanied his punishment.

Education, at this point in Ernest's life, has taken on the role of a responsibility to be performed rather than a means by which he might advance towards his objectives. The concept of obligation is clear in his thoughts as: "Besides even if he were to die and go to Heaven, he supposed he should have to complete his education somewhere" (Butler, 1995: 114). Ernest thinks that he must finish school somewhere, even in the afterlife. The idea of responsibility can be viewed as oppressive since it suggests a lack of autonomy in making personal decisions regarding one's life and educational goals. Moreover, Ernest's strict academic requirements have a negative impact on both his physical health and his capacity for taking part in his classmates' typical activities. This is an example of oppression connected to his physical growth and his time at his school, Roughborough. The physical and mental challenges he faced during his school years are described as follows:

Ernest was one of the latter sort and found the atmosphere of Roughborough so gusty that he was glad to shrink out of sight and out of mind whenever he could. He disliked the games worse even than the squalls of the classroom and hall, for he was still feeble, not filling out and attaining his full strength till a much later age than most boys. This was perhaps due to the closeness with which his father had kept him to his books in childhood (Butler, 1995: 120).

It is clear from the above paragraph that Ernest feels physically unhappy and perhaps oppressed by Roughborough's environment, which includes the sports and activities that take place there. It is possible that his inferior physical condition compared to his friends is the reason for his suffering. As a result of this, he is isolated from his classmates, and this might be considered a kind of oppression. It is also possible to conclude that his father pushed him to high academic

expectations. Thus, because it can affect a person's ability to develop emotionally and physically, this kind of pressure, particularly in childhood, can be viewed as oppression. While Ernest was weak physically, he had an interest in making an organ. However, his father insists on the importance of full concentration to Latin and Greek which can be seen as restriction of creative expression of a student. Mr. Pontifex shows his authority in the following quotation: "I must insist on two things: firstly, that this new iron in the fire does not distract your attention from your Latin and Greek and secondly, that you bring no smell of glue or shavings into the house here, if you make any part of the organ during your holidays" (Butler, 1995: 136). Here, Ernest's father is worried about his new hobbies like making a musical instrument that are not related to traditional study of Latin and Greek. In this way, Ernest's father seems to be trying to stop or restrict his intellectual and artistic growth, which could be seen as an oppressive act as it prevents Ernest from exploring his distinctive skills and creative potential.

Learning Latin and Greek became Ernest's nightmare as his father always forced him to study. Ernest was fond of music yet his father, Theobald always tried to restrict this fondness ignoring Ernest's interest. This is clear in the following statement of Theobald as: "I wish he was not so fond of music; it will interfere with his Latin and Greek. I will stop it as much as I can" (Butler, 1995: 115). Theobald's insistence on prioritizing Ernest's classical studies over his love for music exemplifies a typical authoritarian parenting approach, as outlined by Carter and Welch (1981). Carter and Welch (1981: 191) point out that in this type of parenting, "the parent values obedience as a virtue, and favours forceful measures when the child's actions or beliefs conflict with what the parent thinks is right". Consequently, Ernest finds himself under pressure to focus on subjects that align with his father's desires rather than his own passions. This is a clear reflection of oppression in the parental approach, where Theobald's dominance significantly reduces Ernest's independence, severely limiting his freedom to explore and develop his genuine interests. At home, Ernest even hated some of the rooms as these rooms remind him of his unpleasant experiences. It is described in the novel as: "Of all the rooms in the house he hated the dining-room worst. It was here that he had had to do his Latin and Greek lessons with his father" (Butler, 1995: 164). It can be seen that Ernest appears to have significant unfavourable thoughts towards the dining room. The emotional effect of his lessons is strengthened by the connection of a certain room with undesirable, restrictive learning memories. This could make him feel imprisoned or limited in his own house. On the other hand, in terms of father-son conflict, these sentences reveal the mental burden his education has had on him, including any oppressive influences like pressure, conflict, or control that may have been imposed on him at school or at home.

Within the context of a familial setting, the imposition of pressure onto a child can lead to the emergence of emotional and psychological oppression. In the novel, Ernest is threatened by his father. Dr. Skinner is the headmaster of Ernest's school who is known for his strict rules and authority, and Mr. Pontifex threatens his son with Dr. Skinner if he does not tell him everything at school as follows:

"Now look here, Ernest," said his father with his blackest scowl, "I am going to put a stop to this nonsense once for all. Either take me fully into your confidence, as a son should take a father, and trust me to deal with this matter as a clergyman and a man of the world—or understand distinctly that I shall take the whole story to Dr Skinner, who, I imagine, will take much sterner measures than I should (Butler, 1995: 170).

As described above, Ernest's father uses psychological pressure by insisting that his son tells him everything. This can be perceived as oppressive and authoritarian since it brings a heavy emotional responsibility on the boy and suggests that he has to share all with his father. Furthermore, the father uses emotional control by threatening to involve Dr. Skinner, implying that this outside authority figure would implement "sterner measures". This kind of threat might be considered harsh because it makes the child afraid and forces him to do what his father wants. It represents the main topics of novel such as power relations and emotional issues inside the family. Theobald Pontifex was a priest and he used to give sermons on the horrors of the Inquisition. The Inquisition was well-known for its violent techniques of control and questioning. However, at home, after he heard the misbehaviours of the students at school, he questions Ernest repeatedly in order to get all details:

He was examined, re-examined, cross-examined, sent to the retirement of his own bedroom and cross-examined again; the smoking in Mrs Jones' kitchen all came out; which boys smoked and which did not; which boys owed money and, roughly, how much and where; which boys swore and used bad language. Theobald was resolved that this time Ernest should, as he called it, take him into his confidence without reserve, so the school list which went with Dr Skinner's half-yearly bills was brought out, and the most secret character of each boy was gone through *seriatim* by Mr and Mrs Pontifex, so far as it was in Ernest's power to give information concerning it, and yet Theobald had on the preceding Sunday preached a less feeble sermon than he commonly preached, upon the horrors of the Inquisition (Butler, 1995: 171).

The inspection and interrogation that Ernest is subjected to are emphasised as oppressive and invasive in this line. The paragraph depicts oppression in several ways, including a lack of trust, a violation of his privacy, and the employment of forceful measures by his parents. Ernest is questioned in-depth on his classmates' actions, attitudes, and illegal activities. Due to the violation of his privacy and liberty, this aggressive examination may be viewed as oppressive. The usage of Theobald's sermon connection creates an ironic dimension, therefore highlighting

the disparity between his verbal encouragements and his actual behaviour. Theobald Pontifex pressure his son to get an honour degree at his last year of education as follows:

During his last year at Cambridge, he overworked himself through this very blind deference to his father's wishes, for there was no reason why he should take more than a poll degree except that his father laid such stress upon his taking honours. He became so ill, indeed, that it was doubtful how far he would be able to go in for his degree at all; but he managed to do so (Butler, 1995: 189).

As can be seen from the quotation, Ernest was under a lot of pressure to complete his degree with honours in order to please his father. Having high expectations from his son can be viewed as oppressive if they are inconsistent with Ernest's own objectives or overall happiness. Joseph and John (2008: 20) depict that children raised by authoritarian parents are usually well-behaved, obedient, and competent but suffer lower degrees of satisfaction, social skills, and self-worth. Their lack of social competency stems from the parent's tendency to dictate what their child should do rather than letting them make their own decisions. Ernest did as his father told him to do, without asking or thinking about his own wishes and specifications. This unquestioning obedience can be perceived as extreme, as it potentially led Ernest to engage in actions against his own will. Moreover, these remarks demonstrate the mental and physical difficulties that come from trying to live up to strict requirements.

The negative impact of oppressive behaviours on Ernest's mental health serves as an example of the damaging consequences of such pressures. His experiences reflect the traits commonly seen in children of authoritarian parents, as identified by Joseph and John (2008: 20). They note that such children rarely initiate actions, feel socially isolated, and depend on others for moral direction, lacking spontaneity, and critical thinking. This is evident in Ernest's experience. After school, Theobald never gives up his son and together they go over the study notes and exam papers at home. his father Theobald's excessive control extends to reviewing study notes and exam papers, leaving no room for Ernest's independent thought or decision-making. This constant oversight not only stifles Ernest's initiative but also isolates him from developing normal social interactions and forming his own moral judgments. Therefore, Ernest's experiences exemplify the repressive effects of authoritarian parenting, where his individuality and capacity for self-directed learning are consistently suppressed. Ernest's father spends hours to control his son's quality of education as seen from these lines: "Theobald made him go over all the examination papers with him, and in fact reproduce as nearly as possible the replies that he had sent in. [...] while at home he spent several hours a day in continuing his classical and mathematical studies as though he had not yet taken his degree" (Butler, 1995: 189). Given that he has previously completed his degree yet is still required to study for several hours every day, Ernest does not seem to have much control in this position. His freedom to

make decisions regarding his own life and education is restricted by this lack of autonomy, which may be viewed as oppressive. As noted by Baumrind (1991), children raised by authoritarian parents exhibited unstable and apparently pessimistic traits. In addition to being quickly irritated, they lacked a sense of direction and were not particularly pleasant to be around. Therefore, in Ernest's example, the imposition of Theobald's control sets a limitation on Ernest's capacity for progress and maturity.

3.2. Schooling as a Form of Psychological Oppression

In the Victorian Era, before to the implementation of the Education Act of 1876, the provision of schooling was not offered free of charge. Individuals tend to enrol their children in educational institutions with the intention of providing them with improved prospects in the future. However, the high cost of education turned into a psychological oppression in the process of time as it became a heavy burden on parents. At the same time, this heavy cost of schooling led parents to feel they had the right to make decisions about their children's futures, a form of control that can be seen as psychological oppression, as described by Sandra Lee Bartky (1990: 30). Bartky (1990) argues that this kind of oppression often entails sending messages of low status to specific groups in society (30). In this scenario, when parents frequently spoke of the financial sacrifices for their children's education, it unintentionally conveyed to the children that they were a burden. This situation not only caused tension in the family but also led to feelings of guilt and reduced self-esteem among the children, who were constantly reminded of the financial impact of their education on the family. Thus, the cost of education had profound consequences, extending beyond financial hardship to significantly impacting the mental health and familial relationships of that time.

Paulo Freire (2005: 154) examines the impact of societal structures and cultural environments on shaping parenting approaches, especially those of an authoritarian nature. Freire (2005: 154) notes, "The parent-child relationship at home usually reflects the objective cultural conditions of the surrounding social structure. If the conditions that penetrate the home are authoritarian, rigid, and dominating, the home will increase the climate of oppression". This concept is clearly seen in Mr. Pontifex's situation, who, despite significant financial investment in his children's education, remains doubtful about its worth. His parenting style, deeply rooted in the strict and hierarchical social norms, reflects the oppressive environment outlined by Freire. This is evident in the way Mr. Pontifex controls and doubts the educational process, creating a home environment where his children may feel their educational pursuits are undervalued and their personal aspirations stifled. Consequently, the children might perceive

their education not as a path to self-empowerment but rather as a mechanism to meet their father's expectations, further establishing the cycle of oppression within the family. This situation not only raises questions about the true value of the education but also highlights how oppressive societal standards can influence family life. Mr. Pontifex's ideas on school expenses are presented in the novel as:

He pitied himself for the expensive education which he was giving his children; he did not see that the education cost the children far more than it cost him, inasmuch as it cost them the power of earning their living easily rather than helped them towards it, and ensured their being at the mercy of their father for years after they had come to an age when they should be independent. A public-school education cuts off a boy's retreat; he can no longer become a labourer or a mechanic, and these are the only people whose tenure of independence is not precarious—with the exception of course of those who are born inheritors of money or who are placed young in some safe and deep groove. Mr Pontifex saw nothing of this; all he saw was that he was spending much more money upon his children (Butler, 1995: 28).

Seen through the above lens, Mr. Pontifex attempts to impose psychological oppression onto his children through the financing of a costly education, the potential benefits of which may not be obviously useful to them. He worries about how much their schooling will cost, but he does not think about how much it could hurt their future and ability to be independent. The limited occupational alternatives available to children attending public school, as depicted in the text, reveal a subtle form of psychological oppression. Mr. Pontifex's considerable investment in his children's education, while aiming to secure their future, paradoxically narrows their career paths, making it challenging for them to consider occupations that do not necessitate an expensive educational background, such as mechanics or labourers. This scenario illustrates a key aspect of psychological oppression: the restriction of choices. Samantha Godwin (2011: 264) touches on a related notion, asserting that a common belief among parents, teachers, and other authority figures is that too much freedom can lead children to ruin their lives. This belief often results in adults imposing their own values and career expectations on children, inadvertently leading to psychological oppression. In Mr. Pontifex's case, his decision to invest heavily in education, while intended to benefit his children, may actually limit their ability to explore a wider range of life and career choices. This kind of parental control, as Godwin (2011) notes, can create an environment where children feel compelled to follow predetermined paths, thus experiencing psychological oppression stemming from a lack of autonomy in shaping their own futures.

Theobald Pontifex's father, Mr. Pontifex remembers his own childhood memories considering the amount of money he paid to schools for his children and states that: "My father was a common carpenter, and here you are both of you at public schools, costing me ever so

many hundreds a year, while I at your age was plodding away behind a desk in my Uncle Fairlie's counting house" (Butler, 1995: 29). Since it heavily affects Mr. Pontifex's resources and could restrict their possibilities for enjoyment or personal growth, this financial burden can be oppressive. There is an aspect of disappointment or dissatisfaction in contrast of his children's expensive education with his own experience as an ordinary carpenter. The sentence also refers to parents' sacrifices for their children's education. The desire for the children's achievement motivates this dedication, but it may be burdensome when the financial load limits the parent's opportunities.

When evaluating work choices, a student may not have complete autonomy in their decision-making process due to the financial investment made by their family in their education. Theobald Pontifex corresponded with his father via letters, articulating his lack of desire to pursue a career in the church. However, he continues to experience the financial strain associated with his educational expenditures as follows: "I am aware that I have been a great expense to you in spite of my scholarships, but you have ever taught me that I should obey my conscience, and my conscience tells me I should do wrong if I became a clergyman" (Butler, 1995: 36). Even though he has funding, Theobald feels like he has been a financial burden on the family. On the other hand, Chen (2017) alleges that what actually make oppression damaging is its power to make the oppressed internalise their inferior and subordinate positions. Theobald internalises his inferiority towards his father. Yet, he has received education to listen to his own principles, which advises against pursuing a career in the priesthood. Ann E. Cudd (2006: 158) points out that "feelings of shame and lowered self-worth may also rebound indirectly through oppressed individuals' psychologies from material forces of oppression". This observation implies a divergence between Theobald's own ambitions and the societal pressures imposed by his parents, namely his father. His inner conflict and feeling of shame might be seen as an example of psychological oppression. Mr. Pontifex sends a letter to his son, Theobald stressing his paternal authority to control his choices as follows:

You should not have said "in spite of my scholarships." It was only proper that if you could do anything to assist me in bearing the heavy burden of your education, the money should be, as it was, made over to myself. Every line in your letter convinces me that you are under the influence of a morbid sensitiveness which is one of the devil's favourite devices for luring people to their destruction. I have, as you say, been at great expense with your education. Nothing has been spared by me to give you the advantages, which, as an English gentleman, I was anxious to afford my son, but I am not prepared to see that expense thrown away and to have to begin again from the beginning, merely because you have taken some foolish scruples into your head, which you should resist as no less unjust to yourself than to me (Butler, 1995: 37).

The paragraph reveals Mr. Pontifex's high aspirations about Theobald's educational pursuits and professional development. He has made significant financial investments on Theobald's education and maintains distinct expectations for him, which might be seen as a right of control. According to Godwin (2011: 264), "If children are not under parental control, following a parent-defined path rather than their own desires, adults judge them to be out of control". The oppressive nature of Mr. Pontifex's control and expectations can be seen in his authoritarian stance, which significantly diminishes Theobald's autonomy and independence. This dynamic is a classic example of psychological oppression, as defined by Bartky (1990: 23), where systematic control supports dominance, crushes motivation, and restricts understanding of those in power. In this context, Theobald's concerns and objections are dismissed as mere foolish scruples, illustrating a clear disregard for his personal agency. This denial corresponds with Cudd's (2006: 155) definition of psychological harm, in which she explains that abuse may be both psychological and violent. Psychological abuse, including actions or words that denigrate, humiliate, disrespect, or terrorize, is particularly relevant in examining Mr. Pontifex's behaviour. His manner of dealing with Theobald not only weakens Theobald's self-esteem but also enforces a terrorizing form of discipline that is consistent with Cudd's description of psychological oppression. This oppressive relationship, marked by a lack of respect and empathy, outlines the essence of individual psychological harm, thereby highlighting the need for a critical examination of familial dynamics in the context of authority and control.

Additionally, as Godwin (2011: 290) points out, one of the primary responsibilities of parents is to educate and prepare their children to become knowledgeable and morally upright individuals in society. This obligation cannot be effectively fulfilled without enforcing obedience, managing stubbornness, and correcting negative behaviours. The exchange of letters between the father and son ends in Mr. Pontifex's psychological pressure on Theobald underlining his expectations from him as seen below: "I gave you an education regardless of expense, which has put you in possession of a comfortable income. I have thus started you fairly in life and may claim that you should cease to be a drag upon me further" (Butler, 1995: 50). In exchange for the money spent on Theobald's schooling, his father now expects him to become financially independent and stop being a burden on his family. Rice (2013: 141) states that "oppression involves the taking away of choice and opportunity, the substitution of one's own judgment for that of another". Mr. Pontifex does not respect Theobald's own judgements and choices. Therefore, the psychological stress is increased by the suggestion that Theobald has been a burden. Cudd (2006: 164) defines self-esteem and self-respect as "self-esteem is valuing oneself highly, self-respect is the belief that one is worthy of a high value".

These are two important factors in an individual's life in order to gain confidence. This confidence helps a person to resist oppression and deal with everyday problems. Cudd (2006: 164) also argues that "persons who are humiliated or degraded suffer from a loss of self-esteem. Humiliation and degradation give rise to shame, as well". To conclude, Theobald Pontifex could suffer from the loss of self-esteem and due to his father's humiliations, he might not have his self-respect anymore. He may have a sense of indebtedness towards his parents due to the financial obligations encountered throughout his schooling and this can be oppressive.

3.3. Oppression Within Educational Environments Through Educators, School Managers, Teaching Methods, and Schooling System

During the Victorian era in England, bullying among students in public schools was a common problem that had a big impact on the health of children. Bullying is commonly described as a deliberate and hostile act or behaviour performed either by an individual or a group, which occurs frequently and over an extended period of time. The victim of bullying is typically someone who lacks the ability to easily defend oneself (Smith et al., 2008). Bullying behaviour, defined as persistent acts of hostility, coercion, or intimidation directed against a victim by one or more people, can have a number of detrimental effects on the child who is the target. According to Gini and Pozzoli (2013: 721), individuals who experience peer bullying often have adverse psychological consequences, including heightened levels of anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, and a diminished sense of self-esteem. Samuel Butler's novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, draws attention to the hidden tendency for oppression associated with peer bullying and the behaviours of authoritative people within an educational environment. Roughborough, under Dr. Skinner's leadership, was a prestigious institution known for its rigorous curriculum and strict management. There was a problem with older guys at Roughborough School harassing on younger students. This is a kind of oppression in which more dominant or older students bully and threaten their less dominant or younger friends, making school life intolerable for them. Peer bullying can be observed from these remarks: "Ernest had heard awful accounts of Dr. Skinner's temper, and of the bullying which the younger boys at Roughborough had to put up with at the hands of the bigger ones" (Butler, 1995: 109). At Roughborough School, junior students were subjected to bullying by their older peers. The existence of an imbalance of power is characterised by the offender of bullying having a certain advantage or superiority over the victim, which may show in several forms such as a rising profile, physical size, intelligence, or high social position within their family.

Along with apparent physical violence, bullying contains several types of hostility that may not be directly apparent. A form of bullying might involve an individual expressing accusations towards another individual without committing to physical violence (Rose et al., 2009). In aforementioned Roughborough case, there is a form of oppression in which elder or more powerful students bully and abuse their younger colleagues, thus creating an atmosphere that is unfriendly and oppressive to them. Dan Olweus (1993: 9-10) explains that bullying activity is characterised by an obvious difference in power between the individual performing the behaviour and the individual being targeted, with the aim of causing harm, and the occurrence of constant occasions. On the other hand, Dr. Skinner's anger has been brought up above yet, it is likely that he is not doing anything to stop or handle the bullying. Dr. Skinner's inability or unwillingness to address bullying could contribute to already uncomfortable circumstances at school and despite its reputation as one of the most prestigious schools of its day, it appears to have serious safety issues.

It may be useful to recall the educational system in place at that period. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the concept of compulsory education had not yet been established. However, there were educational institutions like as Roughborough that gained recognition for their strict and rigorous administration. The first public schools were established, mostly for the boys of the upper classes and these places were made to support students in preparing for college. But the great majority of people could not afford them due to their high price (Gardner, 2004). In these schools, managers try to impose their own ideas to students in order to shape their characters. On the other hand, Harry G. Judge (1982: 514) underlines the power of the Church on public schools in Victorian era as follows: "The training which they gave was, of course, clerical and designed to meet the professional needs of the Church". Therefore, the educational mentality of these schools was based on religious roots. Darling (1931: 29) points out how crucial the role of religion on being a headmaster of a public school as follows: "It is not possible to be headmaster of a public school unless one is strongly convinced of the importance of religion in education and even of the value of the forms of religion as practised in churches". At Roughborough, Dr. Skinner's example of this kind of school managers depicted in the novel as follows:

Dr Skinner's pupils distinguished themselves at whichever University they went to. He moulded their minds after the model of his own, and stamped an impression upon them which was indelible in after-life; whatever else a Roughborough man might be, he was sure to make everyone feel that he was a God-fearing earnest Christian and a Liberal, if not a Radical, in politics. Some boys, of course, were incapable of appreciating the beauty and loftiness of Dr Skinner's nature (Butler, 1995: 105).

As already mentioned above, Dr. Skinner had considerable power over the pupils by having a major impact on their worldviews. Carter (1976: 30) claims that “in order to reveal his real views of education in *The Way of All Flesh* Butler invented a pseudonym for his headmaster at Shrewsbury, Dr. Skinner, and called his school Roughborough”. The long-term effect of Dr. Skinner on his pupils was deep, as they were shaped into people who embraced a strong religious faith, had liberal or radical political beliefs, and exhibited an unwavering commitment to Christian principles. In the construction of oppression, educational institutions have a crucial role as Robin DiAngelo (2016: 86) states: “oppression involves the prejudice of the dominant group plus the institutional power to maintain and enforce that prejudice”. This observation implies that the institution encourages a certain level of uniformity and restricts the diversity of viewpoints, therefore potentially being perceived as oppressive.

The control and impact in the school system can also be seen as harassment when it limits people’s freedom of choice and thought as Dr. Skinner did his students in this example. There was a place at school called Skinner’s library where new as well as old pupils may be questioned and disciplined. The function of this library is explained as: “the room where new boys were examined, and old ones had up for rebuke or chastisement. If the walls of that room could speak, what an amount of blundering and capricious cruelty would they not bear witness to!” (Butler, 1995: 110). The fact that this room is used for both exams and punishment, quickly suggests harsh disciplinary measures which are taken at this institution. As described above, the library has seen Dr. Skinner’s brutality and repressive acts in the past and it is possible to conclude at this point that systemic oppression takes place at this educational institution. Besides, the educational system of the era may also be perceived as unpleasant due to the mandatory participation of Latin and Greek language courses at schools. Ivan Illich (1970: 23) refers to the consumerist attitude of schools in which students are taught to think like consumers at schools, and they are made to believe that useful information is something that can be supplied to them. This makes society controlled by deceptive schools and authoritarian managers of knowledge. Further, in Paulo Freire’s (2005: 73) banking concept discussion, students are viewed as blank surfaces that need to be filled by the instructor. Students were unwillingly taking these courses although they had no interest in learning them. Compulsory participation of students in these courses is described as follows:

Latin and Greek had nothing in them which commended them to his instinct as likely to bring him peace even at the last; still less did they hold out any hope of doing so within some more reasonable time. The deadness inherent in these defunct languages themselves had never been artificially counteracted by a system of *bona fide* rewards for application. There had been any amount of punishments for want of

application, but no good comfortable bribes had baited the hook which was to allure him to his good (Butler, 1995: 122).

As can be seen from the quotation, the instruction of subjects was conducted without considering of the individual interests of students, thus it may be seen as a deficiency in student-centered learning. One of the critical oppressive aspects of the educational system lies in the role of educators and their methods of discipline. Furthermore, the tendency to prioritise harsh discipline above creating a caring and helpful learning atmosphere might have an extensively negative effect. The failure of the educational system to hold students' attention and inspire them to learn particular subjects may also be defined as ineffective and oppressive. Carter (1976: 30) notes that Samuel Butler's experiences align with this mentality. Butler's career in educational institutions, ranging from Shrewsbury to Cambridge, was characterised by a deep feeling of loss. He felt that his educators lacked the necessary pedagogical skills, leading to an education that he perceived as largely useless and disconnected from practical life. Butler's personal dissatisfaction is evidence of the broader institutional flaws. It prompts significant inquiries regarding the essence of instruction and the significance of the subjects taught at these prestigious institutions. His experiences call for a more thorough discussion on the need for educational changes that include teaching practices and quality as well as curriculum content.

Another issue related to the deficiencies of educational institutions is the system of rewards and inequalities among students. At Roughborough, Ernest's school, the type of this rewarding which is also called "monthly merit money" is described as:

There was an institution at Roughborough called the monthly merit money; the maximum sum which a boy of Ernest's age could get was four shillings and sixpence; several boys got four shillings and few less than sixpence, but Ernest never got more than half-a-crown and seldom more than eighteen pence; his average would, I should think, be about one and nine pence, which was just too much for him to rank among the downright bad boys, but too little to put him among the good ones (Butler, 1995: 105).

As described above, monthly merit money programme gave pupils rewards for good work or good behaviour. It is evident that the method was not carried out fairly. Ernest's achievement was not considerably poorer than that of many other children, yet he constantly earned smaller prize money. Ernest's peer reputation deteriorated, and his sense of self-worth was impacted by the unfair distribution of merit money. The text illustrates how a reward system that was designed to inspire and motivate students was implemented unjustly. This kind of categorization can be seen as a type of systematic oppression inside the educational system. At the same time, this merit money subject turns into a source of anxiety for students as the school headmasters send a detailed report to the parents at the end of each year, including the school bill and an overall assessment of the students. Ernest got his report from his luggage, which

Theobald described as “infamous and outrageous”. Ernest consistently experienced a sense of anxiety regarding this paper, as it was meticulously examined and subjected to extensive questioning. The details of the report were as follows:

REPORT OF THE CONDUCT AND PROGRESS OF ERNEST PONTIFEX.

UPPER FIFTH FORM, HALF YEAR ENDING MIDSUMMER 1851

Classics—Idle, listless and unimproving.

Mathematics —Idle, listless and unimproving.

Divinity —Idle, listless and unimproving.

Conduct in house. —Orderly.

General Conduct—Not satisfactory, on account of his great unpunctuality and inattention to duties.

Monthly merit money 1s. 6d. 6d. 0d. 6d. Total 2s. 6d.

Number of merit marks 2 0 1 1 0 Total 4

Number of penal marks 26 20 25 30 25 Total 126

Number of extra penals 9 6 10 12 11 Total 48

I recommend that his pocket money be made to depend upon his merit money.

S. SKINNER, Headmaster (Butler, 1995: 149).

As can be seen from the quotation, the report demonstrates the thorough review of Ernest’s school bill by school administrators, which consisted of a comprehensive evaluation of his behaviours, advancement, and personality. He had a greater degree of stress due to the paper because of comprehensive process of inspection and questioning about it. This evaluation of his character shows how worthy he is to be a student. Ernest’s reward and punishment scores are outlined in this text to show how his good conduct has been rewarded and his bad behaviour punished. The idea that the distribution of pocket money should be conditioned upon the collection of merit money means the creation of a framework that regulates a student’s resources in accordance with their conduct, which may give cause for oppressive conditions. In order to control the behaviours of the students, headmasters of the schools constantly evaluate their conduct, character, and development and that may employ rewards and punishments. This can be analysed as the oppressive side of the education system.

Financial constraints at schools due to students’ overall conduct are reflected as follows: “He would therefore have to go back to Roughborough this half year with only five shillings pocket money. If he wanted more, he must earn more merit money” (Butler, 1995: 169). In these remarks financial oppression of the schooling system that Ernest faced can be seen clearly. The extent to which Ernest could increase his personal revenue is dependent upon his potential for collecting additional merit money. Students are under pressure from this system to fulfil requirements, including getting higher merit scores, in order to get more money.

Excessive punishments at schools were another oppressive part of the education system in the nineteenth century. Ernest Pontifex was declared guilty and faced various restrictions and excessive punishment as a result of his behaviours. In the following quotation, it is clear that the schooling system employs unjust and excessive punishments:

Next day at the hour when the daily punishments were read out, Ernest Pontifex was declared to have incurred every punishment which the school provided for evil-doers. He was placed on the idle list for the whole half year, and on perpetual detentions; his bounds were curtailed; he was to attend junior callings-over; in fact, he was so hemmed in with punishments upon every side that it was hardly possible for him to go outside the school gates (Butler, 1995: 173).

The above excerpt illustrates how Ernest is put on the idle list for the whole semester, given permanent penalties. His freedom is severely limited, and all of these penalties are building up, making life more difficult for him. Ernest's conviction for many offences in the absence of a fair procedure or substantiating evidence indicates a potential deficiency in the due process framework employed by the disciplinary system of the school. This causes the perception of oppression since he is exposed to harsh penalties without an equal opportunity to make his defence. In addition to punishments, schooling system has a role to shape the students' choices and career. Ernest faces this oppressive nature of the system as follows:

He took to reading fairly well—not because he liked it, but because he was told he ought to do so, and his natural instinct, like that of all very young men who are good for anything, was to do as those in authority told him. The intention at Battersby was (for Dr Skinner had said that Ernest could never get a fellowship) that he should take a sufficiently good degree to be able to get a tutorship or mastership in some school preparatory to taking orders (Butler, 1995: 182).

As described above, Ernest reads not because he wants to or because he loves reading, but because he is told to. This shows how oppressive the education system is, since it often forces students to follow certain learning paths and meet certain standards, giving individuals with little freedom for independent decisions or pursuits. Illich (1970: 22) emphasizes the lack of autonomy at schools and says that individual autonomy is restricted by the existing education system, which reinforces dependence on institutionalised learning. Ernest's first reaction is to obey the people in power. Jason Chen (2017) propounds that there is an agreement among scholars about what is count as oppression and explains: "Oppression is an injustice caused by the design of social institutions and experienced by individuals in virtue of belonging to a social group" (Chen, 2017: 423). It is implied that Dr. Skinner, the headmaster and other authoritative people have a significant influence in Ernest's academic and professional path (e.g., becoming a clergyman) restricting his personal choices and autonomy. This institutional pressure for obedience is oppressive.

It may be helpful at this point to examine the role of school administrators or instructors as the authoritative figures to which pupils may express opposition. Dr. Skinner was the headmaster of a well-known school at that time and the atmosphere in his school environment described in the novel as follows:

Some such boys, alas! there will be in every school; upon them Dr Skinner's hand was very properly a heavy one. His hand was against them, and theirs against him during the whole time of the connection between them. They not only disliked him, but they hated all that he more especially embodied, and throughout their lives disliked all that reminded them of him. Such boys, however, were in a minority, the spirit of the place being decidedly Skinnerian (Butler, 1995: 105).

It is made clear in the text that these students not only did not like Dr. Skinner, but they also hated what he stands for. This strong feeling shows that the abusive connection was more than just an argument and may have included punishments or bossy behaviour. However, these students who did not agree with Skinner were in the minority, which means that most of the students followed or supported Skinner's rules. This group of people may have felt restricted by Dr. Skinner's rigid, authoritarian direction. Illich (1970: 22) draws attention to the power relationships that exist in the educational system where teachers have control over pupils and serve as judges. Teachers' influence has the potential to corrupt society. The passage emphasises the risk for oppressive dynamics inside educational institutions, particularly in connection to the management strategy used by instructors such as Dr. Skinner.

The long-term consequences of these oppressive interactions within schools have had a major impact on the disobedient students, shaping their views and perspectives throughout the course of their careers. By doing so, headmasters cause potential harm while trying to shape young students' minds. Inexperienced students who are ready to be shaped by educators are described as: "He was making his money by corrupting youth; that it was his paid profession to make the worse appear the better reason in the eyes of those who were too young and inexperienced to be able to find him out" (Butler, 1995: 108). Educators exhibit a notable concern with their financial income and position in society. As a result, they might show a lack of understanding of the moral dilemma involved in their behaviours. It is possible that these children do not have the necessary critical thinking abilities and life experiences to accurately perceive the real purposes of their lecturers. John Reed (1974) states that public schools were seen as flawed learning environments because of the potential for negative impacts and the lack of good communication between teachers and students. Therefore, it can be concluded that instructors in authoritative positions could abuse the power they have to suppress and restrict the children's academic and moral growth, creating an oppressive and immoral learning environment.

Educational administrators such as Dr. Skinner attempt to provide students with a comprehensive and challenging academic basis, therefore enabling their admission into prestigious schools of higher education. Despite their academic achievements, the approaches used by these educators are unable to address the diverse needs and distinctive talents of children. These oppressive dynamics are described by Theobald as follows:

“I hope,” said Theobald to himself, “I hope he’ll work—or else that Skinner will make him. I don’t like Skinner, I never did like him, but he is unquestionably a man of genius, and no one turns out so many pupils who succeed at Oxford and Cambridge, and that is the best test. I have done my share towards starting him well (Butler, 1995: 115).

As can be seen above, the reference to Skinner’s influence with improving students’ achievement at Oxford and Cambridge reflects an important number of educational expectations and demands placed on students. Illich (1970: 33) argues that schools force students to follow a set of predetermined knowledge and skills by using a standardised programme and assessment system. This standardisation restricts individual autonomy and creativity. In achieving the objective of academic success, this expectation can be oppressive because it may prevent students from being creative. On the other hand, as a parent, Theobald thinks he has done enough to give his child a good start in life. This means that parents are also to blame for harsh school systems because they put their child’s academic success ahead of other components of their growth as an individual. According to Rice (2013: 143), “the institutions of families and schools are foundationally oppressive”. As Rice (2013) claims, it is unlikely that parents and educators would stop replacing their own evaluations with those of the kids and students. The pursuit of standardised academic performance is often considered to be the primary objective of the educational system. As a result, the use of an impersonal approach in education might also have oppressive effects on students, as they may perceive themselves as being subjected to a process of obedience aimed at matching with specific academic norms and objectives.

In the pursuit of academic achievement, instructors at schools often engage in the practise of rebuking or humiliating students. In the example of Ernest, he experienced humiliation due to a mispronunciation in class as follows: “He called Ernest ‘an audacious reptile’ and said he wondered the earth did not open and swallow him up because he pronounced Thalia with a short i. ‘And this to me,’ he thundered, who never made a false quantity in my life” (Butler, 1995: 119). The usage of negative words by this character implies a tendency towards oppression and control in the treatment of the student, Ernest. This response, which is meant to shame and put down the student for what seems like a small mistake, can be intimidating. Cultural and linguistic elitism oppresses individuals who do not comply to the

requirements of the dominant culture or language. Ernest describes how do the students feel at this type of class by using a metaphor as: “It seemed like living on the crater of Vesuvius” (Butler, 1995: 120). The use “Vesuvius’s crater” as a metaphor suggests that Ernest’s life is full of dangers and uncertainty. This might be a reference to the demands, expectations, and perhaps even oppressive elements of his schooling that are always pressing on him.

After a longer period of Ernest’s time at schools, he was imprisoned as a result of being suspected of committing rape. Ernest shown remarkable advancement in learning a practical skill, namely tailoring, and received praise from his instructor. The individual draws a comparison between the instructors at the jail and those had within the school as follows:

Any man of his ability who was at the same time anxious to learn would of course make rapid progress, and before he left prison the warder said he was as good a tailor with his three months’ apprenticeship as many a man was with twelve. Ernest had never before been so much praised by any of his teachers (Butler, 1995: 272).

During his time in jail, Ernest made progress in learning how to sew clothes, which shows that different or unusual learning settings can work better for some people. This could mean that standard school settings are not always right for everyone and that systems that are too strict or controlling could make learning harder. The fact that Ernest’s jail instructor praised him shows how encouraging and positive reinforcement may exist in the classroom. It is contrary to his previous interactions in more conventional schools, when he could have encountered harsh critiques, penalties, or unsupportive teaching strategies. This could be regarded as the oppressive nature of traditional schooling.

To conclude, Samuel Butler’s *The Way of All Flesh* is a harsh critique of the strict educational and cultural ideals of the Victorian Era, influenced by his own experiences and family connections. Butler reveals how oppressive parental expectations and authoritarian educational institutions impact individual identity and self-discovery from the perspective of Ernest Pontifex. Butler emphasises the intense pressure individuals experience to conform to society expectations, especially in career development and faith, by reflecting his own childhood in the Pontifex family. The novel examines the main characters’ problems and provides a criticism on the socioeconomic restrictions of the time. Samuel Butler challenges societal standards of the Victorian era by prompting readers to rethink them through Ernest’s journey of resistance and self-discovery. In the end, *The Way of All Flesh* demonstrates how strength and independence may triumph over social injustice.

CONCLUSION

The Victorian era, spanning from 1837 to 1901, stands out as a significant period in British history, marked by profound transformations across various sectors including culture, education, and labour conditions. The literary works produced during this era exhibit a notable correlation with the prevailing societal norms and concerns of their day, with education serving as a frequent theme. The significance of education was widely recognized by Victorian society, as evidenced by the enactment of educational legislations, which also serve as references to the formal education in this era. Furthermore, this period witnessed substantial reforms in the education and school systems, driven by an increasing focus on educational matters.

In Victorian period, middle class wealthy families valued schooling in order to keep their children in a high social status. As a result, education became a tool to form an elite group that controlled key societal positions, reinforcing a sense of superiority over others. Subsequently, an important number of individuals who had previously attended school took up positions of power within the colonial administration, military, and government organisations. Later, educational opportunities extended beyond public schools to include church schools, Jewish institutions, and schools dedicated to girls. However, among these schools, public schools stand as the most remarkable institutions with their educational perspective. The English public school system of the nineteenth century can be regarded as a remarkably effective mechanism for upholding aristocratic beliefs, institutions, and the unequal distribution of power and wealth within an industrialised society. This practice of schooling included integrating the children of the new wealthy class into higher strata of society; so to say, this created a privileged class not only financially but also culturally, intellectually, and socially. This gave them a feeling of belonging and unity with the established ruling class and set them apart from the rest of the people.

In Victorian era, public school education was an opportunity available only to the privileged class and its assumed role was to provide the best possible education with a strict discipline, aimed at elevating social status. However, it also had negative impacts on children's personal independence and development, increasing the probability that they would acquire undesirable traits. This aspect is reflected in Victorian fiction which portrays societal challenges such as bullying, sexual discrimination, and disciplinary issues within the context of school life, characterized by themes of cruelty, humiliation, and class inequality. In Victorian society, education also functioned as a tool for class stratification, favouring the upper classes with

better access to education, while individuals from lower socioeconomic classes were deprived of educational opportunities, as depicted in Dickens' *Hard Times*. Regarding the issue of contradictory influence of formal education as reflected in Victorian novels, this study focuses on two literary works, *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler to explore the oppressive aspects of education and its impact on individuals. Furthermore, it highlights the significant role of parents during the Victorian era, who used their authority and financial resources to ensure their children received the best education. However, this often led to the main characters facing harsh schooling experiences. To sum up, this work provides a comprehensive examination of the multifaceted function of education and schooling throughout the Victorian era, examining its societal significance and potential for oppression.

This research critically examines the Victorian era educational system, drawing particular attention to its oppressive elements. The study argues that although schooling is commonly perceived as a means of providing information and preparing individuals for future challenges, it could also serve as a tool of oppression, especially against marginalized groups. The concept of "oppression" in society arises when certain groups are privileged while others face exclusion or disadvantages, leading to arbitrary treatment, inequality, and discrimination based on identity. Scholars such as Pittman and Ruth emphasise the systemic nature of oppression, which involves both individual acts and societal obstacles that maintain the power of a ruling group. Oppression is thus a deliberate set of actions rather than a random occurrence. Ruth's "circles of control" theory, which includes internalised, psychological, economic, and physical control, explains how oppression works. This model demonstrates the various ways that oppression functions, ranging from apparent physical control to more hidden psychological manipulation and self-perception. Moreover, forms of oppression are multidimensional and interrelated, they include ageism, adultism, racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, transgender oppression, religious oppression, and disability oppression. Among them, gender-based oppression is emphasised as a primary form of societal oppression, interconnected with patriarchal institutions and power relations. Racial oppression and class oppression also play significant role, affecting individuals based on their race and social status.

This approach may be observed in institutional and more constrained dimensions in addition to social ones, as Pittman and Ruth analyse in several contexts. For instance, oppressive characteristics may appear in educational institutions through the behaviours of instructors, headmasters, educational systems, and student attitudes. Authors like Kevin Kumashiro and Ivan Illich point out that educational environments often marginalise individuals perceived as different, with teachers exerting excessive control over students,

limiting their independence and autonomy. However, students' reactions to oppression vary; they may resist, overcompensate in extracurricular and academic contexts, succeed academically while preserving cultural ties, or suffer psychological harm such as internalised stereotypes, despair, and self-destructive behaviours. The classical curriculum and disciplinary framework followed in Victorian public schools promoted prejudice and inequality. These schools frequently adopted a headmaster-centric strategy, which served to reinforce social hierarchies and familial connections among the students. Authors like Hederman and Freire also discuss the internalisation of social and parental control at schools, which reproduces inflexible, authoritarian tendencies. Hence, in this thesis, these studies are referred to assert how in both *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray and *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler, the portrayal of formal education in public schools serves a critique of its oppressive nature, highlighting how these institutions marked by elitism, conformity, and moral hypocrisy; perpetuate societal hierarchies, stifle individual creativity, and reinforce class distinctions. Through the lens of the characters' experiences, both novels expose detrimental impact of rigid educational systems, questioning their role in shaping conformist minds and contributing to a culture of inequality and injustice.

Both *Vanity Fair* and *The Way of All Flesh* offer critical insights into the Victorian education system, albeit with different focuses and implications. Thackeray's novel scrutinizes the social and class implications of education, while Butler's work delves into the psychological and individual impact of an authoritarian educational system. *Vanity Fair* portrays education as a means of achieving advancement in society, while at the same time criticising its superficial and authoritarian characteristics. The novel depicts education as a tool for societal progress, namely for the character Becky Sharp. Becky's use of education to move forward socially shows the system's priority for surface achievements rather than real intellectual growth. As a return for her education, Becky Sharp, an articulated student from a lower socioeconomic background, teaches French to other students. Her treatment is more akin to that of a servant, reflecting the authoritarian nature of status in the educational system. Her independent learning differs from the restrictions imposed by formal educational institutions. The novel offers a critical analysis of the private schools for girls during the Victorian era, showing how education was seen as a commodity depending on students' social backgrounds. Becky's experience at Miss Pinkerton's School exemplifies the oppression based on social status. She is subjected to discrimination based on her lower social status and has a responsibility to provide French lessons in return for her scholarship. The school advocates for a strict set of social norms and

values, especially for women, prioritising etiquette, and aesthetics over freedom of individual choice.

Vanity Fair also depicts the educational experiences of its male characters, emphasising societal injustices and hierarchies. Thus, peer influence and bullying at schools emerge as another subject matter of the study. Thackeray specifically addresses how peer pressure can transform schools, particularly those of the Arnoldian type established in the nineteenth century, into tools of oppression. In this context, characters like William Dobbin and Cuff at Dr. Swishtail's School provide experiences that shed light on this aspect of oppression in educational settings. Furthermore, the novel describes a restrictive educational atmosphere at Dr. Swishtail's School, identified by incidents of bullying and the existence of social hierarchies. Due to his learning problems at school and his lower social standing, William Dobbin becomes the target of ridicule and violence from his peers, often facing physical and verbal bullying, which reflects the hostile environment at school. Dobbin's weakness in confronting all his more powerful classmates serve as an obvious example of the systematic bullying that occurs at schools. Conversely, Cuff is depicted as an authoritative figure in the school, having significant power over his peers. His role allows him to violate regulations without facing consequences. Cuff's style of governance, characterised by the use of fear and brutality towards the other students, forces them into obeying his directives. The students are influenced by his actions, leading to an environment marked by obedience and inequality. Additionally, the school tolerates the use of humiliating nicknames and physical punishment, such as floggings as typical behaviours. Consequently, such behaviours reinforce the unfriendly environment within the school. In contrast, characters such as Rawden Crawley hold the institution in high regard despite remembering only the physical punishment they experienced there. It can be concluded that, English gentlemen held classical education in high regard, notwithstanding any unpleasant personal experiences.

Another critical issue discussed in this thesis is the oppression caused by the schooling system of the era and educators, particularly school administrators. The strict and authoritarian control by Miss Pinkerton exercised over her school symbolizes repressive nature of educational institutions. The portrayal of Becky as a "dangerous bird" within the school's "cage" metaphorically represents the constrictive and autocratic learning environment. Moreover, the curriculum and instruction at Miss Pinkerton's school focusing skills like needlework, music, and dancing in accordance with societal norms of the time, perpetuating the established stereotype of the ideal young woman in the Victorian period. The physical discipline imposed on young females to conform to social standards, including the suggestion

of using a backboard for posture, demonstrates an oppressive aspect of schooling. As a result, personal expression and independence are stifled by the school's emphasis on obedience and appropriate manners. Becky's desire to leave the harsh school setting points out her desire for independence from the strict social and educational expectations. The experiences of Becky and Amelia at Miss Pinkerton's School exemplify oppression based on class. Becky, due to her lower social standing, faces worse treatment and limited opportunities. As Becky advances to become a governess in an aristocrat's house, her past, particularly the shame attached to her parents' inferior social status and occupation, reveals societal discrimination against her class. The anxiety expressed regarding Becky's mother's past indicates fears about undesirable traits being transmitted from lower socioeconomic levels. To conclude, schooling is shown to have long-lasting impacts on individuals, shaping their personalities and societal perspectives.

On the other hand, *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler also explores the oppressive characteristics of the Victorian schooling system, as exemplified through the experiences of the main character, Ernest Pontifex, and his father, Theobald Pontifex. Butler's writings were greatly shaped by his life and familial ties. He faced familial pressure when deciding on a religious career, similar to the experiences of Ernest in *The Way of All Flesh*. Butler's criticism of societal expectations and oppressive norms stems directly from his personal confrontations and struggles with his family's expectations, particularly his father's rigid and authoritarian background. The narrative chronicles the Pontifex family's trajectory across four generations, starting with John Pontifex, a skilled carpenter, and culminating in Ernest, who ultimately rejects the strict Christian principles and oppressive teaching methods he was exposed to. *The Way of All Flesh* illustrates how generational standards impact individuals, particularly through Theobald Pontifex, who is forced to become a priest and subsequently raises his son Ernest in a strict and authoritarian manner. Ernest's life is shaped by familial tensions, academic challenges, and his efforts to establish his own identity in the context of cultural norms.

William Makepeace Thackeray also examines the issue of authoritarian parenting and its effect on children, especially within the context of Victorian England. The novel focuses primarily on Ernest Pontifex and his interactions with his father Theobald Pontifex's strict and authoritarian parenting style. This narrative exemplifies the societal norms prevalent in the Victorian era, marked by strict rules, authoritarian control, and a lack of empathy. For instance, Theobald Pontifex's belief that children would be spoiled without physical discipline epitomizes this authoritarian parenting style.

Parental expectations and societal pressures begin with the second generation of the Pontifex family with Mr. Pontifex, as societal norms compel Mr. Pontifex to set high

expectations for his children, placing them under significant pressure and even oppression. He expects his children to succeed because he compares all of their advantages with his own restricted opportunities. This expectation reflects the pressures placed on children from wealthy families at that time in society to succeed in their pursuits and stick to rigid rules. *The Way of All Flesh* portrays the school system as a mechanism for reinforcing social norms and beliefs. The system's emphasis on strict obedience to social standards can be viewed as oppressive. As the story unfolds, the Pontifex children suffer due to their authoritarian parents' psychological control and physical punishment. As a result, the children's autonomy is restricted, and their natural curiosity is suppressed by this authoritarian parenting approach, damaging their emotional well-being and self-expression. Ernest's experiences at home and school, where his father imposes rigid views and rules, typify this kind of oppression, limiting his independence and potential for personal growth. Theobald Pontifex's continual control over Ernest's academic progress, even after Ernest receives his degree, illustrates the restrictions on his freedom to pursue personal interests such as organ-making.

In *The Way of All Flesh*, Samuel Butler further explores various aspects of Victorian education including the financial burden of schooling and its psychological effects on family relationships and personal growth. Schooling was not free in Victorian England until the Education Act of 1876, imposing an economic burden on families. Mr. Pontifex, like many parents, invests heavily in his children's education in the hope of providing them with better opportunities. However, this investment can be seen as a psychologically oppressive practice. The novel suggests that expensive education may limit children's career choices, confining them to roles incompatible with simpler occupations like labour or mechanics. This constraint represents psychological oppression, limiting children's potential autonomy and enforcing dependency on their parents. The financial investment in education creates high expectations for success, leading to stress, as exemplified by Theobald Pontifex's experiences. Despite receiving scholarships, he views himself as a financial burden and feels trapped between his father's demands and his own values, experiencing psychological oppression. Mr. Pontifex's correspondence with Theobald illustrates his authoritarian parenting style, prioritizing power over his son's decisions and disregarding Theobald's complaints, expecting financial self-sufficiency as a result of the educational investment. This approach reduces Theobald's autonomy and self-esteem.

Oppression in educational settings can occur through the actions of educators or school administrators, as well as through teaching methods and the entire schooling system. The novel emphasises a common occurrence of bullying in public schools, defined by the persistent

display of hatred, pressure, or coercion by dominant students towards those less able to defend themselves. This creates an oppressive and hostile environment for victims, leading to negative psychological consequences like increased anxiety and decreased self-worth. Bullying encompasses more than physical assault; it involves a range of hostile behaviours, including verbal abuse and social isolation. The story offers a critique of school management particularly targeting Dr. Skinner of Roughborough School, for their inadequate handling of bullying issues.

The novel provides a critical analysis of the educational system's focus on religious instruction and clergy training reflecting the broader social emphasis on shaping students according to certain moral and religious principles. Dr. Skinner, the headmaster of Roughborough, shapes students' minds according to his own perspectives, with a special emphasis on creating strong faith and radical or political ideologies. This imposition of a specific worldview is seen as oppressive as it limits students' freedom of thought and restricts their individual growth. Butler also criticises the rigid and unfair procedures employed at schools, such as the way examinations and punishments are conducted and how merit money is distributed. These practices create a system of rewards and penalties that, when applied unfairly, can be oppressive. A further example of the educational system's oppressive nature is the curriculum's emphasis on Latin and Greek, applied to all students regardless of their interests. Consequently, the story compares the inflexible, conventional educational system with Ernest's experience in prison, where he develops in a different kind of learning environment, implying that different systems of learning may be more effective for some individuals.

Vanity Fair and *The Way of All Flesh* both employ schooling as a narrative device to critique the societal structures of their time. In *Vanity Fair*, Becky's struggles highlight the class-based discrimination inherent in the educational system, so to say oppression is primarily social and class-based, whereas in *The Way of All Flesh*, it is more about the suppression of individuality and the emotional impact of authoritarianism in education. Ernest's experience emphasizes the emotional and psychological oppression faced by students. Butler critiques the rigid and authoritarian educational system through the experiences of Ernest Pontifex. In terms of educational goals, Thackeray's work views education as a tool for maintaining societal status quo and the novel criticizes the superficial accomplishments valued in Victorian education, especially for women, emphasizing etiquette and appearance over intellectual development, while Butler's novel sees it as an instrument of personal repression and control. The focus is on how Ernest's schooling and family dynamics limit his personal growth. Both novels highlight the role of parental expectations in shaping the oppressive nature of education. However, *The*

Way of All Flesh gives a more in-depth look at the psychological impact of such expectations. *Vanity Fair* specifically addresses the gendered aspect of education, critiquing how women's education was tailored to uphold societal norms. In contrast, *The Way of All Flesh* focuses more on the universal impact of education on personal development, regardless of gender.

Thackeray and Butler expose the educational system as a reflection of the broader social order, where class distinctions and moral hypocrisies govern the fate of individuals. In *Vanity Fair*, schooling is depicted as a mechanism for maintaining class hierarchies and reinforcing superficial societal values. Becky Sharp's experience at Miss Pinkerton's school, characterized by social oppression, sharply contrasts with Amelia Sedley's, underlining the role of education in perpetuating class distinctions. Thackeray's portrayal of the superficial nature of education, focused more on appearances and social standings than on intellectual development, is a direct criticism of the Victorian era values. Similarly, in *The Way of All Flesh*, Butler portrays education as a tool for imposing rigid moral and social norms. The oppressive nature of Ernest Pontifex's schooling under Dr. Skinner at Roughborough, along with the authoritarian parenting style of his father, Theobald, highlights the emotional and psychological impact of such an education system. The narrative of Ernest's journey from a submissive child to a critical thinker who challenges societal norms is a critique of the Victorian educational system, which prioritized conformity and moral rigidity over individual growth and critical thinking. Education, as portrayed in *Vanity Fair* and *The Way of All Flesh*, is not merely a means to knowledge and social advancement but also a tool for social control and reinforcement of existing power dynamics.

In conclusion, the restrictive features of schooling during the Victorian era are critically examined in both *Vanity Fair* and *The Way of All Flesh*. Thackeray and Butler, through their literary works, provide a critical insight into the Victorian educational system. They reveal how education, which should ideally be a liberating force, becomes an instrument of oppression, mirroring and sustaining the societal ills of classism, moral hypocrisy, and the suppression of individuality. These literary works draw attention to the negative impacts of bullying, the strict and authoritarian administration of schools and the rigid structure of the educational system, all contributing to a damaging and oppressive learning environment. They address the need to make education more personalized and humanitarian, respecting each student's unique needs and promoting personal development. Graduates of public schools during the Victorian era were perceived as highly educated and noble, possessing a comprehensive set of cultural, scientific, and artistic skills. However, as this thesis argues, these individuals often faced significant constraints on their autonomy in career choice and their social lives. In both novels,

the public schools function as instruments of control, reinforcing oppressive structures and preventing the authentic development of individuals. This lack of freedom emerged due to the repressive effects they faced inside their familial and educational environments including school administrators, educators, and peers.



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