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A Treacherous Journey

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A Treacherous Journey:

Striking Realism Within the Winding Narrative of Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*

Modern day readers newly discovering Dickens could be forgiven for assuming that the plight of the children in his novel, *Oliver Twist*, is an exaggeration of real life, the device of a brilliant storyteller, ripe fruit for readers to pluck and enjoy at leisure, and purely for entertainment. While it is true that Dickens provides rich entertainment and his genius is obvious, there is something much more substantial in his writing.

There were forces at work in England during Charles Dickens' lifetime (1812-1870) which are pivotal to this paper's discussion of *Oliver Twist*. The thesis of this paper is that although Dickens creates a winding narrative with unexpected and sometimes hard to believe events, at the heart of his work is the very real cruelty inflicted on children of his time by society. This discussion will begin by elucidating these forces. Next, it will turn to Dickens himself and, finally, to that of the narrative and characters within Dickens' 1838 novel, *Oliver Twist*, with comparisons to real life situations of the day.

Dickens lived during a time of great change in England. Much of the rural population moved to the cities, and such a shift has consequences. The following seeks to serve as a brief overview of that process.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The time period of 1760-1830 is generally considered that of England's Industrial Revolution (Tierney, Kagan & Williams, Introduction). Toynbee writes that the changes which led to the Industrial Revolution started even earlier, and caused agricultural population decreases because of enclosures (68). Farming of common lands was the predominant method of agriculture in England in 1700, but by 1850 the practice had been all but eradicated by what is called "the enclosure movement" (McCloskey 15), which affected roughly fifty percent of England's farmland (McCloskey 16). Enclosures removed any doubts as to ownership of enclosed lands (McCloskey 15). While enclosures resulted in improvements in the way the land was used, and consequently, better outcomes generally (Toynbee 69), by the year 1851 less than 22 percent of working people were working the land (Reeve 20). The displaced farmers made their way to the cities, and helped to form "the army of the industrial revolution" (Mantoux, quoted in Taylor).

London was already large by English standards in the year 1700, and only grew larger, absorbing most of the country's migrants between 1801 and 1831 (Reeve 102). In the year 1801, London was home to more than one third of all British living in cities (Harvie & Matthew 11), and by the year 1861, London was home to one and a half million workers (Reeve 105). In fact, during the Nineteenth Century, London added about 300,000 people every ten years (Humphreys in Ledger & Furneaux 227).

New water, and later steam-driven, machines were invented to spin and weave cotton. The machines took little physical effort, therefore mostly women children worked in the factories. Seven and eight year-old children worked excruciatingly long hours at mills, resulting in physical deformities of the feet for some of them (Hayward 106-107). High yield and cheap labor gave England dominance in the textile industry (Mitchell 3).

Children were also used in coal mines. It was standard for them to be employed there from the age of seven, but some were used as early as five to control the trap doors which provided ventilation to the mines. Again, these children worked very long hours, and in conditions that must have been comparable to a tomb. There was at least one three year-old child working as a “trapper” in a mine. Additionally, children wore harnesses and crawled, like animals, in order to pull the carts to the bottom of the mine. There were terrible accidents because children too young to be responsible for the lives of others were put in that position (Hayward 107).

CITY SANITATION

It is no surprise that during the early part of the nineteenth century sanitation in the cities had become a problem. Every place the eye could see, there was evidence of the coal which fueled civilization; it could be seen clinging to objects as well as hanging in the air. Added to this were the animals navigating the sparsely paved roadways, pulling carriages or heading to slaughter houses, which were also in the city. Some even kept cows close to housing (Mitchell 80). One does not have to work hard to imagine the atmosphere.

In the London of 1850, 640,000 residents had no water in their homes. The water these citizens could get came from public pipes in the street which were activated only at certain times. Unfortunately, this water came from the Thames, raw and completely untreated (Hayward 95).

Dr. Tony Williams describes the Thames in Dickens' day, as "little better than an open sewer" (1:24:06). Not only was sewage being routed to the Thames, but when the river came back in, all the waste from homes and businesses alike came back with it. In the hot weather it was especially difficult to be anywhere near the river (Hayward 103). Before 1854, doctors did not realize that cholera (which terrorized early Victorian England) could be spread by contaminated water. Instead, they thought it was from the terrible odors in the air, otherwise termed "miasmas" (Mitchell 200).

THE POOR LAWS

For at least two centuries before the New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, England's individual parishes were compelled to take on responsibility for their own destitute residents. This was done through "poor rates," paid by those who were better off (Mitchell 92). The Old Poor Law had been in existence since around the turn of the seventeenth century (Cody 134), and was meant to be strict, helping only the most desperate of citizens; however, it had loosened over time, and had swelled to include even the "able-bodied." England's Old Poor Law was costing too much, and there was agreement that it needed reform (Cody 131).

In 1831 England appointed a commission to look into the Old Poor Law (Cody 132). This resulted in the New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, otherwise known as the New Poor Law. This new law changed the way the parishes helped their poor. Those who needed help could no longer get it from home unless they were elderly or had a disability. Anyone needing assistance from the parish who did not meet this standard was compelled to actually go and live in the workhouse (Mitchell 92), which was intentionally cruel (Mitchell 93).

THE WORKHOUSE

Those in charge of the workhouses were to make certain that people under their supervision were more miserable than they would have been as a worker in normal society. This was accomplished in part by taking wives and children away from their husbands and fathers and subjecting them to menial tasks which did nothing to prepare them for life outside the workhouse (Mitchell 93). The poor, upon entering the workhouse, had to give up their clothing and wear the workhouse uniform. They were subjected to a strict diet, and they were afraid of their bodies being dissected after death (Sen paragraph 4).

It was not the intention of those responsible for the New Poor Law that children, elderly or ill people be subjected to the so-called “rule of eligibility,” whereby inmates of the workhouse must live in conditions less agreeable than their poor, working counterparts outside the workhouse. Nevertheless, individuals from those categories became the majority of the workhouse population (Rose 161). Single mothers could not get help any other way, which led to the appearance of children in the workhouse. The old and infirm should have been eligible for outdoor relief, but to receive it, they most likely would have been literally sleeping outdoors.

Dickens writes about his visit to the workhouse in *A Walk in a Workhouse*. He attends church at the workhouse chapel, then accompanies an administrator on a tour throughout. He describes the people attending the church service. Not including the children, they appear old and infirm (Dickens *A Walk* 451). They are broken in body and in spirit, and are generally wilted versions of what they most likely once were. Dickens writes, “Upon the whole, it was the dragon, Pauperism, in a very weak and impotent condition; toothless, fangless, drawing his breath heavily enough, and hardly worth chaining up”(Dickens *A Walk* 451). These poor people were supposed to be the big problem in English society, especially the single mothers (Cody

132); yet here they are, absolutely helpless, and seem unlikely to possess the power to bring about the collapse of Western Civilization.

During his walk in the workhouse, Dickens goes to the so-called “Itch Ward.” There he meets a crudely presented female inmate who is charged with attending the patients therein; however, she had suffered the death of a small child only an hour before. The child had been abandoned on the street outside, and she had taken it on as her own (Dickens *A Walk* 451). Her unabashed and innocent outpouring of grief at the loss of the child, still laid out under a cloth in the room, is no less than would be expected of any mother.

Dickens also meets a young girl, about 23 years old, who had been brought to the workhouse because of a severe epileptic episode. She had been employed at someone’s home as a servant. She is clean and well-mannered, but surrounded by “six or eight noisy madwomen,” and says it is exacerbating her condition, and is “driving her mad-which was perfectly evident” (Dickens *A Walk* 452). She had applied for help from those in charge, but is still waiting for something to change after several weeks. It seems likely that this young woman would have gone elsewhere, if she had anywhere else to go. There are old men, in varying stages of end-of-life. They are largely unresponsive to questions, but two of them do ask, in a very gentle manner, for the one thing that would make them better: for the one it is more bread, for the other it is more opportunity to go outside (Dickens *A Walk* 456). These are examples of people in the workhouse who were not the intended residents.

It is significant that Dickens mentions the eating of potatoes throughout his visit to the workhouse. In the “infant school,” the children are eating potatoes (Dickens *A Walk* 452). Then, when Dickens encounters the elderly men one of them has potatoes in his Sunday dinner, and another is even “paralytically peeling a boiled potato” (Dickens *A Walk* 456). During this time in

England, the potato stood as a symbol; the poor did not want potatoes as a stand-in for bread.

The poor saw potatoes as proper food for animals, not for them. The feeding of potatoes served to further socially degrade the workhouse inmate (Sen 240).

The young children of the workhouse appear to Dickens to be well cared for, especially compared to the horrors of what happened at Tooting, a school for poor children, where a cholera outbreak killed one hundred eighty of them. Dickens does intimate, however, that the young epileptic woman and the boys would improve their circumstances by being “promoted to prison” (Dickens *A Walk* 453).

Throughout the workhouse, Dickens describes elderly women and men, infants and mothers, very sick, crippled or mentally ill people. At the conclusion there is a glimpse of a child, most likely near death, who had been burned. The circumstances surrounding the child’s injury is unstated. There seems to be no trace of the “able-bodied” pauper that the workhouse was intended to steer onto the correct course of life.

In Dr. Tony Williams’ film, he relates an anecdote about Charles Dickens. In 1856 he went past Whitechapel Workhouse and saw people outside who needed to be taken in for the night. Dr. Williams states that the area, Whitechapel, was very dangerous at that time. Dickens, greatly troubled at the sight of the people outside, asked the man in charge of the workhouse why the five homeless people had not been let in. The workhouse master told Dickens that it was not because he did not care, but that there simply was not room for five more people in the workhouse. The master also told Dickens that there were at times even more people outside the workhouse who needed to come in on a nightly basis, but there was nothing he could do. It was even more unsettling because Whitechapel was such a terrifying area (Williams 1:35).

Forster, Dickens' biographer and friend, relates the same story a little differently: he writes that this happened during one of Dickens' many walks, and that it was a stormy November evening. The people outside the workhouse in the rain, numbering seven, were all girls. Dickens gave a shilling to each girl after checking with the master and discovering there was no room for the girls inside the workhouse. The so-called "casual ward" was full. People had gathered around while this was happening, but none of them said anything to Dickens, or asked anything of him (vol 2; 161). It is clear that the workhouse was more like a prison, and sometimes even worse. If there were seven girls waiting outside a workhouse to get in, it seems logical that they would gladly go elsewhere if they could. The connection between poverty and crime is the first thought one may have; in early nineteenth-century England, if even girls are desperate enough to wait outside one of these horrible workhouses for shelter, what else might they be willing to do?

AMENDMENT'S EFFECTS UPON WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Before the 1834 amendment, an unwed mother could alleviate her struggles by alerting the parish to the identity of her child's father. In turn, the parish had authority to compel the father to take on responsibility for the child or marry the mother (Zlotnick 131). Those responsible for the New Poor Law decided to cut unwed mothers and their children off from any financial assistance from their parish. Additionally, the parish would not compel the fathers to help them either. The unwed mothers who were unable to care for themselves had to go into the workhouse (Cody 132).

Clearly, the authors of the New Poor Law blamed the single mothers, and the assistance they received, for many of society's ills. Proponents of the New Poor Law believed that single women would reconsider the indulgence of sexual impropriety once they possessed the

knowledge that the safety net provided by the Old Poor Law had been removed (Cody 132). The “bastardy clause” of the New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 forced complete responsibility for the children onto the mother alone (Zlotnick 131).

Those responsible for the New Poor Law may have created a different problem by cutting off aid to single mothers. In 1862, one hundred and fifty bodies of infants were reportedly found in London’s streets (Higginbotham 319). Single mothers during this era were unlikely to have the means to care for themselves and their children without assistance. Society seemed willing to take the logic of the mothers’ poverty and shame to its natural conclusion (in their minds), which was that the single mothers wanted to get rid of their children, and were murdering them (Higginbotham 322).

Higginbotham’s article looks into actual cases against single mothers between the years 1839 and 1906 (Higginbotham 324). Not all the children were proven to have been murdered (Higginbotham 323). It was more common that the young ladies, having found themselves alone and pregnant, sought to keep their conditions secret (Higginbotham 325). Many of the young women worked as servants, and feared losing their positions (Higginbotham 326).

Henry Mayhew is the author of *London Labour and the London Poor*, published in 1851. Mayhew writes in the preface to his book, which exists in four volumes, that it is his intention to bring to light the lifestyles and struggles of London’s poor, and have the information directly from the poor themselves (iii). In it, he relates the story of a prostitute he interviewed. She had been left to her own devices once she delivered a child. She attempted to mother the child and managed to obtain respectable work, but it did not last. She could not care for the child, and realized he would not survive. At the same time, she could not bring herself to resume prostitution as a means of earning money, because of her child. She waited for the child’s death,

then returned to the streets. She stated that she would have taken the child to an orphanage or “foundling hospital,” but there was not one nearby. Mayhew adds that she could have entered the workhouse, so the child’s death was really her responsibility. The woman did not realize she had committed infanticide. The story illustrates the problem with infant deaths as well as the greatly underestimated aversion of the poor to the workhouse. The woman did not want to earn money by prostitution because of her innocent child, but the horrors of the workhouse were too great for her to bring the child into it, even to save the child’s life.

It is important to note that the problem of abandoned children began well before Charles Dickens. In 1739 “The Hospital for the Maintenance and Education of Exposed and Deserted Young Children” (the Foundling Hospital) originated with Thomas Coram. Coram was a sailor who, upon returning to London, was disgusted to see abandoned children literally dying in the streets. This article points to “gin and prostitution” as the reason for the problem (Lawrence 36). The engraving entitled “Gin Lane” by William Hogarth clearly illustrates the problem (Lawrence 38).



Engraved by H. Aitard.

Death was a familiar reality to children in Dickens' time. In 1840s London, there were 50,000 deaths each year, with 21,000 of those younger than ten years (Williams 10:04). These facts make the story of Oliver's friend, Dick, seem more like reality than the reader may have

thought: Dick is very unwell, and knows he is dying when Oliver stops to see him before running away (Dickens *Oliver* 52). Later in the story, Dick asks the adults in charge to write a letter for him to give Oliver after his death. Dick wants Oliver to know that he is happy to die while still a child, because his little sister is waiting for him in Heaven (Dickens *Oliver* 128). Interestingly, in the film *Charles Dickens' London*, Dr. Tony Williams informs his audience that Charles Dickens' residence at 48 Doughty Street from 1837-39 (1:04) was in very close proximity to the Foundling Hospital, and he would have been aware of it on a daily basis (4:25).

ABOUT DICKENS-EARLY CHILDHOOD

In his film *Charles Dickens' London*, Dr. Tony Williams tells the audience how John Forster and Charles Dickens were close friends; so much so that Forster was given the honor of becoming Dickens' official biographer. Forster had been working toward becoming a lawyer, but he found himself attracted to journalism. The two men worked at the same time on a newspaper, *The True Sun*. From 1836, the two became close friends, and remained so. This is noteworthy because of the trust Dickens placed in him by relating personal and sometimes painful stories of his life to Forster (Williams 22:15). Since much of Dickens' work focuses on children, it is appropriate to look into his own childhood.

Dickens' life began in 1812, when he was born on the island of Portsea on February 7th. His parents were living there because his father, John Dickens, worked as a clerk for the Navy-pay office. Charles Dickens had seven siblings, but two of them, Alfred and Harriet, did not survive (Forster vol 1; 3).

Interestingly, Dickens retained vivid memories from the age of two, when the family moved to London, in consequence of John Dickens' transfer. Each time the family moved, the young Charles remembered details. They lived in Chatham when Charles was between the ages

of about four and nine (Forster vol 1; 5). This is important because that is where the young Charles first met one of his life's true loves, the house called Gadshill-place. He loved the house from the time he first saw it as he walked with his father, who told him that if he worked hard he might have it one day. Dickens wrote his nine year-old self into an essay "Travelling Abroad," to illustrate how much the house meant to "the very queer small boy" (Dickens quoted in Forster vol 1; 6). The nine year-old Dickens and the adult Dickens (author of the essay) talked about the house, and the essayist Dickens tells his audience that the house is *his* house, and the boy's fantasy of having the house has come true (Forster vol 1; 7).

The years Charles Dickens spent in Chatham rooted themselves in his heart; those roots would forever after call him back, in recollection and in body, to that beloved home (Forster vol 1; 6, 13). His first teacher was his mother (Forster vol 1; 7). Then he and Fanny (his older sister) went to a day-school together (Forster vol 1; 8). At age seven, Charles began school with the Baptist minister whose church was next door to the Dickens family home (Forster vol 1; 12). During this time, young Charles was small and physically unwell, a circumstance of his life which is given credit for turning him naturally toward reading (Forster vol 1; 7). He may not have been good at sports, but he was very good at storytelling and singing, and he loved to perform for an audience (on makeshift stages at home and elsewhere) and go to the theatre (Forster vol 1; 11). He even wrote a play during this time (Forster vol 1; 10).

Although the years at Chatham were the genesis of his creativity (Forster vol 1;13) and the best of his childhood, there seems to have been something missing. Forster reveals Dickens' feelings about this period, taken from a letter which Dickens wrote to Washington Irving, stating that he had been a "very small and not overly-particularly-taken-care-of boy" (Dickens quoted in Forster vol 1;7). Similarly, Forster writes of the beloved books which young Charles read

repeatedly at Chatham, “They were a host of friends when he had no single friend;” (vol 1; 13).

According to Mee, Dickens did not believe that his parents had met his needs as a child (1).

LATER CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

When Charles Dickens was ten years old, the family had to move once again. John Dickens was sent to Somerset-house; therefore they had to move to London (Forster vol 1;13). Young Charles made the coach journey in the rain, alone and surrounded by wet straw (Forster vol 1;14). Because of John Dickens’ financial struggles, the family found itself in Camden-town, on Bayham Street, “about the poorest part of the London suburbs then” (Forster vol 1; 14). Charles was not sent to any school, although he longed to go (Forster vol 1;15). Simultaneously, his older sister Fanny was sent to the music academy, which added to his sense of despair and neglect. Charles settled into life as the helpful older brother and son, running errands and assisting his parents (Forster vol 1;16), although he still struggled with ill health at times. It was at this time, also, that he began exploring and appreciating parts of London (Forster vol 1;17).

The family’s financial situation continued to deteriorate, until Charles’ mother endeavored to attempt a remedy by opening a school. Of course this gave young Charles hope that perhaps he, too, could be educated. Mrs. Dickens hung out her shingle: “MRS. DICKENS’S ESTABLISHMENT” (Forster vol 1; 19), and yet, according to Dickens, although he advertised the school heavily, no one attended. Furthermore, it did not seem to young Charles that his mother had things ready to run a school (Forster vol 1; 19-20). “But I know that we got on very badly with the butcher and baker; that very often we had not too much for dinner; and that at last my father was arrested” (Dickens quoted in Forster vol I; 20).

In Victorian England, the usual way of doing business was monthly billing, or even yearly if large sums of money were involved (Mitchell 109-110). Creditors were willing to wait

for payment as long as they had reason to believe payment would be made. Once a creditor ceased to believe that the payment would be made, he could have the debtor locked up to ensure he did not abscond to another country, out of the creditor's reach. Prisons which housed debtors were designed to accommodate the prisoner's family and lifestyle, to a certain extent. Once the debt was paid, the debtor was free (Mitchell 110). This is what happened to John Dickens.

At the time of his father's arrest, both father and son were greatly affected, and it could be said that young Charles was traumatized (Forster vol 1;20). Little by little, the family's belongings were sold, and Charles continued his role as errand-boy, a job which had become even more sad than before, as the books which meant so much to Charles disappeared (Forster vol 1; 21). Charles went to work in the blacking warehouse, at the age of ten (Forster vol 1; 23), where boot polish was made (Mee 2). Dickens is quoted as saying that he was amazed that his parents would send him to work in such a place, with his talents and afflictions, instead of sending him to school, any school. Not only did they send him to the warehouse, they were "quite satisfied." He felt they had thrown him away (Forster vol 1;25).

The spectre of the warehouse was never far from Dickens, even during later years of his life. Dickens himself described it as he began an autobiographical work, which he later decided to use another way (Forster vol 1; 23). According to Dickens, the blacking warehouse was on the river, and in an advanced and dangerous state of decay, the rats constantly gaining ground in their determination to completely take the place over. Dickens recalled "the old grey rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times" (quoted in Forster vol 1; 25). The cousin who had offered employment at the warehouse for Charles had also offered to give him some academic instruction during the break for dinner, but it did not last long. Soon Charles was elbow-to-elbow with the other boys, and felt

to his very core that his life's intended course had been permanently thwarted, and he experienced despair, the memory of which would never leave him for the rest of his life (Forster vol 1; 27).

As if all this were not enough, there was more: John Dickens was having no success in his attempts to remedy the problems which led to his arrest; therefore, his family left the empty rented house and moved to the Marshalsea, the prison in which John Dickens was lodged. Charles was not moved into the prison with his family. He was sent to live with an elderly lady who had other unfortunate children living with her. Charles was exclusively responsible for feeding himself, and only saw his family on Sundays (Forster vol 1; 28). Before the family moved to the prison, Charles was at least going back home at night, although it was too far to go for dinner, for which he was on his own (Forster vol 1; 27).

During this time, young Charles Dickens felt that he was in charge of himself, and was not in any way equipped to be at such a tender age (Forster vol 1; 28). This was the time when anything could have happened to him because he was completely unprotected. Because of this, he surely knew what it was like to be an orphan, but he successfully distinguished himself from the other boys at the warehouse, and he earned the nickname "the young gentleman" (Dickens quoted in Forster vol 1; 30).

Meanwhile, at the Marshalsea, John Dickens and his family (excepting Charles, and Fanny who was at school) were living better than they had before he was arrested (Forster vol 1; 31). John Dickens still had an income and was paying for Charles' lodging with the elderly lady (Forster vol 1; 28). Charles begged his father to let him live closer to the family, and John Dickens agreed (Forster vol 1; 31). At this point, circumstances began to improve for young Charles Dickens. From his new lodgings Charles could go to the prison early in the morning and

again after work, and have meals with his family. He would go back to his attic room shortly before the prison gates closed. An additional blessing was that Charles' new landlord and his family were good and kind people (Forster vol 1; 31).

The end of this chapter in the Dickens family story is that John Dickens received an inheritance which paid his debt and he was released from the Marshalsea (Forster vol. 1; 35). Charles and his family were finally living together again, but he was still working at the blacking warehouse (Forster vol 1; 37). Suddenly, Charles was released from his employment because of a mysterious disagreement between his father and the cousin who had secured the job for young Charles (Forster vol 1; 38).

His father decided Charles should go to school; his mother, however, wanted him to return to the blacking warehouse, a place where Charles, even as an adult, could not bear to walk past, and which brought him to tears even then (Forster vol 1; 39). Needless to say, Dickens never forgot that his mother preferred that for him (Forster vol 1; 38). According to Dickens, he never spoke about those years of his life, ages ten to twelve (Forster vol 1; 39), to any person whatsoever, until he resolved to set his life down on paper. Incidentally, neither his father nor his mother ever breathed a word of it again, either (Forster vol 1; 38).

The topics discussed to this point have hopefully provided a frame into which the story of *Oliver Twist* may be placed, as well as a way of analyzing the narrative. Perhaps one can think of the information provided regarding life in Victorian England as well as Charles Dickens' own childhood as the story is examined.

OLIVER TWIST

The story of *Oliver Twist* is a good example of the nature of Dickens' winding narrative style. On the face of it, the story seems very unlikely. The willing suspension of disbelief which

is necessary for the reader to employ is rewarded by the relief granted by the cessation of Oliver's suffering. Throughout the story, the boy is beaten, neglected, starved and brought near death. These conditions are stressful for the reader on behalf of the unlucky orphan. One may think many of the details of Oliver's existence are equally unlikely; however, that is not the case. Dickens uses a suspenseful and entertaining story to shine a bright light on things which really happened to children in England in the nineteenth century. It is important to look into Oliver's origins in order to get a clear picture of the nature and meandering direction of his struggles toward the story's ending.

Upon Oliver's birth, he struggles at first to breathe (Dickens *Oliver* 3). During the time that "he lay gasping" (Dickens *Oliver* 3), the doctor is busy warming his hands at the fire, and the nurse, herself a resident of the workhouse named Sally (Dickens *Oliver* 176) is in a corner enjoying something she is drinking from a "green glass bottle" (Dickens *Oliver* 4). One may wonder, how can those who ushered this new, helpless life into the world sit by so comfortably while its continued life could very well depend on their intervention? The answer is, of course, that this infant is a pauper. He has just entered life at the very bottom of the ladder of humanity. Not only that, but within minutes of his birth he also becomes an orphan (Dickens *Oliver* 4).

Since Oliver survives, he is immediately dressed in the garb of the workhouse. Dickens makes clear how important this clothing is: before Oliver is dressed, he could be anyone's child, but once he is in the workhouse orphan's clothing, his life is set on a course with a decidedly downhill trajectory (Dickens *Oliver* 5). The importance of clothing for the pauper in Victorian England is expounded on in Sen's article. The workhouse clothing was aimed at setting the inmates apart from everyone else, to make sure they felt "less than." It was part of the plan to

make life in the workhouse no better than the life of the poor on the outside (239). In short, it was a punishment for paupers who needed help.

Upon his birth and survival, the infant Oliver is taken to a “branch-workhouse,” where a Mrs. Mann keeps a great many similarly-situated children and is assumed to be caring for them. The reader is made aware immediately that Mrs. Mann is starving the children, to her own financial benefit (Dickens *Oliver* 6-7). When Oliver reaches his ninth birthday, he is compelled to return to the workhouse wherein he was born, for he must begin to “be educated, and taught a useful trade,” according to the workhouse board (Dickens *Oliver* 12). The board had decided that very day to starve the inmates of the workhouse slowly, to induce them to leave and suffer whatever would befall them on the outside (Dickens *Oliver* 13). How can it be that on the very day Oliver returns to the workhouse, they also begin starving inmates? It seems slightly over-the-top; however, the intentional starvation of workhouse inmates is not, as the following section will illustrate.

STARVATION IN THE WORKHOUSE

Miller writes that others have concluded that the workhouse diet was in reality sufficient to sustain the health of the inmates therein; however, their findings were based only on the official recommendations put forth by the Poor Law Commissioners (940). Miller argues that the actual feeding in the workhouse did not always match the guidelines of the Commission (941).

The Commissioners’ dietary guidelines were designed to keep the paupers alive, but not necessarily healthy (Miller 942). They were supposed to be in accordance with the principle that life inside the workhouse should always be inferior to the life of the working poor on the outside (Miller 944). Additionally, the guidelines were just that, and guardians were granted discretion and flexibility, based on the eating habits of the local poor population, partly to guard against

revolts by the workhouse inmates (Miller 944-45). Occasionally, the regional flexibility granted to the individual guardians caused the workhouse diet to be better than that of the local working poor (Miller 946). More often, though, the workhouse masters were stingy with food, because they wanted to save money. This was revealed by a Select Committee in 1837 which investigated the Poor Law Amendment Act (Miller 947).

A very big problem with the Poor Law Commission was that it allowed food to be used as punishment in the workhouse. The Commissioners believed paupers should not be fed unless they behaved themselves. There was a requirement for the workhouse masters to notify the Commissioners within a day of using such punishment, but that usually did not happen. Unfortunately, this punishment was used on children as well as adults (Miller 947).

The Poor Law Commissioners had not provided any rules for feeding children younger than ten; this was in the hands of those in charge of the individual workhouse. The 1837 Select Committee uncovered that masters at one workhouse dealt with children who they thought were dirty by taking away some of their food three times a week and chaining them up, while making them wear a fool's cap embellished with the word "dirty." The Committee also found that in some cases the workhouse child was only being fed half the adult portion. They concluded that masters had more than the appropriate amount of power over the inmates' diet, and even held one workhouse medical official accountable for not looking after the children in the workhouse (Miller 948).

In cases of temporary workhouse inmates, some of them were so damaged by starvation that they were unable to work outside when the time came (Miller 949). At Andover Workhouse, the master starved the inmates to the point where they desperately tried to extract nutrients from

the marrow of the bones they were supposed to be breaking up, and the children there were eating pigs' food (Miller 953).

OLIVER'S REQUEST

Not surprisingly then, this preoccupation with food is what gets Oliver into trouble in his young life. Dickens brings the issue of feeding front and center by making starvation the force which pushes this story forward. On Oliver's ninth birthday Mr. Bumble (the parish beadle) comes to bring Oliver back to the workhouse. He has to be brought up from the cellar where he was deposited (along with two other boys) after being beaten because he "atrociously presumed to be hungry" (Dickens *Oliver* 7). When Oliver meets Mr. Bumble and is about to be taken back to the workhouse, and is told to greet Mr. Bumble with a bow, "Oliver made a bow, which was divided between the beadle on the chair, and the cocked-hat on the table" (Dickens *Oliver* 10). This detail should not be overlooked, as it is evidence of Oliver's poor eye-sight, most likely caused by his sparse diet during the entirety of his short life.

A bit of detail about Mr. Bumble is that he is the parish beadle (Dickens *Oliver* 8). He is fat, unfeeling towards the orphans he himself names, and he is an opportunist. Mr. Bumble has a greatly exaggerated sense of his own importance, which is evidenced in almost every scene in which he appears in the story. His position puts him in and around the workhouse for much of the time.

Once back in the workhouse, at the tender age of nine, the need for and lack of food once again gets Oliver into trouble. It is not only Oliver who wants more gruel; it just happens to be that he is unlucky enough to have drawn the short stick with the other boys, in a manner of speaking. The boys had been starving on the new workhouse allotment of watery (Dickens *Oliver* 13) gruel for three months, and one of the boys expresses genuine concern for the life of

his sleeping neighbor, because he thinks he might eat him. While this is funny in a way, the boys really are “voracious and wild with hunger,” and so Oliver gets to be the one to put the famous line to the very well fed workhouse master, “Please sir, I want some more” (Dickens *Oliver* 15).

The din that this causes in the workhouse cannot be overstated. The master’s reaction to Oliver’s request is nothing if not melodramatic. He even “clung for support to the copper” from which he had been serving out the gruel, and was unable to speak in his normal voice at first. When Oliver repeats his request, he is struck with the ladle by the master (Dickens *Oliver* 15), and locked up (Dickens *Oliver* 16). It is decided by the board that he will never be good, and they post a note on the gate to let passersby know that “five pounds and Oliver Twist were offered to any man or woman who wanted an apprentice to any trade, business, or calling” (Dickens *Oliver* 16).

It was always necessary for poor children to work (J.L. & B. Hammond in Tierney 48), but traditionally, it had been at home with their parents, at whatever occupation was necessary (Hammonds in Tierney 49). Until 1767, when Parliament acted to ensure the survival of orphans who were wards of the parish, these children did not usually survive. Consequently, there were more of them to be “apprenticed” out (Hammond 49). Children from the workhouse were given over as apprentices to anyone who wished, and were not protected, although magistrates tried (Hammonds in Tierney, Kagan & Williams 49).

During the week that Oliver spends in solitary confinement as punishment for being hungry, Dickens does not let us forget that he is only a child. The description of his reaction to and fear of the dark is heartbreaking, as is the telling of his cold outdoor washing while being beaten with a cane by Mr. Bumble. Oliver’s fate is displayed to the other boys in the form of

public beatings as a deterrent, so that they will not end up in the same situation (Dickens *Oliver* 17).

CHIMNEY SWEEPS

The reader gets educated as to the nature of chimney sweeping, and what it may be like to be apprenticed to one, by the following scenes of *Oliver Twist*. The first would-be master for Oliver is a Mr. Gamfield, a financially challenged and positively evil chimney sweep, who happens to pass by the workhouse and notices the note on the gate about Oliver. The five pounds is what catches his eye, and the small size of the workhouse child is a bonus, given his line of work (Dickens *Oliver* 18). He goes in to speak to the board about taking the boy (and the five pounds). The board members mention how it is a “nasty trade” and “young boys have been smothered in chimneys before now.” Mr. Gamfield explains to the board how one should properly light a fire under a boy who is stuck in a chimney to make him come down, and thinks (to himself) maybe it is because he was responsible for the deaths of a few boys already that the board may not let him have Oliver (Dickens *Oliver* 19).

The use of coal is the reason for chimney sweepers. The coal fire left soot behind it on its way up the chimney. Three and a half million tons of coal were being used in London at the time of Mayhew’s publication in 1851 (Mayhew vol 2; 339), leaving behind an estimated one million bushels of soot in London chimneys (Mayhew vol 2; 344). The soot was used by farmers and gardeners to keep pests away from crops, and was a significant business venture for those who bought and sold it (Mayhew vol 2; 345).

Some sweepers used their own children, with complete impunity, at the age of four (Mayhew vol 2; 346). Some parents lied and apprenticed out their six year-olds, saying that they were eight. Also, workhouse officials gave six year-old orphans over to “to the starvation and

tyranny which they must have known were very often in store for them when apprenticed to sweepers” (Mayhew vol 2; 346). In poverty-stricken areas, there were so many unwanted children that they were sold to sweeps as young as four, and were not cared for at all (Hayward 106).

In 1817 a Committee of the House of Commons investigated the use of children in the chimneys. They found that it was a common occurrence that very young children were being sold to sweepers, both by kidnappers and by their own parents. Some were rescued either by their parents or a stranger, but many never learned their true identities. It was especially dangerous for young children in rural areas, where sweepers had trouble keeping enough apprentices. Parents warned their children, “the sweeps will get you” to keep them close to home (Mayhew vol 2; 348).

The Committee uncovered some training methods employed by the chimney sweeps. Most of the boys did not want to go up the first time. The children were beaten to make them go up the chimney; how badly the boys were beaten depended on what sort of master they had (Mayhew vol 2; 349). The boys below them stuck their feet with pins. Straw was set on fire below them to compel them up. One master chimney sweep told the Committee that he had been forced to climb the chimney naked as a child (Mayhew vol 2; 350).

Another witness told the Committee that he knew of a case where a boy was supposed to sweep a chimney but could not get up into it after several tries. His master lit a fire under him to make him climb, but the chimney was blocked by a bar, and the boy could not get past it, so he had no choice but to come back down. His master gave him such a severe beating that he could not stand for two weeks (Mayhew vol 2; 350).

The children were hurt climbing the chimneys. Their tender elbows and knees were damaged because they had not had time to become calloused to the exertions required to climb the chimneys (Mayhew vol 2; 347). A surgeon spoke to the Committee about physical problems with young apprentices of chimney sweepers. He told them that the children become deformed because they are climbing chimneys at such a young age, when their bones are still growing. The knees and ankles are especially vulnerable to deformity from ascending and descending chimneys. Carrying the heavy bags of soot is also harmful to their young bodies (Mayhew vol 2; 350). He also speaks of their lack of growth to their full potential, in consequence of them starting the chimney climbing so early in life (Mayhew vol 2; 351). The surgeon also tells the Committee that soot gets into the children's eyes, causing inflammation, and often this affects their vision. The children are dirty, and this adds to the eye problems when they rub their eyes with their sooty hands. For this reason they also have trouble getting sores to heal (Mayhew vol 2; 350).

The surgeon speaks to the Committee about "the chimney-sweeper's cancer," which is testicular cancer, of which he has seen many cases. The chimney-sweepers are afraid of the operation for it which could save their lives, so many will not submit to or seek treatment (Mayhew vol 2; 350). For this reason it is difficult to know the true number of cases. A possible cause of this cancer is that the young males going up the chimneys many times wore no clothing whatsoever, and unprotected parts of the body were injured thereby (Waldron 390). The patients would first have thick sores on the scrotum, which were known to them as "soot warts" (Waldron 382). These were not confined to the scrotum only, and could also appear elsewhere (Waldron 392). Percivall Pott, who first decided that the cancer of the scrotum/testicles was caused by the patients' work history (Waldron 390), thought the soot's irritating qualities caused

the sores. One mystery to the experts of the day was that the testicular cancer of chimney sweeps was not happening in other countries (Waldron 393). Sir Henry Butin, a prominent English surgeon, took it upon himself to learn that sweeps in other countries wore much more effective clothing and cleaned themselves much more often than the English sweeps. He also believed that the process of “sifting the soot” prior to selling, which was performed by the adults, contributed to the problem because of the “frictional trauma caused as the scrotum rubbed against soot-covered clothes during the sifting operations” (Waldron 393-394). This could explain why in almost all cases, testicular or scrotal cancer did not show up until the boys were older, usually in their thirties (Waldron 391).

Many of the young apprentice children died from different causes, including neglect, overwork, beatings, and getting stuck in sometimes hot chimneys. The number of children lost to the profession can never be known (Mayhew vol 2; 351). An eight year-old boy named Thomas Pitt went with his master to sweep a narrow chimney at eight o'clock in the morning of March 29, 1813. There was a fire burning when they arrived, and the boy's master forced him down the chimney immediately after putting the fire out. Of course the boy suffered a horrible and painful death. There was evidence he tried to climb back up, but was unable to do so (Mayhew vol 2; 351). In 1816 a sweeper named William Moles was proven to have killed his six year-old apprentice purposefully. He and his wife were let off for murder, but he was found guilty of a misdemeanor and was sentenced to two years. The child's body showed signs of earlier abuse, and the details of the murder were not included in the account because they were so jolting (Mayhew vol 2; 352). Here is evidence of society's throw-away-the-children mentality.

One master-sweeper told the Committee that when the boys became too big to climb up into the chimneys, it was difficult for them to earn a living. They became nomads, and some of

their income came from gambling with the younger boys and taking their money, the same way it was taken from them while they were still apprentices (Mayhew vol 2; 352). Sometimes they followed a course of crime, as they were very good at climbing and getting into places others would not try to go (Mayhew vol 2; 353).

The use of children, or “climbing boys” in chimneys was not addressed until about 1780, when Jonas Hanway called for some protections for these children. In 1788 he tried to get Parliament to pass a bill to this effect, but they passed an inferior bill in its place, which was not adhered to in practice. One of the protections was that no child younger than eight years old could be used to go into and sweep the chimneys (Mayhew vol 2; 346). The use of children in chimneys did not stop until 1875 (Hayward 105).

When Mr. Gamfield wants to take Oliver and the five pounds offered by the board, they decide, since chimney-sweeping was such a “nasty business” they should not have to give him the entire sum (Dickens *Oliver* 19). They are not concerned about Oliver’s welfare; on the contrary, they would like to see him suffer. Mr. Gamfield and the board negotiate and agree on a price, then head to the magistrates to get it formalized. As the board surely is aware of the wretched life Oliver would live as an apprentice to a chimney-sweeper, this is a strong condemnation of the workhouse authorities by Dickens.

Dickens likewise casts the magistrates in a somewhat negative light; they are quite removed from the realities of the society for which they are making important decisions. For example, one of them asks Mr. Bumble of Oliver, “I suppose he’s fond of chimney-sweeping?” He does not seem to realize what the boy would be about to encounter by going with Mr. Gamfield. The magistrates are both very old; one has fallen asleep reading the newspaper, and the other has very poor eyesight, and cannot see the expression on the face of Mr. Gamfield,

which other people would have seen and known that he was evil (Dickens *Oliver* 22). In 1834 the Act which required two magistrates to interview prospective apprentices to chimney sweepers came into existence. The magistrates were supposed to make certain that the child wanted to be an apprentice (Hayward 105).

The often-repeated pattern of reprieve (followed by more suffering) for Oliver begins with this scene. The magistrates finally realize that Oliver is terrified of Mr. Gamfield. They decide he will not be apprenticed to him, and they tell the officials to “Take the boy back to the workhouse, and treat him kindly. He seems to want it” (Dickens *Oliver* 24). In this way, Dickens draws the reader’s attention to the issue of chimney-sweepers’ apprentices without having Oliver fall into their snare, from which the rest of his story would have been even less likely, as he probably would not have survived it. Additionally, the reader gets to breathe a sigh of relief on Oliver’s behalf, if only for a short time.

Since the board could not get rid of Oliver by letting Mr. Gamfield have him, they decide to give him to some ship’s captain, to do with as he may wish. The board is well aware of the reputations of those sorts of men; they think there is a good chance that the captain will “flog him to death” or “knock his brains out with an iron bar” (Dickens *Oliver* 24). Mr. Bumble, the beadle, is on his way back to the workhouse to tell the board what he had discovered in the way of getting Oliver to sail away on board a vessel, any vessel, when he encounters Mr. Sowerberry, the undertaker. The two men engage in light hearted banter about the small size of the coffins, due to the intentional starvation of the workhouse inmates. They both are very amused, but when the undertaker speaks of how little he is being paid for all the coffins he makes for the workhouse dead, Mr. Bumble wants to talk about something else; that something else turns out

to be Oliver. The undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry, decides to take Oliver as a “general house-lad” (Dickens *Oliver* 28).

THE BUSINESS OF DEATH, AND OLIVER’S PLACE IN IT

The frightened and lonely Oliver is escorted to Mr. Sowerberry’s by Mr. Bumble (Dickens *Oliver* 29-30). There he meets Mrs. Sowerberry, who exclaims, “I see no saving in parish children, not I; for they always cost more to keep, than they’re worth” (Dickens *Oliver* 30). Her attitude toward Oliver does not improve and, in fact, worsens during his time there. Oliver inhales scraps set aside for the dog and must sleep in Mr. Sowerberry’s workshop, where coffins are made. As one may expect, Oliver is terrified of the workshop and its contents (Dickens *Oliver* 31-32). Ironically, Oliver embraces the comfort his own death would bring, as he gets into his grave-like nook to sleep (Dickens *Oliver* 32).

Oliver is not the only young person at Mr. Sowerberry’s. When he arrives and is given the dog’s scraps, it is by Charlotte, a very dirty, unkempt girl who is down in the “kitchen,” which is a part of the cellar (Dickens *Oliver* 30). Similarly, he meets Noah Claypole on his first morning at the undertaker’s place. Noah’s designation as a charity boy is illustrated by his clothing. He is said to be wearing “yellow smalls” (Dickens *Oliver* 33). It is also mentioned that he wears a “muffin cap” (Dickens *Oliver* 42). Noah is much bigger than Oliver, and lets Oliver know right away and in very physical terms, that he is Oliver’s “superior” (Dickens *Oliver* 33). Clearly, Noah, who is a marginalized member of society himself, sees an opportunity to bully someone even weaker in the person of Oliver. Noah begins calling Oliver “Work’us” right away, to make sure Oliver does not forget that he has no parents (Dickens *Oliver* 34) and is a workhouse child. Charlotte and Noah do their utmost to make Oliver’s life as miserable as possible during his time at Mr. Sowerberry’s.

Before long, Mr. Sowerberry recognizes Oliver's value as a mute, to attend the funerals of children. He tells his wife that Oliver is a "very good-looking boy," with "an expression of melancholy in his face" (Dickens *Oliver* 35). In Victorian England, undertakers hired people for the purpose of dressing very smartly and standing outside the door where the attendees of funerals were gathered. These people were supposed to behave and appear to be in mourning themselves. They would also walk ahead of the funeral procession. These people were called "mutes" (Scandura 3). The more sad they appeared, the more they would earn (Scandura 4). Mr. Sowerberry thinks it would be good for business to have a child for a mute. He tells his wife, "It would be very new to have a mute in proportion, my dear. You may depend upon it, it would have a most superb effect" (Dickens *Oliver* 35). Oliver is given the solemn responsibility of serving during the funerals of children. He leads the processions, and has quite the desired effect upon the ladies who see him. His little naturally sad face is perfect for Mr. Sowerberry's business, which is good at this time because of the measles which is killing very young children (Dickens *Oliver* 42).

Mr. Sowerberry takes Oliver with him to collect the body of a poor woman for the parish, that entity having been alerted to the woman's condition by a neighbor who applied for assistance from the parish on her behalf, as she was very sick but has since died as a result of her illness (Dickens *Oliver* 36-37), which is at least partly due to starvation (Dickens *Oliver* 39). The pauper woman is disrespected in death no fewer than four times, in short order. First, her own mother is giddy at the thought that she is alive, and her daughter is dead. She thinks it "as good as a play" (Dickens *Oliver* 39). Second, Mr. Bumble and Mr. Sowerberry sit by the fire with the clerk while waiting for the member of the clergy to perform the burial, while local "ragged boys" perform gymnastics over the woman's coffin (Dickens *Oliver* 40). Third, the clergyman barely

gives the woman four minutes of his time, and is over an hour late. Even though he is late, he has to don his robe on the run, immediately before taking his place to do his duty. Finally and, perhaps most disturbing of all, she is buried on top of other paupers, and the grave is nearly full. The amount of dirt needed to fill it in could not possibly be enough, and the grave digger did not even break a sweat (Dickens *Oliver* 41). During Dickens' day, parish cemeteries were very overcrowded. In 1850, at the first Metropolitan Sanitary Reform Association meeting, Dickens spoke, urging action be taken to remedy the problem (Williams 36:26).

OLIVER'S TURNING POINT

Jealousy is a very ugly monster. For months, Noah Claypole sees Oliver surpassing him in value to Mr. Sowerberry (Oliver and the undertaker are very busy), and his abuse of Oliver increases in proportion. Charlotte follows Noah's lead in abusing Oliver, simply because Noah is doing it. Mr. Sowerberry and Oliver get along very well, for which reason Mrs. Sowerberry dislikes Oliver even more than she did at the beginning (Dickens *Oliver* 42). Oliver is accustomed to abuse (Dickens *Oliver* 33), and up to this point is making no attempt to deflect it.

This behavior pattern of Oliver's is finally broken by Noah's insulting of Oliver's mother (Dickens *Oliver* 44). Noah Claypole tries many ways to make Oliver cry, but nothing he does or says is working on this particular day. Finally, he settles on the course of insulting Oliver's mother, his first mention of her getting a reaction from Oliver which Noah mistakes for the beginning of his success (Dickens *Oliver* 43). Oliver warns Noah against speaking of his mother not once, but twice, enduring much of Noah's diatribe with no response (Dickens *Oliver* 44). In a condescendingly merciful tone of voice, Noah tells Oliver that his mother was "a regular right-down bad 'un, Work'us, and it's a great deal better, Work'us, that she died when

she did, or else she'd have been hard labouring in Bridewell, or transported, or hung: which is more likely than either, isn't it?"(Dickens *Oliver* 44)

Noah learns without further delay that what he noticed in Oliver moments before was not the beginning of the boy crying, but the awakening of his rage (Dickens *Oliver* 44). By slandering Oliver's mother, Noah has tapped into the reserve supply of what- Oliver- is- made- of, and it is much more than anyone suspects. Oliver gives Noah the sound throttling he deserves (although Noah towers over Oliver in size), but pays dearly for it himself (Dickens *Oliver* 46), as once Charlotte gets her hands on Oliver, she is joined by Noah and Mrs. Sowerberry in her beating of him.

Once Oliver is tentatively secured in a small locked room in the cellar, a condition which may not last long, as Oliver is violently kicking at the door (Dickens *Oliver* 46), Mrs. Sowerberry sends Noah to get Mr. Bumble from the workhouse (Dickens *Oliver* 47). Noah enjoys the reactions he gets from the man at the workhouse gate, Mr. Bumble, and a member of the board who has always hated Oliver (Dickens *Oliver* 48). Of course, every time Noah tells the story, it gets worse, and much of it is completely untrue.

Mr. Bumble comes to Sowerberry's (as Mr. Sowerberry is not there), and expects the sound of his voice on the other side of the door which Oliver is kicking to frighten Oliver out of the fury he is in; on the contrary, Oliver only tells Mr. Bumble to let him out. Whatever has clicked in Oliver's spirit has also driven away his fear of Mr. Bumble and, for once, that gentleman is speechless. He decides that what is wrong with Oliver must be that he is being given too much to eat, namely meat, and should have been given only gruel, as he was at the workhouse. Of course, Oliver has only been eating scraps during his time at the undertaker's (Dickens *Oliver* 49). Once again, feeding is an important part of this story.

When Mr. Sowerberry returns, he has no choice but to beat Oliver, for his wife will have nothing less. Mr. Bumble also beats him, and then Mrs. Sowerberry returns to insult his mother further (Dickens *Oliver* 51). Finally, Oliver is allowed to go to his little nook to sleep. Oliver's bed is in the workshop, which opens onto the street. He waits for morning, and leaves that place behind him (Dickens *Oliver* 52). The reader's relief is once again short-lived.

OLIVER RUNS AWAY

The reader gets an idea from this part of the story how little children were valued in Victorian England. Once he is on the road, Oliver stops by the place he had lived with the other young children, before returning to the workhouse, and sees his little companion from those times. Oliver tells Dick that he is on his way to "seek my fortune, some long way off," and the dying boy's blessing stays with Oliver for the rest of his life (Dickens *Oliver* 53).

Oliver decides to go to London, as he sees a sign indicating that it is seventy miles away (Dickens *Oliver* 53). The reader may be surprised that Oliver Twist has been taught to read; in fact, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 provided for the "basic education" of children in the workhouse (Pinchbeck and Hewitt vol 2;501). He remembers hearing people talking about London and thinks that he will be safe from the parish authorities there, and perhaps can get some help (Dickens *Oliver* 53). The boy has almost nothing with him, but does have a penny, which he uses to buy bread the first morning after he sleeps outside. It is winter and he is cold, lonely and exhausted, having walked twenty miles the first day (Dickens *Oliver* 54). On the second day of Oliver's journey toward London, he only makes it twelve miles, as the walking takes its toll on his body, especially his feet, and the hunger makes him shaky. He sleeps outside for the second night and is in even worse shape on the morning of the third day, and "he could hardly crawl along" (Dickens *Oliver* 54).

At this point, Oliver resorts to begging. He waits for a coach, and asks for help from the people riding on the outside, but most of them ignore him. Those who do respond to him want him to run up the hill behind the coach, to see if they should give him anything. Out of desperation, Oliver tries to do what is asked, but it is impossible for him in such a weakened condition (Dickens *Oliver* 54), therefore he gets nothing. He tries begging in other places, but is chased away or too frightened of being turned over to the authorities (Dickens *Oliver* 54-55), as some villages have signs to warn beggars that they will be arrested. Two kind people give Oliver what they can on his journey, and this prevents him dying on the road (Dickens *Oliver* 55).

After a week of living this life, Oliver reaches a town not far from London, early in the morning. As the town begins to stir, “he sat, with bleeding feet and covered with dust, upon a cold door-step” (Dickens *Oliver* 55). Unbelievably, inhabitants of the village see Oliver in this condition, a ten year-old boy who looks even younger, and do nothing but gawk at him (Dickens *Oliver* 55). Oliver is in a dazed and greatly reduced state, mentally and physically, while in this posture, within this incredulously unfeeling place.

REALITIES OF THE TIME FOR CHILDREN

To the sensibilities of today’s readers in an advanced society, everything that is happening to Oliver Twist is difficult to imagine. To begin with, many children born during this time period did not survive past the infant stage (Pinchbeck and Hewitt vol 2;349). As difficult as it may be to accept, children simply were not valued in this time period in English society (Pinchbeck and Hewitt vol 1;1). Parents expected some of their children would not survive, and accepted it as a matter of course (Pinchbeck and Hewitt vol 2; 349). Children were the property of their parents, and they could do as they wished with them, and expected them to endure the hardships of life just as the adults were forced to do (Pinchbeck and Hewitt vol 2;348).

The law would not come between the parents and their control of the children (Pinchbeck & Hewitt vol 2; 349). In fact, when parents separated, the father had ultimate rights to the children, but the mother was at his mercy, even when the father's wishes were detrimental to the children, as in the case of a baby being denied his mother's milk (Pinchbeck & Hewitt vol 2; 370). The judges often were forced to side with the fathers, even when they knew they could not force the fathers to do what was best for the children. They had no choices because of the law (Pinchbeck & Hewitt vol 2; 371). All this, of course, applies to legitimate children.

The attitudes of the previous century still dominated the early part of the nineteenth century (Pinchbeck & Hewitt vol 2;390). In 1761, a woman was sentenced to just two years in Newgate for gouging out children's eyes in order for them to garner more sympathy for her as a beggar. Had they been her own children, nothing would have been said about it at all (Pinchbeck & Hewitt vol 2; 350). Children were considered "little adults" (Pinchbeck & Hewitt vol 2; 348), and that simple phrase is the key which unlocks the mystery of why they were seen so differently in those days. Disturbingly, children in early Victorian England were being hanged for crimes such as stealing shoes and burglarizing homes (Pinchbeck & Hewitt vol 2; 352).

In short, the people who saw Oliver on his journey most likely assumed he was up to no good. Henry Mayhew explains that "thousands of neglected children" are out among the people, doing what they can to survive, sometimes through no fault of their own, but still they "are shunned by the honest and industrious classes of society" (vol 4; 273).

OLIVER'S INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF CRIME

This part of the narrative shines light upon things which even contemporary Victorians in England may not have been aware of: the criminal world which existed all around them. Before much time passes, Oliver is approached by a boy of about his own age, who is also very dirty

and strange to Oliver, but who helps him to get up and takes him to get a meal (Dickens *Oliver* 57). This is where Oliver begins to be swept into unsavory quarters; that is, even more unsavory than those from which he fled. How could the reader possibly blame him? Oliver is full of innocence, though he has recently drawn from the well of noble impetuosity within his heart. He has been rescued from starvation and exposure to the elements by a boy the type of which he has never seen before. The stranger is roughly Oliver's age, but acts and speaks like an adult (Dickens *Oliver* 56). The reader shares Oliver's acceptance of this unexpected kindness, for it is a relief to see the young Oliver finally getting a decent meal. For the second time, Oliver has received yet another reprieve from his suffering which will, as will be discovered, be short-lived and come at a very high price.

Young Jack Dawkins, the boy who rescues Oliver from the doorstep, obviously knows his way around the village in which Oliver has found himself. He speedily purchases the food and takes Oliver into an establishment where he could get the beer and let Oliver eat, in a certain back room to which he leads Oliver right away. There he offers to introduce Oliver to the "spectable old genelman" in London who will put Oliver up for no charge. Poor Oliver has been walking and sleeping outside for a week and readily accepts the invitation (Dickens *Oliver* 57).

While Oliver is still very innocent, he does make some observations of Jack, otherwise known as "The Artful Dodger" (Dickens *Oliver* 58), and suspects he may not wish to associate with him in the future, and very much wants to enter the good graces of the "old gentleman" himself. This echoes what has already happened with Mr. Sowerberry and Noah Claypole. If nothing else, this illustrates Oliver's awareness of his own self-worth, which is incredible given everything that has already happened to the boy.

On the way to meet “the gentleman,” Oliver observes his surroundings. He and The Dodger come into this part of London in a less than straightforward manner, and have to wait until after dark. It is late at night, and the streets are full of filth and stench (Dickens *Oliver* 58). Notably, there are a great many children in the arena of complete physical and moral decay which Oliver observes. He is actually considering escaping from the area (Saffron-hill) and from The Dodger, when they reach their destination (Dickens *Oliver* 59). Saffron-hill was in reality one of what were called “rookeries,” areas of intense overcrowding of people, living in decayed buildings and engaging in all sorts of crime (Williams 13:15).

Once inside the old, broken down house which matches the atmosphere of the outside, Oliver meets Fagin (the “old gentleman”) and several boys, all waiting for their dinner, which Fagin is cooking. The boys, who are all roughly the same age as Oliver and The Dodger, are “smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits, with the air of middle-aged men” (Dickens *Oliver* 61). In real life, Henry Mayhew observed “The precocity of the youth of both sexes in London is perfectly astounding” (vol 4; 221).

Oliver gets to eat his fill again and, before the night is over, has been given “a glass of hot gin and water,” which sends him “into a deep sleep,” but not before “he felt himself gently lifted on to one of the sacks” (61). The implication of nurturing that the word “gently” invokes may give the reader cause for hope for Oliver, but it is misleading, just as is Fagin’s use of the term “dear” when addressing Oliver.

The next morning, Oliver is introduced to Charley Bates, one of the smoking boys from the night before, who has been out “working” along with The Dodger (Dickens *Oliver* 64). The two bring Fagin “pocket-books” and “pocket-handkerchiefs.” Charley Bates is amused to the point of almost choking on his breakfast by Oliver’s wide-eyed acceptance of Fagin’s

explanation that The Dodger has hand-crafted the pocket-books and Charley Bates has made the handkerchiefs himself. Fagin is going to teach Oliver how to pull out the stitches which form the letters of the initials of the true owners of the handkerchiefs (Dickens *Oliver* 65).

The Dodger and Charley Bates had also attended an execution earlier that morning (Dickens *Oliver* 65). At this time in London, public executions were still taking place. In fact, in 1849 Charles Dickens went with some friends to the Horsemonger Lane Gaol to witness the execution of a man and his wife for murder. Dickens and his friends had a high vantage point, having rented accommodations which allowed them to watch from the roof of the building. Dickens was shocked by the way the people attending the execution were behaving, treating it like entertainment and an excuse to party. In fact, people were behaving so horribly that some were actually killed in the suffocating crowd of spectators which had gathered. On that very day, Dickens began campaigning for the end of public executions by writing to *The Times* newspaper; the practice was ended in 1868 (Williams 1:16:20), two years before Dickens' death.

There is reason to assume that the execution attended that morning by The Dodger and Charley Bates has some connection to the "pretty things" (Dickens *Oliver* 64) which Fagin had brought out of a box while he thought Oliver was asleep (Dickens *Oliver* 62-63). Fagin is talking to himself, and possibly to the objects, about how some "fine fellows" did not tell anything about Fagin, or the whereabouts of the very expensive watch which he was holding. He also mentions how "dead men never repent," and is thrilled how "Five of 'em strung up in a row; and none left to play booty, or turn white-livered!" (Dickens *Oliver* 63). Later on, the reader will learn that Fagin holds these executions over the heads of his associates, and tells them that if they fail to cooperate, he will make certain that it becomes their fate, as he tells Oliver that he had to do to another boy (Dickens *Oliver* 133).

Fagin begins Oliver's education by playing a game in front of him. Fagin has The Dodger and Charley Bates pick his pockets while he pretends to be an old man with a cane browsing around the street and window-shopping. This game is very funny to Oliver, and provides the reader with a very special gift: Oliver laughing. He has no idea why they are playing the game, but it is very funny. Here is the first appearance of Nancy, who will figure heavily in the story later. She comes to Fagin's with Bet, and the two girls are painted up and very casual (Dickens *Oliver* 66). The two girls and two boys begin drinking, and after a lengthy visit the four of them leave together. After they are gone, Fagin has Oliver take a handkerchief from his pocket, to see if he can do it like the other boys. Oliver remains totally unaware of his new associates' activities.

Henry Mayhew describes how pickpockets were trained from about six or seven years old, and could become quite good at doing it, as in some cases they were being trained by the thieves themselves. One of the training methods was hanging a coat up with a bell on it. The children would practice taking the handkerchief out of the pocket of the coat without disturbing the bell. Another method was that the "trainer" would walk about with the handkerchief in his coat pocket, and the boys practiced pulling it out. The pickpockets also got pocketbooks, bringing them as well as the handkerchiefs to a third party, sometimes the "trainer," who would buy the stolen items from the children for a very low price, and then make money off them himself (Mayhew vol 4; 304).

Mayhew describes how usually the pickpockets worked in small clusters. One would pick the pocket of the unsuspecting victim, usually an old man. Another would stick close to the one picking the pocket, so that no one would observe his hand, while one walked behind as the "lookout." If the victim noticed that his handkerchief had been taken, the picker would give it to

the other boy, who would run away with it. Then the lookout was left to proceed as if nothing had happened, or possibly give the victim false information about which way the thief ran (Mayhew vol 4; 305).

After several days of pulling threads from handkerchiefs and watching Fagin's reactions to The Dodger and Charley Bates returning to Fagin's den without more handkerchiefs, Oliver wants a change of scenery, and possibly is wishing to be of assistance as well. He asks repeatedly to go out with the two boys, and is finally allowed to do so. At this point, Oliver is still laboring under the false impression that the two boys are making the stolen items themselves (Dickens *Oliver* 68).

Once out with the two boys, Oliver is surprised by the way The Dodger and Charley Bates seem to be just walking, not "going to work" (Dickens *Oliver* 69). Also, The Dodger is taking little boys' caps and throwing them down where they may not be easily retrieved, and Charley Bates is stealing fruits and vegetables from vendors along the way. Oliver is thinking about going back to Fagin's, when The Dodger spots his next pickpocket victim, an old gentleman, "a very respectable-looking personage" who is completely absorbed in a book which he has picked up from the bookseller (Dickens *Oliver* 69). One may wonder how this gentleman came to be in such an area. Amazingly, in London during this time period (early nineteenth century), areas of the city could be extremely crime infested and also be where respectable people could be found at the same time (Williams 44:41).

Oliver is unaware of what is about to take place; in fact, The Dodger will not even let him ask (Dickens *Oliver* 69). Oliver sees The Dodger and Charley Bates advance toward the gentleman, follows them a few steps then stops, and is utterly horrified as he watches The Dodger steal the gentleman's handkerchief from his pocket. The Dodger gives the handkerchief

to Charley Bates, then they both run quickly (Dickens *Oliver* 70) around the corner, for they know better than to run away at full speed. What they avoid is exactly what happens to the innocent Oliver.

The moment Oliver sees The Dodger take the gentleman's handkerchief, he realizes what has been going on, and what kind of people he has been sheltered by. Everything falls into place in his mind, and the child does the most natural thing a terrorized child can be expected to do: run away as fast as possible (Dickens *Oliver* 70).

Simultaneous to Oliver beginning to run away, the gentleman realizes his handkerchief has been taken. As he turns and sees Oliver running, he assumes he is the culprit and shouts "Stop thief!" as loudly as he can, and, still holding the book, runs after Oliver. To add insult to injury, The Dodger and Charley Bates join in the pursuit of Oliver, shouting as loudly as they can, too (Dickens *Oliver* 70). It seems as though, according to Mayhew's description of how pick-pocketing was supposed to work, that this one went terribly wrong.

As the gentleman and the two boys chase Oliver in this manner, their cries of "Stop, thief!" draw the attention of everyone within hearing of it. The crowd chasing after the terrified Oliver gains momentum like a snowball rolling downhill, and the cries of those pursuing him reverberate through the streets (Dickens *Oliver* 71-72). When the crowd catches up with Oliver, it is a fully grown man who hits him and knocks him down; the man is very proud of himself and Oliver is bleeding (Dickens *Oliver* 72). Immediately, the reader ascertains that the old gentleman (the victim of the pickpocketing) is very kind, for he is worried that Oliver is injured, and asks the police officer who snatches Oliver up not to hurt him. The old gentleman walks beside the police officer to the magistrate, who will decide what to do with Oliver (Dickens *Oliver* 73-74).

MR. BROWNLOW'S STORY

Here the reader begins to be included in the big secret of the story, which is the connection between Oliver's father and the old gentleman whose handkerchief was stolen. Once inside the police station, Oliver is locked in a very dirty and small cell as he awaits his fate. As the old gentleman sees him locked up, with a heavy heart, he turns to go into another room while he waits for them to see the magistrate. He thinks to himself, "There is something in that boy's face, something that touches and interests me. *Can* he be innocent? He looked like-By the bye, Bless my soul! Where have I seen something like that look before?" (Dickens *Oliver* 74). The cause for Mr. Brownlow (the old gentleman) recognizing something in Oliver is the first strong argument for the narrative of *Oliver Twist* seeming a little over-the-top to some readers. Mr. Brownlow had been friends since childhood with Oliver's father, Edwin Leeford. Not only that, but Mr. Brownlow was engaged to Edwin's sister, and the morning set aside for them to be married found Mr. Brownlow and Edwin Leeford instead grieving at her deathbed (Dickens *Oliver* 377).

Edwin Leeford's father had forced him to marry an older woman for reasons other than love (Dickens *Oliver* 378). The marriage was not a good one, and gradually disintegrated to the point where the couple were living separately, very far apart. Although the marriage was doomed, it produced one son, who went with his mother (Dickens *Oliver* 378). The boy's mother had taught him to hate his father, and the boy did not turn out well (Dickens *Oliver* 399). Edwin Leeford became friends with some new neighbors where he decided to live, as he was alone but, unfortunately, still married (Dickens *Oliver* 378-379). He fell in love with the daughter of his new neighbor, "a beautiful creature of nineteen" (Dickens *Oliver* 379).

It happened that Edwin Leeford had to leave the young woman behind to go to Rome, to sort out the affairs of a relative (presumably his father), as this was the source of his inheritance.

The relative in question had gone to Rome for his health, but still died there (Dickens *Oliver* 379). On his way to Rome, Edwin Leeford had stopped to visit Mr. Brownlow. He had been in a state of great mental anguish (Dickens *Oliver* 380), and told Mr. Brownlow that he intended to liquidate his assets, give a portion of them to his wife and eleven year-old son (Dickens *Oliver* 378), then leave the country forever. He did not tell his friend everything that had taken place, but Mr. Brownlow guessed, aided in no small part by the portrait of the young woman which Edwin Leeford had painted himself and left with Mr. Brownlow for safekeeping (Dickens *Oliver* 380). When Mr. Brownlow observes Oliver closely for the first time following the pickpocket incident, this portrait of his mother is the source of the hazy connection the kind old gentleman senses but cannot initially pinpoint. After all, the portrait had by this time presided over Mrs. Bedwin's (Mr. Brownlow's housekeeper) little room downstairs in Mr. Brownlow's house for a good many years (Dickens *Oliver* 83).

Mr. Brownlow is compelled into the office of the magistrate who will decide Oliver's punishment. As he meets the magistrate, Mr. Fang, he also sees that Oliver is already in the room, locked in a cage and very frightened (Dickens *Oliver* 75). Previous to this, Mr. Brownlow had already expressed his wish not to pursue the case against Oliver, but had been told by the "man with the keys" (74) that he had no choice; the magistrate would have to be seen (Dickens *Oliver* 74).

When Mr. Brownlow is first presented to Mr. Fang, he behaves, in word and posture, like the gentleman he is. Mr. Fang, the magistrate, is no gentleman. He rudely refuses to even look at Mr. Brownlow's card, and demands of the court officer who Mr. Brownlow is and what he has done. The magistrate knows Mr. Brownlow is not charged with any crime, but simply wants to be rude and insulting, and succeeds brilliantly in this endeavor, causing Mr. Brownlow to turn

red. Interestingly, Mr. Fang is based on a real magistrate, Mr. Lang, who was very much like this character (Williams 12:10). Although Fang's behavior is infuriating to Mr. Brownlow, he forebears giving evidence of this to the magistrate because he is already worried about the effect all of this will have on the young boy (Dickens *Oliver* 76).

Mr. Brownlow asks the magistrate for mercy for Oliver Twist, because he is not certain, after all, that the boy is actually the true culprit. He also believes that Oliver is not well, having been injured and appearing very sick, a belief shared by the officer who stands next to Oliver's cage (Dickens *Oliver* 77). The officer answers the magistrate's questions to Oliver, feigning to ask the boy and speaking out his answers, because he can see that the child is incapable of doing so. He does not want to provoke the magistrate's wrath (Dickens *Oliver* 77-78). The magistrate is angered in any case by Oliver's barely audible request for water. He sentences Oliver, who is not even conscious by this time, to "three months-hard labor of course" (Dickens *Oliver* 78). Just when the reader is properly horrified by the sentence the cruel magistrate imposes on Oliver, and is wondering how on Earth he will survive it, into the courtroom rushes another welcome reprieve for Oliver, in the person of the bookseller himself (Dickens *Oliver* 78).

At first, Mr. Fang demands that he be removed from the premises, but the bookseller is determined to be heard (Dickens *Oliver* 78). Reluctantly, Mr. Fang lets the bookseller tell how he saw everything that happened, and that Oliver is not the one who picked Mr. Brownlow's pocket (Dickens *Oliver* 79). At this moment, the magistrate asks the question the reader may have been wondering throughout the entirety of this ordeal: has the book been bought? The answer, of course, is no. Now the magistrate turns the entire issue around, to make Mr. Brownlow aware that he is the actual thief, and has accused an innocent child! Mr. Fang dismisses Oliver, literally, into the street outside (Dickens *Oliver* 79-80). As Mr. Brownlow leaves the office, still fuming

from his encounter with Mr. Fang (Dickens *Oliver* 79), he sees the pitiful sight of Oliver lying outside, in very bad shape. He calls for a coach and, along with the bookseller, brings the child to Pentonville, and his own house, where he sees to it that Oliver is looked after during the days of fever that follow (Dickens *Oliver* 80).

OLIVER ACCIDENTALLY LANDS CLOSE TO HOME

Here the reader sees the young Oliver in the midst of kind people with whom he shares something in common, but has no idea yet. He also meets his mother. Oliver awakens from the fever, very weak and a little confused, to the welcome presence of the kind old lady who has been watching over him during his illness. She is Mrs. Bedwin, Mr. Brownlow's housekeeper (Dickens *Oliver* 83). Down in her little room, he sees the portrait of his mother, and is greatly affected by it (Dickens *Oliver* 83-84). He asks Mrs. Bedwin who it is, and of course she does not know. Oliver feels as though the lady in the portrait would like to say something to him (Dickens *Oliver* 85). This is even more ironic, since Oliver tells Mrs. Bedwin that he believes his mother may have been by his side during the fever (Dickens *Oliver* 81). He has no idea that he is at that moment gazing upon her likeness; at this point, neither Mrs. Bedwin nor Oliver realizes that the portrait of the lady is Oliver's mother.

The reader goes along with the narrative, which is very satisfying at this point, because Oliver is recuperating in the presence and by the efforts of the most kind and gentle people encountered yet in the story. When Mr. Brownlow comes down to Mrs. Bedwin's quarters to check in on Oliver's recovery progress, he is so startled by Oliver's resemblance to the portrait painted by his late friend, which is at that moment directly behind Oliver, that he says "Why, what's this? Bedwin, look there!" with such loud surprise that it frightens the poor boy to the point of fainting (Dickens *Oliver* 87).

THE INTRODUCTION OF OLIVER'S BROTHER TO THE STORY

The interests of the dark characters are revealed to be intertwined, and the reader gains a new level of understanding of Fagin's motives. The Dodger and Charley Bates return to Fagin without Oliver following the pickpocket incident (Dickens *Oliver* 89-90). If the reader is gullible enough, he or she may think that Fagin has some feeling for Oliver because of how angry he is that the boys have lost him (Dickens *Oliver* 90); however, it is yet to be disclosed at this point in the narrative that Fagin has a very good reason to be upset with The Dodger and Charley Bates for losing Oliver, and it is not affection.

Fagin has been in contact with a man he knows as "Monks" (Dickens *Oliver* 196), who is really Edward Leeford, the legitimate son of Edwin Leeford, and Oliver's brother. Monks had been looking for Oliver (Dickens *Oliver* 400), and knew he had been born in the workhouse (Dickens *Oliver* 398). He also knew that his father had written a will once he became ill in Rome, which included provisions for Oliver and his mother, Agnes. The will stated that Oliver's father knew that his mother was carrying him, and the child would be provided for unconditionally if female; but if male, on the condition that he turn out to be an upstanding and honorable individual, like his mother (Dickens *Oliver* 399). This will, and a letter to Oliver's mother, had been addressed to Mr. Brownlow, and Oliver's father wanted it sent after his death (Dickens *Oliver* 398).

Monks' mother had brought him to Rome when his father became ill, and upon finding the letter and the will in her husband's desk, she destroyed the will (Dickens *Oliver* 399), as her husband was on his deathbed and was not aware of her presence (Dickens *Oliver* 398). She then proceeded to tell Agnes' father everything, and he took his family and went into hiding because of the terrible nature of the situation (Dickens *Oliver* 399).

Up until this point, Agnes did not know that Edwin Leeford was married (Dickens *Oliver* 398), she had simply believed in him unconditionally, and kept the gifts of “the little locket and the ring with her christian name engraved upon it, and a blank left for that which he hoped one day to have bestowed upon her” (Dickens *Oliver* 399). Poor Agnes had simply walked away from her family after the truth was revealed. She had not received the letter from Oliver’s father, and was unaware of the will he penned while in Rome, once he saw his death on the horizon, as these items had been intercepted by Monks’ mother. She only knew that the man she had trusted unconditionally and whose locket she wore close to her heart (Dickens *Oliver* 399), and whose child she would bear, had been married and was now dead, and no one can know the private suffering of this character’s heart. After she left, her loving father looked for her, unsuccessfully, and finally accepted that she was gone forever, and then he died (Dickens *Oliver* 400). The reader only knows that the young mother-to-be wanted “to die near the grave of the father of the child” (Dickens *Oliver* 402). The old pauper women who were present at the workhouse when Old Sally died tell a story which implies that Agnes knew she would not survive, but details of her illness are not provided (Dickens *Oliver* 402). When she was brought into the workhouse before giving birth to Oliver, she had been “found lying in the street. She had walked some distance, for her shoes were worn to pieces; but where she came from, or where she was going to, nobody knows” (Dickens *Oliver* 5). Old Sally, the pauper nurse who attended Oliver’s birth and Agnes’ death, was entrusted by the “pretty young creetur” with the safekeeping of the locket and ring (Dickens *Oliver* 180), but stole them instead. Old Sally made this deathbed confession to the workhouse matron (Dickens *Oliver* 181).

One is made aware of the extent of Monks’ (Oliver’s brother) greed as it is revealed by Mr. Brownlow that when he was eighteen years old he stole valuables from his mother and

slinking away to London, leaving her in France. She had enlisted Mr. Brownlow's help to find him and get him back, as she was dying and wished to be reunited with her son (Dickens *Oliver* 400). Monks had vowed to his mother on her deathbed that he would not stop looking for his father's love-child, and do his best to make sure his life was ruined, and that he did not live up to their father's expectations of him (Dickens *Oliver* 399). When Monks chances to see Oliver with Fagin's boys, he thinks he may be the child he seeks because of the resemblance between Oliver and their father (Dickens *Oliver* 381). The fact that Oliver is with Fagin is perfectly aligned with what Monks wants for Oliver's future, and he pays Fagin handsomely to keep the boy within his grip (Dickens *Oliver* 400).

Not only does Monks pay Fagin to ruin Oliver, but the two have a deal that if Fagin loses his grip on Oliver he will be required to pay some of the money back to Monks (Dickens *Oliver* 400). Fagin's own greed causes a natural aversion to that outcome; therefore, when The Dodger and Charley Bates return to Fagin without Oliver, it is a very big problem, and explains Fagin's extreme anger. As the situation stands, Fagin has a very strong interest in recovering Oliver to his fold. Just as the reader is savoring the pleasure of the young orphan beginning to live the life he deserves, he is brutally yanked back to his late misery by nefarious characters who map out a plan to take him back.

THE THIEVES KIDNAP OLIVER

Fagin enlists the help of Bill Sikes, a character to which the reader has not yet been introduced. Bill Sikes is a burglar, and Fagin is the person to which he brings the stolen articles to dispose of them and collect the money (Dickens *Oliver* 109). The two men clearly hate each other (Dickens *Oliver* 91-92), but manage to work together, to their mutual benefit. Bill Sikes

does not have any skills which help him to appear better than he really is; he is a very dark and dangerous character who trusts no one, and is decidedly less clever than Fagin.

Bill Sikes comes in just as Fagin is attacking The Dodger and Charley Bates for losing Oliver. Fagin reminds Sikes that if Oliver tells on him, it could lead to trouble for Sikes as well (Dickens *Oliver* 92-93). This alarms Sikes, and he realizes they need a plan to get the boy back (Dickens *Oliver* 93). Of course, Fagin does not tell Sikes about the payment he has from Monks to keep Oliver; that little piece of intelligence he keeps to himself.

Just as the four of them, Fagin, Sikes, Charley Bates and The Dodger, are trying to figure out how to discover what was done with Oliver at the magistrate's office, in come the two gaily attired young ladies observed by Oliver earlier: Bet and Nancy (Dickens *Oliver* 93-94). Sikes decides Nancy should go and inquire after the boy, and although she resists at first, she agrees and is disguised as a "respectable" young lady by Fagin (Dickens *Oliver* 94).

Nancy rises to the occasion by going to the police office and pretending to look for her little brother, even calling out "Nolly" as a nickname for Oliver (Dickens *Oliver* 95). She puts on a very good show, crying and appearing hysterical at the loss of her "brother." Nancy approaches the officer, the very same gentleman who had shown compassion for Oliver while he was in the cage by helping him to answer Mr. Fang's questions. Her act fooled the kind old officer, and he told her that the old gentleman had taken Oliver, who had fallen quite ill, to Pentonville, and that is all he knows (Dickens *Oliver* 96). Once Nancy returns to the others with this intelligence, the thieves spring into action (Dickens *Oliver* 96). They easily find out where Mr. Brownlow resides, and are keeping watch nearby for Oliver so that they may snatch him (Dickens *Oliver* 110). Once Oliver is let out of the sight of Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Bedwin, they seize their opportunity (Dickens *Oliver* 110-111).

Oliver is eager to be of some use to Mr. Brownlow, and happily accepts the chance to run an errand for him. Oliver is to go to the bookseller, the very same one who has already figured in the narrative, to return some books and pay Mr. Brownlow's balance (Dickens *Oliver* 105). As Oliver is walking along, intent on his errand, he is surprised by Nancy, who upon spotting Oliver, sets up a scene in the street, wherein she puts on the same show as the one at the police office, yelling how she has at last found her little brother. Oliver tries to resist, but Nancy loses no time in turning the crowd of people in the street against Oliver. She tells them how the boy has hurt his family by running away almost a month earlier and consorting with criminals (Dickens *Oliver* 111).

In a few moments, Sikes joins in the act, as he had been walking with Nancy just at the time Oliver was spotted. Sikes accuses Oliver of stealing the books he is carrying, and begins hitting him with them, to the approval of the crowd (Dickens *Oliver* 113). This scene may strike one as a little difficult to believe, mostly because although Nancy is "disguised," (Dickens *Oliver* 110), Oliver is wearing "a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes," (Dickens *Oliver* 98). Oliver had given his old clothes to a servant of the Brownlow home, who had sold them (Dickens *Oliver* 98). Once Sikes joins in the act and begins hitting Oliver with the books and accusing him of stealing them, surely Sikes appears as a brute and more likely to be a criminal than Oliver. He is described as wearing dirty articles of clothing and possessing "two scowling eyes" (Dickens *Oliver* 91). One would think it likely that someone in the crowd would take note of Sikes' appearance. Nancy and Sikes take Oliver to a different (Dickens *Oliver* 114-115) hideout of Fagin's, where Fagin, The Dodger and Charley Bates are waiting for them (Dickens *Oliver* 116).

Once Oliver is back with Fagin, the thieves begin fighting over the money they take from the boy, and Oliver begs Fagin to send the books back to Mr. Brownlow, for he cannot bear the thought of Mr. Brownlow believing that he would steal them. That, of course, is exactly what Fagin wants Mr. Brownlow to believe; it is the perfect outcome (Dickens *Oliver* 119). One of the most heartbreaking scenes of the story is when Charley Bates presents Oliver with the very same old clothes which he had given to the servant to sell, and made Oliver put them back on. Another striking coincidence of the story is that the buyer of Oliver's old clothes had just happened to show them to Fagin, and that is one of the reasons Fagin and his gang were able to learn so easily where Oliver was (Dickens *Oliver* 123).

NANCY

The easy kidnapping of Oliver is made possible by Nancy's involvement; her intelligence and talent may lead one to wonder how she came to be involved with these detestable characters. Dickens does not explicitly state that Nancy is a prostitute, but that is exactly the case. Her story is every bit as important to this narrative as is Oliver's.

Nancy speaks of how she was working for Fagin herself when she was only five years old. From there Nancy says she has continued in the life for twelve years (Dickens *Oliver* 122), in which case she is only about seventeen years old. At one point, when Nancy crosses the line with Sikes, he asks her, "Do you know who you are, and what you are?" (Dickens *Oliver* 121). The closest Dickens comes to revealing details of Nancy's lifestyle is "The girl's life had been squandered in the streets, and among the most noisome of the stews and dens of London," She is described as feeling "deep shame" and as a "degraded being" (Dickens *Oliver* 306). Yet, she emerges as the heroine of *Oliver Twist*.

PROSTITUTES

“The London Society for the Protection of Young Females, and Prevention of Juvenile Prostitution” in 1835 stated in an address, that several hundred people in London were making their living by ensnaring young girls (11-15 years old) into prostitution. The girls could not get away even if they tried, because their captors kept a close eye on them, and the girls knew they would be harshly punished. These girls realized they were doomed, and so took no care of themselves, because they did not expect to have a future. They often were stricken with disease associated with their lifestyle, and had to go into the hospital under false names, or were abandoned by their captors once they became ill (Mayhew vol 4; 211-212). Henry Mayhew interviewed a prostitute who had become middle-aged. Her rate was very low, but she had what she needed, which was a clean place to sleep, food and, most importantly, gin. She told the detailed story of how she was seduced into prostitution at sixteen, and stated that she was not happy, but she did not have feelings like regular people; “all that’s been beaten out of people like me” (vol 4; 240-241). This helps to explain Nancy’s approach to her life.

When Nancy helps to kidnap Oliver, the reader may easily assume that she is just as hardened a criminal as Fagin and Sikes, which is a valid assumption. Perhaps one of the most surprising elements of *Oliver Twist* is that she is not. It is unclear when Nancy’s heart softened to Oliver; perhaps it was when Sikes made Oliver take her hand, after they had kidnapped him and were bringing him back to Fagin. Sikes had been hitting the boy and handling him roughly. He had also told his equally brutish dog to watch the boy, for there is no doubt the dog would tear the boy’s throat out if prompted (Dickens *Oliver* 114).

In any case, Nancy’s attitude toward Oliver changes at some point before or during the time that Oliver desperately tries to escape after being kidnapped. When Oliver runs, screaming for help, from the room, he is pursued by Fagin, Charley Bates and The Dodger. Nancy quickly

closes the door after them, so that Sikes cannot follow Oliver with the dog. She knows the dog will “tear the boy to pieces” (Dickens *Oliver* 120). Sikes is very angry with her, and threatens to kill her, to which she replies that she does not care. As she tries to keep Sikes from opening the door, which is quite an effort, she tells him “the child shan’t be torn down by the dog, unless you kill me first” (Dickens *Oliver* 120).

Sikes throws Nancy across the room, and at the same time Fagin and the boys bring Oliver back in. Fagin decides he will beat Oliver with a club for trying to escape, but Nancy jumps in and takes the club away from Fagin before he can hit Oliver a second time. Not only that, but she throws the club into the fire. During this scene, Nancy is absolutely what some would consider hysterical. She threatens Fagin and tells him not to hit the boy, that he has him back and that should be sufficient for him (Dickens *Oliver* 120). Sikes threatens Nancy again, but her passion is awakened. Sikes criticizes her for being a friend to the boy, and she answers “God Almighty help me, I am! and I wish I had been struck dead in the street... before I had lent a hand in bringing him here” (Dickens *Oliver* 122). From this point on, Nancy is looking out for Oliver, even when the criminals think she has forgotten all about this night. It is almost as though she has become a stand-in for his mother.

THE ROBBERY PLANNED

The next extremely unlikely event in this story concerns the home burglary that Fagin tells Sikes to take Oliver on, to help make sure Oliver turns out to be every bit as much a criminal as the rest of them (Dickens *Oliver* 147). Fagin is having trouble training Oliver as a common pickpocket, so he needs to put him up to something different, and needs to scare him more (Dickens *Oliver* 196-197). Fagin has a house picked out into which he and Sikes have been planning a break-in (Dickens *Oliver* 143), and Sikes has discovered that he needs a small boy to

send into the house to simply open the door (Dickens *Oliver* 145-146). Fagin naturally suggests that Oliver help with the job. Sikes is a brute, and does not sugar-coat the fact that he will kill Oliver if he fails to cooperate (Dickens *Oliver* 146).

Nancy is in the room when Fagin and Sikes have this conversation; it is decided that she will come to Fagin's to get Oliver for the robbery and bring him to Sikes. At some point either before or during the narrative here discussed, Nancy and Sikes have apparently begun living together, and his dominance over her is unmistakable. During this meeting and conversation about the break-in, Nancy appears quiet and reserved, not wishing to provoke Sikes (144).

The home to be robbed is what Fagin calls "the crib at Chertsy," and he is very excited about it, for it contains many valuables. It is known that the idea of burglarizing this particular house originates with Fagin (Dickens *Oliver* 143). Sikes has had a boy they call "flash Toby Crackit" lurking (and disguised differently on different days) in the area of the house for two weeks, attempting to befriend the servants of the house, but to no avail (Dickens *Oliver* 143-144). The gang of thieves had hoped to make it an inside job, with the servants' cooperation, but since that approach has not worked, they must break in (Dickens *Oliver* 144). In real life, sometimes household servants would help thieves break into the homes where they worked (Mayhew vol 4; 335).

Nancy goes to Fagin's to get Oliver and bring him to Sikes for the break-in. She is in a terrible state, pale and very agitated, and even has difficulty looking directly at Oliver at first (Dickens *Oliver* 152). When Oliver realizes that he is going with Nancy out in the street, the thought of escaping comes into his mind; however, she discerns his thoughts and then confirms to him that she is on his side, but now is not his time to get away (Dickens *Oliver* 153). She tells him she has been protecting him the entire time, but she cannot stop what is about to happen. She

shows him the evidence of the consequences of her protection of Oliver left on her by Sikes, and tells “Nolly” as she calls him, that if he does not cooperate it could be very bad for him, and even worse for her (Dickens *Oliver* 153). Once outside, Oliver does not betray Nancy by calling for help (Dickens *Oliver* 153-154). She tells him, “They don’t mean to harm you; and whatever they make you do, is no fault of yours” (Dickens *Oliver* 153).

MRS. MAYLIE AND ROSE

The house in Chertsey, is the home of Mrs. Maylie. She is a pleasantly refined (Dickens *Oliver* 216) old lady, who lives there with her niece. Her niece, Rose, is very young and beautiful (seventeen), but has about her the air of a more mature, thoughtful and intelligent woman (Dickens *Oliver* 216-217). The twist is that Rose is not really Mrs. Maylie’s niece; Mrs. Maylie has taken her in as a member of the family (Dickens *Oliver* 221, 267). Mrs. Maylie’s son, Harry, wants to marry Rose; she is also in love with him, but feels she cannot marry him. Rose tells Harry, “there is a stain upon my name, which the world visits on innocent heads. I will carry it into no blood but my own; and the reproach shall rest alone on me” (Dickens *Oliver* 267).

Rose does not want Harry to struggle under the weight of her questionable birth, so she painfully and gratefully resolves to remain the most loyal friend of his life; (Dickens *Oliver* 266) indeed, Mrs. Maylie even believes that Harry would one day come to resent the young woman he loves so ardently today as her origin story interferes with his future prospects in life (Dickens *Oliver* 255). The entire reason Rose thinks that her name is tainted, and that she is unworthy of becoming Harry’s wife, is a falsehood perpetrated upon her by none other than Monks’ mother, evil woman that she was! One of the big surprises of this narrative is that Rose Maylie is Agnes’ sister, and Oliver’s natural aunt. Rose, as an orphan, has been victimized by Monk’s mother because of the sins of her older sister, Oliver’s mother Agnes.

When Monks' mother went to tell Agnes' father everything that had happened, and the family decamped to another location where they would be unknown, and Agnes' father died after looking for her, he left behind another daughter, younger than Agnes. A local poor family took Rose in. Monks' mother could not let the poor child have any chance at happiness, and so found her new family, and told them everything that happened with the child's older sister. She also told the family that the child was illegitimate, which was untrue. The family believed that Rose was from "bad blood" (Dickens *Oliver* 403), and that is what she had believed all her life. Mrs. Maylie happened to see poor Rose as a child and took her as her niece (Dickens *Oliver* 403-404).

WHY THIS HOUSE?

Mrs. Maylie's house, the one Fagin calls "the crib at Chertsey", which Sikes and Toby Crakit bring Oliver with them to rob, is a very long way from where Nancy and Sikes are staying, in Spitalfields (Dickens *Oliver* 141). Sikes and Oliver have to travel a great distance to meet Toby Crakit and get to Mrs. Maylie's house to break in (Dickens *Oliver* 156-162). One may wonder how Fagin chose this particular house to rob, and it would seem as though it is too great a coincidence that it is also the home of Oliver's aunt, although unknown to him.

In all likelihood, Monks is the one who told Fagin about the house; after all, Monks' mother had tracked down Rose and her new family in order to try to ruin her young life. Monks knows about the lady (Mrs. Maylie) who had taken Rose in, and states that he knows Rose, although she does not know him. Monks tells Rose "I have seen you often" (Dickens *Oliver* 403). Monks also says of Rose, "I lost sight of her, two or three years ago, and saw her no more until a few months back" (Dickens *Oliver* 404). Not only has Monks been actively seeking Oliver, he has been watching Rose. For this reason, the choice of the house to rob is likely not really a coincidence. If this is the case, Monks has unwittingly contributed to Oliver's reunion

with the last remaining member of his natural family. This is one of the more ironic twists in the story.

THE BOTCHED ROBBERY

Once Oliver is delivered to Sikes, the two of them embark on the long journey to Mrs. Maylie's house. Oliver is frightened and exhausted, wondering where they could be going as they pass through many locations on their way (Dickens *Oliver* 158). Finally they meet Toby Crackit, with whom Sikes is to perpetrate the robbery (Dickens *Oliver* 163). The three set out for Mrs. Maylie's house in the middle of the night. When Oliver realizes what is happening, he begs Sikes for mercy, to not make him a burglar, to "let me run away, and die in the fields". This desperate plea only enrages Sikes (Dickens *Oliver* 166).

Sikes, constantly threatening Oliver with a pistol along the way, puts him through the little window. The noble young boy decides that, instead of opening the door for Sikes and Toby Crackit, he will try to run upstairs and warn the residents of the home (Dickens *Oliver* 167). Before Oliver has the opportunity to fulfil his good intentions, he is shot by one of the household servants (Dickens *Oliver* 167, 213). Sikes pulls the wounded Oliver back out through the window and they run away. Sikes cannot escape his pursuers after the botched robbery attempt while carrying the unconscious Oliver. Toby Crackit tells Sikes to leave the boy where he had momentarily placed him, as the men with guns and their dogs are gaining on the thieves (Dickens *Oliver* 206); this is the course Sikes chooses (Dickens *Oliver* 207). Throughout the night, Oliver is unconscious in the ditch, unaware of the cold rain and gunshot wound which threaten his life.

When Monks discovers that Fagin and his gang have attempted a burglary, and Oliver has been left for dead, he is not happy with Fagin. Monks wants Fagin to make a thief of Oliver,

but is annoyed that Fagin included the boy in the robbery (Dickens *Oliver* 196). Another surprise is that Monks does not want to be the cause of Oliver's death; this seems strangely out of character. He tells Fagin, "Anything but his death; I told you from the first. I won't shed blood; it's always found out, and haunts a man besides" (Dickens *Oliver* 197). Given Monks' (Edward Leeford) hatred of Oliver, and his approval of his mother's actions against innocent people, one would guess that he would be thrilled to have the boy gone, by any means.

OLIVER'S NEXT REPRIEVE

While the choice of the house to burglarize may be explained, what happens next is not. Oliver awakens in the morning, out in the ditch in the field, and attempts to get up once he realizes he is on his own; he instinctively feels that if he does not somehow press forward it will mean the end of his life. He is aware that his arm is severely injured, and that he has bled heavily (Dickens *Oliver* 209). As he begins unsteadily walking, he does not even look up or around to decide in which direction he will go; he simply walks, accompanied only by his delusions (Dickens *Oliver* 209-210). Once he reaches the road, he looks up and sees the house: the very house wherein he had been shot! Oliver is seized by fear, but his weakened physical state overpowers his fear, as he approaches the house and uses his last bit of strength to give a light knock on the door (Dickens *Oliver* 210).

The servants of the house, two of whom had pursued the thieves on the previous night (Dickens *Oliver* 212), and one of whom had shot Oliver, hear the knock and open the door to discover the "thief" from their adventure the night before! They are very excited to have him in their custody, although they are also surprised that he is so young (Dickens *Oliver* 213). Rose is given the intelligence that the wounded thief is at the door, and is in bad shape. Mrs. Maylie tells the servants, through Rose, to bring him in, and send for "a constable and doctor" (Dickens

Oliver 215). In this way, Oliver is, once again, taken in while very ill, by those very close to him, but he is completely ignorant of the connection. The reader may happily accept yet another reprieve for *Oliver Twist*. As Oliver benefits from the kindness of Rose, Mrs. Maylie and Dr. Losberne (who holds the Maylie ladies in very high esteem), other unbelievable events are taking place elsewhere.

NOAH CLAYPOLE RE-ENTERS THE NARRATIVE

Noah Claypole, the “charity boy” from Mr. Sowerberry’s the reader is already familiar with, decides to have Charlotte (Sowerberry’s unkempt servant girl) avail the two of them of the contents of Mr. Sowerberry’s cash drawer, after which activity they head out for London. Noah does not want to be discovered and apprehended, so he leads Charlotte towards the less-beaten path upon their arrival in the city (Dickens *Oliver* 323). Perhaps the direction his feet take him is also influenced by his naturally dark and cowardly instincts. It does not take very long for Noah and Charlotte to meet none other than Fagin himself, who naturally sees great potential in Noah Claypole (Dickens *Oliver* 325). Although Noah and Charlotte joining Fagin is another difficult-to-believe coincidence, it does seem appropriate. Fagin tells Noah he can do “the kinchin lay,” whereby one steals money from little children on their way to do things for their parents (Dickens *Oliver* 330).

The realities of the day included children commonly robbed of whatever they were carrying by sneaky thieves who tricked them by offering to hold the items while the child went into a shop for sweets (Mayhew vol 4;281). There were also “child strippers,” usually old women who lured children by offering them sweets. They would get the child to a place where they could give the child the sweets and take the clothing, telling the child to wait for them to come back (Mayhew, vol 4;282). The clothes children wore also often prompted thieves to

kidnap them, in order to pawn their clothing and accessories (Foyster 675). The clothing the children wore was an outward sign to members of society of the child's importance to whomever was providing the clothing (Foyster 677).

NANCY HELPS OLIVER-AGAIN

Although he is in very bad shape after being shot, Oliver manages to tell the Maylies and Dr. Losberne his story; he had not yet shared it with Mr. Brownlow, for it was to be done on the very morning he was kidnapped; another coincidence (Dickens *Oliver* 104). After a considerable recovery period, Oliver goes with Dr. Losberne on a journey to Mr. Brownlow's house, so that they may be reunited, and Oliver may tell Mr. Brownlow all that had happened, for Oliver is very anxious that Mr. Brownlow be made aware of his true intentions. Unfortunately, Mr. Brownlow, along with Mrs. Bedwin, has gone to the West Indies. The Maylies take Oliver to the country, and there remain for several months (Dickens *Oliver* 244). While there, Oliver is spied upon by Fagin and Monks (Dickens *Oliver* 261), who have learned his whereabouts.

Nancy happens to be at Fagin's during a visit from Monks, and eagerly endangers herself to listen to their plans (Dickens *Oliver* 301). She hears Monks speak of Rose and Mrs. Maylie, who by this time are in London for three days. Nancy hears Monks tell Fagin that the Maylies and Oliver are in London, and at which hotel they are staying. Monks also says how much the Maylies would pay for Oliver if they could once again gain possession of the boy, and also mentions that Oliver is his brother (Dickens *Oliver* 309).

Nancy bravely and breathlessly risks her life to make the journey to the hotel to tell Rose everything she has heard and confesses her part in kidnapping Oliver from Br. Brownlow (Dickens *Oliver* 306-312). This journey to a more respectable part of London is especially brave for a girl like Nancy. She is met with hostility upon arriving at the hotel; indeed, if not for the

intervention of a kind employee of the establishment, Nancy would have been turned away and not allowed to see Rose (Dickens *Oliver* 305). The meeting between Nancy and Rose is especially heart-breaking, for Nancy is completely out of her element, and Rose is so compassionate and sweet to Nancy, that the reader sincerely wishes, along with Rose, that Nancy could be “reclaimed” (Dickens *Oliver* 310), but Nancy herself knows better. She tells Rose, “You would serve me best, lady, if you could take my life at once; for I have felt more grief to think of what I am, to-night, than I ever did before, and it would be something not to die in the same hell in which I have lived” (Dickens *Oliver* 312). Rose asks Nancy how she may contact her in the future if it is necessary, and Nancy tells her that she will be on London Bridge on Sunday nights, between the hours of eleven and twelve (Dickens *Oliver* 311).

OLIVER IS REUNITED WITH MR. BROWNLOW

In another ironic twist, Oliver “...had been walking in the streets, with Mr. Giles for a body-guard...” (Dickens *Oliver* 313). The very same Mr. Giles who had shot Oliver on the night of the robbery now walks with him in order to protect him. This is necessitated by the fact that everyone involved realizes that Fagin is trying to get Oliver back. Fagin and Monks have even been to the country house where the Maylies repaired with Oliver earlier in the story. As Oliver dozed in his little schoolroom, the two men were looking into the window at him, and disappeared when the boy screamed for help (Dickens *Oliver* 261). Incredibly, the very next morning after the meeting between Nancy and Rose, Oliver comes to Rose and tells her he has seen Mr. Brownlow on his walk with Mr. Giles, and is very anxious to go and talk with him so that he may tell him everything at last (Dickens *Oliver* 313). Of course, Rose takes Oliver to see him immediately (Dickens *Oliver* 314).

Upon the meeting between Rose and Mr. Brownlow, the reader witnesses a touching reunion between Oliver and Mrs. Bedwin. Interestingly, she says how she has had Oliver's own face in her memory, alongside those of the children she had lost when she was a young woman (Dickens *Oliver* 317). This is a touch of realism, since when Oliver first came to Mr. Brownlow's house and Mrs. Bedwin was taking care of him, she told him stories about her daughter and son, and only spoke of her husband having been dead for twenty-six years (Dickens *Oliver* 98). Here the reader realizes that even Mrs. Bedwin had not been spared the loss of some of her children.

After the meeting between the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow, the two camps join forces to see to it that Oliver is protected from the criminal gang and that he gets everything to which he is entitled, while still keeping Rose's promise to Nancy to come alone to London Bridge (Dickens *Oliver* 311). Mr. Brownlow also wants to protect Nancy from the others in the gang (Dickens *Oliver* 319). They resolve to meet Nancy on the bridge the next Sunday night to talk to her about Monks, and to assure her that the police will not be involved (Dickens *Oliver* 319-320). Nancy tries to meet them, but is prevented by Sikes. During this time period, the clever Fagin has noticed a change in Nancy, and decides to have her followed and spied upon by none other than Noah Claypole, originally the so-called "charity boy" (Dickens *Oliver* 34). Since Noah is new to the gang, Nancy does not know him. Noah follows Nancy to the bridge the following Sunday night and hears her tell Rose and Mr. Brownlow where to find Monks, and describes him (Dickens *Oliver* 356-357). Ironically, Nancy refuses to give Fagin up (Dickens *Oliver* 355). Additionally, Nancy refuses the offer of safety once again which Rose offered her during their first meeting, and that Mr. Brownlow offers again on the bridge. She is drawn back to Sikes even though she knows well what is about to happen.

NANCY'S SACRIFICE

Fagin exaggerates Nancy's betrayal of the gang to Sikes. She was giving up Monks, but not the rest of them. Sikes hears from Noah about Nancy giving him laudanum the night she first met Rose at the hotel, and that sets him off and causes him to bolt out the door (Dickens *Oliver* 364). Sikes goes home and wakes Nancy from sleep, as it is early morning (Dickens *Oliver* 364-365). Nancy tries to convince Sikes to spare her life, and to let Rose and Mr. Brownlow save them both from the life they are leading, even if it has to be separate because of her betrayal. She is clinging to Sikes, and has realized finally that "It is never too late to repent. They told me so-I feel it now-..."(Dickens *Oliver* 365). The murder of Nancy by Sikes is a stunning departure from the way Dickens has glossed over her life as a prostitute. As she clings to Sikes, begging him to help not only her, but himself, while she is yet embracing him out of some kind of love which she feels for him, he takes out his pistol and hits her as hard as he possibly can in "the upturned face that almost touched his own" (Dickens *Oliver* 366). The initial blows do not kill Nancy; she has barely time and strength to issue a prayer before Sikes finishes her off by beating her with a club (Dickens *Oliver* 366).

Sikes leaves the body in the room, and takes off, he knows not where. The image of Nancy's body torments him, and as the sun begins to rise the reader is given the image "...of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling" (Dickens *Oliver* 366). As Sikes is on the road, pursued by Nancy in his own mind, he hears others speaking about the murder which, by this time, has been discovered. By the evening of the same day Nancy is murdered, Sikes is hearing someone say that the murderer is sure to be apprehended. "...for the scouts are out, and by to-morrow night there'll be a cry all through the country" (Dickens *Oliver*

374). It is noteworthy that Nancy is now being noticed by society; a bounty is even placed on her murderer's head by the government (Dickens *Oliver* 383).

OLIVER COMES FULL CIRCLE

With the information Nancy gives them, Mr. Brownlow and Dr. Losberne apprehend Monks, whose story has already been described as being intertwined with that of Mr. Brownlow. Monks is forced to restore to Oliver what is his according to their father's intercepted will, and is allowed to continue his life unaccosted. Fagin has been arrested and undergoes trial, at which he is found guilty and condemned to hanging (Dickens *Oliver* 407-409). The text is not specific about the charges leveled against Fagin, but Nancy's murder is likely a factor.

Sikes is pursued to one of the gang's hideouts, where some of the members are waiting, unsure of what to do next. They know Sikes is wanted for Nancy's murder, and that Fagin has been arrested. Gradually a crowd grows outside, eager to get at Sikes. Charley Bates is horrified at what Sikes has done, and begins calling for the mob to come and get Sikes (Dickens *Oliver* 390). The crowd which gathers outside the house where Sikes is attempting to hide begins to resemble one gathered to witness an execution; indeed, that is what it turns out to be, as Sikes accidentally hangs himself while trying to escape from the roof of the house (Dickens *Oliver* 393).

Oliver is adopted by Mr. Brownlow and they take up residence near the newlyweds Rose and Harry, who have Mrs. Maylie with them as well. Monks is allowed to continue his life, squanders his inheritance and dies in prison. The complicated journey undertaken by Oliver Twist ends happily...but not for all. Oliver goes back to Mrs. Mann's for his little friend Dick, eager to care for him and show him how sweet life can be, but Dick has gone to join his little sister in Heaven. Nancy, who was shunned by society in life, has become infamous in death, and

is no more. She did not feel herself worthy of a chance to cross over to the other side, where respectability and happiness could have awaited her. Finally, *Oliver Twist* is, after all, still an orphan, but his noble nature has helped him overcome (quite literally) unbelievable obstacles. As for the reader, he or she will simply need to accept Mr. Brownlow's confident assessment of the situation as he tells Monks of Oliver, that the boy "...was cast in my way by a stronger hand than chance," (Dickens *Oliver* 380).

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