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The Image of the London Underworld

in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*

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I hereby declare that this bachelor thesis is completely my own work and that no other sources were used in the preparation of this thesis than those listed on the Works Cited page.

Abstract

The thesis provides a brief analysis of the London underworld in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. The theoretical part of the thesis concentrates on the image of London in 1830's, social conditions of the lowest class, the early Victorian underworld, the status of the Jewish minority and Dickens's attitude towards executions as a method of punishment as well as his opinion about Jews. The practical part focuses on an analysis of individual characters in the novel's underworld, their role and development throughout the work as well as their plausibility in comparison to the real London underworld depicted in the theoretical part.

Key Words

Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, the London underworld, early Victorian England

Abstrakt

Tato práce poskytuje stručnou analýzu londýnského podsvětí v *Oliveru Twistovi* od Charlese Dickense. Teoretická část se zaměřuje na obraz Londýna třicátých let devatenáctého století, společenské podmínky nejnižší třídy, raně viktoriánské podsvětí, postavení židovské menšiny a Dickensův názor na popravu, coby prostředek trestu a jeho postoj vůči Židům. Praktická část se zaměřuje na analýzu jednotlivých postav z fiktivního podsvětí, jejich roli a vývoj v díle, stejně tak na jejich věrohodnost ve srovnání se skutečným londýnským podsvětím vyobrazeném v teoretické části.

Klíčová slova

Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, londýnské podsvětí, raně viktoriánská Anglie

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I. INTRODUCTION

Streets and squares with young pickpockets in dirty clothes waiting for any occasion to prey a little trifle – handkerchief, snuffbox, wallet – and then to runaway to their “kidsman” to boast about their swag and be rewarded for that or unfortunately beaten if the booty is unsatisfactory. This is just a fragment of what the London underworld looked like in the early Victorian time. The aim of this work and its motivation derive from the desire to illustrate the shabby London underworld presented in *Oliver Twist* (1837-1839) by Charles Dickens, as well as the life and behaviour of its sinful outlaws.

Realist writers were not realistic in the word’s literal meaning. Therefore, their described world does not always have to look authentic. The Victorian world condemned immorality and praised human noble-mindedness and purity. It can often appear black and white from our perspective, though the whiteness was frequently a mere disguise of the black hypocrisy and bad conscience, and Charles Dickens’s novel *Oliver Twist* can be seen as an example of this tendency. It seems as if nothing existed between good and evil. Criminals are portrayed as rough and heartless villains, while nobility as gentle, innocent and empathetic with others. Yet how much is this Dickens’s description plausible? Does he embellish generosity of high social classes with his pen and words? Is his underworld dreadful or rather illusory by deliberately lowering the criminals’ credibility? How much does his underworld differ from the real early Victorian London?

Dickens presents many characters in his novel who practise various criminal crafts. He brings them to life, makes use of them in his narrative and completes their fate. Does he condemn his outcasts irrevocably or feel for them – a little, at least? And how much does he succumb to the Victorian society prejudice: being born as the poor means being born as a potential criminal?

Everybody is more or less influenced by the place they live in – both positively and negatively. Sometimes people get stuck in their environment and cannot get up their courage to move on. And if they can, what happens? People can sever their ties, but what if they stop halfway? And what makes them change the attitude towards their past?

Stereotypical visions are an inseparable part of people's life; they are rooted deeply in human minds and even when trying hard, people cannot avoid them completely. From the Middle Ages, Europe was wreathed in the prejudice towards Jewish people; the nineteenth century was no exception. This prejudice, as all prejudices did, derived from the mere unfamiliarity with the different culture and mentality and lead to the criticism and fear of minority. Therefore, another issue presented in the thesis is an outline of how the British majority viewed the Jews at the time when the novel was written as well as Dickens's attitude towards Jewish people. Is it only a coincidence that Dickens chose the old Jew, Fagin, as one of his main evil characters or is that his intention? How much does he succumb to the anti-Semitic stereotypes in his novel? And what about Fagin himself, is he an incorrigible, heartless villain who just prospers from corrupting children?

Charles Dickens's books often deal with the theme of childhood. In *Oliver Twist*, he presents two types of children heroes who are, nevertheless, one-sidedly portrayed – little rascals being born for a crime (the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates) and the pure children, such as the little boy Dick and the main protagonist, Oliver. The character of Oliver joins together – and therefore contrasts – two different worlds, the world of shabbiness with the world of splendour. Another discussed issue attends to the character of main hero, Oliver Twist, to the boy's believability, his role in the book and the depiction of his life among the criminals – does he only find imprisonment and fear in Fagin's gang or a kind of fun and happiness, as well? Can he see some good in the shabbiness of the underworld and therefore mingle these two different worlds together – mix up the good with the evil?

Oliver Twist is a novel of contrasts – it brings its readers to the world of ultimate good as well as wicked rottenness. It shows criminals on the one side, and people upholding the law and having the power to punish on the other side. It depicts godless outcasts and virtuous believers, incorrigible sinners and people looking for redemption. Charles Dickens presents us with a vivid image of the world which at times seems so distant and old to nowadays readers, so innocent yet dreadful. However, thanks to the author's narrative skills, this world has not lost anything of its attractiveness. This thesis tries to reveal some of Charles Dickens's opinions disclosed in the novel as well as to analyse the described London underworld and its characters.

II. DICKENSIAN LONDON

II.1 London of 1830's

London of the pre-Victorian and early Victorian era was a city of contrasts; with wealth and splendour on the one side and dirt and shabbiness on the other. The city grew rich as Britain expanded into the overseas; it could boast a new grand building of the National Gallery at the newly-constructed Trafalgar Square, the plans for the reconstruction of the Houses of Parliament in the Perpendicular Gothic style, and also the railway to Greenwich. However, the nineteenth century London was also a city of poverty, with thousands of people living in the overcrowded slums.

For a long time, these two different worlds were in a close touch. The rich, the middle-class, and the poor, Christians and Jews, lived in the same neighbourhoods, though not in the same streets and squares. The nineteenth century brought a strict social segregation of neighbourhoods. As the city grew, the wealthier and middle-class families left the City for the areas such as Bloomsbury, Mayfair, Marylebone, later they moved west to Bayswater and north to Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. More ordinary and poorer middle-classes preferred Islington, Dalston or Hackney. Westminster, Holborn and Whitechapel became infamous for the slums, noise and filth.

In 1830's, crime was a great problem in London. Nevertheless, it was also popularized and glamorized by the Newgate Novels, which were based on the biographies of notorious criminals recorded in the *Newgate Calendar* (first published in 1728). To the great disgust of Charles Dickens, some critics classified his *Oliver Twist* as a Newgate Novel after its first appearances. However, Dickens's endeavour was not to idealize the London underworld, but to illustrate the real life of thieves and to discourage the poor from turning to crime. *Oliver Twist, or, The Parish Boy's Progress* first appeared "in *Bentley's Miscellany* in February 1837, four months before the death of King William IV and the accession of Queen Victoria" (Dickens XIII), and was serialized in this magazine monthly until April 1839.

Dickens wrote the novel also as a criticism of the "then-controversial New Poor Law created by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834" (Dickens XXII). The law allowed the poor people to receive public aid but only if they lived and worked in founded workhouses. There, "husbands and wives were rigorously separated from each

other and from their children. Even if, by chance, they ate at nearby tables in the hall, they were forbidden to communicate” (Chesney 25). This happened to prevent the poor from spreading supposed immorality and from breeding more paupers. Due to the absurdity of the system, many people preferred to live and die in the streets. In the novel, Dickens demonstrates hypocrisy of these organizations and the middle-classes, who treated children cruelly while, at the same time, they proclaimed their belief in the Christian virtue of helping those in need.

II.2 On the Edge of Law

It would be an impossible task to define the exact extent of the London underworld in the time of *Oliver Twist*. As Kellow Chesney writes in his study *The Victorian underworld* (1970), “it had no sharp boundaries” (38) since it spread into the society around it. The underworld life is generally related to poverty and crime; however, it cannot be simply limited by those terms. Labourers who were half dependent on stolen food would be hardly called criminals from the underworld, same as businessmen or bankers jailed for fraud.

People of the shabby environment similar to those Dickens describes in his *Oliver Twist* were called “dangerous classes” (Chesney 38) by respectable people. This label referred to people whose manners of living seemed “a challenge to ordered society and the tissue of laws, moralities and taboos holding it together” (Chesney 38). Thieves, touts, tarts, bullies, beggars and cheats belonged, more or less, to the dangerous classes.

In his novel, Dickens presents and describes real criminal crafts seen in the London streets. In the character of Fagin, for instance, he demonstrates a kind of a villain who was known in the underworld as a “kidsman“ (Chesney 145). Such a man provided children with food and shelter and trained them in stealing, exactly as Dickens depicts. Kellow Chesney shows the witness of a police officer who managed to peep through a window into a lodging house where he saw a kidsman surrounded by a group of small boys. “From a line stretched across the room a coat was hanging, with a number of handkerchiefs tucked into its pockets. Each child in turn tried his skill in removing a handkerchief without moving the coat or shaking the line. Those who performed the manoeuvre with skill and dexterity received the congratulations, but bunglers were punished and... two boys knocked down and kicked for not having

exhibited the requisite amount of tact and ingenuity” (146). Besides stealing in the streets, undersized boys were also used as “snakesmen” (Chesney 161). This is the role in which Oliver was expected to assist Sikes. The snakesman had to be “supple enough to wriggle in between window bars or through a small unprotected back window... and once inside he could open a barred door or shutter for his elders” (Chesney 161). Children as thieves were generally nimble and inconspicuous; however they also had another advantage. When they were caught, they were usually treated leniently, unless they appeared repeatedly in the same police court. Therefore, youngsters often claimed to be younger than they really were and also presented themselves under different names. Thanks to that, they could sometimes avoid being sent to higher courts even after several convictions. On the other hand, if they were not lucky and their reappearance in court was recognized, the law was extremely severe. “Between 1801 and 1835, 103 death-sentences were passed on children under the age of fourteen for theft” (Dickens XV). However, as Philip Horne adds, “sensibilities were changing and not one [execution] was carried out” (Dickens XV). Nevertheless, this does not mean that the number of the hanged decreased and that there was any progress in the law system. According to official statistics, “twice as many people were hanged in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century as in the last fifty years of the eighteenth” (Dickens XV). The increase can be linked to social instability caused by the French Revolution ideas, the Napoleonic Wars, as well as by industrialization and urbanization. In the 1820’s, “two-thirds of the 671 hangings... were for property crime, only one-fifth for murder” (Dickens XV). However, the situation altered due to a series of reforms and the number of the executed lowered by the end of the 1830’s. Philip Horne mentions that “438 were sentenced to death in 1837, only 56 in 1839 – and few of those were actually hanged” (Dickens XVI).

The truth is the executions were a great social phenomenon. The executions were public and their audiences were often very huge. Philip Horne writes about “crowds up to 100 000” (Dickens XVI). The most famous execution place in London was Newgate, although it was not large enough to suit a high number of spectators. However, people did not attend the hangings to draw any moral lessons from it, but rather to have fun. Those who gathered outside Newgate, as Chesney describes, were “eating and drinking and passing the time with songs and horse-play” (306). After witnessing one of such gallows, Dickens wrote in a letter to a foreign friend “The

conduct of the people was so indescribably frightful, that I felt for some time afterwards almost as if I were living in a city of devils” (Chesney 305). For the interest, these are Dickens’s and Thackeray’s impressions of the same event. Both novelists witnessed the hanging of François Courvoisier in 1840, a manservant who murdered his employer. While Thackeray described that the crowd “was extraordinarily gentle and good humoured” (Chesney 305), Dickens was of different opinion and wrote an extended letter to the *Daily News* against the capital punishment:

From the moment of my arrival, when there were but a few score boys in the street, and those all young thieves... – down to the time when I saw the body with its dangling head, being carried on a wooden bier into the goal – I did not see one token in all the immense crowd; at the windows, in the streets, on the house-tops, anywhere; of any one emotion suitable to the occasion. No sorrow, no salutary terror, no abhorrence, no seriousness; nothing but ribaldry, debauchery, levity, drunkenness, and flaunting vice in fifty other shapes. I should have deemed it impossible that I could have ever felt any large assemblage of my fellow-creatures to be so odious (Dickens XVII).

Dickens’s impressions of the hangings are also perceptible in the scenes of *Oliver Twist* in which Fagin sends the Dodger and Charley Bates to pick the pockets of the spectators watching the gallows. Fagin’s appearance in court is also probably written under the influence of the writer’s witnesses. Dickens describes people in the courtroom who do not seem to care at all about the Jew or the trial and rather come for curiosity. Capital punishment is mentioned throughout the entire book; very often in relation to the main hero. Oliver is predicted to be hanged. His surname, given by Mr Bumble, also suggests his likely fate: “one slang sense of ‘twisted’ was ‘hanged’ [which was derived from] twisting as one swings on the rope” (Dickens XV). The deterrent effect of the capital punishment was after all completely meaningless, which was also a viewpoint Dickens held. Criminals, in fact, profited from the executions and masses of people considered them to be a kind of entertainment, no matter how much perverse kind of entertainment.

II.3 The Status of the Jewish People

Since one of the main villain characters in the novel is an old Jew, the next chapter deals with the issue of Jewish people in the late-Georgian and early-Victorian era, how the Jews were accepted and stereotyped by the British majority, what position in the society they occupied and, finally, of what Dickens' opinion about that minority was.

II.3.1 The Stereotypical Visions in the Dickensian Time

The opinion of the British majority about Jews was shaped by two main aspects: the general prejudice inherited from the Middle Ages and the unflattering status of the Jewish minority in the English society in the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The order of King Edward I from 1290 to expel the Jews of England uprooted a prosperous community of merchants and moneylenders who had come from northern France at the time of Norman Conquest. It was not until 1656 that the Jews reappeared in England being given an informal permission by Oliver Cromwell to live and trade in England. Cromwell supported their return for financial reasons and for believing their possible conversion to Christianity would be the fundamental assumption for the Second Coming. Although it was a long period during which the Jews did not occupy England, English people shared a common view on them which did not differ from the continental medieval opinions. Jews were vilified in medieval legends and folklore. They were generally accused of a murder of Jesus and slandered for various crimes – from practising usury and killing Christian children for rituals to poisoning water in Christian wells which caused the Black Death. These stereotypes also soaked into the English literature. Although there were no Jews, medieval and Renaissance writers based some of their villains on the model of an ostensible ordinary Jew. The Jewish characters appeared as the cut-throats in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Prioress's Tale*, Christopher Marlowe presented *Jew of Malta* and William Shakespeare made Shylock one of the central protagonists in *The Merchant of Venice*.

“When Jews first settled in England in the seventeenth century, they made their homes in the City of London and the streets immediately to the east” (Endelman 49). A

great majority of Jews came from Spain and Portugal in the first wave and from the German states, from Holland and Poland later. “A few of them were wealthy merchants, but most were humble traders, itinerant peddlers, and long time vagabonds” (Endelman 41-42). Jewish trades were considered low-status and disreputable. This judgement derived not only from the poor quality of the offered goods, usually soiled or tattered, but also from the manner in which the street trade was conducted and which was regarded as rude and aggressive. “The poet and essayist Robert Southey complained about ‘Hebrew lads who infest you in the streets with oranges and red slippers, or tempt school boys who dip in a bag for gingerbread nuts,’ while a commercial traveller of the early nineteenth century regretted that he never could leave London by coach without being besieged by a small army of Jew boys” (Endelman 44). However unfavourable these comments seem towards Jews, they just reflect the streets of the then London.

“The most characteristic Jewish street trade was the buying and selling of the old clothes. Jewish dealers catered to the needs of an expanding urban population that could not afford to purchase new clothing. Hundreds of them fanned out each day through the streets and squares of middle-class and aristocratic London to purchase articles now deemed unfashionable or too worn by their owners” (Endelman 43-44). In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens indirectly mentions a Jewish second-hand trade. In Chapter 14, Oliver is provided with new clothes from Mr Brownlow and is told to do whatever he likes with his old ones. He gives them to a servant and asks her “to sell them to a Jew” (Dickens 106) and keeps the money for herself. Dickens, who often describes his ideas into details, in this case does not give readers any explanation why the clothes were sold to a Jew; he takes it for granted that his readers understand what he means, which indicates Jewish dealers were nothing unusual in London and that everybody knew of them, bought from them, yet probably despised them at the same time.

The disreputable character of the Jewish trade also derived from their connections with criminal activity. Dealers of second-hand goods and street traders were infamous for purchasing stolen articles, “unscrupulous selling practise, such as misrepresenting their goods and passing counterfeit coins while making exchange” (Endelman 45). The entire proportion of the Jewish criminality to the native-British one is not precisely known. However, it would be erroneous to suppose that Christian lower classes and traders behaved in honest way. Jews, as well as Christians, turned to the criminal way rather on occasions, usually in straits. Nevertheless, criminal activities

were perceived more sensitively in Jewish minority, attracted unfavourable attention and were ascribed to the Jewish character. “When the notorious Ikey Solomons (ca. 1785 – 1850), a leading receiver of stolen goods in London in the 1820’s, stood at the trial at the Old Bailey in 1830, his misdeeds were reported at length in the daily press and in several sensational pamphlets” (Endelman 82). It is believed Dickens based the character of Fagin on those newspaper reports depicting the life of Ikey Solomons.

In the following decades, the number of Jewish street crimes fell as well as their acute poverty faded. There were schools established for Jewish children, they were given some rights and many obstacles and limits on Jewish trade were abrogated (e.g. they gained the right to operate retail business within the City’s boundaries). Nevertheless, even many years after the improvement of Jewish living conditions, the word ‘Jew’ did not mark only a member of a religious community, but it also indicated anticipated behaviour and stereotypical features of a person.

II.3.2 Charles Dickens’s Attitude towards Jews

Charles Dickens knew no Jew personally when creating the character of demonic Fagin. Apart from meeting Jewish peddlers and dealers in London streets, he did not get into any closer touch with them at that time (there is no evidence of it, at least). Therefore, when conceiving Fagin, Dickens mingled the life of Ikey Solomons and noisy Jewish street traders with the stereotypical medieval image of a Jew.

For the first time, Dickens publicly mentioned Jews in *Sketches by Boz* from 1836 “Holywell-street [demolished to make the present-day Aldwych] we despise; the red-headed and red-whiskered Jews who forcibly haul you into their squalid houses, and thrust you into a suit of clothes, whether you will or not, we detest” (Endelman 82). Such a statement seems very unfavourable towards the Jewish minority; however, it should not be understood in any case as an evidence of Dickens’s possible anti-Semitic attitude, but rather as a mere reflection of the then London and the conditions which the streets occurred in. He perceived Jews in a very similar way as other Londoners did. One year later, Dickens presents the Jewish character of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*.

Jews thought Dickens very unjust to them due to this character. “In 1854 the *Jewish Chronicle* was lamenting as to why ‘Jews alone should be excluded from the sympathising heart of this great author and powerful friend of the oppressed.’” (Walsh).

“Responding to an invitation to an anniversary dinner of the Westminster Jewish Free School, he replied ‘I know of no reason the Jews can have for regarding me as inimical to them. On the contrary, I believe I do my part towards the assertion of their civil and religious liberty, and in my *Child’s History of England* I have expressed a strong abhorrence of their persecution in old time.’” (Johnson). This time, Dickens did not feel obliged to defend himself in more details.

Dickens got into the direct contact with a Jew in 1860, when he decided to sell his London house, Tavistock House. James Phineas Davis, a buyer of the house, was a Jewish solicitor. Dickens described him first as “a Jew money-lender”, but later was surprised by how “satisfactory, considerate and trusting the money-dealings between them were” (Dickens 496). Three years later, the wife of Mr Davis, Eliza Davis, wrote a letter to Dickens that he “the large-hearted, whose works plead so eloquently and so nobly for the oppressed of his country... has encouraged a vile prejudice against a despised Hebrew. He had done, she said, a great wrong to the Jewish people” (Walsh). Dickens naturally reacted that “Fagin was the only Jew in the story” and “all the rest of the wicked dramatis personae are Christians” (Walsh). He went on that Fagin had been described as a Jew, “because it unfortunately was true of the time to which the story refers, that the class of criminal almost invariably was a Jew”. In case Jews felt offended, he added, “then they are a far less sensible, a far less just and a far less good-tempered people than I have always supposed”. He continued “in calling Fagin a Jew no imputation had been suggested against the Jewish religion; they had been intended in the same way in which one might call a Frenchman or Spaniard or Chinese by those names. I have no feeling towards the Jews but a friendly one. I always speak well of them, whether in public or private...” (Johnson). Nevertheless, Dickens later reacted oppositely. Although the reprinting of *Oliver Twist* was in halfway in 1867, he stopped it and changed the rest of the text which had not yet been set; and therefore, still today, “Fagin is called the Jew 257 times in the first 38 chapters but in only a small percentage... in the rest of the book” (Walsh).

Dickens considered it absurd that he had been misinterpreted and that people had perceived his feelings towards Jews through Fagin. Mrs Davis’ reproach affected him in the future very much and that was probably why, when writing his last novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), he created an important Jewish gentle character Mr Riah (meaning ‘friend’ in Hebrew) as an apology for Fagin. He put these words about anti-

Jewish prejudice into Mr Riah's mouth "Men say, 'This is a bad Greek, but there are good Greeks. This is a bad Turk, but there are a good Turks'. Not so with the Jews. Men find the bad among us easily enough – among what people are the bad not easily found? – but they take the worst of us as samples of the best; they take the lowest of us as presentations of the highest; and they say, All Jews are alike" (Johnson). In the letter to Mrs Davis, Dickens claimed calling Fagin the Jew had not been intended against the Jewish religion, which is easily believed. However, labelling Fagin in that way so many times evokes the feeling Dickens really wanted to stress the fact that Fagin was a Jew and wished his readers to anticipate certain features and behaviour. Nevertheless, it would be absurd to consider Dickens anti-Semitic. His opinion about Jewish minority altered along with the improvement of Jewish living conditions. *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist* were written in 1830's, the time when the emancipation of Jews and the attempt to extricate them from poverty was in its beginning; streets were still full of Jewish traders and dealers bothering passers-by. Mrs Davis' accusation came about thirty years later when the situation was already different, which was admitted even by Mrs Davis in her next letter to Dickens. With regards to Jewish issue, Dickens started as a critic slightly clapped in stereotypes to condemn the anti-Jewish prejudice later.

III. THE CHARACTERS OF THE UNDERWORLD

III.1 The Grown-up Outlaws

III.1.1 Demonic Fagin

Repulsive bearded face, matted red hair, villainous look, shrivelled body – this is how Dickens describes the old Jew, trying people to create the most terrifying image and anticipate the most insidious behaviour; as if the overall appearance mirrored the awfulness of his rotten soul and sinful mind. Fagin is supposed to appear as the worst of caricatures. There is nothing positive about him and all his negative features are stressed to shape his character. Moreover, details in his environment also help to emphasize his demonic image.

The first time Oliver is presented to Fagin, the Jew stands at the fireplace with a toasting-fork in his hand. In the original book illustration by Cruikshank, the toasting-fork is a small trident. Fagin is not portrayed as an ordinary villain but rather as a devilish monster. The fireplace can be perceived as a symbol of flames in hell and the toasting-fork as a representation of the devil's pitchfork. In addition, Fagin's red colour of hair "was worn by the devil in medieval mystery plays" (Walsh) and the image of matted hair can resemble "lion's mane or serpentine hair, which were used for illustrations of Lucifer" (Royt 63) in the Middle Ages. Several times Dickens calls Fagin the merry old gentleman. It can refer to the Jew's mocking, sarcastic humour and cynical hospitality, yet the expression was also used as "an ancient euphemism for the devil" (Walsh).

Fagin, as a right reptile, abuses people for his own prosperity. He traps young homeless children into the webs of evil and makes thieves of them. According to Walsh, "Fagin is cast in the traditional satanic role of corrupting the innocent, a Mephistophelean devil who seeks out Christian children". His "hopeful pupils", as he calls his young delinquents, are obliged to steal for him and keep the promise of secrecy if needed. He brings them up to look up to him and be faithful. As Mephistopheles looks for souls, giving success, knowledge and wealth in return, Fagin searches for children, providing them with food and shelter. When trying to entrap Oliver, he devilishly wills the boy to be "ours – ours for his life!" (Dickens 159). Fagin's criminal

school can be also understood as Dickens' attempt to recall medieval legends about Jews killing Christian children – their souls being metaphorically murdered when children succumb to the Jew and throw their innocence away.

Later in the novel, Fagin explains to Noah Claypole that any word said against the gang would mean a halter to him. Fagin considers the capital punishment “a fine thing for the trade”. Although some of the hanged people were members of his criminal company and were executed without betraying him, he seems to betray them for rewards. As Philip Horne writes, “he [Fagin] is profiting from the hangings in several ways” (Dickens XVI). Through Fagin's delight in the gallows, Dickens challenges the deterrent effect of the executions.

Under an extreme stress, Fagin proves the great ability of self-control. After recovering from the initial rage and shock – in which he usually beats his boys up, he is able to think rationally and craftily. Therefore, when he finds out about Nancy's betrayal, he brilliantly manages to incite Sikes to a murder and, besides, he warns him not to be too violent for safety.

Calling Fagin the Jew so many times, Dickens does not only mark his anticipated behaviour, yet he also isolates him from others. His alienation from the rest of the society is stressed in a crowded courtroom and later in prison. In court, he even does not seem to realize what is happening to him and rather watches everybody in the room. Yet, people seem to come only for curiosity and to socialize. He is made into a spectacle, but no one face shows “the faintest sympathy with him” (Dickens 441). Since nobody can sympathize with him, nobody can identify with him either. Later in his cell, he refuses to pray before he is to die. From a Christian point of view, he does not show any regret for his deeds. First, he rejects his Jewish religion and then he does not comply with Oliver's begging, “Let me say a prayer. Do. Let me say one prayer; say only one upon your knees with me...” (Dickens 449). By doing so, he isolates himself from the rest of the world.

The character of Fagin is portrayed as the worst of the villains who does not deserve any compassion. Nevertheless, he also becomes a victim. He is doomed not only for his own criminal behaviour, but also for the evil of Monks, Oliver's half-brother. In one case, he also shows a slight trace of kindness towards Oliver. When the boy is already sleeping the night before the planned robbery with Sikes, Fagin wishes to talk to him. Yet when looking at the boy, he suddenly changes his mind and refuses to

wake Oliver up; saying “‘Not now,’ ... turning softly away. ‘To-morrow. To-morrow.’” (Dickens 162). The next morning, he advises Oliver to mind Sikes whatever happens. Could that be understood as a kind of Fagin’s regret for the boy? Does he warn Oliver for the boy’s safety or rather for his own? Since the Jew is described as a devilish man from his very first appearance, he should not be in any case trusted to pity Oliver, and that is also probably Dickens’s viewpoint

III.1.2 Bill Sikes

Bill Sikes appears to be the least human character of Dickens’s underworld. If Fagin is portrayed as a sly sarcastic devilish villain, then Bill Sikes is presented as the most vicious character in the novel. While Fagin, in fact, does no severe criminal activity on his own – he plots against others and leaves the dirty work to his pupils, Sikes is a man of action. He is a thug with a brutal heart and an aggressive proclivity. He does not hesitate to fight and beat the only two living things that seem to like him: his lover Nancy and dog Bull’s-eye. Unlike Fagin, who admonishes to caution, Sikes does not appear to realize a possible danger of the life outside the law. Yet, his fearlessness seems to result rather from his intellectual limitation than from any great courage.

Despite their seeming closeness, the relationship between Sikes and Nancy is very uneven. Although Nancy seems to believe Sikes loves her, his love rather reminds of an abuser’s love; he needs her and she meets his needs. He treats her as a possession: he must know where she is going and what she is going to do. He perceives her betrayal as a great disloyalty. The highest point, which turns him into incredible anger, comes when he finds out that Nancy “gave him a drink of laudanum” (Dickens 394). His girl, his possession dared to outwit him, lie to him, and betray him. He gets completely blinded by this image and in a fit of rage cruelly beats Nancy to death, without listening to her, without making sure that Fagin’s story was true.

Dickens presents two varieties of justice in the chapters following the murder – the public justice and the personal justice. The personal justice brings Sikes to terrific mental torture. The passages of his mental breakdown are psychologically the most complicated parts in the novel. There, Dickens deals with the issue of suffering soul and declining mind, with hallucinations and paranoia.

Immediately after the ghastly act, Sikes becomes so shocked of his crime that he is “afraid to stir”, and horrified of the flesh and “the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling” (Dickens 397). He starts seeing Nancy and feeling her presence everywhere and in everything; her eyes gruesomely follow him wherever he goes. He symbolically washes himself, rubs his clothes, but nothing helps him to shake off the feeling of murder. He thrusts the murderous club in the fire as “there was human hair upon the end which... shrunk into a light cinder, and, caught by the air, whirled up the chimney” (Dickens 398). As Philip Horne notes, “the clubs and fires and whirlings mark the beginning and end of a tragic process” (Dickens XXXVII). Throughout this procedure, Sikes tries to leave the tragedy of the murder behind; yet, at the same time, one of the greatest tragedies of his life begins. He becomes haunted by the sense of guilt, which he cannot get rid of.

John Bayley says, “Sikes starts as an animal and murder turns him into a kind of man” (Dickens XXXVI). Sikes’ mental breakdown, in fact, reflects the state of his conscience, which, though very weak, is shown to exist. He tries to run away from who he has really become. This is also illustrated in his attempt at killing his dog, Bull’s-eye, which is vicious and brutal, the same as Sikes. Sikes desires to kill the dog that represents his own personality, to kill the evil inside himself. The symbolic connection between Sikes and his dog is clearly seen in the end – Sikes dies and the dog dies immediately too.

The public justice is demonstrated through the London mob chasing Sikes. The scene becomes disturbing in that it recalls the earlier scene in which Oliver was unjustly followed up by a similar crowd of people. Although chasing Sikes, the murderer, is understandable, it does not appear to result from any desire for the truth or moral justice, but rather from the desire for the mere participation on the hunt for a quarry.

William Makepeace Thackeray says that readers are caused “to have for Bill Sikes a kind of pity and admiration” (Dickens XXXII). Although it is easy to understand Thackeray’s point, since Sikes’ decline is really deplorable, it is very hard to sympathize with a person who barbarically clubs his lover to death.

III.1.3 Monks and Noah Claypole

Throughout the book, Dickens indicates that it is not only poverty which leads people to the edge of the law, and that it does not always matter in which living conditions people are born but, more importantly, if they deliberately choose to turn to crime or not. This is clearly illustrated in the character of evil Monks. As Philip Horne says, Monks is “the book’s most concrete connection between the bourgeois overworld and the criminal underworld” (Dickens XL). He is brought up in a comfortable background, yet he turns out bad. He is predestined to the mean life by his nature and by the influence of his grudging mother. He becomes a great manipulator whom even such a criminal as Fagin succumbs to.

Monks stands as the opposite of Oliver, who is born into desperate living conditions, but does not end up as a criminal. Dickens presents Monks as a product of a financially motivated marriage – marriage for money which brings up a morally corrupt child that is obsessed with wealth and finally is lead astray by his obsession. On the contrary, there is Oliver, the illegitimate child of a romantic love affair, who is as sincere and innocent as the sheer love of his parents.

The Victorian novelist George Gissing criticises the character of Monks for “his absurd machinations” (chap. IV/IV). The truth is that Monks does not really have any reasons to destroy little Oliver, apart from pure spite. The boy does not know who his parents were, and even if he found out, he would hardly learn there was a will upon which he had been left a sum of money, since it was burnt and Monks inherited the money. Moreover, it would be easier to leave Oliver perish at Fagin’s. Monks is a criminal without a reason. His motives can derive only from hurt feelings and revenge as his father tried to disinherit him. Philip Horne comments, Monks’ absurd machinations result from “Dickens’s inexperience and the improvisatory nature of the writing” (Dickens XXXVII). However, it is not only the absurd behaviour of Monks which seems rather clumsily drawn, there are also many unusual coincidences revealed throughout the book.

In contrast to Monks, Noah Claypole’s background is lousy; he used to be a charity boy, the same as Oliver. In the first part of the book, he creates a counterpart to Oliver; he is presented as a coward leech, a grotesque man. He is a son of a drunken

soldier which means his parents are officially known, yet were not able to bring him up. He manages to profit from this fact and when the first occasion comes he bullies his social inferior – Oliver, who is just an orphan. Through this absurd behaviour, Dickens presents and criticises the Victorian obsession with class distinction and how easily people tend to stomp on those below them. Dickens describes Noah's conduct and compares it to "the finest lords" (Dickens 37). By this comparison, he satirizes snobbism connected with class distinction.

Noah is keen for power and money; however, he refuses to toil to gain some property. This side of his behaviour is more revealed in the second part of the novel, when he gets to London and to Fagin's gang. As a character Noah is a much exaggerated, almost absurd person. He is just a figure, who is not able to think on his own; he does what others tell him, yet only if he is given anything worthy in return. According to Humpray House, Dickens illustrates Noah's lower intellect partly as the result of a hypocritical waste of money in charities which reflected "the wretched and useless education" (92) in children. Also, resulting from his intelligence limitation, Noah is not able to think about the meeting of Nancy and Rose, or any possible consequences. Dickens presents him as a dullard who gets among criminals because of his own laziness and stupidity.

III.1.4 Nancy and Rose Maylie

Throughout the novel, Dickens deals with the question of how much a bad environment can influence human character and soul. As contrasted to Monks, who is actually born to be evil, there is the character of Nancy, who falls into Fagin's snares and gets among criminals when being very young.

Nancy is a prostitute, although Dickens never calls her so in the book nor does he describe her activity as a prostitute – there is no word about her clients and economic deals. However, her occupation is indicated in some parts. When Nancy and her friend Bet appear on the scene for the first time, they are depicted as a "young ladies [who] came to see the young gentlemen... they wore a good deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings... they had a great deal of colour in their faces... [and were] remarkably free and agreeable in their manners" (Dickens 71). It is also implied that Nancy drinks heavily; and later, when she stands up

for Oliver, Sikes tries to stop her taking the boy's side by asking "do you know who you are, and what you are?" (Dickens 132). Sikes' question indicates that Nancy is an immoral person, a prostitute, who is hardly expected to act honestly.

"In the Introduction to the Third Edition in April 1841, Dickens produced the word missing from the novel: the girl is a prostitute" (Dickens XXXIII). However, he rather wrote this on an impulse from *Oliver Twist's* critic William Makepeace Thackeray, who had reacted to the novel and especially to Nancy "Boz, who knows life well, knows that his Miss Nancy is the most unreal fantastical personage possible... He dare not tell the truth concerning such young ladies" (Dickens XXXII). Dickens was evidently upset about Thackeray's cynicism and to his later argument that "no writer can or dare tell the whole truth", Dickens answered "...I painted it in all its fallen and degraded aspect..." (Dickens XXXIV). Yet Dickens did not paint it, as he said, in all its fallen aspect, even though he depicts Nancy's murder into terrible details, he dare not call her who she really is. Any sexual relation between Sikes and her is also missing. The only hint is made just before the murder, when Sikes returns to "his own room" to find Nancy lying half-dressed on the bed. Historically, one of Nancy's jobs would have been "to keep her eye on the apprentice thieves, and apparently also to recruit for the gang... [and] to use her sex as much as possible with boys like Charley Bates and the Dodger" (House 216-217). House also describes "the whole atmosphere in which Oliver lived in London would have been drenched in sex" (217). However, Dickens leaves this out completely, or rather leaves it to the reader's imagination. His censorship can partly be explained by the reading habits in the Victorian society: books and periodicals were read aloud in family circles, often in the presence of children. On the other hand, he describes all the brutality and filth in the novel and does not try to hide them from children. Therefore, his omission of any sexual passion connected with Nancy as well as calling her openly a prostitute rather derives from the fact Dickens wanted his readers to feel sympathy for Nancy, and an ordinary Victorian reader would hardly have felt any compassion on a whore.

George Gissing, who as a young man married a prostitute, in his study *The Immortal Dickens* (1898) disagrees with Thackeray's opinion that "Nancy is the most unreal... personage". Gissing writes "Nancy herself become credible by force of her surroundings..." (chap. IV/IV). She becomes really vivid, and therefore plausible, at least in one scene – in her hysterical fury when protecting Oliver. Her defence of Oliver

seems to result from the sorrow over her own messed-up and corrupt life. She is reminded of her lost innocence and purity every time when looking at the boy, and that is why she is moved to oppose even her fellows and stand up for the child.

On the other hand, Dickens presents characters who embody goodness, who can hardly understand evil, such as Oliver, Rose Maylie, and Mr Brownlow; on the other hand, there are characters explicitly representing evil – Fagin, Bill Sikes, Monks. Only Nancy is capable of comprehending both. She represents Dickens’ opinion that people, no matter how much depraved by society, can preserve goodness in their souls. She is a character who has become an outlaw as a result of the pressure of the outside world; it is highly probable that she has never known anything else than the dirty streets of London, yet still she manages to retain a sense of good. She is depicted in contrast to another female character, Rose Maylie. Rose is a perfectly moral and incredibly pure character; the loveliest, sweetest and gentlest young lady. Understandingly enough, George Gissing criticises her and the whole “Maylie group” for “the feeble idyllicism” (chap. IV/IV). Rose embodies virtues of an ideal Victorian heroine: she is compassionate, loving, self-sacrificing, and kind to young children; to stress her tenderness and softness, Dickens made her stereotypically blond. It is not only her nature which pushes her to sympathize with Nancy’s and Oliver’s fates, yet also the consciousness of her own uncertain origin seems to affect her behaviour towards them. Her questionable birth resembles Nancy’s: they both were brought up out of their families. Unlike Nancy who did not have such an opportunity, Rose was lucky as she got into the rich family. Despite William M. Thackeray’s opinion questioning the credibility of her character, Nancy still appears to be far more real when compared to Rose, as she is more colourful therefore interesting for the reader.

Nancy’s affection for Sikes seems to result from the plain human need of belonging somewhere and to someone rather than from any deep sense of love. As she comments on her first meeting with Rose “when such as me, who have no certain roof but the coffin-lid, and no friend in sickness or death but the hospital nurse, set our rotten hearts on any man, and let him fill the place that parents, home, and friends filled once, or that has been a blank through all our wretched lives, who can hope to cure us?” (Dickens 338). She does not stay with him for any economic reasons to have a “certain roof”, but for spiritual understanding and a kind of certainty, no matter how much appalling, which Sikes brings to her life.

Nancy's compassion on Oliver makes her meet Rose on London Bridge and inform on Fagin and Monks. With every move which gets her farther from Sikes' house, and every step she takes on the bridge's pavement, Nancy leaves her old sinful life on one side of the river bank, yet she is not prepared to abandon her past and cross the bridge completely. Although Rose and Mr Brownlow offer her to flee the country and start a new life in solitude and peace far from Fagin, she rejects the offer with words "I am chained to my old life. I loathe and hate it now, but I cannot leave it" (Dickens 388). She is convinced that her life of mistakes must inevitably be punished and lead her to destruction, to "that dark water" (Dickens 389). She believes she has sunk so much into bad environment and that there is no chance for her to run away from it and return to the honest life; that is why she goes back "home", to Sikes, although she is aware of Sikes' cruelty.

As Nancy predicts, her ending is disastrous. Philip Horne calls her death ineluctable and compares it to Shakespeare's *Othello* for "tragic details: the handkerchief..., the bedroom, [and] the brutal overreaction of a deceived man of action" (Dickens XXXVII). Rose Maylie's white handkerchief, given to Nancy, can be perceived as a symbol of goodness and redemption. When Nancy dies, she kneels and holds it up "in her folded hands as high towards Heaven as her feeble strength would let her go" (Dickens 397). She seems to pray to God for redemption, to be cleared off her sins – and to be pitied by the Victorian readers. Dickens succeeded in portraying Nancy as an unfortunate woman, a victim of the bad environment, who in the very end finds her way to good and God.

III.2 Children

III.2.1 The Artful Dodger and Charley Bates

In the characters of the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates, Dickens presents the prototypes of young streets pickpockets who have got into the gang of Fagin. They are only a little bit older than the main hero Oliver, yet they act as grown-up men, especially the Dodger. They dress, smoke, drink and talk like adults as if the life among criminals deprived them of their youth and childhood and made them older.

The language used by Dickens' underworld characters is rich in authentic slang and thieves' argot, particularly the Dodger speaks in this manner. His first appearance on the scene is introduced by the exclamation "Hullo! my convey, what's the row?" (Dickens 60); and his whole speech continues in the same way. The Dodger tries to make clear to the uncomprehending Oliver "wot a beak is", what "the mill" means and describes as he is "at low-water-mark – only one bob and a magpie" (Dickens 61). Sometimes, Dickens offers to readers the explanation of the slang and argot words through the characters or shows the meaning indirectly in the story; therefore readers easily learn that *wipes* is an expression used for handkerchiefs. On the other hand, the meanings of some expressions are not indicated at all and for that reason an ordinary reader would hardly figure out that, for instance, a *nightcap* is a "halter" (Dickens 473). Dickens does not explain slang words in order to leave readers in the same uncertainty in which Oliver occurs.

Jack Dawkins, nicknamed the Artful Dodger, is probably one of the most memorable characters in the novel. What makes him so funny is his arch and careless attitude as well as the contrast between his age and behaviour. As William Makepeace Thackeray noted, readers were caused to have "an absolute love for the society of the Dodger" (Dickens XXXII). Although Thackeray's view was meant as a negative criticism of the novel's errors in order to warn readers against idealizing the criminals and the underworld, he was right in that readers have some sympathies with this young, merry pickpocket.

Throughout the novel, Dickens illustrates the perverted sense of values in criminals. They consider violence, imprisonment and execution to be a part of their everyday life. The Artful Dodger is no exception. He makes fun of everything serious, including the hangings. When he is arrested and gets to the court he tries to make an unforgettable act and mocks the authorities, yet he does not seem to realize the gravity of his issue. As Kellow Chesney mentions "if bad luck had not ended his [the Dodger's] career he would have become the 'great man' Fagin foresaw, perhaps with furnished rooms in Camden Town and a smart dolly to share them" (146). However, being Fagin's most talented pupil, the Dodger could have ended up as the follower of the Jew's business, since they have a few features in common. Both are ironic, make fun of serious matters (executions) and both would be able to do anything to settle their unpleasant situations – the Dodger sets the mob against his new comrade Oliver and

Fagin instigates Sikes to murder Nancy. However, with Jack Dawkins such behaviour can be expected as his nickname the Artful Dodger suggests – a person who avoids responsibility in a clever yet dishonest way.

Charley Bates, similarly to the Dodger, creates the comic side of the novel. Nevertheless, he seems to stand in the shadow of his companion – both, with his craft skills and humour. While Dawkins lightens the novel by his witty comments and conduct, Bates does nothing but uproariously laughs at everything. He appears to perceive the crime to be a joke. However, that is only until Nancy's death. "Appalled by Sikes' crime" (Dickens 456), Charley turns serious and leaves his past behind, as Dickens concludes in the last chapter. On the contrary, the Dodger is presented as a boy born for the crime. Yet, his last appearance, "perhaps the best in the book" (Gissing), is in the chapter depicting his trial. He is not mentioned at all in the rest of the book and becomes the only main character whose life Dickens leaves open for readers.

The Artful Dodger and Charley Bates are probably the most likeable characters of Dickens' underworld. There were many such boys in the real London. As Philip Horne writes, the Dodger's entertaining courtroom defiance was "based on the performance of a young pickpocket whose committal Dickens had witnessed" (Dickens XXXV). Dickens drew inspiration for his writing everywhere around himself. On the other hand, as Peter Ackroyd mentions in his biography, "Dickens opened up the world for those who were already living in it" (274) by his novel. Ackroyd goes on and gives an example of a police inspector who reported that "young thieves spent their time playing games like pith-halfpenny and reading books like *Oliver Twist*" (274). It is easy to imagine that those young pickpockets had great sympathies for the society of the Dodger, who obviously enjoyed his criminal life, and for that reason perhaps also found some inspiration in his jolly character.

III.2.2 Oliver Twist

An embodied innocence, an ethereal being, faultless and empathetic – it is Dickens' Oliver. He walks through the shabby London underworld, yet his young soul retains its purity. Oliver's innocence is stressed by his soft, angelic appearance. Throughout the whole novel, Dickens makes it easier for readers to distinguish who stands on which side, whether the good or evil one, according to the character's

physical look – as if there was a close connection between the human soul and the appearance. Therefore, characters such as Fagin, Bill Sikes and Monks are depicted as repulsive, while Rose and Mr Brownlow as nice.

Oliver's face with the signs of innocence moves some characters to believe the boy and to help him (Rose, Mr Brownlow, Nancy and in one moment even Fagin seems to be touched by Oliver's purity). However, not everyone can see the good in the boy. There are characters, usually the representatives of authorities, who predict him to be hanged. Through this inability to recognize the boy's goodness, Dickens criticizes the prejudice of the Victorian society that the poor are doomed to take an immoral path since their birth. However, readers do not tend to have doubts about Oliver's goodness as Dickens gives them insight in the boy's mind and describes his feelings.

The reason why Oliver cannot succumb to Fagin's influence is simply the boy's good nature. For his innocence, he is not able to understand who Fagin, the Dodger and others really are. He realizes that after seeing the Dodger and Charley in the action. He does not think about what and why the lads did what they did, his reaction is the escape. He feels naturally appalled by the crime. Therefore, he instinctively runs away, trying to get away from that scene, from the possible danger of being put together with thieves. This is also obvious in the later scene when Oliver is kidnapped and gets to Fagin's gang again. Charley asks him "why don't you put yourself under Fagin, Oliver?" (Dickens 149), and the Dodger adds "And make your fortun' out of hand?" (Dickens 149). Oliver timidly answers "I don't like it... I wish they would let me go. I – I – would rather go" (Dickens 149). Here, Oliver just confirms that he does not like the idea of being in touch with criminals and would rather choose to leave and live anywhere else.

Paradoxically, the very first time Oliver seems to feel really comfortable is when he gets at Fagin's. Yet, this happens when he still does not realize he is among criminals. Before getting to London, Oliver is always portrayed as an unhappy child. At Fagin's, it is the first time Oliver can be seen laughing and enjoying his time; although he is not aware of what he is really laughing at since he does not understand that Fagin does not play any game with the Dodger and Charley, but trains them for stealing.

Dickens' approach to Oliver and the impossibility to corrupt him is in contrast with the story of Nancy and Charley Bates who are described rather as victims of the bad environment. Dickens' own statement about his lounging hungry about the streets

after work also contradicts the image of bad surroundings' influence on a person "For the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond" (Dickens XX). Yet, he did not succumb to the criminal life, as his nature did not allow him. In his Preface from 1841, he mentions "I wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last" (Gissing). Dickens believes, and illustrates it in some of his characters, that the soul of a man cannot be destroyed completely.

For his absolute incorruptibility, Oliver appears to be a completely unbelievable character. This is also what Angus Wilson says about Oliver "he cannot be a real boy, because if he were, he could succumb to corruption" (119). Oliver is a flat character. Throughout the novel, he does not change at all. He is as pure at the end of the novel as he was presented in its beginning. For a main hero, after whom the whole novel is named, Oliver lacks the qualities which a reader would expect from the protagonist. The boy is very passive except for his escape from Mr Sowerberry to London and the little fight with Noah, which is also the only moment Oliver shows some temper. Oliver's reaction to Noah Claypole's insult that his mother would most likely have been hanged if she had not died in childbirth is of that kind readers later can see rather in Bill Sikes. "Oliver... overthrew chair and table, seized Noah by the throat, shook him in the violence of his rage till his teeth chattered in his head..." (Dickens 47-48). In this scene, Oliver's reaction is understandable and makes a real boy of him. Beside Oliver's first and last step to change his life by escaping to London, Oliver remains passive and his fate is in the hands of other characters and life coincidences.

For the main hero, he also speaks very little and when he does, his words are unnaturally soft, often expressing or requiring compassion and praising somebody's goodness. Although he is rather expected not to be well-educated (since the charities often neglected the education of parish children), he speaks in proper Queen's English and is always grammatically correct. Through his language, Oliver severs the potential links between himself and the members of Fagin's gang who speak in Cockney with the thieves' argot. This is also evident in the scene when Oliver, being at the Maylie's country house, wakes up and sees Fagin in the window. He starts to cry "The Jew! The Jew!" Jonathan Grossman notes that through this Oliver "naturalizes his position in the middle class, with Mr Brownlow, who also later privileges the term 'the Jew' over Fagin's name" (40). Technically, this scene demonstrates the cooperation between the

author and the illustrator. According to John Sutherland, Dickens originally planned Oliver to be kidnapped in this scene or attempted to be murdered. He “duly instructed Cruikshank to go ahead with the villain-at-the-window illustration, preparatory to that scene” (Dickens XXVII). Yet, Dickens changed his mind and since it was “too late to replace the illustration” (Dickens XXVII), he made the scene a possible hallucination of the boy.

The life of Oliver, after reaching London, is directed by a great many unbelievable coincidences. The first one comes when the Dodger and Charley Bates picked the pocket of Mr Brownlow, the friend of Oliver’s father who was once in love with his father’s sister (Oliver’s aunt). Then, there is a resemblance between Oliver and a woman in the picture in Mr Brownlow’s house; the woman is later revealed to be Oliver’s mother. The next coincidence appears when Sikes uses Oliver as a ‘snakesman’ when he decides to burgle the house where Oliver’s other aunt, Rose Maylie, lives. The remark in Oliver’s father will that if his and Agnes Fleming’s child is a boy, he will inherit money only if he never stains “his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice, and wrong” (Dickens 433) also seems improbable. Another coincidence is when Oliver’s brother Monks, who is the only one to know his father’s will, appears. Although he has never seen Oliver before, he recognizes him as the boy reminds him of their father.

K. J. Fielding aptly comments “our grasp on *Oliver Twist* depends on not trying to read it as if it were ‘realistic’” (Dickens XXXVIII). Mr Brownlow and Rose trust Oliver due to the innocence they see in his face; however, it is exactly the same innocence which makes readers not believe the boy as a character.

IV. CONCLUSION

Charles Dickens portrays his underworld as a mixture of fiction and the cruel reality seen in the streets of the 1830's London. As a person, who is not indolent towards the surrounding world, he tries to draw his readers' attention to the poverty and to the deplorable state which thousands of people occurred in. As a moralist writer, he warns people against turning to crime and also attempts to prove, and perhaps to inspire and encourage the poor through the character of Oliver, that a human being can resist filth and crime if he or she really wants to. On the other hand, he seems to understand that the misery can get a person on the edge of the law.

Dickens records the then atmosphere of London shabbiness quite plausibly. He describes the underworld on the basis of the events he witnessed personally, read about and heard of. He illustrates the techniques young pickpockets used in the streets, writes about the real criminal crafts, acquaints his readers with the cruel environment of the 'kidsman' and shows his avidity and selfishness. He depicts the plans for a burglary with the enforced help of the 'snaksman' and also describes the nets of intrigues which results in the most vicious crime of all, the murder. To make the whole underworld more authentic Dickens lets his criminals speak in the thief's argot, which may cause some difficulties in reading, yet it makes the dialogues more vivid and it also pushes readers into guessing what the cant words mean.

Dickens' world in *Oliver Twist* is rather one-sided: most characters are either only good or only evil. He makes it easier for readers to recognize who a villain and who an honest person is by the character's physical appearance. While the antagonists are always rough and repulsive in their look, the good-natured characters are portrayed as nice, gentle, and empathetic. However, due to this one-sided differentiation, the characters do not appear to be complex and therefore often do not look believable. Their personalities are unequivocally given and their behaviour can thus be anticipated in many cases. On the whole, the underworld characters seem more believable in comparison to the good ones. They keep their badness, yet fate coincidences make them move in their lives and show some kind of humanity and therefore a little change in their personalities (for instance, Sikes' mental torture, Nancy's compassion on Oliver, Charley Bates' turn to good). On the other hand, there is no development indicated in Oliver, Rose Maylie, or Mr Brownlow and that is why they seem so flat.

The novel reveals some of Dickens' opinions about the controversial issues of his time. In the first part of the book, he openly satirizes New Poor Law, and greed and hypocrisy of the officials connected with the law. He criticizes the bureaucrats who preached the Christian moralities, yet in fact were indifferent to the paupers. The issue dealing with the advisability of the executions is indicated mainly in the character of Fagin. Dickens points out how criminals managed to profit from gallows, and challenges the deterrent effect of the hangings. The most controversial question concerns the potential anti-Semitic views of Charles Dickens. Until the present days, the character of Fagin has exemplified one of the most notorious Jewish characters in literature. Although Dickens defended himself that he had only described the underworld which also included many Jews at that time (which was actually true), he succumbs to the medieval images to some extent. Every time when he calls Fagin a 'Jew', he does not seem to mark only the character's religion, yet also to indicate a stereotypical behaviour. Nevertheless, as proven in his correspondence and his later novels, he finally overcame the anti-Jewish prejudice.

Oliver Twist is not Charles Dickens' masterpiece. In certain parts, the novel seems literarily rather weaker; for instance, in the innumerable number of coincidences, absurd machinations of Monks, sheer goodness of the Maylies' and Mr Brownlow, and also purity and passivity of the main protagonist Oliver. Nevertheless, thanks to the author's narrative skills his world has not lost anything of its attractiveness and the novel still remains one of the greatest fictional presentations of the London underworld, particularly for the frankly dreadful horror of the criminals whom Dickens portrays in a far more intriguing way than his insipid main hero.

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