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'This World of Sorrow and Trouble': The Criminal Type of Oliver Twist

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"THIS WORLD OF SORROW AND TROUBLE": THE CRIMINAL TYPE OF OLIVER TWIST

by

MEGAN SAMPLES

Under the Direction of Dr. Paul Schmidt

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the criminals of Charles Dickens’ Oliver Twist as a criminal type: impoverished, unattractive people who lack family roots. It establishes connections between the criminal characters themselves as well as the real-world conditions which inspired their stereotypes. The conditions of poverty and a lack of family being tied to criminality is founded in reality, while the tendency for criminals to be unattractive is based on social bias and prejudice. It also identifies conflicting ideologies in the prevailing Victorian mindset that begins to emerge as a result of research into the criminal type.

INDEX WORDS: Oliver Twist, Criminals, Criminology, Phrenology, Victorian culture, Dickens
"THIS WORLD OF SORROW AND TROUBLE": THE CRIMINAL TYPE OF *OLIVER TWIST*

by

MEGAN SAMPLES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013
"THIS WORLD OF SORROW AND TROUBLE": THE CRIMINAL TYPE OF *OLIVER TWIST*

by

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August 2013
DEDICATION

This paper, its research, and the work that went into it is dedicated to the family and friends who supported its undertaking, specifically, Lochlin Samples, my husband and best friend, and Leanne Davis, the world's best study partner.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Schmidt, Dr. Galchinsky, and Dr. Richardson for their contributions to this work.
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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1858, Sir Henry Holland referred to his own time, the Victorian era, as "an age of transition," as historian Walter Houghton notes (1). Although this is logically true of any time frame, perhaps Holland's observation was most apropos in regard to nineteenth century England. The Industrial Revolution was changing the face of technology, the economy, and society as a whole. John Stuart Mill noted the infancy of change, claiming that "mankind have outgrown old institutions and old doctrines, and have not yet acquired new ones," in 1831(1). A few short years later, in February of 1837, a twenty-five year old Charles Dickens began publication of *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress*. Not only did his second novel characterize the beginning of a quite transformative writing career for Dickens, but it creatively, and perhaps unknowingly, documented one of the beginning points of immense social transition which England was undergoing in the 1800s.

One of the most important points of change at the time was a new sense of mobility, both in the social and physical sense. The emergence of social mobility meant people had the ability to affect their own social status; one's rank was no longer determined only by birth, a blessing for Dickens. The new transportation of railways and steamboats brought to this new order the option of nomadically following opportunities, casting off the medieval feudal system forever (5-6). In 1830 though, Bulwer Lytton pointed out the "age of destruction" that inevitably precedes the "sluffing-off" of old ways (3). One of the relatively newer elements in Victorian society was an interest in criminality, and with this new attention, people began to make observations and assumptions about the criminal realm. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1838) is
evidence of the observations and assumptions being made of the criminal class and shows how some of the old ways hang on in social thought.

The criminal realm of *Oliver Twist* betrays a conflicting mindset of the old and new ways of life. Readers may note a new wave of circumstances and ideas coming to shore, but the undercurrent of old traditions and assumptions was still strong below. This piece will aim at establishing the criminal characters of *Oliver Twist* as types and showing how the type is indicative of conflicting ideologies, what Houghton explains as a result of replacing old ways of thinking with dogmatic substitutes while new mindsets are being worked out.

Through the framework of criminality in the novel, I will argue that a strict caste system, along with other ancient relics which the Victorians sought to forsake, was strongly rooted in the changing, more mobile society. Houghton already explains that the Victorians relied on dogmatic tendencies in an attempt to rebuild a prevailing national mindset after the Industrial Revolution (138), but I will show how these tendencies manifest themselves in the criminal aspect of Dickens' text.

There is most definitely no shortage of criticism into Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*. Within the past fifteen years, (and certainly before) scholars have approached the work with a broad range of viewpoints and focuses. I would like to outline some of the dominant trends in *Oliver Twist* criticism so as to highlight the ways in which my study will deviate.

Most notably, scholars have approached the historical aspects of the text and investigated the level of accuracy with which Dickens portrays Victorian London. This trend is shown in works like Sheila Sullivan's "Dickens' Newgate Vision: *Oliver Twist*, Moral Statistics,
and the Construction of Progressive History" and "The Black Hole of London: Rescuing *Oliver Twist*" by Jim Barloon. Some have looked specifically into issues surrounding poverty, like Humphry House's "Poverty in *Oliver Twist,*" Holly Furneaux's "'Worrying to Death'-Reinterpreting Dickens' Critique of the New Poor Law in *Oliver Twist* and Contemporary Adaptations," and Susan Zlotnick's "'The Law's a Bachelor': *Oliver Twist,* Bastardy, and the New Poor Law." Still other scholars have ventured more into the historical significance of crime, for example: Marcy Hess' "*Oliver Twist,* Dickens' Nancy, and the 'Truth' of Victorian Prostitution," David Parker's "*Oliver Twist* and the Fugitive Family," Edyta Swierczynska's *The Double Face of London: Crime and Space in Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens,* and Larry Wolff's "'The Boys are Pickpockets, and the Girl Is a Prostitute': Gender and Juvenile Criminality in Victorian England from *Oliver Twist* to London Labour." Some of these titles lean also into the cultural studies realm, but all must still be considered historicism because the research involved is inevitably historical. My focus will also be historical, but I will look at the shared traits of the criminals in the novel in order to assess their reflection on the reality of Dickens' time.

One very specific trend centers around Fagin, the Jewish criminal ring-leader, and Semitism and anti-Semitism. Works like Robert Butterworth's "The Significance of Fagin's Jewishness," Susan Meyer's "Anti-Semitism and Social Critique in Dickens' *Oliver Twist,*" and Sharon Aronofsky Weltman's "'Can a Fellow Be a Villain All His Life?: *Oliver!*, Fagin, and Performing Jewishness" follow this trend. Also keeping with this theme, some critics look into the novel's media adaptations and their treatment and portrayal of anti-Semitism. These works include Juliet John's "Fagin, the Holocaust, and Mass Culture: or, *Oliver Twist* on Screen" and Maria Cristina Paganoni's "From Book to Film: The Semiotics of Jewishness in *Oliver Twist.*"
Of all the scholarly trends, this one on Fagin and attitudes towards Jews in the Victorian Period is the most thematically concise, and it certainly jumps out as important since the topic has drawn so much thought. These studies of anti-Semitism in the novel add to my thesis, as I will draw on these in order to show how Fagin's highly-stereotypical appearance reflects a social bias against Jews in nineteenth century England.

Psychoanalysis has even found its way into recent *Oliver Twist* criticism. David McAllister utilizes the ideological approach in "'Subject to the Scepter of Imagination': Sleep, Dreams, and Unconsciousness in *Oliver Twist,*" and Karen Elizabeth Tatum presents a psychoanalytic reading into the treatment of women in "'Something Covered with an Old Blanket': Nancy and Other Dead Mothers in *Oliver Twist.*" It is interesting to note that these were the only two recent psychoanalytical criticisms, and they were published within two years of each other. One may have expected to see more examples of this type of criticism with such a popular text. Although my study will not use psychoanalysis, it will explore the ideology and teachings of the criminal family, including the way the criminals themselves viewed their livelihood.

Some scholars have chosen instead to provide additional references for reading the text. These scholars include Brian Cheadle with "Oliver Twist" *A Companion to Charles Dickens,* Donald Hawes with *Charles Dickens,* Juliet John with *Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist: A Sourcebook,* and David Paroissien's bibliography.

Lastly, although one example obviously does not constitute a trend, some unique and creative ideas deserve mention. Grace Moore's "Beastly Criminals and Criminal Beasts: Stray Women and Stray Dogs in *Oliver Twist*" is included in a book (edited by Deborah Denenholz..."
Morse and Martin A. Danahay) specifically about animals and Victorian scientific controversy, the division between animals and humans, and the idea of using animals as scapegoats. Vilija Adminiene takes a linguistic, Marxist approach to the text in "The Specific Uses of Expressions Related to the Market in Charles Dickens' Novel *Oliver Twist.*" Similarly, John R. Reed looks at the use of a specific literary device in "The Gentleman in the White Waistcoat: Dickens and Metonymy." While these Marxist studies present important contributions, my approach will acknowledge the ideas of labor and people as commodity in its exploration of the class struggle between the wealthy and the poor (Chapter 2).

Although much criticism centers around the criminal as a point of social critique, it appears that nothing has been said of the criminal type as a medium for discussion of more abstract ideas, especially ones that are not necessarily criminal in nature. For example, Fagin has been examined as representing an anti-Semitic prejudice of the time, but critics have not focused on how the system of physical traits as representative of personal qualities and how the "new" science of physiognomy embodied an intentional social change. Also, poverty in the novel has been explored quite a bit, but little has been done to connect the idea of poverty with the Victorian ideas of financial success through hard work and those ideas' connection to the lingering caste system. Likewise, the lack of traditional family roots has been briefly discussed, but not with the backdrop of the real-world clash between the Industrial Revolution, economic progression, and mounting pressure on lower-income families.

It is not unrealistic or unheard-of to consider the criminal portion of society a failure or a group that went off-track at some point. *Oliver Twist*'s criminals, though, reflect how even mainstream society has fostered conflicting ideas about poverty, appearance, and family. This
seems conflicting, though, for a people who fancied themselves pioneers in the ways of social mobility, society of the early Eighteenth Century held to "old-fashioned" ideas. It appears that the freedom and encouragement of potential social elevation excluded poor, unattractive people who had no family. The prevailing Victorian ideas about poverty, beauty, and family seem to be relics of the past which do not align with their commitment to mobility and a new economic reality, the results of the Industrial Revolution.
2. CRIMINALITY AND POVERTY

Perhaps the most obvious of the dogmas to which Dickens gives nod in *Oliver Twist* is the one concerning the poor. Simply put, the general Victorian attitude is that poor people are the ne'er-do-wells of society, and criminals are the most unfavorable among them, the worst of the worst. This new stereotype, though, shows a change in general thinking, and even progress. Historians Donald Macraild and Frank Neal explain that societal "preoccupations with the environmental, rather than the psychological causes of criminality became prevalent in this period" (438). They clarify that whereas before the nineteenth century, mental abnormalities were blamed for societies' deviants, people in the 1800s began to realize that other elements may contribute to atypical behavior. "Poverty and modern urban environments became recognized factors" of crime (438) around the time *Oliver Twist* was published. Thus, I propose that for Victorians, while environmental elements work together to lead a person to crime, poverty is the most important of these elements in contributing to criminality.

2.1. Poverty as a symptom of moral depravity

During the early Victorian period, economic and social status were considered inextricably and directly linked to moral character. The more elevated a person's moral character, the more elevated his status, with few exceptions. Walter E. Houghton contends that Victorians typically held that people were "poor because they were vicious" (192). Lest the views be considered half-concocted, the reverse was also true: wealth equaled respectability (184). Although this assumption is a strong theme throughout *Oliver Twist*, the clearest illustration is the contrast between the novel's two major father-figures, Fagin and Mr. Brownlow. Brownlow exemplifies the Victorian male who has already reached the social
definition of success, ethical integrity and wealth, while Fagin is the polar opposite, both morally and financially impoverished.

The general Victorian notion of success in life was a man\(^1\) who worked his way up the socio-economic ladder. Historian Kristen Guest explains that "conventionally, idealized views of fatherhood helped manage the contradictory demands of privileged masculinity by vesting economic and domestic forms of authority in a single individual who ensured that moral values predominated" (641). The man held the role of provider for the family, which effectively "[placed] money as a by-product of self-discipline and proper conduct" (641). In some ways, money was like a "displaced spirituality" because it defined class status and public reputation, but it also held a "corrupting influence that undermined fixed moral value" (644). *Oliver Twist*, on the other hand, does not portray wealth as a corrupting influence: instead, characters associated with wealth, mainly Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies, are described as upstanding citizens.

On January 5, 1854, Leonard Wyon, a chief engraver who occasionally worked with royalty, noted of Joseph Paxton, the designer of the Crystal Palace, "I was fortunate in my drawing of Sir Joseph, with whom I was much pleased. He is a man evidently risen from the common class, but has thoroughly the look of a man born to do something and never be curbed by difficulty. His manners are very agreeable, and his face and head very fine, and particularly large" (Creaton 29). This casual notation in Wyon's personal diary brings a few pertinent assumptions to light. Primary among these is the assumption that there is something innately wrong with lacking wealth, that, as Wyon describes it, someone born to humble beginnings has

\(^1\) "Man" is truly the most apropos word in this context, because the opportunity of attaining a higher status through hard work was not available to women.
nothing for which to aspire. Likewise, manners and social courtesy are considered uncharacteristic of the lower classes. Wyon also notes Paxton's facial features and attractiveness as being unexpected, considering his birth, but this particular stereotype will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

With the emphasis on achieving financial success through hard work and the assumption that though honest people will work hard and be rewarded monetarily, it is no surprise to learn of the stigma that accompanies the life of poverty. For the Victorians, being "left behind" financially was a hellish torture (Houghton 191). Consider then, the role of the criminal, Fagin for example, in this social construction. He does not work (at least conventionally speaking), he does not contribute to the common goals of society, and he is unapologetic in his counterproductive lifestyle. The criminal is largely idle, which is an unforgivable sin for the Victorians who spent so much time and effort striving for their very definitive idea of success.

Readers see this prejudice against the poor in the first pages of *Oliver Twist*, where young Oliver elicits a somewhat over-blown response from a "gentleman" after unknowingly overstepping his bounds by uttering the novel's most famed sentence, "Please, sir, I want some more" (27). Although the boy was merely referring to a ladle of gruel to alleviate his own hunger, the reaction seems to be based more on the overarching societal implications than on the actual situation. Immediately, the cook "turned very pale" and "gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel" (27). The beadle "rushed into the [board] room in great excitement" to alert the proper authorities of the outburst, even "after [Oliver] had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary" (27). The culminating and immensely telling thought comes
from a member of the board, who declares, "That boy will be hung. I know that boy will be hung" (27).

This strong reaction is not only perversely humorous, but poignantly telling of the attitudes towards poverty in the Victorian era. The reaction is one more towards the poor making requests or demands of a society to which they do not contribute, rather than a hungry boy asking for food. It is indicative of society's foremost mindset towards a subset of the poor who, rather than achieving success or earning a livelihood through hard work, desire to simply take what they want from others. They want more than they deserve or have earned, and it is "honest" society who bears the burden. Based on the concluding statement, Oliver is perceived at this point to be a criminal in progress; he is poor and he has desires beyond his limited means. The glaring oversight, of course, is that at this point, Oliver has neither age, experience, nor intellect working in his favor in regard to finding a means through which to provide for himself; beyond simply asking for more food, he has no options.

Houghton addresses a societal understanding of "the glorification of work as a supreme virtue, with the accompanying scorn or idleness" (243), which relates to this scene in the book. Oliver is derided by the cook, the beadle, and the board, all supposedly productive members of society. They see him as mistakenly feeling entitled to more food simply because he is hungry, rather than the more respectable reason of because he has earned it. They see themselves as working members of society and Oliver as a parasitic obligation, someone who enjoys a leisurely life where his needs are cared for by others. This was unforgivable in Victorian society, where comfort and provisions were rewards for hard work, not inalienable rights.
Dickens plays with this prejudice in the criminals of *Oliver Twist*. Fagin, Sikes, and Nancy are a thief, a housebreaker, and a prostitute, which denote the tendency and desire to fill a material deficit without honest work. This idea is embodied in Fagin's teaching that money is "attractive and immediate" (John 130). Fagin's game and reward system in working with Oliver exemplify this teaching: "See if you can take [the handkerchief] out, without my feeling it: as you saw them do, when we were at play this morning…. You’re a clever boy, my dear…. I never saw a sharper lad. Here’s a shilling for you. If you go on, in this way, you'll be the greatest man of the time" (Dickens 71). This system of "take what you want to get what you need" would have angered the Victorians' sense of respectability through work, especially later when Oliver "begs the old gentleman to allow him to go to work [emphasis mine], with his two companions" (71). The irony of the word choice here would not have been lost in conventional Victorian society.

This is not to say that Victorians tolerated dishonesty, stealing, or victimizing others in general, but part of the reason *Oliver Twist*’s criminals were so detestable to their audience is that they were poor. For Victorian readers who had learned from childhood "that wealth and respectability are two sides of the same thing" (Houghton 184), the disrespectful nature of the criminals fell perfectly in line with their poverty.

The law of the time is indicative of this emphasis on wealth. The importance of materialism over humanity permeated the Victorian legal system in which crimes against property were more harshly punished than violent crimes against people. In *The Victorian*

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2 Although the text does not explicitly state that Nancy is a prostitute, in the 1841 preface to the text, Dickens addresses the ambiguity by writing, "The girl is a prostitute. … I endeavoured… to banish… any expression that could by possibly offend. … In the case of the girl, in particular, I kept this intention constantly in view." (Collins 96).
Underworld, Kellow Chesney provides specific accounts of criminal sentences most accurately reflect this bias. "A costermonger who attacked a policeman from behind and disabled him for life was imprisoned for a year— at a time when the penalty for stealing a few pounds worth of goods might well be ten years transportation" (92). Additionally,

In 1840 a publican found guilty of stealing a 'piece of honeycomb tripe and a cow-heel, worth ninepence' was not only jailed but, as a convicted felon, sentenced to forfeit his whole property. On the other side there was the case of a man who so belaboured a girl that he destroyed one of her eyes, broke her nose, and induced concussion of the brain, then after violently kicking her prostrate body seized her legs and hurled her over a parapet to a ten-foot drop. His victim survived and he was sentenced … to twelve months hard labour. (93)

This account perfectly exemplifies the mentality of material possessions, especially when viewed as personal property, valued more highly then human life that pervaded the Victorian era.

Cesare Beccaria, an Italian writer whose publication On Crimes and Punishments (1764) is "one of the three or four most influential texts in the history of criminology" (Rafter 8), may hold one clue to the villainous reputation of the poor. While Beccaria does not mention poverty itself as a crime, he does address bankruptcy. He contends that the "fraudulent bankrupt" should be "stript… of his substance," which hold as evidence of his theft, and "thrown into prison, and thus deprived of the only remaining good, the melancholy enjoyment of liberty" (Beccaria 142-3). The "honest bankrupt," on the other hand, is not free to leave the country until his debt is paid off in full (144). The assumption here is that bankruptcy is a crime of theft.
against creditors, the same as any other theft. It is likely that this mindset is shared by England's Victorians; poor people are a strain on the society which the respectable, wealthy citizens work hard to maintain, and the resources (food, space, clothing, etc.) that the poor occupy are in some ways stolen from those who deserve them. This sentiment is supported by the fact that England imprisoned its citizens for debt until the 1860s (Collins 7). Dickens alludes a similar practice when on Oliver's journey to London, he notices "large painted boards… fixed up: warning all persons who begged within the district, that they would be sent to jail" (Dickens 61); begging was viewed as receiving the fruits of another's labor without actually working.

2.2. A feudalistic social structure in a time of upward mobility

Beyond the ideal of hard work as the pathway to riches and high regard and upward social mobility as the carrot dangling in the face of every man, an undercurrent of the long-past feudalistic caste structure seems to run strong. During the Victorian period, poverty was perpetuated through the legal system which used poor houses and debtors' prisons as ways of keeping the unwashed masses in check. This system had a substantial impact on Dickens personally. Dickens scholar Philip Collins explains that when Dickens was only twelve years old, his father was taken the Marshalsea Prison, a well-known London debtors' prison of the time. The experience led to a fascination with the misery and squalor of the prisons and their inmates (13-4). This shows an awkward beginning point for transition in which social mobility was encouraged, but the medieval feudal assumptions were still entrenched in the general mindset.

Much like the feudalistic connection between people and land, a sense of place as origin held meaning to Victorians. While opinions of the time differed as to which factors were
responsible for depravity in the lives of the poor, "that pauperism, filth, overcrowding and crime were intimately connected, and slums the major breeding ground of criminals, seemed too obvious to be denied" (Chesney 91). While the Victorians valued the ideal of social mobility, being poor seemed to be as stigmatized and strictly categorized as the feudal surfs whose lives and livelihoods were determined at birth. In fact, social mobility at the time of Oliver Twist was almost exclusively the ideal; very rarely did it prove reality. The possibility of elevating one's socioeconomic standing hardly helped anyone until the turn of the century, about sixty years after the book's publication, "when education became more widespread" (Nelson).

While Dickens was beginning his ascent up the social ladder, most people were doing their best to hold on to the bottom rungs. For the poor of the time, the outlook was grim. Purchasing power for the lower classes was minimal at the time of Oliver Twist's publication, but continued to decline. By 1865, most town laborers lived "barely above subsistence," and it is estimated that as late as 1900, when the situation for the poor had already begun to improve, the poverty rate in London was around 31%, compared to 29% in New York City at the same time (Nelson)\(^3\).

While the Industrial Revolution (1760-1850) is sometimes thought of as providing ample employment opportunities in the new production industries, this is far from the reality. "For many Britons in the laboring classes, the Industrial Revolution took away that they once had centuries before, and only grudgingly gave it all back by the close of Victoria's reign." After her death in 1901, though, the "living standards of average Britons continued to increase" (Nelson).

\(^3\) A modern-day comparison may be helpful here. India is well-known for its widespread poverty, and its estimated poverty rate in 2010 was at 29.8% ("India").
2.3 A disparity between perception and reality

It appears that the new fluidity between the classes was met with a rigid and malicious opposition, one that undermined the whole principle of social mobility. The possibility of the poor rising in the class ranks appears to have set the upper echelons into attack mode, one that often proved hypocritical.

Although the poor classes had been branded as a vile nuisance which plagued the land, one of the time's notable problems originated in the upper classes. Dueling was highly stigmatized as "un-English," a term which came from England's ridicule of other European ways of dealing with crime, assuming itself of a higher standard (Wiener 207-8). Nevertheless, the practice was embraced by the aristocracy and passed down to the lower classes (204), opposing the general assumption that that evil originates in the lower classes.

Moreover, the financial and industrial progress enjoyed by the wealthy came at the cost of the poor. Tradesmen who once made a fair living from work making clothing or other goods found themselves unable to compete with the low prices of mass-manufactured, factory products. Instead, they found themselves working in the factory setting where their previous skill-set held no value and they were easily replaced (Chesney 18-9). This disposability worked against both laboring class adults and children. Although adult factory workers could earn a decent wage based on their industry (for example, pottery and metal workers made significantly higher wages than those working with textiles), factory owners increasingly used cheaper child labor whenever possible. This led to a rise in unemployed adults, which the Victorians dubbed "overpopulation" (Nelson).
Landlords, like the factory-owners, benefitted from the poor with their densely populated residential buildings, and their lack of concern for what occurred in them led to terrible living conditions for the many tenants (Chesney 94). Fagin's "back-room" comes to mind with its "walls and ceiling… perfectly black, with age and dirt" (Dickens 65).

Additionally, the lack of concern for what tenants did while in the buildings is evident in that Fagin housed "four or five boys: none older than the Dodger" and orchestrated a theft ring out of his dingy room (65). Other unscrupulous entrepreneurs opened their "shining saloons" next to the slums, where their best customers, who had no truly disposable income, would be unlikely to resist the cheap drink (Chesney 96). Oliver's first introduction to London describes the area in terms of his own experience in that "a dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen…The sole places that seemed to prosper, amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses; and in them, the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main" (Dickens 64). This type of systematic exploitation illustrates competition among class relations and paint the "upwardly mobile" Victorians as a very "hierarchic and class conscious society…[which exhibits] a firm spirit of subordination" (Chesney 20).

Perhaps the most vicious and startling measure taken against the poor was the 1834 Poor Law Amendment, the "fundamental document of Victorianism," which was "designed to inspire fear" in the laboring poor classes (Chesney 24), which "constituted the bulk of the population (Nelson). The Poor Law of 1834 was intended to make it more cost effective for parishes to take care of their poor. It mandated that every parish have a workhouse, in which "deliberately harsh" conditions ensured that only the most desperate people sought help through them. These conditions included splitting families, forcing children to work, often in mines or factories, uncomfortable uniforms, and "monotonous" diets ("1834 Poor Law").
Oliver Twist's portrayal of the workhouse is consistent with these accounts. Dickens sarcastically describes the practices with regards to families:

They made great many other wise and humane regulations, having reference to the ladies, which it is not necessary to repeat; kindly undertook to divorce poor married people, in consequence of the great expense… and instead, of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor. (Dickens 26)

The sarcastic tone continues when two gentlemen of the board inform Oliver, who at this point has become a "juvenile offender against the poor-laws" (Dickens 20), present what they deem good news. "Well! You have come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade…. You'll begin to pick oakum to-morrow morning at six o'clock" (25). This sentiment continuing, the book describes Mr. Gamfield's, a chimney-sweep who considers taking Oliver on as an apprentice, thought process. "Mr Gamfield, knowing what the dietary of the workhouse was, well knew he would be a nice small pattern: just the very thing for register stoves" (30-1). Perhaps Dickens' sentiment towards the policies can best be summed up in Oliver's response to learning of his imminent move to the workhouse: "on a rough hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep. What a noble illustration of the tender laws of England! They let the paupers go to sleep!"(25). Scandals which erupted over situations such as starving inmates eating worms off dead bodies, caused Parliament to set standards on who could operate workhouses ("1834 Poor Law"), but these improvements did not begin until the 1840s (Higginbotham).
2.3. *Oliver Twist's* vile poverty as deceptively simple

Although the prevailing Victorian mindset towards poverty and criminality can now be seen as antiquated and somewhat barbaric, it showed progress from former assumptions. As explained, earlier theories attributed criminality to mental abnormalities. While the Victorians progressed to considering environmental causes, poverty being one, these extrinsic factors were regarded more as qualities; the desperation of poverty did not lead a person to commit a crime, but the person was simply villainous, which coincides with poverty. This trait or quality of being poor was viewed as something to fix or overcome.

Those men who managed to overcome poverty, or move farther away from it, gained respect and the spoils of success. Those who remained in poverty, whether criminal or not, were met with disdain. This being the case, the poor did not need handouts for necessities; they needed to work their way up to civilized living. Criminals, though, earned the shame of not only remaining poor, but trying to overcome their poverty through dishonesty, rather than work. For the rest of society, wealth and property became extensions of the respectability of success, the accumulation of trophies, a thought that logically led to the Great Exhibition of 1851.

This rigid theology against the poor did not allow for opportunities for social advancement. This works against the very idea of social mobility, even though Victorians applauded those who worked their way to riches. The advancement of the poor becomes even more improbable when considering the tendency for the wealthy to gain more money at the expense of the poor. With factories looking for the cheapest labor to produce the cheapest goods, public houses owners choosing the edges of the slums to set up shop, and residential landlords making more profit as housing conditions worsened, it is little surprise that Victorian
success proved an unrealistic dream for most. As if societal conditions were not obstacle enough, the Poor Laws aimed at both punishing and prolonging poverty through incarcerating debtors and putting people to use through menial, non-vocational tasks that serve little purpose outside the workhouse.

The ironic twist is that while Dickens acknowledges this in the text with his portrayal of the workhouses and the lure of children into the criminal world, he is himself a Victorian success story, in spite of his struggles with the workhouse system as a child. The characters of *Oliver Twist* do not work themselves out of terrible conditions; Oliver, who is born poor and has wealth at the end of the book, is plucked out of poverty and criminality because he is discovered to have been wealthy all along (328). Dickens, therefore, validates the dogmatic Victorian ideas regarding poverty.
3. CRIMINALITY AND APPEARANCE

Much as the case with economic class, Dickens uses unflattering physical appearance as a characteristic by-product of low moral standards or criminal tendencies. In fact, appearance holds significant meaning with regard to the novel's plot; as Dickens scholar Michael Hollington notes, "the first metamorphosis of state undergone by the infant Oliver is a fall into a world of signification and interpretation based on external appearance" (Hollington 243).

This initial fall comes immediately upon the novel's introduction, when Oliver's entrance in the first chapter comes as a baby, kissed by his mother just before she dies (Dickens 18). Indicative of the looming, seemingly unnatural class struggle, he is fed gruel, the sustenance of the workhouse, rather than the nurturing milk of a loving mother. Perhaps the first directly stated observation of appearance relating to a person's character comes from the doctor, only lines later, when he adds, "She was a good-looking girl, too…" (19). This statement, aside from seeming wildly inappropriate given the circumstances, betrays the universal tendency to equate physical beauty with a mental and spiritual beauty. The doctor seems to bemoan the beautiful young lady's passing, certain that she was a "good" person, that her son would surely be better off had she lived, regardless of the fact that he knew nothing about the woman. This chapter will address Dickens' adherence in *Oliver Twist* to the assumption that a person's physical features and appearance indicate his or her inner character. In order to adequately examine this tendency in the novel, I will explore the implications of both Dickens' text and the novel's illustrations by artist George Cruikshank.
3.1. The story of the pictures

Considering *Oliver Twist* was first published as text with considerable illustrative accompaniment, examining the original pictures is critical to a study of characters' physical descriptions. Dickens, knowing that readers would benefit from the story's visual representations, does not often give elaborate textual descriptions of his criminals, opting instead for minimalist descriptors like "vile" or "hideous" within the text.

Although Dickens relies upon the illustrations to supplement his text, it would be negligent to think that Dickens had complete control and authorship over these images. *Oliver Twist's* illustrations are the work of George Cruikshank, one of the most popular "characturists" of the time, according to Dickens scholar Mark Bryant (58). At the time Cruikshank and Dickens met, Cruikshank was far more well-known than the young author (58), and historian Frederick Kitton goes so far as to say that "*[Oliver Twist's] remarkable success was brought about in no small measure by Cruikshank's inimitable pictures*" (10). One telling historical account of Cruikshank's fame is that with the mounting success of *Sketches by Boz*, a December, 1836 review in *The Speculator* called Dickens "the Cruikshank of writers" (Bryant 58). This being said, Dickens would have likely taken his illustrator's professional opinion to heart, concerning the appropriate appearance for his characters.

Cruikshank's notable reputation legitimates the notion that he contributed to some of the elements in *Oliver Twist*, but a year after Dickens' death, Cruikshank claimed to have more of an authorial role in the novel's conception. In a letter to *The Times*, Cruikshank wrote that the story was his idea, arguing that the plot was based on a project called "The Life of a London

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4 The related term "cartoonist" was not used in its modern sense until 1843 (Bryant 58).
Thief" that he compiled fifteen years before meeting Dickens (Bryant 59). While scholars agree that the illustrator likely contributed to the story, they distrust his professional ego and ignore his claim:

It is not improbable, of course, that from Cruikshank's familiarity with life in the Great City he was enabled to offer useful hints to the young writer, and even perhaps to make suggestions respecting particular characters; but of this there can be no doubt, that Cruikshank's habit of exaggeration, combined with his eagerness in over-estimating the effect of his work, led him (as Mr. Blanchard Jerrold remarks) "into injudicious statements or over-statements, "which were sometimes provocative of much unpleasant controversy. (Kitton 24)

This information should serve to validate an examination of the illustrations in Oliver Twist, even to the point that their depictions are as important as the text's. Readers should keep in mind that while Dickens did not have absolute control and conceptual authorship over the story's illustrations, they were drawn with his collaboration and can be considered trustworthy as evidence of Dickens' intentions with its characters.

3.2. Physiognomic approaches to Dickens

While Hollington's article on *Oliver Twist* looks at "natural" signs, such as the body and face, and "the secondary signs offered typically by clothes" (Hollington 243), I disagree with his inclusion of "secondary signs" as a part of physiognomy. When Johann Kaspar Lavater popularized the study of physiognomy in 1797, his interest was in facial features that led to emotional impressions in the viewer (Lavater, vol 1, ix), not what someone was wearing. His argument is that people can "see nature discover herself naked to the eye of careful observation," in spite of (that which Hollington chooses to attend to) "the various shapes which the artificial commerce of the world induces mankind to wear" (Lavater, vol 1, 82). Physiognomy argues that "there exists a collateral harmony between moral and physical beauty," that God, being pleased with the world, "establish[ed] a natural union between moral and physical excellence" (Lavater 114). The physical realm is the largely unchangeable characteristics and qualities of a person's body, not their environment, in which clothes play a part. This being said, the study of physiognomy is an appropriate application to understanding Dickens' criminals, but one must be careful not to include inappropriate elements into a physiognomic analysis.

In analyzing the text in this study, I make no claim of a purely physiognomic approach, but rather embrace the fact that *all* physical descriptions of characters are relevant. Although a person's appearance is often impacted by socio-economics (and not scientifically dependable for physiognomic studies in the real world), it has already been addressed that socio-economic conditions are likewise indicative of moral standing with Dickens' characters. Since Dickens

*Chuzzlewit* in 1991. The trend resurfaced in 2011, when Angelika Zirker published "Physiognomy and the Reading of Character in *Our Mutual Friend.*"
asserts authorship over the text and the illustrations (by proxy through Cruikshank), one would be remiss to overlook any set of details. This chapter, then, will look at all of the pertinent physical aspects of a character's appearance. After all, each detail of a novel is purposeful and holds authorial intention. With this foundation in mind, it is now possible to approach the physical significance of the criminals in Oliver Twist.

3.3. The Criminal Physicality

3.3.1. Oliver

Although many readers may not consider Oliver a true criminal, he does, even if unwillingly, break the law. Furthermore, analyzing Oliver's features provides a telling contrast to the other, more experienced criminals. Dickens plays to the audience's expectations that moral characters will be physically appealing within the text. Playing off Lavater's notion of nature revealing itself in the face, Mr. Brownlow's first thoughts of Oliver are those of an unintentional physiognomer. "'There's something in that boy's face,' said the old gentleman to himself… 'something that touches and interests me. Can he be innocent?'" (Dickens 76). Although this thought is interrupted by a faint feeling of recognition, Brownlow considers what readers instinctually understand: that Oliver's appearance is a representation of his honest personality. Later, Brownlow cannot deny Oliver's virtue, when the narrator notes that "'[Oliver's statement] sounded so much like a falsehood that the old gentleman looked somewhat sternly into Oliver's face. It was impossible to doubt him; there was truth in every one of its thin and sharpened lineaments" (Dickens 86). Oliver's face is so indicative of his good nature that even Brownlow's common sense bends to its power. Fagin, on the other hand,
aims to bend its power to his own will. Historian Larry Wolff notes how Fagin sees that "what is criminally useful in Oliver…is connected to his 'looks,' which are, paradoxically, an asset in crime precisely because of their innocence" (233).

Oliver's honesty displays itself in the illustrations with a different type of "sharpened lineaments." Cruikshank's depiction of Oliver in many of the novel's illustrations seems to suggest to the reader another sense of honesty. The illustrator's technique in drawing Oliver allows the reader to immediately trust Oliver's image; it is easy for the reader to identify Oliver in the drawings because he is so clearly, straightforwardly drawn, intimating a dependability in his character as well as his image (See Appendix). In "Oliver Introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman" (Figure 1), Oliver's profile is more readily identified as a person than any of the frontal depictions of the other characters, who all happen to be criminals. The stray marks, likely indicating dirt or physical abnormalities, of the other characters, especially on Fagin's character, make it harder for readers to identify them as people. Likewise, "Oliver's Reception by Fagin and the Boys" (Figure 2) illustrates the clean lines of Oliver's face, making his physical features more pleasant than those of the surrounding characters. Also, though not physiognomically relevant, Cruikshank draws Oliver to be "whiter" than the other characters; less ink and lines appear on him, making him the brightest, most immediately noticed aspect of the drawing. The extra marks on the other boys may indicate dirt, associated with poverty, an ethnic bias amongst the English against darker skin colors, or even the never-ending war between light and dark (good and evil). The clear, honest lines with which Cruikshank draws Oliver are perhaps most noticeable in "Master Bates Explains a Professional Technicality" (Figure 3). His face, clearly drawn, causes him to appear a handsome little man. His straight nose contrasts the more pig-like noses of the Dodger and Charlie Bates. Additionally, his face
and figure are slim, compared with the more chubby features of the other boys, which may seem untrustworthy or dishonest on poor children, indicating that their recent thievery has been quite profitable. One should also note that the clear, uncluttered drawing technique Cruikshank utilizes, along with the "white" quality of Figure 2 and his central location of Figure 3 make Oliver appear singled-out, clearly different from the criminal characters of the pictures; this physical reflects his moral difference from these less savory characters.

3.3.2. The Artful Dodger

The Artful Dodger warrants a more detailed physical description than does Oliver in order to grasp the many differences between the two. At first introduction, the Dodger is described as "about [Oliver's] own age: but one of the queerest-looking boys that Oliver had ever seen" (Dickens 62). Since Dickens scholar Juliet John attests that both the Dodger and Charlie Bates are fashioned after real boys (130), it is likely that his "queerest" appearance is connected to his previously unknown (to Oliver) personality. Oliver certainly had his share of interaction with boys his age from growing up in the workhouse, and it is evident from the following description and the illustrations that the Dodger was no physical anomaly with alien features; it is possible, then, that Oliver was caught off-guard by some intrinsic quality that shown in his countenance, some outward expression of his inner villainy? Given that Oliver's innocence is reflected in his own appearance, it is quite likely that the Dodger's perverse childhood and values somehow manifested in his face.

Dickens goes on to more acutely describe the Dodger's appearance as the "queerest-looking boy… ever seen," and he is certainly ugly. "He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough; and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had about
him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age: with rather bow-legs: and little, sharp, ugly eyes" (Dickens 62). Aside from the dirt, which Dickens may well have intended as a permanent feature on the Dodger, these are all permanent, biological unpleasantries that indicate the Dodger's moral qualities. The final, culminating detail before Dickens moves on to discussing the Dodger's clothes is his "little, sharp, ugly eyes," and as John claims, the eyes hold special importance. "For Dickens, eyes are ideally the mirrors of the soul" (John 116). This idea was not new for Dickens' readers, either. The eyes have long held a special interest in regard to reflecting inner intentions or emotions.\(^5\) According to Lavater's publications in physiognomy, the Dodger's sharp, pointed eyes denote "cunning," and the (implied) narrowness of the eye is "incompatible with integrity" (Lavater, vol 4, 167). Lavater also includes thoughts from Georges-Louis Leclerc, Compte De Buffon, a well-known, French natural historian, who poetically describes this feature:

> The eyes belong to the soul more than any other organ; it seems in perfect contact with it; and to participate in all its movements; it expresses passions the most lively, and emotions the most tumultuous… it conveys them with all their force… just as they arise… [the eye] instantly communicates to another the fire, the action, the image of that soul from which they proceed. (Lavater, vol 4, 168)

In this sense that the eyes reflect the soul, the "sharp" quality of the eye, even if not intended literally, is quite damming. Additionally, the contrast between Oliver's features, which imply honesty, naivety, and innocence, which have been noted as Fagin's impressions of the boy, and

\(^5\) John Lydgate's Middle English text *Secrets of Old Philosoffres* (aka *Secrees of Old Philisoffres: A Version of the 'Secreta Secretorum'*) looks at "physronymye," (physiognomy), with a special focus on the eyes as the key to the soul. Lydgate died before finishing the manuscript, but the text was finally published in 1894. Although its publication is after *Oliver Twist's*, it proves that people have systematically practiced judging others based on physical features since (at least) the Middle Ages.
those of the Dodger indicate the Dodger's evil intentions toward Oliver, even though at this point in the text, the Dodger has not actually done anything malicious. He is the type of boy Fagin is speaking of when he says to Sikes, "Their looks convict 'em when they get in trouble" (Dickens 137). Instead of the face that convinces Brownlow of Oliver's unequivocal innocence, the Dodger has a face that warns of mischief and ill-intent.

The illustrations, while still depicting the Dodger as physically unappealing, do not exhibit the same vile appearance as Dickens describes. "Oliver Introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman" (Figure 1) shows the Dodger standing closest to Fagin, with his own hand extended in introduction toward Oliver. He shares the distorted facial features and dirty appearance that the other child criminals exhibit. "Oliver's Reception by Fagin and the Boys" (Figure 2) and "Master Bates Explains a Technicality" (Figure 3) show a more striking similarity between the Dodger and his fellow criminals as well as a distinct difference between them and Oliver. The Dodger and the other criminals share the same unchildlike face shape, dark hair, and pudgy stature, compared to Oliver's innocent face, light hair, and slim build. The images suggest that the child criminals are a breed of their own, a group who are clearly biologically destined to be similar to each other, the opposite of Oliver and his physical and mental goodness. Although this pattern quality with the Dodger and other child thieves differentiates them from Oliver, their features in the images do not perfectly reflect Dickens' textual descriptions.

Interestingly, the appearance of child criminals is one place in which Dickens parts from realistic accuracy in order, likely, to provide his audiences with what they expect. Mayhew later describes how criminals, both boys and girls, would "cloak" their intentions with their
innocent appearances (Wolff 233). It makes sense that the overwhelming condition of children turning career criminals would be more closely associated with the innocent looks that make them successful rather than the foreboding appearances that make them suspicious. While this description of delinquent children as unattractive is unrealistic, it does explain a misunderstanding in the primary Victorian social mindset. Victorians expected to see ugly criminals in their literature, presumably in real life as well; in reality, crime was much easier for actual criminals because they did not fit the image society had of them. In this case, their "nature," as Lavater puts it, did not reveal itself in their appearance.

Kitton notes that "although the artist has imparted too venerable an appearance to the Artful Dodger, he has seized in a wonderful manner the characteristics of criminal types in his rendering of Fagin and Bill Sikes" (Kitton 11). Dickens describes the Dodger as having a truly menacing appearance, in accordance with his actions and his plot distinction as Oliver's first introduction to the criminal world; but he and Cruikshank present different depictions of the young thief, although both are appropriately unappealing. And as discussed next, Nancy's character is not lacking in the appropriate physical features, either.

3.3.2 Nancy

Nancy is the female who outranks only the children in the group of criminals, and as a woman and a prostitute, she is somewhat of an outsider in the criminal realm. Although the text does not use the term "prostitute," causing some readers to question her exact role in the criminal realm, Philip Collins assures the reader of her vocation. Citing Dickens' 1841 Preface to *Oliver Twist*, Collins explains, as noted above, that Dickens intended for her to be read as a prostitute, but felt the need to maintain a sensitivity in regard to how the readers would react to
her (Collins 96). Nancy herself cries that, "It is my living; and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home; and you're [intending Fagin] the wretch that drove me to them long ago; and that'll keep me there, day and night, day and night, till I die!" (116). In fact, it appears that Nancy may be at work the first time the reader meets her. She and her friend leave the room together with the Dodger and Charley Bates after being given money by Fagin (70). Although Oliver assumes this is four friends going out for a walk, the reader is left to wonder where the four inebriated criminals may have to go at night, and why the trip would be initiated by one of the "ladies complaining of a coldness in her inside" (70). It is clear that this is an instance where Dickens took special care to balance the line between representing reality and offending sensitive readers. Now that Nancy is established as one of the story's criminals, it is reasonable to address her physical appearance and its correlation to her somewhat decayed morals.

In describing Nancy and another prostitute, Dickens explains that "they wore a good deal of hair: not very neatly turned up behind; and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings" (Dickens 70). This first description seems to be a thinly veiled comment about the fact that the ladies do not live a life that enables or requires them to attend to propriety in appearance; even with the strict Victorian standards about dress and modesty, it does not matter if these girls cannot manage to keep their stockings up. Next, readers learn that "they were not exactly pretty" (70). Considering Dickens' difficulty in writing women characters, readers should perhaps read this as uncharacteristically minimalist, but no less noteworthy. The author continues in depiction with, "but they had a great deal of colour in their faces; and looked quite stout and hearty" (70). By this, he means that they were heavily painted with make-up and not at all the Victorian image of a proper woman. Most of the description Dickens gives in regard

6 With Dickens' draw toward the beautiful "angel in the house" character, Nancy is a stark contrast, although the actual depiction here is brief.
to Nancy deals with her status as a prostitute and reflects his own prejudice toward her, as Dickens describes above as, "the lowest character," representative of "the fallen and degraded aspects" of society. The illustrations of Nancy supplement the textual depictions regarding her appearance.

Cruikshank is often criticized for being unable to draw pretty women, however "his portrayal of Nancy is particularly ugly and repelling" (Kitton 11). "Mr. Fagin and His Pupils Recovering Nancy" (Figure 5) shows her as a haggard woman with disheveled hair and clothes. Her circular face surpasses the point of cherubic and becomes rotund, not dainty or "ladylike" whatsoever. Compared to the other, male characters in the drawing, Nancy's facial features are less intricately drawn; the squiggly lines of her nose, eyes, and mouth take on the same misshapen quality that the Dodger and the other child thieves share in "Oliver Introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman" (Figure 1).

Unlike Dickens' well-known "angel in the house" female characters, Nancy is criminal and, appropriately, ugly. Just as the Dodger's appearance differentiates himself from Oliver and implies his unsavory character, Nancy's appearance illustrates her own (by Victorian standards) unladylike lifestyle and criminal orientation.

3.3.3 Fagin

Arguably the most infamous criminal in Oliver Twist is Fagin, and both Dickens and Cruikshank appear to have paid special attention to making his appearance as vile as his character. Dickens plays off of stereotypes, creates negative comparisons, and continually reminds readers of the villainy in Fagin's features. Kitton notes that "although the artist [Cruikshank]
imparted too venerable appearance on the Artful Dodger, he has seized in a wonderful manner the characteristics of criminal types in his rendering Fagin and Bill Sikes” (11). Notably, although Kitton analyzes the artistry and drawing skills exemplified in Cruikshank's work, he plays into the notion that to draw a criminal well, one must produce an image that is physically as vile as the character's personality. Fagin's rendering was no small matter, given that Cruikshank gave "no less than five studies of Fagin" for Dickens to choose from (Kitton 15). It appears that with Fagin's enduring popularity and Dickens' and Cruikshank's extra attention, Fagin is intended as the criminal masterpiece in *Oliver Twist*.

The most compelling and damning description of Fagin, for Dickens' contemporary audience, is his Jewish ethnicity. In fact, in the first half of the novel, Fagin is as likely to be referred to as "the Jew" as anything else. Not only that, but as scholar Susan Meyer points out, Dickens "emphasizes aspects of [Fagin's] character familiar from the anti-Semitic tradition, namely his miserliness, his greed, his exotic and strange appearance, his effeminacy, his obsequiousness, his cowardliness- and the size of his nose" (239). And as seen in the examples below, Fagin is first given identity as his ethnicity, not by a name. As critic Maria Paganoni discusses, Dickens worked within society's long-established anti-Semitic prejudice (310). As Dickens scholar Robert Butterworth explains, it is likely Dickens was unaware of his own tendencies towards anti-Semitism, although it is certainly apparent now, adding that as a newly popular writer, Dickens "would be ill-advised to write something grossly out of tune with the attitudes of his readers." Although the nineteenth century was a time when Jewish citizens were gaining more acceptance in both mainstream society and politics as well as equality under the law, "prejudice had by no means ended" (Butterworth). It was not until the 1867 edition that he removed some of these references because of complaints from his readers (Paganoni 315).
Fagin's initial description leaves no room for mistaking his evil character, and he seems to mesh into his seedy surroundings:

The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black, with age and dirt… In a frying-pan which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantelshelf by a string, some sausages were cooking; and standing over them, with toasting-fork in his hand, was a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare; and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying-pan and a clothes-horse: over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging. (65)

Readers may notice from his choice of meal that his faith bears little weight in Fagin's daily life, and much can be said of his apparent "divided attention" as well. The fact that he guards both his food and his handkerchiefs show that he distrusts people, even his own child recruits. His attention to food and goods suggest a survivalist mentality, especially since the goods are his stolen bounty from which he supports himself.

The text describes Fagin's appearance in a straightforward way, even though his actions are often described sarcastically. "The Jew smiled hideously; and, patting Oliver on the head, said, [as long as Oliver behaved him] he saw they would be very good friends," and then he leaves the room and locks Oliver inside (Dickens 126). Readers know immediately that the pat on the head and promise of "very good friends" is a thinly veiled disguise for a master, slave relationship.
Fagin then takes on the likeness of a paranoid snake guarding his hoard:

It was a chill, damp, windy night, when the Jew: buttoning his great coat tight round his shrunken body, and pulling the collar up over his ears so as to completely obscure the lower part of his face: emerged from his den. He paused on the step as the door was locked and chained behind him; and having listened while the boys made all secure, and until their retreating footsteps were no longer audible, slunk down the street as quickly as he could… The Jew stopped for an instant at the corner of the street; and, glancing suspiciously round, crossed the road, and struck off… It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew, to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved…

(131-2)

Paganoni notes this snake/reptile comparison as a Satanic reference, adding that the "merry old gentleman" title by which Fagin is often referred is another name for the Devil (310). Socially, readers would likely agree with Fagin's comparison to Satan; as historian Larry Wolff explains, his "campaign to make Oliver a thief" was understood to be "a comprehensive assault upon the innocence of a child" (231-2), much like Satan's own campaign against humanity.

With vague descriptions like "the old Jew" (Dickens 66), "[his] hideous grin" (67), his "evil leer" (91), and the very common, "old man," it is clear that Dickens relied greatly on Cruikshank to establish the specific details of Fagin's unattractive appearance, and Cruikshank delivers a memorable image of the famed criminal in the story's illustrations.
"Oliver's Reception by Fagin and the Boys" (Figure 2) shows Fagin, standing sideways, laughing, along with the Dodger, at Oliver. His back is hunched, giving the "shrivelled" effect that Dickens refers to, and his nose and beard create two sharp points, as opposed to the other characters' more round faces. Also, his crooked fingers give away both his old age and his "crooked" ways. Both "Monks and the Jew" (Figure 4) and "Mr. Fagin and His Pupils Recovering Nancy" (Figure 5) clearly emphasize his extraordinarily large, hooked nose, another anti-Semitic, stereotypical trait (Paganoni 308), and his beady eyes, which suggest anger and a lack of sympathy. This is contrasted, with what Cruikshank biographer Robert Patton says is "arguably the most celebrated etching Cruikshank ever made" (Bryant 59), "Fagin in the Condemned Cell" (Figure 8).

This last image of Fagin shows both his villainous physical features and the terror that plagues a man on the brink of an untimely death. As he "[sits] down on a stone bench opposite the door, which served for seat and bedstead; and [casts] his blood-shot eyes upon the ground, [trying] to collect his thoughts" of men he had seen hanged (Dickens 352), readers can see the terror in Fagin's eyes and panic across his wrinkled face (Figure 8). Although this illustration does not portray him as a sympathetic character, for his criminally ugly features have not changed, readers can easily identify the terror in Fagin's face. Dickens' ultimate criminal writhes at the thought of his ultimate punishment the same way Dickens' readers writhed at his descriptions.

3.3.4 Sikes

It may seem strange that if Fagin is Dickens' ultimate criminal, there is one who seems to trump his evil by comparison, but Bill Sikes does just that. He is the violent robber and
"housebreaker" of the criminal gang (Dickens 111), and his temper keeps even Fagin on his toes.7

Textually, Dickens describes Sikes mainly by his clothing and spends little time on his actual facial features. Sikes is described as a "stoutly built fellow" around thirty-five years old, "in a black velveteen coat, very soiled drab breeches, lace-up boots, and grey cotton stockings" (Dickens 90). He had "a very bulky pair of legs," "a brown hat," and a "dirty belcher handkerchief" which he used to wipe the beer of his face (90). Dickens also tells of his "broad heavy countenance" with a scruffy beard, "and two scowling eyes," one having been recently blackened (90).

Another scene resembles the readers' introduction to Fagin, in that Sikes appears as a detail in an environment:

In the obscure parlour of a low public-house, situate in the filthiest part of Little Saffron-Hill; a dark and gloomy den, where a flaring gas-light burnt all day in the winter-time: and where no ray of sun ever shone in the summer; there sat: brooding over a little pewter measure and a small glass, strongly impregnated with the smell of liquor: a man in a velveteen coat, drab shorts, half boots, and stockings, whom, even by that dim light, no experienced agent of police would have hesitated for one instant to recognise as Mr. William Sikes.

(Dickens 103-4)

Dickens' focus on Fagin as the chiefly evil criminal rather than Sikes is a comment on intellectual or manipulative evil. Fagin tricks children into the life of crime and, as discussed later, threatens them into compliance. To Dickens, Fagin's corruptive power is more evil than Sikes' sheer violence, which is apparent at the offset. This is further illustrated that whereas Fagin is often referred to by personality-invoking terms, like "the merry old gentleman" and "the Jew," Sikes is referred to by his actions as "the housebreaker."
Again, Dickens establishes the unpleasant, seedy bar as the perfect setting for Sikes; the sentiment here is that he is the typical looking criminal in the typical criminal hideout.

The illustrations give more detail into Sikes' facial appearance. In "Oliver's Reception by Fagin and the Boys" (Figure 2), Sikes has a strikingly large figure which towers over the other characters and gives the impression that he is overbearing or domineering, as his sheer size is enhanced by a large top hat, adding to his towering effect. His smile suggests a very dark sense of happiness, much like the smile of Dr. Seuss' Grinch; his lips are very much curved up, but his mouth is closed, which appears to suggest sinister intent. Additionally, his eyes, which have been discussed as holding particular importance, are hardly visible. Only, a small glimmer of white under the shadow of his hat peaks through. This quality in the picture is only shared by Fagin, who, although his face is unobstructed, appears to have no eyes under his heavy brow. Since eyes have been noted as revealing the true selves, the lack of visible eyes in these two may suggest their hidden intentions or their untrustworthy natures.

Interestingly, "Mr. Fagin and His Pupils Recovering Nancy" (Figure 5) does not show Sikes as quite the towering figure as previously discussed. Instead, he is only slightly taller than the other criminals and is more facially exposed, his beard and unkempt hair giving him a scruffy, unwelcoming appearance. "Sikes Attempting to Destroy His Dog" revives the housebreaker as a towering figure, which is made all the more notable in that his dog cowers at his outstretched palm. While he appears more neatly dressed in this image than others, his face appears more menacing than before, with bold, dark eyes, and a pinched, down-turned mouth that denotes hatred or contempt. "The Last Chance" (Figure 7) depicts the similarly dressed criminal fleeing for his life, scared dog in tow. Here, Cruikshank's use of darkness in the
backdrop also seems to muffle the image of the famed housebreaker, as he searches for a means of escape from authorities, but readers can still determine his characteristically strong facial features: the down-turned mouth, large sideburns, and somewhat crooked nose, perhaps broken several times in his violent lifetime.

Sikes' general depiction as a menacing figure mirrors his role as the clearly dangerous member of the criminal gang. This also supports the point mentioned earlier that whereas Fagin represents a deceptive, Satan-like evil, Sikes portrays the more obvious, loud evil that threatens violence and oppression at the onset. Sikes' image as larger (and in most pictures, more centrally located) suggests that he is the type honest citizens watch for and easily spot, whereas Fagin is the more cunning force that sneaks in without causing alarm, much as they did in Oliver's life.

**3.3.5 Monks**

Monks is arguably the darkest, most mysterious criminal of the novel. In the first discussion of him, Nancy describes him how he likely goes by an alias in different social circles and holds conversation (about killing Oliver) with Fagin in the dark (268). Chapters later, readers learn that just as his initial description is mysterious and hidden, his actual physicality is likewise covert and "unseeable." Nancy, who has only seen him once and recollects other peoples' descriptions of him, shares with Rose Maylie how Monks is:

- tall… and a strongly made man, but not stout; he has a lurking walk; and as he walks, constantly looks over his shoulder, first on one side, and then on the other.
- Don't forget that, for his eyes are sunk in his head so much deeper than any other
man's, that you might almost tell him by that alone. His face is dark, like his hair and eyes; and, although he can't be more than six or eight and twenty, withered and haggard. His lips are often discoloured and disfigured with the marks of teeth; for he has desperate fits, and sometimes even bites his hands and covers them with wounds…I have only seen him twice, and both times he was covered with a large cloak. … Upon his throat: so high that you can see a part of it below his neckerchief when he turns his face: there is…[a large burn mark]. (309)

Monks' appearance goes along perfectly with his secret identity as Oliver's half-brother and conspirator against the young boy (268). His physical appearance seems to try to hide itself as well, with a strong but not large build, deeply sunken eyes, and dark facial features that mimic the shadows in which he lurks. He is young but does not appear so, his lips appear changed because of his biting them, and his hands hide under wounds as well. He renders himself almost invisible, beyond distinction, in a large cloak and scarf to cover the distinct scar on his neck. He would stand out, but he does not. The reader can acknowledge his presence, but to imagine what he truly looks like is to cover up what makes him distinguishable as human; he is a shadow. He is very much present, but unseen, much like his role in the novel's plot.⁸

Dickens employs the notion behind early physiognomy, that a person's character is reflected in their physical features, in his depictions of the criminals in Oliver Twist. The more vile the character, the more unpleasant the character's appearance. The implication, then, is that

⁸ Figure 4, entitled "Monks and the Jew," supposedly depicts Monks, along with Fagin, looking in a window at a sleeping Oliver. However, this picture and title are unreliable; different editions of Oliver Twist use this picture in two different ways. Some have this picture in Chapter 28, making the picture of Fagin and Sikes and including a different title. Others have the picture in Chapter 34, making it "Monks and the Jew." Although the figure in Figure 4 looks nothing like the other pictures of Sikes, it likewise has little in common with Dickens' description of Monks, and therefore has very little value in this analysis.
unattractive or abnormal looking people are untrustworthy or dangerous, that physical presentation is a warning. In England's growing cities, with swarms of people flocking for industrial jobs and a chance at economic stability, those with less than ideal features found themselves at a disadvantage, for beauty had become, not only a commodity, but a virtue. Regardless of the interest in upward social mobility, it appears to have been understood that unattractive people would have a much more difficult time climbing the ladder.
4 CRIMINALITY AND UNROOTEDNESS

While Dickens illustrates the common cultural perceptions that unpleasant conditions like poverty and ugliness accompany criminality, his depiction of criminals as lacking traditional family roots is quite different. Firstly, the real correlation between uprooted individuals and criminality is much stronger. Although poverty was a common factor in people's compulsion towards crime and a person's appearance can truly be impacted by their lifestyle, lacking family roots is often key to a person's involvement in crime.

4.1 Disparity Between Traditional and Realistic Families

According to Chesney, the "cult of the family" prevailed in Victorian society (Chesney 21). At the head of the family was the "prosperous Victorian father" who worked outside the home (21). Then, there was the subservient wife who accepted her "inferiority, as prescribed by law and custom" (22), and she watched after the household and domestic matters, including the education and rearing of children, although most respectable families had servants who did the actual work (23).

With family roles so clearly defined, Victorian readers could easily see how a deviation from the family norm would result in a deviant individual. With "increased urbanization and immigration," England saw its need to establish the first orphanages in the 1800s, as more people voluntarily surrendered their children to state custody as a temporary relief measure (Shealy 566), further adding to the number of unrooted individuals. The family was artificially emphasized in society because the change from the previous agricultural economy to an industrial goods-driven economy did not help to hold families together as in the past. The idea of family was stressed by the new society, but the structural changes in people's lives made family close-
ness harder to maintain. Although the literary ideal of the "angel in the house" mother and the financially responsible father was popular, most families found it impossible in reality.

### 4.2 The Isolated Criminal

Most of Victorian society accepted the idea of a true criminal class. Tobias explains that most people at the time considered criminals to be a separate group from the rest of society (11), what one writer referred to as "a caste of themselves, having their peculiar slang, mode of thinking, habits, and arts of living" (53), which further isolated the criminal, adding to his already unrooted reality. He goes on to differentiate between Victorian ideas of crime and what modern readers may assume:

What is now called 'white-collar crime', criminal activity carried on at the margin of a respectable trade or profession, seldom entered into the matter—though it was of course prevalent. The 'criminals' were Fagin and the Artful Dodger and their like, and the 'crime' was what they did and what they lived by. Members of the 'criminal class' were not the only ones who committed crimes, but they had adopted a way of life in which crime played an important part. Whether or not we today regard these ideas as valid, the contemporary evidence has to be considered in its own terms…”

John agrees that the criminal was seen as an outsider (John 118), and Chesney adds that the criminal was of a "dangerous class," separate from the poor (Chesney 38). Dickens, then, capi-
talized on this idea, as he was able to depict a criminal world that operated completely outside social conventions and only interacted with respectable society when victimizing it.\(^9\)

Although the argument is that the criminals lack the roots that a family structure provides, it would be negligent to overlook that there are no traditional, functional families in *Oliver Twist* (Parker). Although the Brownlow clan is the closest example of a true family, they are not a traditional family in the biological sense; they do, however, serve as moral ties for one another and their interactions reinforce traditional societal values. The popular belief at the time was that criminality was somehow a "family" trait; the criminal class was believed to be bred from birth (Tobias 53-4). With criminality determined so early, the opening scene's cryptic tone is even more meaningful. Oliver is ill-fated from birth. Being born poor in the workhouse, having a pretty mother who did not survive much past his birth, the doctor notes Oliver's bastard status: "no wedding-ring, I see," (Dickens 19). Explaining that he does not want to be bothered with Oliver's future care, the doctor states, "It is very likely it will be troublesome" (19). Oliver's future is set, and the narrator admits that "if he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of churchwardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder" (19). With no parents or other family to guide his upbringing, Oliver's orphan status presumably condemns him to a life of crime.

Because of the lack of family roots, criminals then had no ties to any set location, and this often led to a feeling of anonymity, which made a life of crime more feasible. At the time of *Oliver Twist's* publication, courts had to trust a defendant's claim for name and age (Tobias 17) because national birth records were not kept until the latter half of the century (12). Even as

\(^9\) It is worthwhile to note here that Henry Mayhew's highly popular publications on the sympathetic criminal came out in the 1850s, after *Oliver Twist*, so Dickens' audience was not tainted by concern or understanding in regard to his criminal characters (Tobias 14).
late as 1887, Rev. J.W. Horsley, Chaplain of Clerkenwell Gaol, admitted that, "We take very little notice of names and ages in prison, as from various reasons they are apt to alter with each entrance" (17). With the ease of assuming a new identity after encounters with the law, criminals enjoyed a fair amount of anonymity. Adding to this, many criminals moved about the city to avoid the more efficient police forces who knew of them (Chesney 32).

Similarly, the railways were one of the foremost icons of industrial progress and civilization and they proved to be of utmost importance in Victorian society (Chesney 39). For the first time, people were easily able to move between city and country to avoid the slums or gain proximity to appealing jobs (60-1). On the other hand, they were as easily used by the criminals who flooded London in the 1800s (107). This ease in changing identity and place did not mean that criminals had no semblance of family structure, though.

4.3 The Criminal Pseudo-Family

The criminals of Oliver Twist exemplify the pseudo-family that arises in the Victorian's supposedly separate criminal class. They serve as a dysfunctional, destructive family that reinforces poor ethical values. One way in which the criminal family functions is in the educational model for children. Fagin takes on the roles of both teacher and father by teaching Oliver and the other boys how to effectively pickpocket (Dickens 71). This is in stark contrast with Brownlow's insistence of educating Oliver through reading (97). Another lesson in the criminal education of children is that self-preservation is the first law of nature. Charley and the Dodger turn on Oliver, rather than aiding in his escape, as he is chased down the street by angry citizens (73). In reality, children were often taken in by thieves and beggars who taught them about their own version of independence (Chesney 99), and some lodging houses served as training
schools for criminals (100), where children stole in order to pay their room and board (101).
The need for an early sense of looking after one's own welfare was as prevalent in the real city of London as in Dickens' construction. Children around the Dodger's and Charley Bates' age would likely have been severely punished for their crimes if caught because, as Macraird and Neal explain, children were considered *doli capax*, legally capable of discerning good from evil, at age fourteen and could be charged as adults for their crimes; it was rare, though, that children under fourteen were sent to prison (433).

For Victorians reading *Oliver Twist* during its initial publication, the stories of child criminals would have come at a time of new attention to the topic. By the 1930s, newspapers were reporting an increase of children involved in crime (Macraild and Neal 435). This resulted in social panics over juvenile crimes in the 1830s and 1840s, as the surge in media attention caused people to think it was a new phenomenon (434). For Dickens' original readers, then, the tales of Charlie Bates, the Artful Dodger, and young Oliver would have coincided with a new dialogue about children and crime.

Dickens' readers are even entreated to a criminal philosophy of education, compliments of Sikes. Sikes goes to Fagin, discussing his desire to borrow a chimney-sweeper's young apprentice in a burglary. Then, he complains that:

> the father gets lagged; and then the Juvenile Delinquent Society comes, and takes the boy away from a trade where he was arning money: teaches him to read and write: and in time makes a 'prentice out of him. And so they go on… so they go on; and, if they'd got money enough (which it's a Providence they have not,) we
shouldn't have half-a-dozen boys left in the whole trade, in a year or two.

(Dickens 135-6)

Sikes makes the logical point that could be applied for many undesirable, but legal, professions as well as the criminal life. He philosophizes that crime is a trade that children can enter in order to earn a living. However, if children are systematically taken from the trade, it will not survive. The label of criminality as a "trade" is important because it illustrates Sikes' (and likely Fagin's) opinion that crime is a way to forge a living in the world, just like a baker or beadle would.

Readers learn that Nancy was also one of these criminally-raised children, beginning her criminal life as a child thief in Fagin's gang around the age of five (116). This, too, is a reflection of reality in Victorian London life. The idea of childhood training was addressed when, in 1828, The Keeper of Newgate prison was asked how children are brought into crime. He "replied: 'Generally speaking, I think they are trained up from what I may call juvenile delinquents; they go on step by step, and have no trade at all" (Tobias 53).

As historian Larry Wolff explains, child runaways often found themselves immersed in the criminal life; the boys becoming street-sellers, and the girls becoming both street-sellers and prostitutes, a situation that Henry Mayhew also brought to light in his own works (230). The social views of the two genders, however, were very different: girls were viewed with pity, as "poor, innocent girls, struggling to make an honest penny," while the boys thought of more like regular, street criminals (231). This may explain Dickens' more generous depiction of Nancy's character. Whereas Nancy, the Artful Dodger, and Charley Bates are all young criminals who started as small children, Nancy exhibits a sense of humanity that readers identify (and even sympathize) with. Dickens' audience would likely have shared the view that young girl crimi-
nals, especially prostitutes, are more so the victims of circumstance than their male counterparts.

This criminal family structure also establishes a model for interaction between adults and children. Fagin threatens Oliver, warning him against turning on his authority, by telling Oliver about another boy who he turned in to be hanged (Dickens 125); a moment later, Charley Bates and the Dodger praise Fagin as a mentor, promising Oliver that "Fagin will make something of you, though, or you'll be the first he ever had that turned out unprofitable" (129). Chesney accounts instances of other real-world mistreatment of children in that people would often motivate child chimney-sweeps to work more quickly by starting fires in the fireplaces while the child was in the chimney (56). Like Dickens' scenario, Chesney also claims that child chimney-sweeps often became burglars (58).

As Kitton explains, *Oliver Twist* first came out at the same time as investigators were looking into the deaths of some work-house children who had been "farmed out" as chimney-sweeps from the parish of St. James' in Westminster (20), so Dickens' presentation of the mistreatment of children, and chimney-sweeps specifically, was both timely and culturally popular at the time.

Of course, the criminal family establishes the protocol for adult interaction as well. Sikes gives Fagin a hard time by saying, "What are you up to? Ill-treating the boys...?... I wonder they don't murder you; I would if I was them... I'd have done it long ago... you're fit for nothing but keeping as a curiosity of ugliness in a glass bottle" (Dickens 90). Sikes clearly does not respect Fagin, and it may be rightly so. Immediately afterwards, Fagin wishes to poison Sikes' liquor (91). Sikes reciprocates the feeling, though. After physically fighting with (and al-
most killing) his dog, Sikes expresses that he wishes he could kill Fagin as easily as he could his pet, without fear of legal consequence (105). Sikes would also disrespect Nancy, except for her "native talents" (106); if Sikes were not a frequent customer of Nancy's he would have no use for her either.

The criminal family is a perversion of the traditional family, and it is the only routine, systematic interaction for the criminals of *Oliver Twist*. This mirrors reality in that criminals tended to be unanchored in society, having no family for guidance or accountability and changing names and locations on a whim. The criminal culture which replaced the family funneled children into the life of crime, often with abusive tactics. However, this problem could not have been so widespread without the Industrial Revolution, the migration and separation of families for jobs, and the growth of the industry-centered city, all logical conditions of the time. Also, the strict expectations of families further isolated those who either had no family at all or no "proper" family to turn to for support.
5. CONCLUSION

Criminality is one of the foremost themes in *Oliver Twist*, and it is now established that the notorious criminals of the story conform to a criminal type, characterized by socio-economic standing, appearance, and a lack of family roots. This type, or perhaps *stereotype*, reflects Victorian society's expectations of what a believable criminal should be. Being both poor and unattractive, the criminal is easily identifiable. And in the criminal's exclusion from traditional family life and its system of values, he is both easily cast off as an outsider and perhaps explained as growing up without alternatives. The latter can be seen in the child thieves' appreciation of playing Fagin's games, even though they instill poor morals, perhaps paving the way for acceptance of more understanding works like Mayhew's publications.

Even the arguable exceptions to the type, Monks, who is wealthy, and Oliver, who is both secretly wealthy and physically pleasant, serve as exceptions which reinforce the rules. Monks is notably different, an outsider even in the criminal realm, and his wealth seems to be the reason. His need to remain mysterious and secretive makes him an outsider, even amongst the group of obvious outcasts. Oliver, with his honest face and innate innocence, aside from unwillingly taking part in crimes, never truly feels at-home in the criminal gang. This is evident in the story's narration as well as its plot; the third-person narrator often takes on Oliver's perception, sharing his view as naive observer with the audience. When the reader learns of his wealth at the story's end (344), this discomfort makes sense. He cannot be truly criminal because he does not fit the type.

*Oliver Twist's* criminals are poor, ugly, and unrooted, and they serve as examples to where society steps back in its commitment to social mobility. The poor, theoretically, had the
option of gaining social ground through acquiring wealth, but, as seen, society was set up in a way that made it highly impossible. Unattractive physical features were viewed as indicative of a person's unpleasant or sinister nature, so any type of positive lifestyle change in a person with unattractive features could potentially be viewed as ill-gotten or undeserved. Lastly, the appeal of the city as holding career potential for hard workers often hid the reality that a stable family life, while highly stressed in popular culture, was a mirage for most laboring families. The criminal type in *Oliver Twist* illuminates these social conflicts.

It appears that Dickens was, as a young author gaining popularity, very much writing for his audience and their expectations. As a child ward of the workhouse with an interest in people in general, he likely understood that the true social workings of London were more complex than those presented in his second major work, but as a new writer, his personal convictions and unique observations gave way to popular demand, at least until he gained the notoriety which granted the freedom to produce works like *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Bleak House* (1852).

Even with the critical popularity of *Oliver Twist*, much of which centers around the novel's famed criminals, it is important to step back and examine the overall picture of criminality and its social illuminations. What is discovered in a historical look at the common qualities of Dickens' criminals is their apparent simplicity masks an intricate system of values and beliefs, one which is actually much more devious and cynical than the crimes the criminals themselves commit.
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Figure 1: Oliver Introduced to the Respectable Old Gentleman
Figure 2: Oliver's Reception by Fagin and the Boys
Figure 3: Master Bates Explains a Professional Technicality
Figure 4: Monks and the Jew
Figure 5: Mr. Fagin and His Pupils Recovering Nancy
Figure 6: Sikes Attempting to Destroy His Dog
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Figure 8: Fagin in the Condemned Cell