ABSTRACT

DREAM AND REALITY IN OLIVER TWIST

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

Oliver Twist is a fairy-tale novel with a moral lesson. Oliver, a kind of Everyman, dreams of happiness and lives in a nightmare world. Dickens makes his hero's dream come true by means of fairy-tale magic which resembles sympathetic magic. The author persuades his readers to revolt against the nightmare realities he presents them with. He thus gains general assent to moral assertions that oppose the nightmare and become embodied in the dream-vision of his happy ending. This wish-fulfilment fantasy reflects folk aspirations and is based on the concept of the happy family as the basic unit of a healthy society. Dickens's social criticism thus reaches beyond the Victorian scene to take on universal meaning.

Short Title

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References and Abbreviations

With the exception of Oliver Twist all references to Dickens's novels are to The New Oxford Illustrated Edition of his works.

All references to chapter numbers in Oliver Twist refer to chapters in The Clarendon Oliver Twist.[+]

[+] Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, edited by Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford, 1966).

THE THESIS

Oliver Twist struggles to survive in an environment that oscillates between enchanted world of dream and alien world of nightmare realities. Dickens presents with convincing realism the orphan's difficulties in searching for a better life. Oliver's final achievements, however, seem to be more contrived than realistic. Indeed, at the end of the story the reader senses the hand of the author waving a magic stick to dissolve the nightmare and make the dream come true. Dickens finally grants his hero happiness, social status, and financial success by means of magic, rather than through realistic plot development. I intend to explain how Dickens obtains assent to this magic.

Oliver plays a leading part in a private fantasy in which the reader recognizes certain fundamental human aspirations. Grotesque material, peripheral to the hero's story, illustrates nightmare realities which challenge man's aspirations in real life, as well as in Dickens's fictional world. Much of this peripheral material bears little obvious relation to the major plot, yet closer examination reveals that it corresponds to central ideas in the book. Perverse sexual, marital, and familial relationships bring about the major problems in the story. Images of these disorders on the periphery of the tale offer concrete manifestations of evils without which

Oliver's quandary would never have arisen. These dark mirror images of Oliver's dream of a happy family life throw the dream into sharper relief by contrasting it with recurring deplorable situations where basic standards of decent behaviour are grossly violated.

Central to this thesis is the identification of rules of conduct fundamental to the dream implied in Oliver Twist. With these ethics, Dickens captures his audience's imagination so that it concurs when the imaginative deceptions of the happy ending offer the triumph of what men consider best in life, and the condemnation of what they hold to be shameful. The final wish-fulfilment fantasy embodies a natural reaction to the disregard of fundamental ethics which has pervaded the novel's action; the dream demands that human norms of conduct be established before an acceptable world-picture may emerge from the nightmare.

The dream at the core of the story belongs to a fairy-tale tradition. This tradition offers Dickens a structural pattern for his material and a familiar myth that facilitates communication with a large audience which is conversant with the rags-to-riches fairy-tale mode.

I regard Oliver Twist as Dickens's early attempt to present certain materials in a peculiar genre of his own. Yet much of what I say about Oliver may also be said of David Copperfield and Pip Pirrip. For Dickens continues to experiment with similar materials and develops the same genre to greater perfection over the span of his career. Dickens's conception of the relationship of the nightmare mirror images

to the central dream becomes increasingly complex over the span of Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Great Expectations -- a span which traverses the early, middle, and late periods of Dickens's career.

Dickens's presentation of the ambiguities of human experience in Great Expectations interrelates fantasy and reality in such a manner that men's dreams prove to be less fantastic than the realities which issue from them; both dream and reality become indissoluble components of the tragi-comic human condition. This condition comes as near to being 'absurd' as a nineteenth-century writer who believed in a Divinity could imagine.

Oliver Twist displays the more optimistic Dickens in the early flush of personal success and with all the young man's faith in human perfectibility. The book neverthless reveals premature insights into the darker aspects of reality which Dickens later portrays with increasing penetration.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I

The following statement that Frank O'Connor makes about Dickens's work is closely related to my topic and invites some elaboration. He says of Dickens,

> In all his work there is a flight to the periphery of the story, a sort of embarrassment with the given material, yet, though this means that almost always the center of a Dickens book is empty or nearly empty, it means, too, that towards the periphery there is always a great sense of crowds and vitality.[1]

Though I agree, on the whole, with what Frank O'Connor says here, I would modify his statement somewhat. In Oliver Twist the reader's attention certainly turns to the periphery of the story, where dark comedy and sensation abound. The centre of the novel does appear empty, particularly in contrast to the crowded periphery. I can think of several kinds of embarrassment with the given material in Dickens's books and I find a particular kind of embarrassment in Oliver Twist. Where my thesis departs from Frank O'Connor's is in the separation that this writer seems to imply exists between the central and the peripheral material in Dickens's work. In Oliver Twist, as well as in David Copperfield and Great Expectations, I find a significant interaction between central and peripheral matters.

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[1] The Mirror in the Roadway (New York, 1956), p. 80.

Unless one sees that the periphery is intimately connected with the central idea in these novels, the peripheral material appears to offer a series of magnificent burlesques, outrageous caricatures, and sensational thumb-sketches roughly held together by a thin central thread of story which pulls in its train a non-hero. I think that Oliver Twist already offers an example of Dickens's early striving for a more closely-knit narrative unity than he had tried for in Sketches by Boz or was achieving in Pickwick Papers.

Like David Copperfield and Great Expectations, Oliver Twist offers a confrontation between a central dream and a peripheral nightmare. An enchanted dream world lies at the centre of the boys' stories: a golden, smiling idyll of benevolence and innocence.[2] This centre seems to be empty because it forms the focus not so much for characters and action as for a vision of idyllic happiness towards which the hero obviously strives, and the action inevitably moves, in each novel. Nevertheless, the idyll reverberates in the mind of author, hero, and reader while the crowded world of nightmare peripheral to the idyll closes in upon the hero and clamours for attention.

By their very nature, the centres of these books must seem empty; they contain little more than wishes that demand

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[2] For a different view of this dream, as a reflection of the Victorian bourgeois taste for domestic felicity, see: Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, translated by Angus Davidson (London, 1956), p. 128 ff.

fulfilment. Oliver, David, and Pip in turn symbolize a young Everyman who asks, insistently, for more. They desire what, in their innocent optimism, they take to be natural rights: love, protection, and security which they expect to receive from adults who bear some close relationship to them. The nightmare consists of forces that oppose these expectations: a host of people who first fail to show humanity of feeling for those with whom they share the most intimate relationships and then exhibit the same disregard for all with whom they associate. Such fundamental disorders in human affairs take on cosmic proportions in the hypocrisy of those who only pretend to benevolent solicitation for their fellows. In this hypocrisy, Dickens finds an entire society conspiring. Since the whole of Victorian society becomes implicated in this nightmare, it follows that towards the periphery of these novels, there is, indeed, a great sense of crowds and vitality.

Physical approximations to the idyll appear, fleetingly, within the novels. It finally materializes in the wish-fulfilment of each novel's happy ending, though it becomes progressively, and interestingly, modified over the span of the three books. On the other hand, the nightmare is embodied in action and dialogue throughout the novels; at times, it occupies so much space that it seems inaccurate to call it peripheral material.

In Great Expectations, the nightmare pervades the novel in the same way that mists permeate Cooling Marshes, and criminal darkness lowers over London. Now, as well as inher-

ing in unnatural activities on the part of normal human beings, the nightmare is embodied in a series of objective correlatives for disturbed states of mind. Even the hero contributes to the nightmare. Yet the dream idyll, here less golden and smiling, remains a focus for the hero's aspirations and withstands the competition it now receives, not only from the nightmare, but also from ignoble semblances of itself which form the centres of aspiration for characters who surround, and influence, the hero.

One source of embarrassment in these novels derives from the idyll at their centres. The reader feels embarrassed when Oliver asks for more; when David hopes to solve his problems by seeking refuge with Aunt Betsey. He feels embarrassed, too, when Pip and Joe look forward to "woT larX" they will enjoy once Pip becomes apprenticed to Joe, and later, when, with indomitable optimism and incredible innocence, they look forward to larks after Pip will have recovered from his fever. Such high hopes evoke a sympathetic response from the reader; but his experience of life, and of events in the novels, prompt him to reject such aspirations as mere pipe dreams. Dickens constantly renews the reader's awareness of alternatives to his everyday enterprise in compromise. Confrontations between innocent optimism and sardonic worldliness reveal to the reader an embarrassing dichotomy within himself which runs parallel to double standards that operate within the novels.

No discussion of Dickens's work can omit at least paren-

thetic reference to passages of excessive sentiment in his work. These occur when, not content with deploring the plight of innocence in an ignoble world, and seeking to mend that world by means of satire, Dickens abandons brave optimism and resorts to manic pathos. Such morbid indulgence of the emotions appears infrequently in Oliver Twist. On shifting attitudes to sentimentality Edward Wagenknecht remarks: "different periods are soft and hard in different ways and places." [3] The same may be said of Dickens: he can be soft with Agnes and yet murder Nancy.

The embarrassment that Frank O'Connor refers to is perhaps Dickens's own embarrassment with his materials. Such embarrassment occurs when Dickens's urge to reveal autobiographical materials in his stories struggles with his need to conceal them. At least three of Dickens's heroes, Oliver, David, and Pip take flight from symbolic representations of Dickens's experiences in Warren's Blacking Factory. To what extent Dickens vicariously makes amends for a flight he never undertook, but which he must have dreamed about during the time he worked at the factory, may only be speculated. Forster's biography of Dickens makes it clear that parts of David Copperfield, at least, were based on Dickens's own experiences. Edgar Johnson goes so far as to suggest that "David's flight from the warehouse is the dream-flight that

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[3] The Man Charles Dickens, revised edition (Norman, 1966), p. 113.

Dickens must often have visioned in his childhood grief." [4] Dickens repeatedly recalls his own experiences in his fiction; his approaching, and retreating from, painful material which insists on being exteriorised, may induce certain flights to the peripheries of his stories.

In the three novels I have mentioned, Dickens disguises painful memories in grotesque humour and macabre sensationalism which direct attention to the periphery of the stories and divert interest from the central dream. Ironically, this flight to the periphery leads the reader to images of those disorders which, by contrast, throw the central dream into greater relief. While such fusion of seemingly disparate elements of the story into organic unity may be found in the three novels, Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, and Great Expectations, it is worth remarking, because Dickens is not always given credit for it, that the embryo of this method of unifying his materials is to be found as early as in Oliver Twist.

In Dickens, however, personal experiences become universalized to describe what is familiar to every modern amateur psychologist: Everyman's shock on being expelled from the womb paradise into a cold, uncushioned world where, once the umbilical cord is severed, he must learn to fend for himself by establishing new lines of communication in order to

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[4] Charles Dickens, His Tragedy and Triumph (New York, 1952), II, p. 685.

obtain the requirements of life. The average child, in a healthy society, may expect co-operation from parents in this task; but while Dickens's heroes come into the world equipped with the normal needs of children, they do not emerge into normal family units. Dickens's preoccupation with this perplexing situation may stem from his early experiences of fragmentation within his own family, and from his later observations of families around him.

John Forster, who probably knew Dickens better than anyone else did, offers important information here. When the Dickens family entered the Marshalsea prison, the young Charles remained outside. He finally moved his lodgings nearer to the prison. Dickens recorded in a fragment of an autobiography that he once showed Forster, "when I took possession of my new abode, I thought it was a Paradise." Forster comments: "What was to him of course the great pleasure of his paradise of a lodging was its bringing him again, though after a fashion sorry enough, within the circle of home."[5] Edgar Johnson records that in 1844 Dickens wrote to a friend:"the greater part of the parents who came under his observation seemed to him selfish in their behavior to their children."[6]

Dickens repeatedly displays outrage at man's inhumanity to man. The neglect and abuse of children serve as his

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[5] The Life of Charles Dickens, new edition (London, 1966), I, p. 26.

[6] Tragedy and Triumph, II, p. 685.

major illustrations. His books are filled with orphans, mistreated children, and unhappy families. Disastrous illicit sexual relations and unions based on mean ambition further illustrate Dickens's point. These affairs lead to relationships lacking in Christian charity and love; they result in hypocrisy and cruelty towards those whose claim to affection and generosity should be strongest.

II

Dickens takes the plight of Oliver, David, and Pip to an extreme by depriving them of parents, and putting them at the mercy of a variety of surrogate parents and blood relations, some of whom resemble good fairies and most of whom act like witches and giants out of nursery tales. Indeed, many Dickens critics refer to fairy-tale elements in his stories. Edgar Johnson suggests that critics might well examine Dickens for something "in which the elements of the fairy tale are superimposed on the everyday world and the deep symbolic truths of myth gleam through to the surface."[7] Frank O'Connor goes so far as to say that, "In Dickens the fairy tale is being injected into the novel, expanding it to limits it has never reached before, and may never reach again."[8] Significantly, Dickens himself frequently alludes

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[7] Dickens Criticism, a Symposium (Boston, 1962), p. 10.

[8] The Mirror in the Roadway, p. 82.

to fairy tales in his works. I find marked resemblance between the trio of novels I have mentioned and the wish-fulfilment fantasies of the rags-to-riches kind of fairy tale.

In 1964 Harry Stone suggested that "The fairy-tale focus of Dickens's imagination -- one of the salient features of his creative bent -- affected his art momentously."[9] This writer finds it strange that "the contribution of fairy tales to Dickens's development has scarcely been touched upon."[10] Yet in 1963 Shirley Grob made a brief, but excellent, study of fairy-tale motifs in Dickens.[11] G. K. Chesterton, too, has made many allusions to the fairy tale in Dickens; these remain allusion; Chesterton stopped short of analysis. Much work remains to be done in the field. In my thesis I examine Oliver Twist as a kind of fairy tale. I hope to submit David Copperfield and Great Expectations to a similar investigation in a later work.

An interesting comparison may be drawn between the design of Cinderella -- itself such a wish-fulfilment fantasy as I have referred to -- and Dickens's method of fusing central and peripheral images in his three success stories. In relation to Oliver Twist I shall give this matter close attention in my final chapter. The optimistic picture of a change in the fortune of the central character in Cinderella

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9 "Fairy Tales and Ogres: Dickens's Imagination and David Copperfield," Criticism (1964), VI, 324.

10 "Fairy Tales and Ogres," p. 324.

11 "Dickens and Some Motifs of the Fairy Tale," Texas Studies in Literature and Language (1963), V, 567-79.

resembles the dream that comes true for Dickens's three orphans. Before the dream may be given substance, before Oliver, David, and Pip may be transformed from itinerant orphans seeking an identity in a society that offers them only cold comfort, individuals in that society must first agree to oppose, where they cannot change, unhealthy relationships that are symbolized in the peripheral material. In Dickens, truly benevolent patrons provide for the boys and so play the part of the nursery-tale's fairy godmother. Dickens obviously pins his hopes more on individuals than on conglomerate society as it is represented by its institutions.

Such wish-fulfilment fantasies as one finds in fairy tales, and in Dickens, offer secularised testaments to ancestral desires which were proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." Primitive emotions converge in this dream. Despite credibility-gaps in Dickens's plots, readers identify with his heroes' needs. Readers recognize in these heroes common, deeply-rooted aspirations which provide the necessary leap of the imagination to bridge credibility-gaps. When the heroes' stories end happily, the fantasy world of dream is proclaimed triumphant in acts of faith, hope, and charity on the part of author and reader alike. More precisely, faith predominates at the close of Oliver Twist; hope prevails at the end of David Copperfield; and charity towards man's pitiful dreams produces at the conclusion of Great Expectat-

ions, what Edward Wagenknecht describes as, "a book filled with the spirit of forgiveness, of Christian love and forbearance."[12]

Before I discuss any further aspects of the fairy tale in Dickens, I must make certain reservations. Dickens does, as Frank O'Connor suggests, expand the fairy tale to limits it had never reached before. As Dickens advances in his career, the world of his novels increases in complexity. Each of the three fairy-tale novels I have mentioned presents in succession a more realistically drawn world than that of the fairy tale, and each successive novel displays a less simplistic attitude towards human affairs.

This deepening complexity is apparent in Dickens's presentation of different kinds of patronage over the span of the three tales. Financial benevolence springs less and less from simple generosity of heart. Fairy godmother and godfather figures gradually disappear to give place to ambiguous figures, part fairy, part witch or ogre. Yet Nancy in Oliver Twist shows the first sign of this ambiguity. Actually, the possibility, even the desirability, of a fairy-tale wish-fulfilment gradually fades in a world that takes on increasingly absurd characteristics. Here, Dickens outstrips the bounds of fairyland, and expands the novel to encompass realities of far greater significance, both psychologically and philosophically.

Dickens presents not only worlds where connections seem

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12 Dickens and the Scandalmongers (Norman, 1965), p. 133.

to be more conventionally realistic than those of fairyland, but he also implies the existence of super-realities where connections prove to be not nearly as obvious, and as predictable, as those which people choose to find in their real world. Dickensian connections often operate in the manner that G. K. Chesterton describes:

> We may not see the direct logical connection between three beautiful silver spoons and a large ugly policeman; but then who in fairy-tales ever could see the direct logical connection between three bears and a giant, or between a rose and a roaring beast?[13]

The Dickens world seems more real than the real world in the same way that a dream from which one awakens seems, momentarily, more real than the real world. Dreams employ a more primitive language of symbols than those which people use daily. A similar language, which has been preserved in folk-myth and fairy tales, enables Dickens to communicate realities which one finds more often in poetry than in prose. These claims may seem somewhat wild. I back them up with evidence and explanations in the final part of Chapter Five of this thesis.

The wish-fulfilment kind of fairy tale reveals an archetypal pattern similar to the patterns Dickens uses in his works. A brief survey of the way in which this kind of tale works will suggest how Dickens adapts the mode to his purpose.

Rags-to-riches fairy tales pander to an audience's

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[13] Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "Fairy Tales," All Things Considered (London, 1908), p. 258.

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13 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, "Fairy Tales," All Things Considered (London, 1908), p. 258.

desire to picture the world as rational and ethical. Just like our everyday world, this imagined world depends on the belief in a necessary relationship between cause and effect. Within this particular world of connections, the causes are virtue and evil; the effects are due rewards and punishments. Beauty and ugliness often stand for good and evil in this fairy world. Furthermore, a reward of riches often goes hand in hand with the reward of a partner in marriage. This is logical. Through the ages, the wherewithal to earn a living and support a family have been regarded by organized societies as essential requirements before a marriage could be contemplated.

In the beginning of these tales, the good people are poor; the wicked are often wealthy and, or, powerful. When the wicked characters bear no relation to the good characters through blood or marriage, they sometimes stand in a master-servant relationship to them. Both relationships may co-exist.

Jack and Cinderella offer typical examples of good and humble characters who climb the social ladder, either by means of a beanstalk, or with the aid of glass slippers. Snow White, though she has royal blood, is deprived of her status and cast away from home by her jealous stepmother. Snow White eventually regains her status by means of her great beauty. It is interesting to note how often emblems of fertility assist the hero or heroine to exchange rags for riches. Beauty is one such emblem: it holds the promise of beautiful and healthy children and is therefore logically

associated with virtue. The beanstalk may offer a symbol of male virility; the glass slipper presents a fragile female sex symbol.

Examples of evil characters may be seen in the giant who possesses a castle where he devours enormous meals, and keeps a hen who lays golden eggs. Far below him Jack and his mother remain poor and hungry. Cinderella's stepmother and pampered, ugly stepsisters, who employ Cinderella as their servant, re$present evil of another kind. Jack is not wholly virtuous. He becomes a thief. This raises the question: does Jack become a criminal through force of circumstance, and does this excuse him? Or, is this story a representation of what happens when man ceases to be a shepherd, or in this case a cowherd, and takes up agriculture? Answers to these questions would take me too far from my immediate subject.

Fairy realms possess a ruling deity, Magic. Magic often walks on earth in the shape of a good fairy who works against the spirit of evil and helps the hero, or heroine, to achieve wealth, a suitable consort, and happiness. This triumphant assertion of the connections between virtue and rewards, evil and punishments, constitutes the happy ending.

This ending combines the terrible justice of the Eden myth with a dream of Paradise recreated on earth: the wicked are banished from the realm, or killed; the good inherit the riches of the earth in the form of wealth, a spouse, and immortality -- for the good always live happily ever after, and often they have lots and lots of children. However, the Paradise that is gained offers no return to a state of

innocence. Rather, it implies the beginning of a new, improved cycle of human relationships. Now, awareness of self as a discrete entity entails awareness of others, too. Now, the desirability of affectionate co-operation with others, as opposed to selfish rivalry or enmity, is recognized. This aspect of the fairy tale holds special prominence in Dickens's happy endings. More often than not, Dickens embodies the dream-come-true in a love-match and the establishment of a happy family.

I find in this kind of fairy tale a conspiration to cast a spell of sympathetic magic over the real world by the affirmation, through the medium of folk art, of a world approximating folk aspirations. This conspiration seems to embody a primitive impulse to perform fertility rites which will encourage procreation under the most desirable circumstances in the community. Sympathetic magic goes to work when children absorb these tales which inculcate in them the implied ethics based on experiences of previous generations. Far from being the naive escapism that they might appear to be, such wish-fulfilment fantasies grow from the fierce needs of people whose ambition it is to improve their chance of surviving in a dreadfully hostile world. These artificers belong with Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators of the world." When Dickens updates this tradition he resembles his ancient forebears in affirming human values and aspirations. His drawing upon archetypal patterns aids him in obtaining assent to his assertions from his readers.

A revolutionary might object that this kind of literature relieves the immediate emotional stress of an evil social system without immediately removing the cause. A Burkeian evolutionist would agree. But he would look at revolution, as Dickens does in A Tale of Two Cities, and decide that evolution may be no more costly in lives and institutions than is revolution, while it seems to offer a more durable progress. Dickens proves to be an active evolutionist in his social criticism; he prefers words to other persuasive weapons.

Dickens adapts the rags-to-riches fairy-tale mode for a mass audience which is largely materialistic in outlook, well versed in fairy tales, folk-lore, and the Bible, but unused to the sophistications of poetry written for an élite of previous centuries.

The happy endings in Dickens's books more often than not offer visions of ideal states of affairs which have grown out of the chaos in his fictional world. Order appears to come about according to laws that are presumed to be inevitable, even if they, like laws in the real world, move too slowly to save every person from injustice. Moreover, Dickens tries to persuade a largely bourgeois audience to concur with him in the need to make room in their hearts, if not in their ranks, for their less fortunate fellows. For he implies, in his criticism of bourgeois hypocrisy, that the middle classes need some of the forthrightness, generosity of heart, and good humour in adversity that he finds among

certain members of the poor. To be thus persuasive, the world within Dickens's fairy-tale novels must offer a super-reality, something more real than the real world. And they do.

Dickens partly conveys this super-reality as the fairy tales do: by heightening contrasts between good and evil. Until the mists rise on Cooling Marshes, there is little half-tone in the novels that I have been discussing. In Oliver Twist, in particular, brilliant prospects alternate with dark foreboding. The world is filled with black darkness except for those sunny moments at Mrs. Maylie's or those bright hours before Mr. Brownlow's fire. With very few exceptions, good characters possess every shining virtue, while evil characters are obvious associates of the fiend himself. In this way Dickens calls upon primitive memories in the collective unconscious of his audience. These are the memories of fundamental contrasts of good light and evil darkness, with the concomitant joy and sorrow that result from warmth and cold, food and famine. Dickens invents nothing here; he follows a long tradition in drawing upon such symbolic polarities.

He also appeals to a further primitive human instinct: the need to preserve the race, or tribe, by caring for, and protecting the young, which has made the family the basic unit in society. Connections that are presumed to be laws in Dickens's novels are blood and emotional relationships which exert expectations of reciprocal affection and generosity. The nightmare in Oliver Twist, David Copperfield,

and Great Expectations grows from a disregard for, or perversion of basic connections such as the husband-wife, parent-child relationships.

Had Oliver not been conceived illegitimately, had David's mother not made such an unwise second marriage, had Pip's surrogate parents not treated him as their "creature," the three novels would have no cause to be. The root evils of these novels may be traced to before the stories open. Again, the same malady may be discerned. In the interests of family pride and ambition Oliver's father had been pressed into an "ill-assorted union" with a woman ten years older than himself. Monks is the most "unnatural issue" of this monstrous, loveless marriage. Edwin Leeford then perpetuates an evil situation by falling in love with, and seducing, Agnes Fleming. Oliver is the child of this alliance. David's parents had been immature and devoid of "any practical ideas of life." David's mother appears to be a mere child when Betsey Trotwood meets her. Aunt Betsey arrives at the Rookery to save a female baby from making the same mistake that she herself has made -- that is, putting trust in a man unworthy of it. When the baby turns out to be a boy, Betsey leaves without realizing that she has, indeed, left behind a female baby who needs her wisdom and guidance. Pip's loveable stepbrother-father, Joe Gargery, proves too weak to protect the boy he loves from the base and foolish ambitions that Pip's sister and uncle conceive for the boy. Pip is drawn into Miss Havisham's private nightmare, itself issuing from a broken betrothal. If Joe is weak before Mrs. Joe Gargery,

it is because Joe and his mother had both suffered at the hands of a violent father-husband figure.

These are some of the terrible realities upon which Dickens builds his three fairy-tale novels. The dream at the centre of the stories presents an idyll that defies these nightmare realities in a vision of overcoming them.

It is time to abandon generalizations, and to examine in detail what happens when Dickens pits one small boy against such giant problems as I have suggested above. I shall now concentrate what I have to say on one of the earliest of "that long sequence of rejected children, fatherless or motherless, neglected or abandoned, who move through almost all of Dickens's stories."[14] He is Oliver Twist.

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[14] Johnson, Tragedy and Triumph, II, p. 684.

CHAPTER TWO

DICKENS'S MORAL PURPOSE IN WRITING OLIVER TWIST

I

It is as difficult to deny Oliver Twist a moral purpose as it is to find unanimity among critics who seek to define that purpose. Since the book's first appearance critics have disagreed in particular on Dickens's moral intentions in dealing with its topical issues.[15] George Gissing offers one side of the debate when he states unequivocally, "Oliver Twist had a twofold moral purpose: to exhibit the evil working of the Poor Law Act, and to give a faithful picture of the life of thieves in London."[16] Although the Poor Law and London's criminals do provide Dickens with timely references to topical issues,[17] Dickens does not treat them with the single-mindedness that he would have brought to bear upon them had they been the chief objects of his criticism.

Dickens's initial attitude towards his topical material speaks for itself when, shortly before Oliver Twist's first

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15 For pertinent criticisms of Oliver Twist from its first appearance until 1844, see Keith Hollingsworth, The Newgate Novel 1830-1847 (Detroit, 1963), pp. 126-131.

16 The Immortal Dickens (London, 1925), p. 67.

17 On the topicality of Oliver Twist see Humphry House, The Dickens World (London, 1941), pp. 42-45, and pp. 92-102.

appearance, he writes to an associate: "I send you herewith, the forthcoming Miscellany, with my glance at the new poor [sic] Law Bill."[18] A glance from Dickens can encompass a great deal. Yet Dickens restricts this glance to the early chapters of Oliver Twist and makes no special issue of the Poor Law when he states his aims in the novel's several Prefaces. Indeed, when Dickens criticizes the old poor-relief system in his glance at the new Poor Law, I conclude that he treats the new Law only as a starting point for more far-reaching criticism. I draw similar conclusions from Dickens's ambiguous treatment of London's criminals. His depiction of the tawdry misery of criminal life certainly offers some antidote to the glamour thrown around criminals in the Newgate literature of his day. In certain circumstances, however, he appears to defeat his avowed purpose by calling upon the reader's sympathy for criminals. I shall treat this point more fully in the second part of this chapter.

In fact, Dickens's criticisms throughout Oliver Twist indicate that he cares more about exposing fundamental human perversities, and correcting them by enlarging man's sympathies for his fellows, than about writing a critical tract specifically for his day. Dickens makes issues of topical interest in Oliver Twist subserve a broader moral purpose than many of his critics allow him. My concern is with this broader purpose.

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18 The Letters of Charles Dickens, I, 1820-1839, edited by Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford, 1965), p. 231, Dickens to Thomas Beard, 1/28/1837. Oliver Twist began to appear in Bentley's Miscellany in February, 1837.

To credit Dickens with aims he does not have is not my purpose. He makes no attempt to build a pretentious philosophical structure into his works. Edward Wagenknecht, always a careful judge of Dickens, declares that Dickens approaches problems of social reform "emotionally, intuitively, not intellectually, or, above all, schematically. Never in a thousand years could he have delivered himself over to a system."[19] George Orwell surveys the impression given him by Dickens and realizes that, "His whole 'message' is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent."[20] I would say that Dickens knows when a truism, rather than a platitude, is relevant to the problems of his time. Dickens has the courage to repeat that truism when he thinks it needs re-emphasizing. By creating a world in which he contrasts ugly with decent behaviour he gives the needed definition of his truism.

Dickens feels fiercely about certain injustices in his world, injustices which seem so to haunt him that they penetrate even the lighter-hearted passages in Oliver Twist. Indeed, the same injustices present no less a reality at the end of the book than on its first pages. In response to a nightmare world of evil realities Dickens conjures up a dream vision in which he places his young hero at the close of Oliver Twist. Nevertheless, the final dream-like pastoral idyll exists within an outer framework that is society

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and society itself remains just as evil at the end as at the beginning of the story. Society exhibits one redeeming feature: its vices sometimes bring out the very best in certain of its members.

In the final chapter of Oliver Twist, in the very midst of the idyll, Dickens is realist enough to remind his readers that beyond the charmed circle inhabited by the Maylies, and Mr. Brownlow, society has not changed. The workhouse still thrives, only under new management; Noah Claypole and Charlotte remain in business; young Dick, and countless unnamed children whom he represents, have not survived to tell the story of the misery meted out to them by society. Dickens has no need to remind his readers that although Fagin is no more, his brothers in that line of business continue to thrive in the real world of every town in England. For at that time, "The Jew fence was not merely a London character: he was known all over the country."[21]

Furthermore, although Oliver's aunt Rose manages to surmount the stigma attached to her name by society, her marriage is only made possible when her lover surrenders his ambition for rank and patronage, abandons the society of his powerful relatives, and retreats with Rose to a small country parsonage. Harry Maylie's stand against the false values of society forms an important part of the dream vision which Dickens creates in response to terrible social realities.

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[21] Humphry House, Introduction to the New Oxford Illustrated edition of Oliver Twist (London, 1949), p. viii.

That stand contrasts sharply with the initial evil from which Oliver's personal nightmare springs -- his father's culpable assent to his family's false values. The final words of the story remind the reader of further realities which lie beyond the idyll, for when Oliver grows up and wishes to marry he will have to contend with Rose's problem. Although Mr. Brownlow will no doubt give Oliver his name, society will still remember that Oliver's mother was "weak and erring." The consequences for Oliver will be no less problematical than if he had been deposited at birth in a hand-bag in the cloakroom on Victoria Station.

By reintroducing Agnes's image at the close of the book Dickens directs the reader's attention back to the child-bed and death-bed scene on the opening pages of the story. These pages immediately plunge the reader into a cold world of misery and pain where two human beings struggle for survival. Agnes at that time presents a figure familiar to the parish surgeon: "The old story," he said, shaking his head: "no wedding-ring, I see." (I). The tale thus opens and closes on an identical note of guilt and of sympathy for the guilty. Whenever Dickens calls upon the reader's sympathy for the guilty in Oliver Twist, the guilty person has been isolated from his, or her, fellows by a society which is in itself guilty of criminal inhumanity. Although Dickens does not condone individual guilt, he does not hesitate to point out that it often exists within a broader framework of hidden guilt on the part of the community.

In the interest of protecting women and providing for their off-spring, society has agreed that one of man's most primitive and powerful impulses must be bridled and confined within the bounds of marriage. Dickens has no quarrel with this law that gives prime responsibility for bringing up children to parents rather than to society. Agnes and her lover have broken this law. Dickens claims the reader's sympathy for them on the grounds that they loved each other; that Agnes believed that she would eventually marry Edwin; and that a worse crime than theirs had prevented their being married. Edwin Leeford's youthful marriage to an older woman, whom he did not love, had been a monstrous crime perpetrated against him by his family in the interests of their own base ambition. Since Leeford's wife appears to have brought no fortune into the family, and since she soon devotes herself to "continental frivolities" after her marriage, I conjecture that she must be the cast-off mistress of the same relative "to strengthen whose interest and importance [Oliver's] father had been sacrificed," and who, "to repair the misery he had been instrumental in occasioning, left him [Edwin] his panacea for all griefs -- Money." (XLIX).

Thus the evil source of Oliver's social status can be traced back to a lack of charitable humanity among men: first, to the Leeford family's lust for money and position overriding the claims of love and kinship; and then, to Leeford's and Agnes's carnal lust overriding the tenderness and selflessness of romantic love. Scene after scene in Oliver Twist illustrates

this ultimate source of evil. Brutal lack of charity goes hand in hand with the exploitation for financial gain of the weak by the strong, of a woman by a man, of a child by an adult.

Even the best comedy in the tale draws its material from this source. It is a black kind of comedy in which brutality and lack of charity exist in a member of the 'weaker' sex who turns the tables on her spouse and humiliates him: in ironic scenes of domestic disharmony in Sowerberry's kitchen and, above all, in slapstick comedy between the cowardly bully, Mr. Bumble, and his termagant wife. She brings into her second marriage more savage equipment than the beadle had counted on when he took stock of her silverware before proposing to her. Bumble experiences a truly appropriate contrast between his dream and the reality that issues from it.

Relationships between administrators and inmates of such Poor Law institutions as the workhouse and the baby-farm provide Dickens with the first in a series of related images. These permeate the tale and form its underlying theme: that brutal and uncharitable human relationships, particularly those most primitive relationships between the sexes and between adults and children, form the well-spring for most of the evils in the world of Oliver Twist. Significantly, Dickens begins by selecting these images from topical issues of the day; he persists in deploying similar perverse images throughout the tale. Their frequent recurrence

affords the reader clear evidence of Dickens's moral stance. In Chapter Three I shall show how these images also contribute to the unity of the book.

Since the very act of condemning something as evil implies some concept of good as a touchstone for judgement, those readers who feel, with Dickens, that the world into which Oliver is born is evil may be supposed to envision some better world. They may be expected, then, to sympathize with the hero, first, when he asks for "more," and later, when he formally rejects his nightmare life by declaring: "I am running away. They beat and ill-use me, Dick; and I am going to seek my fortune, some long way off." (VII). Here Dickens has found a remarkably concise means of naming his own project for his hero while allowing his character to act it out for himself. In the scene between Dick and Oliver, Dickens provides his audience with cause for anger and indignation. As a result, author, reader, and hero participate in the same revolt against an evil situation and share the same desire to change it. This desire may seem to be a mere pipe-dream to cynical realists among Dickens's audience. Nevertheless, those who see the evil world with Oliver's eyes -- as a distorted mirror-image of some beautiful world of innocence -- long to see the ugly reality transformed.

The brief leave-taking between Dick and Oliver is no mere set-piece of Victorian sentimentality. On the contrary, although it offers a truly harsh exposition of the boys' situations it also reminds the readers of age-old alternatives

open to man in his struggle with evil conditions on earth. Each boy envisions a flight from present realities. Dick dreams of soon finding kind faces in Heaven -- faces that he never sees when he is awake. Oliver, on the other hand, refuses to risk following Dick to an early grave. Instead, he will make a bid for a better life, "some long way off," but on this earth.

Oliver thus voluntarily takes upon himself Everyman's burden of seeking the good life for himself and of establishing his own identity in the world. It is revealing to see how literally Dickens interprets what more modern writers treat as a psychological problem. Oliver actually discovers who he is in a very literal sense of finding out who his parents were and where, by birthright, he belongs in society.[22] His burden is made heavy because he starts out on his quest as an itinerant orphan, friendless except for Dick; on the wrong side of the law, since he has run away from his legal guardians; and, as if he foreshadows more modern heroes who revolt against society, he is on the road with no clear destination in view and with no more than a penny in his pocket.

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22 Several coincidences lead to the discovery of Oliver's relatives. It is unfair to Dickens to exaggerate the number of these coincidences. See Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, p. 156 and again on p. 157. Praz declares that Mr. Brownlow is revealed as Oliver's grandfather. This critic also twice refers to Edwin Leeford as Edwin Leefold. He may, therefore, have used a corrupt text. K. Tillotson in her Introduction to the Clarendon Oliver Twist, p. xxi, describes a stage version, produced before the novel was finished, in which Oliver was revealed as Brownlow's grandson. Dickens had no hand in this production.

Dickens may count on fairly general approbation for his hero's aspirations. It is in the fulfilment of the dream that Dickens finds his severest critics. Readers who disdain the dream-come-true on the final pages of Oliver Twist and who criticize its bourgeois, ivy-clad domesticity because it promises no higher values ignore Dickens's very real fears. Oliver must survive in something less than the best of all possible worlds. Dickens feels that Oliver needs no Pangloss to teach him the intricacies of some "metaphysico-theologo-cosmolo-nigologie." Like many practical men of the nineteenth century, Dickens fears that when Oliver and his compeers go short of gruel, those who would suggest that the boys eat cake, as well as those who insist that Dickens's ambition is to see the poor "fed with turtle soup and venison out of gold spoons,"[23] stand in imminent danger of losing their heads.

On humanitarian grounds Dickens would deem it criminal, for example, to invite a young sweep to consider man's ultimate destiny when the boy is stuck inside a chimney and desperately needs help in wriggling out of a death-grip. In such circumstances, Dickens has no more sympathy with subjects for nice debate in the Garden of Academus than he has for the then-current custom of lighting straws beneath boy-sweeps' feet in order to extricate them from chimneys. Dickens is a pragmatist who sees an immediate need to re-

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[23] Charles Dickens, Postscript to Our Mutual Friend, 1865.

lease the child from his prison, to separate him from his cruel master, to wash and feed him, and to offer him a warm bed under a secure roof. Both Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Brownlow illustrate this practical application of the lesson of the Good Samaritan. If this is what it is to be bourgeois, I find it hard to quarrel with it when it leads people to offer Oliver the basic requirements for a healthy life.[24]

It is true that in David Copperfield (XIII), Mr. Dick becomes the mouthpiece for just such practical actions as these. Like Shakespeare's fools, Dickens's childish adults sometimes possess a wisdom of the heart that is denied their intellectual superiors. C. B. Cox suggests that "Dick's brains may be a little touched, but as he flies his kite on peaceful summer days, he evinces a god-like serenity." In fact, "In literature, the great and virtuous man is often a fool. Parson Adams, Uncle Toby, Don Quixote and Prince Muishkin are foolish because their enthusiasms, their kindliness, their visions, all reflect an ignorance of the cunning and deceit which constitute so much of human life."[25]

Dick's serenity is that of the saint. Those who only pretend to saintliness have to work at it all the time. Dickens criticizes most mercilessly whenever he finds an

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[24] Dickens's enormous popularity in the U.S.S.R., where Western bourgeois ideals are highly criticized, leads me to believe that the term 'bourgeois' as it is now thrown upon any object of contempt must be regarded as a cloak of many colours which is slowly growing threadbare.

[25] C. B. Cox, "In Defence of Dickens" (1958), in Dickens: Modern Judgements, edited by A. E. Dyson (London, 1968), p. 42.

empty-hearted braggart. In Bleak House (XlX), he creates a memorable figure of pompous obtuseness in Mr. Chadband. Gorged with food, and further inflated with ideas of his own wisdom, Mr. Chadband offers a discourse on spiritual enlightenment to the destitute and starving foundling, Jo. The flatulent windbag chooses to inquire "in a spirit of love" into the question which Jo has least need to ask: "What is bondage?" Dickens opposes to "such abominable nonsense" Mr. Snagsby's sincere practicality in offering Jo what he most needs -- the broken meats from Chadband's recent meal.

Dickens makes his position quite clear. A real concern to provide 'first-aid' for the needy forms part of the definition of decent behaviour that he repeats throughout his writing career. Oliver must change his name to that of a Philip Pirrip before Dickens will concern himself with a young boy's higher values. Even then, values of the heart become the subject for Dickens's ultimate enquiry.

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Oliver Twist opens on the vivid images of a prison-like institution in which Agnes dies in giving birth to Oliver. Some readers may not remember the subdued and gentle joy of the final pages of the book; none will forget the penultimate scene which takes place in Newgate's condemned cell. Here the half-crazed Fagin is left to send up "cry upon cry" as the last few hours of his life run out. He has had his last glimpse of virtue: Oliver has walked out of the condemned cell into the sunlight beyond. Fagin remains with only the reality of the noose before him and the final darkness it will bring him. This horrible depiction of the miserable reality of the criminal's fate caters to the reader's thirst for sensation. It appeals, at the same time, to the reader's sympathy for the mad old fence -- now more snared beast than man -- who will provide a holiday spectacle for the "pushing, quarrelling, joking" multitude which has assembled to watch him hang. Critics who question Dickens's moral purpose here tend to ignore that mob and the crowd at Fagin's trial thirsting for the old man's blood yet guilty themselves of who knows what crimes.

Not all critics agree with the writer in The Edinburgh Review (of 1838) who declares that Dickens "never endeavours to mislead our sympathies -- to pervert plain notions of

right and wrong -- to make vice interesting in our eyes."[26] In fact, the Introduction to Oliver Twist that Dickens wrote in 1841 offers a reply to charges that he had written a Newgate novel.[27] In this Introduction -- Dickens subsequently called it a Preface -- Dickens hopes that his description of the "miserable reality" of the thieves' world will be "a service to society" because it offers the "stern and plain truth" to counterbalance the glamour thrown around criminals in much of the fiction of the day.

From the perspective of more than a century after the novel was written, Alec Lucas returns to the accusation against Dickens by demonstrating that Oliver Twist "exhibits the same tendency to uphold -- to pity or admire -- felons and to scoff at law "[28] as does the Newgate novel. This writer further declares:

> The fact is that Dickens tried to defend Oliver Twist with the same arguments that Lytton had used to justify his Newgate novels. Aside from pointing out the general moral of Oliver Twist, that crime does not pay, the first preface. . .proclaims. . .the suitability of criminals for fiction on the ground that their characters need to be investigated and understood.[29]

Understanding, however, inevitably leads to sympathy. As Alec Lucas's article demonstrates, both Fagin and Sikes,

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26 Humphry House, The Dickens World, 2nd ed. (London, 1942), quotation on p. 40.

27 Kathleen Tillotson's Introduction to the Clarendon Oliver Twist, pp. xxvii-xxviii, cites evidence for this and describes how Dickens came to write this Introduction.

28 "Oliver Twist and The Newgate Novel," Dalhousie Review, XXXIV (1954), 384.

29 Ibid., p. 383.

brutal criminals though they are, do indeed attract the reader's sympathy once they become isolated as exiles from the society which has hunted them down.

It is worth noting that Monks, the real villain of the story, the man who exhibits least motivation for his evil ways, draws no sympathy from the reader. Monks's character is neither properly investigated by the author nor understood by the reader. He remains a stock character seemingly taken straight from Victorian melodrama but with some darker ancestry in the fairy tale. Earle Davis comments on the absence of sufficient evidence of psychotic obsession or financial greed to justify Monks's villainy and make him convincing.[30]

I have already suggested that the reader sympathizes with Oliver when he rebels against his intolerable situation and runs away to seek his fortune. In thus sympathizing and approving of Oliver's decisive action, the reader concurs with a boy who voluntarily becomes an outlaw. Dickens subtly expands his reader's imagination to encompass an understanding of the criminal-rebel who is forced by circumstances to abandon his legal status. Dickens thus lays the foundation for a more humane attitude towards the countless waifs of England's larger cities at that period. Henry Mayhew's chapter on The Sneaks, or Common Thieves of London

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[30] The Flint and the Flame (Columbia, 1963), p. 135.

describes "thousands of neglected children loitering about the low neighbourhoods of the metropolis, and prowling about the streets, begging and stealing for their daily bread."[31]

Dickens himself must have seen such boys every day when he worked in the Blacking Factory near the Thames. There, many of the waifs slept on barges or in mean shacks erected on the river banks. Dickens played, sometimes, with Bob Fagin on these very barges and banks during his meal-breaks. More than once, later in life, Dickens must have shuddered at the thought that but for a combination of circumstances he might have become one of these "mudlarks" destined for a life of crime.

The reader who ponders on Oliver's own good fortune in escaping from Sikes's and Fagin's ultimate fate, and the fulfilment of the ominous early predictions made for Oliver by the gentleman in the white waistcoat, must regard criminals with less hasty and obtuse prejudice thereafter.

Dickens's mature attitude to criminals may be found in Great Expectations where he portrays Magwitch and Orlick as examples of two criminal types. Magwitch is the man-made-criminal by social and economic circumstances from his birth; Orlick is the incarnation of natural evil impulse who might be regarded by today's criminal psychologists as possessing an abnormal chromosome factor.

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[31] Volume IV of London Labour and The London Poor (London, 1862), edited by Peter Quennell in London's Underworld (London, 1950), p. 133.

This leads me to speculate that Dickens already knew instinctively what present-day psychologists are establishing as fact. Dickens presents, even in Oliver Twist, two basic criminal types. He presents one kind who might have sprung direct from the devil's loins; these criminals might today be regarded as having been born with a certain biological make-up which favours criminal tendencies. Dickens also presents criminals whose childhood experiences would, without the intervention of a miracle, only lead to a life of crime. My point is, Dickens may subtly subvert his reader's preconceived notions about criminals when he shows that some of them are victims of society's imperfections. The reader does not have to imagine Oliver without a charm laid upon him. Nancy, Fagin's boys, even Noah Claypole and Charlotte deserve to be judged in the light of their early experiences of reality. Logically, Fagin and Sikes deserve similar consideration. Dickens tells the reader that Monks was evil even as a baby; what does he tell the reader of Sikes's and Fagin's backgrounds? Dickens does offer two hunting scenes in which Fagin and Sikes figure as the prey and which offer some parallels, as well as contrasts, to the chase in which Oliver is the prey.

The reader pities Fagin and Sikes while remaining aware of their essential criminality. Dickens so works upon his audience's imagination that it pities even the most degraded individual once he forfeits his place among human kind and

becomes reduced to the level of a hunted animal. This is even more true when the hunters are human beings who have abdicated their own humanity to some extent. Such is the mob in and outside the prison at Fagin's trial. Earlier, such is Fagin himself when, like a rabid beast, he claws at Sikes and poisons his mind into believing that Nancy has denounced him. Thus Sikes carrys out Fagin's own murderous designs upon the girl. Dickens pulls the reader's sympathies in many directions at once. If the reader can pity these felons, how much more will he pity those whose innocence never stands a chance of resisting perversion and exploitation by such men!

During the course of the action in Oliver Twist, all the terrible injustices endemic to Dickens's nightmare world reverberate in the reader's mind so that he becomes prey to many conflicting emotions. Where is he to lay the ultimate blame? The reader must know that at the very moment Sikes murders Nancy doctors are somewhere hurrying post-haste to houses of the rich such as Brownlow's or the Maylies'. The doctors will dine well, or practise their art upon those who can pay well and offer warming spirits into the bargain. Meanwhile, doctors' apprentices despatch "medicine in a blacking bottle, off-hand," (V) to the destitute sick whose complaint is never diagnosed until it is time to measure them for a very narrow coffin. Somewhere else Sowerberry is probably measuring for a coffin the corpse of a woman who has starved to death while her husband languished in prison

because he begged in the streets for her. (V). Someone like old Sally, in some rural workhouse, robs the young corpse before it is yet cold. Some wise old woman like Mrs. Mann, who knows what is good for herself better than she knows what is good for children, maintains orphan babies on a less than subsistence diet, and contributes in her own way to population control by hastening weaker souls such as Dick's out of this Malthusian world. As I shall demonstrate in my next Chapter, the catalogue of crime in this nightmare world seems to be endless. The world in which Bill Sikes kills Nancy is indeed a world in which "plain notions of right and wrong" desperately need assertion.

I suspect that Dickens himself knows not where to lay the blame for the nightmare world he sees around him. He seems to feel himself as murderer, judge, and murdered person all in one. Finally, all that he can say is, "If men would behave decently the world would be decent." In saying this he does more. For the little space of time in which he engages his reader's emotions he does obtain fierce assent to his basic moral thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

PERVASIVE NIGHTMARE IMAGES IN OLIVER TWIST

I

Dickens's consistent deployment of uniformly similar nightmare images throughout Oliver Twist does more than offer clear evidence of his moral stance. By providing a heterogeneous patchwork of scenes and characters with a common nightmare denominator these images help to bind together extraordinarily diverse materials. Oliver Twist offers an interesting early example of what Stephen Wall identifies in later Dickens novels as "an organic relation between his plots and his morality."[32]

In this chapter I wish to show that Dickens's moral stance connects the different parts of Oliver Twist by consistently exposing the same shocking realities in each part. These realities spur the reader to join the hero in dreaming of a quite different world. The story's happy ending fulfils a desire which Dickens nurtures in the first pages of the book and subsequently continues to promote in his main plot. From the start, Dickens himself possesses a dream vision. He names his overall project for Oliver in the book's subtitle:

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[32] "Dickens's Plot of Fortune," Review of English Literature, VI (1965), 67.

"The Parish Boy's Progress." This is to be no Rake's Progress, but the very opposite. Indeed, Dickens confesses three years after the story is finished, "I wished to shew, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last."[33]

My debt to Humphry House for his opinions and historical data on the world of Dickens is enormous. I, however, must disagree with him on one point. I cannot see that such a dichotomy exists between the emotional climate of the early and later chapters of Oliver Twist as he asserts:

> Some adjustment of attention is needed to see the frighteningly evil world of the later part of Oliver Twist, which has the private emotional quality of a bad dream, as a proper development of the opening chapters. We tend rather to think of the first part as a detached tract, preliminary to the novel that matters. But for its earliest readers the emotional connexion would have seemed far closer.[34]

Every reader must sense a dislocation between the early and later chapters of the book. Once Oliver sets out to seek his fortune the movement of the narrative becomes markedly disjointed. Oliver's brief, but painful, period on the road provides a demareation between the small-town scene and the teeming metropolis. In this brief intrusion upon the rhythm of the narrative I find a direct physical intimation of Oliver's own faltering, and staggering, in a no-man's land that separates the past scene of his babyhood nightmares

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33 Dickens's Preface to the third edition of Oliver Twist, see the Clarendon Oliver Twist, p. lxii.

34 The Dickens World, 2nd ed. (London, 1942), p. 92.

from the new scene of his boyhood. In the new setting Oliver's nightmare does not disappear, but periodically vanishes from sight for increasingly longer spells of time in favour of dream-like experiences of an altogether other way of life.

Once arrived in the City, Oliver becomes immersed in what seems to be a thoroughly different world that is clearly filled with criminals. Yet the relationships between men and women, and between adults and children, bear striking resemblances in both the old and new settings. Actually, the London scene presents no more perverse a picture than that which Oliver has left behind him. The incidence of crime is in proportion to the larger world in which it exists. Since laws punish the new kinds of crime that Oliver discovers in London, certain distasteful behaviour now becomes more clearly identified as criminal. In addition, the reader now remarks strong similarities in the behaviour of those who are branded as criminals and others who masquerade as respectable pillars of society. Before I discuss these similarities, I have one further remark to make.

Dickens draws certain odd analogies in Oliver Twist that are not unrelated to the kind of analogy Gay suggests in The Beggar's Opera. Gay is one author -- Voltaire another -- to whom Dickens refers in his Preface to Oliver Twist. In fact, he refers to these two authors in the same breath. Like Gay in his play, like Voltaire in his novels, Dickens suggests that human nature is the same the world over: there exists one law for the strong and another for the weak. Almost everywhere in Oliver Twist one part of the world exploits the other part without regard to any claims the

weak might make upon the strong. The unscrupulous strong in Dickens's tale exhibit brutal avarice combined with ruthless egocentricity; they tend to exploit the advantages, and neglect the responsibilities, associated with inherited or acquired power and rank.

In the opening chapters of Oliver Twist the homeless, the hungry, the unemployed, and the pauper sick depend on the mercies of small, but sturdy, pillars of provincial society. In descending order of rank and authority these are: the local magistrates; the elected Board of Governors of the workhouse; the parish surgeon; the administrators who run the workhouse and its annexed baby-farm. With these last the town's tradesmen work hand in greedy business hand.

The reader's common sense tells him that a similar kind of social organization must also prevail in the administration of workhouses in the City. What Dickens concentrates on revealing in the London scenes is the same kind of hierarchy prevailing in the criminal underworld. Monks is a gentleman-criminal who springs from a social background similar to Steerforth's in David Copperfield, and to Compeyson's in Great Expectations. Monks's class superiority, and the consequent power of his money, allow him to manipulate the head of a criminal gang to his own ends. In turn, Fagin exploits weaker, less cunning, and more needy individuals than himself. Fagin's associates follow the example of their leader in being ready to exploit and cheat their fellow gang members. Everyone, including Monks, goes in fear of

the City magistrates. Not even a respectable and honest citizen such as Mr. Brownlow may feel immune from the bullying passion of a magistrate such as Mr. Fang.

In bringing together in one story elements of the Poor Law system, administrators of the Criminal and Civil Laws, and members of the criminal underworld Dickens exposes certain practices of those who profess to be on the right side of the law as no less despicable than the actions of criminals whose surest prospect is the gallows.

When Dickens introduces Oliver to various administrators of the Poor and Criminal Laws, he not only criticizes weaknesses in these Laws, he criticizes evils within the nature of the people who make and administer the Laws. He implies that such evils will outlast the institutions with which they are connected.

Mr. Bumble ostentatiously wears the parochial badge of office which portrays the Good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. Yet Mr. Bumble carries a wax-ended cane "for purposes of parochial flagellation." The cane is his true badge of office -- he is a habitual bruiser, rather than a healer. Moreover, the beadle is constantly arranging to bury people who have come under his care. This whited sepulchre comes of ancient lineage. When the beadle addresses Oliver as "a naughty orphan what nobody can't love," (III) Dickens's criticism strikes beyond the Poor Laws to the pompous attitude of mind behind them that carries over into their administration. The debate as to whether the beadle

belongs to the old or new system matters little. He represents a familiar attitude of mind that equates orphaned illegitimacy with criminality, and condemns young paupers as "juvenile offenders against the poor laws." (II).

By bringing Oliver before a "half blind and half childish" magistrate who, but for his shortsightedness and clumsiness, would have sanctioned Oliver's indentures to the villainous Gamfield, Dickens confronts the reader, as well as the hero, with an administrative world of absurd muddle. Here right and wrong are no functions of justice; privilege and position bear no relationship to responsible and efficient actions. In appearing before the vicious City magistrate, Mr. Fang, Oliver meets another man of law totally unfit for his position, in whom rank incompetence vies with the insolence of office each time that he shouts, "Swear this person!"[35]

Dickens demonstrates that might may wrongly be mistaken for right, and that power may be criminally abused and go uncorrected, because the abusers are also the wielders of 'justice.' Yet he does not preach anarchy. His aim is not to destroy the structure of society, but to correct its human disorders. Dickens vents his fierce indignation not on the legal system itself but on the human blemishes within the system. It is worth remembering that in the final scenes of

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[35] For details on Fang's real-life counterpart see the Introduction to the Clarendon Oliver Twist, p. xxxvii.

Oliver Twist, Mr. Brownlow, a man with a strong sense of common justice, upholds the authority of the law. Mr. Bumble, who has repeatedly abused his legal authority in his parish, is the character who declares that "the law is a ass -- a idiot." (LI).

Mr. Bumble's statements, as well as his actions, have a peculiar way of rebounding upon him. Early in the story he explains to Sowerberry the need for yet another coffin. The beadle reveals that an impoverished husband in the parish has refused medicine sent "off-hand" to his sick wife by the surgeon's apprentice while the doctor is out dining. Mr. Bumble laments the behaviour of these "proud" and "obstinate" people, "rebels" who refuse "Good, strong, wholesome medicine, as was given with great success to two Irish labourers and a coalheaver, only a week before -- sent 'em for nothing, with a blackinbottle in . . . ." (V). Since the medicine was "sent 'em for nothing," the beadle may well be lamenting the waste of parish money when he describes the inscrutable antics of the poor as "antimonial" immediately after he has described their behaviour as "sickening." The medicine itself was, most probably, emetic. I suspect the beadle's indignant outburst reveals a complex and unconscious association of ideas. He may, in his innocence, also be thinking of a term he has somewhere heard which describes a frame of mind closely akin to his own -- or at least, his interpretation of the term -- that of the Antinomians who maintain that the moral law is not binding on Christians.

A catalogue of some of this unchristian behaviour exhibited in the early, as well as in the later, parts of Oliver Twist hardly fits this discussion. It does, however, demonstrate the omnipresence of images of horrible realities which confront the hero through most of his progress towards a dream world and does require the fuller study that follows in the next part of this chapter.

II

Dickens's plot and subplots in Oliver Twist introduce the reader to a series of sketches of domestic disharmony where the bonds of consanguinity and marriage are variously dishonoured. Even among the Maylies the reader detects a prevailing discordant note until in the final pages of the book the family enters into the dream idyll. The one harmonious home in the story belongs to a bachelor, Mr. Brownlow.

The cruel absence of reciprocal affection and compassion that should exist among people who are closely related finds its parallel in what Dickens chooses to exhibit of the extended 'family' that composes society.

The workhouse offers Dickens a fecund illustration of his theme. In its very name the workhouse comprises a mockery of a 'home.' It is not designed to be one. The ideas behind this 'home' for paupers reflects discredit upon the aims and ideals of the society which produced it. A fervent belief in individual enterprise and self-help formed part of the Victorian Dream. The workhouse was therefore designed to encourage independent self-reliance.

Early Victorians were not in possession of Mendel's findings on genetics. Part of the Victorian Dream seems to have been based on the romantic assumption that all men are born equal, and that once the umbilical cord is severed a man should be free to anticipate unlimited progress. Rousseau

saw that men were neither free nor equal; he blamed civilized society. The truth is more complex. The severing of the umbilical cord cuts off an automatic food supply and leaves the individual trailing chains of inherited chromosomes whose every link bears genes to govern the individual's characteristics. No two persons are identical from birth. Their inherited differences become further differentiated by inequalities in the psychological and physical environment that subsequently confronts them.

It is, then, inhumane to leave certain people free to 'do their own thing,' which I take to be a contemporary equivalent for the nineteenth-century catchword for so many meanings: laisser-faire. It produces not only the freedom to exploit others but also the freedom to be exploited and to starve.

Dickens needs no scientific evidence to lead him to this conclusion. With one glance at the world, he sees intuitively the need for compassion towards the deserving weak on the part of the strong. He consistently calls for more benevolence in the world. What Louis Cazamian calls Dickens's "philosophie de Noel" may rightly be attributed to Dickens; not because he always depicts Christmas as a generous and joyful occasion -- he does not -- but because the Christmas story depicts three rich and wise men bringing gifts to a helpless and needy child. These pragmatists, who see in a child the promise of new Life, bring benevolent gifts of gold and medicine to him. This spirit of Christmas forms an

important part of Dickens's philosophy of benevolence, his philosophie de Noel.[36]

In the workhouse scenes of Oliver Twist, Dickens exposes a hypocritical society helping its richer self by economising at the expense of the poor. Although the workhouse's aim -- to put itself out of business -- is not bad in itself, its method of achieving this goal is ruthlessly calculating. It encourages paupers to suffer hunger and privation beyond its walls rather than to endure additional indignities within them. Dickens rightly points to the worst of these privations: the separation of family members once they enter the workhouse. Here society sets an evil precedent.

The parish adopts an outward sign of humanitarianism in providing shelter for its paupers. The parish's true attitude towards these is as despicable burdens even when the paupers are new-born and guiltless in themselves. A terrible complicity reigns between parish authorities, beadle, baby-farmer, surgeon, and undertaker. Until Oliver parts from Dick, the only kind of fraternity depicted in the early pages of the story is a business fraternity. One brief passage from the story suffices to describe this complicity. When awkward questions were occasionally asked about a child's death at the branch-workhouse,

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36 Louis Cazamian, Le Roman Social en Angleterre, 1830-1850, 2nd edition (Paris, 1904), chapter IV, "Dickens -- La Philosophie de Noel."

> these impertinences were speedily checked by the evidence of the surgeon, and the testimony of the beadle; the former of whom had always opened the body and found nothing inside (which was very probable indeed), and the latter of whom invariably swore whatever the parish wanted; which was very self-devotional. Besides, the board made periodical pilgrimages to the farm, and always sent the beadle the day before, to say they were going. (II).

This is one of several passages in the book which should reverberate in the reader's mind, later, when Fagin is tried for collusion in a murder case. If the later parts of Oliver Twist convey the atmosphere of a bad dream, it is partly due to a cumulative process which begins in the first chapters.

I should remark that the Poor Law Commissioners' original intentions were excellent, even if the subsequent administration of their recommendations left much to be desired.[37] Dickens sees the immediate misery the Law creates; he does not see the Law's ultimate propensity for good.[38] On the other hand, the 'realities' of Dickens's fiction should be seen for what they are: literal translations for felt realities communicated by means of the artifices of a medium which dictates its own rules. For Dickens is not writing a History of the Poor Law; he is incorporating and transposing topicalities in a novel kind of fairy tale.

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[37] For a fuller treatment of this subject see Humphry House, The Dickens World, 2nd ed. (London, 1942), pp. 97-99.

[38] See G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History (London, 1942), pp. 538-539 for a view, based on hindsight, of Dickens's attitude to the Poor Law. For a less sympathetic view of Dickens's "confusion of mind which reflects the perplexity of his time," see G. M. Young, "Portrait of an Age," Early Victorian England, 1830-1865, II, ed. G. M. Young (London, 1934), pp. 455-456.

Prison images find their way into most of Dickens's fictions. He often describes homes in terms of prisons. The young David Copperfield suffers imprisonment in his own home at the hands of his stepfather. Philip Pirrip spends his early youth in a home which his sister runs more or less as a prison. This hero of Dickens's maturity soon discovers that prisons can also be self-imposed, and may result from imprisoning states of mind. Dickens's early hero, Oliver, knows nothing of such subtleties. He has to cope with 'prisons' unjustly imposed upon him by surrogate parents society provides him with and, later, with imprisonment which his stepbrother arranges for him at Fagin's.

Society's surrogate homes for paupers in Oliver Twist resemble nothing so much as prisons. Towards the end of the story, Oliver returns to his birthplace and sees the workhouse as "the dreary prison of his youthful days, with its dismal windows frowning upon the street." (LI). Now the workhouse assumes a monstrous life of its own, its lean porter standing at the gate seeming anxious to usher Oliver back into its hungry jaws as the boy shrinks away in fear. No less prison-like is Mrs. Mann's baby-farm. There, this witch-mother locks in dungeon-like coal-cellars those children placed under her "parental superintendence" who presume to cry when they are hungry.

Inmates and staff of the workhouse show no more family feeling in dealing with each other than Mrs. Mann shows her babies, and society shows its paupers. No more fraternity exists among workhouse paupers themselves, who nevertheless

share a common misfortune, than honour prevails among thieves in their community in London.

Old Sally robs Agnes as she dies in childbirth. In turn, the workhouse crones steal the last cup of wine from Sally's lips as she lies dying. Mr. Bumble eagerly anticipates the death of his superior, the Master of the workhouse, in order to step into his shoes. Both Mr. and Mrs. Bumble bully and humiliate workhouse inmates. In return, the women in the wash-house delight in witnessing the new 'Master' of the workhouse mastered in public by his new wife. She is spied upon, and followed in secret, by workhouse crones just as Noah Claypole later spies upon, and follows, a member of the gang he joins in London.

Dickens finds the same vicious inhumanity existing among the townsfolk beyond the confines of the workhouse. Gamfield the sweep, all too ready to exploit a child for his own gain, would surely starve Oliver in order to protract the period during which the boy would be tiny enough to scramble into chimneys. Gamfield may ill-treat his pauper apprentices without any more interference from the law than when he savagely kicks his horse. In fact, as soon as Oliver reaches the legal age at which he can start work, and then shows himself to be a 'rebel' at the workhouse dinner-table, the Guardians are ready to pay Gamfield, "whose villanous countenance was a regular stamped receipt for cruelty," (III) for his trouble in relieving them of a burden.

Again, the Sowerberrys are bent on exploiting Oliver at minimum cost to themselves; and ready to capitalize on the

potentially pathetic and picturesque sight the boy's tiny figure will make at juvenile funerals. Olive feeds on scraps that the household dog scorns to eat. Still, Mrs. Sowerberry lives in daily fear that Oliver will eat her out of house and home, in this "home" where Oliver receives savage beatings and worse still, hears his mother's name insulted by another parish pauper. Beatings Oliver can withstand. He can make do with a bed among the coffins. The insult to his mother's name he cannot accept. This finally sparks his revolt and his subsequent flight from the nightmare.

The heartless treatment that the Sowerberry family offers the defenceless newcomer under their roof carries over into relations between the members of this family. Mrs. Sowerberry, a castrating shrew of long lineage in English literature and one of several such wives in this tale, spars for daily supremacy over her husband. He is so little master in his own home that what compassion he feels for Oliver he must show covertly and beyond the confines of his house.

As if Nature would redress an imbalance, Mrs. Sowerberry's personality and her vixenish countenance finds a fawning contrast in her servant, Charlotte. She willingly serves as beast of burden for the idle and cowardly apprentice Noah Claypole. He exploits for his own advantage Charlotte's gullibility and her lust for him. Charlotte robs the Sowerberrys to run away with Noah only to find that he is ready, if need be, to save his own skin at the expense of her neck. Certainly, it will be by the sweat of Charlotte's brow that Noah will finally make his living. Charlotte is destined for

Nancy's career in the long run. Furthermore, in the nightmare world that Dickens creates in imitation of a real world he knows all too well, there is nothing outstandingly shocking in this.

It is no more distressing than other facts revealed by social histories of the period. Boy sweeps could not really look forward with confidence, as Tom in The Water Babies looked forward, to "the fine times coming, when he would be a man, and a master sweep"[39] like his master, Mr. Grimes. Too many young sweeps suffocated in chimneys or lost their way in bends of the more tortuous chimneys and, unlike Tom, never extricated themselves. Indeed, skeletons have been found within chimneys of those early Victorian houses that have subsequently been torn down.[40] Sweeps who survived these hazards had others to contend with. There was a disease endemic to the profession, "the peculiar and horrible disease of climbing boys,"[41] which was cancer of the scrotum.

On the other hand, prostitutes sometimes felt a vocation for their career. Henry Mayhew's writings on the subject, and Steven Marcus's The Other Victorians, reveal that many prostitutes of the period were 'casuals' supplementing in-

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39 Charles Kingsley, The Water Babies (London, 1957), p. 4.

40 Charles Dickens, A Centenary Volume, edited by E. W. F. Tomlin (London, 1969), p. 135 offers an illustration from I825 of a boy sweep retrieved dead from a chimney.

41 Humphry House, The Dickens World, 2nd ed. (London, 1942), p. 217.

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comes derived from other honest, or dishonest, sources. Nancy appears to belong to this latter class; Charlotte, no doubt, will join it too. The fact is that this source of income was more profitable, and certainly less hazardous, than many occupations open to women in mines and textile mills of the period.

Henry Mayhew remarks of prostitutes that, "One of the peculiarities of this class [of women] is their remarkable freedom from disease. They are in the generality of cases notorious for their mental and physical elasticity."[42] It is possible that Mayhew was privileged to observe a strange case of "the survival of the fittest." Mayhew is not, of course, referring to diseases common to the trade, but implies that even these were less widespread than was generally thought. Dr. William Acton made a study of prostitution in the first half of the nineteenth century. He declares: "By far the larger number of women who have resort to prostitution for a livelihood, return sooner or later to a more or less regular course of life."[43] The real threat to Charlotte, as to Nancy, is a perverse attraction to a felon who will exploit her affections for him.

Oliver escapes from the nightmare realities in his hometown only to find that further afield, in London, a new kind of imprisonment and exploitation awaits him. At first he feels

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[42] Peter Quennell, Introduction to London's Underworld (London, 1950), p. 32.

[43] Ibid., p. 25.

that he has found a kindly old father figure in Fagin. He soon learns that he and the other boys under Fagin's roof live entirely at the fence's mercy; they only owe their continued existence to their usefulness to him. He has still not found a real family to offer him true affection and a secure lodging.

Fagin evinces no more, and let it be remarked, no less, paternal solicitude for his young pupils than Mrs. Mann, the Bumbles, Gamfield, or the Sowerberrys show parental concern for their young charges. The Jew differs from Oliver's earlier acquaintances only in being recognized as a criminal by a society that is to some extent composed of people like those Dickens places in his microcosmic world of Oliver's home town.

The Poor Law required people who could not work to submit to gruel in the workhouse, or starvation on the streets. When Fagin has food he feeds his apprentices on something better than gruel; certainly on something better than scraps disdained by a dog. The old fence also proves more generous with the gin than is Mrs. Mann. Of course, his charges are larger than hers (the pun is intentional), and his motives in dulling the boys' senses more complex. Fagin knocks his pupils about no more than Oliver has seen happen elsewhere. The incidence of deaths among the young thieves is probably no higher than among Gamfield's boys; certainly less than on

Mrs. Mann's farm if her farm bears any resemblance to the notorious Drouet baby-farm.[44]

Dickens gives no evidence of Oliver having been offered any formal education until Fagin offers the boy The Newgate Calendar. What is more, the wise old gentleman teaches his pupils the rudiments of social philosophy. It is a discipline far more democratic than anything Oliver has thus far experienced. Fagin's discovery of the superiority of the magic of the number one over the older magic numbers three and seven leads to his teaching the more up-to-date philosophy of "one for all, and all for one." Oliver leads a relatively charmed life at Fagin's. He is neither forced to adopt this philosophy nor to submit to Fagin's peculiar version of the workhouse rule: those apprentices not gainfully employed, who return to the thieves' den empty-handed, go to bed hungry and are occasionally thrown down the stairs.

It is true that in dealing with the criminal world in London Dickens constantly emphasizes the dreadful probability that some of the boys and the adults will one day find their way to the gallows. Inevitably, Fagin will inform on them once they fail to be of use to him. No less horrifying, however, are the risks to life and health that I have indicated exist in the non-criminal world of Oliver Twist.

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44 Humphry House, The Dickens World, p. 100, describes the vast farm at Tooting "where 1,400 children were kept together with awful overcrowding, [which] had an outbreak of cholera in which many children died." This, in 1848.

Echoing parallels in the nightmare may be found in the smallest details of the action. For example, Fagin's exploitation of Tom Chitling's 'weakness' for Betsy results in the thieves' prostitute "pulling off a job" of great profit to Fagin. For this job Tom receives six weeks of hard labour because he refuses to "split" upon Betsy. (XXV). In the same chapter in which the reader learns about this, he witnesses the Artful Dodger and Master Bates conspiring together to take advantage of Tom's gullibility in order to cheat him at cards. The old adage, "Like father, like son," comes to mind here.

These comprise some of the grim realities of the "world of sorrow and trouble" into which Dickens brings Oliver. The world is that of the dark and cold primeval forest fraught with nightmare scare and danger. Here, as red in tooth and claw as any fiery dragon in folk memory, man cares less for his young than do most beasts. Man commits violence against his own species as does no animal which has not learned man's ways. Man commits such outrage not for sheer survival's sake but because his nature combines avarice with cruelty.

Oliver's task requires that he traverse this forest in quest of a glint of light that beckons from beyond the dark of the wood. It is the light of a golden dream which promises warmth and security from adults who live in an enchanted world where all is loving benevolence and bright confidence, where evil is powerless against such true goodness. Only a child can believe in its reality, of course, and Dickens

therefore closes the book before Oliver grows old enough to face the problems of adulthood. There is, however, some fundamental truth in every fairy tale. This will be the subject of my next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAIRY-TALE ELEMENTS IN THE STORY

I

Although Shirley Grob admits that Dickens introduces fairy godmother figures into his early novels, she believes that in these early novels "Dickens has not yet begun to make much use of [the fairy godmother figures'] fairy-tale associations."[45] She asserts that "It is not until David Copperfield that Dickens begins to exploit the fairy tale."[46] This opinion I do not share. The same writer suggests that David Copperfield sees the people around him as fairy-tale figures: as ogres, giants, enchantresses, princesses, genie, and revengeful fairies who employ the "traditional witch practice of bewitching children in order to eat their hearts."[47] I find Dickens dressing characters in Oliver Twist in just the same garb even if the fairy-tale labels are less explicit than in David's story. The wizard's stick, the fairy wand, the sudden first appearances of magical characters and their abrupt departures all figure in Oliver's story too.

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45 "Dickens and Some Motifs of the Fairy Tale," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, V (1963), p. 569.

46 Grob, p. 569.

47 Grob, p. 573.

The problem in examining any Dickens story for its fairy-tale elements quickly becomes apparent. The examiner begins by calling Dickens's stories novels and then proceeds to scrutinize their fairy-tale elements as a kind of exotic superimposed embroidery.

A more fruitful approach to the problem lies in examining certain of Dickens's tales as fairy tales. It might be objected that Dickens assumed that he was writing novels and that no real fairy story was ever composed in regular weekly or monthly instalments to boost the sales of a magazine. These objections are valid up to a point. Nevertheless, Dickens's own references to magic and to fairy tales in his stories indicate that he has certain analogies in mind as he writes. Fairy tales were certainly not produced in regular short instalments; but they were, like Dickens's stories, produced for a mass audience. Fairy tales have passed from generation to generation and from one culture to another. In the process they have undergone mutations and changes so that it is no easier to establish their original form than to divine their exact symbolic significance. What is clear is that people through whose hands -- more likely mouths -- these stories passed modified details to coincide with their own peculiar concepts and desires. Yet the same basic tales may be found among many different peoples. They may, then, be regarded as offering material of universal appeal to human beings. Certain things can be said of such cumulative materials as are to be found in folklore:

> For psychology tells us the importance of the fictive experience as a release mechanism in expression of matters otherwise repressed. To discuss the story in emergent symbolic psychological terms is to see the tale as a physical embodiment of an internal experience. And when the experience can be shown to be extrapersonal the narrative achieves psychological importance for the group as well as the individual. Thus we can relate the implicit values of the story to the lives of those of the group.[48]

When Dickens consults audience reaction to characters and events in the monthly or weekly issues of his tales and keeps one eye always cocked in the reader's direction, he is, then, actually conspiring with the public to create a new kind of folk fairy tale. J. B. Priestley refers to the unique quality of Dickens's work and calls him a "haunted tragi-comedian of mythopoeic genius."[49] He concludes that "this great novelist was not, strictly speaking, a novelist at all."[50] He adds, "There is a sense in which Dickens's novels are merely pretending to be the usual prose chronicles of man in society: they might better be described as huge grotesque poems."[51] This is surely one way of describing a fairy tale.

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48 Roger Abrahams, "Folklore in Culture: Notes Towards an Analytic Method," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, V (1963), p. 107.

49 "The Great Inimitable," Charles Dickens, 1812-1870: A Centenary Volume, edited by E. W. F. Tomlin (London, 1969), p. 30.

50 Priestley, p. 29.

51 Ibid., p. 29.

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50 Priestley, p. 29.

51 Ibid., p. 29.

This is no place to demonstrate the many striking parallels between Dickens's fictions and certain traumatic events in his own life. John Forster's biography of Dickens and Edgar Johnson's Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph both give ample evidence that Dickens transposes and transforms his own experiences, particularly those of his youth, in his fictions. Probably the most seminal study of Dickens's projection of personal traumas onto his works is that made by Edmund Wilson in "Dickens: The Two Scrooges." The most recent study of Dickens's manner of incorporating his deepest recollections, associations, even clearly unconscious associations, and chance encounters and coincidences into his work may be found in Harry Stone's amazing contribution to the Centenary Volume on Dickens. I refer to the story recounted in "The Genesis of a Novel: Great Expectations." If proof is needed that Dickens manages to exteriorize and transfigure personal traumas and repressions in his fictions, and incorporate with them his boundless love of life itself, these and other authors offer it in abundance.

Since this is not really my subject I shall put what I must say about it in the briefest terms.

J. B. Priestley believes, and I agree, that Dickens's youthful experience in the Blacking Factory left him with a "deep wound" that "never stopped bleeding for the rest of his life. As a middle-aged man, famous throughout the world, he still dreamt of being turned out, discarded, to go to

the dark factory."[52] A boy called Fagin worked alongside young Dickens in the factory at Hungerford Stairs. Before Dickens's mother and her other children joined Charles's father in debtor's prison, young Charles ran between the pawnshop and his own rapidly disintegrating home pawning brooches and what silver plate remained in the house. Later, when he returned from work at the factory each night he crossed over Blackfriars Bridge. It is fascinating to see what issued from these few experiences of an unusually sensitive and imaginative child when the child becomes a creative genius.

Without looking ahead to what Dickens makes of these and other experiences when he comes to writing David Copperfield and Great Expectations, I find Oliver Twist abounding in prison images and substitute images for prisons, particularly those places of confinement to which Oliver is consigned. Dickens uses Fagin's name too. With the old fence's secret hoard of jewels and plate hidden beneath the floorboards of his den, this fictive Fagin combines the real Bob Fagin's name with the aspect of a transfigured pawnbroker. In the past, pawnbrokers were notorious receivers of stolen goods. To this day in London tiny old-fashioned pawnbrokers' shops may be found whose owners operate from behind wooden-boarded cubicles at which the goods destined for 'Uncle's' are received. The manner in which pawned goods disappear from sight under the counter might well have inspired Dickens

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[52] Ibid., p. 29.

to imagine Fagin's hoard hidden under the floor-boards in his den. And, in the boy's youthful anguish, would he not tend to look upon the pawnbroker as a vicious and bestial predator swallowing up his family's possessions one by one? Such deep-rooted associations in Dickens's forgotten past might easily issue in the portrayal of Fagin, the parasitic receiver of stolen goods, the criminal who is more and more often described in terms of fiendish animal imagery as the tale progresses.

The question why Dickens should call Fagin after a boy who was very kind to him at the factory I cannot entirely answer to my own satisfaction. Dickens may have done this out of a perverse 'urge to kill the good thing.' This I doubt. More likely, Dickens saw that a boy such as Bob Fagin, with no future prospect of anything but poverty and a life of hard labour in the Blacking Factory, might easily turn to crime later in life out of sheer desperation. I shall not join the debate on whether Fagin was actually based on the real-life, notorious Ikey Solomons. I tend to agree with J. J. Tobias who believes that what evidence exists for linking these two characters is of a negative kind only.[53]

Hungerford Stairs and Warren's Blacking Factory re-appear in the early chapters of Oliver Twist transposed into images of hunger associated with blackness and imprisonment. Mrs. Mann's downstairs coal-cellar where children are

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53 For an examination of both sides of the debate see "Ikey Solomons -- a real-life Fagin," The Dickensian, LXV (September, 1969), pp. 171-175.

locked up for being hungry offers an early example of what I mean. Gamfield is associated with black soot, imprisoning chimneys, and hungry children who must climb up and down his chimneys. Sowerberry's coffins and funerals offer images of the final confinement to earth, black ribbons, and mourning clothes. Mrs. Sowerberry underfeeds Oliver and also locks him in a cellar which Dickens refers to as a prison. Here is yet another house in Oliver Twist in which people constantly run up and down stairs.

It does not require a very large leap of the imagination to connect Blackfriars Bridge with the shrouded black figure of Monks, who acts as a bridge, or ford (Hungerford Stairs), between so many of the mysterious events in Dickens's complicated plot. Monks in himself connects two classes of people in the story: the wealthy middle-class Leefords from whom he springs by birth and the criminal underworld he joins by inclination. With the name Leeford Dickens may have associated, somewhat caustically, the idea of a bridge leading towards shelter, a shelter which Edwin Leeford did not provide for Agnes and Monks did not provide for his young half-brother. Finally, the blackness of Fagin's den is the first thing Oliver remarks on when he is welcomed into the 'devil's' kitchen.

In the past, critics have neglected to deal with such parallels between images in Dickens's life and images in Oliver Twist. Not as rich a vein as David Copperfield, it yet merits attention. Hunger, stairs, darkness, imprison-

ment, bridges are common enough symbols in literature. For Dickens they were more than the artist's stock-in-trade: they were part of his private anguish and perhaps this is why he envelops them with such peculiar intensity in his fiction.

That Dickens universalizes his personal emotions so that they reflect not only his own inner landscape but also coincide with emotions in the outer world where he finds his mass audience is seen in his phenomenal popularity. In his own day he reached a mass audience through the medium of print. Today he appeals to a similar audience through the adaptations of his works into twentieth-century entertainment media. His printed works attract a growing critical and academic audience one hundred years after his death.

Part of my thesis is that Dickens obtains his reader's assent to a dream that begins as his personal dream which he then transposes and presents as a recognizable aspiration known to all men. I now propose to examine this moral folk-tale of a Parish Boy's Progress as a fairy tale, rather than as a novel. I shall ignore any kinship Oliver Twist might have with romances of the period, or of earlier times. Such considerations would lead me far afield and, I suspect, would inevitably bring me back to the folk-fairy tale.

II

Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Maylie may appear to be incongruous figures in Oliver's nightmare world; yet there is at least as much justification for their appearance on the scene as there is for the fairy-godmother's sudden apparition in Cinderella's kitchen. Like Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Maylie, Cinderella's fairy-godmother appears just when she is most needed. The situations into which these fairy-godparents enter seem to demand their presence. Oliver's fairy-godparents are the magic symbols representing what is required to bring about the reversal of Oliver's nightmare. Actually, even if the seemingly unlimited sources of their wealth and their warm-heartedness remain secret, these magic powers are far more realistic and tangible than the magic wielded by Cinderella's godmother.

Like any good fairy-tale teller, Dickens knows too much about life to attempt to portray the principle of Good surviving for long alone in the battle against evil. While Dickens knows the irreparable harm that wicked genii such as Monks and Fagin can work upon a young boy, he also knows the powerful magic that people such as Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Maylie may perform when they are possessed of benevolence and fairy wands of gold. Dickens ensures that Oliver receives assistance from fairy figures before Fagin obtains enough hold upon the boy to call him his own. What Dickens finally

offers the boy is the magic of parental love and care. Both Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Maylie, because they exist in a world of fairy tale and of magical connections, possess bonds of affection with blood relatives of Oliver long before they meet him. Every reader realizes that had Dickens not cast a magic spell upon Oliver from the first the child would have suffered a fate similar to young Dick's, or would have ended in the same dock as awaits most of Fagin's boys.

The contrived world of magical coincidence in Oliver Twist shows good and evil actions stemming from a hidden labyrinth of emotional relationships and blood ties. In an ideally just society these relationships would arouse expectations of reciprocal affection and generosity. Since Oliver's fairy-godparents possess spontaneous generosity, as well as money, they instinctively respond to Oliver's need without knowing that he has any real claim on their affections.

Oliver also meets with false fairies who would lead him astray. As soon as he approaches the City he meets a sorcerer's apprentice. On a magic day, "the seventh morning" after he sets out on the road, he sits with bleeding feet and feels a sense of his own "loneliness and desolation." Suddenly his eye is caught in a magic gaze coming from "one of the queerest-looking boys that Oliver had ever seen." (VIII). From the moment this "strange young gentleman" repeats the magic incantation, "Hallo, my covey! What's the row?" the boy is in the thrall of evil in seductive guise

and intimidated by the exotic charm of an exclusive language of metaphors he does not fully understand. Oliver's common sense and cautious observation eventually act as counter-charms to this seduction; he literally sees through the Dodger's false swagger and rhetoric to the realities and truths behind them.

In fairy tales the succes of a quest -- often the attainment of happiness in love -- depends on the observation of certain conditions which appear to be magical formulae but which are susceptible of rational interpretations. Cinderella must observe the warning from an older and wiser woman schooled in 'magic' that she must leave the ball, and the prince, before the stroke of midnight. This might just be the advice of any prudent parent. Yet, in leaving the ball so abruptly and mysteriously, Cinderella arouses the prince's natural curiosity and his instinct to follow in pursuit of the strange vision of beauty he has so briefly encountered.

Dickens knows that "There is a passion for hunting something deeply implanted in the human breast." (X). He conveys dream as well as nightmare illustrations of this instinct in Oliver Twist. While Oliver pursues a better life for himself the forces of evil pursue him. When he glimpses the good life at Mr. Brownlow's he is determined to retrieve it once he has lost it. Similarly, once Monks catches sight of his prey, Oliver, he is determined to ensnare the child.

The tale of Beauty and the Beast may be regarded as an allegoric description of the combination of animality and beauty transforming bestial sexuality into romantic love. Beauty alone among her sisters recognizes the glory of Nature and places a higher value on human affection than on objects such as trinkets. She is therefore the one sister capable of perceiving beyond the Beast's ugly exterior his inner noble qualities. Beauty thus fulfils the condition necessary to break the spell which prevents the Beast from appearing to her in his true manly and princely guise. In Dickens's fairy tale, Rose's beauty and virtue finally bring Harry Maylie's true integrity to the surface so that he abandons ignoble and aggressive ambition and becomes Rose's rural 'shepherd' lover. Oliver's beautiful innocence also works a miracle upon Nancy.

Snow White may only be aroused to life when a prince finds her so beautiful, even in the frigidity of apparent death, that he must possess her in her glass case. The story of Snow White illustrates the impossibility of defying certain fertility laws of nature. The old queen cannot retain supremacy in beauty beyond her natural term. She cannot prevent the inevitable recognition of her step-daughter, who represents the new generation, as the 'fairest in the land' and therefore ready to take her turn as the new queen. This story has obvious connections with ancient fertility rites, the dying of the old year, and the killing of the old

king to make way for the new, more vigorous one.

Many fairy tales seem to favour the propagation of the species. A special 'natural' sexual selection prevails. The fittest, or best, is often the morally or physically most beautiful. Physical beauty, a sign of health and strength, appears to be equated with virtue. Its virtue, presumably, is the promise of healthy off-spring.

Dickens, like his predecessors in telling fairy tales, lays down certain conditions vital to the attainment of his story's happy ending. The achievement of desirable human relationships, particularly family relationships, which are to reform the nightmare world of Oliver Twist, depends on certain qualities of personality. These Dickens prescribes in an act of faith on the final page of the book: "without strong affection and humanity of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, happiness can never be attained." Mercy and Benevolence are qualities to which Dickens attaches capital importance in his plea for an end to man's inhumanity to man. He does not regard these virtues as exclusively Christian. To judge by what he says in his maturer writings, as well as in Oliver Twist, these virtues are sometimes the last qualities exhibited by those who preach rather than practice Christianity.

It should be remarked, in passing, that Dickens constantly refers to Oliver's appealing face. His virtue and

charm are figured in his face. He wins over Mr. Brownlow, Mrs. Bedwin, Rose, Mrs. Maylie, and most importantly, Nancy, first of all by means of his good looks. Monks, his rival, is presented as repulsive and diseased.

About fairy tales I am making a number of generalizations. These tales offer many variations and inspire as many interpretations. Shirley Grob quite rightly draws attention to the fact that Dickens neglects to employ one gambit frequently encountered in fairy tales: the deployment of cruelty and cunning as a means to success.[54] Dickens concentrates on a moral kind of fairy tale in which virtuous characters who exhibit affection and generosity are destined for happiness, while such characters as Cinderella's stepmother and ugly stepsisters, Snow White's jealous stepmother, and Beauty's vain and flighty sisters, all of whom exhibit hatred, envy, and brutal inhumanity towards those whom they should regard with affection, are destined for disappointment.

In general the same pattern is found in Oliver Twist. Monks's mother plays the role of wicked enchantress in relation to her husband's second son. While she lives she does her utmost to ruin Agnes and Rose Fleming's good names. She casts a horrible spell on Oliver from her death-bed. Like a truly vengeful fairy's, her last wish demands that her son hound his half-brother to the foot of the gallows. She dies miserably. So does Monks, despite the second chance

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54 Grob, op. cit., p. 569.

he receives to lead a decent life. He deserves more than passing comment, and I deal with him more fully below.

Bill Sikes, the murderous giant in the tale, and Fagin, the wicked sorcerer, both lose their lives by hanging -- Sikes from his own rope. For the Bumbles, Dickens reserves a truly ironic end: they return to the workhouse, this time as inmates; and Mr Bumble has not even the grace to appreciate the workhouse rule which speedily and inexpensively 'divorces' married folk.

Since a happy home forms the object of Oliver's quest, Dickens could employ no apter words to describe the fate of the remaining members of the criminal gang: "As far from home, [as Monks] died the remaining members of Fagin's gang." (LIII).

Dickens makes exceptions to his general rule in the final distribution of rewards and punishments. This is, after all, a realistic fairy tale. Noah Claypole's end is not yet in sight. Master Charley Bates reforms and turns to working on the land; Dickens could not do otherwise than save a character so full of the sense of the comic in life. Similarly, the Artful Dodger displays the cocky, spritely wit and ebullience of spirit typical of a class of Londoners who all descend from Sam Weller so that Dickens cannot condemn him outright. Some time before the story closes, Mr. Jack Dawkins is transported to a New World. There, Jack may eventually swagger with the best of "young shavers," exert his "priwileges" as an Englishman, and fulfil his promise: to revenge

himself upon an uncomprehending system of justice with the aid of a "wery numerous and 'spectable circle of acquaintances as'll make them beaks wish they'd never been born." (XLIII). It is not impossible that Dodger is reincarnated many years later to appear on the streets of Philip Pirrip's home-town dodging around Pip in the form of Trabb's boy. Although Dickens persists in the belief in Mercy and Benevolence to the end of his career, he never fails to depict affection, humanity of heart, and gratitude to God as uncommon attributes in his fictive world. Nor does he guarantee happiness to those who possess these attributes. He merely states that without them happiness is unattainable. Even in this very early story, Dickens avoids an unduly simplified philosophy. He offers a more complex view of the world in significant allusions to recognizable realities that underly the labyrinth of contrived blood relationships and magic coincidence in the plot of Oliver Twist.

In this story of a boy's progress through a nightmare world towards a dream Dickens writes a moral fairy tale that still has significance today. In transmitting his message by means of fairy-tale devices he writes something more than a Victorian novel. Edgar Johnson puts it nicely: "With Pickwick [Dickens] invented the realist fairy tale. It was to recur in much of his future work."[55] Certainly it recurs in Oliver Twist.

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55 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, I, p. 174.

III

On the first page of Oliver Twist Dickens juxtaposes dream and reality in the macabre comedy he makes of Oliver's initial struggle to breathe. Dickens ironically conveys his own concept of the ideal conditions for a baby's birth by offering Oliver the very worst delivery-room conditions and assuring the reader that, when Oliver is "unequally poised between this world and the next," he owes the very breath of life to the fact that he must fend for himself in the cold workhouse infirmary. In a grotesque blend of jest and horror Dickens suggests that had Oliver been "surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably have been killed in no time." (I). Later in the story, just such figures as these who would have killed Oliver at birth twice nurse him back to life. With these two important exceptions, the majority of Oliver's experiences of family life resemble his initial experience at birth. He must fight a lonely battle for survival, a battle which no ordinary child would survive as well as he does. The truth is, Oliver is a fairy-tale hero. As I have already suggested, a charm, as well as a curse, is laid upon him at birth. The charm ensures that Oliver survives the physical hardships and moral trials that issue from the curse laid upon him.

Dickens implies that under normal circumstances a

solicitous family group offers a baby the ideal welcome into this world. The world into which Oliver arrives welcomes him as a "new burden on the parish." He is "the orphan of a workhouse -- the humble, half-starved drudge -- to be cuffed and buffeted through the world -- despised by all, and pitied by none." (I). Dickens repeatedly emphasizes the child's loneliness during his early years. Even when Oliver leaves Mrs. Mann's farm, "the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years," he feels "a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world." (II). Again, when Mr. Bumble conveys Oliver from the workhouse to Sowerberry's, the boy tearfully admits his sense of solitude.

Oliver retains his feeling of isolation right up until a dramatic turning point occurs in his career. At the very moment of clarification of unexplained mysteries, when the activities of Fagin's apprentices suddenly become revealed to Oliver for what they are, when, in an instant of illumination, he realizes what kind of 'family' he has joined in London, he is more alone than ever before. On his way to Sowerberry's he had explained his sense of loneliness to the beadle: "Everybody hates me." (IV). Now Oliver is on the run, hunted as a thief. His young companions have left him in the lurch and the entire world appears to pursue him. Heroes in Dickens's maturer works share Oliver's experience: adults viciously contribute to the child's sense of isolation from his fellows by branding him as guilty and criminal from

his earliest years.

Here I am thinking in particular of David Copperfield and Pip Pirrip. In the three stories in which Oliver, David, and Pip figure as heroes Dickens presents children, as well as adults, as criminals. This raises the question of Dickens ambivalent attitude to criminals in general which I have already commented upon in Chapter Two.

Dickens intrudes his own voice upon the cries of "Stop thief!" that follow on Oliver's heels. "There is a magic in the sound," Dickens suggests. He comments further on the passion for hunting something that is "deeply implanted in the human breast." (X). Real-life aggression proves to be more attractive than any feigned imitation of it. Dickens, the artificer, knows all too well what he implies when he adds, "a whole audience desert Punch in the very thickest of the plot," to join the throng chasing Oliver. (X).

This hunting scene offers the savage violence that so often inheres in fairy tales. Its sequel produces the unexpected and coincidental intervention of fairy-tale magic found in fairy tales just when it is most needed to combat disorder. Such magic often appears at the height of anguished human dilemmas which spring from the confrontation of a dream with the experience of reality in a fallen world.

In this instance, Oliver has his eyes opened wider to reality than ever before. He now realizes that in joining the friendly old gentleman and his jolly pupils he has joined a school for thieves. Mr. Brownlow also has his per-

spective changed for him. A thief is one thing. A child brutally hounded like an animal is something else. Furthermore, a child exposed to the ignorant and querulous garrulity of a magistrate like Fang is more to be pitied than a child exposed to the brutality of a lout in the streets. So immersed in a book -- that surely treated of no such shocking realities as these -- Brownlow had been oblivious to the real life in the streets around him. In scenes which precede this chase Dickens presents sufficient examples of man's brutal aggression towards his weaker fellows, particularly towards children. The diabolical magic that draws out man's ruthless hunting instinct now produces an opposite fairy-magic reaction in Brownlow: a good man's compassion for the hunted prey, particularly since this hunted prey is a child who is pursued by vicious adults. The reader has been prepared to give assent to this magic by the Master Magician who has been telling this tale. Now the reader should be ready to participate in the acting out of a cathartic drama by sympathizing with the young hero and identifying his aspirations with those of Everyman.

Mr. Brownlow unwittingly sets the chase in motion. A "great lubberly fellow" cuts his knuckle against Oliver's mouth and fells him to the ground with "a clever blow." As abrupt as any fairy transformation is Mr. Brownlow's assumption of a fairy-godfather's role once he is confronted with the felled child. Not until long after Oliver is carried out of Mr. Fang's court does the boy realize that the sudden entry

into his life of a fairy figure carrying a magic cane-wand, so different from the beadle's cane, has temporarily dispelled his nightmare. His fairy-godfather drives him in a coach to an enchanted house where, for the first time in his life, he experiences the full warmth and solicitude of benevolent kindness.

This house is filled with magic. When Oliver awakens "from what seemed to have been a long and troubled dream," a feverish dream which could just as well describe his past life as his recent illness, a "motherly old lady" waits upon him with great gentleness. Oliver confesses to having experienced the curious sensation that his mother had sat near him during his fever. Once he is well enough to sit up, a portrait of a beautiful, sad-eyed lady confronts him and so rivets his attention that Mrs. Bedwin removes it from his sight. Yet Oliver continues to see it in his mind's eye. This picture similarly occupies Mr. Brownlow's mind when he sees it behind Oliver's chair.

It is, of course, a magic picture on the wall: an image of Oliver's mother. It conjures up memories from the past for Mr. Brownlow, memories of his fiancée and her brother (his best friend), now both dead. Reminders of such close emotional ties from the past no doubt work their own magic and contribute to the warmth that the old gentleman extends to Oliver. Mr. Brownlow had, indeed, wished to succour the girl whose portrait he has kept in his house. He had been anxious to aid her with any child who might have issued from her relationship

with his old friend, Leeford. In a world of magical coincidence, Oliver was bound to find his way to Mr. Brownlow's.

Mr. Brownlow's sudden appearance in Oliver's life counterbalances the appearance of the other seemingly kind old gentleman who first ushered Oliver into his den in London. It seems to me that Dickens shows his own acute understanding of the child's mind here, an understanding which may well stem from Dickens's own attitude to his father and to the older boy, Bob Fagin, who "fathered" him by teaching him his job and by nursing him at the Blacking Factory. Dickens may well have seen his image of a father figure split into a good and a bad figure. His real father was, for a time, a criminal; his surrogate father during this period was the good father to him. When Dickens actually came to naming the criminal father figure he preferred to transfer the criminal aspects of the father to his surrogate father, Bob Fagin. Any other course of action might have been too unbearable. In any case, Dickens manages to convey with startling accuracy the manner in which a child will regard various parent figures as either good, or bad, and never see the parent as a mixture of the two.

Until Oliver meets Mr. Brownlow, he experiences only fleeting apparitions of good-fairy figures such as those he meets on his way to London: the "good-hearted turnpike man, and a benevolent old lady." (VIII). These save Oliver from starving. Fairy-like, they appear on the scene in the nick of time after Oliver has met with a series of malevolent

creatures of evil disposition. By showing Oliver that some other world does actually exist beyond the nightmare world he has always known, Mr. Brownlow offers the boy the first real evidence that his dream might finally materialize.

As I have suggested before, Oliver may be regarded as a type of Everyman. His pursuit may be regarded as an archetypal quest through a nightmare world in search of the dream that has been denied his parents. The glint of a symbolic golden bough leads modern man, just as it led mythical man, to traverse the dark and forbidding forest towards its light. Oliver resembles a fairy-tale or mythical hero on whom certain conditions are laid at birth. The success of his quest depends on one condition which is never revealed to him until he reaches his goal. The same condition that has been laid down for him before his birth by his father, is also required of him by his fairy-godfather, Mr. Brownlow. It is the same condition conceived for him from his inception as a hero by the Inimitable Magician, his creator. The condition demands that the principle of Good within Oliver remain unblemished until he grows up.

Since Oliver is destined to face the world with every disadvantage the condition seems to be merciless and impossible. He has no father to care for him, no legitimate name, no fortune. Although his father could not foresee this, Oliver must also make his way branded as a parish orphan. His, however, is no more absurd a situation than the task that Christian man sets himself. Man opposes his fallen condition

on earth in order to merit redemption and the promised inheritance from the Father who originally permitted his parents to 'fall' and condemned them, as a consequence, to be debarred from Eden.

Unlike the heroes of chivalric romanees, Oliver seeks his own personal salvation. Like a hero of romance, the success of Oliver's quest offers the clue to the healing of society. What is good for Oliver is good for all men.

Christians pin their faith in a God-made-man Saviour who is a miracle worker. Dickens provides down-to-earth miracle workers of his own who preach His moral by their example.

Oliver triumphs finally: he gets 'out of the wood.' Actually, the triumph is Dickens's own. He has seen that conditions as merciless as those which confront Oliver may only be overcome by benevolent love. Of course, Oliver's virtue, which shines from his face, inspires that love.

No matter what happens in the world of Oliver Twist, the hero retains a private fantasy which in his childish way he sees as a desire for "more" than life offers him. Above all, he longs to be loved rather than hated. His fantasy resembles man's perennial urge to achieve the improbable, to transcend seemingly impassable barriers, whether within himself or the environment. As Edgar Johnson writes, "It is the wonder but the truth of humanity that it does so struggle."[56] In this struggle Stephen Marcus sees more than this. When

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56 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, I, p. 282.

discussing another of Dickens's small people, one who struggles like Oliver against enormous odds, Stephen Marcus sees Dickens as "outraged that in our world anyone should have to endure such agony to remain human -- yet he is at the same time aware that through such agony, and its effort, is humanity in part created."[57]

This does not mean to say that Dickens espouses the one hint that the reader finds in Mrs. Maylie of what George Gissing calls "the stifling Puritanism of the age." Gissing rightly points out that Dickens instinctively rebels against such religious severity.[58] Dickens sees no need to provide any more agony, or effort, for his hero than society already presents him with.

Oliver's trials bear some resemblance to the cruel initiation rites of primitive tribes, rites which were designed to test and prepare a young boy for adult status. Dickens would appear to regret the necessity for such survival tests in his day. Nevertheless, Oliver is exposed to endurance tests from birth. For Dickens is basing his fairy tale on terrible realities of his day. What Edgar Johnson

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57 The Other Victorians (New York, 1966), p. 108.

58 The Immortal Dickens, p. 84. Mrs. Maylie feels guilty for having been happy for too long with Rose. When Rose is sick, Mrs. Maylie feels she must pay for her happiness by losing Rose. Mrs. Maylie does not see that such payment would demand that Rose pay the higher fee -- that of her own life. Later in Dickens's career, this guilt-ridden philosophy culminates in the extremes of Mrs. Clennam's wrathful rigidity. See Little Dorrit, chapter III, ironically entitled "Home."

finds in Pickwick applies even more succintly to Oliver Twist where "the symbolic evils of the fairy tale and allegory have become the real evils of the real world."[59]

The crucial test occurs for Oliver when he is deprived of his fairy-godfather soon after he has been rescued by him. More than once the Wheel of Fate turns from well to woe for Oliver. After a first brief experience of the golden life, Oliver is suddenly snatched away by the Devil's own sorcerer, Fagin. Once back in Fagin's den, Oliver loses his finery just as Cinderella loses her beautiful dress, her coach, and her servants. As if by magic, Oliver is presented with the identical rags he thought he had lost for good when Mrs. Bedwin disposed of them. Back in Fagin's clutches, Oliver must feel as he feels towards the end of the tale when he revisits his birthplace. Momentarily then he believes that the workhouse might reclaim him as its own and he experiences the sensation that "there was nearly everything as if he had left it but yesterday, and all his recent life had been but a happy dream." (LI). Still, Oliver must not despair. He must resist Fagin's temptations and his gang's urgings to turn to a life of crime.

Oliver resists these urgings partly because the charm laid upon him by his creator leaves his innocence untouched by the corruption around him. He has a great deal of luck. Often with the help of patrons he survives ill-treatment,

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59 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, I, p. 174.

sickness and hunger. Though Oliver is naïve he is not stupid. He has good reason to resist Fagin. Each time a member of the gang vaunts the criminal life, concrete evidence appears, as if by magic, to deny these boasts. The brutality of Sikes and Fagin must speak for itself to the boy. He learns, too, that when the Dodger speaks of spirit and pride, and of "peaching," this same young man of spirit can desert his friends and allow them to take punishment for him. In the very same scene in which the Dodger and Charley Bates try to persuade Oliver to co-operate with the gang, a former gang member arrives at Fagin's. He is Tom Chitling, who has just laboured hard for six weeks. He warns Oliver that the same fate awaits him. If there is magic in Oliver's remaining good, there is reason too.

Fagin specializes in perverting innocents and training them for a life of crime. He regains Oliver through the evil offices of a wicked fairy, one of Fagin's own perverted creatures. Nancy is finally won over by the magic of Oliver's virtuous sweetness. Her transformation costs her her life. Unlike Oliver, Nancy has only a curse laid upon her in her youth. When a charm finally lights upon her from Oliver's guileless face, it is too late to help her escape the evil forces in which she is enmeshed. The girl has been a thieves' prostitute for too long. She cannot suddenly cease to play the role of Oliver's wicked sister, respond to her maternal instincts, and act as a mother saving her child without paying a price for it. Nancy is, in effect, attemp-

ting to redeem her own lost childhood by saving another child from Fagin's machinations. He, the evil sorcerer who deprived her of her childhood innocence, finally engineers the destruction of Nancy in her most appealing and beautiful aspect. Just when she plumbs her deepest instincts and finds that "last fair drop of water at the bottom of the weed-choked well,"[60] Sikes murders her. Nancy's dream and reality deserve the closer attention I devote to them later.

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60 The "Author's Preface" to Oliver Twist.

IV

As I have already suggested, George Gissing underestimates the scope of Oliver Twist's moral purpose. He also seems to ask the tale to be what it is not: a realistic novel. He is far from being the only critic to complain, "There is no coherency in the structure of the thing; the plotting is utterely without ingenuity, and the mysteries are so artificial as to be altogether uninteresting."[61] Such criticisms cannot be lightly dismissed. Oliver Twist, a new departure from Dickens's early style in the Sketches by Boz and different, too, from the episodic Pickwick Papers which were only half finished when Dickens began Oliver's story, certainly contains flaws. All of Dickens's books contain flaws by one or another critical standard. I suspect that part of Dickens's problem with Oliver Twist was that he was feeling his way toward a new genre and was not fully conscious of where his talent was leading him. Some of the flaws in this story may be attributed to Dickens's lack of experience in writing an extended narrative in which each of the parts is fused into a whole. He is beginning to write in a genre peculiar to himself, a genre which cautious critics sum up, and so dismiss, as "Dickensian."

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61 Gissing, pp. 77-78.

I admire Trevor Blount's approach to Dickens: "The art that he practises is a mixed literary form, and it ought to be judged not by later canons of art but by the literary standards and conventions that it seems to set itself."[62] In Oliver Twist Dickens is obviously trying to achieve more unity in his material than he had so far attempted. Some extent of Dickens's success may be gauged by comparing the manner in which he fuses together his contrasting materials in Pickwick and in Oliver Twist. Dickens shows that the Pickwick Club members cannot set out on their travels through life without encountering a variety of experiences. Although Mr. Pickwick appears to lead a charmed life during the major part of the book, Dickens remains true to reality by occasionally confronting this gentleman of leisure with the darker aspects of human activity. Still, Dickens fails to establish adequate connections between the horrifyingly nightmare material of the four interpolated tales and the rollicking jollity of most of the Club members' miscellaneous travels and adventures. The real differences, and the dangerous affinities, between certain lunatic antics of the Club's eccentric members and the terrible actions that result from people's truly disturbed states of mind are only clumsily hinted at. When the grotesque aspects of reality impinge on Mr. Pickwick's seemingly charmed life and threaten to give it a catastrophic turn, the reader is insufficiently prepared to understand what is happening. The

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62 Dickens: The Early Novels (London, 1968), pp. 7-8.

connections exist, yet Dickens establishes them as crudely as he conceives them.

When Oliver and his companions in the workhouse become so hungry that they fear an act of cannibalism among themselves, they dare to ask for more to eat. This apt employment of the old fairy-tale device of cannibalism emphasizes the world of terrible realities in the story, realities which give rise to aspirations for a better world. Oliver Twist's nightmare world-picture offers a distorted mirror image of the dream world to which Oliver aspires.

The world that Oliver first comes into and the other world he meets at Fagin's resemble each other far more than either world resembles the world of Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies. It might be supposed that Fagin's world grows, in part, out of the evil world Oliver first encounters at birth. The world inhabited by Mr. Brownlow and Mrs. Maylie seems, in the context of the story, to grow out of sheer need for such a world to balance the world of misery. In everyday reality everyone knows that these worlds exist side by side. Dickens takes care to show that the Maylies' household is not perfectly happy and that Mr. Brownlow himself has known deep sorrow in the past. The new warm homes that Oliver finds with these people take on a more golden glow for Oliver just because they offer such contrasts to what he has previously known. Nevertheless, each of these different worlds comments upon, and explains, the others. Here, Dickens has made real progress in the handling of contrasting and complementary materials in his story. Each world has its own logical reality

and convincing reasons exist for their being brought into the same story.

Dickens's fairy-tale novel is realistic in that it offers a world that is recognizable to his readers. Oliver goes from pillar to post before he arrives at the end of his quest. His adventures may be regarded as an elaboration of the recurrent fairy-tale theme of frightening encounters with dangers and pitfalls that a young man who leaves home, or is cast away from home, meets in an alien world. Instead of the journey through a dark forest full of wild beasts and storms that would be understood by a rural and pre-industrial-revolution community, Dickens offers his urban readers a homeless boy's nineteenth-century journey from the small town to the great metropolis. All the darkness, the fright, and the beasts become part of a contemporary world. Dickens makes biting commentaries on the Victorian social scene by presenting social institutions as evil witches' houses (Mrs. Mann's) and giants' castles (the workhouse), and then depicting a criminal's den by means of the same imagery. Fagin's resembles a sorcerer's kitchen. Just as in a traditional fairy tale, young people become imprisoned, mistreated, and put to work against their will in all of these places.

Interesting commentaries on nineteenth-century money-oriented values and on the widespread exploitation of child labour may occasionally be seen in Dickens's variants upon fairy-tale themes. Where in earlier fairy tales a witch

would place a boy in a cage to fatten him up for eating, in Dickens's world one boy is tempted to devour another. Boys are also starved in the interests of public and private economy. They are kept thin and small to prolong their utility as sweeps and to exploit their appeal to the lachrymose sentiments when they walk as mutes in funerals. If certain of Sowerberry's wealthier bereaved husbands and wives wish to offer a realistic semblance of grief, some small trigger for the tear-glands needs pulling. Oliver discovers that among Sowerberry's clients,

> Husbands, too, bore the loss of their wives with the most heroic calmness. Wives, again, put on weeds for their husbands, as if, so far from grieving in the garb of sorrow, they had made up their minds to render it as becoming and attractive as possible. It was observable, too, that ladies and gentlemen who were in passions of anguish during the ceremony of internment, recovered almost as soon as they reached home, and became quite composed before the tea-drinking was over. (VI).

It is extraordinary how many of the significant ideas in Oliver Twist become condensed in the brief scenes which depict Oliver's stay at the Sowerberrys. At times, Dickens's observation of grotesque parallels between nightmare images in fairy tales and images of the real world he imitates borders on the hysterical.

The significant images that Dickens evokes are of life opposed to death. He, like his hero, asks for "more," more years of life for the young people he portrays, more opportunity for them to grow up into decent human beings and to realize their potential. Nancy, the pretending wicked

sister to Oliver, changes into a good fairy before she dies. She fears that the gallows awaits Oliver. She is, in other words, afraid of the death of Everyman. Her maternal instinct is aroused and overwhelms her instinct for self-preservation. Like Oliver's true mother, Nancy dies in the fight for Oliver's life. Nancy, too, asks for "more," but she asks too late for more for herself.

In Nancy's last desperate pleas to Sikes before he murders her she reveals her innermost dream. She tells Sikes:

> the gentleman, and that dear lady, told me tonight of a home in some foreign country where I could end my days in solitude and peace. Let me see them again, and beg them, on my knees, to show the same mercy and goodness to you; and let us both leave this dreadful place, and far apart lead better lives, and forget how we have lived, except for prayers, and never see each other more. It is never too late to repent. (XLVII).

Nancy's plea is extraordinary for several reasons. In the first place, she prefaces this plea with others in which she calls upon Sikes to spare her life "for the love of Heaven," and "for dear God's sake." These are hardly terms calculated to move Sikes. The idea of this brute bully acting on Christian motives, or praying, or repenting strikes the reader as grotesque. Dickens, who is nobody's fool, surely knows what he is doing here. Nancy's appeal reveals the hopelessness of her dream in face of realities with which she is confronted. Dickens condenses these realities in the silence of Sikes's ruthless reply to Nancy -- without a word he batters her to death.

From this moment Sikes is condemned to a world of

silence and hauntings. I shall return to Sikes's dilemma in Chapter Five.

In the scene which follows Sikes's death Dickens suppresses his natural inclination to convey realities by means of the super-realism of fantasy. In a regrettable urge to offer the half-truths of realistic narrative, he tries to explain too much. Chapter LI, "Affording an Explanation of More Mysteries Than One, and Comprehending a Proposal of Marriage with No Word of Settlement or Pin-Money," is an important chapter in the book. This chapter is also one of the weakest in the book. It is the second of four final chapters in which Dickens alternates in quick succession his nightmare and his dream worlds. Sikes's hanging, a scene full of poetic justice in tune with the general drift of the tale, immediately precedes Chapter LI. It is followed by Fagin's trial and the dreadful justice that ensues in his final night of madness in the condemned cell.

The chapter separating two such vivid incidents should offer some relief in tension without allowing the reader's interest to flag. Dickens solves this problem by revealing Oliver's and Rose's origins, and the part that Monks and his mother have played in their destinies. Like so many fairy tales, particularly where the achievement of a happy family life forms the object of the hero's quest, this tale requires a marriage to end the story. Since Oliver is far too young for marriage, his sister-aunt is engaged in a surro-

gate marriage for him. It is a marriage with "No Word of Settlement or Pin-Money," and therefore the ideal love-match. Oliver's father's marriage is the perverse and nightmare mirror image for this marriage. Rose's marriage breaks the evil cycle which threatened to become perpetuated if Harry Maylie compromised his integrity to satisfy the demands of wealth and influence.

Despite the importance of this scene to the book's real message, Dickens merits Gissing's criticisms of the mysteries in the book. When Dickens ties up all the loose ends of his mysteries he may be likened to a conjuror who performs feat after feat of prestidigitation and then fumblingly shows his audience how it was all done. My own earlier analyses of symbolical meanings behind certain fairy-tale themes offers a good example of what can happen when too much is explained. The reader, and the writer, become aware that a simplistic interpretation of symbols leaves much unexplained and deprives the symbols of their deeper and fuller implications. Oliver Twist's most serious shortcomings arise when Dickens wavers in his fairy-tale stance. Those mysteries concerning Monks, in particular, lose their deeper implications once they become programmed for the kind of data required to produce the computerised logic of cause-and-effect equations proper to naturalistic novels.

Monks as the shadowy and mysterious character of such fiendish power that even Fagin, the devil's own disciple, quakes before him, is someone the reader has met before. "HE,"

faceless and nameless, appears from nowhere and disappears just as strangely. He represents fearful unknown forces which the reader most often encounters in nightmares. He is the unrecognized enemy who may be, for all that the dreamer knows, the dreamer himself. This half-brother to Oliver might well be Oliver's own shadowy self, part of his birthright, an inherited curse: the urge towards evil which he must resist with all his might. Monks is the Beast whom no Beauty can transform. If what I suggest is true, Monks is an early example of a subsequent series of dual aspects of one person divided into two characters that Dickens depicts in his later works.

A Monks unmasked, given a family name and pedigree, tamed and grovelling before his hated half-brother becomes ludicrous. He is taken quite out of his true symbolical element in myth, fairy tale, or nightmare and unbelievably made flesh. The reader knows that such phantoms possess neither name nor fleshly body to be caught and held for questioning.

In order to retain some of Monks's awesome qualities Dickens should have permitted him to flee "to a distant part of the New World" far sooner than he does. Had Monks evaporated into thin air the journey down to Oliver's home-town to confront the Bumbles with the two old workhouse crones would then have seemed more necessary to corroborate Monks's earlier confession to Brownlow. Once Dickens brings Monks inside the charmed circle created by the Maylies and Mr.

Brownlow, he abandons the fairy-tale stance he has taken during the major part of the story. Monks belongs beyond the window of that inn-room in Oliver's home town, forever crying like a demon from hell for Oliver's soul and forever being thwarted in his aims.

The quandary in which Dickens finds himself concerns his moral position. Earlier in Oliver Twist Dickens takes a stand for the darker aspects of fairy-tale morality which offers the same intransigent Old Testament justice as is meted out in Eden. This justice makes clear distinctions between good and evil and sees the struggle between the two as merciless; the survival of one requires the total defeat of the other.

In the return to Oliver's birthplace Dickens exhibits a more tempered attitude towards good and evil. He paves the way for Mr. Brownlow's forgiving and merciful treatment of Monks in the final chapter of the book where the New Testament's message of hope and forgiveness prevails. Once Dickens approaches the idyllic resolution to Oliver's struggles and gathers all his benevolent characters around the boy, the author's rigid morality falls away from him. Possessed now by Pickwickian goodwill he makes Mr. Brownlow act out of character by allowing him to give Monks a second chance and half of Oliver's fortune. The reader must ask why Mr. Brownlow should take this attitude now, when earlier he was ready to abandon all thought of Oliver should the boy turn out to be dishonest.

From the point of view of psychological realism the answer is simple. Human beings act with less strict logic than they might wish to. They often demand more of those whom they love and treat their shortcomings more harshly than when they deal with people whom they despise. Mr. Brownlow is also a fairy figure with a right to his own logic and reasons which go beyond mere rational understanding. If Mr. Brownlow's understanding tells him that Monks is, in effect, Oliver's own shadow he will do what lies in his power to offer it peace and lay the evil ghost for good. After all, the whole tale is a laying of ghosts, a dissolving of nightmares in favour of a dream.

For a while, Dickens lays some of his own ghosts. He does so not only by laying a charm upon them and bringing his nightmare obsessions to a happy conclusion. He perceives, too, beyond his personal traumas realities that coincide with those of most men. Thus he can share with his audience a cathartic experience and gain communal assent to a fundamental act of faith. It is the same act of faith found in many traditional folk fairy tales.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FAIRY-TALE STRUCTURE OF OLIVER TWIST

I

One point that I make in my Introduction remains to be discussed. I have suggested that Dickens's employment of the familiar myth contained in the rags-to-riches fairy tale facilitates instant communication with a wide audience conversant with this story pattern. I have yet to demonstrate that the structure of Oliver Twist and the interplay between the different parts of the story bear a strong resemblance to the pattern of the typical rags-to-riches fairy tale, Cinderella. This story pattern enables Dickens to convey by implication a moral thesis within a gripping and sensational narrative.

Certain features common to the two tales are obvious. Both Cinderella and Oliver progress from rags to riches with the assistance of fairy-godmother figures. Cinderella exhibits even less individual personality than Oliver exhibits; each more resembles a symbol than a human personality. Both protagonists possess attributes that contribute to their final success; these attributes are natural virtue and beauty. As characters they exhibit varying degrees of passivity in contrast to the teeming activities that go on around them. Most of the time the audience's interest

focusses less on these two protagonists than on more vivid characters and spectacular events peripheral to them. Cinderella endures a miserable family life with her wicked stepmother and ugly stepsisters who treat her like a servant. Oliver is pursued by his wicked stepbrother and by his stepbrother's evil mother. The boy suffers at the hands of any number of surrogate parents who set him to work at menial tasks.

Cinderella and Oliver both become associated with chimneys or hearths. Gamfield's chimneys and Fagin's hearth may be regarded as perverse symbols associated with brutality, crime, and hard labour in contrast to the cheery, innocent hearths possessed by Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Brownlow. The final hearth to be mentioned in the story resides in the idyllic "joy of the fireside circle" (LIII) in Rose Maylie's happy home.

An important feature in the ultimate success of the hero and heroine in Oliver Twist and in Cinderella is their leaving cold hearths where they are treated as aliens and 'slaves' for warmer, more loving homes where they are regarded as family members. The dream at the heart of both of these tales is the dream of becoming part of a united family circle and participating in the warmth that radiates from its centre. Both tales leave the reader with intimations of deeper, perhaps more primitive, symbolical meanings submerged beneath the surface of the narrative. At the close of this chapter I shall attempt to identify the source of some

of these meanings.

While Cinderella's unhappy experiences are confined within a single family unit, Oliver's miserable experiences of family life involve a fairly wide cross-section of society. Society itself serves to illustrate a perverse extension of the individual sick family units of which it is composed.

Cinderella knows that she may retain the attire and trappings of a princess only on condition that she leave the ball at midnight. Oliver, on the other hand, is never informed of the condition laid down for his final success as acknowledged heir to his father's fortune and as Mr. Brownlow's adopted son. Oliver differs most importantly from Cinderella in making a vital decision to rebel against his situation and to seek a better life for himself. If Cinderella represents the passive female attitude towards life, Oliver exhibits some degree of male virility in taking the initiative to influence his own destiny. In this Oliver is far more representative of a modern, Western, and non-deterministic outlook than is Cinderella. She appears to have no free will; she obeys authority.

Graham Greene presents an interesting thesis on Oliver's predicament as illustrating "the nightmare fight between the darkness, where demons walk, and the sunlight, where ineffective goodness makes its last stand in a condemned world."[63] Stimulating as this thesis is, it lends to Dickens

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63 "The Young Dickens" (1950), Collected Essays (London, 1969), p. 109.

a defeatist outlook that he never actually exhibited. Dickens was no resigned observer of human depravity. He was a relentless fighter in the cause of man's human dignity to the end of his days. While he deplored man's Satanic impulses, he never expected man to be god-like. Dickens asked only that man should be more humane. Surely no one who, like Dickens, believes that man is capable of showing generosity, charity, and love may regard the world of men as condemned, nor goodness as ineffectual.

In Oliver Twist Dickens makes an act of faith. Indeed, the scheme of Oliver Twist, like that of Cinderella, follows a familiar and optimistic pattern: the assent of the virtuous protagonist's fortune is accompanied by the downfall of those who have opposed the forces of good in the story. This is really the pattern of comedy as opposed to tragedy. The change for the better in Oliver's and Cinderella's fortune is heightened by the contrasting loss of status and happiness among those less virtuous and beautiful than themselves.

The important action in Cinderella lies first in the transformation of a neglected orphan into a princess who is loved by a prince, and then in her transportation from servitude beside a cold chimney corner to residence in a king's palace. In fact, however, the spectacular transformations of a lowly pumpkin and of Cinderella's rags into far finer objects, and of six mice, a rat, and six lizards into superior beings, really monopolize the audience's in-

terest. This does not matter, since these peripheral transformations offer a series of mirror images which reinforce the major transformations. Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters, by their very evil, also steal the show from the heroine. Still, their final fall from superiority and mastery in their humiliation before the elevated servant-girl heightens the heroine's change in status and fortune.

Similarly, peripheral material in Dickens's tale seems to steal the show from Oliver; it actually acts as a foil to the main thesis of the story. I have already indicated that Dickens sparks a revolt in his reader's mind against the world of evil and inspires the reader to share Oliver's vision of an ideal world. Dickens achieves this effect by piling one nightmare image of reality upon another so that their cumulative effect cannot fail to evoke the response he seeks. In a similar fashion, Dickens enforces the impression that his subject is really the opposition of an ideal dream to evil realities.

The central dream in Oliver Twist is, as I have several times suggested, Oliver's dream of a happy family to which he might belong. The dream arises in opposition to terrible realities which confront the hero from birth. Within the imaginative bounds of the story Oliver's dream becomes a reality. The story presents a series of other characters inspired by various dreams and aspirations; some good, some bad. A significant number of these dreams somehow involve the uniting or the breaking of a family unit. The fulfilment

or the destruction of dreams peripheral to Oliver's own dream lends extraordinary precision to Dickens's delineation of his moral thesis. The reader may not consciously bear all these parallels and contrasts in mind as he reads; yet their sheer accumulation must surely vibrate in the reader's unconscious imagination.

The contrast between certain dreams and their outcome in the story at times so rivets the reader's attention that Oliver's own story is temporarily forgotten. Nancy, for example, reveals her dream of a new life in "a home in some foreign country" (XLVII) at the most sensational point in the story. I refer to Nancy's last prayer to Bill Sikes before he murders her. Her final plea for "a little, little time!" represents her desperate desire to survive and find a better life. Her plea is as hopeless, and the idea of it being granted by Bill Sikes as grotesque, as is Oliver's initial request for "more" from the workhouse master. Nancy's dream is every bit as appealing as the reality with which it collides -- Sikes's brutal and silent reply -- is convincing.

The pathos in this murder scene stems from the absence of any real communication between two people who have shared the same bed, the same hardships in cold and hunger, the same daily fear for their lives. The bonds between Nancy and Sikes are as tight as those between any married couple. Although no law holds them together, Nancy's real love for Sikes does; they are further bound together because each holds the power of life and death over the other. It is when Sikes believes that Nancy has jeopardized his life that he

murders her.

Bill Sikes fully realizes what he has done only after he has murdered Nancy and finds himself alone in the world. At this point he is hunted, wherever he runs, by a society that can close its eyes to the death by starvation of an orphan child, or an aged pauper, yet cannot tolerate the act of shedding blood. What makes Sikes's act most appalling is the fact that he has murdered the one human being who has shown any love for him. As far as Nancy's abilities had allowed, she had acted like a fairy godmother towards Sikes. Only Nancy stood by him while he was sick and abandoned by the rest of his criminal tribe. She was the one person upon whom he could rely for trustworthiness and affection. In other words, when Fagin misrepresents Nancy's movements to Sikes, the burglar sees Nancy's actions as a betrayal of the only kinship he can lay claim to. Once he has spilled the blood of a 'kinswoman' he has isolated himself from human kind. Descriptive headlines that Dickens added to the 1867 edition of Oliver Twist enforce this idea. Sikes is referred to as "the Wild Beast" in four headlines.[64]

The murderer's frantic scouring of the countryside around London only reinforces his sense of exile. Briefly, the sound of human voices in distress breaks upon his isolation and he temporarily loses himself and his private nightmare by joining forces with other men in fighting a

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64 See the Clarendon Oliver Twist, Appendix C, p. 387, for a list of these headlines. The headline for Sikes's actual flight is: "The Curse of Cain." The italics are mine.

fire. Once this community of purpose comes to an end and the fire-fighters disperse into small groups away from the scene of the fire that had united them, talk of Nancy's murder spurs him to resume his flight. He resolves to return to London where he dreams of finding some human contact: "There's somebody to speak to there, at all events," he decides. (XLVIII). Furthermore, he goes so far as to dream that Fagin will provide money so that he may escape abroad. Yet even on Jacob's Island Sikes finds no comfort. No longer a part of mankind, he is the "very ghost of Sikes." He is received in awful silence and is compelled to exclaim, "Damn you all! Have you nothing to say to me?" (L). And Charley Bates compresses the reality that confronts Sikes in two words: "You monster!" Sikes has lost his place among even the derelicts stranded on the shore of Jacob's Island. Even the lowest of criminals there recognizes Sikes's monstrous denial of the most fundamental bond of kinship in killing a person who had become one flesh with himself. Viewed in this light, Sikes's accidental self-destruction offers the most terrible image of poetic justice in the whole of Oliver Twist.

Parallels and differences between Sikes's story and Oliver's cry out for comments which lie beyond my province but well within the psychoanalyst's office. Sikes and Oliver both become outlaws; both set out on the road with nowhere to go; both become friendless and destitute. When they are hunted down as criminals by a mob, each claims a certain

degree of sympathy from the reader. The question that Dickens neither raises nor really answers here is: what if Sikes were really a grown-up Oliver who, as a child, had never met a Mr. Brownlow? Dickens raises the question in Great Expectations; a man of law, Mr. Jaggers, clearly describes the seed-bed of criminals he sees in London:

> Put the case that [a legal adviser] lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children was, their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. Put the case that he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar, where they were held up to be seen; put the case that he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman, and growing up to be hanged. Put the case that pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life, he had reason to look upon as so much spawn, to develop into fish that were to come to his net -- to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow. (LI).

What Dickens puts into words towards the end of his career he already conveys by implication in the early Oliver Twist.

I should not neglect to mention the initial dream on the outer periphery of Oliver Twist. Oliver's major quandary results from the frustration of Edwin Leeford's dream of fleeing the country and starting a new life with Agnes and her baby. Edwin's untimely death prevents him carrying out his purpose. Like Nancy, he had been 'prostituted' when he was very young; and like Nancy, too, his youthful innocence had been exploited by his elders for their financial gain. What is worse, Leeford was sacrificed by his own kinsmen for the meanest of dreams, "the most sordid and narrowest of all ambitions." (XLIX). The Leeford family reaps its own harvest of reality: the patronymic heir is a fiend who goes

under an assumed name, and abandons the name of Leeford.

In the fairy world of Oliver Twist Edwin Leeford's dream could not possibly come true. No more could Nancy's. Neither Leeford nor Nancy has fulfilled the magic condition upon which dreams come true, for the principle of Good within them has not remained unblemished.

Monks's evil dream of hunting Oliver to the very foot of the gallows issues in defeat. Monks, in referring to his own and his mother's lack of success in their evil pursuits, admits, "There was some cursed spell, I think, against us." (LI). The cursed spell, in my opinion, stems from the betrayal of claims of kinship: the curse of Cain.

Fagin escapes into unreality at the end of the tale. His last mad dream of escaping from the condemned cell and eluding the noose with the help of Oliver's innocence demonstrates that even through his madness the old man recognizes the power of virtue. The recognition comes too late to be of service to Fagin. The final image the reader retains of Fagin is of a crazed old man, restrained by the agents of the law, who sends up "cry upon cry" that penetrate even the massive walls of Newgate.

Nancy, Sikes, Monks, and Fagin: these are the characters whose actions claim the reader's attention. Neverthless, in retrospect, their fates reinforce Oliver's escape from a world of nightmare into a dream. These peripheral characters are all too enmeshed in the nightmare ever to escape. Where they find death, Oliver finds a new life.

Such is the Dickens world in Oliver Twist. It contains a dream at its centre and that dream is reflected again and again on its periphery, sometimes as a clear mirror image of itself that becomes shattered, more often as a dark nightmare reflection of the true dream. Based on a fairy-tale pattern, it yet surpasses that pattern in richness of detail and resonance. Oliver Twist offers "the characteristic Dickensian atmosphere, a world in which all seemingly trivial, unrelated objects, people, and events finally mesh in an intricate and self-contained pattern."[47]

One further example of this fusion of disparate elements in the story into an organic whole demands to be examined. For, it is also part of Dickens's genius that the kind of situation which calls upon his deepest sentiment may also inspire his greatest comic vein. Were I to altogether ignore this facet of Dickens's art I would do his genius a grave injustice. I propose, then, to examine Mr. Bumble's dream of wedded bliss and the reality with which his dream is confronted.

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47 Taylor Stoehr, Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithaca, New York, 1965), p. 10.

II

Edmund Wilson remarks on the dualism which runs through Dickens's works. "There has always to be a good and a bad of everything: each of the books has its counterbalancing values, and pairs of characters sometimes counterbalance each other from the casts of different books,"[48] and much of what I have already said only confirms this statement. After Dickens had finished Oliver Twist he had a lot more to say about a young orphan's adventures in seeking a fortune in the world, particularly in David Copperfield and in Great Expectations. In these two stories Dickens also has more to say about a Bill Sikes, a Fagin, and a Monks figure. Nancy, too, finds her counterparts and figures who counterblance her in these later stories.

For the present, I wish to concentrate on Dickens's wide sense of perspective in his portrayal of human dreams and realities in the early Oliver Twist. Rose Fleming's love affair counterbalances her sister's and Nancy's unfortunate experiences in love. Dickens presents an idealized and sentimental picture of a courtship and marriage in the love affair between Rose and Harry. There is no need for me to add to the adverse criticisms Dickens has received on the unreality of these lovers. The fact is they belong to a dream vision in fairyland. Dickens does not manage to combine in these figures

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48 "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," The Wound and the Bow (Cambridge, Mass., 1941), p. 64.

the fairy-tale atmosphere with the symbolic human reality with which he infuses the Everyman Hero, Oliver.

The burlesque comedy of Mr. Bumble's courtship and marriage is something different. Here Dickens parodies his own vision of the ideal marriage, illustrates the important message of his book, and employs many of the symbolical images that play such an important part in the tale.

When Dickens describes Mrs. Corney "before a cheerful fire in her own little room," with the "smallest of all possible kettles . . . singing a small song in a small voice," (XXIII) he depicts all the minutest details of a bourgeois domestic scene that might be found in a Dutch painting. All the creature comforts are there, even to the cat "who, in the centre of her family, was basking before the fire." (XXIII). The outer frame to this picture of warm felicity and "complacency" literally offers a polar contrast. Dickens describes the bitter cold beyond Mrs. Corney's room: the snow "frozen into a hard crust" and the "sharp wind," which seems to attack with savage fury "such prey as it found." Dickens hammers the last nail into the picture-frame he has constructed: "Many hunger-worn outcasts close their eyes in our bare streets, at such times, who, let their crimes have been what they may, can hardly open them in a more bitter world." (XXIII).

Later, this outer frame to Mrs. Corney's domestic comfort offers a kind of perspective on deeper realities beyond the farcical domestic realities with which Bumble is

eventually confronted. He is to meet with the cold and crusty sharpness of Mrs. Corney's tongue; he is also to become a prey to her savage fury. In the context of people, even criminals, who might starve to death alone in the snow, Bumble's reality remains as comic and as well-deserved as Dickens intended it to appear.

The parish beadle leaves this cold exterior frame which opens onto Chapter Twenty-three and steps into the picture of Mrs. Corney's warm hearth. As I have mentioned before, evil can be seductive and its agents insidiously correct in their outer deportment. (One only has to think of Fagin's welcome to Oliver when the boy arrives in the thieves' kitchen.) So it is with Mrs. Corney. The picture she makes inspires Bumble with a dream and Dickens with one of the funniest episodes in Oliver Twist. What magic Dickens finds in a round table before a cheery grate and two plump hypocrites who face each other around that table is only ever matched again by Dickens in the table-scene at Pip's London residence when Joe's bowler hat assumes a demonic life of its own. The latter scene, although it is as comic as any scene depicted by Laurence Sterne, is Chaplinesque in its dreadful pathos. The scene in which Bumble demonstrates that the shortest way between two bodies is not necessarily the most direct contains the biting satire suited to the players in a game that might aptly be called, "Ring around the Roses, we ALL fall down." For, Mrs. Corney's ways are no more straightforward than her suitor's.

Mr. Bumble later finds his words of love rebounding upon him in the cruellest manner: "I mean to say this, ma'am; that any cat, or kitten, that could live with you, ma'am, and not be fond of its home, must be a ass, ma'am." (XXIII). Bumble's final words before he disappears from the story altogether reveal the reality that has resulted from his awakening from a dream. When Mr. Brownlow informs the "master" of the workhouse that the law supposes that his wife acts under his direction, he protests: "If the law supposes that, . . . the law is a ass -- a idiot. If that's the eye of the law, the law is a bachelor; and the worst I wish the law is, that his eye may be opened by experience -- by experience." (LI).

These words of a defeated man make a sad commentary on Bumble's earlier joyful dance around Mrs. Corney's table before he had proceeded to make a careful inventory of her furniture and after he had already inspected her table-ware for its true sterling qualities. The riches surrounding the beadle inspire him to confess his wild dream to Mrs. Corney: "Oh, Mrs. Corney, what a prospect this opens! What a opportunity for a jining of hearts and housekeepings!" (XXVII). What a prospect indeed: "Coals, candles, and house-rent free," plus the pending death of the master of the workhouse to look forward to, with the subsequent "wacancy" which will have to be filled.

Sadly, and comically, the beadle wakes from his dream and sees that his real-life "fascinator" is not "a Angel," nor "a weak creature," and certainly no "porochial perfection." Only two weeks after his marriage the beadle is quite trans-

formed from the "irresistible duck," the "dove" that was his former self. Now the new master of the workhouse sits before a "cheerless grate" whose "cold and shining surface" reflect only sickly rays of the sun. Mr. Micawber would probably declare that "the God of day had gone down upon him." (David Copperfield, XI.) The transformation of the fireside scene seems to symbolize the dead ashes Bumble finds in place of warm words of love between his teeth.

Bumble is caught like one of "the heedless insects" he watches hovering around "the gaudy net-work" of a paper fly-cage above his head. Dickens remarks, "it might be that the insects brought to mind some painful passage in [Bumble's] own past life." (XXXVII). Bumble is now stuck with the creature he once addressed as "my fascinator," and he appears to have been caught on the gaudy prongs of a pair of silver sugar-tongs.

Like Oliver, who loses his fine clothes once he returns to the sorcerer's kitchen, the one-time beadle has lost his laced coat, cocked hat, and his staff of office. Like other figures in Oliver Twist he has been prostituted for vulgar gain. "I sold myself," he moans, "for six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a milk-pot; with a small quantity of second-hand furniture, and twenty pound in money. I went reasonable. Cheap, dirt cheap!" (XXXVII). I have already remarked on the diabolic manner in which Bumble's words, as well as his actions, have a distressing way of rebounding upon him. The reader must remember at this point, too, that the beadle was ready to "sell" Oliver even less than "dirt cheap." Of all the tales of prostitution in Oliver Twist

this is the least heart-rending and, perhaps, the most convincing in its everyday reality.

The "relict of Mr. Corney deceased" -- Dickens no doubt chooses his word for the association it conjures up, for Mrs. Corney is a relic as well as a widow, one as old as the Wife of Bath, and equally interested in mastery in her own house -- finds her new husband dear rather than cheap. Appropriately enough, Mrs. Bumble's definition of "dear" emphasizes cost at the expense of affection.

The vicious sparring with words and blows between these two unhappy partners in marriage surpasses anything Oliver sees in Sowerberry's kitchen. Based on mercenary and selfish considerations, the Bumbles' marriage makes a mockery of the central vision of a happy home in Oliver Twist. The union of the beadle and matron of the workhouse reflects a nightmare image of the final "Marriage With No Word of Settlement or Pin-Money" announced in the title to Chapter Fifty-one. By means of comedy Dickens conveys a nightmare picture just as vividly as he depicts the nightmare episode of Nancy's murder by means of violent sensationalism. That Dickens could do all this so early in his writing career is some indication of the enormous scope of his talent.

III

Taylor Stoehr has written a fascinating thesis on Dickens's stance as that of the dreamer.[67] Although this attitude to Dickens opens new avenues of approach to his work, and fruitful ones at that, I cannot help feeling that what a dreamer does unconsciously often corresponds to what his ancestors have done consciously in developing means of representing ideas and emotions in linguistic and visual terms. Freud says that "the purpose of dreams is wish fulfilment."[68] He also says that "the dreamer has at his command a symbolic mode of expression of which he knows nothing, and does not even recognize, in his waking life."[69] The aims of art are broader than those of dreams, and the methods of the artist are certainly more deliberate than those of the sleeper. On the one hand there is the helpless sleeper at the mercy of his subconscious mind; on the other hand there is the conscious artificer, the knowing creator.

Dickens certainly offers wish fulfilments in his tales. He also expends a great deal of effort on representing life's deepest realities; he somehow manages to get the feel of real

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67 Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithaca, New York, 1965).

68 Sigmund Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis, Washington Square Press edition, translated by Joan Riviere (New York, 1952), p. 162.

69 Freud, p. 173.

life onto his pages. This absorption with life becomes in itself a celebration of life that holds equal importance with another desire common among artists. This is the desire to draw a magic circle around chaos, or the raw material of life, and so make it part of a design which is aesthetically pleasing to man, perhaps because it satisfies some of his eternal longings.

While the dreamer is unconscious of what he does, the artist consciously strives for his effects even when his deepest intuitions must be conjured up from his unconscious mind. No dreamer really, Dickens simply shares with all great artists a common ability: to exteriorize in universally comprehensible terms some intuitive knowledge of general human impulses, the intimations of certain enduring preoccupations of man's heart and mind. Indeed, Dickens shares with prehistoric artists, the Palaeolithic cave painters, a need to win the approval and the participation of his audience.

Some tens of thousands of years ago Palaeolithic man employed a secret language in the Lascaux Caves in the Dordogne which "attests an organized collective manifestation of will, with a defined intention, and requiring the participation or approval of a whole society."[70] Two views of this work prevail. One view holds that the work was purely and

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[70] Fernand Windels, The Lascaux Cave Paintings (London, 1949), p. 49.

spontaneously aesthetic. "But on another view, it will have been to serve [a people's] economic needs through magic."[71] In either case, "man tries to conciliate the great unknown forces of the world. Magic rites are enacted, in the mysterious depths of the caves, by sorcerers."[72] Here, magic utility seems to be combined with artistic compulsion. Primitive societies observe rites for sympathetic magic, which "consists, funadamentally, in subjecting the image of the inanimate creature to what it is desired that the creature itself should suffer."[73] Palaeolithic man wished to influence his survival by exerting some influence over his luck in hunting. His animal paintings surely offer evidence of sympathetic magic rites. Sympathetic magic might then be equated with wish fulfilment, and so with the broader meanings of 'dream' which are not restricted to the sleeper.

This kind of dreamer's stance I readily associate with Dickens. It is not that of the lonely sleeper preoccupied solely with his own traumas. Dickens's dreamer's stance conspires to cast a spell of sympathetic magic over the real world by the affirmation in a dream vision of a world approximating certain moral aspirations. Dickens's dream

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71 Windels, p. 50.

72 Ibid., p.55.

73 Ibid., p. 55

grows out of realities, good and bad, that he sees around him. It demands the defeat of evil realities and the victory of what Dickens finds most beautiful in the real world. He admires the untouched innocence of a child; the generosity of older, wiser individuals; the impulse towards good that may be found in unexpected quarters; the miracle of one human being selflessly reaching out to another in love. This miracle is the basis for a happy family. In Dickens's eyes, a happy family seems to be the basis for a healthy society.

Oliver Twist leaves the reader with intimations of symbolical meanings submerged beneath the surface of the narrative. Many of these symbols resemble dream-symbols, it is true. The explanation is simple enough. Of the meaning of dream-symbols Freud says, "we derive our knowledge from widely different sources: from fairy tales and myths, jokes and witticisms, from folklore, i.e. from what we know of the manners and customs, sayings and songs, of different peoples, and from poetic and colloquial usage of language. Everywhere in these various fields the same symbolism occurs, and in many of them we can understand it without being taught anything about it."[74]

Freud goes on to say that from the "thought-relations, and comparisons between different objects, in virtue of

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[74] Freud, p. 166.

which one idea can constantly be substituted for another,"[75] which is to say, from the symbolism he finds in different sources, he recognizes "an ancient but obsolete mode of expression, of which different fragments have survived in different fields."[76] Freud refers to philologists who "have maintained that in the oldest languages opposites such as: strong-weak, light-dark, large-small, were expressed by the same root word."[77] Furthermore, "In ancient Egyptian, as well as in other later languages, the sequence of sounds was transposed so as to result in different words for the same fundamental idea."[78]

I believe that Dickens's fairy-tale stance draws on some of these ancient devices for communication. Dickens draws a nightmare image and he evokes a dream image. Just as an image in a dream may stand for itself and for its opposite, when Dickens presents an image of man's primitive hunting instinct, he shows a good hunting instinct (Oliver's quest for survival and a better life) and he juxtaposes against it any number of examples of evil hunting instincts. He presents, for example, Cain's instinct to hunt Abel, or his own flesh and blood; the street-mob instinct to hunt a single victim; the chase after financial gain and social

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[75] Ibid., p. 173.

[76] Ibid., p. 174.

[77] Ibid., p. 187.

[78] Ibid., p. 188.

status; and so on.

Ancient ways of thinking in terms of comparisons may be detected in Dickens's depiction not only of polarities but also of parallel images. If the happy family forms the centre of the dream in Oliver Twist it is to be expected that parent figures would play an important part in the story. They do. In fact, the various parent figures in the book exhibit all the complex contradictions of character that might in reality be found together in one parent. Impulses that are good and bad; generous and mean; solicitous and indifferent; these parental characteristics never come together in any one of Oliver's surrogate parents as they so often do in real parents. Dickens keeps the gentle nurse and the child-beater apart. Oliver's surrogate parents are either idealized fairy figures or wicked monsters. This is a child's view of parental figures rather than an adult's. It helps the reader to believe in a world as Oliver might see it. It thus helps Dickens to gain assent to the dream he evokes in the story.

Nevertheless, to regard and accept a parent as a many-sided human being requires a degree of maturity that I suspect Dickens did not possess when he wrote Oliver Twist. I think that this is fortunate for Dickens's readers. Had he reached this stage of maturity early in life he would never have produced Oliver Twist. He would immediately have written David Copperfield and Great Expectations. As it is, the reader has the privilege of observing Dickens's own emotional

development while enjoying the three very different versions of one basic Cinderella-type story.

Dickens's balancing of three dark portraits of hag-mothers in Oliver Twist with three sketches of smiling, affectionate mother-figures offers an illustration of his employment of parallels and contrasts to enforce his point. In the opening pages of the book, a besotted hag-nurse replies to Agnes's talk of dying:

> Lor bless her dear heart, when she has lived as long as I have, sir, and had thirteen children of her own, and all on 'em dead except two, and them in the workus with me, she'll know better than to take on in that way, bless her dear heart! Think what it is to be a mother, there's a dear young lamb, do. (I).

This woman lives in a world where children are spawned as irresponsibly as they are held cheap. Hers is a world where people neither practise what they preach nor ponder the significance of their words. Sally is incapable of really communicating with Agnes because, despite the endearments on the hag's lips, Sally feels no warmth in her heart. She feels only greed for the gold ring and locket that she steals from the girl's body while it is still warm. In doing so, Sally deprives Oliver of the vital clue to his identity.

Although Monks's mother comes from a different social stratum from Sally's, she exhibits certain character traits in common with the workhouse nurse. Monks's hag-mother deprives a young person of her good name; but when she defames Rose and her family, she does so with evil premeditation. More deliberately wicked than Sally, this wealthier hag-mother

combines greed for money with a lust for vengeance on Agnes's innocent child. Mrs. Leeford appoints her son as executor of her vindictive will to hunt Oliver down, destroy his reputation, and so deprive him of his inheritance. Her last wish makes a contrast with Sally's attempt to make amends from her death-bed for the theft she had committed years before. Sally's guilty conscience has chained her to the memory of Agnes long after the girl has rotted in her grave, and to Oliver long after he has disappeared from the nurse's life.

Dickens compresses his comment on a further perverse and horrible mother-figure in Mr. Bumble's brief words of praise of Mrs. Mann. When she offers the beadle gin, which she pretends to keep in the house as medicine for her infant charges, Bumble exclaims: "You feel as a mother, Mrs. Mann." (II). Again, in a few words, Dickens makes a complex comment on the habit of dosing babies with alcohol to keep them quiet. Furthermore, he offers a preposterous example of the beadle's own brand of double-talk. Bumble knows perfectly well what goes on at Mrs. Mann's farm; he knows that money that was spent on the gin he drinks should have been spent on food for the babies at the farm.

These nightmare images of motherhood are counterbalanced by their opposite idealities. Mrs. Bedwin, the "motherly old lady" who looks after Mr. Brownlow and has wonderful stories to tell Oliver about her own children and former family life, is one such counterbalance to the hag-mothers. Another true

mother-figure is Mrs. Maylie, who first takes Rose in under her roof and then takes Oliver, even when she believes that he is a criminal. She takes him in because he needs immediate help if he is to live. Mrs. Bedwin and Mrs. Maylie offer bright contrasts to the dark portraits of the hag-mothers. What is more, they are associated with images of light sunshine and bright firesides time and again. Rose herself is last seen as a happy mother surrounded by smiling children who seem destined to 'live happily ever after' as it should be, in every good fairy tale.

Fernand Windels suggests an explanation for the abundance of animals in the same picture in certain Lascaux caves. The pictures even show the superimposition of one animal upon another by the same artist. Windels relates this characteristic to the primitive belief "that by multiplying the images one causes the living things themselves to multiply."[79] This writer suggests that rites of fertility and generation correspond to the concern for multiplying images.

Dickens might very well be incorporating age-old fertility rites in the multiplication of certain images in Oliver Twist. If Dickens's work is, as I believe, in part a celebration of life, he would naturally tend to think in terms of life's continuation. His employment of the fairy-tale stance, which in itself gives evidence of similar generative

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[79] P. 64.

purposes, would therefore only be natural.

Oliver Twist contains certain proliferating images which contemporary man knows best from his own dreams but which obviously derive from a common storehouse of primitive symbols and which artists, in particular, consciously employ as a means of communication. Some of these proliferating images are of black darkness which conjures up opposite images of light. There are images of confinement, too, which issue in the desire for freedom; and images of hunger which demand satisfaction. The images of frightening beast-like figures in Oliver Twist demand to be vanquished by more powerful good-fairy figures. Hidden objects and lost people require discovery; and staircase images, present throughout the story and one of the most familiar of dream symbols, may have sexual connotations as Freud believes. I would think rather that the staircase, related to the ladder, refers to man's earliest experience in reaching for the stars by standing upright instead of walking on all fours. In this act man separated himself from his brother animals and perhaps first conceived the idea that there was an 'up' and a 'down,' and finally, a Heaven and a Hell, and that man, of all the beasts, seemed to reach in both directions at once.

Oliver Twist similarly points in two directions. Its imagery points towards a nightmare at the same time that it invokes a dream.

CONCLUSION

Dickens's motives for writing his stories appear to have been highly complex. From the time in his childhood when he wrote a tragedy called Misnar, The Sultan of India to the end of his life he exhibited a compulsion to communicate with an audience. Equally obvious is Dickens's obsession with certain traumatic ghosts that he repeatedly tried to exteriorize and so dispel by transforming them into fictions. Many of his 'ghosts' happen to coincide with age-old traumas well known to mankind. In writing Oliver Twist Dickens sought to consolidate his growing early popularity as a writer. He thus combined his desire to earn money with his urge to reach out to a public and entertain them with his own laughter and tears.

At the same time, Dickens had a moral purpose in writing Oliver Twist. It is on this moral aspect of Dickens's writing that I concentrate in this thesis. I am aware that in concentrating on one aspect of Dickens's magic I risk doing his genius a real injustice. I have neglected that comic magic of Dickens by means of which he draws a reader into a nightmare world and yet leaves the reader with a sense that life is not all dark tragedy, because even in the midst of pathos life can be comical.

In Chapter Two of this thesis I demonstrate that the

attack Dickens made against specific contemporary evils in society must be regarded as subsidiary to his general purpose to criticize fundamental human vices. I have shown in Chapter Three that Dickens's moral stance pervades the entire story to provide it with an underlying unity. I have illustrated how the images of a nightmare world pervade the book and constantly evoke images of an opposite kind of world. The omnipresence of terrible realities in Oliver Twist produces a natural reaction in the reader to envision a dream world in response to the nightmare. Like Oliver, the reader is inspired to rebel against man's cruel indifference to the needs of others and to ask for more charity and affection among men. This rebellion against a perverse world and the consequent desire for its reform results in common assent to the story's contrived happy ending.

The happy resolution of a disturbed world-picture resembles the visionary wish fulfilment found in certain fairy tales. I have drawn attention to the presence of fairy-tale devices and images in Oliver Twist in my fourth chapter. Finally, I have suggested in Chapter Five that the structure of Oliver Twist and the interplay between the different parts of the book bear a strong resemblance to the design of Cinderella's story.

Oliver Twist offers an interesting example of an important early stage in Dickens's development as a writer of fiction. The structure of the story may be regarded as a springboard from which much of Dickens's subsequent fiction

arose. Trevor Blount rightly suggests that "every Dickens novel is a really new beginning; and unless we are in a position to recognize novelty and assess it in terms appropriate to its experimental nature, we shall invariably misjudge the outcome."[79] This Dickens critic realizes that critical approaches relevant to authors in the main stream of novel writing are "not necessarily just or illuminating when applied to [Dickens]."[80] I have tried to discuss Oliver Twist in terms I deem appropriate to Dickens's own approach to his material. The fact remains that no adequate definition of Dickens's peculiar fictional stance may be arrived at from the study of only one of his books. No more can his development of the fairy-tale stance in an extended narrative be wholly appreciated without a study of what he did with it in David Copperfield and Great Expectations. Dickens's final attitude towards the fairy-tale 'happy ending' can truly only be assessed when the significance of the two equally ambiguous endings to Great Expectations is taken into account. Such considerations belong to a larger work than the present thesis.

Obviously, what I say about Oliver Twist gives rise to a number of questions about Dickens's final opinion on criminals, his attitude towards social rebels, his real feelings about fairy-godmother figures, about parenthood, and the really fundamental relationships within a family.

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[79] Dickens: The Early Novels (London, 1968), p. 9.

[80] Blount, p. 9.

Such questions may only be answered after a detailed investigation of what happens when Dickens writes in the person of David Copperfield and then of Pip Pirrip. Like Oliver, both of these later heroes ask for "more." David learns that although a fairy godmother may offer the vital first-aid to a child in dire need of the essentials for physical and emotional well-being, that child's ultimate happiness depends upon his developing self-reliance and self-discipline. Pip must learn even harder lessons. He learns to accept his deepest longings as "poor dreams." Not only must he see through society's false values, he must acknowledge his own lack of true integrity. His is a confession that he is no hero but a despicable snob. Ultimately, Pip saves himself by coming to terms with the perplexities of human aspirations in the context of the tragi-comic human condition. The love and compassion that the man-hero Pip wins from the reader at the end of Great Expectations surpasses in depth any emotion the reader feels for the boy-hero at the end of Oliver Twist.

Compared with David and Pip, Oliver is a very unsophisticated hero; he is, as I have said in this thesis, hardly more than a symbol to represent primitive human apsirations. His values and his virtues are more instinctive than acquired through experience. What convinces the reader of Oliver Twist is not so much Oliver's own individual reality as the reality of the dream and the nightmare which confront the hero.

If the hero of Oliver Twist learns very little, the same cannot be said of the reader. Humphry House refers to Dickens's

introduction into Oliver Twist of criminal characters from London's underworld and makes the point that, "In his knowledge of such things Dickens was by no means unique; but using it in a novel, with all the heightened interest of a vivid story, he brought it home to the drawing-rooms and studies and boudoirs where ignorance, blissful and delicate, might be touched."[81] This is true in a way that Humphry House himself fails to see, since he considers, despite what I have quoted him as saying, that in Oliver Twist "a serious, considered moral lesson is very hard to find."[82] Some believe in absolute values, others think in terms of relativity. I believe that a moral lesson must spring from a certain point of view. A point of view is usually a question of metaphorical definitions. One man might regard a cow as sacred; another man would view the worship of a sacred cow, particularly if it were in the form of gold, as evil. From the first man's point of view, any suggestion to smash the golden image would be radically perverse and subversive.

There is something fundamentally subversive in Dickens's message in Oliver Twist which, I believe, is essentially moral. With each monthly instalment of Oliver Twist Dickens subtly expanded his reader's human sympathies to include even criminals under certain circumstances.[83] Dickens more

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81 Introduction to The New Oxford Illustrated edition of Oliver Twist (London, 1949), p. viii.

82 Ibid., p. viii.

83 Blount, Dickens, on page nine refers to weekly issues of Oliver Twist. These appeared in 1849-1850, after the monthly instalments of 1837-1839.

than hinted that criminal activity might even be found in the drawing-rooms and studies and boudoirs where all was perhaps not as ignorant, blissful, and delicate as their occupants might pretend, and where there might be less excuse for criminal activity than in the slums of Saffron Hill. The reader who today scans Oliver Twist within the space of hours, rather than months, misses some of the slow cumulative effect of reading it as it was originally presented: in monthly instalments with gaps between issues which allowed time for thought and wonder. Nevertheless, a single reading of the tale offers a peculiarly powerful impact in a more direct manner.

Dickens certainly broadens his reader's understanding of terrible realities present not only in nineteenth-century England but in human nature the world over. He encourages a more charitable attitude to the needy poor, especially to children, and invites his audience to share his affirmation of a dream in the visionary reformed world he finally creates for Oliver. Yet to all intents and purposes he is entertaining his readers with a gripping story. He belongs to an ancient tradition of great artists who manage to teach while they delight. I can think of no more apt summary of Dickens's achievement in Oliver Twist than one written long ago in praise of the true poetic vocation:

> with a tale, forsooth, he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner; and, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue; even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things, by hiding them is such other as have a pleasant

taste, -- which, if one should begin to tell them the nature of the aloes or rhubarb they should receive, would sooner take their physic at their ears than at their mouth.

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84 Sir Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesy, edited by Dorothy M. Macardle (London, 1962), p. 21.

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