universität wien

DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

„Blurring the Lines of Victorian Gender Ideals: A Literary Analysis of Charles Dickens's Child-Hero Oliver Twist"

verfasst von / submitted by

Clara Wunsch

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2021 / Vienna, 2021

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt / degree programme code as it appears on the student record sheet:	UA 190 344 353
Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt / degree programme as it appears on the student record sheet:	Lehramtsstudium UF Englisch UF Spanisch
Betreut von / Supervisor:	Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sylvia Mieszkowski, MA

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank Univ.-Prof. Dr. Sylvia Mieszkowski for agreeing to be my supervisor and mentor despite her already full schedule. I am eternally gratefully for her support, her invaluable advice, and her encouragement to always keep going.

Also, I would like to thank my family, first and foremost my parents and my siblings. Without your love and support, without the countless hours you babysat my daughters and challenged me not to give up, writing this thesis would not have been possible. You are simply the best. And to my husband – I love you, thank you bearing with me and believing in me!

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

Charles Dickens was not only one of the greatest and best-known novelists of the nineteenth century – his works have become classics, and his influence goes far beyond literature. As a master of storytelling and as a prolific writer, Dickens appealed to a wide readership. His books were popular among all social classes and sold more copies than any other author at the time (Mee 4). Dickens's popularity and success even helped redefine the novel, "[establishing] the novel as the dominant literary genre, a position it has held in Britain and elsewhere ever since" (Hollington 355). Even though he started writing well before Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, Dickens is often seen as the quintessential Victorian writer. "In fact, no writer of any period is more closely identified with the time and place in which he lived, which is why 'Victorian' and 'Dickensian' have become more or less interchangeable terms" (Douglas-Fairhurst 3-4). For this reason, his fiction provides insights into various aspects of Victorian daily life and lends itself to further study.

This thesis analyses Dickens's portrayal of his beloved protagonist and child-hero Oliver in his novel *Oliver Twist* (1838) with regards to gender. Oliver is a poor and underprivileged orphan that seeks a better life in a world full of brutality and injustice. On the threshold of adolescence, he has to overcome many devastating obstacles, most importantly his lack of a loving family. Despite these challenges, Oliver is surprisingly mature and often seems to behave differently from what was expected of boys his age. The main aim of this thesis is to explore Oliver's behaviour reflects or transgresses the dominant ideals of Victorian masculinity.

Even though Dickens first and foremost wanted to entertain and amuse his readers through his creation of iconic characters, dramatic elements, and complex, grotesque fictional worlds, he was certainly passionate about social reform (Smith 2009: 7). Thus, Dickens's books can also be read as a social commentary and a critique of the pressing issues society had to face due to industrialisation and urbanisation, especially the Victorian institutional apparatus. Through his use of satire and quick-witted humour, Dickens condemned and indicted the shortcomings of the law, the injustices of

Parliament, and the hypocrisy of the church and society (Hollington 459). Dickens drew attention to the social conditions of the most vulnerable and defenceless of Victorian society, the poor, and, most importantly, their children.

The first part of this thesis outlines the contextual background that is pivotal for understanding the historical happenings impacting Charles Dickens's writing. The focus is on the early- (1837-1851) and mid-Victorian period (1851-1875), as this was the time during which Charles Dickens wrote and published *Oliver Twist*. The examination of the Victorian Era includes a comment on industrialisation, the principal economic developments, major political reforms and movements, and on the characteristics of Victorian society. Then, the concept of childhood is discussed. Following an outline of the field of childhood studies, the examination of Victorian childhoods puts emphasis on the child as an active subject that has a complex social, historical, and economic dimension, a fact that until recently has been largely omitted from historical research and academic discourse (Honeyman and Goose 8-9). After a brief historical analysis of the development of childhood as a separate stage of life, light is shed on the beliefs about childhood that were prevalent during the Victorian period.

The second part of this thesis contains a brief discussion of Charles Dickens's life, including the factors that motivated and influenced his writing, and a short synopsis of *Oliver Twist*. This is followed by the literary analysis of *Oliver Twist*, the focal point being the young character's portrayal and development with regard to Victorian gender ideals. My supposition is that even though Oliver often acts and behaves in gender-conforming ways, he also exhibits character traits that challenge and defy certain gender ideas expected of him.

While gender norms and boundaries often seem to be clear-cut in the 19th century, changes in these constructions occurred due to social, economic and technological advances. As a man of his time, Dickens was well-aware of the societal expectations and requirements of acceptable girlhood and boyhood. Natalie McKnight points out

that he has often been criticised for his celebration of Victorian domestic virtues and his portrayal of saintly, “angelic young women”, like Amy Dorrit, and “earnest young gentlemen” like Pip or David Copperfield (186). Nevertheless, she concludes that he “[…] was far more prone to bend and blend stereotypical gender roles than many had previously thought” (186). When we delve deeper into the subject and analyse Dickens’s depiction of Oliver, it becomes obvious that this character’s reflection of Victorian gender ideals is more complex than it appears.

Before the end of the eighteenth century, children and childhood did not have any relevance as subject-matter in literature. This changed with the emergence of new ideas about childhood by prominent thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke. They considered childhood a valuable stage of life and argued that children should be treated according to their cognitive and physical capabilities (Cunningham 54-55). Romantic poets such as William Blake and William Wordsworth drew from Rousseau and Locke’s positive attitude towards childhood, and viewed childhood as a state of god-like innocence that needed to be cherished and protected (Cunningham 54-55). Inspired by the Romantic notion of childhood, the child – often abused, neglected, and mistreated – is at the heart of Dickens’s work.

> Dickens extended the romantics’ moral, psychological, and philosophical use of the child from the realm of lyric and personal epic poetry into that of the encyclopaedic Victorian novel so that a child’s welfare now also became the crucial index of a nation’s – indeed, an empire’s – social and political health and even its survival. (Locke 13)

Dickens’s own childhood experiences were a significant inspiration for many of his fictional characters and stories. When Charles’s father, John Dickens, was imprisoned for debt in 1824, young Dickens’s relatively carefree childhood came to an abrupt halt. At twelve years old, he was sent to work at a boot blacking factory to improve the family’s finances – an episode of his life that lasted roughly a year, after which his father sent him back to school (Slater 22-24). Nevertheless, this experience forever scarred him and instilled in him a strong belief in social justice, making childhood in Victorian England a central theme in many of his major works (Slater 20-21). In *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1869), Dickens writes, “[…] I can find – MUST find, whether

I will or no – in the open streets, shameful instances of neglect of children […]" (257). With Oliver, Dickens created a fictional character who demonstrates the plight of this shamefully neglected Victorian child.

Since *Oliver Twist* is set in the Victorian period, Oliver's life is determined by the circumstances of Victorian daily life. This is why in order to make assumptions about his childhood, it is essential to first consider the historical context of the era. Named after the British monarch queen Victoria, whose reign spanned from 1837 to 1901, the Victorian period marked a time of great change and transformation. Queen Victoria ascended the throne at the beginning of the nineteenth century and led Britain to recover and cement its economic power in the world (Steinbach 3). The Industrial Revolution had already begun to change the British economy in the later decades of the eighteenth century, "[…] and it inaugurated an era of industrial expansion and further technological innovation that changed the world" (Allen 1). Ground-breaking inventions such as the steam engine, cotton mills, and the coke-fuelled blast furnace, changed the manufacturing processes, and transformed a predominantly rural and agrarian society into a predominantly urban and industrial one. Large factories provided new employment opportunities for unskilled labourers in the cities, inciting many to migrate from rural environments to the cities. However, due to a considerable growth of the population, cities became overcrowded and living conditions were often poor (Steinbach 13-18). Thus, politically speaking, the Victorian age was a period of much-needed reformation to ameliorate the lives of those at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy.

From the beginning until the end of the nineteenth century, the population increased from 24 million in 1831 to over 37 million at the turn of the century, roughly 35 per cent of which were under fifteen years old (Steinbach 3). Clearly, "[…] the youthfulness of the population was one of the defining characteristics of Victorian life" (Frost introd., par. 6). Following the tradition of the Romantic period, children were sentimentalised and idealised as pure, innocent creatures who had to be protected, and who symbolised nature and humanity in contrast to the dehumanising effects of

industrialisation (Robson 2015: 5). However, this perception of childhood conflicted with the also popular Evangelical notion of children as creatures afflicted by original sin.

The doctrine of original sin, which was essential to Evangelical teachings, goes back to Augustine (354-430), one of the most influential church fathers. His ideas about the fall of Adam and Eve in *Genesis* stress that "[…] all human beings thereafter are born into a state of estrangement from God – an 'original sin' that condemns all individuals prior to and apart from their committing any 'actual' sins in time and space" (McFarland 29-30). Evangelicalism thus emphasised the necessity of moulding children into good, moral adults through discipline and correction (Fletcher ch. 1, par. 3-5). The Bible justified this viewpoint; in Proverbs 22:15, it says, "Foolishness is tied in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline shall drive it away" (qtd. in Cunningham 35). Evangelicalism celebrated its revival from the late eighteenth- until the mid-nineteenth century in Victorian Britain (Steinbach 275). It can be best understood as a Christian movement, incorporating "[…] a wide diversity of methodologies, theologies, and spiritualities" (Smith and Stephen x). As will be shown, Evangelicalism enabled the rise of the middle classes, which in turn established a rigid social order based on gender difference in Victorian Britain.

Evangelical writings and teachings became hugely influential in the first part of the nineteenth century. Two prominent Evangelical leaders were laywoman Hannah More (1745-1833) and the abolitionist and philanthropist William Wilberforce (1759-1833) (Smith and Stephen x-xi). Wilberforce stresses his belief in original sin in *A Practical View on the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians* (1797), arguing that only through his faith is man "[...] to be delivered from the condition of a child of wrath, and a slave of Satan; to be adopted into the family of God;" (237). In her successful conduct book *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), More raises awareness for the importance of reprimanding and correcting a child's faults. "[W]e frequently hear such expressions as these: 'Children will be children': […] Thus we may observe this dangerous and delusive principle frequently turning off with a

smile from the first indications of those tempers, which from their fatal tendency ought to be very seriously taken up" (66-67). Similar advice could be found in many widely-read Evangelical conduct books, catechisms, and magazines (Fletcher ch. 1, par. 4). Both the romantic perception of childhood as well as Evangelical teachings on child-rearing based on original sin coexisted in Victorian society, the implications of which will further be discussed in chapter three.

Research on child labour in nineteenth-century Britain indicates, that undeniably, many children from poor families worked to contribute to their family's income (Humphries 2010: 2). As the population continued to grow, it became imperative to integrate children into the labour force in order to shorten their dependency on their parents and to ensure industrial progress (Horn 5). "The eighteenth-century demographic system [...] was fragile, and only consistent gains in both production and productivity would permit continued population increases. Neither population growth nor economic growth could be sustained on the productive capacity of adults alone" (Honeyman 3). Contrary to the wide-spread belief that children mostly worked in factories and mines, Peter Kirby argues that "[t]he archetypal model of child labour in large factories and mines was never the predominant mode of child labour" (2003: 132). Rather, children often worked in agriculture, small-scale manufacturing enterprises, and in the domestic service industry (Humphries 2010: 2). Nigel Goose and Katrina Honeyman (5) also stress that children's experience of labour was diverse – socially, economically, geographically, and culturally speaking. As far as age is concerned, according to the 1851 census for England and Wales, which provided the first reliable data of the population and occupational employment, only two per cent of children under the age of ten were employed (Horn 7). Looking at types of employment for boys aged ten to fourteen, over 52 per cent worked in agriculture and small-scale workshops and handicrafts, 15 per cent in cotton factories, and roughly nine per cent in mines and quarries. Over 75 per cent of girls in the same age group worked in three sectors: domestic service, agriculture, and small-scale workshops and handicrafts, compared with 24 per cent working in cotton factories (Kirby 2003: 52). What can be inferred from this, is that by the middle of the nineteenth century, the manufacturing industry still heavily relied on small workshops as industrial units. According to Kirby, "[e]ven in the

modern cotton-manufacturing sector, more than half of manufacturers employed fewer than twenty people, and a great deal of production was carried out on inexpensive hand-powered machinery" (2009: 545). Even though the majority of juveniles did not work in large factories, the fact that such workplaces exposed children to unsafe and dangerous working conditions incited a new public and political debate about the nature of child labour (Horn 6). The 1833 Factory Act was the first in a series of Acts that sought to legally protect and better the life of children in employment. It excluded children under the age of nine from working in textile mills, and determined, that children aged nine to eleven should work no longer than eight hours per day and attend school for two hours a day. Working hours for children aged thirteen to eighteen were limited to twelve hours per day. Additionally, the appointment of four inspectors should ensure that factory owners abided by these stipulations (Horn 39). What Goose and Honeyman highlight (8), is that working children were not just passive victims of industrialisation. On the contrary, they were active participants of society who were heavily involved in the transformational processes at play in nineteenth-century Britain.

As far as middle- and upper-class children are concerned, their childhoods were more sheltered and allowed for more free time to enjoy and play with their siblings and friends (Frost ch. 1, par. 35-37, 44). Additionally, what separated children from a higher socioeconomic background from working-class children was the factor of education. The 1851 census showed that out of the five million registered children aged three to fifteen, only two million were in school (Frost ch. 2, par. 3). Middle- and upper-class boys were sent to day schools or private boarding schools between the age of six and seven. Middle-class girls attended day schools, and upper-class girls were usually educated at home by their governesses (Frost ch. 2, par. 29-33, 38-41). As the state gradually granted more rights to the poorer population by the middle of the nineteenth century, the authorities acknowledged that future voters should be literate and have basic math skills. Gradually, the idea that schooling should be made available for all children, regardless of their social and economic background, gained importance. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 laid the foundation for universal education, establishing a national system of schools. Ten years later, an amendment to this law

made schooling mandatory, although free elementary education was only guaranteed in 1891 (Frost ch. 2, par. 7-8). Victorian childhood experiences were thus diverse and complex, as Dickens also shows through Oliver's fictional experience of childhood.

Ginger S. Frost (introd., par. 6 and 9) clarifies, that gender was another essential factor that impacted how young girls and boys experienced their childhood years in nineteenth-century Britain. In order to determine how the character of Oliver reflects and challenges Victorian perceptions of masculinity and femininity, it is essential to closely study Victorian gender ideology. As we identify the acceptable social roles and behaviours for women in contrast to men, we can unveil the underlying assumptions about femininity and masculinity and their repercussions on children. The main principle of gender ideology that emerged during the early Victorian period was the doctrine of separate spheres. Women were confined to the private sphere – the home – whereas men had access to the private sphere, being the patriarchs of the family, as well as the public sphere, procuring employment and earning money (Rubinstein 319). Essentially, women's identities were centred on domesticity, on taking care of their husbands, children, and households. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall indicate that the foundations of the doctrine of separate spheres can be traced back to Christianity:

> The precise doctrines on manliness, femininity and the family within different religious groupings varied […], but there was enough common ground to allow for the emergence of a series of beliefs and practices as to the distinct and separate spheres of male and female which provided the basis for a shared culture among the middle class by mid century. (74)

The ideology of separate spheres was closely connected with Evangelical beliefs. Stemming from the Bible, "[d]ependence was at the core of the evangelical Christian view of womanhood, and the new female subject, constructed in real religious terms, was the godly wife and mother" (Davidoff and Hall 114). Women were considered to be subordinate to men, as in *Genesis*, Eve had eaten from the forbidden fruit. Hence, she was to blame for sin falling into the world (Davidoff and Hall 114). Many nineteenth-century family prayer books contained the Bible verses Col. 3,18-22, in which it says, "Wives submit unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord" (qtd. in Davidoff and Hall 108). The head of the family was thus the father, who cared and provided for his wife

and children, whereas a woman found salvation by becoming a devoted and sacrificing wife and mother (Davidoff and Hall 114). As gender roles in the Victorian era established that men and women were fundamentally different, they had to fulfil different social roles, duties, and responsibilities.

The rigorous standards and stereotypes of acceptable womanhood and manhood were deeply entrenched in Victorian minds and shaped every aspect of their lives, starting the day they were born. According to Frost, "[...] a child's experience depended vitally on the economic status of the family and on the child's sex, for both of these helped determine his or her future prospects" (ch. 1, par. 1). Children were thus under a lot of pressure because they were expected to grow into proper, respectable, and successful women and men. Deviating from feminine and masculine gender norms was not an option. From an early age, girls were taught that their main duty in life was to become a loyal and subservient wife in charge of a harmonious household. Boys, on the other hand, were supposed to become "manly", meaning independent, hard-working men, who were respected in the public realm and were able to financially support their families. Victorian gender ideology thus determined how children were treated and seen.

The focus of this thesis is to investigate how the protagonist of Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* is portrayed with respect to the dominant Victorian gender ideals. The assumption is, that while Oliver on the one hand exhibits gender-conformity, on the other hand, there are also instances in which he disregards and defies the gender roles expected of him. Through my literary analysis, I hope to gain an insight into whether Oliver's childhood experiences represent typical Victorian experiences of boyhood, or whether they were out of the norm, more progressive, and even rebellious. I intend to prove my assumption by finding textual evidence in the books. To be more precise, I need to thoroughly examine Dickens's use of language in the novel, looking at passages that concern Oliver through the critical practice of close reading, which "[...] concerns close attention to textual details with respect to elements such as setting, characterization, point of view, figuration, diction, rhetorical style, tone, rhythm, plot, and allusion" (Rapaport 4). The way I am going to approach this is by analysing

Dickens's choice of words when he describes Oliver, when he has other characters talk about them, or when the child protagonists speak, act, or think. I am basing my literary analysis on two critical cultural approaches: gender theory and age studies.

Gender studies developed in the 1990s as an answer to 1980s feminist criticism, which in turn emerged out of 1970s women's studies. Feminist criticism focused on the binary opposition of women and men and recovered the female voice, highlighting women's experience in the past, their challenges, interests, and achievements. In literature, feminist theorists found that representations of women largely supported a male-dominated, patriarchal view of the world, making women the inferior sex (Kusch 119). Gender studies theorists investigate not only femininity, but all gender identities, the main argument being that gender roles are social and cultural constructs. In her book *Paradoxes of Gender* (1994), Judith Lorber points out that once a baby's biological sex is determined, the construction of gender starts: "Once a child's gender is evident, others treat those in one gender differently from those in the other, and the children respond to the different treatment by feeling different and behaving differently. As soon as they can talk, they start to refer to themselves as members of their gender" (14). Another gender theorist I would like to foreground is Judith Butler. In her ground-breaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990), she makes the argument that gender is not a stable, fixed trait or entity, but rather is performed by what she calls "performative acts" (173). Gender is thus constructed through expressions, behaviours, and movements, that are continuously repeated, leading to the assumption, that gender is only a reality as long as it is performed. "The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of and abiding, gendered self" (Butler 179). Ensuing from these insights, I am treating the character of Oliver as a child who continuously performs or transgresses the Victorian gender norms of femininity and masculinity. This means that the construction of Oliver either helps to uphold the dominant gender ideology or positions him as a social deviant outside of the norms of society.

I would also like to foreground the work of Mary on the concept of ideology. In her book *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (1988) she starts from the premise that "[...] the representation of biological sexuality, the definition of sexual difference, and the social organization of sexual relations are social, not natural, phenomena" (Poovey 2). Therefore, gender ideology is intertwined with and heavily impacts all social, economic, and political institutions, which in turn mobilises and bolsters how gender is performed by society. Since ideologies are always inconsistent and incomplete, Poovey stresses that Victorian gender ideology was constantly scrutinised, contested, and modified. "[B]ecause it was always in the making, it was always open to revision, dispute, and the emergence of oppositional formulations. The system of ideas and institutions [...] was uneven, and it developed unevenly" (Poovey 3). This is essential for my literary analysis, as I hope to uncover that Oliver embodies the contradictions or fluctuations of Victorian gender ideology.

The interdisciplinary field of age studies developed in the 1990s and is closely linked to feminist studies and cultural studies (Gustafson 2014). Age studies, "life age studies", or "life span studies", proposes that meanings of aging, just like meanings of race, gender, and class, are social and cultural constructs that function as a "vehicle of inequality" (Packard 42). In her book *Figuring Age*, age studies theorist Kathleen Woodward indicates, that borrowing from methodologies and epistemologies of gender studies, "[...] age studies is concerned with understanding how differences are produced by discursive formations, social practices, and material condition" (x). As our age system is hierarchically organised, it categorises people according to their age. These age groups become identity-establishing and create important power relations, meaning that a person's age is directly linked to their social standing and how powerful they are perceived to be (Packard 42). Another prominent age theorist is Margaret Gullette, who, in her book *Aged by Culture* (2004) stresses, that "[w]e know that gender is a performance because we can see it feigned so well. About age as a performance, we need to start the arguments" (159). For my literary analysis, it is thus essential to investigate how childhood was constructed or performed in the Victorian period and what social and cultural meanings were attached to young age.

Cultural historians have acknowledged that late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, including didactic fiction, conduct books, as well as novels, essentially created meanings and power dynamics for the stage of childhood that were based on the dominant Romantic and Evangelical notion of childhood we have already discussed (Gustafson 532). Taking this into consideration, Oliver is a fictional character who embodies certain ideas about class, gender, and, most certainly, about age. What I have always found interesting while reading the novel is that Oliver can appear extremely naive and child-like on one page, and extremely adult and wise on the next. The assumption that age is performed and socially constructed consequently becomes a relevant factor for my analysis, in particular how age links up to gender. I would argue that Dickens's construction of Oliver as a young boy does not reflect the dominant ideal of Victorian masculinity. Boys should seek the companionship of other boys, during playtime and in school, to train them for social life and the public realm (Tosh 1999: 104-105). Oliver, however, does not perform or train the manly attributes that are expected of him. He is a young boy, however, Dickens's constructs him in a way that foregrounds his femininity.

The four key factors of Victorian gender ideology that I have identified and therefore constitute the essence of my literary analysis are the ideology of separate spheres, the ideal of middle-class domesticity, the construction of femininity, and the construction of masculinity. Collecting and contrasting textual evidence from the novel will allow me to evaluate whether or not Oliver conforms to the essence of Victorian manliness.

The first aspect of my analysis is the ideology of separate spheres. A theoretical examination will determine the origins of the concept and how the Victorians came to embrace the notion of women being restricted to the private sphere of the home while men could move freely between the private sphere and the public sphere. Based on this, I am analysing whether Oliver stays in his assigned sphere or not and to what end.

The next aspect of my analysis is the ideal of the middle-class family and the doctrine of domesticity. Again, a theoretical elaboration of why the middle-class family came to be idolised and what it entailed is contrasted with Oliver's own experience of family life. According to Susie Steinbach (168), while the middle-class ideal of domesticity mostly remained a theoretical goal, the notion of the father as the economic provider and the mother as nurturing the home, certainly had an effect on all social classes. Jon Mee argues, that "Dickens had an important role in creating the idea of the sanctity of the family for the nineteenth century and beyond […]" (64). In *Oliver Twist*, the protagonist ultimately finds his happy ending in a middle-class family. As an orphan, at the beginning of the book, Oliver actively pursues a better life and is eventually allowed to find refuge within an honourable middle-class family.

As previously mentioned, Victorian constructions of girlhood and boyhood are closely bound to the underlying Victorian perceptions of femininity and masculinity at work in society. A girl's upbringing should ensure her preparedness for her duties as future wife, mother, and manager of the household. In contrast, a boy's upbringing should teach him the qualities of manliness needed for his business endeavours and social standing, first and foremost independence and respectability (Fletcher ch. 2, par. 14-16 and Steinbach 166). While many criticise the character of Oliver Twist as one of Dickens's weaker characters, lacking depth and originality, Dickens himself stated in the preface of the third edition in 1841, that he "[...] wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of God surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last;" (vi). Dickens clearly intended to spark outrage at the abuse and ill-treatment of the Victorian pauper child and make the reader question the integrity of governmental institutions, which is why Oliver's character development was of secondary importance (Locke 5). This is the reason why Oliver has been omitted from discussions of gender and its implications. My analysis will lay bare how Dickens constructs Oliver as a boy of his time and will provide textual evidence for how he both reflects aspects of Victorian masculinity as well as Victorian femininity.

2 Historical Context: The Victorian Era

2.1 A Comment on Industrialisation: Economy and Growth

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens puts the child protagonists Oliver in a universe that although fictional, is Victorian in its core and captures not only a great variety of human Victorian experiences, but also the ambivalence of the era. Gender is at the heart of this experience. As a Victorian himself, Dickens experienced the social and political events of the time first hand. This is why in order to understand Oliver's journey and the gender roles he embodies, it is essential to outline the historical circumstances of Victorian Britain.

As will be shown, the emergence of a distinct Victorian gender ideology in nineteenth-century Britain relied on the rise of the middle classes. In *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (2003), Sonya O. Rose proposes that the effects of industrialisation, especially the rise of industrial capitalism, changed the dynamics of gender at place in society. She observes that changing ideas of masculinity and femininity first became visible in families of the middle and working classes, i.e. families that had to work to make money:

> Relations between and among the men and women who created the first industrial nation were transformed by the very development of that society. As working people struggled to secure their livelihoods, they found themselves constrained by shifting forms of employment, competition with one another for scarce jobs, and revised legal entitlements, responsibilities, and restrictions. They were forced to improvise new directions for living that altered the familiar routes of the past, and gender distinctions were crucial to these transformed patterns and emerging practices. (Rose 2003: 1)

The period between 1837 and 1901 is called Victorian period, as it encompasses the 63-year-long reign of Queen Victoria. Since Britain was the first country in the world to experience industrialisation, it profited from its advanced economy to become the richest country by the middle of the nineteenth century (Steinbach 84). The process of what is now often called the Industrial Revolution, however, already started well before Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in the 1760s and lasted until the 1840s (Steinbach 85). Christopher Harvie (3) stresses, that while industrialisation was

certainly happening, before 1820, the government was not progressive enough to even be aware of the concept and what it entailed. “Industrial development did not follow a predetermined, predictable route to success. The process was gradual and casual. [...] [E]ven in the 1820s, economists doubted whether technology could improve general living standards” (Harvie 9). Central to industrialisation is the notion that technological innovation and change led to unforeseen economic growth and prosperity (Bruland 118). Today, however, economic historians highlight the fact that changes in productivity and manufacturing were happening slowly, step-by-step, and only became discernible by the middle of the nineteenth century.

> The once dominant perspective that Britain was a land ravaged by factories and machines during the early nineteenth century has in recent years been severely eroded. New macro-economic studies have provided seemingly incontrovertible evidence that national economic growth between 1780 and 1820 was actually much slower than once thought. In other words, the view that the period associated with the Industrial Revolution marked a major economic discontinuity has been fundamentally challenged. (Ashworth 224)

Joel Mokyr (2004: 2) points out that the British economy already boasted a high level of economic growth and security in the second half of the eighteenth century, the alleged beginning of industrialisation. At the same time, the standards of living did not improve considerably until the 1850s, leading Mokyr to question whether “[...] the concept of an Industrial Revolution is indeed the product of an obsolete historiography.” (2004: 2) Nevertheless, especially the first half of the nineteenth century was undeniably a period of great technological innovation and improvement, boasting the invention of steam power. While manufacturing processes previously predominantly took place in people’s homes and relied on hand tools or uncomplicated machinery, the focus was now on high-cost specialised machinery, materials, and equipment in large factories, enabling mass production. New scientific and technological breakthroughs brought prosperity and stability to agriculture and the textile, coal, and iron industries. As farming and agriculture became more efficient, more and more unskilled workers from rural areas moved to the cities in search for employment (Steinbach 92). Essentially, from the second half of the eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century, Britain transformed from an agrarian and rural society to an industrial and urban one (Mokyr 2004: 2, 27). This development created a high demand for the service industries, including domestic services, retailing, and

professions such as teachers, doctors, and clergymen, which "[…] helped to create an integrated national marketplace and made service an important agent of economic change and growth" (Steinbach 92). According to Josephine Guy, the aforementioned events, paired with population expansion and more opportunities for trade because of newly acquired colonies, "[…] led to the emergence of a new type of economy. It was characterised by high productivity, largely driven by industrial production, and sustained by relatively rapid growth" (13). Additionally, Britain's successful banking system played a pivotal role in why the economy grew the way it did (Steinbach 89). Banks were quick and efficient in granting private credits to industrialists to further invest in their businesses, which was unheard of in other European countries. Therefore, "[…] while the Victorian period is usually characterized as an industrial age, in which factory, mill, and mine owners became wealthy through industrial profits, far more wealth was created in the world of finance, chiefly banking and insurance" (Steinbach 89-90). The reasons for industrialisation and economic growth in nineteenth-century Britain are thus complex and dynamic.

That being said, scholars widely agree (Harvie 14-15 and Ashworth 225-227) that the textile sector – the cotton production in factories to be more precise – was at the centre of industrial change, profiting immensely from technological breakthroughs. In the 1770s, James Hargreaves's spinning jenny, though hand-operated, revolutionised the spinning of cotton. Other key inventions such as power looms, James Watt's steam engine, and Richard Roberts's self-acting mule, slowly mechanised and automated the manufacture of cotton, speeding up production and making cotton "the nation's most profitable export - constituting something like 40 per cent of all profit from Britain's exports" (Ashworth 226). What also needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that before the 1847 Factory Act, which was one of a series of acts regulating work and employment, women and children frequently worked long hours under hazardous working conditions for low wages, thus reducing labour costs for the cotton mills (Ashworth 227). At the same time, however, other economic sectors, the domestic sector, retail, and construction, to name a few, progressed more slowly and less noticeably. "Large sectors of the economy, employing the majority of the labour force and accounting for at least half of gross national product in 1830 were, for all practical purposes, only little affected by innovation before the middle of the nineteenth century"

(Mokyr 2004: 12). Social inequalities reached a new zenith, and while the rich grew wealthier, the poor had to endure miserable working and living conditions. For many, the differences in power and wealth between the small elite, holding dominant positions in the British Establishment, and the great majority of working-class people, was the central salient feature of nineteenth-century life (Rubinstein 279). However, it is too simplistic to reduce nineteenth-century Britain to social inequality. The following chapters will discuss the political and social factors that shaped the era and added to its complexity.

2.2 Political and Economic Thought

During the Victorian period, the two main political parties consolidated into the Liberal "Whig" party and the Conservative "Tory" party (Sanders 235). By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Liberals became very popular, since they were oriented and open towards the interests of the middle- and working classes. As the "dominant ideology of the Victorian period" (Steinbach 39), Liberalism supported the expansion of the democratic system, gradual reform, and laissez-faire thought, favouring a free market economy as opposed to government intervention. The Conservatives favoured tradition over progress. They strongly believed in the monarchy and in upholding social hierarchies, maintaining that the landed elite should be in charge of governing. Furthermore, they were proponents of protectionist economic policies restricting international trade to protect domestic industries (Steinbach 38-39). Michael Sanders indicates that the nineteenth century was "a time of political fluidity" (236), as the boundaries between the two political and ideological forces were not always clear-cut. He identifies several possible political positions, "[...] Tory, Tory-Radical, Conservative, Liberal-Conservative, Liberal, Radical and Ultra-Radical" (236). As we will see, Dickens did not have straightforward political views; rather, his political and ideological positions are highly contradictory.

Hugh Cunningham (2008: 159) points out, that even though Charles Dickens is often praised as a reformer, his political viewpoints are difficult to pinpoint. "This does not mean that he did not attack abuses in his society, nor that his reputation as a reformer

was undeserved; rather, his responses to particular issues were shaped by his abiding concern for decency and humanity, and not by any coherent doctrine of the proper role of the state" (Cunningham 2008: 159). Michael Sanders agrees that while Dickens refrains from directly commenting on political ideologies, his novels exhibit "[...] a 'revolutionary' impatience with an actually existing society which is always shown to be in urgent need or reform [...]" (236). Thus, Dickens's fiction does not point to a particular political party or political school of thought. It is revolutionary as it criticises the existing social and political order.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, some ground-breaking and influential moral, economic, and political theories evolved, that were well-received by politicians and underpinned many nineteenth-century laws and regulations. politics and legislation (Cunningham 2008: 160). I would like to foreground Jeremy Bentham's school of utilitarianism, Adam Smith's doctrine of political economy, and Thomas Malthus's theory of population. Bentham, Smith, and Malthus and their disciples were all dedicated to reform, however, Dickens strongly opposed their liberal philosophies, which he believed were inhumane and cruel towards the poor and were irreconcilable with his belief in Christian charity. In *A Nightly Scene in London* (1856), which he wrote for the magazine *Household Words*, Dickens declared:

> I know that the unreasonable disciples of a reasonable school, demented disciples who push arithmetic and political economy beyond all bounds of sense (not to speak of such a weakness as humanity), and hold them to be all-sufficient for every case, can easily prove that such things ought to be, and that no man has any business to mind them [...] I utterly renounce and abominate them in their insanity; and I address people with a respect for the spirit of the New Testament, who do mind such things, and who think them infamous in our streets. (Qtd. in Slater 1998: 351)

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), a wealthy lawyer, intended to reform legislation by objectively calculating and measuring what actions led to certain quantities of pleasure or pain. "The aim of that legislation was to ensure a right or 'good' society where 'good' was defined in terms of the principle of utility" (Guy 16). In *A Fragment On Government* (1776), Bentham introduced this principle, explaining that "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong" (3). Hence, an action or

a law can only be considered morally good or right, if it maximises the wellbeing or happiness of society: “Whether we are evaluating actions or policies or practices or institutions, what is fundamentally important is how much happiness is produced and how much suffering is avoided or alleviated” (Turner 188). While Bentham favoured democracy, individual and economic freedom, as well as equality before the law (Turner 186), his ideas had negative repercussions on the poor. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens harshly criticised the New Poor Law of 1834, which was influenced by Benthamite thought, and caused tremendous suffering among the poor.

Another theory that had a great impact on nineteenth-century politics and legislation was the concept of political economy, the founding father being Scottish moral philosopher, economist, and reformer Adam Smith (1723-1790). His most famous work, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), outlines a theory of how a nation’s economy works best and most efficiently, and “[...] details the benefits, interconnections and consequences of a free-market economy that paved the way for modern capitalism” (McCreadie 1). Smith argued that for an economy to be able to grow, it is essential that labour is divided among the people. Labour division leads to more productivity, and productivity leads to a surplus, which is useful if it can be invested in a market that is not restricted by state intervention (Evensky 68-69). For Smith, human behaviour and the economy were directly related. People instinctively invest and act according to how and where they can make the most profit and this in turn benefits society and leads to economic progress. Thus, political economy advocated free trade and laissez-faire capitalism, and sought to limit protectionist measures that tried to regulate the market (Guy 19-20). According to Paul Young (234), many Victorians, Dickens included, opposed the theory of political economy, criticising that a capitalist economy would create even more conditions for social injustice and inequality.

Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) was an influential British cleric and political economist. He is most famous for his work *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), in which he formulated his wide-spread theory of population (Broten 9-10). Malthus’s main axiom is that when left uncontrolled, the population is always expanding while at

the same time food supplies are limited and food production cannot grow fast enough: "[…] I say that the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man" (Malthus 10-11). Population growth and economic progress are thus in conflict. To ensure that the demand for food does not eventually outgrow food supplies, Malthus envisaged "positive" checks, meaning natural causes for population decline such as disease, or famine, and, "preventive" checks, meaning human intervention through abstinence or late marriages to reduce the number of offspring (Mathew 4). In addition, Malthus believed that his theory of population proved that the state's attempt to reduce poverty, the Elizabethan Poor Laws, was flawed. He argued that distributing money to the poor would increase population growth and decrease production, causing even more poverty and misery (Poynter 152-154). "Like so many of his contemporaries, he refused to see poor rates as anything but a waste of resources on unproductive paupers [...]" (Poynter 154). As the literary analysis of *Oliver Twist* will show, Dickens's intentionally constructed Oliver as an innocent, fragile, and saintly boy, attributes that were typically associated with femininity, in order to foreground the harsh reality and the injustices the poor had to face.

The aforementioned theories are thus essential, as Oliver's embodiment of feminine rather than masculine gender ideals can be construed as Dickens's condemnation of the government and its liberal and utilitarian attitudes. Cunningham stresses (2008: 161), that Dickens's rejection of liberal economic ideas does not make him a conservative. Like many radicals, Dickens distrusted the government, and he criticised the uncontested power of the aristocracy. At the same time, he was strongly against "mob action" and thus disapproved of the Chartist movement, a working-class attempt to reform Parliament (Cunningham 2008: 161). In a speech at Birmingham and Midland Institute on 27 September 1869, Dickens famously announced: "My faith in the people governing is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in The People governed, is, on the whole, illimitable" (Dickens qtd. in Sanders 242). Dickens's political convictions are neither unequivocally liberal nor conservative nor radical (Sanders 242). Rather, he stands for social justice and for humanity.

2.3 Politics: An Age of Reform

The subsequent pages give an overview of the political landscape in the first half of the nineteenth century in Britain, as conceptions of gender and the construction of gender roles evolve dynamically and are interrelated with the political processes at play in society. Michael Roper and John Tosh argue that in order to study gender difference, it is essential to view "[..] masculine and feminine identities as part of a political field whose relations are characterised by domination, subordination, collusion and resistance" (8). When speaking about the politics of a specific era, we try to identify the power relations at work in society (Steinbach 35). Rohan McWilliams defines "politics" as "the ways in which the distribution of power within society is understood and debated" (2). In 1820, Britain had over 21 million inhabitants, nevertheless, only about 516,000 upper-class men, mostly landed gentry, were allowed to elect the Members of Parliament, "MPs" (Steinbach 36-37). Consequently, at the start of the nineteenth century, political participation and legislative power was restricted to a small social elite.

The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of necessary political reform. Cunningham (2008: 162) points out that by the 1830s, the government had already become leaner and cleaner. It had reduced military expenses, the number of civil servants, and sinecures, paid positions that required little to no responsibilities and work. Additionally, the government started to endorse the liberal principles of political economy. By the 1860s, the development of a free-market economy had developed, and the idea that the state should not interfere with the economy had become a central tenet of British politics. (Smith 163 and Harvie 69). "Individualism, self-respect, self-reliance, and the organization of voluntary and co-operative societies were the keynotes of mid-Victorian liberalism" (Harvie 69). However, Guy points out (13) that while national wealth and the economy grew, money and riches were distributed unevenly at the cost of the poor.

To appease mounting working-class discontent and to avoid social unrest and upheavals, the elected liberal Whig government committed to social reforms to

ameliorate the lives of the people from the 1830s onwards (Steinbach 37, Sanders 235, Guy 13). Reforming legislation such as the Reform Act of 1832, the Factory Acts of 1833, 1844, and 1847, the Mines Act of 1842, and the Public Health Act of 1848, to name a few, regulated working hours, supervised working conditions for women and children, implemented compulsory elementary education, increased wages, and provided new opportunities for political participation (Sanders 235, Harling 110). Guy underscores, "[...] that the origins of the British welfare state can (in part at least) be traced backed to the interventionist character of Victorian social legislation" (13). While in the eighteenth century, the government was primarily concerned about the defence of the nation (Harling 110), by the end of the nineteenth century, it became much more visible and influential to the people.

2.3.1 Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834

A notable reform of the 1830s was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The Poor Laws regulated how the poor were assisted by the government and could seek support. The older system dated back to Elizabethan times and obligated each parish to take care of their poor. Since wages were low and working-class families were often unable to feed and clothe their children, parishes granted outdoor family subsidies and provided voluntary poor-house accommodation (Steinbach 45-46). In short, those who did not have the means to take care of themselves –, orphans, the sick, the disabled, the elderly –, received support at their local parish. Parish officials determined who was eligible for outdoor relief or who would be taken into a workhouse. "It wasn't an ideal system, but it was rooted in Christian charity, and recognizing the humanity of the poor: valuing family ties and endeavouring to keep families together" (Richardson 14-15). There were still injustices and corruption, but overall a sense of a local community that could provide for its members. With the introduction of agricultural machinery, more and more workers and former farm hands moved to urban areas in search for employment (Rose 1996: 52). At the same time, the population grew steadily and the clash between the rich and the poor became insurmountable.

The New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 is a perfect example of how Jeremy Bentham's moral theory of utilitarianism and Thomas Malthus's theory of population were introduced into society through legislation. The more people sought relief in their parishes, the more money had to be raised from middle- and upper-class taxpayers to finance this support system. As a result, the social elite demanded for the Poor Laws to be changed to their advantage (Rose 1996: 52). Poor law reformers such as Bentham's disciple Edwin Chadwick were adamant that the poor should learn to help themselves, arguing that "[…] poverty was 'natural,' and […] that destitution, unless it was caused by illness or old age, was the fault of the destitute" (Rose 1996: 52). The new system was no longer locally organised but was under control of a centralised new Poor Law Commission, which ensured that the poor could only seek help inside the workhouse – relief outside the workhouse became illegal (Richardson 15). The workhouses were deliberately designed to be uncomfortable, harsh and deterring places, meant to prevent the poor from seeking help.

Fewer people in the workhouses meant less money had to be incurred from taxpayers to finance them. According to Ruth Richardson, "[t]he new workhouses were effectively a sort of prison system to punish poverty" (15). Inmates had to hand in everything they owned. They were given a uniform and were made to do hard manual work for their food rations. However, rations were intentionally sparse and the poor were slowly starved to keep them quiet and women from having more children. Families could not stay together but were brutally separated, a measure influenced by Malthus, who talked about the importance of controlling population growth, especially among the poor (Young 248). The poor that sought relief in the workhouses were perceived as idle and disinclined to work and as such, the general opinion was that they were undeserving of financial aids:

> Implicit in the Poor Law Act of 1834 was the idea that if able-bodied people who were poor sought assistance from the state, it was because they were indolent. It was not the low wages of employed men that made it hard for the poor to feed their families. Rather, the Poor Law reformers believed, the cause of the poverty of the able-bodied was their refusal to work. (Rose 1996: 53)

In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens addresses the distinction between the undeserving and the deserving poor. While there is no mercy for brutal working-class criminals such

as Fagin and Sikes, and hypocrites such as Mr Bumble, Oliver is an innocent boy that certainly deserves to be loved and protected. However, just the mere fact that he was born in the workhouse suffices for him to be considered undeserving. Dickens seems to suggest that a person should be judged by their character and actions rather than by the fact that they are dependent on the workhouse. As will be examined, Dickens constructs Oliver as delicate, saintly, and feminine, which emphasises the clash between those that are truly undeserving and those that wrongly accused of being undeserving. Rose observes that "[t]he Poor Law Amendment Act marked a significant turn in class relations, and its stipulations were met with hatred by the poor" (1996: 53). As working-class discontent and distrust of the governing elite grew, tensions between the poor and the privileged classes became palpable.

2.3.1 Chartism

The Chartist movement was the first independent mass movement of the working class. It aimed to secure democratic rights and to draw attention to the living and working conditions of the poor, "[...] and it dominated all political thinking and government domestic policies in the first ten years of Queen Victoria's reign" (Rudé 179). Despite the spirit of social reform and improvement, the working class was excluded from political participation. Steinbach points out, that "[w]hile Britain as a country got richer, most people's standard of living actually decreased between 1820 and 1850" (92). This means that while national wealth increased, the gap between rich and poor, between the powerful and the weak, further expanded.

Before 1832, the aristocracy was the sole ruling class, holding all powerful positions and the right to vote. Parliamentary reform was supported not only by the liberal government, but also by many conservatives, who were anxious that denying middle-class men the right to vote might lead to a violent revolutionary outburst (Steinbach 44 and Guy 12). According to Bruce Morrison, "[...] elites will make democratic concessions when faced with substantial, even revolutionary, popular challenges to power and privilege" (678). Thus, the 1832 Reform Act gave men that had the financial means to rent property or a home for a minimum of ten pounds the vote, adding over

one million adult men to the electorate. Roughly 14 percent of adult men, or 1.75 million men could now vote (Steinbach 44). However, the fact that more political rights were granted to the middle class after the Reform Act "[...] created a new ruling class based on the upper and middle classes against the rest" (McWilliam, ch. 2). This incited working-class dissatisfaction.

Apart from the shortcomings of the 1832 parliamentary reform, the working-classes disapproved of the economic difficulties of the poor and the New Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. (Steinbach 132-133 and Chase 96). In 1838, William Lovett and Francis Place presented the manifesto of the Chartist movement, the "People's Charter", in which six major demands to reform Parliament were made: all men should have the right to vote, the ballot should be secret, there should be equal electoral districts, MPs should no longer have to be property owners, they should get proper pay for their work, and general Parliamentary elections should be held annually (Tredell 177). The Charter was presented to Parliament in 1839, 1842 and 1848; however, it was always rejected, which caused violent demonstrations and discontent among the people (Tredell 177). With over 50,000 members, the National Charter Association was a visible and active movement, not only locally but nationally. Working-class Britons took to the streets and held large rallies to protest social injustices. Malcolm Chase explains that these assemblies "[…] became a prime vector of communication […] that created and affirmed identity" (4). Chartism thus certainly helped to establish a distinct working-class identity.

By mid-century, the Chartist movement subsided due to its lack of cohesion, political approaches, and the return to economic stability (Harvie 38, Smith 163). Nevertheless, the movement was an important turning point for members of the working classes, realising for the first time that unified, they could be a powerful political force. As a consequence, working-class struggles, in particular unsafe and exploitative working conditions and unhygienic, overcrowded living conditions, incited politicians such as the liberal Edwin Chadwick and social commentators such as Thomas Carlyle to start their own investigations (Steinbach 92-93). Chadwick published his findings in *Enquiry*

into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain (1842). He concluded "[t]hat annual loss of life from flight and bad ventilation are greater than the loss from death or wounds in any wars in which the country has been engaged in modern times" (369). Carlyle declared in his essay *Chartism* (1839), that "[a] feeling very generally exists that the condition and disposition of the Working Classes is a rather ominous matter at present; that something ought to be said, something ought to be done, in regard to it" (1). Politicians and social reformers became increasingly aware that industrialisation paired with less state intervention led to high rates of poverty among the people.

The Chartists addressed many social injustices that Dickens also criticised, such as the consequences of the New Poor Law and the economic struggles of the poor (Chase 101). However, Dickens's fiction leaves no doubt that he strongly disapproved of working-class civil unrest. In his historical novel *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), rebels and rioters die as punishment for their militancy (Chase 98-99). Apart from that, Dickens's 1844 Christmas story *The Chimes* on the one hand condemns idle politicians and the rich, and on the other hand praises the worker that humbly endures and faces the hardships thrust upon him. "The poor are to be pitied and treated kindly by their masters. They are not, however, to decide social matters themselves. At the end of the tale, […] the poor are asked to have faith in the inherent goodness of their erstwhile tormentors" (Chase 107). Chase concludes, "[a]s much as he genuinely detested social injustice, Dickens more feared social rebellion, class conflict, and radical change" (99). As a reformer and peacemaker at heart, Dickens was aware of the suffering of the poor, however, he did not believe in violent upheavals to change the political status quo.

Malcolm Chase's analysis is extremely insightful for the ensuing literary analysis, as he suggests that Dickens was anxious about a social rebellion that questioned the social order. Consequently, it would seem probable that Dickens also considered deviations from the Victorian ideals of masculinity and femininity as threatening to

society. Therefore, it seems all the more intriguing to examine whether Oliver conforms to or transgresses the gender roles that were expected of him.

2.4 Characteristics of Society

In the 1850s, slowly but steadily, optimism spread among the people. Britain's economy prospered following the end of Chartism and the rise of liberal, laissez-faire politics (Steinbach 48-49). However, the country continued to be divided along the lines of social class. As the character of Oliver passes through different social environments and "families" of different socioeconomic backgrounds, it is essential to outline the social landscape of nineteenth-century Britain. The following pages discuss four salient features of society: class formation and social identity, social mobility, population growth, and urbanisation.

2.4.1 The Social Experience: Class and Identity

While the British had certainly categorised their people according to socioeconomic factors such as wealth and status well before the Victorian period, Steinbach points out that consciousness and awareness of the concept of social class was a defining characteristic of the nineteenth century:

> Victorian Britain was a deeply classed society; everyone was aware of class, admitted that it was a meaningful social realty, and identified themselves as a member of a class. As a result, understanding class is fundamental to understanding Victorian Britain (Steinbach 124).

Social stratification in nineteenth-century Britain was based on a class system that distinguished between the working, middle, and upper classes. Priti Joshi remarks that "[c]lass is a notoriously vexed concept, its definition a utility routinely questioned" (260). Social historians have been divided whether the concept of social class should be based on economic factors such as income or standard of living, or on social factors such as occupation, class consciousness and identity, status, and power relations, or on some of the aforementioned factors combined (Joshi 260). The subject of how to

define social class could undoubtedly be further explored, however, Joshi (260) adequately describes that the division into the working-, middle-, and upper classes provides a convenient and practical tool to look at societal differences in nineteenth-century Britain.

Michael Hewitt (316) explains that the tripartite structure of society was generally accepted by social historians of the time as each class behaved visibly differently from the classes below or above. "[...] [T]he classes lived entirely different kinds of lives, married different kinds of spouses and had different aspirations, different possibilities and different limitations" (316). Thus, class provided not only a set of hierarchical social categories, but also a rationale for understanding the socioeconomic and political developments (Hewitt 305). "For contemporaries, the history of the nineteenth century was written above all in the shifting fortunes of the classes, the eclipse of the aristocracy, the triumph of the middle class and the challenge of the working class" (Hewitt 305). Hewitt (306) and Steinbach (125) agree that the division into three social classes can be ascribed to David Ricardo (1772-1823), an influential political economist of the early nineteenth century. In his work *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), he distinguishes between those receiving income from rent, property or interest (the upper classes), from profit and salaries (the middle classes) and from wages (working classes).

> The produce of the earth – all that is derived from its surface by the United application of labour, machinery, and capital, is divided among three classes of the community; namely, the proprietor of the land, the owner of the stock or capital necessary for its cultivation, and the labourers by whose industry it is cultivated. (Ricardo iii).

However, it is too simplistic to reduce the class system to the economic factor. Hewitt (316) points out that the classes were separated spatially, as they lived in different areas; - linguistically, as they used different dialects and vocabulary; - physically, as they clothed differently and had different access to hygiene; - and demographically, as they usually found a spouse within their own class. Hence, it is essential to recognise that the classes had many layers and were in a state of flux, changing constantly (Steinbach 126). Steinbach (125-126) similarly points out that apart from one's

earnings, defining aspects of class included type of employment, education, social standing or respectability, culture, moral values, and the area they lived in. Therefore, it was not uncommon that upper working-class families were financially more fortunate than some lower-middle-class families. Still, they would identify as working class because they lived in a strictly working-class area or socialised with other working-class families (Steinbach 125). Social class thus provided the Victorians with a framework to organise society and to understand themselves within society. In a speech to the House of Commons in 1850, Prime Minister Lord Palmerston declared that people were content within their social class and should strive to remain content, as God had selected their class for them:

> We have shown the example of a nation in which every class of society accepts with cheerfulness the lot which Providence has assigned to it, while at the same time every individual of each class is constantly striving to raise himself in the social scale - not by injustice and wrong, not by violence and illegality, but by persevering good conduct, and by the steady and energetic exertion of the moral and intellectual faculties with which his Creator has endowed him. (qtd. in Sanders 1888: 136)

In 1820, roughly 80 per cent of the population belonged to the working class, 15 percent to the middle class and 5 per cent to the upper class (Steinbach 128). Over the course of the century, it was the middle classes that grew and found their own voice (Joshi 261). By 1850, they comprised about 25 per cent of the population, a percentage that rose to 50 per cent until 1871 (Steinbach 128). Thus, two salient characteristics of the nineteenth-century British population were the large working class in the first half of the century and the development of a strong middle class in the second half.

As Oliver travels between working-class and middle-class families, which both have their own distinct ways of dealing with his fragile and innocent nature, it is essential to analyse the salient features of these classes. The most important characteristics of the Victorian middle classes was their emphasis on gender ideology and the doctrine of separate spheres, which will be further discussed in chapter four. What separated them from the upper and the working classes was that their work was intellectual rather than manual and that they lived by rigorous social norms that demanded respectability and

the keeping up of appearances. Additionally, members of the middle classes strived for financial and professional security.

> A new ethic of work, a sense of self tied to one's labour [...], a faith in the free market and one's expanding potential were beliefs that created the prosperity of the middle classes and were also the defining features of this emerging class. Set off from the workplace and new business practices was the home, elevated by Victorian domestic ideology as a haven. (Joshi 262)

As already indicated, the middle classes grew considerably during the nineteenth century. By mid-Victorian times, about 15 to 20 per cent of the population belonged to the middle class, while about 15 per cent belonged to the lower-middle class (Rubinstein 287). Thus, the middle classes were subdivided into different groups. "The large sector of professionals and merchants in London differed from manufacturing families in the north and Midlands whose experience differed again from the market town tradesmen and solicitors or the farmers whom they serviced" (Davidoff and Hall 21). A strong indicator of a distinct middle-class identity is the emergence of a middle-class elite of intellectuals, professionals, and businessmen in the 1830s and 1840s, that functioned as class leaders, among them Thomas Carlyle, Charles Darwin, George Eliot, and Benjamin Disraeli, to name a few. "[A]n elite of commercial and professional men together with their intellectual allies led the creation and assertion of a middle-class identity and authority which was produced, disseminated and negotiated through a network of voluntary societies'" (Joshi 261). As a result, though there were subdivision, the middle classes were strongly bound together by a sense of identity and community, and they grew more powerful not only socially, but also economically and politically.

Davidoff and Hall (20) argue that what set the middle classes apart from the upper classes was their dependence on a salary to make a living, while the aristocratic and landed elite lived from rents. Aristocrats had a nonchalant attitude towards money, spending it freely and with pleasure, whereas members of the middle classes were anxious about maintaining or gaining financial stability and were more mindful about financial matters (Davidoff and Hall 21). Consequently, a distinct middle-class identity "[...] encouraged a different ethos, emphasizing pride in business prowess" (Davidoff

and Hall 20). Middle-class entrepreneurs and industrialists benefited from new technologies and tools, the division of labour, and the increasing consumption of goods and services, and mostly believed in the concept of political economy (Davidoff and Hall 20). Joshi (262) likewise identifies an emphasis on work and the belief that hard work will be rewarded, and an emphasis on the home, that provided a safe and peaceful haven for the family, as central elements of middle-class identity. Davidoff and Hall (20-21) point out that the middle classes were marked by a conflict between the belief in economic liberalism and the adherence to a traditional gendered social order. Joshi (262) explains that the belief in rigid gender roles further helped to set the middle classes apart from the upper classes they deemed immoral and corrupt and the lower classes, where women often had to work to ensure the family's survival. In chapter four, we will discuss Victorian gender ideology and its implications in more detail.

In his fiction, Dickens depicted the multifacetedness of the middle classes. According to Joshi, "Dickens is one of the richest resources for studying the Victorian middle classes in all their variety and nuance" (263). Out of his over 1,000 characters, most are middle-class and show a wide array of different experiences, jobs, income, interests, prospects, and status (Joshi 263). What Dickens further excels in is his depiction of one central middle-class characteristic, namely "the ability to invent oneself, to begin life in one 'station' and make one's way to another" (Joshi 263). Oliver Twist, for example, David Copperfield, Pip in *Great Expectations* and Esther in *Bleak House* all come from humble backgrounds and are determined to improve their place in society. Pip in particular embodies the Victorian middle-class myth of the "self-made man" (Joshi 263). In his work, he frequently thematised the fate of typically young men from lower middle-class backgrounds who attempt to move to a higher social class in order to secure financial stability and social respectability.

In his best-selling book *Self-Help* (1859), author and reformer Samuel Smiles argued that every man could achieve greatness, no matter his background. He stressed that a man's most important trait should be his willpower. "Hence energy of will may be

defined to be the very central power of character in a man - in a word, it is the Man himself. It gives impulse to his every action, and soul to every effort" (Smiles 152). The country boy Pip starts off as a blacksmith's apprentice and becomes an English gentleman, with the help of an anonymous benefactor. Pip's financial and social rise stands for the belief that everybody could achieve upward mobility. However, Pip eventually has to learn that his success came from laundered money and he realises that only through hard work, discipline and determination can he find happiness in life. "Yes, to be middle class is to have expectations - or aspirations - but not 'great expectations', Dickens suggests, and certainly not any that attempt to bypass hard work and introspection" (Joshi 265). Dickens seems to agree with Smiles that hard work and willpower are indispensable middle-class qualities that lead to a happy life. Even if a man leads a humble life, "[...] it will be a great satisfaction to him to enjoy the consciousness of having done his best" (Smiles 152). This implies that in order to find his place in the world, a man must follow the prescribed ideals of manliness: to become independent, strong, determined and respectable members of middle-class society.

June Foley points out that Dickens's success and fame was also, essentially, self-made. "In an energetic and industrious era, no man was better known for his energy and industry, his astonishing output of words in novels, plays, nonfiction works, and his own magazines, as well as in public speaking engagements, than Dickens" (Foley 14). This explains his fascination with and predilection for men that achieve middle-class status through hard and honest work. However, in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens refrains from making the hero, Oliver pursue and achieve manly attributes. Possible reasons for Dickens's emphasis on Oliver's feminine qualities will be given in the conclusion.

The working class was the largest social class in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Sally Mitchell (18) points out that out of four people that were employed, three did manual work and where thus part of the working classes. According to Andrew Miles and Mike Savage, "[t]he fundamental question which lies behind working-class history is that of agency" (1). Still today, they are often described as "hapless victims of a new, impersonal 'factory system'" (Miles and Savage 41). In fact, working people

were indispensable for economic progress: “Mid-Victorian capitalism […] expanded not by crushing workers’ skills, but by drawing on and utilising them” (Miles and Savage 42). Working people were interested in how politics affected their lives and their political convictions were diverse, ranging from conservative to radial (Steinbach 132). Miles and Savage argue that “[i]t was the working class which was the main carrier of democratic traditions in Britain” (6). As previously described, the era of Chartism in the 1830s and 1840s showed working-class agency as it manifested their capacity to unite to protest political injustices and the indifference of the governing elite.

The working class was heterogeneous and can be subdivided into the lower (unskilled and semiskilled) working class, and the upper (skilled) working class. Hewitt divides the working class into a small “favoured group” who received higher wages, a “much wider cohort” who was employed but received lower wages, and a “shifting mass” reliant on Poor Law provision, charitable giving, and temporary work (308). According to the 1851 census, 15 per cent of the working people were employed in skilled occupations such as “[p]rinters, masons, carpenters, bookbinders, expert dressmakers, shoemakers, and the growing number of highly skilled workers in new trades such as toolmaking […]” (Mitchell 20). Around 21 per cent were unskilled workers in agriculture, and 13.3 per cent worked in the domestic service (Mitchell 42). Unskilled work was frequently dangerous and physically demanding. Working hours were long and unregulated, and workers usually received neither employment contracts nor retirement benefits (Mitchell 41). Additionally, unskilled employment was often temporary or seasonal, which is why many women and children also worked to support their families, mostly in the domestic sector or in factories (Steinbach 130). Consequently, poor working-class families often lived in dire poverty and suffered extreme hardships to survive.

The upper (skilled) working class was anxious about falling into poverty, a fear they shared with the lower middle classes. “[...] [I]n a world without the types of welfare systems we know today, poverty was a truly terrifying prospect” (Moore 12). Thomas Carlyle even described poverty as “the Hell of which most modern Englishmen are

most afraid" (qtd. in Moore 12). Small businesses could easily go bankrupt as there was no government support and working-class entrepreneurs often faced significant setbacks. Grace Moore indicates (13), that in 1842, of the sixteen million inhabitants of England and Wales, about one and a half million were paupers, meaning that they were dependent on the workhouse to survive. Although standards of living slowly improved, at the turn of the century, roughly 25 to 35 per cent of the working class still lived in poverty (Hewitt 310). While the poor were often praised for being industrious and hard workers, the paupers, who relied on the workhouses, were at the bottom of society, stigmatised as idle and undeserving good-for-nothings.

2.4.2 Social Mobility

As previously noted, in the nineteenth century, British society was organised hierarchically. Those at the top of the hierarchy were more dominant and wealthier than those at the bottom. Steinbach indicates that "[m]ost people sought not to break barriers or rise as high as possible, but to find happiness at the level at which they found themselves" (125). Even though this system was based on and revealed social inequalities, the majority of people approved of it. Oliver is an orphan, even though, unbeknownst to him, his parents were actually members of the middle class. Therefore, he is misplaced in the workhouse and in Fagin's family of young criminals. Eventually, Oliver regains his middle-class status, suggesting that for Dickens, class identities are inherited and passed along from parents to their children.

Social mobility lays bare how easily and how often people move to another class and whether class boundaries are strong or weak. Miles and Savage define social mobility as "[...] the way in which individuals move between occupations and social classes, either in the course of their own lives (intra-generational mobility), or compared to their parents (intergenerational mobility)" (30). Hewitt points out that social mobility was rare. "The Victorian myth of self-improvement suggested almost unlimited prospects of advancement for the thrifty and industrious. Widespread middle-class anxieties seem to confirm the dangers of movement in the opposite direction. The reality was more

static" (310). This would suggest that there was little to no upward social mobility in nineteenth-century Britain.

Nevertheless, social mobility was possible. What is new is that "[i]n contrast to previous centuries, when one's station was inherited and fixed, the mid-eighteenth century onwards is marked by social fluidity, particularly for those in the middle class […]" (Joshi 261). Depending on various factors, such as education, choice of profession, choice of spouse, sudden rise or drop in income because of new businesses or inheritance, middle-class men could move upwards or downwards (Steinbach 128). Hewitt argues that "[t]here was sufficient truth in the myth of the self-made industrialist to sustain it, but mobility down across this divide was much easier than mobility upwards across it" (310). Lower-middle-class men were terrified of downward mobility and constantly felt the pressure of remaining in their social class (Joshi 261). As a result, the lower middle class and the upper stratum of the working class moved closer together.

In his study on English working-class social mobility, Andrew Miles used data from over 10,000 marriage registers from ten English districts between 1839 and 1914. They contained the occupation of the groom, the groom's father, the bride's father, and occasionally of the bride. Miles's study showed that only around five per cent of men that had a working-class father and roughly ten per cent of working-class women married into the middle class (Miles and Savage 30-32, 39). "Prior to 1914 then, the English working class was a very stable and mature structural entity. Its members' horizons, whether they looked backwards or forwards, were severely restricted" (Miles and Savage 33). Even if working men managed to engage in non-manual work, they did not move farther than the lower middle classes. Usually, they started a small business with limited prospects or worked as clerks, receiving about the same pay as they would have doing skilled manual work (Miles and Savage 33). For working people, upwards social mobility was rare and if achieved, then through education or a surprising inheritance.

2.4.3 Population Growth

Between 1750 and 1900, one social phenomenon that affected all aspects of British life, was the rapidly growing population. Robert Woods explains that the nineteenth century was "[...] a turning point in England's longer population history" (4). While the first British census in 1801 shows that England, Scotland, and Wales had a population of 10.5 million, this number rose to 41.5 million by 1901 (Barczewski 262). The following paragraphs provide a theory of demographic transition and analyse what factors caused this population explosion.

At the time Charles Dickens wrote his novels, Britain's population was young and growing. In the first half of the nineteenth century in particular, many children grew up without a family. Since there was no social safety net for them, these children were expelled from respectable society and often turned to criminal activities to survive. His experience of the London streets teeming with neglected children certainly influenced Dickens's writing. In *Oliver Twist*, the readers meet many street urchins: the boys, such as Charley Bates and Jack Dawkins are pickpockets, and the girls, such as Nancy and Bet are prostitutes.

Every society experiences demographic changes. In *The British Fertility Decline: Demographic Transition in the Crucible of the Industrial Revolution* (2014), Michael S. Teitelbaum (3-4) outlines a theory of the history of human population and demographic transition. Generally speaking, there are three stages of demographic transition. Pre-industrial societies are in the first stage: population growth is stable as birth rates and death rates are both similarly high. "The high rate of mortality is taken as inevitable in the absence of modern forms of agriculture, transport, sanitation, and medicine" (3). However, over the course of industrialisation, medical and technological advances paired with better food supplies lead to a decrease of mortality. Consequently, societies in the second stage still have high fertility rates but lower mortality rates. "This is the first phase of the 'population explosion,' i.e., the rapid and unprecedented growth of population resulting from an imbalance between birth rates and death rates" (4). In stage 3, depicting urban and industrial societies, death rates further decline and birth

rates fall as well as traditional perceptions of the family ideal and reproduction are questioned. “Urban and industrial life are seen as modifying substantially the role of the family in production, consumption, recreation, and education” (4). With the introduction of compulsory education, children are no longer part of the work force and thus, smaller family units are favoured and women start to control their fertility (Teitelbaum 4-5). This general theory can easily be applied to Britain’s population history.

In the nineteenth century, Britain transitioned from a stage two to a stage three industrial society. According to William D. Rubinstein, “England was probably the first society to undergo the ‘demographic transition’ in its full form […]” (264). Life expectancy remained relatively stable, between 30 and 40 years, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and started to increase from the late eighteenth century onwards to almost 50 years in 1901. This means that in the first half of the nineteenth century, Britain was in the second stage of demographic transition. Women had many children while at the same time people lived longer (Woods 5-6). Rubinstein (262-263) also argues that the population started to grow as fertility increased by fifty per cent because of younger and more marriages. Additionally, children were regarded as important assets to the workforce (Rubinstein 262-263). From the 1850s onwards, the population pattern slowly started to change again, and Britain transformed to a stage three society at the turn of the century. Birth rates declined and families became smaller. The total fertility rate (TFR), which measures the average number of children per woman, peaked at 5.75 in the early decades of the nineteenth century and fell drastically from around 4 to under 2 between 1901 and 1931 (Woods 5). Rubinstein (264-265) identifies a number of reasons for this development: the high costs of sending boys to school or apprenticeships, the increasing social acceptance of staying unmarried and single, and changes in courtship behaviour due to urbanisation, mainly because working hours increased, and workplaces were closely regulated and controlled.

3 Constructing Childhood

3.1 Childhood Studies

A child's development is contingent upon its absorption of the complex meanings, discourses, and contexts of the social world. Diana Gittins describes a baby as "a material and biological reality", completely powerless and dependent on the adults that take care of it (35). Gradually, children learn how to react to different social experiences (Gittins 35). Michael Woodhead remarks that "[c]hildren do not grow up on their own! They learn to think, feel, communicate and act within social relationships in the context of particular cultural settings and practices, mediated by beliefs about how children should be treated and what it means to be a child, as well as when childhood begins and ends" (21). This is essential for the literary analysis of the character of Oliver Twist. In order to contextualise Oliver's childhood experiences and to establish a connection with the reality of Victorian childhoods, it has to be acknowledged that children are actively involved in societal, social, and cultural processes, which shape how they experience themselves and the world.

Childhood studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that attempts to understand the experience of childhoods in history. Therefore, childhood studies "[...] can contribute to an emergent paradigm wherein new ways of looking at children can be researched and theorized" (Kehily 1). Woodhead highlights the interdisciplinary nature of childhood studies, which he believes should function as "a forum for critical analysis, research and debate" (32). One approach of looking at childhood, for example, is to look at other fields of science and research that question the dominant power relations in society and focus on marginalised social groups (Woodhead 31). "Power relationships linked to gender informed the analysis of generational relationships between adults of child relationships" (Woodhead 31). Therefore, at its beginnings in the 1990s, contemporary childhood studies both benefited and borrowed from women's studies.

Until the 1990s, childhood was primarily approached from a developmental perspective (Moran-Ellis 303). One of the most prominent scholars in this regard was the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, whose theory of cognitive development sought to explain how a child's cognitive abilities developed and allowed them to cross into adulthood (Woodhead 20). Sociological studies of children and childhood, for example Talcott Parsons and Robert F. Bales's *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (1955) looked at how the child needed to be socialised within the family and social institutions to become a fully-fledged and functioning member of adult society (Parsons and Bales 16-17). "So, for most of the twentieth century, the dominance of both developmental psychology and socialisation led to an almost exclusive focus in the social sciences on mapping and marking children's progress towards adult functioning and societal membership as adults" (Moran-Ellis 306). Children were perceived as deficient human beings and it was analysed how society, social relationships, and social institutions allowed them to develop so they could transition into adulthood.

A new understanding of childhood defined children as social actors and social constructs. Contemporary approaches to childhood emphasise that childhood is created and shaped by a child's cultural and social experiences (Kehily 6). "Increasingly, the spotlight was on the ways different branches of the social sciences construct their subject, and the possibilities for a very different kind of 'child-centred' scholarship [...]" (Woodhead 20-21). In their 1990 analysis *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, U.K. sociologists Allison James and Alan Prout pioneered a new sociology of childhood, arguing that children actively construct and shape not only their own lives, but that their agency also has an impact on society (Moran-Ellis 308). At the same time, children are shaped by their cultural and social experiences and encounters.

3.2 The Idea of Childhood

Ideas of what childhood means and how it is supposed to be are culturally constructed and constantly changing. James and Prout observe that "[t]he immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful is

a fact of culture" (7). Therefore, perceptions of childhood are fluid, constantly contested, and challenged:

> "It is these 'facts of culture' which may vary and which can be said to make of childhood a social institution. It is in this sense, therefore, that one can talk of the social construction of childhood and also, [...] of its re- and deconstruction. In this double sense, then, childhood is both constructed and reconstructed both for children and by children." (James and Prout 7)

Consequently, when studying beliefs about childhood at a certain time and age in history, one has to take into consideration that they are closely intertwined with the social, political, demographic, and economic landscape of that time (Cunningham 2021: 3). Woodhead agrees and points out that "[c]hildhood has been understood, institutionalized and regulated in different societies and at different points of history - and experienced differently by children" (22). One way of looking at childhood and the position of the child at a certain time in a certain society is through historical studies (Woodhead 22). As the following landmark historical study of childhood shows, the notion of childhood as separate and distinct from adulthood is a fairly recent invention, which became increasingly important in the nineteenth century.

3.2.1 Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood*

In 1962, the French social historian Philippe Ariès (1914-1984) published his masterpiece *Centuries of Childhood*, in which he examined the history of the idea of childhood. His research was revolutionary, as for the first time, childhood was analysed from a historical and cultural perspective. "Ariès introduced a new approach to the study of childhood that focused on the socially and culturally constructed meanings of childhood rather than on the child itself" (Prag and Tendler 26). He thoroughly studied written documents, private letters, diaries, pictures, clothing and toys, which allowed him to draw conclusions about the reality of childhood (Cunningham 2021: 38). This allowed him to come to the conclusion that the notion of childhood as a separate stage of life was absent from medieval European society.

> The idea of children is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult [...]. In medieval

> society, this awareness was lacking. [...] as soon as the child could live without the constant solitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society. (Ariès 128)

Ariès observed that in the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the Modern Period in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, children were seen as miniature adults that did not need special attention or different treatment. “The family fulfilled a function; it ensured the transmission of life, property and name; but it did not penetrate very far into human sensibility” (Ariès 411). Children entered the adult community as soon as they did not need assistance from their mothers or nannies anymore, usually at the age of seven (Ariès 411). One important factor that resulted in an awareness of the concept of childhood was a rising concern about education in the Renaissance period and the Age of Enlightenment. Increasingly, it became the schools’ and the family’s duty to prepare their children for the world, instilling in them good manners and a sense of morality (Ariès 412-413). Therefore, “[f]amily and school together removed the child from adult society” (Ariès 413). This awareness of the child and the focus on children’s education was intricately linked to changes within the social classes.

The rise of the middle classes strengthened the importance of the nuclear family and the belief that children needed to be loved and protected. Ariès stresses the “moral ascendancy of the family” (413) within the middle classes from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, which changed the relationship between parents and their offspring. The bond between family members grew stronger and became more affectionate. “The child became an indispensable element of everyday life, and his parents worried about his education, his career, his future” (Ariès 403). However, the family was still very much part of society. “Where the family existed, that is to say in the big houses, it was a centre of social relations, the capital of a little complex and graduated society under the command of the pater-familias” (Ariès 403-404). The eighteenth-century modern middle-class family, on the contrary, gradually isolated itself from the eyes of society. While the upper-class elite was much longer bound to etiquette, the lower classes primarily looked at their children as workers well into the nineteenth century. As a result, it took these classes longer to move the family from

the realm of sociability to the realm of privacy (Ariès 389, 413). Ariès also asserted that the middle classes needed to isolate themselves against the pressures of the lower classes. “It seceded: it withdrew from the vast polymorphous society to organize itself separately, in a homogeneous environment, among its families, in homes designed for privacy, in new districts kept free from all lower-class contamination” (Ariès 415). By the end of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth century, this emphasis on domesticity had spread to all social classes (Ariès 404). Child-rearing now predominately took place within the private realm of the nuclear family, making the child an object of increasing interest.

Ariès’s detailed study of childhood as well as the complex field of childhood studies demonstrate that ideas about childhood existed in abundance, influencing how the child is treated by its family, society, and the authorities (Cunningham 2021: 3). In *Oliver Twist*, Charles Dickens incorporates different perceptions of childhood. The middle-class characters believe in Oliver’s inherent goodness and innocence, while many lower-class characters consider him to be vicious and corrupted. The following pages will look more closely at how the ideas of childhood in the Victorian period were constructed and impacted by the Renaissance period, the Enlightenment period, Romanticism, and Protestant thought.

3.2.2 Renaissance Humanism

During the Renaissance period in the sixteenth century, a new understanding of childhood emerged. Cunningham calls it “a new humanist approach to childhood” (2021: 30). One important voice of Renaissance humanism in Northern Europe was the Dutch philosopher Desiderus Erasmus. He emphasised the importance of historical context and studying classical texts such as the Bible in their original language. “[...] Erasmian humanists urged a return ad fontes (that is, ‘back to the sources’), replacing contemporary scholastic disputations as the principal texts of scholarship with an attention to the classical, Biblical and Patristic sources” (Parrish 591). Education was central to humanist thought. “In tune with the broader spirit of the Renaissance, Erasmian humanism conceived of education as a method for cultivating human

potential and dignity to the fullest possible extent" (Parrish 592). Erasmus's ideas on the nature of the child, child-rearing, and methods of education, are expressed in *Institutio Principis Christianity* (*On the Education of a Christian Prince*, 1516) and *De Pueris Instituendis* (*On the Education of Children*, 1529).

Erasmus's approach to childhood was built on his understanding that children inherently wanted to know, learn and be taught about the world. He believed that through education, children should be formed and shaped into good and moral adults:

> The child that nature has given you is nothing but a shapeless lump, but the material is still pliable, capable of assuming any form, and you must so mould it that it takes on the best possible character. if you are negligent, you will rear an animal; but if you apply yourself, you will fashion, if I may use such a bold term, a godlike creature. (*Collected Works of Erasmus* 26: 305)

Erasmus's voice was thus also a Christian voice. Education was so significant because it "[implanted] the seeds of piety in the tender heart" (*CWE* 25: 273). Therefore, it was the parents' duty towards society to provide their children with a sound, Christian education, "[...] for God gave them children to be raised in the ways of religion" (*CWE* 26: 307). Education also had a moral implication, because "if you do not mould your child's soul to become fully human, it will of itself degenerate to a monstrous bestiality" (*CWE* 26: 306). Consequently, he demanded that children should receive an education as soon as possible (*CWE* 26: 319). While children should be allowed to learn playfully, Erasmus was adamant that there was no place for violence and fear in the classroom (*CWE* 26: 325, 327-328, 333-334). His emphasis on education became a salient characteristic of Protestant beliefs.

3.2.3 Protestant Thought

In order to comprehend how the idea of the Victorian child came into being, it is essential to examine Protestant attitudes towards the family and childhood. Protestant beliefs, especially the emphasis on the "spiritualization of the household" (Cunningham 2021: 34) significantly influenced the emergence of Victorian domestic and gender

ideology. Protestants were adamant that it was the family's duty to raise children as religious beings, which is why they focused on moral and religious education.

In the sixteenth century, attempts to reform the Catholic Church from within resulted in the development of Protestant Christianity, and ended the hegemony of Catholicism in Western Europe (Holmes and Bickers 132, 160). Eva-Marie Prag and Joseph Tendler (40) indicate that in the course of the Protestant Reformation, religious ideas and practices came under scrutiny. Central to Protestant doctrine was the belief that God judges every individual by their character and actions. Therefore, Erasmus's writings and ideas on child-rearing and education, which were disseminated all over Europe, became immensely influential (Cunningham 2021: 33-34). "Protestants [...] looked to the Bible more than to the classical authorities who were Erasmus's main inspiration, but the conclusions they reached about child-rearing were very similar and drew on Erasmus's authority" (Cunningham 2021: 34). J. Derek Holmes and Bernard W. Bickers (121) explain that increasingly, Protestant reformers subscribed to the humanist idea that the Church and the State could only be reformed through education. Consequently, Protestants taught their children from an early age to practice daily and live by the principles of Christianity (Prag and Tendler 40). This led to a growing interest in the family and familial obligations.

Central to Protestantism was the belief that the family was responsible for grooming the next generation of devout Christians. As the English clergyman William Gouge declared in his celebrated conduct book *Of Domestical Duties* (1622), "a family is a little Church, and a little Commonwealth" (11). In order to strengthen the community, the family should cultivate a Christian environment, praying and reading the Bible together (Cunningham 2021: 34). For Protestants, the period of childhood thus was essentially a period of formation and teaching. As a result, the child as an individual gained importance.

Advice and conduct books instructed parents how to train and teach their offspring. Viet Dietrich, a Protestant reformer, wrote in 1546, "[t]here is no more precious,

friendly, loveable thing on earth than a pious, disciplined, obedient, and teachable child" (qtd. in Ozment 93). Gouge similarly explained that children were "under the government of their parents" and therefore it was "their whole calling to be obedient to their parents [...] and to do what they command them in the Lord" (12). The Protestant family was structured hierarchically, the father being the head or patriarch, who was responsible for chastising his children to correct their character and instil in them good manners and respect (George and George 290). This acceptance of corporal punishment is closely linked with the belief that children were born corrupted and sinful. While Erasmus dissociated himself from the concept of original sin, rather claiming that it was adults that corrupted a child's mind, the idea that children were born corrupted was deeply entrenched in sixteenth- and seventeenth century Protestant thought (Cunningham 2021: 33-34). In the early seventeenth century, clergyman John Robinson remarked that children could only become virtuous if their wills were bent:

> [...] [S]urely there is in all children, though not alike, a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride, which must [...] be broken and beaten down; that so the foundation of their education being laid in humility and tractableness, other virtues may, in their time, be built thereon. This fruit of natural corruption and root of actual rebellion both against God and man must be destroyed. (qtd. in George and George 290)

The strict ideals of child-rearing that families attempted to fulfil often did not reflect the reality of family life. Cunningham (2021: 38) argues that while the abundance of Protestant catechisms and conduct books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fixated in people's minds the notion of the ideal family and the ideal child, it remains unclear to what extent children were affected by these ideals. Consequently, the reality of child-rearing and of childhood experiences were much more diverse and conflicted with the ideas and ideals that Protestant thinkers promulgated.

3.2.4 The Eighteenth Century: Locke and Rousseau

The eighteenth century marks the emergence of new ideas and beliefs about nature, which in turn transformed how people thought about childhood and children. "The key to these changes is the long-term secularisation of attitudes to childhood and children"

(Cunningham 2021: 45). As society began to turn to science and research in order to solve the great mysteries of the world, Christianity gradually lost its absolute power. With this changing viewpoint, children were no longer seen as inherently bad and malicious beings that needed to be transformed through discipline and teaching. The focus was now on the child as an individual, rather than a spiritual being, an individual that had its own unique temperaments and talents, and the ability to develop and enrich its surrounding adult community (Cunningham 2021: 45-46). “Some people began to see childhood not as a preparation for something else, whether adulthood or heaven, but as a stage of life to be valued in its own right” (Cunningham 2021: 45). Eighteenth-century ideas on childhood gained broad acceptance among the middle- and upper classes. (Fletcher ch. 1). Subsequently, the writings and main ideas of two prominent figures of the Age of Enlightenment, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau, with regard to childhood, will be explained.

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), the British philosopher John Locke laid bare his thoughts about child-rearing and education. Following the Protestant tradition, he focused on middle- and upper-class boys, thus excluding poor children and girls in general from the narrative of childhood and education (Cunningham 2021: 46). Still, Anthony Fletcher remarks this publication was “[…] a signal moment in the development of the positive ideology of childhood” (ch. 1, par. 11). Crucial to Locke’s thinking was that he had a secular mindset and did not consider Christianity a parenting goal (Cunningham 2021: 46, Fletcher ch. 1, par. 11). Instead, a child should become a “successful and moral adult” (Cunningham 2021: 46). Locke stressed that therefore, a child needed to be trained early on to bow to reason and to put aside its own wishes:

> And he, that is not used to submit his Will to the Reason of others, when he is young, will scarce hearten or submit to his own Reason, when he is of an Age to make use of it. [...] It seems plain to me, that the Principle of all Vertue [sic] and Excellency, lies in a power of denying ourselves the satisfaction of our own Desires, where Reason does not authorize them. This Power is to be got and improved by Custom, made easy and familiar by an early Practice. (*Education* 37-38)

John Locke saw children as individual beings that needed individual treatment and education in order to develop. Therefore, a child is a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, “white paper, void of all characters, without any *ideas*” (*Essay* 71). As Cunningham (2021: 46) points out, Locke understood that while children needed experience and formation, their diverse temperaments and capabilities were already there when they were born. This realisation helped not only educators but also parents to understand that every child was unique and as such required differentiated treatment, which was “an important step towards a child-oriented society” (Cunningham 2021: 47). Locke emphasised that children should be “treated as rational Creatures” (*Education* 54), who needed “Rewards and Punishments” in their forming years as an incentive to internalise the precepts of a good, moral life (*Education* 55). A child’s curiosity should be nurtured and stimulated, and their questions should be taken seriously (Cunningham 2021: 47). Also, children should be encouraged to play to “keep up their spirits, and improve their strength and health” (*Education* 63). Locke continues that “[..] all innocent folly, playing, and childish actions, are to be left perfectly and unrestrained, as far as they consist with the respect due to those that are present” (*Education* 62). Locke thus inspired the belief that children were unique beings that on the one hand should be taught morals, and on the other hand, should be allowed to grow up more freely.

A second ground-breaking philosopher and writer of the eighteenth century was the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His approach to the nature of childhood was more radical than Locke’s. In the preface to *Émile* (1762), his landmark treatise on education and the nature of man, Rousseau wrote, “[w]e do not know childhood” (xii). He asserted that “[e]verything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature; but everything degenerates in the hands of man” (1). Rousseau thereby acknowledges that children are inherently good, rejecting the notion of original sin, but are corrupted by society. Childhood is thus a valuable, precious period of one’s life. Children should be allowed to be children first and be brought up as such. “They must jump, and run, and scream, whenever they have a mind to do so. All their movements are needs of their constitution which is trying to fortify itself;” (Rousseau 47). Contrary to Locke, Rousseau challenged the assumption that children should be made to submit

their will to reason. Rather, “childhood is the slumber of reason” (Rousseau 69), consequently children “do good and evil without knowing it” (Rousseau 31). Education is essential, however, as it will “[...] allow a child to discover the secret of true happiness which is to achieve an equilibrium between the power and the will” (Cunningham 2021: 48). “[W]e are born destitute of everything”, Rousseau observed, “[a]ll [...] which we need when we are grown, is given us by education” (2). While Rousseau still was interested in how children evolve into good adults, the novelty in his thinking is “to allow children to grow up in accordance with nature, and without the imposition upon them of moral rules and learning” (Cunningham 2021: 49). Learning from nature, that is by experience and from things, is much more important than human intervention and supervision. Parents should therefore guarantee that their children had an enjoyable, carefree, and uninterrupted childhood:

> Love childhood; encourage its sports, its pleasures, its amiable instincts. Who of you has not sometimes looked back with regret on that age when a smile was ever on the lips, when the soul was ever at peace? Why would you take from those little innocents the enjoyment of a time so short which is slipping from them, and of a good so precious which they can not abuse? Why would you fill with bitterness and sorrow those early years so rapidly passing, which will no more return to them than to you? (Rousseau 45)

Rousseau realised that one’s childhood experiences were immensely important for one’s adulthood. They represented a childlike innocence that was lost once adulthood was reached(Cunningham 49). Therefore, his work revealed a sentiment of nostalgic reverence for the stage of childhood (Cunningham 49). A child’s innocence and pure nature became a great treasure that adults, inevitably corrupted by society, struggled all their life to retrieve and restore. Rousseau’s sentiment that childhood should be celebrated and cherished still resonates today and was vital in the development of a positive attitude towards children. Certainly, his observations influenced the Romantics’ view of childhood and child-rearing and the construction of the Victorian child.

3.2.5 The Romantic Notion of Childhood

Central to Romanticism was the idea that childhood was the best stage of life. Since infants came straight from God, they "[…] offered adults glimpses of an original heavenly purity" (Robson 2018: 7). Cunningham points out that for the Romantics, "[l]ife could be seen, not as an ascent to maturity, but as a decline form the freshness of childhood" (2021: 55). Romantic writers and poets at the turn of the eighteenth century such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, believed that childhood was "the spring that should nourish the whole life" (Cunningham 2021: 54-55), which is why adults should treat children with love and respect.

Wordsworth agreed with Locke that the infant was a tabula rasa, however, he rejected the idea that children should be educated to become good, moral adults. Rather, children should be allowed to use their imagination freely, to express their feelings and to seek sensations without restrictions (Cunningham 2021: 54-55). Wordsworth thus emphasised the "concept of nature as the foundation of moral virtue and beauty" (Fletcher ch. 1, par. 26). In his famous poem "*My Heart Leaps Up*" (1802), he wrote: "The Child is the father of man, / And I could wish my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety" (Wordsworth 79). The Romantics thus became aware that one's childhood experiences define one's adulthood. However, adults gradually lose the innocence and purity they once possessed as a child.

To heal the wounds inflicted by the world, adults should seek to recover their inner child. Fletcher explains that the Romantics enabled "[…] the creation of the modern notion of an inner self, that could be seen as having experienced innocence and as having a personal history which could be told through autobiography" (ch. 1, par. 29). Essentially, childhood came to be viewed as the special time in which one's individual and distinct self-developed (Fletcher ch. 1, par. 29). "People began to think of the self as an interior personal space to which they alone had access, and in its formation childhood and the memories of it were crucial" (Cunningham 2021: 56). Romanticism

was very influential in nineteenth-century Britain, contributing to a palpable idealisation of childhood.

3.3 The Victorian Child

The Victorian period gave rise to a new understanding of childhood. John R. Gillis remarks that "[t]he Victorians taught us not only what to think about the child but also how to think *with* the child" (82). In his analysis of the Victorian concept of childhood, he argues that in the course of the nineteenth century, the child came to be the focus of middle-class families, "an object of intense nostalgia" (Gillis 91), transforming not only the family, but society as a whole. Cunningham likewise indicates that "from being the smallest and least considered of human beings, the child had become endowed with qualities that make it godlike, fit to be worshipped, and the embodiment of hope" (2021: 59). The following paragraphs delineate the underlying causes and cultural, religious, and social developments that led to the construction of the Victorian child.

The invention of the Victorian child can only be understood in the context of the aspiring Protestant middle classes and Romantic ideas about childhood. Gillis (85-86) points out that as systems of thought, Evangelical Protestantism and Romanticism were highly contradictory. Nevertheless, "[…] in spite of this radical disagreement, these two different versions of the child turn out to be remarkably amenable to each other in the daily practice of nineteenth-century life and discourse" (Robson 2018: 6). Gillis further explains that even though these belief systems already existed in the eighteenth century, in the nineteenth century, the permeated all of society and legitimised a rigid system based on class and gender difference:

> [...] [W]hatever the legitimate claims of these precursors, it was not really until the nineteenth century, and first among the Anglo-American middle strata, that these notions became hegemonic, embedded in an emerging class and gender system that would naturalize and universalize them, ultimately institutionalizing them in law in social practice. (Gillis 85)

Subsequently, the influence of the Evangelical Revival in the first half of the eighteenth century on the formation of the family and the child will be examined. In the

seventeenth century, the Catholic Counter-Reformation opposed the spread of Protestantism, which strengthened the Catholic Church all over Europe (Ditchfield 10). “While in 1580 almost half of Europe had been Protestant, by 1700 that proportion had been reduced to only about one-fifth. The Protestant states were confined to the northern and north western fringes of Western Europe [...]” (Ditchfield 10). However, from the 1730s and 1740s onwards, Europe, North America, and the British Isles experienced a revival of Evangelicalism, some leading figures being Nicolaus Zinzendorf, George Whitefield, and John Wesley (Ditchfield 9, 31). This revival had a great impact on the middle classes of the nineteenth century.

Central to Evangelical thought was the Bible, conversion, and the family. G. M. Ditchfield explains that “[b]y definition, evangelicalism denoted the preaching of the gospel, with the emphasis on the message of hope contained in the New Testament” (26). The Bible was the basis for all prayers, sermons, and theological arguments (Ditchfield 27). Evangelical Christians preached that Jesus saved mankind by dying for them on the cross and redeeming them from their sins. Through his death, Christians could convert and become reconciled with God (Ditchfield 28-29). This emphasis on conversion meant that believers were requested to preach the Gospel and tell others about their awakening (Ditchfield 30). Evangelicals were required to look closely at their souls and conduct and to discourage behaviour that was unconducive to their redemption. “Individual faith was key to moral regeneration, and the primary setting for maintaining faith was a religious family and household” (Davidoff and Hall 83). This means that the family and the home became tightly monitored places that sought to uphold morality and stability. Children were scrutinised and controlled at all times and educated so they atone for their sinful nature and receive God’s forgiveness (Robson 2018: 7). Children and domesticity were thus at the heart of Evangelical Protestantism.

Especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, Evangelical families still adhered to the doctrine of original sin, presuming that their children were born tainted and sinful. One of the most important religious writers of that time was laywoman Hannah More (Ryan 17). In her treatise *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*

(1799), she reminded parents that it is “[...] a fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings, whose little weakness may perhaps want some correction, rather than beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions which it should be the great end of education to rectify” (44). Evangelicals thus emphasised the importance of religious education, both at school and at home (Ryan 6). Children grew up studying the Bible and going to church with their parents. Conduct books and catechisms provided guidance and answers regarding child-rearing (Ryan 6). Ultimately, parents hoped that they could teach their offspring to become good Christians.

At the same time, Lockean, Rousseauan, and Romantic notions challenged Evangelical assumption of childhood. Catherine Robson (2018: 7) points out that by mid-century, many Christians had rejected the doctrine of original sin. “[...] [D]ifferent strains of Victorian Christianity [...] found themselves variously in contention and agreement with Romanticism's view of the child as pure and innocent, but ultimately colluded with its insistence upon the central importance of childhood” (Robson 2018: 7). The secularisation of Evangelicalism meant that increasingly, Christianity became a social, rather than a religious requirement (Gillis 86). The Christian way of life was thus reduced to respectability. Respectable middle-class families went to church and attended Christian gatherings, regardless of their true beliefs. (Davidoff and Hall 76). This decrease of faith presented a crucial moment in the construction of the Victorian child:

> [It] produced [...] a desperate and enormously creative search for new secular sources of grace, a quest that turned away from introspective souls searching to find signs of salvation in the most unexpected places – in nature, in encounters with “noble savages,” but most of all in childhood. (Gillis 86)

The new awareness of childhood had far-reaching consequences, not only giving rise to the nuclear family, but transforming society as a whole. Gillis explains that, “[it] was at this same moment that the cultural understanding of the child underwent a revolution that was to have an immense impact on the ideas and practices of modern family life” (90). What this means is that the domestic realm of the nuclear family became “the middle classes’ ultimate refuge of innocence and purity” (Gillis 86). While mothers

became the centres of the household, providing a loving home, fathers became the breadwinners that needed the family as a safe heaven and source of support (Gillis 89-90). As people ceased to look to God for sanctification, the family, in particular women and children, started to be celebrated for their pure, uncorrupted, heavenly nature.

> It is little wonder that childhood had by this time become an object of intense nostalgia, attracting to itself all those longings that had previously attached themselves to the Garden itself. Childhood had come to symbolize not only uncorrupted nature but also the nobility associated with simpler times and peoples. (Gillis 91)

Following the decline of Evangelicalism, Romantic ideas of childhood became popular in Victorian society. Cunningham specifies that between 1860 and 1930 especially, "[a] Romantic sensibility towards childhood" (2021: 55) was prevalent in society, displacing other notions of childhood. This was visible in conduct and advice books, and imaginative literature for children, which now followed Wordsworth rather than More (Cunningham 2021: 58). Many parents realised that attentive child-rearing allowed their children to lead healthier, safer, and longer lives (Cunningham 2021: 58). Therefore, the development of children, both physically and psychologically, began to spark interest. Childhood gained meaning through the creation of child-oriented rituals, routines, and practices. Birthdays, meal schedules, bedtime routines, and celebrations like Christmas became an integral part of family life (Gillis 90-91). Childhood also became commercialised, and children were increasingly targeted as consumers. The acquisition of particular toys, clothing, and children's paraphernalia became important (Fletcher ch. 1, par. 33). Essentially, the modern understanding of childhood can be traced back to the Victorian period.

However, the reality of child-rearing proved that Romanticism was more influential in theory than in practice. Fletcher (ch. 1, par. 33) and Cunningham (2021: 58-59) both support the view that Locke's advice to train children to form good habits was more popular among middle- and upper-class families. Child-rearing was a serious matter and concern, especially for worried mothers (Cunningham 2021: 58). To succeed in society, children had to be taught how to be respectable and well-behaved. Parents

were required to closely watch and supervise their children's progress. Consequently, Rousseau's notion that children should learn through experience did not gain broad acceptance. On the contrary, the Victorians "[...] believed it to be their duty, through instruction, to perpetuate social and gender order and to create moral adults" (Fletcher ch. 1, par. 21). Still, Romantic ideas significantly changed the way people thought about childhood. Most importantly, rejecting the doctrine of original sin meant that positive attitudes towards the nature of children could develop and spread.

> Romanticism embedded in the European and American mind a sense of the importance of childhood, a belief that childhood should be happy, and a hope that the qualities of childhood, if they could be preserved in adulthood, might help redeem the adult world. In becoming more child-oriented in this way, society had radically changed its ideas on the relationship between childhood and religion. (Cunningham 2021: 59)

On the one hand, roots of the Victorian perception of childhood can be found in Protestant thought, depicting children as creatures tainted by original sin, that needed to be saved. On the other hand, this perception coexisted with the notion that emerged during the Renaissance, the Enlightenment period, and Romanticism, of children as innocent, pure, and heavenly creatures that needed to be protected. Besides, the Victorians became more interested in their own childhood and how their upbringing influenced their adult lives (Coveney 69). "[I]t was the childlike quality of the child which needed to be preserved" (Cunningham 2021: 56). Growing up was considered a burden that removed adults from their innocent and pure state they possessed as children. As will be analysed, in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens not only incorporated both conflicting perceptions of childhood, but also shows how they were linked to social class and Victorian gender ideals.

3.4 Dickens's Representation of Childhood

Generally speaking, before the end of the eighteenth century children and childhood did not have any relevance as subject-matter in literature. This changed with the influence of the Romantic movement and authors such as William Wordsworth (Newsom 1). The child is also at the heart of Dickens's work and interest. According to Peter Coveney (111), "[t]here is perhaps no other major English novelist whose

achievement was so closely regulated by a feeling for childhood." Where Dickens's preoccupation with the theme of childhood stemmed from is still an issue of debate, and some possible reasons are subsequently illuminated.

In his fiction, Dickens portrayed a wide array of neglected and abused children. Angus Wilson (202) gives three explanations: his own traumatic childhood experiences, the repercussions of the Romantic and Evangelical conceptions of childhood, and his intention to show that despite technological and scientific achievements so characteristic of the Victorian period, children were still often victimised and exploited. Robert Newsom argues that Dickens's traumatic and bitter experiences as a child "made him especially receptive to the Wordsworthian conception [of childhood]" (1). In an autobiographical fragment published by his biographer John Forster, Dickens admits, "I do not write resentfully or angrily: for I know all these things have worked together to make me what I am [...]" (I: 49). Coveney agrees that "[a]s a child, Dickens undoubtedly received the wound from which so much of his sentimentality springs" (118-119). Newsom further observes that because of his difficult childhood, "[...] not just a reverence for the child, but an often intense fear for the child's welfare and a sometimes morbid sentimentality hover about Dickensian children, many of whom die young" (1-2). Dickens was well aware that his story was applicable to many others. It is possible, thus, that he processed his childhood traumas creatively through his writing.

Many of Dickens's child characters, Oliver included, thus represent the Romantic notion of childhood. According to Cunningham, they are "the embodiment of a force of innate goodness which could rescue embittered adults" (2021: 55). However, while the Romantic child should be free and close to nature, Dickens's child heroes are also often precocious, serious, and victimised (Newsom 3). In *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child* (1994), Andrew Malcolm addresses this apparent discrepancy. He suggests that Dickens often constructed grown-up children that served as metaphors for one's inner child, whose initial innocence was eventually corrupted and irretrievably lost (Marks 167). This is also one possibly reason why Dickens endowed Oliver with qualities that

were predominantly associated with the ideal Victorian femininity. Through the grown-up, feminine child, adults could connect with their inner child as a repository of a lost innate goodness and humanity.

In *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel* (1999), Laura C. Berry makes a similar claim. She suggests that Victorian authors like Dickens created innocent, pure child victims to enable adults to process social injustices and abuses (Berry 10). The development of industrial capitalism created a need for political structures and social institutions, which meant that increasingly, the private realm became a topic of socio-political and economic concern. For the Victorians, thus, a conflict emerged between their need for self-determination and independence, and the encroachment of the public on the private sphere (Berry 12). According to Berry (12), the answer to this problem can be found in depicting the child as a victim in novels and social documents. The endangered child should be understood as "both self- and socially determined" (19), symbolising the adult generation. Consequently, stories about decaying, abused, malnourished, and abandoned children are narratives about "[…] the pressures of social structures on the idea of the individual selves" (Berry 19) and allow the readers to reimagine themselves as a victimised child.

> In substituting innocent children for potentially dangerous adults, these texts might be said to manage the threat by displacing it. And certainly, one effect of the turn to children in nineteenth-century culture, especially pauper children, is to transform a large and powerful Malthusian body into a petite and manageable one. (Berry 10)

Dickens thus put the abused child in the centre of his fiction to voice his criticism of Victorian double standards and morality. In a world that developed so rapidly and put machines and utility above human life, the child turned into a symbol of imagination and sensibility, a symbol of the authors' frustrations and discontent with society and a world in which technological progress without ethical progress had a merciless and dehumanising outcome (Coveney 115). The child stands for nature against the brutal forces of society, working to de-nature mankind. As many other intellectuals, Dickens saw that while a capitalist economy developed, and technological innovations sprang up everywhere, many people suffered, as "[i]ndustrial society had for long been

developing faster than political institutions and public morality could contain" (Coveney 123). Through the child, authors could approach their discontent with industrialisation that stood in stark contrast to Romantic ideas and beliefs and provide their readers with a tool to process the injustices of society.

4 A Literary Analysis of Oliver Twist's Adherence to Victorian Gender Ideals

The aim of the subsequent literary analysis is to unveil whether Charles Dickens's beloved child character Oliver Twist adheres to or transgresses the prevalent gender roles ascribed to boys in nineteenth-century British society. One way of looking at gender at a specific time in the past is to analyse constructions of gender difference in "cultural productions" (Rose 1992: 8), which include social rituals and practices, such as fiction. In her landmark work *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988), historian Joan Wallach Scott argues that language is an important tool for understanding gender difference. "[...] [I]f we attend to the ways in which "language" constructs meaning we will also be in a position to find gender" (55). This means that we need to study our material thoroughly to find the meanings that signify and construct gender difference.

> [...] [T]here is a connection between the study of "language" and the study of gender, when both are carefully defined; [...] By "language" I mean not simply words in their literal usage but the creation of meaning through differentiation. By gender I mean not simply social roles for women and men but the articulation in specific contexts of social understandings of sexual difference. (Wallach Scott 55)

Representations of gender, in particular of sexual difference, and the uneven distribution of power permeated all aspects of nineteenth-century British society. "Gender", asserts Sonya O. Rose, is "a core feature of the social fabric and its transformation" (1992: 2). Victorian ideals of femininity and masculinity were articulated not only in the private sphere of the home, but, most importantly, in the public sphere of political discourse, legislation, public institutions, and the economy (Poovey 2). Mary Poovey stresses that nineteenth-century assumptions about gender depict "[…] an entire social organization that depends upon naturalizing monogamous marriage, a sexual division of labour, and a specific economic relation between the sexes, in which men earn and women "spend" and "husband" the earnings of men" (2). By mid-century, which was when Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist*, these representations and assumptions had become a widely acknowledged belief system, or ideology, that was seemingly stable and coherent (Poovey 3). However, Poovey further argues that every ideology is constantly being contested, redefined and adapted; it is, in effect, "uneven" (4). In

order to examine whether or not Dickens's character Oliver conformed to or transgressed the socially prescribed male gender ideals, it is necessary to consider the social, political, and economic processes at play, which have been studied extensively in the previous chapters.

The analysis is structured as follows: first of all, Charles Dickens's life and his influences are briefly summarised, as well as the plot of *Oliver Twist*. Afterwards, four key aspects of Victorian gender ideology are described, the ideology of separate spheres, the ideal of domesticity, the ideal of femininity, and the ideal of masculinity. Each aspect is contrasted with Oliver's behaviour, actions, and experiences in the novel in order to evaluate whether he complies with the ideals of Victorian gender ideology or not.

4.1 Charles Dickens and His Influences

Charles Dickens is one of the most beloved and essential English writers, and the author of timeless classics such as *A Christmas Carrol* (1843), *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Great Expectations* (1861). As Claire Tomalin observes, "[h]e was, and he continues to be, a national treasure, an institution, a part of what makes England England;" (400). Dickens was born on 7 February 1812 in Portsmouth as the second child to John Dickens, a clerk in the Naval Pay Office, and Elizabeth Dickens (Slater 4). Dickens's humble lower-middle-class background caused him great anxiety (Douglas-Fairhurst 125). All his life, he was concerned about his social standing and tried to establish himself as a member of the upper middle class.

Dickens's work is often inspired by his own experiences. In 1822, his family settled in London, where young Charles spent much of his time wandering, observing the hustle and bustle of the city (Tomalin 22). In February 1824, his father was imprisoned in the Marshalsea prison for debtors. At twelve, Charles was employed at Warren's, a boot blacking factory, gluing the labels onto pots of blacking for six shillings a week. The

monotony of the work and the absence of his parents had a great impact on him (Tomalin 22-24). After his father's release, Charles was inscribed as a day pupil at Wellington Academy in London, where he stayed for three years (Douglas-Fairhurst 41-42). At fifteen, Charles started to work as a junior clerk at the solicitor's firm Ellis & Blackmore. While office life did not suit young Dickens very well, he enjoyed the freedom of his life in London. In the evenings, he went to the theatre, discussed Shakespeare with his friends, studied the intricacies of shorthand, or observed the world around him (Tomalin 34-36). Dickens was always paying attention and everything he observed fostered his fiction.

In 1831, Dickens became a parliamentary reporter for *The Mirror of Parliament* (Slater 32). In a time of political reform, he was part of an exclusive group of reporters and journalists, although politics frustrated him. In 1833, after a number of freelance jobs for different newspapers, Dickens published his first short story in a small-scale magazine (Douglas-Fairhurst 78, 111). In 1836, *The Pickwick Papers*, in which he demonstrated his unexpected writing style and his ability to understand the people of his time, ensured Dickens recognition throughout the country (Smiley 9). The success of *Pickwick* can be seen as the starting point of Dickens's incredible literary career and his transformation from sketch writer to novelist.

In April 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth. However, their marriage should not be a happy one. Catherine's younger sister Mary was a frequent guest at the couple's apartment in Doughty Street. Jane Smiley concludes that these were Dickens's happiest years, "[t]he gentle and affectionate, but somewhat languid Catherine satisfied the role of wife and mother, while the quicker Mary offered a more virginal and intellectual form of female companionship" (5). When Mary unexpectedly died in 1837, he was greatly affected by her loss (Slater 114). In 1858, Dickens and Catherine separated, and he fell in love with the young actress Nelly Ternan (Slater 447). He had high hopes for all of his ten children, nevertheless, only his son Henry was professionally successful, the other boys were irresponsible with money and the girls

were stuck in unhappy marriages (Smiley 122). Dickens's personal life was thus far from the Victorian domestic ideal he often wrote about.

In the 1830s and 1840s, he published several successful novels, *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *Barbary Rudge* (1841), *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *David Copperfield* (1850), his favourite novel (Smiley 76, 81-83). In 1850, Dickens started his ambitious own weekly periodical, *Household Words*, in which he published articles on many social issues and matters of public concern, making him not only "a spokesman for the domestic virtues" (Mee 66), but also a fervent critic of the appalling living and working conditions of the poor (Tomalin 229). According to Cunningham, "[m]any have credited him with creating the climate of opinion that facilitated the reforms in education, public health, and criminal law that helped make Britain a safer and less strife-ridden society" (Cunningham 2008: 159). Dickens was thus not only a novelist, but also a philanthropist and a reformer that wanted to eradicate the ills of society.

In the 1850s, Dickens wrote and published the instalments of three novels in which he approached the current situation and condition of England: *Bleak House* (1852), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Little Dorrit* (1857). Tomalin (239) explains that these novels "[…] have endured as accounts of mid-century life and as extraordinary works of art, poetic, innovative, irradiated with anger and dark humour […]". The last two novels he completed were *Great Expectations* (1861) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). In the 1860s, he was overworked and his health deteriorated, nevertheless, he continued relentlessly and refused to give up his public readings (Tomalin 316). On June 8, 1870, Charles Dickens died at Gad's Hill of a stroke (Slater 613). In 1907, G. K. Chesterton wrote, "[w]hatever the word 'great' means, Dickens was what it means" (4). His sharp-witted satirical views of society and humanity continue to entertain, and many of his fictions' underlying themes are still relevant today.

4.2 Synopsis of Oliver Twist

Oliver Twist is one of the novels most associated with Charles Dickens's legacy. It first appeared in monthly instalments until April 1839 in Bentley's Miscellany and was published as a novel in three volumes in November 1838 (Cheadle 308). It was the first novel written in the English language whose main character was a child (Coveney 127). In this respect, *Oliver Twist* showed Dickens's innovatory spirit and ambition.

The novel has two parts. The first seven chapters tell Oliver's story, who is born in a parish workhouse in the 1820s. His mother dies shortly after giving birth to him and Oliver becomes the victim of the workhouse, beaten, mocked, and humiliated. At nine, Oliver is apprenticed to an undertaker, but he manages to flee to London. In London, he is taken in by Fagin, the gruesome leader of a greedy band of young criminals. Oliver is the newest addition to their team, even though he at first firmly believes in the innocence of their "work". Following a series of unfortunate events, Oliver is mistaken for a pickpocket, injured, and taken to the police station. However, Mr Brownlow, the victim of the crime, takes pity on him and takes him in. Oliver is fed, washed and clothed, and flourishes in Mr Brownlow's house. When he is sent on an errand, Oliver is caught by Nancy, who works with Fagin, and takes him back to the thieves. Oliver is forced to take part in a burglary in the country, during which he is shot and left to die. Now begins the second part of the novel. Oliver ends up at the home of the Maylies. Mrs Maylie and her adoptive daughter Rose are moved by Oliver's story and nurse him back to health. Oliver quickly becomes part of their family. Before his happy end, however, his origin story is revealed. Unbeknownst to Oliver, he is the illegitimate son of a wealthy man, Edwin Leeford SR and his young mistress Agnes Fleming. Oliver should inherit his father's estate, provided that he grows up a good and honourable man. Leeford's other son from a failed marriage, Edward JR, "Monks", knew of the will and contacted Fagin to turn Oliver into a criminal, so he could collect the inheritance. In the end, Oliver gets his own family. Mr Brownlow happily adopts Oliver and Rose is revealed to be Agnes's sister and thus Oliver's aunt.

4.3 Ideology of Separate Spheres

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were often actively engaged in the family business, working side by side with men. However, with the technological and economic changes brought on by industrialisation, the realm of work became separated from the domestic realm of the family. Jane Humphries indicates that "[t]he contrast between pre-industrial and modern families implicates economic change in the household's loss of function" (2004: 239). Increasingly, the production of goods was removed from the household, which transformed the structure of family life. As women were physically weaker than men, they were regarded as unfit for the workforce and relegated to the private sphere (McKnight 192). The family transitioned to what Humphries identifies as "a male breadwinner family system" (2004: 260). These economic developments, paired with emerging religious beliefs and changes in the class system, paved the way for the Victorian doctrine of separate spheres.

As previously clarified, the rise of the ideology of separate spheres in nineteenth-century Britain was closely linked to both religion and class. From the late eighteenth century onwards until the 1840s Evangelical Christianity became very influential among the emerging middle classes (Steinbach 133). Evangelicals perceived the public realm as a threat to moral society, condemning "the world of work and politics as a place of temptation, greed and vice", which is why "[…] they valued the home as a refuge from these sins and increasingly sought to separate public and private spheres" (Griffin 39-40). Evangelical women were seen as "the moral and spiritual centres of their families", thus exclusively domestic creatures (Steinbach 168). Essentially, women's identities were centred on domesticity, on taking care of their husband, children, and household, while at the same time reserving time for prayer and examinations of conscience (Davidoff and Hall 91). The house, which the wife was in charge of, was invaluable as it represented the surest bulwark of peace "[…] to allow a man to contemplate God and to provide him with the peace and love he required to develop his character, so that he could protect himself against the sinfulness of the public sphere" (Griffin 41). Middle-class men, in contrast, had much more independent

roles, crossing into the public sphere as the family's breadwinner and main provider (Steinbach 166). They also assumed the roles of loving fathers and husbands, and were the family's spiritual leaders, praying with them and teaching them about God (Steinbach 133). Davidoff and Hall point out that "[w]hile the home could be to some extent a scene of retreat and seclusion for men, for middle-class women it was the site of their responsibilities" (90). The ideology of separate spheres installed a rigid system of gender roles and practices that was broadly accepted across the social strata by mid-century.

Early nineteenth-century writers and thinkers on the ideology of separate spheres were widely-read and thus vital in disseminating ideas on how womanhood and manhood had to be lived. To give an example, Hannah More's popular novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1805) offered guidance and advice as to how women and men should behave and what place they should occupy in society (Davidoff and Hall 169). In her *Essays on Various Subjects* (1777), she argued that men were suited "for the more public exhibitions on the great theatre of human life", as "it is their proper element" and "[t]hey were intended by Providence for the bustling scenes of life" (5). Women, in contrast, were better suited for the private and domestic (Davidoff and Hall 169). "[...] [W]here there is more beauty, and more weakness, there should be greater circumspection, and superior prudence", hence "[women] find their [...] safety in their delicacy" (4-6). According to More, thus, women were not less important than men, but their nature required them to act differently and to withdraw to the private sphere.

A couple of decades later, Hannah More was followed by more secular writers such as Sarah Stickney Ellis, Sarah Lewis, Harriet Martineau and John London. "Writing in the troubled decades of the 1830s and 1840s, when political and social unrest both at home and abroad was rife, they propagandized for the family as a repository of stability and firm values […]" (Davidoff and Hall 180). Thus, these authors contributed significantly to the wide acceptance of the ideology of separate spheres. In her 1839 popular women's conduct book *Woman's Mission*, Sarah Lewis indicated that God intended for women to be the caretakers of the moral realm:

> Let men enjoy in peace and triumph the intellectual kingdom which is theirs, and which, doubtless, was intended for them; let us participate in its privileges without desiring to share its domination. The moral world is ours, – ours by position; ours by qualification; ours by the very indication of God himself. (129)

By mid-century, the notion of separate spheres had spread to the working classes and the social elite. Davidoff and Hall (149) point out that by the 1850s, the idea that men and women should be treated differently was no longer solely associated with Evangelicalism, but had become an accepted reality. Mary Poovey shows that by mid-century, the notion of separate spheres, based on sexual difference, permeated all areas of Victorian culture and society:

> The model of a binary opposition between the sexes, which was socially realized in a separate but supposedly equal 'spheres,' underwrote an entire system of instructional practices and conventions at mid-century, ranging from a sexual division of labor to a sexual division of economic and political rights. (Poovey 8-9)

Additionally, the ideology of separate spheres was deeply entrenched and implemented in law. A series of Factory Acts passed in 1833, 1842, 1844, 1847, 1850, and 1853 regulated the hours women and children could work, what work they could do, and sought to improve their working conditions. The 1850 Factory Act, for example, prohibited women and children from working night shifts (Steinbach 168-169). Women were thus regarded as needing protection and security. Men, by contrast, were not protected by the law, which underpinned the notion that they were the stronger sex. "[M]en could more freely decide which work to take on. For better or worse, they were neither hampered nor protected. The first law to address the long working hours of adult men was not passed until 1874" (Steinbach 169). Apart from the Factory Acts, there were specific laws concerning married women that will be described in more detail below.

It is important to consider that perceptions of gender are never stable but always in flux. Steinbach (168) points out that while the ideology of separate spheres was certainly powerful in nineteenth-century Britain, it was mostly theoretical, and

constantly changed. Sonya O. Rose emphasises that "[...] images of gender difference always fail to capture the complexities and the multiplicity of lived experience [...]" (1992: 13). As society, the economy, science, and politics evolved, representations of gender, such as the ideology of separate spheres, necessarily adapted to these developments.

4.3.1 Oliver Conforming to the Ideology of Separate Spheres

In nineteenth-century England, a young middle-class boy's life was strictly regulated and organised. Typically, from the age of six onwards, he would leave the safety of his family home to become accustomed to the public realm he was meant to populate and dominate as an adult man. Born in a parish workhouse, then taken to an orphanage, and later back to the workhouse, Oliver lives within the confines of an institution for the first nine years of his life. The orphanage and the workhouse are social institutions that Oliver cannot leave and that are in charge of his upbringing. They consequently represent a family construct, albeit a distorted and dangerous, even life-threatening one. For the first nine years of his life, Oliver is trapped in the private realm of the orphanage and the workhouse.

Usually, from the age of six onwards, middle-class boys should start to attend school and afterwards be trained or apprenticed. However, it was quite common for the poor to send their boys to work earlier. At about age nine, Oliver becomes an apprentice to Mr Sowerberry, the parish undertaker, "to be educated and taught a useful trade" (*OT* 14). This chapter is revealingly called "Oliver, being offered another place, making his first entry into public life" (*OT* 29). Mr Bumble emphasises the importance of this moment to Oliver, "'[t]he kind and blessed gentlemen which is so many parents to you [...] are a-going to 'prentice you, and to set you up in life, and make a man of you [...]'" (*OT* 24). It seems hard to imagine, however, how Mr Sowerberry, uneducated himself, should be able to teach him.

This is the first time Oliver is thrust into the world outside of the workhouse, as he should be at his age. He feels “alone in a strange place” (*OT* 37) and “he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin” (*OT* 38). Oliver is terrified when Mr Sowerberry takes him for the first time to collect the corpse of a poor woman who had died. In the house, Oliver “*felt* that it was a corpse” (*OT* 45) and he was too scared to look at the people who “seemed so like the rats he had seen outside” (*OT* 45). After the burial, Mr Sowerberry asks him if he liked it and he confesses, “Not very much, sir”, wondering “whether it had taken a very long time to get Mr Sowerberry used to it” (*OT* 48). Oliver is continually abused by Noah Claypole, the other apprentice, Charlotte, the maid, and Mrs Sowerberry. “Charlotte treated him badly because Noah did, and Mrs Sowerberry was his decided enemy, because Mr Sowerberry was disposed to be his friend” (*OT* 50). It becomes clear, therefore, that Oliver does not belong here, he is not meant for this kind of brutal and loveless life.

After an altercation with Noah, Oliver decides to run away to London. He is “frightened” (*OT* 63) but determined. His first impression of the city is as follows: “A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odors” (*OT* 68). Oliver is all alone, fending for himself in a brutal, ghastly world. London presents itself as hopeless and decaying, leading him to question “[...] whether he hadn’t better run away” (*OT* 69). Once again, there is no hope in this new world, no glimpse of a better life for Oliver.

Oliver meets Jack Dawkins, who goes by “the Artful Dodger”, a young small-time crook, who takes him to Fagin, the leader of a gang of young criminals. Fagin lets him stay in his den, and a confused Oliver tries to figure out what it is exactly that Fagin and the boys do to make a living. Fagin teaches him to take handkerchiefs out of his pockets without him noticing (*OT* 78). Arguably, he is learning a trade, but a criminal and illegal one that will not help him secure a respectable position in the public realm. The first time Oliver is allowed outside to be instructed in the art of pickpocketing, he is caught, even though he did not do anything. “In an instant the whole mystery [...] rushed upon the boy’s mind. He stood for a moment with the blood so tingling through all his veins

from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire;" (*OT* 81). This incident proves that Oliver is unable to fit in and cannot navigate the world of the young criminals.

The second time he is captured by Fagin's gang, Oliver accepts his fate without a struggle. "[R]esistance would be of no avail" (*OT* 132). His surroundings as well seem to foreshadow Oliver's inevitable demise. "The night was dark and foggy. The lights in the shops could scarcely struggle through the heavy mist, which thickened every moment and shrouded the streets and houses in gloom, […] making [Oliver's] uncertainty the more dismal and depressing" (*OT* 133). Oliver has to give away the new clothes Mr Brownlow endowed him (*OT* 141), every remnant of his blissful middle-class experience is destroyed.

Dickens's description of the environment and the people Oliver meets in the underworld radiates pure evil. "Spiders had built their webs in the angles of the walls and ceilings, and sometimes, when Oliver walked softly into a room, the mice would scamper across the floor, and run back terrified to their holes" (*OT* 154-55). The description of the room, teeming with spiders and mice, juxtaposes Oliver's shy, quiet nature. It seems as though Oliver is an intruder, trespassing on a territory that can offer him nothing but cruelty. The underworld presents itself as threatening and dark, populated with beastly, merciless, and grotesque creatures that mistreat and mock Oliver. The following description of Fagin and his surroundings underscores how dark and gruesome the underworld is:

> The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down, and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch. [...] As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved, crawling forth, by night in search of some rich offal for a meal. (*OT* 162)

Fagin has become one with the underworld, he is both a product of it and he adds to its cruelty. Oliver reacts as a victim would, "bewildered with alarm and apprehension" (*OT* 186), "turning sick with fear" (*OT* 186), "well-nigh mad with grief and terror" (*OT*

192), and “more dead than alive” (*OT* 194). Often left alone for days, “[Oliver] would crouch in the corner of the passage by the street door, to be as near living people as he could, and would remain there, listening and counting the hours, until the Jew or the boys returned” (*OT* 155). Dickens makes clear that Fagin’s world is not only Oliver’s prison, it is his death. “The boy was lying, fast asleep, on a rude bed upon the floor, so pale with anxiety, and sadness, and the closeness of his prison, that he looked like death […]” (*OT* 171). However, Oliver is not strong enough to escape the clutches of the underworld – he needs to be rescued.

For Oliver, thus, the public sphere young boys experienced, does not fulfil its original purpose as a place of education and preparation for the world. On the contrary: for Oliver, the public sphere is the underworld. In *Fagin’s Children* (2002), Jeannie Duckworth points out that “[...] the increasing population was predominantly a young one, facing an unfamiliar environment with no families to turn to, no employers and no clergymen to guide them” (2). Cities were unsanitary, overcrowded and generally wretched places and children often resorted to crime in order to survive. By the 1850s, there were around 100,000 street children in London alone (Duckworth 15). “The armies of neglected children have been attributed to the high birth-rate which made a large child surplus inevitable and, without parental attention and control, children such as these created a great problem for local authorities and the law” (15). Duckworth (5) remarks that especially for the young, work was hard to find, and until the 1870s schooling was hardly available for the poor. She continues that until mid-century, “[n]o separate legal code or court system existed for juveniles; and children over the age of seven were tried, imprisoned and transported on the same grounds as adults” (5). In *The Seven Curses of London* (1869), the Victorian journalist James Greenwood wrote about these young criminals. What is interesting is that he depicted them as children that rejected morality and distrusted the authorities. Dickens also portrayed the street urchins such as Charley Bates or the Dodger as immoral and devious. Consequently, it is safe to assume that this is how many Victorians saw these children:

> Some are thieves from infancy. Their parents are thieves in most cases; in others, the children are orphans, or have been forsaken by their parents, and in such cases the children generally fall into the hands of the professional thief-trainer. [...] Here then, is one great source of crime. These children are

> nurtured in it. They come under no good moral influence; and until the ragged-schools were started, they had no idea of honesty, not to mention morality and religion. [...] They believe the clergy are all hypocrites, the judges and magistrates tyrants and honest people their bitterest enemies. (Greenwood 129-139)

Oliver falls into the hands of a professional thief-trainer, however, he is different than his co-trainees, for he has an awareness of and desire for morality. The experience of the public sphere, the underground world, is not meant for Oliver, it is not an environment in which he can survive or thrive. In the preface to the 1841 edition of *Oliver Twist*, Dickens writes: “The cold, wet, shelterless, midnight streets of London; the foul and frowzy dens, where vice is closely packed and lacks the room to turn; the haunts of hunger and disease, the shabby rags that scarcely hold together: where are the attractions of these things?” (xi). He stresses that there is nothing attractive, nothing good or redeeming to find in London’s streets.

4.3.2 Oliver Transgressing the Ideology of Separate Spheres

In marked contrast to the ideology of separate spheres which dictates that boys should learn how to move around in the public sphere, at the end of the book, Oliver becomes part of a middle-class family as Mr Brownlow’s adoptive son. In fact, throughout the story, there are only two places of peace and salvation for Oliver: Mr Brownlow’s house and the Maylies’s house, two middle-class, respectable homes, that are populated by pure, motherly women, restricted to the home, and honourable, protective men, passing back and forth the two spheres.

What is interesting is that both times Oliver is rescued from Fagin, he is injured and has to recover first, fighting for his life until he has regained his strength and can appreciate his new surroundings and caretakers. When Mr Brownlow saves Oliver from the police and takes him to his house, “[…] he was tended with a kindness and solicitude that knew no bounds” (*OT* 93). However, it takes a long time for him to recuperate: “But, for many days, Oliver remained insensible to all the goodness of his new friends. [...] Weak, and thin, and pallid, he awoke at last from what seemed to

have been a long and troubled dream" (*OT* 93). It is almost as though the excruciating experiences in the underworld are so burdensome, so cruel for him, that they leave him barely alive. Only in the hands of honourable, good people, can he be saved and nursed back to health, but that takes time. All remnants, all evidence of the underworld need to be destroyed. Therefore, Oliver receives beautiful new clothes and he gives the old ones, tainted by his old life, to a servant. "[…] [H]e felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone, and that there was now no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again" (*OT* 113). Only then Oliver can breathe again. While he was almost dead at Fagin's, he is now starting to come to life again. "They were happy days, those of Oliver's recovery. Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly – everybody was kind and gentle – that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like heaven itself" (*OT* 113). As Dickens emphasises, "[t]he crisis of the disease was safely past. He belonged to the world again" (*OT* 96). Oliver needs to be in an ideal middle-class household such as Mr Brownlow's home. Here, he feels "cheerful and happy" (*OT* 96), and he looks "delicate and handsome" (*OT* 114). Here, he finds an environment in which he can thrive.

Nevertheless, Oliver only stays with Mr Brownlow for a short while, just long enough for him to recuperate. Then, he is sent on an errand to return some books. Eager to prove himself to Mr Brownlow, Oliver is grateful and happily runs out. "Oliver, delighted to be of use, brought down the books under his arm in a great bustle, and waited, cap in hand, to hear what message he was to take" (*OT* 121). This is the first time he leaves the shelter of Mr Brownlow's house, unaware of the dangers outside. Once again, the unfolding events show that Oliver cannot survive in the world outside, unprotected. Almost instantly, he is caught by Nancy, who makes the bystanders believe that he is her run-away little brother. The sheer brutality of the people, none of whom believe his innocence, leave him numb and without the strength to resist his attackers.

> Weak with recent illness, stupefied by the blows and the suddenness of the attack, terrified by the fierce growling of the dog, and the brutality of the man, and overpowered by the conviction of the bystanders that he really was the hardened little wretch he was described to be, what could one poor child do! Darkness had set in; it was a low neighbourhood; no help was near; resistance was useless. (*OT* 130)

Oliver surrenders without a fight. “They were in a dark corner, quite out of the track of passengers. Oliver saw, but too plainly, that resistance would be of no avail. He held out his hand, which Nancy clasped tight in hers” (*OT* 132). The second time Oliver is rescued, he ends up at the house of the Maylies, the house of the attempted burglary with Sikes. “He was so weak that he could scarcely raise himself into a sitting posture; when he had done so, he looked feebly round for help, and groaned with pain” (*OT* 242). Oliver, shot and wounded, somehow makes it back to the house, hoping “[…] they might have compassion on him, and if they did not, it would be better, he thought, to die near human beings than in the lonely, open fields” (*OT* 243). This once again shows how much Oliver yearns for human companionship. Mr Giles, the old servant, asks Rose what to do about Oliver. Rose consults her aunt and even though they know he was one of the thieves, they are determined he should stay with them until his injuries are healed. Rose also demands that he be treated kindly (*OT* 247). “Then, bending over Oliver, [Mr Giles] helped to carry him upstairs, with the care and solicitude of a woman” (*OT* 247). This sentence is important, as Oliver’s whole stay with the Maylies is characterised by female care and warmth.

The first description of the house evokes a notion of comfort and wholesomeness. “In a handsome room – though its furniture had rather the air of old-fashioned comfort, than of modern elegance – there sat two ladies at a well-spread breakfast table. Mr Giles, dressed with scrupulous care in a full suit of black, was in attendance upon them” (*OT* 248). Instantly, the reader is aware that this is a good home, the complete opposite of Fagin’s den, inhabited by proper ladies and their benevolent servants. The first time Mrs Maylie and Rose go to see Oliver in his room, he appears “[…] a mere child, worn with pain and exhaustion, and sunk into a deep sleep” (*OT* 253). Rose is deeply moved and “her tears fell upon his forehead” (*OT* 253). Mrs Maylie is certain, “This poor child can never have been the pupil of the robbers” (*OT* 254). Even though Oliver does not know yet where he is, he reacts to the ladies’ presence. “The boy stirred, and smiled in his sleep, as though these marks of pity and compassion had awakened some pleasant dream of a love and affection he had never known […]” (*OT* 253). He subconsciously feels safe and at home. Rose and her aunt decide to do everything in their power to save Oliver’s life. “[T]hink how young he is; think that he may never have

known a mother's love, or even the comfort of a home, and that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt" (*OT* 254). Rose believes that Oliver was not born evil, but is a victim of his circumstances. Rose also stresses the importance of motherly love and a good home for a young child. It takes Oliver weeks to recover and become whole again, not only physically, but mentally as well. Even though "[...] Oliver gradually throve and prospered under the united care of Mrs Maylie, Rose, and the kind-hearted Mr Losberne" (*OT* 271), Oliver still has not made a full recovery.

Mrs Maylie and Rose decide to take Oliver to their countryside cottage by coach. Before the trip, they want to take Oliver to see Mr Brownlow. On the way, he notices the house he was taken to just before the robbery. Mr Losberne immediately confronts "a little ugly humpbacked man" (*OT* 274) who opens the door. He denies everything and Mr Losberne cannot corroborate Oliver's story as the furniture mysteriously looks different from what Oliver has described to him. The man then walks up to the coach and inspects Oliver. "[…] [H]e looked into the carriage, and eyed Oliver for an instant with a glance so sharp and fierce, and at the same time so furious and vindictive, that, waking or sleeping, he could not forget it for months afterwards" (*OT* 275). The underworld creeps in again, just seeing the man look at him has a deep effect on Oliver.

However, when they finally reach the cottage, Oliver is born anew: "It was a lovely spot to which they repaired. Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there" (*OT* 279). Dickens's description of the countryside stands in stark contrast to his description of London. Here, Oliver experiences genuine companionship, while London was a gloomy prison full of insincere and vicious characters. "It was a happy time. The days were peaceful and serene; the nights brought with them neither fear nor care; no languishing in a wretched prison, or associating with wretched men; nothing but pleasant and happy thoughts" (*OT* 279). It is with a sentiment of nostalgia that Dickens writes about the advantages of country living. The idyll of the middle-class country

refuge as a safe haven to recuperate from ruthless city life and to reconnect one's soul to nature and heaven is palpable in the following lines:

> Who can describe the pleasure and delight, the peace of mind and soft tranquility, the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village! [...] Men who have lived in crowded, pent-up streets, through lives of toil, and never wished for change, [...] even they, with the hand of death upon them, have been known to yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature's face, and, carried far from the scenes of their old pains and pleasures, have seemed to pass at once into a new state of being [...]. The memories which peaceful country scenes call up are not of this world, nor of its thoughts and hopes. (*OT* 278)

Here, in the country, Oliver is finally educated. He starts going to church every Sunday and to read the Bible (*OT* 280). Even the poor are quite unlike the London poor, "so neat and clean" and kneeling "so reverently in prayer" (*OT* 280). Oliver is thus immersed in an environment that knows no harm, no abuses, no darkness. After three months, he has visibly changed, he has "grown stout and healthy" (*OT* 282), though this has not made him proud, he is "still the same gentle, attached, affectionate creature" (*OT* 282). The private realm is where Oliver can grow, where he can be completely himself. The countryside and Oliver's two angelic female benefactresses heal the wounds inflicted by his tormentors in the workhouse and the London underworld. When Oliver is reunited with Mrs Bedwin, she instantly remarks that he has changed. "Ah! the same sweet face, but not so pale; the same soft eye, but not so sad" (*OT* 367). It becomes quite clear that Oliver is not meant for the public realm. Oliver has arrived at his final and true destination, a middle-class respectable family.

When Rose falls dangerously ill and Mrs Maylie asks Oliver to mail a letter, Oliver runs out without hesitation "at the greatest speed he could muster" (*OT* 286). But in the inn-yard he runs into Monks, who is "wrapped in a cloak" (*OT* 287), "[…] glaring at the boy with his large dark eyes" (*OT* 287), and talking "[…] in a horrible passion between his clenched teeth" (*OT* 287). Clearly, this man is an intruder, a creature of the underworld coming to harm Oliver. Oliver is unaware of the danger and safely returns home. It seems as though the underworld is not as powerful here than it is in London. Shortly afterwards, the underworld, Fagin and Monks to be more specific, manage to find

Oliver sleeping at his desk and peer at him from outside the window. Oliver is asleep, but even in this state, he feels the looming danger. “Suddenly the scene changed; the air became close and confined; and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was in the Jew’s house again” (*OT* 301). It was over in a second, “[b]ut they had recognized him, and he them, and their look was as firmly impressed upon his memory, as if it had been deeply carved in stone, and set before him from his birth” (*OT* 302). This passage shows that Oliver can never be safe, his soul can never find peace, until his abusers are found and eradicated. One last time, the underworld encroaches on Oliver. The boy accompanies Mr Brownlow to see Fagin in prison, however, he “[...] nearly swooned after this frightful scene, and was so weak that for an hour or more he had not the strength to walk” (*OT* 480). Eventually, all of Oliver’s former tyrants end tragically. Bill Sikes accidentally hangs himself, Fagin is executed, and the Bumbles lead a miserable existence in the workhouse. Now, Oliver’s destiny can be fulfilled. Mr Brownlow happily adopts him and Oliver is “truly happy” (*OT* 517), the reader is assured.

Oliver’s final destination is the private realm of the ideal middle-class family. While a boy his age should learn how to master the public realm, rubbing shoulders with his peers, strengthening his character, learning to be assertive and resilient, all throughout the book Dickens makes it clear that Oliver was not meant to take these steps. He cannot handle the world outside. His soul is so delicate, fragile, and pure, that he is unable to shield himself from all the vice and brutality in the world. On the contrary, Oliver seems to be a magnet for malicious criminals attempting to corrupt him. Additionally, the fact that Oliver is never alone, that he always ends up in some sort of family-like structure, is further indication that he is not ready for the public realm. Thus, there is little doubt that Oliver was meant for anything else but to be protected and treasured in the private sphere, it is where he can flourish and enrich the people around him.

4.4 The Family Ideal: Domesticity

Initially a feature of the Evangelical middle classes, the ideology of domesticity became so pervasive in Victorian culture that by mid-century it permeated all social classes, the realm of politics, and the economy. Evangelicalism provided the middle classes with a sense of identity and community, which enabled them to set themselves apart from the upper and the lower classes (Davidoff and Hall 76). In their groundbreaking study *Family Fortunes* (1987), Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall stress that the Christian emphasis on domesticity was incidental to the formation of a distinctive middle class in nineteenth-century Britain.

> The precise doctrines of manliness, femininity and the family within different religious groupings varied [...] but there was enough common ground to allow for the emergence of a series of beliefs and practices [...] which provided the basis for a shared culture among the middle class by mid century. (Davidoff and Hall 74)

Especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, the relation between religion and identity became evident. An increasing network of church buildings, charities, Sunday schools, reunions and events, as well as literature and magazines such as the popular Evangelical Magazine dedicated to the Christian faith united believers, and helped to forge a distinct, middle-class identity built on the ideal of domesticity. (Davidoff and Hall 78). Why the Christian community and domestic life became so important can further be explained by the impact of industrialisation. The first half of the nineteenth century was a time of significant economic, political, and social change and unrest (Davidoff and Hall 76). Work and production no longer took place in one's house, which contributed to the transformation of family life. "[...] [T]he household [...] lost its economic functions, requiring the reconstruction of family on an entirely new basis, based no longer on material relations among its members but on entirely new cultural foundations." (Gillis 85) Consequently, the middle classes turned to the family and religion for stability, safety, and a sense of purpose.

Central to Victorian domesticity was the nuclear family, consisting of father, mother, and children. Increasingly, this new family ideal displaced other, much broader kinship

networks (Davidoff and Hall 321). “Ideologically, the middle-class home and family represented the essence of morality, stability, and comfort” (Mitchell 142). Therefore, every family member had specific roles and duties to fulfil. At the core of the family was the marriage between husband and wife. Their work and responsibilities as spouses and the character traits they should exhibit were clearly defined and leaned heavily on the prevalent notion of gender difference. It was commonly understood that men and women were created to complement each other.

> In fact, the romantic ideal of marriage was not based on equality. It assumed that sharply distinguished roles could be deeply satisfying to both parties: to the husband on account of the emotional support he received from his wife, and to the wife because of the window on the wider world which his education and experience made available to her. (Tosh 1999: 28)

The two most important and widely-read writers on domesticity at the turn of the eighteenth century were William Cowper, who Davidoff and Hall call “the Evangelical poet of domesticity” (20) and laywoman Hannah More. In his work, Cowper idealised the home as a haven for modesty, happiness, and peace (Davidoff and Hall 157). In his poem *The Task* (1785), Cowper praised domesticity, writing, “Domestic happiness, though only bliss / Of Paradise that has survived the fall / [...] Thou art the Nurse of Virtue” (63). Davidoff and Hall argue that writers such as Cowper and More “[...] were influential in setting the terms for the characterization of domesticity and sexual difference” (149). The literature and conduct books they disseminated reinforced the legitimisation of a system of strict gender roles.

The husband and father was the head of the family, who was legally and economically in charge of his wife, children, and domestic servants (Mitchell 142). The wife and mother assumed a subordinate, subservient role, which she graciously accepted (Davidoff and Hall 322). Ideally, she was humble, devout, and delicate, “an image of fragility and helplessness” (Davidoff and Hall 323), whereas the husband was her assertive and potent protector and provider (Davidoff and Hall 323). To give an example, the mother of a young woman about to get married wrote to her daughter’s future groom: “I trust she will find a father, a brother and a friend all united in one of the tenderest and kindest of husbands” (qtd. in Davidoff and Hall 327). This sentence

perfectly encapsulates the ideal marriage that the Victorians longed for. In *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), the English critic and writer John Ruskin shared his thoughts on the nature, qualities, and roles of men and women. He argues that “each [sex] has what the other has not: each completes the other, and is completed by the other: they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give” (77). Husband and wife should therefore approach each other with genuine, pure love, and appreciation, each aware of their duties and responsibilities.

Most importantly, the family and its home was elevated to become a place of safety and peace. Rose writes that “[...] both paternalism and the ideology of domesticity were promulgated as cures for the social upheavals and human misery of industrial capitalism” (1992: 36). In a world that was constantly changing, the home, in the tender hands of the caring wife, came alive by the children’s laughter and footsteps, provided stability, and allowed tired husbands to leave their anxieties and worries aside. Ruskin gives the following description of the ideal home:

> This is the true nature of home - it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. [...] so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the [...] unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; (77)

Most men found great delight in fatherhood and developed strong bonds with their children. Even though they were often absent from the family, they were loving and enjoyed playing with their younger children, who they believed were heavenly gifts (Davidoff and Hall 330). For their older children, especially their sons, they acted as mentors, providing companionship and advice (Davidoff and Hall 330). John Tosh explains that fathers deeply worried about their sons’ education, knowing that only a profound, academic background would allow them to procure an honourable employment (1999: 116). A father’s most important obligation was to teach his son how to become manly, that is a respectable middle-class man (Tosh 1999: 116). A good son should follow to his father’s advice and attempt to make him proud. With their daughters, fathers could be more affectionate. “It seems clear that fathers found deep

satisfaction in showing a tender, indulgent side to their daughters, which they felt unable to show to their sons without undermining their manhood" (Tosh 1999: 115). Often, a single daughter dutifully remained at her father's side as he grew older and weaker (Davidoff and Hall 332). Fathers were furthermore the spiritual leaders of their families, gathering the family every day for prayer. Despite a father's responsibilities towards his children, above all, fatherhood should be an enjoyable experience.

Women were primarily meant for marriage, bearing children, and being the emotional anchor of the family. Sarah Lewis stressed that a mother's love was "the only purely unselfish feeling that exists on this earth" (128). Also, motherhood was considered a logical and natural consequence of womanhood. Women were destined and born to become mothers (Davidoff and Hall 335). As the "guardian angels of man's infancy" whose "mission" is "the implanting of the heavenly germ to which God must indeed give the increase […]", motherhood came with certain responsibilities and duties (Davidoff and Hall 30). Mothers were the centre of the house, angelic in demeanour, self-abnegating, and virtuous in character. Their main duties were to take care of the children and the household and to comfort their husbands after long and tedious hours at work.

Most importantly, mothers were responsible for the early instruction of their children. They were expected to "mould the moral development of the young" (Tosh 1999: 45). As Sarah Lewis writes, "[t]he most powerful of all moral influences is the maternal" (21). In teaching their young children a potpourri of spiritual lessons, reading and writing, and other, more gender-specific skills, mothers "[...] were instrumental in inculcating general standards and behaviour, coincidentally emphasizing differential roles for boys and girls" (Davidoff and Hall 340). Mitchell (141) points out that middle-class mothers were in a privileged position, as they neither had to work like many working-class mothers, nor had to attend social and political events like aristocratic mothers. Usually, middle-class families could afford at least one nurserymaid or even two to three servants, so that mothers had enough resources to nurse their babies and spend time with their children (Mitchell 148). Additionally, women also needed to tend

to their husband's needs and incorporate time for individual prayer (Davidoff and Hall 342). Consequently, motherhood could be time-consuming and women were supposed to carefully plan their days.

Finally, the children were the centre of the family. "Children completed the circle of affection. Victorian homes were 'childcentred' [...] in the more literal sense that their needs, as perceived by adults, determined so much domestic activity" (Tosh 1999: 28). While children were considered the greatest blessing, they also had strict roles to fulfil. Most of all, they should be well-mannered, obedient, and deferential towards their parents (Mitchell 142). On the one hand, middle-class children in the nineteenth century grew up closer to their parents than upper-class children, who were mostly taken care of by their nannies. On the other hand, parents also started to cater for their children's unique needs and interests, buying special toys, and children's books for their enjoyment. (Davidoff and Hall 343). While boys were encouraged to play outside with balls and hoops, to learn to swim, and to be physically active, girls should preferably play with dolls and dolls houses or learn to do needlework. (Davidoff and Hall 344). This shows that from early on, children also had to learn to embody specific gender roles.

4.4.1 Oliver Conforming to the Ideal of Domesticity

What Oliver, like every child, really longs for, is love and friendship. His loneliness is difficult for him to come to terms with, he yearns for a family, a home where he can feel safe and wanted. Both Mr Brownlow's house and the Maylies's house represent a good, honourable middle-class household. Although neither reflects the traditional family constellation of father, mother, and child, they are both family-like social structures in which Oliver is treated with dignity, love, and respect, and in which he is allowed to thrive. Furthermore, both families adhere to the most important features of Victorian domesticity: belonging to the middle class, allocating fixed and clear roles, being Christian, and valuing children as inherently good and worthy beings.

4.4.1.1 Middle-Class Membership

The first time we are introduced to Mr Brownlow, he is at the bookstall, reading. He is described as an older, nice gentleman, "a very respectable-looking personage, with a powdered head and gold spectacles" (*OT* 81). Further, "[h]e was dressed in a bottle-green coat with a black velvet collar, wore white trousers and carried a smart bamboo cane under his arm" (*OT* 81). He is browsing for books, "[…] reading away, as hard as if he were in his elbow chair, in his own study" (*OT* 81). As the bookish owner of his own study and from his appearance, it becomes clear that Mr Brownlow is different from the malicious people that have so far taken care of Oliver.

Additionally, Mr Brownlow is a genuine gentleman, kind, and respectable. Even though at first he believes Oliver to have robbed him, Mr Brownlow is adamant that the police don't hurt the boy (*OT* 83). When he sees how Oliver is treated at the "[...] very notorious Metropolitan Police office" (*OT* 85), he immediately decides not to press charges. "The old gentleman looked almost as rueful as Oliver when the key grated in the lock. He turned with a sigh to the book, which had been the innocent cause of all this disturbance" (*OT* 86). While the police officers and the magistrate Mr Fang are rude and heartless, Mr Brownlow speaks to them "*like* a gentleman" (*OT* 88). After Oliver faints and is acquitted of the crime, Mr Brownlow takes the "poor boy" (*OT* 98) to his house, "[…] a neat house, in a quiet shady street near Pentonville" (*OT* 93), a "white house" (*OT* 276), indicating that it is untainted and uncorrupted, like himself, to nurse him back to health.

Mr Brownlow has a housekeeper, Mrs Bedwin, who immediately takes to Oliver. "Here a bed was prepared, without loss of time, in which Mr Brownlow saw his young charge carefully and comfortably deposited […]" (*OT* 93). Apart from the housekeeper, there are at least two more servants that remain unnamed who look after Oliver. At night, "a fat old woman" (*OT* 95) checks on Oliver after he has gone to sleep. Also, "[...] as [Oliver] was still too weak to walk, Mrs Bedwin had him carried downstairs into the little housekeeper's room [….]" (*OT* 96). Later on, Oliver is taken to Mr Brownlow's study, "[…] a little back room, quite full of books, with a window looking into some pleasant

little gardens" (*OT* 114). Oliver is impressed by Mr Brownlow's book collection, although he cannot read. Dickens even compares Oliver's stay with Mr Brownlow to heaven, asserting that his experiences there "[…] seemed like heaven itself" (*OT* 113). Mr Brownlow's respectability, the description of his house, and the fact that the has a housekeeper and servants, indicate that he is a member of the middle classes.

The second middle-class household Oliver experiences, "the house at Chertsey" (*OT* 278), is the home of Mrs Maylie and her adopted niece Rose. Even though it is never explicitly stated that they are middle-class, it becomes evident as Mrs Maylie employs several servants: Mr Giles, "the butler and steward to the old lady of the mansion" (*OT* 241), Brittles, "a lad of all-work" (*OT* 241), a cook, and a housemaid (*OT* 244). Even the servants are good and loyal and would never betray Mrs Maylie. "The old lady has had 'em these twenty year and, if you were to give 'em five hundred pound, they wouldn't be in it" (*OT* 165). Everyone else connected to the household is respectable, compassionate, and clearly middle-class. There is Mr Losberne, a doctor and good friend of the family, an "honest gentleman" (*OT* 253), and Mr Harry Maylie, Mrs Maylie's "dutiful son" (*OT* 311). Additionally, the residence itself seems to be well-kept and inviting, neither poor nor extremely luxurious (*OT* 311). Also, the two ladies of the house are perfect examples of ideal middle-class Victorian women:

> Dressed with the utmost nicety and precision, in a quaint mixture of bygone costume, with some slight concessions to the prevailing taste, which rather served to point the old style pleasantly than to impair its effect, she sat, in a stately manner, with her hands folded on the table before her. Her eyes (and age had dimmed but little of their brightness) were attentively fixed upon her young companion. The younger lady was in the lovely bloom and springtime of womanhood; at that age, when, if ever angels be for God's good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be, without impiety supposed to abide in such as hers. (*OT* 269)

Apart from the London residence, the Maylies also own a cottage in the country, where Oliver spends three months. There, the ladies engage in typical middle-class feminine behaviour, going on walks, talking about books, picking flowers, and going to church on Sundays (*OT* 279-280). Rose also practices the piano and sings. In the country, Oliver experiences the bliss of the middle-class idyll of domesticity and it makes him

come alive. “[…] [H]e would walk with Mrs Maylie and Rose, and hear them talk of books, or perhaps sit near them, in some shady place, and listen whilst the young lady read [...]” (*OT* 279). Later on, Oliver would prepare his school lessons, “till evening came slowly on, when the ladies would walk out again, and he with them” (*OT* 279). These months “were true felicity indeed” (*OT* 281) for Oliver. Consequently, Oliver needs a middle-class family to thrive and to develop his full potential.

At the end of the story, the ideal of domesticity is achieved. Mr Losberne, Mr Grimwig, and the Maylies contrive a plan to help Oliver, the aim being “[...] the discovery of Oliver’s parentage, and regaining for him the inheritance of which, if this story be true, he has been fraudulently deprived” (*OT* 368). Uncovering Oliver’s origin story, it finally becomes clear why Oliver seems to fit so perfectly with Mr Brownlow and the Maylies. Oliver himself is middle-class because his parents were members of the middle classes. In the end, Mr Brownlow adopts Oliver, and together with Mrs Bedwin, they move to a house in the country. Close-by, Harry and Rose live in a parsonage house with Mrs Maylie, which “[...] linked together a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world” (*OT* 482). Even the servants belong to this “little society”. As for Mr Giles and Brittles, “[t]hey sleep at the parsonage, but divide their attentions so equally among its inmates, and Oliver, and Mr Brownlow, and Mr Losberne, that to this day the villagers have never been able to discover to which establishment they properly belong” (*OT* 483). Mr Losberne and Mr Grimwig, the two old bachelor gentlemen, become friends as well. Mr Losberne takes “a bachelor’s cottage outside the village of which his young friend was pastor” (*OT* 482), discovering “gardening, planting, fishing, carpentering and various other pursuits of a similar kind” (*OT* 482), and he is visited “[…] a great many times in the course of the year” (*OT* 482) by Mr Grimwig. Oliver’s new family is by no means a realistic portrayal of a nineteenth-century British middle-class family, however, it certainly symbolises the ideal that middle-class families strived to attain.

4.4.1.2 Fixed Roles

In both Mr Brownlow's house and the Maylies's home, all members have clear roles they fulfil. These roles are specifically middle-class and are never questioned but celebrated and adhered to with unbelievable ease. The men are Oliver's financial benefactors and wise father figures that attempt to solve the mystery surrounding his birth and heritage, whereas the women provide Oliver with motherly affection and care, introducing the boy to the pleasures of ideal middle-class domesticity.

Mr Brownlow becomes Oliver's wise and compassionate father figure. Dickens wants us to know that he is no ordinary man but extraordinary in that he is exceptionally kind and generous: "Mr Brownlow's heart, being large enough for six ordinary old gentleman of humane disposition" (*OT* 98). Inexplicably, Mr Brownlow is drawn to Oliver from the beginning, recognising "something in that boy's face," (*OT* 86) that deeply "touches and interests" (*OT* 86) him. Mr Brownlow wonders, "*Can* he be innocent?" (*OT* 86). Another time, he admits to Oliver "[...] but I feel strongly disposed to trust you, nevertheless, and I am more interested in your behalf than I can well account for, even to myself" (*OT* 116), again suggesting that there might be some underlying reason for his attachment to the boy.

Although Mr Brownlow is not actively involved in Oliver's recovery process, he regularly goes to see how he is doing. He cares deeply for Oliver. Seeing him so frail and sick at his house moves him to tears, even though as a gentleman it is improper to cry in front of other people. So he tells Mrs Bedwin, "I'm rather hoarse this morning, Mrs Bedwin. I'm afraid I have caught cold" (*OT* 98), and then he immediately diverts the attention from himself, asking Oliver how he feels.

Mr Brownlow is Oliver's financial provider, allowing him to stay at his house, paying for his new clothes, his food, and his doctor. Like a father, Mr Brownlow wants to get to know Oliver, he wants to know who he is and what he has experienced, and he wants to be his companion in life. "Let me hear your story; where you come from; who brought

you up; and how you got into the company in which I found you. Speak the truth, and you shall not be friendless while I live" (*OT* 116). For Mr Brownlow, being honest and truthful is an important trait. After Oliver disappears, he is convinced that the boy has betrayed him. Offended that the child would take his benevolence for granted, he angrily demands, "Never let me hear the boy's name again" (*OT* 152). Mr Brownlow is also Oliver's protector, he realises that the boy is very fragile and thus wants to shield him from any more pain. He even takes down a portrait, which, as it turns out in the end, shows Oliver's mother Agnes Fleming, because it distresses Oliver so much that he faints (*OT* 112). As an educated man, he wants Oliver to be educated as well and gives Oliver access to his books. "You shall read them, if you behave well" (*OT* 114). Mr Brownlow asks him whether he "should [...] like to grow up a clever man, and write books" (*OT* 115). Mr Brownlow's behaviour and attitudes towards Oliver reveal that he believes in and upholds the notion of Victorian domesticity.

Mrs Bedwin is Mr Brownlow's housekeeper, and Oliver spends most of his time in her company. She is "a motherly old lady, very neatly and precisely dressed" (*OT* 94-94), and her duties regarding Oliver are markedly different from Mr Brownlow's. She talks to the boy, feeds him, plays with him, and clothes him. She becomes very attached to Oliver and takes care of him lovingly and selflessly. "[...] [T]he old lady very gently placed Oliver's head upon the pillow and, smoothing back his hair from his forehead, looked so kindly and lovingly in his face, that he could not help placing his little withered hand on hers, and drawing it round his neck" (*OT* 94). Contrary to Mr Brownlow, Mrs Bedwin cries in front of Oliver. "[...] [T]he good old lady sat herself down too and, being in a state of considerable delight at seeing him so much better, forthwith began to cry most violently" (*OT* 96). Mrs Bedwin and Oliver develop their own little daily routines, which Mr Brownlow is not a part of.

> When the old lady had expatiated, a long time, on the excellences of her children, and the merits of her kind good husband besides, who had been dead and gone […] it was time to have tea, and after tea she began to teach Oliver cribbage, which he learnt as quickly as she could teach, and at which game they played, with great interest and gravity, until it was time for the invalid to have some warm wine and water, with a slice of dry toast, and then to go cosily to bed. (113)

Mrs Bedwin loves Oliver like her own son. She even has a premonition when he runs out with the books. "'Bless his sweet face!' said the old lady, looking after him. 'I can't bear, somehow, to let him go out of my sight'" (*OT* 122). Contrary to Mr Brownlow, she never doubts his innocence when he does not come back from returning the books. After Oliver disappears and Mr Brownlow believes him to be "an impostor" (*OT* 152), Mrs Bedwin disagrees, "I know what children are, sir, and have done these forty years, and people who can't say the same shouldn't say anything about them. That's my opinion!" (*OT* 152). As a woman and a mother, Mrs Bedwin believes that she is a better judge of character regarding children than Mr Brownlow, who does not have children of his own and, as a man, is not acquainted with the nature of children. Mrs Bedwin thus takes over the motherly duties in Mr Brownlow's household.

As far as Mrs Maylie and Rose are concerned, they embody perfect middle-class Victorian women. Neither of the ladies are employed and Dickens never explicitly states what they do in the city apart from taking care of Oliver. In the country, they take long walks, read, talk about books, and go to church. Rose plays the piano and sings (*OT* 280). Both women are charitable and kind, and they instantly take in the wounded Oliver, even though they know that he was one of the burglars. Guided by their female intuition, there is never a doubt in Mrs Maylie nor Rose's mind that Oliver might not be innocent or good. The men, in contrast, are not so easily convinced. They need to hear his story from Oliver himself, they need his reassurance before they allow themselves to trust him.

While Rose is young, naive, and emotional, Mrs Maylie is an older lady, more rational and contained. When Rose almost dies, Mrs Maylie allows herself to cry and grieve only for a short time and then "[...] Mrs Maylie was ever ready and collected, performing all the duties which devolved upon her steadily, and, to all external appearance, even cheerfully" (*OT* 307). Mrs Maylie and Rose thus both adhere to the middle-class imperative that women must be dutiful. Her suitor Mr Harry Maylie calls Rose "[a]n angel" (*OT* 306), "a creature as fair and innocent of guile as one of God's own angels, fluttered between life and death" (306 *OT*). Even though he is in love with her, she

rejects him, asserting that “[i]t is a duty that I must perform” (*OT* 308). Rose is completely selfless and subservient, she even tells Harry to find a respectable woman to love. “Look into the world; think how many hearts you would be proud to gain are there. Confide some other passion to me, if you will; I will be the truest, warmest and most faithful friend you have” (*OT* 308). She does not want to be “[…] this great obstacle to [his] progress in the world” (*OT* 308). Rose thus embodies the ideal of youthful and dutiful Victorian femininity.

Apart from their sense of duty, Dickens emphasises the ladies’ passivity. Mrs Maylie and Rose are not actively involved in the discovery of Oliver’s heritage, they are informed about it by the men. When Rose finds out through Nancy that Monks is in fact Oliver’s half-brother, who offered Fagin a lot of money if he got Oliver back, Rose is completely overwhelmed (*OT* 356-358). Nancy advises her to ask “some kind gentleman” (*OT* 358) for help. Rose ponders this for “a sleepless and anxious night” (*OT* 362), and then “[…] arrived at the desperate conclusion of consulting Harry” (*OT* 362). After Rose tells Mr Brownlow about the events, he relieves Rose from the burden of the news and takes matters into his own hands. “[...] [T]he old gentleman considered that she had acted prudently, and readily undertook to hold solemn conference with the worthy doctor himself” (*OT* 367). Rose, just like Oliver, is not meant to deal with troublesome information. Towards the end of the book, she and Oliver are usually left out of all discussions, even though they concern their heritage. “All these things made Rose and Oliver, who were not in any new secrets, nervous and uncomfortable. They sat wondering, in silence, or, if they exchanged a few words, spoke in whispers, as if they were afraid to hear the sound of their own voices” (*OT* 460-61). The ladies and Oliver thus need male guidance and protection and have to be shielded from difficult news, as they are too fragile.

The circle of middle-class gentlemen that become Oliver’s protectors and benefactors is impressive. They are characterised by their active nature, they are the doers of this story. Mr Brownlow, Mr Losberne, and Mr Harry Maylie all move in the public sphere, they have or had careers or professions, and cross into the private sphere whenever

they want to. This becomes especially evident when Mrs Maylie, Rose, and Oliver stay in the country cottage. Mr Losberne and Harry have professional obligations in London, but they regularly visit the three in the countryside. Contrary to Oliver, the outside world cannot harm his male benefactors, they have the strength and resilience to cope with the pressures and the cruelties of the public realm.

Mr Losberne is not only a good friend of the Maylies, he is compassionate, honourable, and kind, and takes over the manly duties that Mrs Maylie and Rose cannot. Dickens describes him as a "kind-hearted doctor" (*OT* 256), "universally considered one of the best-tempered creatures of earth" (*OT* 258). He is the father figure in the Maylies's household and looks after the ladies with genuine interest. While the ladies quickly decide that the injured Oliver should be taken in, Mr Losberne is more hesitant and inquires about Oliver's background. Upon hearing his story, which "[…] was a solemn thing to hear, [...] the feeble voice of the sick child recounting a weary catalogue of evils and calamities which hard men had brought upon him" (*OT* 256), Mr Losberne decides that the ladies should not give the boy up to the police. Similarly to Mr Brownlow, it is highly important to him that Oliver is truthful with him. "[...] [F]inding that Oliver's replies to his questions were still as straightforward and consistent, and still delivered with as much apparent sincerity and truth, […] he made up his mind to attach full credence to them, from that time forth" (*OT* 276). Mr Losberne thus becomes Oliver's fervent protector.

4.4.1.3 Christianity

The middle-class idyll of domesticity that Dickens describes is closely connected to Christianity. On the last page of the novel, Dickens writes that Oliver and Rose, the two orphans, found each other, "thanks to Him who had protected and preserved them" (*OT* 485). Dickens thus seems to suggest that it was God's intention to save and guide these two noble souls and to provide for them.

It appears that Oliver is inherently Christian and connected to Heaven, though it remains unclear who could have taught him about God in the workhouse, at the

undertaker's, or at Fagin's den. Oliver often starts to pray and to implore God when he feels that he cannot escape the inhumanity around him. Oliver "[...] turned his face upon the pillow, and fervently prayed to Heaven" (*OT* 96). Upon realising that he is being forced to rob a house, Oliver cries out, "Oh! Pray have mercy on me, and do not make me steal. For the love of all the bright angels that rest in heaven, have mercy upon me!" (*OT* 192). Oliver also thanks God for everything good that happens in his life. "If fervent prayers, gushing from hearts overcharged with gratitude, be heard in heaven – and if they be not, what prayers are! – the blessings which the orphan child called down upon [Mrs Maylie, Rose, and Mr Losberne], sunk into their souls, diffusing peace and happiness" (*OT* 271). For Oliver, praying and looking towards God is nothing that has to be taught, learned, or studied in catechisms. Rather, he instinctively knows when and how to pray.

At the Maylies, Oliver is introduced to the institution of the church. For the first time, he becomes aware of the importance of Sundays for the respectable middle-class society. He accompanies the ladies to church, a picturesque little building, "with the green leaves fluttering at the windows, […] and the sweet-smelling air stealing in at the low porch" (*OT* 280). Later, "[…] at night, Oliver read a chapter or two from the Bible, which he had been studying all the week, and in the performance of which duty he felt more proud and pleased, than if he had been the clergyman himself" (*OT* 280). Practicing Christianity makes Oliver feel more connected to the people of the middle-class environment he now finds himself in.

Dickens never explicitly states that Mr Brownlow and the Maylies are Christian. However, it is certain that they are moral people, embodying Christian values such as being compassionate, kind, and charitable. At Mr Brownlow's house, the old lady that sits by his bedside at night has "with her in a little bundle a small prayer book" (*OT* 95). When Rose falls ill, Oliver exclaims, "Heaven will never let her die so young" (*OT* 285). Mrs Maylie reminds Oliver that "[…] this should give us comfort in our sorrow – for Heaven is just, and such things teach us impressively that there is a far brighter world than this, and that the passage to it is speedy" (*OT* 285). In line with Evangelicalism,

Mrs Maylie believes that death is unavoidable and part of God's plan, "God's will" (*OT* 285). Death is a devastating, though necessary step that allows the soul to find peace in heaven, therefore, Mrs Maylie reminds Oliver, one has to bear it with fortitude.

4.4.1.4 The Perception of Childhood

As far as the notion of childhood is concerned, Oliver's middle-class benefactors clearly believe in the inherent goodness and purity of children. After Oliver, "[o]ne wretched breathless child, panting with – terror in his looks; agony in his eye; large drops of perspiration streaming down his face […] (*OT* 82)", is brutally stopped by a bystander and Mr Brownlow identifies him as the thief, he only has kind words for him, calling him "[p]oor fellow" (*OT* 83) and asserting that "[h]e has hurt himself" (*OT* 83). When he first stays in Mr Brownlow's house, Mr Brownlow calls Oliver a "poor boy" (*OT* 98), "[g]ood boy" (*OT* 98), "[m]y dear child" (*OT* 115), and Mrs Bedwin calls him "a grateful little dear" (*OT* 94), and a "[p]retty creetur (*OT* 94). What this shows is that Oliver is instantly considered good and innocent and thus, Mr Brownlow and Mrs Bedwin take pity on him and decide to take care of him.

At the Maylies, Oliver is treated and regarded similarly. The first time Mr Losberne enters Oliver's room to look at him he is surprised that "in lieu of the dogged, black-visaged ruffian they had expected to behold, there lay a mere child" (*OT* 253). Rose and Mrs Maylie call him a "[p]oor creature" (*OT* 247), "this delicate boy" (*OT* 254), a "poor child" (*OT* 254) and are convinced that "[h]e cannot be hardened in vice" (*OT* 256). Rose even stresses, despite being unaware of his heritage, that "[h]e is a child of a noble nature and a warm heart" (*OT* 365), and "[…] that Power which has thought fit to try him beyond his years has planted in his breast affections and feelings which would do honour to many who have numbered his days six times over" (*OT* 365). In this house, Oliver is taken care of by two women that immediately show him motherly love and affection. "Oliver's pillow was smoothed by gentle hands that night, and loveliness and virtue watched him as he slept. He felt calm and happy, and could have died without a murmur" (*OT* 257). The Maylies even take the trouble to take Oliver to their country cottage to allow him to recuperate. Here, the Rousseauean and Romantic

vision of a carefree and uncorrupted childhood closely connected to nature comes to life.

Catherine Robson points out that in his fiction, Dickens usually does not idealise the past and the rural environment. Consequently, "[w]hen Dickens does, on occasion, construct a rural scene by way of contrast to his frenetic metropolis, we are less likely to gain a rich feeling of fully-realized human relations than a simple sense that the narrative has stalled" (2005: 236). Oliver thrives in this new picturesque rural environment, which is so unlike anything he has experienced and seen before.

> The rose and honeysuckle clung to the cottage walls, the ivy crept round the trunks of the trees, and the garden flowers perfumed the air with delicious odours. Hard by was a little churchyard, not crowded with tall unsightly gravestones, but full of humble mounds, covered with fresh turf and moss, beneath which the old people of the village lay at rest (*OT* 279).

In the country, Oliver receives his first formal education. Apart from his studies, however, Oliver is either in company of Mrs Maylie and Rose, or in the village to do charitable work, or in the garden, looking after the plants (*OT* 280). Here, in the peaceful and otherworldly confines of the village, time stands still. Oliver grows "stout and healthy" (*OT* 284) and he becomes domesticated. He grows attached to the Maylies and they grow attached to him as their young charge.

As part of these middle-class families, Oliver is the model child, always grateful, obedient, humble, easy to please, and completely dependent. He does not have any ambitions and aspirations of his own, he does not ask for anything, except to be loved and taken care of. Furthermore, Oliver looks up to his caretakers, he believes in their good intentions, and he never tires of showing his gratitude, praying for them, and wishing that he would never have part with them again.

> Oliver turned homewards, thinking on the many kindnesses he had received from the young lady, and wishing that the time could come over again, that he might never cease showing her how grateful and attached he was. [...] [A]nd yet a hundred little occasions rose up before him on which he fancied he might have been more zealous, and more earnest, and wished he had been. (*OT* 290)

Both families thus do not consider Oliver to be tainted or bad because he is an orphan and his family origins are unknown. Rather, they see in Oliver a poor, mere, innocent child that has been abused and hurt by the world and hence needs protection and love. Oliver is protected as best as possible, while the middle-class men attempt to solve the mystery of his parentage and free him from his evil persecutors in the underworld. Oliver is never part of his friends' endeavours, he is tucked away safely in the house, usually with Rose. As any young child would, Oliver does not question his new family's decisions, he trusts them completely.

4.4.2 Oliver Transgressing the Ideal of Domesticity

Oliver is put into various families or family-like structures that do not meet the criteria of the ideal of domesticity: in the workhouse, at the undertaker's, and at Fagin's. They exploit rather than protect Oliver, they ridicule him rather than attempt to understand him, and they abuse rather than love him. Subsequently, it will be examined in more detail, how these families transgress the nineteenth-century vision of domesticity.

4.4.2.1 Middle-Class Membership

Oliver was born in the workhouse and then brought to the parish orphanage as his mother died after giving birth. "[…] [H]e was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once – a parish child – 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" (*OT* 6). Oliver is now part of the system. As an infant orphan, he bears a certain stigma, he is assigned a role in society which is difficult to overcome. After "eight or ten months" (*OT* 7), Oliver is taken to the parish orphanage, as "[…] there was no female then domiciled in 'the house' who was in a situation to impart to Oliver Twist the consolation and nourishment of which he stood in need" (*OT* 7). Female supervision and care for the young is essential. However, the workhouse system, which requires the parish and the workhouse authorities to work together, is built on "treachery and deception" (*OT* 7). Almost all the people in charge of the children, first and foremost Mrs Mann, the elderly woman supposed to provide the aforementioned female care, and Mr Bumble, the parish beadle, are hypocritical, greedy, and cruel.

> Upon this, the parish authorities magnanimously and humanely resolved that Oliver should be 'farmed', or, in other words, that he should be dispatched to a branch-workhouse some three miles off, where twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female [...]. (*OT* 7)

While the workhouse officials demand that the children be under the care of a woman, a mother figure, Mrs Mann fails to exhibit any of the required motherly attributes. Dickens sarcastically describes her as "the good lady of the house" (*OT* 9), Mr Bumble enthusiastically calls her "a humane woman" (*OT* 11) and tells her, "[y]ou feel as a mother, Mrs Mann" (*OT* 11), when in reality, the children are afraid of her. When Mr Bumble comes to take Oliver, now eight years old, back to the workhouse, because he is too old for the orphanage, Oliver anxiously asks him, "Will she go with me?" (*OT* 12), indicating that Mrs Mann never treated the children with respect, dignity, or love. Mrs Mann is cruel and heartless, the complete opposite of Mrs Maylie and Rose.

Oliver thus has to leave the only family he knows and is put in the workhouse. It is difficult for him to leave, even though the orphanage was "[…] the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lit the gloom of his infant years" (*OT* 13). The other orphans were his only companions and he had shared their suffering. "Wretched as were the little companions in misery he was leaving behind, they were the only friends he had ever known, and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world sank into the child's heart for the first time" (*OT* 13). The conditions in the workhouse are even harsher than in the orphanage. The utilitarians in charge of the poor laws, "very sage, deep, philosophical men" (*OT* 15), upon discovering that the poor were not given any incentive to work, "[…] established the rule that all poor people should have the alternative [...] of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it" (*OT* 15). Oliver and the other children "[…] suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months" (*OT* 16). Dickens foregrounds the inhumanity of the workhouse. Instead of nurturing and providing for the children, instilling in them good manners, preparing them for the world, and sheltering them from abuse, as good parents would, the workhouse employees starve, beat, and berate them without an

inkling of remorse. Dickens depicts the supposed protectors as unrelenting criminals that intentionally abuse the children in their care. For many, including Oliver's innocent friend little Dick, the workhouse not only becomes their prison, but also their death. Hence it presents nothing that even remotely resembles the ideal middle-class family.

After Oliver runs away, he almost instantly meets Jack Dawkins, and he finds himself in a new family. Jack, "the Artful Dodger" (*OT* 68), is a boy his age, who offers to take him to "a 'spectable old genelman" (*OT* 67) where Oliver can stay. "This unexpected offer of shelter was too tempting to be resisted, especially as it was immediately followed up by the assurance that the old gentleman already referred to would doubtless provide Oliver with a comfortable place, without loss of time" (*OT* 67). Fagin's den, just like Fagin himself, is broken, filthy, and decaying, not at all meeting the criteria of a respectable middle-class household.

> The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt. [...] In a frying pan, which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantelshelf by a string, some sausages were cooking, and standing over them, with a toasting fork in his hand, was a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair. He was dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare, and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying pan and a clothes horse, over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging. Several rough beds made of old sacks were huddled side by side on the floor […]. (*OT* 69-70)

While at Mr Brownlow and Mrs Maylie's house Oliver is always protected and surrounded by compassionate, loving people who are interested in his past, talk to him, and value him as a human being with dignity, life at Fagin's den is pure torture. Here, he is constantly laughed at, mocked, violated, and threatened, not only by Fagin and Sikes, but also by the other boys, Charley Bates and the Artful Dodger. Fagin or the boys never explain to Oliver the nature of their work, so he tries to make sense of what he sees in his own childlike ways. "He is so jolly green!" (*OT* 76), exclaims Charley Bates, laughing at Oliver. Not even the "curious and uncommon game" (*OT* 76) they play in the den, where Fagin plays a gentleman walking in the streets and the boys attempt to take his watch and handkerchief, without him noticing, makes Oliver sceptical.

Only on rare occasions does the gang feel like a family. “At other times, the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days, mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings” (*OT* 161). However, there is an agenda behind those fleeting and short happy times. Fagin wants Oliver to feel included in the group. “In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils and, having prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it and change its hue for ever” (*OT* 161). It is obvious that Oliver really wants to fit in with his new family, he longs to not be alone anymore, even though his instincts warn him not to trust Fagin and the boys.

As in any (normal) family, the children trust their parents or their supposed carers. Oliver still does not question Fagin’s methods, but after about ten days in the den, “[…] he began to languish for fresh air, and took many occasions of earnestly entreating the old gentleman to allow him to go out to work, with his two companions” (*OT* 79). In theory, Fagin’s group of criminals is a family, but not in the sense of the middle-class ideal. Fagin does not care about the boys’ feelings or their future, he needs them to steal for him. If they come home empty-handed, Fagin denies them food and “he even went so far as to knock them [...] down a flight of stairs” (*OT* 79). The boys take advantage of Oliver and the Dodger even has him clean his boots, which Oliver consents to, “too glad to make himself useful, too happy to have some faces, however bad, to look upon” (*OT* 155). When Oliver comes back after having stayed with Mr Brownlow, they “did not stop to bestow any other mark of recognition upon Oliver than a humorous grin” (*OT* 135). They mock his new clothes and his books, declaring him to be “nothing but a gentleman” (*OT* 135). Fagin joins them. “‘Delighted to see you looking so well, my dear,’ said the Jew, bowing with mock humility. ‘The Artful shall give you another suit, my dear, for fear you should spoil that Sunday one. Why didn’t you write, my dear, and say you were coming? We’d have got something warm for supper’” (*OT* 136). Oliver is stripped of his new clothes and is put in old and dirty rags again instead. Here, in the world of criminals and thieves, there is absolutely nothing except pain and horror for Oliver.

Contrary to Oliver, the other young criminals are proud thieves. Robbing and stealing grants them their independence and will eventually allow them to make something of themselves, so they believe. Charley Bates asks Oliver, stunned, “Don’t you take any pride out of yourself? Would you go and be dependent on your friends? Oh, blow that!” (*OT* 157-58). The Dodger agrees “with an air of haughty disgust” (*OT* 158). The Dodger continues, “You’ve been brought up bad […]. Fagin will make something of you, […] or you’ll be the first that he ever had that turned out unprofitable” (*OT* 158-59). It seems as though the boys are so immersed in their life of crime that they have accepted it, it has become their ideal. They do not even want to escape it anymore.

Fagin also makes sure that Oliver is scared of him and knows his place in the family. He calls Oliver out on “the crying sin of ingratitude” (*OT* 153), lamenting that he willingly left “the society of his anxious friends” (*OT* 153), even though Fagin had “taken Oliver in, and cherished him” (*OT* 153) Additionally, Fagin advises him to never attempt to escape again. “Mr Fagin concluded by drawing a rather disagreeable picture of the discomforts of hanging, and, with great friendliness and politeness of manner, expressed his anxious hope that he might never be obliged to submit Oliver Twist to that unpleasant operation” (*OT* 153). Afterwards, Oliver is locked in the den and left alone during the day in order to teach him a lesson, to torture him and to make him even weaker and less prone to resistance. “And so Oliver remained all that day, and for the greater part of many subsequent days, seeing nobody, between early morning and midnight, and left, during the long hours, to commune with his own thoughts […]” (*OT* 154). Fagin emphasises that their relationship can only work if Oliver is obedient. For Oliver, this is easy in the good middle-class families, but being a criminal, being malicious, goes against his nature. He can never be like Fagin and his young rooks. “The Jew smiled hideously, patting Oliver on the head, said that if he kept himself quiet and applied himself to business, he saw they would be very good friends yet. Then [...], he went out and locked the room door behind him” (*OT* 154). Fagin’s “family” is thus a highly dysfunctional and dangerous construct that thrives on him selfishly exploiting and abusing its members.

In the end, the family-like structures of the workhouse and Fagin's gang do not last. Mr Bumble and his wife end up as unhappy paupers in the workhouse, but for Fagin and Sikes there is no mercy, they die a cruel and lonesome death. As Dickens remarks, "[...] how suddenly they changed from strong and vigorous men to dangling heaps of clothes!" (*OT* 475). The "family" they have created cannot survive because its members are either malicious tormentors, such as Fagin and Bill, or abused victims, such as Oliver and Nancy, or both, such as Charley and the Dodger. There is neither love, nor trust, nor loyalty that binds them together; on the contrary, it is a vicious network based on dependency and subordination that is the opposite of the middle-class ideal of domesticity.

4.4.2.2 Fixed Roles

In the 1841 preface, Dickens explains that the evilness of the criminal character in *Oliver Twist*, though terrifying, was intentional. "It is, it seems, a coarse and shocking circumstance, that some of the characters in these pages are chosen from the most criminal and degraded in London's population; that Sikes is a thief, and Fagin a receiver of stolen goods; that the boys are pickpockets, and the girl is a prostitute" (ix). In the universe of the underworld, all characters have their fixed roles they adhere to, just as in the middle-class families of Mr Brownlow and Mrs Maylie. Apart from Nancy, who in the course of the book comes to care deeply for Oliver, none of the other characters show regret or remorse at the misery they have caused Oliver. In the following, the roles of Oliver's main antagonists in the workhouse, Mr Bumble, and in the London underworld, Fagin, will be analysed.

Mr Bumble is the proud, two-faced, and hypocritical parish beadle overseeing the workhouse and the orphanage. He is "a fat man, and a choleric one" (*OT* 9), a self-proclaimed "farmer of infants" (*OT* 146). He considers himself a generous and Christian caretaker of undeserving children, who in turn show him nothing but disrespect and ingratitude. He calls Oliver "an ill-conditioned, vicious, bad-disposed parochial child" (*OT* 147) and even accuses the boy of corrupting the other children in the workhouse (*OT* 148). Mr Bumble is self-important and a firm believer in the system of the poor

laws. In his opinion, the bad orphans do not deserve love or a family. When Oliver cries out to him that everybody hates him, "[…] [looking] into his companion's face, with tears of real agony" (*OT* 34), Mr Bumble seems overwhelmed, "[…] [hemming] three or four times in a husky manner and [...] muttering something about 'that troublesome cough' [...]" (*OT* 34). Thus, it appears as though he is capable of feeling compassion for Oliver.

In the end, however, his haughtiness prevents him from seeing and admitting his guilt. Mr Bumble considers it his duty to inform Mr Brownlow of Oliver's background, clarifying "[...] that Oliver was a foundling, born of low and vicious parents. That he had, from his birth, displayed no better qualities than treachery, ingratitude, and malice" (*OT* 151). Thus, Mr Bumble succeeds in destroying Oliver's reputation with Mr Brownlow. He could be a father figure and a gentleman, helping those entrusted to him to find their place in the world. However, he abuses his power and lashes out whenever he feels insulted.

Fagin is the leader of a gang of criminals. He offers them a place to sleep in his lair in exchange for stolen goods, such as watches, handkerchiefs, jewellery, and books. He did not originate from Dickens's imagination alone. As Henry Mayhew pointed out in *London Labour and the London Poor* (1840), young thieves were commonly trained by and under the supervision of adult trainers. "Youngsters are taught to be expert thieves ... a coat is suspended from a wall with a bell attached to it and the boy attempts to take a handkerchief from the pocket without the bell ringing. Until he can do this with proficiency he is not considered well trained" (336). Such adult thief trainers led young, impoverished children to a life of organised crime.

Ironically, Fagin calls the people around him "my dears", though his methods are always self-serving and he shows nothing but disdain for those around him. Dickens makes clear that the readers know how evil and irredeemable he is. Contrary to the humble and benevolent gentlemen of the middle-class families, Fagin does not protect but exploit, he does not provide shelter, but a prison, he is not invested in the children's future, but in their downfall. Dickens describes him as having a "[…] face so distorted

and pale, and eyes so red and bloodshot, that he looked less like a man than like some hideous phantom, moist from the grave, and worried by an evil sprit" (*OT* 417). When Oliver proves to be a skilful pickpocket, Fagin tells him, "If you go on in this way, you'll be the greatest man of the time" (*OT* 78). Fagin lures the children into his den and then promises them to achieve greatness and independence if they behave and obey him. He thus abuses the children's trust and only has his own selfish interests at heart.

4.4.2.3 Christianity

The beliefs of the parish officials and the board members of the workhouse are not based on Christianity, but rather exhibit their falsehood and indifference towards the needs and nature of young children. When Oliver is questioned before the workhouse board without being given an explanation or kind words, he starts "weeping bitterly" (*OT* 14). The "gentleman in the white waistcoat" (*OT* 14) reacts astounded, unable to comprehend why the boy would cry. Another "gentleman" admonishes Oliver, "I hope you say your prayers every night, [...] and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you – like a Christian" (*OT* 14). Dickens clarifies that to pray would indeed be Christian, however, "nobody had taught [Oliver]" (*OT* 14). This reveals the hypocrisy of a system rooted in inhumanity and self-interest rather than Christian charity.

Courageously, a starving Oliver asks for more food in the workhouse. His supplication is immediately interpreted as an act of rebellion and insubordination, an "impious and profane offence" (*OT* 19). Oliver is put in solitary confinement and "[…] denied the benefit of exercise, the pleasure of society, or the advantages of religious consolation" (*OT* 19-20). At prayer time in the evening, he is forced to listen to the other boys praying "to be made good, virtuous, contented and obedient, and to be guarded from the sins and vices of Oliver Twist" (*OT* 20), a prayer "inserted by authority of the board" (*OT* 20). Again, this shows the falsehood of Christianity preached by the workhouse officials.

In the criminal world of the London streets, there is no room for Christianity. However, even Fagin's gang ridicules the hypocritical and disingenuous Christians. In that

respect, they seem to be more authentic and do not feel the need to put up masks to please society. Charley Bates calls Sikes's dog "an out-and-out Christian" (*OT* 157), "an appropriate remark" (*OT* 157), Dickens stresses, as "[...] there are a great many ladies and gentlemen, claiming to be out-and-out Christians, between whom, and Mr Sikes's dog, there exist very strong and singular points of resemblance" (*OT* 157). Once again, Dickens criticises and lays bare the two-facedness of many so-called Christians such as Mr Bumble.

According to Fagin and Sikes, being truly Christian means to be charitable and to take in foolish young children, but it also implies a certain weakness in that one likely becomes too emotionally invested. They demeaningly call Mr Brownlow and Oliver's middle-class benefactors "soft-hearted psalm-singers, or they wouldn't have taken him in at all" (*OT* 137) and are convinced that "they'll ask no questions after him, fear they should be obliged to prosecute, and so get him lagged" (*OT* 137). Generally speaking, then, Christian morale has no place in the underworld and in the workhouse.

4.4.2.4 The Perception of Childhood

The middle-class families seem to pertain to the Romantic notion of childhood, believing in Oliver's goodness and innocence and treating him kindly. In the workhouse and in the London streets, however, Oliver and the other orphan children are not seen as human beings worthy of love and respect, which is indicative of the Evangelical belief that children were born sinful.

For the sole reason that Oliver is born in the workhouse, he is considered evil, damaged, and unfit for respectable society. The surgeon present at his delivery asserts, "The old story [...] no wedding-ring, I see. Ah!" (*OT* 5). He concludes that "[i]t's very likely it *will* be troublesome" (*OT* 5). Mr Bumble calls Oliver a "young rascal" (*OT* 25), a "[…] naughty orphan which nobody can't love" (*OT* 24). Mrs Sowerberry similarly exclaims, "I see no saving in parish children, not I – for they always cost more to keep than they're worth" (*OT* 35). At one point Mr Bumble tells Mrs Sowerberry that Oliver

has lashed out because she has given him too much to eat: “The only thing that can be done now, that I know of, is to leave him in the cellar for a day or so, till he’s a little starved down [...]” (*OT* 58). When a gentleman of the board asks Oliver if he knows that he is an orphan, and the boy innocently asks what an orphan is, he instantly is called a fool: “The boy is a fool - I thought he was” (*OT* 14). In the streets, Oliver is constantly berated. He is called a “[y]oung wretch” (*OT* 129), a “little brute” (*OT* 129), and a “young villain!” (*OT* 129). This treatment has an effect on the boy’s physique. In the workhouse, Oliver is described as “a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference” (*OT* 9), he has “thin and bony fingers” (*OT* 34), and even Mrs Sowerberry points out that “[h]e’s very small” (*OT* 35). Outside the safety net of his middle-class protectors, Oliver is considered troublesome and stupid.

While Oliver is a small, weak, and uncorrupted child, Fagin’s boys appear and behave more like grown men. The heavy burden of a life in the streets has already and irrevocably corrupted them. Dickens first describes the Dodger himself as “a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough, and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see, but he had about him all the airs and manners of a man” (*OT* 65). When Oliver first arrives at the den, “[...] seated round the table were four or five boys, none older than the Dodger, smoking long clay pipes, and drinking spirits, with the air of middle-aged men” (*OT* 70). Despite Oliver not fitting this criteria, Fagin seems to see a special value in him. “I never saw a sharper lad” (*OT* 78), says Fagin about Oliver. The only one defending Oliver and seeing his pure heart is Nancy, suggesting that she herself also has a pure heart. She calls him “a lamb” (*OT* 177) and stops Fagin from beating him. “He’s a thief, a liar, a devil: all that’s bad, from this night forth. Isn’t that enough for the old wretch without blows?” (*OT* 140). Nancy realises that since Oliver is now associated with Fagin and the boys, his words will never be believed again and he can never lead a respectable life.

Since paupers were regarded as lazy and unwilling to work, their offspring was also regarded as a nuisance, a problem that needed to be solved. Dickens criticises that as

part of the solution, orphan children were systematically abused and exploited in the workhouse. “It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop” (*OT* 9). Mr Bumble cruelly remarks, “What have paupers to do with soul or spirit? It’s quite enough that we let ’em have live bodies” (*OT* 58). In the novel, the people populating the workhouse and the underworld consider pauper children inherently evil, and destined for a life of crime and vice. This reflects the Evangelical notion of original sin, and that children needed to be moulded into good adults. By contrast, the middle-class families believe that children are valuable and intrinsically good, reflecting the Romantic perception of childhood. Dickens highlights that both these notions of childhood were prevalent in society and impacted how children were treated.

4.5 Constructing Femininity

Victorian middle- and upper-class girls were brought up in a way in which they would identify with and embody the expected gender norms and stereotypes. Sarah Stickney Ellis (1799-1872) was an influential author who wrote many best-selling conduct and advice books for Victorian women about their role in society. In *The Daughters of England* (1842), she explained the character traits and behaviour young Victorian girls should acquire in the course of their childhood and adolescence:

> “[F]or woman, whose whole life, [...] from the cradle to the grave, is one of feeling, rather than of action; whose highest duty is so often to suffer, and be still; whose deepest enjoyments are all relative; who has nothing, and is nothing, of herself; whose experience, if unparticipated, is a total blank;” (133).

The Victorian girl Ellis describes is passive, gentle, and quiet, putting her own needs and desires last. A girl should be obedient to her father, representing her future husband, and loyal to her family. As Robson puts it, “[i]ndeed, […] the stillness required of her would be most perfectly achieved by a girl who was actually dead” (2018: 52). She argues that in many respects, girls embodied the ideals of Victorian femininity better than adult women. “[…] Her relative powerlessness in some ways makes the girl more ‘feminine’ than the grown woman” (2018: 52). Girls were sexually pure and

untainted, lacking any fleshly desires, whereas married women and mothers were sexually active and thus could no longer embody the ideal of chastity (Davidoff and Hall 322). Pure and innocent in nature, a girl's virginity was her highest possession until she was married (Fletcher ch. 3, par. 10). Stepping into womanhood should be delayed and was not desirable (Robson 2018: 55). Consequently, growing up, girls inevitably lost some of their innocence and appeal.

Additionally, girls were completely restricted to the private sphere of the house, exhibiting no signs of independence. From a small age, girls were instructed to do everything in their power to better the lives of the male figures of the house. At the very least, they should help their mothers or other females in the house in the same pursuit. According to Ellis, girls appreciated practicing self-abnegation: "[T]he daughters of a family, from the oldest to the very infant, are all too happy in the exercise of their affections to think of self" (1842: 270). In that way, girls offered their fathers an even better escape from the harsh world of business than their wives.

> [T]he object of a daughter is to soothe the weary spirit of a father when he returns home from the office or [...] where he has been toiling for her maintenance. [...] never does a daughter appear to more advantage, than when she cheerfully lays aside a fashionable air, and strums over [...] some old ditty which her father loves. [...] The old man listens until tear are glistening in his eyes, for he sees again the home of his childhood - he hears his father's voice - he feels his mother's welcome [...] and, happiest thought of all! they are revived by the playful fingers of his own beloved child. (Ellis 1842: 111-112)

A girl's responsibilities, however, extended further than being passive and accommodating. Girls were supposed to be educated, which was considered "[…] a source of inner strength, a bulwark for modesty and chastity, a defence against fashion and triviality" (Fletcher ch. 3, par. 44). In his 1797 conduct book *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, clergyman and poet Thomas Gisborne explains that "[b]oth in schools and in private families there prevails a desire to call forth the reasoning powers of girls into action, and to enrich the mind with useful and interesting knowledge suitable to their sex" (58). According to Linda A. Pollock, "[e]ducation did not exist to liberate minds but to preserve the gender and status distinctions of society" (xviii). It

was common sense in Victorian society that girls' education had to be different from boys' education, since they had opposite duties and places in society.

From the age of six or seven, girls should either attend school, or be tutored by a governess. "The choice depended partly on class; middle-class girls tended to go to day schools, while gentlewomen had governesses" (Frost ch. 2, par. 37). For middle- and upper-class girls, the curriculum included "English literature, math, science, geography, history, and modern languages [...]" (Frost ch. 2, par. 39). It was also appropriate to train in music, poetry, painting, and piano playing – all being accomplishments that contributed to a girl's respectability and that would be beneficial when they started courting (Robson 2018: 53 and Fletcher ch. 3, par. 39). Furthermore, girls were taught in in sewing and knitting (Frost ch. 2, par. 37). As morality was closely linked to religion, emphasis was also put on religious and moral teachings, which would unveil a girl's innate desire for self-sacrifice. Girls were instructed "to donate to charities or to volunteer in missions or at Sunday schools" (Frost ch. 2, par. 38). Usually, a daughter stayed at home with her family until she found a suitable husband (Davidoff and Hall 341). In the future, she would use her education and high moral standards to be a mindful and well-versed companion to him.

Of the utmost significance was also the impression a girl left outside of the domestic realm. Ellis asserts that "[…] society is often to the daughters of a family, what business is to the sons" (1842: 212). The point in time as well as the way in which higher middle- and upper-class girls were introduced to society was strictly regulated. Once she reached her teenage years, it became the mother's responsibility to introduce her daughter to society. At home, she instilled in her daughter the rules of Victorian etiquette, decorum, and manners – even posture, body language, and walking had to be meticulously rehearsed. All social behaviour was, as Fletcher indicates, tenaciously ritualised, and upper-class girls in particular were immersed in "[…] a whole way of life ruled by convention, correct procedure and etiquette" (ch. 3, par. 34). Gradually, mothers took their adolescent daughters to see relatives, neighbours, and family acquaintances. During these social calls, girls should show their good character and appealing physique. When it was their time to officially attend debutant balls, the family

had but one endeavour: To find a suitable husband for their daughter (Fletcher ch. 3, par. 29-34). Every aspect of a girl's life was thus already laid out and planned for her by her parents.

The Victorian construction of femininity came at a great cost for young girls. They grew up following a set of rigid rules and a code of conduct that regulated every aspect of their life (Fletcher ch. 3, par. 34). Leonore Davidoff considers the gender ideology imposed on girls by society ruthless, calling it "one of the most effective instruments for social control ever devised" (qtd. in Fletcher ch. 3, par. 31). First and foremost, their training should prepare girls for their duties as future wives, mothers, and managers of the household. Robson points out, that "[t]o keep hold of her symbolic power, the ideality of the little girl must be universal; it cannot be contingent upon accidents of class and fortune" (2018: 73). While middle-class girls in particular were raised in line with the ideal of femininity, working-class girls posed a threat to its power (Robson 2018: 73). From a young age, they were often out of the house, working, because their wages were essential to the survival of the family.

Societal expectations towards how a grown woman should feel, think, act, as well as what she should look like and do in life existed in abundance. The ideal woman should be, what Coventry Patmore described in his 1854 poem, an "Angel in the house" (Yildirim 2). She should exude femininity and embrace domesticity, characterised by a set of attributes, such as being gentle, dutiful, submissive, and unselfish (Yildirim 2). They should become angels, a mentality that was approved of by Queen Victoria herself and, especially in the first half of the nineteenth century, was hardly ever questioned (Yildirim 2). In her conduct book *The Women of England* (1843), Sarah Ellis emphasises that women should be self-abnegating and subservient and embrace this role in prayer:

> […] [I]t is necessary for her to lay aside all her natural caprice, her love of self-indulgence, her vanity, her indolence – in short her very self – and assuming a new nature, which nothing less than watchfulness and prayer can enable her constantly to maintain, to spend her mental and moral capabilities in devising means for promoting the happiness of others, while her own derives a remote and secondary existence from theirs. (40)

The origin of female subordination can be traced back to the physiological differences between the male and the female body. In the nineteenth century, this notion was supported by Christian thought and legitimised by medical and scientific research (Moscucci 2). For one thing, it was widely agreed that femininity and masculinity were God-given, as in the biblical chapter *Genesis*, God created Eve from Adam's body, making her his subordinate (Fletcher ch. 3, par. 3). For another thing, medical professionals believed that women "[...] were governed and defined by their reproductive capacity" (Poovey 35). Her reproductive organs proved that a woman was inherently different from a man, and her childbearing ability was assumed to determine all of her – her personality as well as her social roles (Poovey 35). As it was the highest good for a woman to bear children and become a mother, she should be protected from any dangers. "They could not physically or mentally exert themselves too far or else they would drain needed energies from their wombs" (Steinbach 168). Physicians and gynaecologists thus verified that men and women were biologically different and consequently should have different roles in society.

> Because of her role in reproduction, woman is regarded as a special case, a deviation from the norm represented by the male. This difference is used to prescribe very different roles for men and women. The public arena of work, politics and commerce is said to be more appropriate for men, while women are held to be better suited for activities in the private sphere of the family as mothers and wives. (Moscucci 2)

Women were the moral pillars of society. They were believed to be inherently virtuous and pious, guarding in their heart "[…] the noblest passions, the deepest feelings and the highest aspirations of humanity […]" (Ellis 1843 28). Fletcher (ch. 3, par. 24) points out that there was an understanding that society would fall without women. Women should thus abnegate themselves and forget their own needs for the sake of others. That implied that it was socially unacceptable for women to have any sexual desires or feelings. Rather, they should be "passionless" creatures, as historian Nancy F. Cott wrote in 1978 (qtd. in Steinbach 168). It was believed that women would not engage in improper sexual behaviour since they did not have sexual impulses.

The subjugation of women in the nineteenth century was systematic, entrenched not only in society, but also in legislation and politics, and public institutions (McKnight 192). Ben Griffin indicates that “[...] women [...] were oppressed by laws that systematically and deliberately served the interests of men” (Griffin 4). Women were not allowed to vote in parliamentary elections until 1918, and they were excluded from holding powerful political, judicial, or business positions (Griffin 5). Rubinstein explains that women experienced a dual subjugation. They were “[...] exploited as unpaid domestic workers (and bedmates) by their husbands; [and] exploited and discriminated against in the labour force and in society as a whole” (324). Since women had no say in the laws that were passed, they were at the mercy of men, both in the private, and in the public realm.

While working- and upper-class women had a slightly broader range of possibilities to escape the domestic sphere, middle-class women embodied the preservation of the sanctity of the home (Yildirim 4-5). Until 1882, once a woman got married, she became one with her husband, and any property and rights she had had before, were transcribed to her husband (Griffin 4). “In fact married women had no independent legal identity in the eyes of the law: husband and wife were deemed to be one person, and that person was the husband” (Griffin 4). As her husband’s property, the wife’s main duties were the household, the children, and offering her body to fulfil her spouse’s sexual needs. This legal doctrine was called coverture (Steinbach 169). Coverture was strict and rigid. Between 1670 and 1857, only four women were able to divorce their abusive husbands (Griffin 5). “These laws left women at the mercy of brutal and unscrupulous husbands who could deprive their wives of the custody of their children or leave them without the means to pay for food or shelter” (Griffin 10). While upper-middle- and upper-class women were able to have trusts that were not accessible to their husbands and thus had some financial security, most women were not that fortunate. If their husband left them, they were allowed to seek employment, though their wages legally still belonged to their spouse (Steinbach 169-170). In addition, especially working-class wives were frequently beaten by their husbands, a practice that should subdue and tame insubordinate women (Yildirim 6 and McKnight 192). Yildirim explains that “[w]omen were granted almost no rights, but rather had been

assigned roles and duties they had no choice but to carry out" (4). Consequently, the roles and duties that arose from this understanding of femininity were, if not always legally, morally binding.

The reality of women often challenged the ideal of Victorian femininity. There is evidence that many women trespassed into the male public sphere. Davidoff and Hall observe that "[w]omanhood was a contested site, not only intellectually but in practice" (149). The 1851 Census revealed that an astounding 42 percent of the women aged twenty to forty were unmarried, and that a third of the six million British women, were not only employed, but self-sufficient (Poovey 4). These women posed a great threat to the Victorian social order. "It was feared that wage earning, which contradicted the Angel in the House notion, might lead these women to be more demanding and independent" (Yildirim 11). Langland (8) further points out that women were often in charge of the family finances, which means that women had responsibilities that surpassed their duties as housewives. Consequently, the Victorian ideal of femininity remained mostly that: an ideal, that was hugely influential for many women but ultimately failed to reflect their diverse reality and experiences.

4.5.1 Oliver Conforming to Victorian Femininity

The main tenets of the ideal of Victorian femininity are being saintly and angelic, being innocent and pure, being subservient and obedient, being passive and emotional, as well as an emphasis on weakness and fragility. In the following chapter, Oliver's embodiment of these feminine attributes is discussed. Oliver's many similarities with his aunt Rose, who represents the essence of youthful and graceful Victorian femininity, will be shown. At seventeen, she is in the prime of her life, "so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful;" (*OT* 249). Dickens continues that "earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions" (*OT* 249). Her intelligence "was stamped upon her noble head" (*OT* 249) and she "seemed scarcely of her age or of the world" (*OT* 249). Most importantly, she is "made for Home, for fireside peace and happiness" (*OT* 249). Oliver as well is angelic, pure, and noble, seemingly not of this world and made for the private realm of the home.

4.5.1.1 Saintliness

Even though Oliver is a child, there is no doubt that he is an extraordinary character. With Oliver, Charles Dickens did not want to create a realistic, multi-faceted child. As he states in the preface to *Oliver Twist*, he intended to portray through him "the principle of good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last" (x). Richard Locke asserts that Oliver is the quiet, innocent centre of the novel, "emitting an odor of sanctity and effecting by his example the workings of grace" (*OT* 19). Oliver appears to be an immaculate being sent from heaven to teach us a lesson about good and evil.

> The book will resemble the life of a saint – an unchanging exemplary sacred essence, a static icon in a violently fallen world. […] There will be no need for subtle psychology, no personal development. The action and the prose style can and must move toward bold effects, melodrama, and Manichean black and white. (Locke 15)

Dickens suggests that Oliver is inherently good; he is born good. Therefore, his cruel experiences in the workhouse and in the streets, as well as his violent encounters with malicious and vindictive tormentors, cannot taint or corrupt him. Oliver's saintliness does not change after he is saved from the underworld. Even though he develops healthily and hardly resembles the frail, pale child he was in the workhouse or with Fagin, "[...] he was still the same gentle, attached, affectionate creature, that he had been when pain and suffering had wasted his strength" (*OT* 304). His angelic character is thus genuine.

Oliver seems to be naturally connected to God. He often wishes to die, certain that he would then finally be at peace in a better place. He cannot bear having "[...] no friends to care for, or to care for him" (*OT* 37), which is why "[...] he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be laid in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep" (*OT* 38). In the workhouse and at Fagin's den, Oliver often even looks like death, "[…] not death as it shows in shroud and coffin, but in the guise it wears when life has just departed, when a young and gentle spirit has, but an instant, fled to heaven, and the gross air of the world has

not had time to breathe upon the changing dust it hallowed" (*OT* 171). Him wishing to die points to the fact that Oliver is not strong enough to endure the hardships of the lower-class and criminal families.

Oliver is meant for heaven, or for an analogy as such on earth – a respectable, loving middle-class family. At the end of the novel, Mr Brownlow is convinced that he was supposed to find Oliver from the beginning. "[Oliver] [...] was cast by my way by a stronger hand than chance […]" (*OT* 441). This implies that Oliver meeting Mr Brownlow was divine providence; it was God's will that Oliver is ultimately saved by a good gentleman so closely connected to his dead father.

4.5.1.2 Innocence

Oliver embodies the essence of innocence of purity; he is so good that his actions often become unbelievable, especially for a young boy of roughly ten years. Dickens asserts, "It was impossible to doubt him; there was truth in every one of its thin and sharpened lineaments" (*OT* 99). Even Fagin realises that Oliver is different from the other boys; they are "not worth the taking" (1 *OT* 69) because "[t]heir looks convict 'em" (*OT* 169). However, with Oliver, "[…] properly managed, my dears, I could do what I couldn't with twenty of them" (*OT* 169). Charley Bates also acknowledges that Oliver is not like the young crooks. He sighs, "What a pity he isn't a prig!" (*OT* 156), and explains to Oliver, "I am […]. So's Charley. So's Fagin. So's Sikes. So's Nancy. So's Bet. So we all are, down to the dog. And he's the downiest one of the lot!" (*OT* 156). Oliver is honest to his core, contrary to people such as Fagin or Mr Bumble, he does not wear any masks, he does not disguise himself for his own benefit or to please someone.

Oliver always thinks the best of people; he does not judge them by their background or their station in life. He is grateful when the Dodger tells him that Fagin might be able to give him a place to sleep. "[…] [H]e secretly resolved to cultivate the good opinion of the old gentleman as quickly as possible, and, if he found the Dodger incorrigible, as he more than half suspected he should, to decline the honour of his further acquaintance" (*OT* 68). What is interesting here is that Oliver has good instincts.

Having only just met the Dodger, his feelings tell him that he might not be a good person. Still, he gives him the benefit of the doubt. Oliver sees Fagin's box with the stolen watches and is surprised, when Fagin tells him that he is "only a miser" (*OT* 74). Still, Oliver trusts him. "Oliver thought the old gentleman must be a decided miser to live in such a dirty place, with so many watches, but, thinking that perhaps his fondness for the Dodger and the other boys cost him a good deal of money, he only casts a deferential look at the Jew, and asked if he might get up" (*OT* 74). When Fagin teaches him to pick pockets, Oliver is curious, "[b]ut thinking that the Jew, being so much his senior, must know best, he followed him quietly to the table, and was soon deeply involved in his new study" (*OT* 78). Also, he could never fathom that Nancy and Bet might be involved in criminal or sexual activities. Oliver judges them by their character, "[b]eing remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed" (*OT* 77). When Oliver first encounters Monks, he appears a "madman" (274) in a cloak. "He advanced towards Oliver, as if with the intention of aiming a blow at him, but fell violently on the ground, writhing and foaming, in a fit" (*OT* 287). Oliver is confused because the man seems to know him and swears at him. Nevertheless, the boy ensure that he is taken care of. "[…] [Oliver] darted into the house for help. Having seen him safely carried into the hotel, he turned his face homewards [...]" (*OT* 288). He wonders, "with a great deal of astonishment and some fear" (*OT* 288) about the man's behaviour, however, he soon forgets about it.

As a reader, however, it is frequently challenging to distinguish between Oliver's inherent goodness and his childlike naivety. As most nine-year-old children, Oliver is by nature very curious and naive. He asks questions when he should not, and frequently finds himself in situations he cannot make sense of. When Mr Bumble orders Oliver to "Bow to the board" (*OT* 13), Oliver is confused and starts crying, "[…] and, seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that" (*OT* 13). Arriving at Fagin's den, Oliver does not understand that the boys are thieves. Although he finds Fagin suspicious and curious, he would never assume that he is involved in an illegal business. Oliver is unacquainted and inexperienced with the criminal world, its rules and its slang. He truly believes that Fagin's boys themselves are manufacturing the pocket books and pocket handkerchiefs they bring home and he looks forward to

learning the trade. Thus, when he is sent out with the Dodger and Charley Bates for the first time and suddenly realises, they are stealing from innocent citizens, he is alarmed, and starts running.

> Although Oliver had been brought up by philosophers, he was not theoretically acquainted with their beautiful axiom that self-preservation is the first law of nature. If he had been, perhaps he would have been prepared for this. Not being prepared, however, it alarmed him the more, so away he went like the wind, with the old gentleman and the two boys roaring and shouting behind him. (*OT* 82)

When Fagin sends Oliver to stay with Sikes for the burglary, he does not tell Oliver what awaits him, but asks him directly what he believes might happen to him there. Fagin warns him, “Whatever falls out, say nothing, and do what he bids you. Mind!” (*OT* 173). Oliver, “with a trembling heart” (*OT* 173), is trying to make sense of what he has said, however, he is too innocent and naive to understand Fagin’s advice. “The more he thought of the Jew’s admonition, the more he was at a loss to divine its real purpose and meaning. He could think of no bad object to be attained by sending him to Sikes which would not be equally well answered by his remaining with Fagin […]” (*OT* 173). For Oliver, it is difficult to grasp that there might even be more evil and cruelties than those he has already experienced. The rules of the merciless world he lives in are a mystery to him. Similarly, Rose does not comprehend why they cannot tell the police the truth about Oliver. “Surely, [...] the poor child’s story, faithfully repeated to these men, will be sufficient to exonerate him” (*OT* 263). Mr Losberne, however, knows that an orphan and “runaway” (*OT* 263) will be immediately judged and discredited. He is touched by Rose’s simplicity. “Bless the bright eyes of your sex! They never see, whether for good or bad, more than one side of any questions […]” (*OT* 264). Women and Oliver – Dickens seems to suggest – are too good and naive to fathom the immorality of the world. Oliver’s naivety can therefore be interpreted not only as a childlike quality, but also as a feminine quality.

His whole appearance is non-threatening and innocent, he is a small, shy, and quiet child, who usually does not push himself to the fore. Oliver is often portrayed in terms associated with femininity. Adjectives Dickens frequently uses to describe him are

“timid”, “gentle”, “soft”, “innocent”, and “meek”. Mrs Bedwin call him “a dear, grateful, gentle child” (*OT* 152). He is “[a] very good-looking boy” (*OT* 41), he has an “earnest face” (*OT* 304) and there is “an expression of melancholy in his face” (*OT* 41). He is a “sickly boy” (*OT* 278) and “continued meekly to submit to the domination and ill-treatment” (*OT* 50). When he looks around, he does so “in mute and timid wonder” (*OT* 190), when he walks, he does so “softly” (*OT* 154), and when he stares or enquires, he does so “innocently” (*OT* 25, 39). Oliver therefore embodies many typically female attributes.

4.5.1.3 Obedience

Oliver respects and obeys the adults and authority figures he meets on his journey. Even though he is abused and abandoned, he is not vengeful, he does not abuse back; these experiences have no effect on his goodness. He even wants to pray for his main tormentor Fagin before his execution. “Oh! God forgive this wretched man!”, Oliver exclaims, “with a burst of tears” (*OT* 480). Like a martyr, he endures all pain and suffering, mostly without complaining or rebelling.

As part of Mr Brownlow and Mrs Maylie’s family, Oliver can never stop thanking them and wanting to serve them for their benevolence. “But, at length, […] he felt the goodness of the two sweet ladies, and how ardently he hoped that, when he grew strong and well again, he could do something to show his gratitude;” (*OT* 272). He always feels that he does not do enough to prove how grateful he is. “[…] [Y]et a hundred little occasions rose up before him on which he fancied he might have been more zealous, and more earnest, and wished he had been” (*OT* 290). Oliver never questions what Mr Brownlow, Mrs Maylie, and his other middle-class benefactors do or how they treat him. He is eternally thankful and indebted to them and would do anything to please them.

Oliver’s obedience is genuine and real; it is his way to show his love. In addition, being subordinated makes Oliver feel safe and protected. He longs for a place in a middle-class family, where he can be completely dependent on the goodness of his

caretakers. Dickens explains that “[...] by the end of that short time, Oliver Twist had become completely domesticated with the old lady and her niece, and that the fervent attachment of his young and sensitive heart was repaid by their pride in, and attachment to, himself” (*OT* 281). There is no sign of him wanting to be independent or showing tendencies of desiring to go out in the world, to live in the public realm. Rather, he is content being dependent.

Oliver is also obedient to the various lower-class families he finds himself in, although they exploit and hurt him. He endures having to leave the orphanage for the workhouse, he endures having to become an apprentice to Mr Sowerberry, and he also endures the curious activities Fagin has him do in the den. When Nancy takes Oliver to Bill Sikes, he knows that he has the chance to start screaming and flee. However, she implores him not to run away because Sikes and Fagin would surely hurt her. “But the girl’s voice was in his ear, beseeching him in such tones of agony to remember her that he had not the heart to utter it. While he hesitated, the opportunity was gone […]” (*OT* 177). Oliver is obedient and selfless; it is more important for him to protect Nancy than to protect himself. This is again an example of Oliver’s noble character. He is selfless to the point that he is willing to put himself in danger.

4.5.1.4 Passivity and Emotionality

Rather than actively fighting and confronting his tormentors, Oliver usually passively endures his suffering. He lets himself be ill-treated and abused because he is too pure to resort to brutality and become an abuser himself. Just as Victorian girls were taught not to meddle in affairs that would require them to take action themselves, Oliver also primarily observes and feels rather than acts.

Oliver is thoughtful and considerate towards other people. Even though he wants to know how long it took Mr Sowerberry to get used to his job as an undertaker, “[...] he thought it better not to ask the question, and walked back to the shop, thinking over all he had seen and heard” (*OT* 48). When Mrs Bedwin realises that the portrait of Agnes Fleming, her eyes in particular, have a great effect on Oliver and she turns his

wheelchair around so he cannot see it anymore, “Oliver *did* see it in his mind’s eye [...], but he thought it better not to worry the kind old lady, so he smiled gently when she looked at him [...]” (*OT* 98). Oliver is thus careful not to burden or trouble anyone, he intuitively knows how to respond to people’s feelings.

Dickens emphasises Oliver’s feelings and emotions – traits typically associated with the female sex. “The simple fact was that Oliver, instead of possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much, and was in a fair way of being reduced, for life, to a state of brutal stupidity and sullenness by the ill-usage he had received” (*OT* 33). Oliver also cries a lot. “It was no very difficult matter for the boy to call tears into his eyes. Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry, and Oliver cried very naturally indeed” (*OT* 12). However, Oliver also cries and is prone to emotional outbursts when he is feeling gratitude for being loved and protected. At the prospect of being reunited with Mr Brownlow, “tears of happy expectation [are] coursing down his face” (*OT* 276), and Oliver is “shedding tears of delight” (*OT* 363). The thought that he may soon visit his friend little Dick in the workhouse overwhelms Oliver. He cries out “with a burst of affectionate emotion” (*OT* 459), “He said ‘God bless you’ to me when I ran away, […] and I will say ‘God bless *you*’ now, and show him how I love him for it!” (*OT* 459). When Rose finally gets better after falling ill, Dickens uses dramatic language to highlight his relief: “It was almost too much happiness to bear. […] [Oliver] could not weep, or speak, or rest. [...] [H]e seemed to awaken, all at once, to a full sense of the joyful change that had occurred, and the almost insupportable load of anguish which had been taken from his breast” (*OT* 292). Oliver thus is not afraid to show his emotions and in the middle-class families, he is never reprimanded for being too emotional.

The men, on the other hand, are not at all keen to express their emotions so freely. Mr Brownlow and Mr Bumble start coughing when they feel a rush of emotions and quickly change the topic (*OT* 98, 34). Evidently, it is not appropriate for a man to show emotions, especially not in front of other people. The following description of Mr

Grimwig, tearing up, highlights that Victorian gentlemen were more comfortable repressing their emotions, than showing them.

> Mr Grimwig [...] discharged from his features every expression but one of unmitigated wonder, and indulged in a prolonged and vacant stare; then, as if ashamed of having betrayed so much emotion, he jerked himself, as it were, by a convulsion into his former attitude and, looking out straight before him, emitted a long, deep whistle, which seemed, at last, not to be discharged on empty air, but to die away in the innermost recesses of his stomach. (*OT* 364)

In the face of violence and injustice, Oliver often remains passive and even numb. The boy is "[…] shaking from head to foot at the mere recollection of the sound of Mr Bumble's voice" (*OT* 43), when he looks at Mr Bumble he sees "the repulsive countenance of his future master with a mingled expression of horror and fear" (*OT* 26), he is "[f]rightened by the menacing gestures" (*OT* 190) of Sikes and Toby Crackit. Shortly before the burglary, at Mrs Maylie's house, Oliver is frightened and scared, however, he does not act upon his feelings, he remains passive. "Oliver sat huddled together, in a corner of the cart, bewildered with alarm and apprehension, and figuring strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene" (*OT* 186). Through depictions of Oliver being frightened, crying, and trembling, the readers notice how much pain he has to endure.

4.5.1.5 Weakness

Dickens often emphasises how frail, delicate, and weak Oliver is, which again are attributes typically associated with femininity. He is "[...] dependent for every slight attention and comfort on those who tended him" (*OT* 282). Being dependent on his caretakers to survive, the abuses and horrors he experiences in the underworld leave their mark on him. He is quickly overwhelmed and his body responds to his anxiety and stress by either crying, trembling, fainting, or sleeping.

As Mr Sowerberry's apprentice, Oliver has to accompany him to the houses of the poor to retrieve the corpses of their dead. He feels uncomfortable and scared, "Oliver

shuddered as he cast his eyes towards the place, and crept involuntarily closer to his master […]" (*OT* 45). After the pickpocketing incident with Mr Brownlow, Oliver is questioned by Mr Fang, a ruthless magistrate. He is "[…] trembling very much at the awfulness of the scene" (*OT* 87). Unaware of any wrongdoing on his part, Oliver is utterly confused and scared. "Oliver tried to reply, but his tongue failed him. He was deadly pale, and the whole place seemed turning round and round" (*OT* 89). Eventually, Oliver's body fails him and he faints, though Mr Fang regardless believes him to be disingenuous and guilty. Upon learning that Mr Brownlow has moved to the West Indies, "Oliver clasped his hands, and sank feebly backwards" (*OT* 277). Oliver agrees to see Fagin one last time before his execution, which is immensely difficult for Oliver, resulting in him almost fainting and taking hours for him to recover (*OT* 480). In my analysis of the ideology of separate spheres, it also becomes clear that both times Oliver is rescued from Fagin and taken to a respectable family, he needs a long time to recuperate – sleeping for days and being slowly nursed back to health. "Gradually he fell into that deep tranquil sleep which ease from recent suffering alone imparts; that calm and peaceful rest which it is pain to wake from" (*OT* 96). At Mr Brownlow's and Mrs Maylie's house, Oliver can finally recover.

Because of Oliver's fragility, he is sheltered and protected by his middle-class benefactors. After the discovery that Mr Brownlow has moved to the West Indies, Oliver wants to see the book-stall keeper, which Mr Losberne forbids. "My poor boy, this is disappointment enough for one day" (*OT* 277). Mr Losberne has understood that Oliver is too fragile and weak to endure a number of disappointments simultaneously. Furthermore, Oliver and Rose are the last ones to receive the information about their heritage. Beforehand, Mr Brownlow has already explained to Oliver, Mrs Maylie, and Rose that he has talked to Monks, however, "[...] the whole matter was enveloped in enough of doubt and mystery to leave them in endurance of the most intense suspense" (*OT* 458). Oliver is barely able to cope with this news, "[…] [he] was in a flutter of agitation and uncertainty which deprived him of the power of collecting his thoughts, and almost of speech, and appeared to have scarcely less effect on his companions, who shared it, in at least an equal degree" (*OT* 458). The men are well

aware that such life-changing news have to be delivered carefully and thoughtfully to such delicate human beings.

When Mr Brownlow finally starts, he apologises to Rose and Oliver for having to burden them with such difficult news. “This is a painful task [...]. I would have spared you the degradation [...]” (*OT* 461). As the puzzle is slowly explained, Rose grows weaker, she starts trembling, and pleads with Mr Brownlow to not say anything more, “I have not strength or spirit now” (*OT* 467). Oliver, upon hearing the details of his parents’ tragic romance, is also seemingly shocked, “[his] tears fell fast” (*OT* 462). After everything has been disclosed, Oliver and Rose cry and embrace each other for a long time. “Let the tears which fell, and the broken words which were exchanged in the long close embrace between the orphans, be sacred” (*OT* 501). Oliver and Rose are thus similarly fragile and weak, their goodness stemming from their gentle and kind mother Agnes.

4.6 Constructing Masculinity

In the Victorian period, not only femininity, but also masculinity was increasingly regarded as a trait or quality that needed to be appropriately trained. In *Manful Assertions* (1991), Michael Roper and John Tosh analyse British masculinities since 1800, clarifying that masculinity “is never fully possessed but must be perpetually achieved, asserted and renegotiated” (18). Fabrice Neddam indicates that “[g]ender-role socialization begins at birth” (312). As parents wanted their sons to become accepted members of society, they instilled in them the social norms and appropriate roles, attitudes, and values associated with the dominant notion of masculinity. These norms and ways of manliness were reiterated in the schools and in all of society.

> Thus, not only parents but also the socio-cultural environment as a whole create a system which includes mechanisms of social control and rewards boys who adhere to these to these normalized masculine values. Conforming to these patterns and assimilating these messages allow a boy to have his part in his social world; it is his passport to recognition. (Neddam 312)

In the nineteenth century, manliness was seen as an innate quality; however, the roles and behaviours pertaining to manhood needed to be rigorously trained and cultivated over one's whole life. At the core of Victorian boyhood was they idea that boys needed to grow into proper men: independent, active agents of their lives, responsible in their actions and, most importantly, aware of their patriarchal duty as father and husband, which we will see, was the passage to manliness. As women were considered inferior to men – physically, mentally, and intellectually – the development of feminine and effeminate qualities such as weakness, passiveness, and subservience should be avoided (Fletcher ch. 2, par. 13). Parents guided their sons. While mothers were responsible for providing moral and emotional support, fathers exerted a more authoritarian influence over their sons, and their bond was often less affectionate (Tosh 1999: 103). Thus, growing up, boys underwent specific stages that eventually led them to manhood.

Boys experienced the first clear and often traumatic cut when they were roughly six years old. They had spent the first years of their life in a predominantly feminine surrounding, taken care of by their mothers, female nursery maids, and their sisters. They even dressed the same as girls. The so-called "breeching" ceremony was an important rite of passage for young boys. John Tosh describes breeching as "[...] the acknowledgement, [...] that [the boy] was not only a child but a male child and therefore entitled to wear breeches or trousers" (103). Boys were given their own clothes, distinct from their sisters' clothes, and they started to go to school, which initiated them to their training in manliness. Central to boyhood was the belief that the development of typically feminine and effeminate traits should be avoided. Rather, boys should toughen up, which would protect them from being weak, fragile, and meek (Fletcher ch. 2, par. 13). Consequently, boys were separated from their sisters and pushed from the safety of their private home and family into the unknown public sphere.

Boys were now encouraged to spend more time outside and to engage in physical activities to strengthen their physique and socialise with their peers (Tosh 1999: 104). Working class boys started to work to support their families, while middle- and upper-

class boys started school outside their home (Robson 2018: 4). In the nineteenth century, boys were increasingly educated and trained away from the home in formal settings, in "[...] institutions created specifically for educational or professional training" (Davidoff and Hall 237). Schools were essential, as they should train them in the aspects of manliness – the prerequisite for the public world. In his conduct book for young people, *Self-Cultivation Recommended* (1817), the English writer Isaac Taylor shared his views on the importance of education. "A man must act", clarified Taylor, "whether he is necessitated to labour for his maintenance; or is freed by fortune from all apprehension and from all constrained exertion, yet he must act" (2). Boys were required to become active agents of their lives. For this, a boy needed education, which would "enable him to act rightly, honourably, successfully" (Taylor 2). Further, Taylor asserted that a boy's education would be most effective if he practiced "[s]elf-instruction, self-command, self-acting energy" (8). Tosh (1999: 104-105) points out that schools paved the way for a future career, imparting not only academic knowledge, but also fostering an atmosphere of competitiveness which should enhance the boys' resilience (Tosh 1999: 105). Schools thus encouraged the development of essential moral and physical aspects of manliness in their students.

For most middle-class boys, school ended around the age of fifteen, when they started an apprenticeship or went on to train for a business or career. A father's biggest concern was to find a suitable and respectable position for his son as "[t]his was the vital prerequisite of his future masculine standing" (Tosh 1999: 115). Davidoff and Hall (234) remark that this was a result of occupations becoming more specialised and required the mastery of particular skills, which in turn presupposed that the child needed the right training or apprenticeship. Therefore, a middle-class boy's adolescence ended abruptly. In this stage of formal training, most boys lived away from their parents, at best being offered accommodation by their employer, instructor, a family relative or acquaintance (Tosh 1999: 105-107). Usually, the stage between adolescence and marriage lasted about ten to fifteen years. During that time, as boys became young men, and they were not allowed to spend time with middle-class girls. "The cult of female purity, not to mention the physical restrictions placed on respectable women, allowed little opportunity for any degree of physical intimacy with a girl of

comparable background" (Tosh 1999: 107). Nevertheless, young bachelors were encouraged to have their first sexual experiences, often pressured by their peers. Prostitutes were often frequented (Tosh 1999: 108). Tosh points out, that "[y]oung men were the prime market for commercial sex [...]" (1999: 108). Sexual intercourse was an essential step towards manhood, "a rite of passage". This practice certainly conflicted with the Christian emphasis on abstinence and restraint until marriage. Christian churches and organisations such as The Young Men's Christian Association founded in 1844 were established to offer young men moral guidance, support, and access to a community of likeminded men (Tosh 1999: 107-108). As young women were unavailable as friends, young men often formed close and deep attachments to other young men, valuing their company and opinion.

Upper-middle- and upper-class boys went on to public schools, which prepared them for university and a future in the professions (Tosh 1999: 105, 118). Such schools, some of which became very popular and prestigious from the 1860s onwards – like Eton – further instilled the key aspects of manliness in their pupils. Apart from the academic curriculum, there were lessons dedicated to moral and Christian education. In general, however, these schools were known to be harsh, often unforgiving places for boys (118). Davidoff and Hall argue that "[...] discipline in the school was left as much as possible to the boys on the grounds that self-regulation and representation were the key to the proper functioning of a community" (237). What this illustrates is that institutions such as schools greatly influenced and enabled the establishment of strict gender roles.

For any boy and young man, transitioning into adulthood and manhood was often a difficult and lonely experience. It required leaving the safety of the family, and going out into the world to earn his place as a respected member of society. This entailed choosing the right career or profession, becoming financially independent, and, most importantly, marrying a suitable woman (Tosh 1999: 110). Marriage, meaning to become the patriarch of one's own family, was the last step to manliness. "To form a household, to exercise authority over dependents, and to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining and protecting them – these things set the seal on a man's gender identity"

(Tosh 1999: 108). Generally speaking, men did not marry until their late twenties to early thirties, as they needed to be self-sufficient, and to have the financial means to set up their own household to provide for their dependants (Tosh 1999: 108-109). Finding the right wife was an essential achievement. (Fletcher ch. 2, par. 27). In nineteenth-century Britain, boys were expected to grow into proper men and embody the socially accepted masculine or manly attributes. Young men had to persistently work on their manliness. As with girls, they were under constant scrutiny and pressured to behave in accordance with what their parents and society demanded. Boys were thus prevented from fostering any individual aspirations or endeavours that might undermine their masculinity.

The notion of masculinity changed greatly in the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, masculinity was predominantly equated with “gentlemanly politeness”, which meant being refined, civil, respected in the social elites and, above all, adhering to gentlemanly etiquette and behaviour (Steinbach 167). At the same time, male aristocrats were also known for their proclivity for luxury and sexual debauchery, and their emphasis on their reputation in social circles (Tosh 2016: 64). The new notion of manliness stemmed from the rising middle classes in the early nineteenth century and what traits they regarded as “manly”. This new notion of manliness was closely linked to Evangelicalism, which meant that the moral standards associated with manliness became higher. (Fletcher ch. 2, par. 30-32). Tosh explains that “[...] [t]he change is from personal to bureaucratic authority, from sociability to domesticity, and from sexual license to respectability (2016: 63). R. W. Connell coined the term “hegemonic masculinity” to describe the dominant notion of masculinity in a specific time and place. “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees […] the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (77). By mid-century, the Evangelical, Christian idea of manliness had gained acceptance through all social classes (Fletcher ch. 2, par. 34). Many men exerted themselves to accomplish all aspects of manliness in order to become a respectable member of society.

In his widely popular book *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), John Ruskin writes on the nature and duties of men and women. He emphasises a man's independent and active nature. Men should courageously face the challenges of the world, and conquer them. Making mistakes was part of the process of becoming manly, as this would strengthen his character. Men should also protect women from the world. Ruskin sums up the ideal of masculinity as follows:

> The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender. His intellect is for speculation and invention; his energy for adventure, for war, and for conquest, wherever war is just, wherever conquest necessary. [...] The man, in his rough work in open world, must encounter all peril and trial; - to him, therefore, must be the failure, the offense, the inevitable error: often, he must be wounded, or subdued; often misled; and always hardened. But he guards the woman from all this; (77)

Social historians agree that a Victorian man's most important attribute was his independence. Both Steinbach (166) and Tosh (1999: 111) stress that independence was the central feature of the nineteenth-century masculine identity. It implied being autonomous, having a clear path and goals for one's life, being resilient, and asserting oneself among one's peers. Independence was the most important requirement to succeed in the public realm (Tosh 1999: 118). Steinbach additionally identifies the following other essential attributes of manliness:

> [A]n emphasis on [...] individualism, and personal integrity; a strong, even punishing work ethic; a restraint on physical aggression; and a perception of the home as a compensatory refuge and reward. "Character" was highly valued. "Manly" and "straightforward" were terms of high praise, as was the concept of "manly simplicity". (166f)

The new perception of manliness focused on his morality and respectability. According to the Evangelicals, the traditional conception of manliness was flawed as it emphasised one's reputation over one's true character (Tosh 1999: 112). Moral traits such as integrity and restraint, which were highly important for middle-class Evangelical families, and defined their respectability, became intricately bound to a man's good character. A man's character should constantly be improved and strengthened through discipline and hard work.

> Character was formed by two areas of experience, moralized work and moralized home. Work acquired almost hallowed authority. Manly energy was to be focused not on anti-social self-assertion, but on occupation or 'calling'. The material reward for living by the work ethic was not only personal wealth, but true freedom from dependence or patronage. (Tosh 1999: 112)

Even though women were primarily associated with the private sphere and the home, it was just as important for men. According to Tosh, "[f]or most of the nineteenth century home was widely held to be a man's place […], as the place where his deepest needs were met" (Tosh 1999: 1). Home was a safe haven, an intimate refuge of peace, love, and support, that allowed men to recuperate from the harsh, fast-paced world of business and industrial capitalism (Tosh 1999: 30-31, McKnight 189). Here, men could "become fully human again" (McKnight 189). In his novel *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849), James Anthony Froude perfectly described the significance of domesticity for men:

> When we come home, we lay aside our mask and drop our tools, and are no longer lawyers, sailors, soldiers, statesmen, clergymen, but only men. We fall again into our most human relations, which, after all, are the whole of what belongs to us as we are ourselves, and alone have the key-note of our hearts. [...] [W]e cease the struggle in the race of the word, and give our hearts leave and leisure to love. (103)

The Christian notion of manliness thus presupposed that men not only devoted their energy and attention to their career. Rather, they should also take care of those entrusted to them, first and foremost their family (Steinbach 167, Tosh 1999: 112). Between 1840 and 1870, domesticity became another central feature of manliness (Steinbach 166). As Tosh observes, "[t]he journey to manhood began in domestic dependence and ended in domestic authority" (1999: 113). While men did not help their wives with household chores or childcare, they worked hard to financially sustain the domestic ideal of the family (Steinbach 166). Further, they had the responsibility of ensuring "a morally sanctioned life" (Davidoff and Hall 229) for their dependants. Establishing their own household enabled men to daily cross from the public to the domestic realm and appreciate the best of both worlds.

4.6.1 Oliver Conforming to Victorian Masculinity

The traits of the ideal Victorian manliness that Oliver adheres to are limited. He exhibits some signs of independence, resilience, courage and respectability that is, a noble heart and nature. However, his manly attributes are inconsistent and overpowered by his feminine attributes. The subsequent analysis examines to what extent Oliver reflects the essence of nineteenth-century masculinity.

4.6.1.1 Independence

As previously established, Oliver is characterised by his passivity and dependence on his caretakers. He does not exhibit signs of a longing for independence or for populating and establishing himself in the male-dominated public realm. Achieving independence and marriage are the main passages to manhood; however, Oliver accomplishes neither, or, to be more precise, Dickens does not reveal what becomes of Oliver once he grows up. Instead of learning how to successfully travel from the public sphere to the private sphere and assert his dominance in both, at the end of the novel, Oliver is content being restricted to the home and the family.

Oliver briefly shows his sense of independence, when he runs away from Mr Sowerberry's workshop in the hope of starting a new life. The only person he confides in is his sick orphan friend Dick, whom he secretly visits once more in the workhouse after escaping. "I am running away. They beat and ill-use me, Dick, and I am going to seek my fortune, some long way off" (*OT* 61). Oliver is determined to actively change his destiny, and he bravely flees from Mr Sowerberry's workshop. "Then he sat down to rest at the side of a milestone, and began to think, for the first time, where he had better go and try to live" (*OT* 62). Oliver's decision is thus spontaneous and instinctive; he never contemplated the consequences of living in the streets. He concludes that it would be sensible for him to go to London, as it is big enough for no one of his old life to find him. According to Richard Locke, his escape and his journey to London means that "Oliver has reached the summit of his heroism" (*OT* 19). Oliver should never strive for independence and autonomy again; on the contrary, he will always find himself dependent on various family-like structures.

4.6.1.2 Resilience

Without a doubt, Oliver is a resilient boy. Dickens points out that he should have already died at his birth, having no one to love him and no prospects in life. Being born in the workhouse, his fate is already sealed. Despite his bleak and grim future, from his first breath, it is clear that Oliver is determined to live. "[…] Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. The result was that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish […] (*OT* 4)". This points to his inner strength and resources. In a way, it feels as though this "win" against nature foreshadows that no matter the obstacles and hurdles thrown in his way, Oliver will eventually overcome them. Dickens continues that "[…] nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast. It had had plenty of room to expand, thanks to the spare diet of the establishment, and perhaps to this circumstance may be attributed his having a ninth birthday at all" (*OT* 9). The juxtaposition of Oliver's smallness and powerlessness, and his eventual triumph against his tormentors, is interesting to ponder.

A boy should learn to be resilient through rubbing shoulders with his peers, which usually happened from the age of six onwards, when boys started to go to school. Oliver grows up in the orphanage and the workhouse; however, it is a cruel environment in which he is starved and mistreated. Consequently, Oliver lives in constant fear and survival mode. Receiving an education is not an option for him, and when he is finally apprenticed, Oliver cannot choose his apprenticeship – he is forced into it. At the Maylies's country cottage, Oliver is finally educated. However, he does not attend school, as boys should, but he is tutored privately. "Every morning he went to a white-headed old gentleman, who lived near the little church, who taught him to read better, and to write, and who spoke so kindly, and took such pains, that Oliver could never try enough to please him" (*OT* 279). He is educated, however, his education resembles the tutoring that girls received. After Mr Brownlow adopts Oliver, he "[fills] the mind of his adopted child with stores of knowledge" (*OT* 484), indicating that Oliver still does not go to school. Oliver is intentionally kept away from the rough

climate in schools – his resilience does not have to be fostered through his interaction with other boys, it is rather an inborn trait.

4.6.1.3 Courage

While Oliver is usually a shy and quiet, passive boy, he also exhibits tremendous bravery when he is confronted with injustices. When he daringly asks for more gruel in the workhouse, he is "somewhat alarmed at his own temerity" (*OT* 17), only realising the weight of his seemingly innocent question the moment it comes out of his mouth. "The master […] gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel […]. The assistants were paralysed with wonder; the boys with fear" (*OT* 17). Oliver's ingrained survival instinct often drives him to be fearless in decisive situations. His request for more food is so outrageous that Oliver is isolated from the rest of the children and a reward is given to anyone that will take him as his apprentice. Mr Bumble takes him to the board, where Oliver is asked whether he wants to become a chimney sweep under the supervision of gruesome Mr Gamfield. At the sight of him, Oliver becomes so scared that he cannot be silent. Dickens calls it "[…] the critical moment of Oliver's fate" (*OT* 26). Terrified of the prospect of working under Mr Gamfield, and despite Mr Bumble's threats to behave and obey, Oliver begs the board to have mercy on him: "Oliver fell on his knees and, clasping his hands together, prayed that they would order him back to the dark room – that they would starve him – beat him – kill him if they pleased – rather than send him away with that dreadful man" (*OT* 27). Oliver's will to live is not to be underestimated, however, it seems to only flare up in life-or-death situations. Afterwards, Oliver is his shy and helpless self again.

Oliver becomes an apprentice to Mr Sowerberry, the undertaker, where he has a fight with Noah Claypole, the other apprentice. This is a turning point in Oliver's life. Noah starts insulting Oliver's mother, calling her "a regular right-down bad un" (*OT* 52). At first, Oliver starts crying and tells Noah to stop. Then, however, his countenance suddenly and unexpectedly transforms and he lashes out:

> Crimson with fury, Oliver started up, overthrew the chair and table, seized Noah by the throat, shook him, in the violence of his rage, till his teeth chattered in his head, and, collecting his whole force into one heavy blow, felled him to

> the ground. A minute ago, the boy had looked the quiet, mild, dejected creature that harsh treatment had made him. But his spirit was roused as last; the cruel insult to his dead mother had set his blood on fire. His breast heaved; his attitude was erect; his eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed, as he stood glaring over the cowardly tormentor [...] with an energy that he had never known before. (*OT* 51-52)

To defend his dead mother's honour, Oliver goes against his nature and becomes violent. He should never again be violent in the course of the book. His outburst of rage does not remain without repercussions. Mrs Sowerberry locks him in the dust-cellar, however, he does not calm down; he kicks the door and shouts, and he is not even afraid when Mr Bumble turns up. "[...] [W]hen he was pulled out of his prison, he scowled boldly on Noah, and looked quite undismayed" (*OT* 59). This time, Oliver does not cry in front of them – he appears determined and unscathed. "He had listened to their taunts with a look of dogged contempt; he had borne the lash without a cry – for he felt that pride swelling in his heart which would have kept own a shriek to the last, though they had roasted him alive" (*OT* 60). This behaviour is very unlike Oliver, who is generally submissive and gentle. However, his family is important to him, and he does not regret defending his mother, it is the right – and manly – thing to do.

In two other situations, Oliver shows how courageous he can be. The second time he is caught by Fagin's gang, upon realising that Mr Brownlow will consider him an ungrateful thief, Oliver tries to run to the door and he screams for help. "[...] [Oliver] jumped suddenly to his feet, and tore wildly from the room, uttering shrieks for help, which made the bare old house echo to the roof" (*OT* 137). Fagin violently stops him. The other time Oliver surpasses himself is when he realises that he is sent on mission with Sikes to rob a house, which goes against all of his beliefs. "[...] Oliver, well-nigh mad with grief and terror, saw that housebreaking and robbery, if not murder, were the objects of the expedition. He clasped his hands together, and involuntarily uttered a subdued explanation of horror. A mist came before his eyes; the cold sweat stood upon his ashy face; his limbs failed him; and he sunk upon his knees" (*OT* 192). To no avail, Oliver, "more dead than alive" (*OT* 194) implores Sikes not to make him steal and to have mercy on him. Consequently, he decides to warn the family, a decision which he knows might cost him his life. "[...] [T]he boy had firmly resolved that, whether he died

in the attempt or not, he would make one effort to dart upstairs from the hall, and alarm the family. Filled with this idea, he advanced at once, but stealthily" (*OT* 194). In the end, his bravery enables Oliver to join a new, good family and to finally find his place in the world.

4.6.1.4 Respectability

Oliver's noble character stems from his unwavering respectability, which includes his loyalty, his integrity, his respectable demeanour, and his honesty. He always chooses to do the right thing, which, as it turns out, is a gift he inherited from his parents. His respectability is thus closely connected to his parents' respectability and middle-class status.

Oliver is respectful and polite to everyone he meets on his journey, even to those who abuse him. When he is first captured by Fagin's gang, he begs him to send back the books and the money belonging to Mr Brownlow. "Keep me here all my life long, but pray, pray send them back. He'll think I stole them, the old lady, all of them who were so kind to me, will think I stole them" (*OT* 137). Mr Brownlow thinking badly of him afflicts Oliver more than the thought of him remaining with Fagin forever. Even when he is recuperating at Mrs Maylie's house, he cannot stop thinking about Mr Brownlow and Mrs Bedwin. He still feels closely connected to them and the thought of them believing him to be a thief is almost unbearable to him. "[…] [A]nd now, the idea that they should have gone so far, and carried with them the belief that he was an impostor and robber – a belief which might remain uncontradicted to his dying day – was almost more than he could bear" (*OT* 277). Furthermore, "[t]he hope of eventually clearing himself with them, too, and explaining how he had been forced away, had buoyed him up, and sustained, him under many of his recent trials […]" (*OT* 277). Oliver is loyal to Mr Brownlow and Mrs Bedwin, and he wants to explain himself. He cannot rest and be happy otherwise.

Despite the adverse circumstances he often finds himself in, Oliver exhibits an extraordinary strength of character. Dickens points out that his experience with Mr

Sowerberry, especially observing how people find strength despite their loved ones dying, impress Oliver greatly. “As Oliver accompanied his master in most of his adult expeditions, [...] he had many opportunities of observing the beautiful resignation and fortitude with which some strong-minded people bear their trials and losses” (*OT* 49). On his way to London, he is scared, alone and hungry, nevertheless, “[h]e had no heart to beg” (*OT* 65). This shows that Oliver is also proud. Although he has every reason to, Oliver never complains, and he never directs his anger at God or his tormentors.

Oliver is true to himself, which shows his integrity. He does not lie in order to be in someone’s good graces. When Mr Sowerberry asks him if he likes the work, Oliver feels compelled to tell him the truth. “With considerable hesitation” (*OT* 48), Oliver replies, “Pretty well, thank you, sir, […]. Not very much, sir” (*OT* 48). Similarly, when the Dodger asks him why he does not want to work for Fagin, he also defends his beliefs. Shyly, Oliver confesses, “I don’t like it […]. I wish they would let me go. I – I – would rather go” (*OT* 157). The Dodger is confused and asks him where his pride is, why he would voluntarily choose to depend on others. Oliver daringly points out the Dodger’s hypocrisy, “You can leave your friends, though, […] and let them be punished for what you did” (*OT* 158). In line with the ideal of Victorian manliness, Oliver is aware of good and evil, which seems surprising as he did not have any positive role models during the first nine years of his childhood; he is deeply moral does and not let himself be corrupted by the cruelty of the world.

Last but not least, it is revealed that Oliver’s parents – his mother Agnes Fleming in particular – were in fact good, honourable, middle-class people. Laura C. Berry argues that “[…] [Oliver] is the rightful and righteous [heir], shown in the fact that he ‘inherits’ his mother’s innocence” (52). His father, Edward Leeford SR, was a rich man, and Mr Brownlow’s oldest friend. Edward was forced into a “wretched marriage” (*OT* 438) by his family when he was very young, through which he fathered Monks. After the couple separated, Edward became friends with a retired and widowed naval officer, who had two daughters, Agnes and Rose, “[…] one a beautiful creature of nineteen, and the other a mere child of two or three years old” (*OT* 439). Edward fell in love with the older

daughter, Agnes, “[…] a guileless, untried girl” (*OT* 439), and lied to her about why he could not marry her. “[...] [A]nd so she had gone on, trusting patiently to him, until she trusted too far, and lost what none could ever give her back” (*OT* 462). Agnes became pregnant and soon afterwards, Edward died, leaving a will which said that the child should inherit his money, “[…] but if a boy, only on the stipulation that in his minority he should never have stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice or wrong” (*OT* 463). The questionable affair Oliver’s parents had is rendered unimportant because they were good people.

Oliver’s mother became pregnant out of wedlock, but she was morally pure and innocent, traits that she passed on to her son. Similarly, his father Edward was forced into a miserable marriage and truly loved Agnes, even though as his mistress, he could not marry her. He never intentionally wanted to harm her. Mr Losberne explains that Oliver is “[…] the offspring of a guilty and most miserable love” (*OT* 443), however, Oliver himself is “an innocent and unoffending child” (*OT* 443). Oliver’s mother belonged to a respectable middle-class family, and his father Edward presumably belonged to the upper middle class, essentially making Oliver a member of the middle classes as well. His manner of speech, his politeness, and his interest in books and education can thus be explained not only by his character, but also by him being a member of the respectable middle classes.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine how Charles Dickens's beloved child-hero Oliver Twist conforms to and transgresses the dominant masculine and feminine gender ideals of nineteenth-century Britain. What the analysis has shown, is, that while Oliver does adhere to some – albeit limited – manly roles, he often transgresses Victorian masculinity and exhibits typically feminine roles and qualities. In fact, Oliver embodies the ideal Victorian girl more fittingly than the ideal Victorian boy.

On the one hand, Oliver embodies some attributes associated with ideal Victorian manliness. Against all odds, he manages to survive and to overcome all hardships and torments. This points to his resilience and his innate will to survive. As previously analysed, there are a few turning points for Oliver in which he proves his courage and inner strength. When he cannot bear Noah's insults towards his dead mother any longer, Oliver is unexpectedly violent and determined. It is a man's duty to defend his mother's honour, Dickens seems to suggest. Therefore, violence is appropriate in this case. Oliver also exudes respectability, an essential attribute of the Victorian gentleman. He is kind, honest, loyal, and he has integrity. The passage to Victorian manliness is achieving independence and marrying a good woman. Oliver, however, is a child, and he rarely shows his independence. Two salient situations, in which he does not obey his caretakers but rather acts independently, are when he decides to run away to London, and when he warns the servants of Mrs Maylie's house about the ongoing burglary. Consequently, Oliver shows a very limited number of manly traits. His aforementioned respectability and his kindness parallel the behaviour of the good gentlemen in the novel – Mr Brownlow, Mr Harry Maylie, and Mr Losberne. However, apart from some spontaneous outbursts of courage, strength, and independence, it seems to be in Oliver's nature to be rather passive than active, emotional than rational, fragile than strong, and dependent rather than independent.

One the other hand, Oliver's character captures the quintessence of Victorian femininity. He is predominantly depicted by qualities that were associated with the ideal nineteenth-century femininity. The analysis has shown that he is saintly and angelic,

he is innocent and pure, he is often passive and emotional, and he is portrayed as weak and fragile, both in physique and in spirit. Additionally, he comes to life in the private sphere, even if at the age of nine he should be going to school, be apprenticed, and grow accustomed to the male-dominated public sphere. Oliver is not interested in the public sphere; he longs for love and companionship, for being taken care of, for being protected, for a family. For his caretakers, his family, he would do anything. It seems that it is his destiny to comfort those around him with his innocence, saintliness, and sense of duty – just like a good housewife, mother, or daughter would do. In order to thrive, Oliver needs to grow up completely dependent and within the safety of a respectable middle-class family.

In the following paragraphs, three possible reasons for Oliver's transgression of Victorian masculinity and his adherence to feminine qualities will be delineated in more detail. Firstly, Oliver's character foregrounds the paragon of the ideal middle-class Victorian family. The heart of middle-class family life was the dutiful, loving, subservient mother and the children. The perfect child, it seems, was the girl – the daughter of the house, who should emulate their mothers and comfort the tired men of the family. Oliver resembles and transforms into said dutiful daughter, as he has abandoned all aspirations to become independent and manly. He thrives, conforming to the ideal of femininity associated with good middle-class girls on the threshold of womanhood, like Rose Maylie does. Secondly, in highlighting Oliver's innocent, fragile, and dependent nature, Dickens succeeds in pointing out the cruelty of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The lives of many hard-working poor were heartlessly destroyed because society wrongly deemed all paupers unworthy, lazy, and inherently bad people. Thirdly, Oliver's feminine traits enable the reader to reconnect with their own – lost and abused – inner child, which was also characterised by feminine qualities.

Oliver's victimisation despite his obvious innocence and goodness highlights Dickens's belief in the sanctity of the middle classes. John Carey calls *Oliver Twist* "[…] a hymn to the purity of the middle-class soul" (149), and Claudia Nelson defines Oliver as "the embodiment of middle-class ideals of childhood, so unusual in the realm of the

undeserving poor" (138). Through a series of unfortunate events, Oliver the orphan grows up in the cruel system of orphanages and workhouses. Laura Berry explains that "[…] Oliver must always remain a child, or risk losing his status as victim […]" (62). However, Oliver is a special child and orphan because of his genealogy: he actually has a middle-class background, even though this fact is only revealed in the last pages of the novel. He neither belongs to the working classes nor to the criminal world because he represents the middle-class ideals of domesticity and femininity. Oliver's language also points to his true heritage; he is articulate, polite, and well-spoken, which contrasts strongly with the language of working-class and criminal characters such as Mr Bumble and Fagin. Separated from his own middle-class, good parents at birth, Oliver is never alone, but has to journey through a number of working-class, even criminal, families. Berry points out, that Oliver cannot exist outside of a family-like structure:

> The family is toxic – and physiologically so. Oliver is separated from his wealthier family, and travels through a series of lower-class "families," from the unfortunate clan at Mrs. Mann's to the undertaker's establishment, to Fagin's den, demonstrating the obvious truth that a child is never capable of being outside structures of one form or another. (58-59)

Oliver cannot survive without a family, he has to be fed and he has to be loved, which is why he is always dependent on others. Berry continues that therefore, "[h]e cannot be imagined as a fully psychologized and free agent […]" (58-59). She makes an interesting point, however, I disagree with her assessment. In my opinion, Oliver is a self-determined advocate of his own life, because in the end, he is able to free himself from his evil tormentors. Thanks to his tenacity to not give up, Oliver can finally find peace in his new middle-class family, his own "little society", where he can truly be himself – gentle, sweet, and dutiful, appreciated and cherished for his pure, feminine, and noble soul. Dickens even refrains from giving the reader a glimpse of what the future holds for Oliver. "[…] Mr Brownlow went on, from day to day, filling the mind of his adopted child with stores of knowledge, and becoming attached to him, more and more, as his nature developed itself, and showed the thriving seeds of all he wished him to become […]" (*OT* 484). Mr Brownlow has aspirations for Oliver, but they are not enunciated. He educates the boy and becomes even more attached to him, thus

indicating that it is not his intention for Oliver to become independent and grow accustomed to the public sphere. On the contrary, Oliver will forever be remembered as the abused and angelic child-hero that in the end conquers the underworld. He was never meant to grow up.

In the first seven chapters, Dickens highlights the constant emotional as well as physical abuse and pain Oliver has to endure. He is met with disdain by the workhouse and parish officials, first and foremost, Mr Bumble, the parish beadle. He is mistreated by the family that is in charge of his apprenticeship, especially Mrs Sowerberry, Noah, and Charlotte. He is caught and exploited by Fagin, the thief trainer, and his young crooks. In real life, Oliver would most likely die, like his innocent and angelic friend little Dick. He is too weak, too pure, too vulnerable to make sense of and defy the merciless world of the workhouse and the London streets. He is the complete opposite of the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates, who easily navigate the underworld.

Oliver's world is defined by clear binaries; he experiences two worlds in opposition – the good world of the respectable middle-classes, and the evil world of the parish workhouse and the streets of London. Malicious and evil characters such as Mr Bumble, Fagin, and Sikes, are juxtaposed with respectable and genuine characters such as Oliver, Mr Brownlow, Mrs Bedwin, the Maylies, and Mr Losberne. This stark contrast underscores the significance of the triumph of good over evil. Dickens's depiction of the inhumanity of the workhouse and the underworld might appear exaggerated. However, through his use of sarcasm, humour, and grotesque elements, he manages to expose the systematic oppression of workhouse children, and to condemn the double standards and hypocrisy of Victorian society and institutions (Kermani and Fazli 38-45). As Dickens wrote in the 1841 preface to the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, he wanted Oliver to conquer the evil of the underworld against all odds (x). It was never his intention to portray a realistic Victorian child.

Oliver Twist does not paint a historically accurate picture of Victorian England. Rather, Dickens puts the focus on an innocent, saintly orphan, who the system has outcast

and marginalised, with the intention of foregrounding the harsh realities imposed upon the hard-working poor, in the wake of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. "*Oliver Twist* was not a piece of accurate research; but, rather, the expression of what Dickens *felt* would happen to a child in a society which could conceive of the 1834 Act" (Coveney 128). Dickens's novel captures two divergent nineteenth-century attitudes toward childhood: the middle-class belief that childhood was the best stage of life and thus children should be treasured and protected, as well as the Evangelical belief in original sin, which stipulated that children were sinful beings that had to be moulded into good adults. Because of these two conflicting belief systems, children were both celebrated as well as exploited. As Marilyn R. Brown remarks, "[p]aradoxically, in nineteenth-century Europe the diffusion and sentimental glorification of the cult of childhood coincided exactly with an unprecedented industrial exploitation of children" (3). Dickens attempts to appeal to the readers' conscience by emphasising Oliver's impeccable character, and the effects the abuse in the workhouse and the underworld have on him.

John Carey argues that Charles Dickens was a "manufacturer of model children, pious little monsters, moribund and adult" (131). He identifies Oliver as one of the "Dickensian dwarfs" (136). These often behave like grown-ups, however, they still maintain the purity and innocence that adults have lost. "Such plastic children bring tears to the grown-up eye, because they represent an innocence which the grown-up wrongly imagines he once possessed himself" (Carey 136). Oliver often does not act and react in a way in which a young child would, but rather a grown-up would. He seems most childlike in the Maylies's country cottage, running around in the meadows and enjoying the unspoiled nature. However, even there, he is often serious and quiet, and engages in activities typically considered feminine at the time. Instead of playing with other boys his age, climbing trees, or going on an adventure, Oliver picks flowers, goes to church, and helps Rose decorate the birdcages. "Dickensian dwarfs" are not meant to be complex characters because they should primarily comfort and appeal to the adults (Carey 142-143). Claudia Nelson agrees that "[s]ome child-women and child-men clearly tap into this phenomenon, appealing through their exploitation of the nostalgic longing for innocence" (4). In constructing a boy that embodies the essence

of the Victorian ideal of middle-class femininity, Dickens succeeds in making his innocence and vulnerability, and his need for human affection and protection, more palpable and genuine.

In *Men in Wonderland* (2018), Catherine Robson argues that middle-class men in particular idealised girls, as they embodied a part of their childhood that was irrevocably lost. As previously explained, until they were roughly six years old, little boys were not treated differently from little girls. What can be drawn from this, remarks Robson, is, that "[w]hile it may be a critical commonplace that the Victorians adhered to a rigid system of gender separation, in this particular instance it seems that young boyhood crossed the line, and actually looked more like girlhood" (2018: 4-5). The construction of masculinity started abruptly with the process of breeching, when boys were given different clothes and started school, thus being pushed from the female-dominated private sphere into the male-dominated public sphere (Robson 2018: 4). From this point on, boys were taught to become manly.

The adult Victorian seemed to be fascinated with little girls. According to Robson (2018: 5), the reason for this might be that girls represented the adults' lost innocence they wanted to reconnect with. "On those occasions when paradise was imagined as the primary, lost stage in the journey of life, […] then the perfect little girl formed its most apt symbol" (Robson 2018: 8). In *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Inferiority* (1995), Carolyn Steedman similarly argues that "[…] when the child was watched, written about and wanted, it was usually a feminised set of qualities (if not a female child) whose image was left behind for our analysis" (9). Therefore, in constructing Oliver as a boy that remains innocent, uncorrupted, and fragile, Dickens allows his readers to reconnect with their lost, inner child, that they associated with the feminine qualities of the first six years of their childhood.

In this respect, Amberyl Malkovich's analysis *Charles Dickens and the Victorian Child* (2013) is very insightful. She claims that many of Dickens's child characters, such as Oliver Twist, represent "imperfect" rather than perfect children (1-2). They have

experienced and seen first-hand the abuse many real Victorian children had to suffer and they seem to transcend the prerequisites of the rigid Victorian gender and class system.

> Not bound by class constraints, the imperfect child develops from and in nature, challenges many social ideologies and cultural mores, undergoes tremendous hardships, experiences magic through everyday occurrences, learns through both formal social methods and experience, and is often exposed to religion. (29)

Despite the difficult situation or crisis they find themselves in, imperfect children are self-determined agents of their lives. Often found on the fringes of society, they eventually decide to face the cruel world they live in and take charge of their life (Malkovich 2). Oliver's inherent goodness and innocence remains intact, despite the evils and brutality he experiences in the workhouse and the London underworld. Malkovich argues that "[…] in order to be good, one must also know the evils of the world and what to avoid" (40). Therefore, "[t]he imperfect child is neither the Romantic child nor a street urchin but rather an individual who is comprised of both innocence and experience; who's [sic] 'good' comes from their knowledge of the 'vilest of evil'" (Malkovich 2). In the 1841 preface, Charles Dickens writes that he created the malicious characters in the novel to challenge Oliver's goodness and to show that eventually goodness wins over evil:

> In this spirit, when I wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last – and when I considered among what companions I could try him best, having regard to that kind of men into whose hands he would most naturally fall – I bethought myself of those who figure in these volumes. (x)

As an imperfect child, the character of Oliver transgresses socially prescribed gender norms, which concurs with the findings of my analysis. Malkovich (2-4) argues that imperfect children not only transcend social binaries such as female-male but also rich-poor, or good-evil. Natalie McKnight (190) points out that in Dickens's work, he was able to capture both the prevalent gender ideas and how they started to change in the middle of the nineteenth century. "Does Dickens rely on gender stereotypes? Certainly. Does he reveal the contradictions and dangerous tensions in these stereotypes?

Absolutely. Does he transcend the gender stereotypes? Almost always" (McKnight 197). Dickens's depiction of gender roles and gender adherence is thus more intricate than one might suspect.

With the character of Oliver, Dickens created a boy who conforms to Victorian ideals of femininity and thus constantly defies and transgresses Victorian ideals of masculinity. Mc Knight points out that usually, Dickens's young male characters "[…] tend to reflect his own aspirations to gentlemanliness while exhibiting basic qualities of honor and good character" (195). Oliver, however, was never meant to be more than a dependent, angelic, feminine child. He represents what is wrong with Victorian society, the shameless hypocrisy of a nation that is built on exploiting their poor. Oliver also represents the young, innocent, uncorrupted daughter of the house, who provides comfort for those that have to toil in the unrelenting world of commerce and business. In the underworld, Oliver is met with condescendence and incomprehension. There is no place for someone as good and delicate as him. Only in the respectable middle-class families, is he finally appreciated for this true self, is he finally loved and treated kindly.

In conclusion, Dickens's portrayal of Oliver's femininity was certainly unusual because it did not reflect the hegemonic nineteenth-century masculinity that boys were meant to acquire. Oliver is certainly an unlikely hero in that his heroism does not depend on his courage and rebellion, but rather on his effeminacy, his fragility and passivity. With Oliver Twist, Dickens created a little boy that had only one aspiration: to be loved and valued for his noble, feminine soul. Sarah Ellis explains, "One of the greatest charms a girl can possess, is that of being content to be a girl, and nothing more" (1842: 331). Oliver is a boy, however, he is content in the private sphere, being loved by his family dutifully loving them in return. In this respect, Dickens's construction of Oliver undeniably does challenge the traditional Victorian middle-class gender roles and manly attributed little boys were expected to embody. While there is no reason to believe that Dickens intended to question the prevalent gender ideals through his portrayal of Oliver's femininity and masculinity, he was clearly aware of them and used

them to his advantage. To conquer the evils of the world, Dickens seems to suggest, one has to possess of the innocence and purity of a woman’s heart.

6 Bibliography

6.1 Primary Sources

Dickens, Charles. *Oliver Twist*. 1838. Surrey: Alma Classics, 2014. EBSCOhost eBooks.

---. The Author's Preface to the Third Edition. *Oliver Twist*. 1841. By Dickens. Surrey: Alma Classics, 2014. EBSCOhost eBooks.

6.2 Secondary Sources

Allen, Robert C. *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Cambridge UP eBooks.

Andrews, Malcolm. *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child*. London: Macmillan, 1994.

Ariès, Philippe. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962.

Ashworth, William J. "Industry and Transport." *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 223-237.

Barczewski, Stephanie, et al. *Britain Since 1688: A Nation in the World*. London: Routledge, 2015.

Bentham, Jeremy. *A Fragment On Government*. 1776. Ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. 4th Sept. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=hTSwCKh2P2UC&printsec=frontcover&dq=A+Fragment+on+Government+Burns&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi59tbdlKbvAhVOr4sKHSJOBy0QuwUwAHoECAIQCA#v=onepage&q=A%20Fragment%20on%20Government%20Burns&f=false>.

Berry, Laura C. *The Child, The State, and the Victorian Novel*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999.

Bowen, John, and Robert L. Patten (ed.). *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Broten, Nick. *Thomas Robert Malthus's An Essay on the Principle of Population*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Brown, Marilyn R. (ed.). *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002.

---. Introduction. *Picturing Children: Constructions of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*. By Brown. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002. 1-27.

Bruland, Kristine. "Industrialisation and Technological Change." *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain. Vol. 1: 1700-1870*. Ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 117-146.

Burns, Arthur, and Joanna Innes (ed.). *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York: Routledge, 1990.

Carlyle, Thomas. *Chartism*. 2nd ed. London: Fraser, 1840. 13 Dec. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=g-kpZ-3MZGQC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Chartism+Carlyle&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ah

UKEwjL95jW_aXvAhUSHHcKHZA-AG0QuwUwAHoECAIQBw#v=onepage&q=Chartism%20Carlyle&f=false>.
Chadwick, Edwin. *Inquiry into the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*. London: W. Clowes, 1842. 14th Jan. 2021. <https://books.google.at/books?id=lzK5iitgFpUC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Inquiry+into+the+Sanitary+Condition+of+the+Labouring+Population+of+Great+Britain&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj1no3W_qXvAhXikIsKHfSmD8IQuwUwBXoECAYQCA#v=onepage&q=Annual%20loss%20of%20life&f=false>.
Chase, Malcolm. *Chartism: A New History*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007.
Cheadle, Brian. "Oliver Twist." *A Companion the Charles Dickens.* Ed. David Paroissien. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2008. 308-317.
Chesterton, G. K. *Charles Dickens*. 1907. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2007.
Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005.
Coveney, Peter. *The Image of Childhood: A Study of the Theme in English Literature*. Rev. ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967.
Cowper, William. *The Task*. 1785. London: John Sharpe, 1822. 14th Nov. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=LqMDAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Cowper+The+Task+John+Sharpe&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjC_LDNj6bvAhVy-SoKHeKhAtoQuwUwA3oECAgQBw#v=onepage&q=Cowper%20The%20Task%20John%20Sharpe&f=false>.
Cunningham, Hugh. *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2021. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
---. "Dickens as a Reformer."*A Companion to Charles Dickens*. Ed. David Paroissien. Malden: Blackwell, 2008. 159-173.
Davidoff, Leonore, and Catherine Hall. *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2019. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
Dickens, Charles. *The Uncommercial Traveller*. 1860. Ed. Tyler Daniel. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015.
Ditchfield, G. M. *The Evangelical Revival*. 1998. London: UCL Press, 2005. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert. *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011.
Duckworth, Jeannie. *Fagin's Children. Criminal Children in Victorian England*. London: Hambledon and London, 2002.
Ellis, Sara Stickney. *The Daughters of England: Their Position in Society, Character & Responsibilities*. London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1842. 15th Sept. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=bTNTAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Ellis+The+Daughters+of+England&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjeoqCCiKbvAhUtlYsKHWFqAKsQuwUwAHoECAIQBw#v=onepage&q=Ellis%20The%20Daughters%20of%20England&f=false>.
---. *The Women of England, their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits*. New York: D. Appleton, 1839. 4th Dec. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=jRASAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=sarah+ellis+the+daughters+of+england&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjggeGFgKbvAhXwsIsKHdgtDWsQuwUwBHoECAAQBw#v=onepage&q=sarah%20ellis%20the%20daughters%20of%20england&f=false>.

Evensky, Jerry. *Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations: A Reader's Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015.
Fletcher, Anthony. *Growing up in England: The Experience of Childhood 1600-1914*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008. Kindle eBook.
Floud, Roderick and Paul Johnson (ed.). *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume 1: 1700-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004.
Foley, June. *Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens, the "Angel in the House" and the "Self-Made Man": A Study of Gender, History, and Narrative.* Diss. New York U, 1995.
Forster, John. *The Life of Charles Dickens: 1812-1842*. Vol. 1. 1873. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. Cambridge UP eBooks.
Frader, Laura L., and Sonya O. Rose (ed.). *Gender and Class in Modern Europe.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996.
Frost, Ginger Suzanne. *Victorian Childhoods*. Westport: Praeger, 2009. Kindle eBook.
Froude, James Anthony. *The Nemesis of Faith*. London: John Chapman, 1849. 15th Oct. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=K0FjAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Froude,+James+Anthony+Nemesis+of+Faith&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj6o7i5lqbvAhVltIsKHQGCDAYQuwUwAHoECAEQBw#v=onepage&q=Froude%2C%20James%20Anthony%20Nemesis%20of%20Faith&f=false>.
George, Charles H., and Katherine George. *The Protestant Mind of English Reformation, 1570-1640*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Gillis, John R. "The Birth of the Virtual Child: A Victorian Progeny." *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology*. Ed. Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2003. 82-95.
Gisborne, Thomas. *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. 7th ed. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806. 3rd Nov. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=qW8uAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=An+Enquiry+into+the+Duties+of+the+Female+Sex&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjc-6LUh6bvAhXSpIsKHetmD_wQuwUwAnoECAEQBw#v=onepage&q=An%20Enquiry%20into%20the%20Duties%20of%20the%20Female%20Sex&f=false>.
Gittins, Diana. "The Historical Construction of Childhood." *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. Ed. Mary Jane Kehily. 3rd ed. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2015. 34-47.
Goose, Nigel and Honeyman, Katrina. *Childhood and Child Labour in Industrial England: Diversity and Agency, 1750-1914*. Farnham: Routledge, 2013.
Gouge, William. *Of Domesticall Duties: Eight Treaties*. London: William Bladen, 1622. Early English Books Online, ProQuest.
Greenwood, James. *The Seven Curses of London*. London: Stanley Rivers, 1869. 23rd Jan. 2021. <https://books.google.at/books?id=gQ9eAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA1&dq=The+Seven+Curses+of+London&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjX3c3JkKbvAhUSjosKHW7eA6YQuwUwAXoECAQQBw#v=onepage&q=The%20Seven%20Curses%20of%20London&f=false>.
Griffin, Ben. *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012.
Gullette, Margaret Morganroth. *Aged by Culture*. Chicago: UP of Chicago, 2004.

Gustafson, Katherine. “Life Stage Studies and the Eighteenth Century: Reading Age in Literature.” *Literature Compass* 11.8 (2014): 528-537.
Guy, Josephine, and Ian Small. *The Routledge Concise History of Ninenteenth-Century Literature*. London: Routledge, 2011.
Hafezi, Ehsan, and Kermani Roshanak Fazli. “Oliver Twist and Inklings of ‘Grotesque’.” *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 15.1 (2012): 34-51.
Harling, Philip. “Parliament, the State and ‘Old Corruption’: Conceptualizing Reform, c. 1790-1832.” *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850*. Ed. Arthur Burns and Joanna Innes. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 98-113.
Harvie, Christopher. *Nineteenth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.
Hewitt, Martin. “Class and the Classes.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 305-320.
Hindman, Hugh D. (ed.). *The World of Child Labor: An Historical and Regional Survey*. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2009. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Hollington, Michael. “Dickens and the Literary Culture of the Period.” *A Companion the Charles Dickens.* Ed. David Paroissien. Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2008. 455-469.
Holmes, J. Derek, and Bernard W. Bickers. *A Short History of the Catholic Church*. London: Burns & Oates, 2002.
Honeyman, Katrina. *Child Workers in England, 1780-1820: Parish Apprentices and the Making of the Early Industrial Labour Force*. London: Routledge, 2016. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Horn, Pamela. *Children’s Work and Welfare 1780-1890*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
Humphries, Jane. *Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.
---. “Household Economy.” *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume 1: 1700-1870*. Ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 238-267.
Jackson, Timothy P. (ed.). *The Best Love of the Child: Being Loved and Being Taught to Love as the First Human Right*. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2011.
James, Allison, and Alan Prout (ed.). *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issue in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. London: Flamer, 2005. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
---. “A New Paradigm for the Sociology of Childhood? Provenance, Promise and Problems.” *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issue in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. Ed. Allison James and Alan Prout. London: Flamer, 2005. 7-32.Taylor & Francis e-Library.
Jordan, John O. (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.
Joshi, Priti. “The Middle Classes.” *Dickens in Context*. Ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 260-267.
Kehily, Mary Jane (ed.). *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. 3rd ed. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2015.
---. Introduction. *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. 3rd ed. By Kehily. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2015. 1-16.
Kirby, Peter: *Child Labour in Britain, 1750-1870*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

---. “History of Child Labor in Britain.” *The World of Child Labor: An Historical and Regional Survey*. Ed. Hugh D Hindman. Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 2009. 544-549. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Koops, Willem and Michael Zuckerman (ed.). *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology*. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2003.
Kusch, Celena. *Literary Analysis: The Basics*. London: Routledge, 2016.
Langland, Elizabeth. *Nobody’s Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995.
Ledger, Sally, and Holly Furneaux (ed.). *Charles Dickens in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.
Lewis, Sarah. *Woman’s Mission*. 2nd ed. London: John W. Parker, 1839. 13th Nov. 2020.<https://books.google.at/books?id=xLNGAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Woman%27s+Mission+Sarah+Lewis&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjFg_vAgKbvAhXl_CoKHaAcCWAQuwUwAHoECAQQBg#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Vol. 1*. 1689. London: C. Bathurst, 1795.
---. *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. London: A. and J. Churchill, 1693. 18th Dec. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=OCUCAAAAQAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Some+Thoughts+Concerning+Education.+London:+A.+and+J.+Churchill&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjP0_LglqbvAhVox4sKHT-8BA8QuwUwAHoECAQQBw#v=onepage&q=Some%20Thoughts%20Concerning%20Education.%20London%3A%20A.%20and%20J.%20Churchill&f=false>.
Locke, Richard. *Critical Children: The Use of Childhood in Ten Great Novels*. New York: Columbia UP, 2011. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Lorber, Judith. *Paradoxes of Gender*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1994.
Malkochiv, Amberyl. *Charles Dickens and the Victorian Child: Romanticizing and Socializing the Imperfect Child*. London: Routledge, 2013.
Malthus, Thomas Robert. *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. 1798. London: Electric Book, 2011.
Marks, Patricia. “Dickens and the Grown-Up Child.” *South Atlantic Review* 60.4 (1995): 166-167.
Mayhew, Henry. *London Labour and the London Poor*. London: George Woodfall, 1851. 5th Oct. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=pmZRAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=london+labour+and+the+london+poor&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi0-rnJgqbvAhVlAxAIHdmQBIEQuwUwAHoECAAQBw#v=onepage&q=london%20labour%20and%20the%20london%20poor&f=false>.
McCreadie, Karen. *Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations: A Modern-Day Interpretation of an Economic Classic*. Oxford: Infinite Ideas, 2009.
McFarland, Ian A. *In Adam’s Fall: A Meditation on the Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2010.
McKnight, Natalie. “Dickens and Gender.” *A Companion to Charles Dickens.* Ed. David Paroissien. Malden: Blackwell, 2008. 186-197
McWilliam, Rohan. *Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century England*. Oxford: Routledge, 2002.

Mee, Jon. *The Cambridge Introduction to Charles Dickens*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. Cambridge UP eBooks.
Miles, Andrew, and Mike Savage. *The Remaking of the British Working Class 1840-1940*. London: Routledge, 1994.
Mitchell, Sally. *Daily Life in Victorian England*. Westport: Greenwood, 1996.
Mokyr, Joel. "Accounting for the Industrial Revolution." *The Cambridge Economic History of Modern Britain: Volume 1: 1700-1870*. Ed. Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004. 1-27.
---. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economic History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.
Moore, Grace. *The Victorian Novel in Context*. London: Continuum, 2012.
Moran-Ellis, Jo. "Children as Social Actors, Agency, and Social Competence: Sociological Reflections for Early Childhood." *Neue Praxis* 43.4 (2013): 303-318.
More, Hannah. *Essays on Various Subjects, Principally designed for Young Ladies*. London: J. Wilkie ad T. Cadell, 1777. Project Gutenberg EBooks.
---. *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*. 4th ed. Dublin: P. Wogan and W. Porter, 1799. 21st Nov. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=aZ9YAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=strictures+on+the+modern+system+of+female+education&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjTxbOFgqbvAhVCEncKHeiGDXQQuwUwBnoECAkQBw#v=onepage&q=strictures%20on%20the%20modern%20system%20of%20female%20education&f=false>.
Morrison, Bruce. "Channeling the 'Restless Spirit of Innovation': Elite Concessions and Institutional Change in the British Reform Act of 1832." *World Politics* 63.4 (2011): 678-710.
Moscucci, Ornella. *The Science of Woman: Gynaecology and Gender in England, 1800-1929*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.
Neddam, Fabrice. "Constructing Masculinities under Thomas Arnold of Rugby (1828-1842): Gender, Educational Policy and School Life in Early-Victorian Public Schools." *Gender and Education*. 16.3 (2004): 303-326.
Nelson, Claudia. *Precocious Children and Childish Adults: Age Inversion In Victorian Literature*. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2012.
Newsom, Robert. "Fictions of Childhood." *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*. Ed. John O. Jordan. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 92-105.
Ozment, Steven. "Raising a Loving Child in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (1400-1700)." *The Best Love of the Child: Being Loved and Being Taught to Love as the First Human Right*. Ed. Timothy P. Jackson. Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2011.
Paroissien, David (ed.). *A Companion to Charles Dickens*. Malden: Blackwell, 2008.
Parrish, John M. "Education, Erasmian Humanism and More's *Utopia*." *Oxford Review of Education* 36.5 (2010): 589-605.
Parsons, Talcott and Robert F. Bales. *Family Socialization and Interaction Process*. London: Routledge, 1956.
Pickard, Susan. *Age Studies: A Sociological Examination of How We Age and Are Aged Through The Life Course*. London: Sage, 2016. Kindle eBook.
Pollock, Linda A. *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988.
Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1988.

Poynter, J. R. *Society and Pauperism: English Ideas on Poor Relief, 1795-1834*. Toronto: Toronto UP, 1969.
Prag, Eva-Marie, and Joseph Tendler. *An Analysis of Philippe Ariès's Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. London: Macat, 2018. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
Rapaport, Herman. *The Literary Theory Toolkit: A Compendium of Concepts and Methods.* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
Ricardo, David. *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. 1817. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015. Cambridge UP eBooks.
Richardson, Ruth. *Dickens and the Workhouse: Oliver Twist and the London Poor*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.
Robson, Catherine. "Historicizing Dickens." *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*. Ed. John Bowen and Robert L. Patten. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 234-255.
---. *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2018.
Roper, Michael, and John Tosh. *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*. London: Routledge, 1991.
Rose, Sonya O. *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*. London: Routledge, 1992.
---. "Protective Labor Legislation in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Gender, Class and the Liberal State." *Gender and Class in Modern Europe*. Ed. Laura L. Frader and Sonya O. Rose. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996. 193-210.
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile or Treatsie on Education*. 1762. Ed. William H. Payne. New York: D. Appleton, 1895. 14th Nov. 2020. <https://books.google.at/books?id=CbglAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=emile+or+treatise+on+education&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiHrOG6gabvAhVhtIsKHfkRA1UQuwUwAHoECAUQBw#v=onepage&q=emile%20or%20treatise%20on%20education&f=false>.
Rubinstein, W. D. *Britain's Century: A Political and Social History, 1815-1905*. London: Arnold, 1998.
Ruskin, John. *Sesame and Lilies*. 1865. Ed. Deborah Epstein Nord. New Have: Yale UP, 2002. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Ryan, Linda A. *John Wesley and the Education of Children: Gender, Class and Piety*. London: Routledge, 2017. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
Sanders, Lloyd Charles (ed.). *Statesmen Series: Life of Viscount Palmerston*. London: W. H. Allen, 1888.
Sanders, Michael. "Politics." *Charles Dickens in Context*. Ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 235-242.
Schlicke, Paul. *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*. Anniv. ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
Shand, John (ed.). *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019.
Slater, Michael. *Charles Dickens*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011.
---. (ed.). *Dickens 1970*. New York: Stein and Day, 1970.
---. (ed.). *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens's Journalism. Vol. 3. 'Gone Astray' and Other Papers from Household Words, 1851-59*. London: Dent, 1998.
Smiley, Jane. *Charles Dickens*. New York: Lipper/Viking, 2002.

Smith, Grahame. “The Life and Times of Charles Dickens.” *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens.* Ed. John O. Jordan. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 1-15.
Smith, Mark and Stephen Taylor (ed.). *Church of England Record Society. Vol. 12: Evangelicalism in the Church of England c. 1790-c.1900*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2004. Cambridge UP eBooks.
---. Introduction. *Church of England Record Society. Vol. 12: Evangelicalism in the Church of England c. 1790-c.1900*. By Smith and Taylor. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2004. x-xii. Cambridge UP eBooks.
Smith, Michael S. “Parliamentary Reform and the Electorate.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Ed. Chris Williams. Malden: Blackwell, 2004. 156-173.
Sowards, J.K. (ed.). *Collected Works of Erasmus: Literary and Educational Writings. Vol. 25&26*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 1985.
Steedman, Carolyn. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority, 1780-1930*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
Steinbach, Susie L. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, Culture, and Society in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. 2nd. London: Routledge, 2017.
Taylor, Isaac. *Self-Cultivation Recommended, or Hints to a Youth Leaving School*. 2nd ed. London: Rest Fenner, 1817. 4th Feb. 2021. <https://books.google.at/books?id=nmVKAQAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Self-Cultivation+Recommended+Isaay+Taylor&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiv4dGQgabvAhVEkMMKHfc4CWMQuwUwAHoECAAQBw#v=onepage&q=Self-Cultivation%20Recommended%20Isaay%20Taylor&f=false>.
Teitelbaum, Michael S. *The British Fertility Decline: Demographic Transition in the Crucible of the Industrial Revolution*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014.
Tomalin, Claire. *Charles Dickens: A Life*. London: Viking, 2011.
Tosh, John. *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1999.
---. *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire*. 1993. London: Routledge, 2016. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Tredell, Nicolas. Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield/ Great Expectations*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
Turner, Piers Norris. “The Rise of Liberal Utilitarianism.” *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*. Ed. John Shand. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019. 185-211.
Wallach Scott, Joan. *Gender and the Politics of History*. 1988. 30th anniv. ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2018. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Williams, Chris (ed.). *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Malden: Blackwell, 2004.
Wilson, Angus. “Dickens on Children and Childhood.” *Dickens 1970*. Ed. Michael Slater. New York: Stein and Day, 1970. 195-227.
Woodhead, Martin. “Childhood Studies: Past, Present and Future.” *An Introduction to Childhood Studies*. Ed. Mary Jane Kehily. 3rd ed. Maidenhead: Open UP, 2015. 19-33.
Woods, Robert. *The Demography of Victorian England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.

Woodward, Kathleen. *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999. EBSCOhost eBooks.
Wordsworth, William. *The Collected Poems of William Wordsworth*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition, 1994. 2nd Jan. 2021. <https://books.google.at/books?id=vTWfcTyQYKEC&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+collected+poems+of+william+wordsworth&hl=de&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi_o_LtgKbvAhVVkMMKHT_FDwQQuwUwAHoECAAQBw#v=onepage&q=the%20collected%20poems%20of%20william%20wordsworth&f=false>.
Yildirim, Aşkın Haluk.*Victorian Gender Ideology and Literature*. New York: Nova Publishers, 2015.
Young, Paul. “Political Economy.” *Charles Dickens in Context*. Ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. 243-251.

7 Abstract

English Version

This thesis analyses Charles Dickens's construction of his beloved fictional character Oliver in *Oliver Twist* (1838) with regards to gender. With the rise of Evangelical Protestantism and economic changes brought on by industrialisation, the middle classes grew stronger in nineteenth-century Britain. By mid-century, their notions of femininity and masculinity culminated in the ideology of separate spheres and the doctrine of domesticity, which institutionalised and legimitised the inferiority of women and the superiority of men. The literary analysis of the character of Oliver incorporates aspects of gender studies, age studies, and childhood studies, and shows that Dickens foregrounds Oliver's traits that were typically associated with Victorian femininity. Therefore, Dickens's portrayal of Oliver is extraordinary because the boy clearly deviates from the gender roles he was supposed to embody. Dickens uses Oliver's femininity to condemn the exploitation of the poor and innocent, and he enabled the reader to reconnect with their own, lost, inner child, that was predominantly characterised by female traits.

Deutsche Version

Diese Arbeit untersucht die Darstellung von Charles Dickens' beliebtem Kinderhelden Oliver in seinem Buch *Oliver Twist* (1838) in Bezug auf die damaligen Gender-Ideale. Die Industrialisierung einerseits und der Aufschwung der evangelikalen Christen andererseits begünstigten die Herausbildung einer starken Mittelklasse. Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts dominierten ihre Ansichten in Bezug auf Maskulinität und Femininität das soziale Leben. Diese Gender-Ideologie institutionalisierte und legitimierte die Unterordnung der Frau und die Überordnung des Mannes. Das Ergebnis meiner literarischen Analyse von Oliver, in welche Aspekte der Gender Studies, Altersforschung und der Kindheitsforschung einfließen, zeigt, dass Dickens Olivers weibliche Züge unterstreicht. Seine Darstellung von Olivers Femininität ist außergewöhnlich für die damalige Zeit, da der Junge von den Geschlechterrollen, welche er verkörpern sollte, klar abweicht. Dickens benützt Olivers Weiblichkeit, um

die Ausbeutung der Armen und Unschuldigen zu unterstreichen, und um es dem Leser zu ermöglichen, eine Verbindung zu seinem eigenen verlorenen inneren Kind, welches gekennzeichnet ist durch weibliche Züge, wiederherzustellen.

8 Anti-Plagiarism Statement

I hereby declare that this research paper is my own work, and that it is not a copy of another person's published or unpublished work. For this paper I have used my own ideas, except for quotations from published or unpublished sources, which are indicated and acknowledged within the text and in the bibliography section according to the rules of MLA academic writing stylesheet.

10th March, 2021