

Anti-Semitism in David Lean's and Roman Polański's

*Oliver Twist*



Joske Verheul  
S4627407

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Supervisor: Dr N.T. van Pelt  
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## Abstract

The novel *Oliver Twist* is one of Charles Dickens' most popular works and has been widely criticised due to the use of anti-Semitism in its plot. This criticism has also transferred to the adaptations that were made of the novel. This thesis will look at two film adaptations of the novel *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens; the 1948 adaptation directed by David Lean and the 2005 adaptation directed by Roman Polański. It will examine how the anti-Semitic elements of the novel are adapted to the screen, as well as compare the two adaptations in relation to anti-Semitism. By analysing how these two directors incorporated such a delicate subject in their adaptations may give us an insight in how the two contemporary film industries handled such subjects.

**Keywords:** Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, David Lean, Roman Polański, Adaptation, Anti-Semitism.

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## Introduction

Anti-Semitism has been present for centuries and is as Nathan Reich called it an “age-old phenomenon.”<sup>1</sup> He described it as a “social phenomenon”<sup>2</sup> that “represents a special aspect of the general problem of social behaviour and group conflict.”<sup>3</sup> During the Middle Ages, Jews were accused of being “usurers, parasites, and a menace to economic welfare”<sup>4</sup> who would trap and kill innocent children.<sup>5</sup> During this time, Jews were both legal persons in their own right, but also properties that could be mortgaged or sold.<sup>6</sup> An example of this was when King Henry III mortgaged them to his brother against a loan, and as the property of the king, the possessions of the Jews also belonged to the king.<sup>7</sup> During the middle- and late-twelfth century, heavy taxes were imposed on the Jewish community, and in 1280 Jews were even forced to attend conversion sermons. 10 years later in 1290, Jews were either forced to convert to Christianity or expelled from Britain.<sup>8</sup> Elliott Horowitz noted that in Shakespeare’s time, “barrenness, death, usury, legalism, and literalism”<sup>9</sup> was imagery often associated with Jewish people. These ideas were still common beliefs in the nineteenth century, making it hard to escape these anti-Semitic stereotypes in the

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<sup>1</sup> Nathan Reich, “Anti-Semitism,” *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 18, no. 5 (1945): 294.

<sup>2</sup> Reich, “Anti-Semitism,” 295.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109.

<sup>6</sup> Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth Marks, “Brief Summary of Anglo-Jewish History C. 1066– C. 1880.” In *The Archaeology of Anglo-Jewry in England and Wales 1656–c.1880*. (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2014), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Elliott Horowitz, “The Use and Abuse of Anti-Judaism,” *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 95, no. 1 (January 2015): 100.

Victorian era.<sup>10</sup> Harry Stone notes in his paper “Dickens and the Jews” that the stereotypical Jew during this era was often presented as a “rapacious moneylender, or perhaps later, a thieving peddler or old-clothes dealer”<sup>11</sup> in both literature as well as common belief. As the Victorian era progressed, a shift occurred in how Jewish people were treated in England. In 1858, the first Jewish man was given a place in the House of Commons, and “Jews were able to enter the professions, hold civic office, and administer justice without taking a Christian oath.”<sup>12</sup> Jewish people were from then on given the same rights as English people with regards to jobs previously only reserved for Christians.<sup>13</sup> Due to the increase in public visibility and financial success of several people within the Jewish community, the dominant stereotypes of Jews being greedy and criminals shifted to them being “ruthless self-made men.”<sup>14</sup> This is noteworthy as this was how Jews were also viewed by Christians in the twelfth century when they lived close to their Christian neighbours.<sup>15</sup> These changes from Christians and Jews living side by side to Jews being persecuted and back again shows that society as a whole is capable of changing and that the ways in which people are perceived are constantly changing.

Thomas Wilson commented on the change in society in relation to anti-Semitic stereotypes. He divided anti-Semitic stereotypes into two classes: ‘malevolent and benign stereotypes’.<sup>16</sup> He concluded that while ‘benign stereotypes’ may appear

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<sup>10</sup> Harry Stone, “Dickens and the Jews,” *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 2, no. 3 (1959): 227.

<sup>11</sup> Stone, “Dickens and the Jews,” 228.

<sup>12</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, “Dickens’s ‘Jewish Question’: Pariah Capitalism and the Way Out,” *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 39, no. 1 (2011): 35.

<sup>13</sup> Epstein Nord, “Dickens’s ‘Jewish Question’: Pariah Capitalism and the Way Out,” 35.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England*, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas C. Wilson, “COMPLEMENTS WILL GET YOU NOWHERE: Benign Stereotypes, Prejudice and Anti-Semitism,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 37, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 465.

‘pro-Semitic’, they are very likely to “veil underlying Anti-Semitism.”<sup>17</sup> This means that while ‘benign stereotypes’ do not seem as stereotypes to the people that have them, they are stereotypes nonetheless; people are still placed in a certain box based on previous bias. Kristen Anderson noted on this that because these biases are insidious, they are extremely damaging.<sup>18</sup> People hold these stereotypes without even realising that they have them, making them maybe even more harmful. The difference between ‘malevolent stereotypes’ and ‘benign stereotypes’ towards Jewish people is that ‘malevolent stereotypes’ classify Jews as ‘greedy people who band together’; ‘benign stereotypes’ of Jews are that they are financially successful and loyal to their family and ‘own people’.<sup>19</sup>

The novel *Oliver Twist*<sup>20</sup> is a popular novel written by Charles Dickens between 1837 and 1839. It was written to be published in monthly instalments in the magazine *Bentley's miscellany*.<sup>21</sup> While the magazines printed what they thought would appeal to the public, the readers also had to some extent influence on how the story would develop. Authors wrote to appeal to the reader, accommodating their stories to please their readers. This means that the depiction of Fagin is assumed by the magazine’s editor to be accepted by the readers of the magazine. Stories such as *Oliver Twist* had to be written in such a way that it should be able to be read as a mini-story itself, ending in a satisfactory intermission, but it should also be written to keep the readers interested in the story.<sup>22</sup> Charles Dickens’ portrayal of Fagin can be

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<sup>17</sup> Wilson, “COMPLEMENTS WILL GET YOU NOWHERE: Benign Stereotypes, Prejudice and Anti-Semitism,” 474.

<sup>18</sup> Kristen Anderson, *Benign Bigotry: The Psychology of Subtle Prejudice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 4.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, “COMPLEMENTS WILL GET YOU NOWHERE: Benign Stereotypes, Prejudice and Anti-Semitism,” 465.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Penguin, 2012)

<sup>21</sup> Lance Schachterle, “*Oliver Twist* and its serial predecessors,” *Dickens Studies Annual*, Vol. 3 (1974): 1.

<sup>22</sup> Schachterle, “*Oliver Twist* and its serial predecessors,” 2.

seen as very anti-Semitic in *Oliver Twist*. The immense popularity and the continuous anti-Semitic elements in the novel indicate that the magazine's editors may have concluded that the public accepted how Fagin was depicted, leading to the continuing anti-Semitic elements in the novel. Had this not been the case, Dickens would have been informed about his readers' disagreement and changed his representation of Fagin. The readers in Victorian England appear to have accepted the elements that we now view as anti-Semitic. While Victorian society's acceptance does not justify the way in which the Jewish characters, and by extent the Jewish people in society, were represented, it is an important part of the story. Susan Meyer even called the anti-Semitism in the novel: "the book's great strength [and] its compelling argument."<sup>23</sup> It could be argued in general that Fagin is portrayed just as 'vile' in his actions as Bill Sikes, but contrary to Fagin, Sikes is not identified through his religion in the story. Neither did Dickens use as many negative stereotypes to describe Sikes' character as he did to describe Fagin, disproving the argument.

In the first publication, Fagin is more often called 'The Jew' than by his real name. The drawings provided of Fagin also play in on the physical stereotypes often attributed to a person with a Jewish heritage. Charles Dickens was known to make people aware of the differences in social statuses. However, 30 years after *Oliver Twist* was published, Charles Dickens' representation of Jewish people in his novel was questioned. In 1863, Dickens was sent a letter by Mrs Davis, a Jewish acquaintance, regarding the portrayal of Fagin in the novel and in extension, the Jewish people in England. She felt that this was not a fair portrayal as it "encouraged a vile prejudice"<sup>24</sup> against Jewish people. Dickens never admitted to this, but heavily

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<sup>23</sup> Susan Meyer, "Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 33, no. 1 (2005): 250.

<sup>24</sup> Meyer, "Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*," 239.

edited his 1867 version of *Oliver Twist* by exchanging the epithet ‘the Jew’ for Fagin’s actual name.<sup>25</sup> This implies that Dickens realised that the representation of Fagin, how acceptable it may have seemed to him, was anti-Semitic and had affected the Jewish people in his society. Due to this version being published as a novel and not in a magazine, Dickens was not tied to the editorial instructions of a magazine to appeal to its target readers as he had to do 30 years prior.

*Oliver Twist* has been widely researched with regards to anti-Semitism, as the character Fagin is somewhat of a paradox with what Dickens himself had said. He contested the accusation that he encouraged the prejudice against Jewish society made by Mrs Davis over numerous letters that they exchanged<sup>26</sup>, yet he created Fagin to be “one of the most terrifying evil portraits in western literature.”<sup>27</sup> This paradox has not only gripped academics, also filmmakers are interested in this aspect of the novel. When wanting to make a classical period production, producers often look to popular novels as they already have an audience and are proven to be popular.<sup>28</sup>

This thesis will compare two film adaptations of *Oliver Twist*, the 1948 adaptation directed by David Lean and the 2005 adaptation directed by Roman Polański, in how the anti-Semitic elements of the novel have been adapted to the screen, and if there are significant differences in Fagin’s appearance, behaviour and character between the two films. Films, very much like novels, are a product of their time and play into the interests of the public as the producers make them “to appeal to contemporary audiences.”<sup>29</sup> They can help us understand the age in which they were

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<sup>25</sup> Meyer, “Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*,” 240.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Gelber, “Teaching “Literary Anti-Semitism”: Dickens’ “*Oliver Twist*” and Freytag’s “*Soil Und Haben*,”” *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 16, no. 1 (1979): 2.

<sup>28</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 5.

<sup>29</sup> Sian Barber, *Using Film as a Source* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 62.

produced because they are a part of cultural history.<sup>30</sup> This means that these films represent a distinct cultural viewpoint on Jews and anti-Semitism of their time. By comparing these two films, the different viewpoints of the different times in which the films were produced become clear.

The first chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to the novel *Oliver Twist*. The anti-Semitic elements of the novel will be discussed, and the effect that it has on the depiction of the Jewish characters will be analysed. Chapter 2 will look at the 1948 adaptation of the novel, and assess the anti-Semitic elements and stereotypes used in the film. Additional to this, this chapter will also include literature and research surrounding the film and the commentary that the cast and the crew have given with regard to the film. The same will be done in the third chapter with regards to the 2005 adaptation. In chapter 4, the findings of the previous two chapters will be brought together and a comparison between the two films will be made. It will look at how the different anti-Semitic elements are used in the adaptations to portray Fagin's character. The last chapter of this paper will contain the conclusion of this thesis, providing the finding of the previous chapters in short. Additionally, it will also highlight the change in anti-Semitism in film and thus the different times in which they were produced.

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<sup>30</sup> Sian Barber, *Using Film as a Source*, 62.

## Chapter 1 – Anti-Semitism in *Oliver Twist*

Through the character of Fagin, Dickens' explores certain anti-Semitic characteristics, such as greed, a certain appearance, and other negative characteristics.<sup>31</sup> Fagin is portrayed as a man who is sometimes closer to an animal than an actual man, mistrusting of everyone around him. He uses manipulation to achieve what he wants and does not care whom he hurts, as long as he gets what he wants. Immediately when Fagin is introduced in the novel, his identity as a 'villainous and shrivelled Jew' is established.<sup>32</sup> He is described to have "matted red hair"<sup>33</sup> and a large nose.<sup>34</sup> These characteristics, minus the colour of the hair, are all present in the images accompanying the story drawn by George Cruikshank. These drawings also depict something else that sets Fagin apart from all the other men in the story. Contrary to the high hats that were in fashion in the Victorian era, Fagin wears a low, wide-brimmed hat, establishing further that Fagin is different from all the other characters.<sup>35</sup> Another stereotype that is attributed to an, albeit minor, character is a 'speech impediment'.<sup>36</sup> Barney's words came out as if from his nose instead of his mouth.<sup>37</sup> He is also described as being "nearly as vile and repulsive in appearance"<sup>38</sup> as Fagin. Alain Corbin noted that during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Jews were often viewed as "filthy individuals"<sup>39</sup>, which was attributed to their "characteristic dirtiness."<sup>40</sup> Fagin is described to have "long black nails"<sup>41</sup>, which are

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<sup>31</sup> Meyer, "Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*," 239.

<sup>32</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>36</sup> Meyer, "Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*," 244.

<sup>37</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 135.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>39</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (New York, Berg Publishers: 1986): 145.

<sup>40</sup> Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, 145.

almost claws. This idea is further strengthened when his few teeth left are compared to the fangs of dogs or rats.<sup>42</sup>

Not only is Fagin compared to animals in his appearance, his behaviour and expressions are also expressed through animal metaphors. When he is walking, he is not merely walking, but creeping like a reptile.<sup>43</sup> He looks with lynx<sup>44</sup> and hawk eyes<sup>45</sup> and is once described to have a face that is more of a “snared beast”<sup>46</sup> than that of a man. Fagin is also called a “thundering old cur”<sup>47</sup> by Sikes, which can refer to a dog, but also to someone that is worth nothing.<sup>48</sup> This presents an image in which Fagin is merely an animal. Or as Deborah Nord has described it: a “repellent, reptilian, primordial creature”<sup>49</sup> that is hunting to “feed his depraved appetites”.<sup>50</sup>

Fagin’s obsession with valuable objects and his aversion to part with money plays in on the stereotype of Jews being ‘greedy’. Fagin will haggle to get the amount of money as low as possible<sup>51</sup>, sighs when he has to part with any money<sup>52</sup> and complains with “many solemn asseverations”<sup>53</sup> that he will be left with very little money to keep his household running. This is not true, as the reader knows that Fagin has large amounts of goods and valuable trinkets that he hides from everyone and can sell.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 447.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

<sup>48</sup> *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. “Cur”, accessed 9 June 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cur>

<sup>49</sup> Epstein Nord, “Dickens’s “Jewish Question”: Pariah Capitalism and the Way Out,” 30.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>51</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 372.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

Fagin trains young boys to steal for him so that he can indulge his greediness and grow his collection of valuable objects.<sup>55</sup> Time and time again Fagin makes it clear that he does not care for the boys as much as he cares about what they are able to bring him through stealing. When the boys return to the lair, he is only interested in the stolen goods, trembling eager to see what they bring him.<sup>56</sup> In the event of the boys returning without having stolen anything, Fagin would accuse them of being lazy.<sup>57</sup> The boys would be sent to bed without supper, and sometimes even knocked down the stairs.<sup>58</sup> This paints the picture that Fagin does not care about anything but the valuable objects that the boys are able to procure him. By degrading and punishing the boys, Fagin ensures that they will try everything they can as to not to disappoint him again.

Manipulation is often used by Fagin to ensure that his thieves do what he wants them to do. Fagin does not have the physical build to make people do anything, so he uses manipulation. Fagin must have something on the person that he wants to convert into a thief, as he notes to Monks when they are discussing Oliver. Fagin notes that he had “nothing to frighten him with”<sup>59</sup> and that they must always have that or the labour will be in vain. The only thing that Fagin has is his silver tongue. By using this ‘ability’, he creates thieves from boys and prostitutes from girls. Fagin uses games and funny stories about stealing as a tool, as to make it seem innocent.<sup>60/61</sup> Social isolation is also a form of manipulation that Fagin uses. He locks Oliver away for numerous days, resulting in Oliver accepting anything as long as he is not alone

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<sup>55</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 79.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

anymore.<sup>62</sup> Fagin not only uses manipulation on people, he also uses it to manipulate events to go the way that he wants them to. He can easily manage to have people hauled up for a capital felony<sup>63</sup>, giving the idea that Fagin has the means and the connections to do this.

The ‘connection-web’ that Fagin has with the other Jews in London is, albeit not overtly noticeable, a recurring element in the novel. This can be seen through the interactions between Fagin and Barney. Barney often looks to Fagin for confirmation of the command that he has been given or for permission.<sup>64/65</sup> They are able to communicate with each other in a way that is almost unnoticeable to other people.<sup>66</sup> This might be derived from the fact that when Jews from the diaspora come together, they are able to communicate in Hebrew, no matter their background.<sup>67</sup> Another example of this network is with the unnamed Jew that was sold Oliver’s old clothes.<sup>68</sup> Through his network Fagin acquires these clothes, giving him an indication of where Oliver is.<sup>69</sup> It is almost as if, as Susan Meyer puts it, “all the Jews in London have an almost supernatural connection with one another, forming a sort of cabal.”<sup>70</sup>

In the novel, Fagin is depicted as being very mistrusting of everything. When he is walking outside, he is always looking around to see who else is in the street.<sup>71</sup> When he arrives at Sike’s place, he looks around in a “suspicious manner that which was habitual to him.”<sup>72</sup> He employs Noah to spy on Nancy<sup>73</sup>, and even in his own

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<sup>62</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 166.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>67</sup> Lewis Glinert, *The Joys of Hebrew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 5.

<sup>68</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 120.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>70</sup> Meyer, “Antisemitism and Social Critique in Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*,” 244.

<sup>71</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 174.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 433.

home he is afraid that people will see what he is doing or hear the conversations that he has with his partners.<sup>74/75</sup> He never shows any light to the outside<sup>76</sup>, afraid that people will see him and know where he lives. He goes as far as locking the doors to prevent people from coming in<sup>77</sup>, showing how paranoid Fagin is and willing to do to keep his secrets.

To conclude, Charles Dickens used several characteristics to describe the character Fagin, which were often attributed to Jewish people in his time and had a negative connotation to them. He shows Fagin to be a greedy man who is not afraid to step over other people to get what he wants. Throughout the novel, Fagin can be seen manipulating young children to steal for him, relying on his connections to get information about what is going on in and around London. By giving Fagin a stereotypical appearance, Dickens accentuates even more how different Fagin is from the other characters in the novel.

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<sup>74</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 76.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 246.

## Chapter 2 – Anti-Semitism in David Lean’s *Oliver Twist*

David Lean’s adaptation of *Oliver Twist*<sup>78</sup> is maybe the most popular and influential adaptation of the novel, with many later adaptations taking it as an example.<sup>79/80</sup>

However, the representation of Fagin in this film has been widely criticised throughout the years, with its reputation coloured with anti-Semitic debate.<sup>81</sup> Its premiere had been postponed for two years in the United States and has led to riots in Germany.<sup>82</sup> David Lean found the uproar about the film to be “utterly preposterous”<sup>83</sup> and did not see anything wrong with how Fagin was depicted in it.<sup>84</sup>

In this chapter, I will discuss the David Lean adaptation of *Oliver Twist* in relation to anti-Semitism. I will look at how Fagin’s character is visualised as well as how the characteristics of greed, afraid, manipulating and scheming, mistrust and evilness are portrayed. Lastly, I will also briefly touch upon several cinematic effects used during the film.

### Appearance

The main difference between a book and a film is that instead of the audience imagining how a character looks when reading the novel, the audience is given a direct image in the film. They are presented with the image that the producers of the film had in mind. The visualisation of Fagin in this adaptation was for a large part

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<sup>78</sup> David Lean, “Oliver Twist,” ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0f3xiKxnmXo>

<sup>79</sup> Gene Phillips, *Beyond the epic The life and films of David Lean*. 124.

<sup>80</sup> Chris Louttit “Dickens, David Lean, and After: Twenty-First Century Adaptations of *Oliver Twist*,” in *Cahiers Victoriens et Édouardiens*, ed. Annie Escuret (Montpellier: Presses universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2012), 93.

<sup>81</sup> Melanie Williams, *David Lean* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 58.

<sup>82</sup> Al McKee, “Art or Outrage? *Oliver Twist* and the flap over Fagin,” *Film Comment* 36, no. 1 (New York, Film Society of Lincoln Center: 2000): 45.

<sup>83</sup> Al McKee, “Art or Outrage? *Oliver Twist* and the flap over Fagin,” 45.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

designed by the actor Alec Guinness. He decided to appear in full costume on the audition, having modelled after the well-known Cruikshank images.<sup>85</sup> This includes a large prosthetic nose, matted hair, and a long unkempt beard.

The prosthetic nose is one of the most prominent features that sets Fagin apart from the other characters in both the novel and the adaptation by Lean.<sup>86</sup> The nose was a prosthetic that Guinness used during his audition to complete the look. When Stuart Freeborn – the makeup artist for the film – asked Lean if he should tone down the nose, Lean responded that he did not want to change anything.<sup>87</sup>

The beard that Fagin is given in the adaptation sets him apart from the other main characters and even the background characters.<sup>88</sup> The length might not seem that big of an issue, and one might even argue that more men could have had a longer beard, had it not been for Fagin being the only character in the film with a beard longer than a few centimetres. The contrast between the length of Fagin's beard and that of the other men in the film highlights the difference between them.

Even Fagin's clothes are used to show that he is different from the other male characters in the film. He wears many layers and his waistcoat is the same length as his overcoat. The length of the overcoat is most likely also based on the Cruikshank drawing, but everything under that is not drawn, leaving this up to the producers of the film to decide. In one particular scene, Fagin is seen wearing a shawl to protect him against the rain and the cold wind.<sup>89</sup> This shawl is made of a fabric that has an 'oriental' feel to it. By using this kind of fabric, the producers of the adaptation again show that Fagin is different from all the other characters in the film, regardless of

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<sup>85</sup> McKee, "Art or Outrage? Oliver Twist and the flap over Fagin," 44.

<sup>86</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 36:17.

<sup>87</sup> Phillips, *Beyond the epic The life and films of David Lean*. 129.

<sup>88</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 36:17.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:24:47.

their class. The hat that is given to Fagin in the film is the same low, wide-brimmed hat as it was drawn for the novel.<sup>90</sup> In the film, this is also used to set Fagin apart from the other characters. He is the only character with a hat different from the caps and the top hats widely seen worn in the film, creating a contrast between him and the other characters.

One major difference between the Lean adaptation and the novel is that Fagin is given a lisp in the film, a characteristic originally attributed to Barney.<sup>91</sup> This stereotype was not given to Barney, who is given none of the characteristics that he has in the novel. Instead of keeping to the novel and giving Barney this stereotype, or omitting the stereotype entirely, Lean incorporated it in Fagin's character, attributing an additional stereotype to the character. As a result, the film has just one character with all the stereotypes instead of it being spread over two characters.

The image of Fagin created by Lean is not only true to the images accompanying the novel. Melanie Williams noted that the image presented was also inseparable from the images used by the Nazis before and during the war.<sup>92</sup> This was still fresh in people's minds, resulting in audiences protesting against the film. Lean was even warned by Joseph Breen – the American film industry's censor – that the image of Fagin could offend certain racial groups. Lean ignored this warning and left the portrayal of Fagin as it was. Despite the efforts of a number of Jews, the film became a hit in Britain.<sup>93</sup> In America, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith issued a statement regarding the film, saying that they believe it would do serious harm if it were shown.<sup>94</sup> The New York Board of Rabbis petitioned the film to be never shown

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<sup>90</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 37:51.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 36:36.

<sup>92</sup> Williams, *David Lean*, 57.

<sup>93</sup> McKee, "Art or Outrage? Oliver Twist and the Flap over Fagin," 44.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 44.

in the United States due to its anti-Semitic elements. It was several years later, with significant cuts of Fagin's scenes, that the film made it to the American cinemas.<sup>95</sup> In Germany, protests began when the film was shown in Allied-occupied Berlin. Protesters made their way into the theatre got up the stage and gave angry speeches, resulting in the showing to be cancelled. The following evening even more protesters showed up. It was only when the manager came out to announce that they would discontinue the screening of the film that the protesting stopped and the protesters left while singing the Israeli national anthem.<sup>96</sup>

### *Greed*

The stereotype of 'greed' is also largely present in the film. Due to the visual representation of the characters, it is easier to portray the emotions that they are thought to feel at that moment as the actor can manipulate small changes to his or her face to portray this. This representation can also be seen in how Fagin is portrayed to feel towards the gold and stolen goods that he has or comes into his possession. Fagin is portrayed multiple times with excitement in his face when he sees money or valuable things. The first time that this happens is when the Dodger hands him a pocket watch that he has stolen. Fagin's eyes grow bigger and he begins to smile. The watch goes immediately into one of his pockets as if he is afraid that one of the boys should steal it from him.<sup>97</sup> The other time that this facial expression is used to portray greed in the character is when he sees Oliver who is returned by Nancy and Bill.<sup>98</sup> It is almost as if he is seeing the profit that he can make by making Oliver steal for him. Fagin is depicted to be smiling and jumping up and down in joy in the

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<sup>95</sup> McKee, "Art or Outrage? Oliver Twist and the Flap over Fagin," 45.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>97</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 37:24.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1:08:22.

anticipation of more money coming his way, not being able to conceal his excitement.<sup>99</sup>

The first time that Monks is seen in the film, is when he pays Fagin for taking Oliver. In this scene, Fagin is seen smiling and holding his hand up for the money that he was promised. However, this smile disappears when he realises that he will not get all the money that Monks has in his pocket.<sup>100</sup> This shows that while Fagin is given a considerable amount of money for kidnapping the boy, whom he also intends to exploit for more money, it is not enough for him if he knows that there is more money. The way in which Fagin is depicted in this film is that he is a ‘miser’<sup>101</sup> who always wants more money, and what he has is given is never enough.

This is also shown when the Dodger is looking at the money Oliver was given by Mr Brownlow. Fagin grabs it immediately, hoping that Sikes has not seen it yet.<sup>102</sup> Fagin tells Sikes he can have the books, and only hands it over after Sikes begins to choke him. Fagin’s expression at that moment shows his reluctance, showing that he is very unwilling to part with the money.

The relationship that Fagin had with his money and treasures in the film is also peculiar. The first scene in which Fagin is depicted as being alone with his treasures is when he retrieves the jewellery box from the floor.<sup>103</sup> He is shown to look adoringly at the trinkets in the box and becomes highly aggressive when he realises that Oliver has seen the box. This box has been kept secret from everyone, and in this scene Fagin is shown to be willing to kill to keep this secret. This idea is further highlighted when Fagin and the boys are packing up their place in fear for the police. Fagin is

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<sup>99</sup> Lean, “Oliver Twist,” ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 1:17:53.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 40:27.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 42:00.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1:10:02.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 40:48.

shown that he is willing to risk staying in the place where he could be arrested a little longer so that he can retrieve his jewellery box in secrecy.<sup>104</sup>

### Manipulation

Another ‘anti-Semitic characteristic’ attributed to Fagin in the novel also used in the adaptation, was the portrayal of Fagin manipulating and scheming so that certain situations and information result in the best outcome for him. He is shown to manipulate people into doing what he wants them to do. The game used to practice the boys’ skills in pickpocketing described in the novel is also used in Lean’s adaptation.<sup>105</sup> The visual image of the comical expressions that Fagin makes and the laughter of the boys add an extra layer to the story and show how it is easy to mistake the training for an innocent game.

Same as in the novel, Fagin is shown in the adaptation that he uses manipulation to make people do what he wants them to do. In the film, Fagin notes that Oliver “will do anything you want if you frighten him enough.”<sup>106</sup> He uses information that he has on those around him to manipulate them into doing what he wants; seeing as he has information on many people around him that could lead them to their end.

A lot of information that Fagin has, he uses for the destruction of other people. After having received the information regarding Nancy’s betrayal, Fagin is depicted pondering over what to do with that information, how he can use it to his advantage.<sup>107</sup> This is further accentuated when Fagin is seen waking the Dodger so that he can give the account of what he had heard. Fagin is depicted as smiling in the

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<sup>104</sup> Lean, “Oliver Twist,” ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 52:25.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 37:50.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 1:17:37.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 1:28:10.

anticipation of Sikes hearing of the betrayal.<sup>108</sup> Fagin is even seen holding Sikes back to ensure that he hears the entire story, ensuring maximum damage is done.<sup>109</sup> He knows that Sikes will kill Nancy, as he asked about that previous in a sly way.

This depiction of Fagin shows him as someone who manipulates everyone around to ensure that the outcome will be favourable for him. This can be seen in the scene where he tells Sikes about Nancy's meeting on the bridge. Fagin knows that he must get rid of her, and also knows that Sikes will do so after he is angry enough to want to see blood. By manipulating how Sikes received the information, Fagin ensures the most favourable outcome for himself.

### *Mistrust*

Throughout the film, Fagin is shown throwing numerous suspicious glances and is very suspicious of other people. As also shown in the novel, the adaptation Fagin is afraid of other people hearing about the robbery that he and Sikes are planning while they are standing in a very noisy pub.<sup>110</sup> This combined with the alcohol that can be seen being drunk; it is highly unlikely that people would hear what they are discussing.

The scene in which Fagin's mistrust is most highlighted is when he does not trust Nancy anymore. He asks the Dodger to follow her, as he suspects her hiding something. When he meets Sikes, Nancy and Barney at Sikes' place to drop off Oliver, Fagin is seen watching Nancy with a suspicious look, even when he is in the background of the scene.<sup>111</sup> Films add an extra dimension to the story that is told: they are able to depict what happens in the background, essentially creating an extra layer

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<sup>108</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 1:30:33.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., , 1:31:13.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 1:17:01.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 1:24:46.

to the story. By continuing Fagin's suspicious looks in the background, the producers ensure that Fagin's mistrust lingers in the background.

In the film, this look is also utilised when Fagin is deciding whether to trust Sikes after he received the news that Nancy talked to Mr Brownlow. He does not let Sikes out of his sight, as if he is afraid that Sikes will betray him if he turns his back.<sup>112</sup> The entire time, Fagin throws side-glances while he decides if he can trust Sikes or not. In the end, Fagin decides that he can trust Sikes with the story, and uses it to manipulate the situation so it is favourable for him, resulting in Nancy's death.

The mistrust between Fagin and Sikes is mutual as the film progresses. When Sikes arrives at the new lair of Fagin and the boys, he has hidden himself. He also has a pistol in his hand when he makes his way inside; he did not trust Fagin to let him in if he had a choice.<sup>113</sup> Lean shows this mistrust to be justified as Fagin tried to shut the door as soon as he saw that it was Sikes who knocked on the door.

### *Evilness*

The 'evil characteristics' of Fagin described in the novel can also be found in the film adaptation. He is easy to anger when things do not go the way that he wants them to. When he realises that Oliver is awake while he is looking at the jewellery in his hidden box, he threatens him with a poke.<sup>114</sup> When Oliver has run away with the books, Fagin threatens him with a poke taken from the hearth. This is the same kind of weapon that Sikes later uses to murder Nancy in anger.<sup>115</sup> By using the same object for these two instances, the producers of the film draw a comparison between these

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<sup>112</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 1:28:39.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 1:45:55.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 41:15.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 1:33:14.

two scenes; showing what could have happened if Fagin did not have the ulterior motive of using Oliver for stealing.

Another way in which this film shows Fagin as an evil character is through how other characters call him. Fagin is called a skeleton and a devil by Sikes, and a villain and a wretch by Nancy.<sup>116/117</sup> These are the characters that are the closest to Fagin, have known him the longest and are in the same profession. Despite these similarities, they still think that he is more evil than they are. By using these characters and showing how they view Fagin, Lean is able to show that even among the thieves, Fagin is viewed as evil.

### Cinematic effects

An adaptation of a book adds more to the story due to the cinematic effects that it can use. By making use of camera angles, lighting and music, the mood of a scene can easily be set. These techniques are also used in this adaptation of *Oliver Twist* to complete their image of a character.

Close-ups of Fagin's face are often shot from a lower angle, resulting in him appearing very imposing. This is often done in combination with the manipulation of the lighting. It is often that Fagin's face is only half in the light, with the rest of his face in the shadows, giving certain evilness to his character. Lighting is also used in the aftermath of Nancy's murder when Sikes hears the voices of Fagin and Nancy. Nancy's face is entirely in the light, while Fagin's face is lit from below.<sup>118</sup> This angle is often used during the telling of a ghost story and the teller illuminates his or her

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<sup>116</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 1:10:21.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 1:12:10.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 1:36:19.

face with a torch from below. By drawing this comparison and the contrast with Nancy's face, the filmmakers increase the spooky feeling of the scene.

Music is another effect that is used in the film. It is not used very often in the film, making it extra noticeable when it is, resulting in more intense scenes. In the scene where Fagin is haunting Sikes, the music used adds to the spooky feeling created by the use of lighting.<sup>119</sup> During the game of pickpocketing, upbeat music is added giving the impression that it is an innocent game and not the training of pickpockets.<sup>120</sup> The laughing of the children also aids in making it seem innocent. Similar music is used when Fagin implores Oliver to take his handkerchief out of his pocket, making the connection between the two scenes.<sup>121</sup> When Sikes and Nancy bring Oliver back to Fagin's place, ominous music is used to set the mood of the scene, ending when Oliver is in front of Fagin.<sup>122</sup> By ending the music when Oliver is in front of Fagin, it becomes clear that he is the evil that the music was building up to.

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<sup>119</sup> Lean, "Oliver Twist," ATC, 11 December 2011, YouTube video, 1:36:19.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 37:48.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 42:24.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:09:23.

## Chapter 3 – Anti-Semitism in Roman Polański’s *Oliver Twist*

Roman Polański is of Polish-Jewish descent whose parents were incarcerated in concentration camps during the Second World War.<sup>123</sup> During the time that Polański was separated from his parents he had to lean on strangers for their kindness, something he could later use to relate to Oliver while creating *Oliver Twist*<sup>124</sup>.<sup>125</sup> Polański created this film with his children in mind and wanted to portray Fagin as a lovable villain who is like a father to the boys that he takes in.<sup>126</sup> Sir Ben Kingsley, the actor portraying Fagin, noted that Fagin essentially created a family around himself.<sup>127</sup> Dianne Sadoff noted that in the film, Fagin is a “caring father”<sup>128</sup> rather than the criminal he is in the novel.

In this chapter I will discuss Fagin’s appearance, his characteristics of manipulation, mistrust, evilness, greed and kindness as shown in the film, as well as the attribution that the music used makes to the representation of his character.

### Appearance

When the audience sees Fagin for the first time in the film, he is standing over the fire.<sup>129</sup> When he turns around and moves away from the fire it becomes clear that he is permanently doubled over either due to old age. His hair is thinning along with his beard. Heavy make-up was applied to the actor Sir Ben Kingsley to make him appear older.

<sup>123</sup> Dianna Sadoff, “Boz and Beyond: “Oliver Twist” and the Dickens Legacy,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 45 (2014): 34.

<sup>124</sup> Roman Polański, “Oliver Twist,” Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Slf42s9ECr4&t=3813s&has\\_verified=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Slf42s9ECr4&t=3813s&has_verified=1)

<sup>125</sup> Julia Ain-Krupa, *Roman Polanski: A Life in Exile* (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2010), 153.

<sup>126</sup> Sadoff, “Boz and Beyond: “Oliver Twist” and the Dickens Legacy,” 35.

<sup>127</sup> Chuckthemovieguy, “Ben Kingsley interview for Oliver Twist,” 4 March 2008, YouTube video, 3:54, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PPCvZdyBDD8>

<sup>128</sup> Sadoff, “Boz and Beyond: “Oliver Twist” and the Dickens Legacy,” 35.

<sup>129</sup> Polański, “Oliver Twist,” Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 32:20.

It is noticeable that Fagin's nose is not over-exaggerated as it is in the drawings accompanying the novel, taking away one of the most telling 'stereotypes' traditionally attributed to Fagin.<sup>130</sup>

Fagin's hat is the same as in the novel, low and wide-brimmed. This is not the same as the high hats most seen in the film, but due to the variety in hats also seen on the extra's in the film, it does not stand out as much as it would if it were the only hat that was different. By subtly including different hats in the background, Polański is able to show that Fagin is not an outsider with his hat, while also staying true to the original image given.

Just as described in the novel, Barney talks through his nose in the adaptation.<sup>131</sup> This is a stereotype that was often attributed to Jews in the Victorian era and the only one attributed to Barney in the novel. Dickens also described him to be "vile and repulsive"<sup>132</sup>, but this is not something that is used in the portrayal of Barney in the film.

### Manipulation

Same as in the novel, in the film Fagin is shown to manipulate people. Some of these instances are made more noticeable than others. An example of this is when Fagin and Sikes are discussing Oliver being taken to the police office. After Sikes tells Fagin that it is about time that he is given to the police, Fagin tells him that the outcome would be worse for Sikes than for Fagin himself.<sup>133</sup> This results in Sikes forcing Nancy to go to the police office and bringing Oliver back.

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<sup>130</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 32:37.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 1:15:25.

<sup>132</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 135.

<sup>133</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 52:12.

During the scene in which Fagin talks to Oliver after he has been locked up for several days, Fagin accuses him of being ungrateful and causing them great anxiety by wanting to go to the police.<sup>134</sup> He uses a story of a boy who he was once like a father too, who was guilty of the same sin and went to the police.<sup>135</sup> Fagin tells him that he had to ensure his safety and that of his friends by manipulating evidence for the case. He goes on that a person does not even have to be guilty of anything to be hanged, because people “are so very fond of hanging”.<sup>136</sup> By telling this story, Fagin scares Oliver so that he will not go to the police to tell on him and his friends, and if he does, Fagin would have no other choice but to let him go. This is also insinuated later when he tells Oliver that he would have a friend in Fagin if he does as he is told.

Beside these instances, there are also scenes in which Fagin is seen using manipulation that are rather unnoticeable. The first time is when he is inspecting the handkerchiefs stolen by Charley and he sees that one of them has the initials of the owner on it. The disappointment can be used as a form of manipulation seeing as Fagin is a father figure for the boys, resulting in them wanting to prove themselves and make Fagin proud.<sup>137</sup>

When everyone is sitting at the table and Nancy is telling Oliver about what Fagin and the boys do for a living, Fagin interrupts her as to keep it a secret.<sup>138</sup> When he later remarks that the life they are living is good, it becomes clear that Fagin wants to ease Oliver into the life that they are living. To train him first through the use of the game, with the result that Oliver will be too deep into that world that he cannot turn back anymore.

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<sup>134</sup> Polański, “Oliver Twist,” Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 1:07:57.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 1:08:46.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 1:09:15.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 39:01.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 42:14.

Mistrust

In the novel, Fagin is very mistrusting of everyone and everything. He is always looking around him and never shows a light to the outside. In the adaptation by Polański, Fagin is not as mistrusting. He still keeps his eyes on Oliver when he moves to retrieve his box from the floor and asks the Dodger to follow Nancy, but he is not as suspicious of his surroundings.<sup>139/140</sup> In the film, the rooms are well lit with nothing in front of the windows to stop the light from being seen from outside. This shows that Fagin is not afraid of other people knowing that someone is living in the old house and that he is not as mistrusting of other people as Fagin is described in the novel.

Evilness

Evilness was a characteristic of Fagin that was very apparent in the novel, and also returns in this adaptation. The most obvious evil deed that is present in the film is Fagin trying to turn Oliver into a pickpocket. The scenes where Fagin's evil character shows the most in the film are when Oliver is brought back after being with Mr Brownlow. Fagin mocks Oliver's new clothes, laughs evilly when Oliver tells them that Mr Brownlow will think that he has stolen the books and the money, and even resorts to physical punishment after Oliver tried to run to the police.<sup>141</sup>

Before this Fagin is seen holding the Dodger by his coat, threatening to throttle him is he does not tell Fagin where Oliver is.<sup>142</sup> When Sikes enters the room and sees what is happening, he asks Fagin if he is "ill-treating the boys again?"<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 34:30.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 1:37:37.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 1:03:47.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 50:58.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 51:32.

This suggests that situations like these occur more often. Lastly, both Nancy and Sikes refer to Fagin as the devil, a commonly used symbol for evil.<sup>144/145</sup>

### Greed

Fagin's greed is not as heavily displayed in this film as it is in the novel. It is still present in the film, but Fagin is not presented as only caring about the money and valuables that he has. There are only a few instances in the film when Fagin's greed and love for valuable things are noticeable. The first time is when he opens the box hidden in the floor. He smiles as he takes in the contents of the box, almost like he cannot believe that the boys have stolen all these items for him.<sup>146</sup> Fagin examines the various items in the box and even kisses a string of pearls. This shows that he loves these riches and it becomes clear from him hiding them in the floor that he does not want to share them with anyone else. This is also shown in the scene where Fagin and his boys are fleeing their house after they learn of Nancy's betrayal.<sup>147</sup> Another scene in which Fagin's greed is accentuated is the scene where he immediately takes the pound note that Oliver was given by Mr Brownlow.<sup>148</sup> This scene is taken directly from the novel where Fagin does not want to give it to Sikes who wants it for his part in bringing Oliver back.

There are more scenes in which Fagin's relation with money and valuable things is shown, but they are not as heavy as the aforementioned situations. When Fagin is going through the pocketbook that the Dodger has stolen, he puts aside the money found in it, instead of hiding it immediately.<sup>149</sup> He is somewhat disappointed

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<sup>144</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video 1:24:37.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 1:39:55.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 35:20.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 1:43:10.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 1:03:05.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 38:27.

that it does not contain as much money as they sometimes are, but he does not dwell on it and comments on how well the pocketbook is made.

Before Fagin plays the game of pickpocketing with the boys, he can be seen checking a ledger.<sup>150</sup> This ledger can later be seen when Sikes arrives with stolen goods when Fagin uses it to write down what was in the bag, showing that Fagin is very organised and keeps a close eye on everything that comes through him.<sup>151</sup>

Just as in the novel, Fagin trains the boys into becoming pickpockets so that he can profit from it. When he sees Oliver for the first time, Fagin comments that he will become a hard worker.<sup>152</sup> Later when Sikes has decided that they should get rid of Oliver, Fagin talks about how Oliver could pick pockets in churches due to his looks. These comments show that Fagin is not afraid to use other people for profit.<sup>153</sup>

### Kindness

One of the first instances in which Fagin's kindness is depicted is when he is cleaning shoes for Oliver since his old ones fell apart from his journey to London.<sup>154</sup> He is taking care of Oliver by making sure that they are clean so that Oliver is able to walk the streets again without hurting his feet. Shoes provide a certain degree of freedom by enabling the wearer to walk wherever he or she likes without hurting their feet. By giving Oliver the new shoes, Fagin gives him this freedom back.

When Oliver is brought in with the gunshot wound, Fagin cleans it immediately.<sup>155</sup> He appears to be genuinely concerned for him, and can even be heard making soothing noises while taking care of Oliver. This continues in a later scene

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<sup>150</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 39:32.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., , 52:07.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 33:45.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 1:41:21.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 44:21.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 1:23:36.

where Fagin is treating the wound with a remedy that was passed down for generations from father to son.<sup>156</sup> By including this in this scene, Polański shows a vulnerable, personal side of Fagin. It also visualises the relationship between Fagin and Oliver like that between a father and his son. It is also during this scene that Oliver tells Fagin that he will never forget his' kindness. Fagin's reaction to this is that of remorse. He knows that what he is doing it not the right thing, resulting in feeling remorse for pulling Oliver into the thieving world while he could have had a good life with Mr Brownlow.<sup>157</sup> This is again used in Fagin's final scene where Oliver meets him for the last time and tells Fagin again that he was always kind to him.<sup>158</sup> By repeating this at the end of the film, these words show the truth of what Oliver taught of Fagin, more so because they were his last words to him.

Fagin's kindness is also highlighted in contrast with Sikes. Fagin does not want to get rid of Oliver, even though he called for help during the robbery. This is not solely due to the potential profit he might make off Oliver, but also due to genuine caring for the boy as can be seen in his face and hesitation.<sup>159</sup> When Nancy is seen talking to Mrs Bedwin, she tells her that Oliver is safe at that moment, but that he might not be for long.<sup>160</sup> This is because she overheard Sikes telling Fagin that he plans to get rid of Oliver as soon as he is recovered of his fever. This line shows that it is not Fagin who is a threat to Oliver, but Sikes and that Oliver is safe as long as he is with Fagin.

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<sup>156</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 1:31:30.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 1:32:00.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 2:01:41.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 1:25:48.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 1:30:06.

After Fagin and Sikes learn of Nancy's betrayal, Fagin tries to hold Sikes back and asks him not to be too violent.<sup>161</sup> In contrast to the book, Fagin appears to be genuine in his plea in the adaptation. He did not have time to figure out how he could manipulate the information that the Dodger gave him as he heard it at the same time as Sikes. This is also because in the novel Fagin continues to tell Sikes not to be "too violent for safety"<sup>162</sup> and imploring him to be crafty in his actions. This contrast shows that in the adaptation, Fagin still cares about the young people he takes in and cares about their safety.

### *Cinematic effects*

The music used during the film helps create how certain scenes are set and how the characters and events are perceived by the audience. As previously discussed, besides being greedy, evil and manipulative, Fagin is also portrayed as a kind father figure in this adaptation. This is also reflected in the music that is used throughout the film. When Fagin runs towards Oliver with the scissors in his hands, the accompanying music is comparable to that of when a hunter is attacking its prey.<sup>163</sup> By using this type of music, the relationship between Fagin and Oliver at that moment – that of a hunter and its prey – becomes clear. When Fagin has calmed down after deciding that Oliver is no threat to him, the music resides, thus ending the hunter-prey relationship between the two characters.

In two scenes, Fagin is accompanied by dark, ominous music. The first time is when he is bringing Oliver to the carriage taking him to Sikes, and the other time is when he is looking at a sleeping Oliver together with Sikes.<sup>164/165</sup> The type of music

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<sup>161</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 1:42:28.

<sup>162</sup> Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, 452.

<sup>163</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 36:19.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:11:43.

used is often used in filmmaking to represent the character of a personage or to foreshadow that something bad is going to happen. These are the only two instances where Fagin is accompanied by this type of music, and both times Sikes is also present or in the near future. When looking at the entire film, it becomes clear that Sikes is often accompanied by ominous music, suggesting that the music in these scenes apply to Sikes instead of Fagin.

Examples of when music is used to put Fagin in a more positive light are when Oliver has managed to steal the handkerchief for the first time and at the end of the film. After Oliver has stolen the handkerchief from Fagin, the proud feeling that both characters are feeling at that moment is represented through the music that is playing.<sup>166</sup> The last scene between Oliver and Fagin in the cell ends with music that evokes sympathy in the spectator.<sup>167</sup> The music helps to present Fagin as a more kind, father-like character instead of the supervillain he is often made out to be.

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<sup>165</sup> Polański, "Oliver Twist," Mohammed Mamdouh, 1 march 2019, YouTube video, 1:41:11.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 43:51.

<sup>167</sup> Sadoff, "Boz and Beyond: "Oliver Twist" and the Dickens Legacy," 35.

## Chapter 4 – The two adaptations compared

Apart from looking at how the ‘anti-Semitic elements’ of the novel were adapted to the screen, I also wanted to compare the two adaptations to see if there were significant differences between the two films. In this chapter, I will compare the ‘anti-Semitic elements’ that I have found during the analysis of the two films to see if there are significant differences between the films in their portrayal of the characters presented as Jews in the novel by Dickens. This will be divided into the different subcategories also used in the two previous chapters.

### Appearance

When looking at how Fagin is represented in the two films, similarities as well as differences can be found between the adaptations. Both Lean and Polański took inspiration from the Cruikshank drawings accompanying the novel. In both adaptations, Fagin is given a low, wide-brimmed hat, a beard and a long coat. However, how both directors interpreted the physical image of Fagin into their respective adaptation Fagin’s differs significantly. The most discernable difference between the two characters is the nose that they were given. Lean’s Fagin was given an over-exaggerated nose, which would cast a significant shadow onto his face in certain scenes. In contrast, Polański’s Fagin had a normal nose that was not over-exaggerated, creating a more natural and softer appearance for the character.

The beards are also different between the two characters, with Lean’s Fagin’s beard being significantly longer than Polański’s. A lot of the extras in both films had either short or no beards, resulting in a contrast between Fagin’s beard and theirs. Because the beard of Lean’s Fagin was much longer, the contrast is bigger, setting him further apart from the ‘ordinary people’ than Polański’s Fagin is.

Another difference between the two characters is their voice, and more specifically their accents. Lean deviated from the novel and gave his Fagin lisp. While Polański's Fagin did not have the lisp, he did have a subtle accent possible caused by missing teeth.

One of the major differences between the two films is their representation of Barney. Lean's Barney does not speak through his nose as he is described to do in the novel. In contrast, Polański stayed close to the description in the novel and has given Barney this characteristic.

### Greed

Fagin's 'greediness and love for valuable things' had a substantial role in the novel that both Lean and Polański incorporated in their adaptations. The most important aspect being the fact that Fagin used the boys to steal for him. He would then store the valuable objects in a box in the floor, a scene that both Lean and Polański included in their adaptations. This box is used in both films to show Fagin's obsession with valuable items by showing him gazing at the contents of the box adoringly. Another scene included by both is when Fagin sees the money Oliver is given by Mr Brownlow for the books. Both Fagin's take the money as soon as they see it and do not want to give it to Sikes.

The difference between the two films is the intensity of Fagin's obsession with the items. When looking at how the two Fagin's interact with the money when they are around other people, some differences become apparent. Lean's Fagin is portrayed as someone who pockets every item of value as soon as he touches his hands as if he is afraid of losing it if he puts it somewhere else. His eyes get big when he sees something of value, asks for his promised money as soon as possible and literally

jumps up and down at the prospect of getting more money. In contrast, Polański's Fagin is much more subdued. He puts the money he finds in the stolen pocketbook on the table instead of pocketing it, showing that he is not paranoid that one of the boys will take it from him. This Fagin is much calmer and less obsessed than Lean's Fagin.

Another difference between the two Fagin's is that Polański's Fagin can be seen keeping a ledger. He keeps track of what he receives and goes out, making him appear very organised as opposed to Lean's Fagin.

### Manipulation

Both directors incorporated manipulation in their films, from humorous games to actions with fatal consequences. In both films the game is used by Fagin to train their boys the art of pickpocketing; to make it appear funny and innocent enough to incorporate Oliver. Lean's Fagin tells Sikes that information is needed to scare the boys in submission. When he tells Sikes of Nancy's betrayal, he uses manipulation to make him angry, setting Sikes on a murderous path. Fagin has been seen scheming in the scene before this, thinking about how he could use the information he was given by the Dodger to his advantage.

Polański's Fagin is seen to use manipulation on Oliver after he had tried to run away. During the story about the boy who was hanged, Fagin tells that he had no other choice but to fabricate information which led to the boy's death. The difference between these two instances of manipulation is that Polański's Fagin appears to feel remorse for what he has done, while Lean's Fagin is only concerned with his own safety.

### Mistrust

The biggest difference between the two Fagin's is the level of mistrust that they feel towards the other characters and the outside. Lean's Fagin shushes Sikes when they are talking about the robbery in the crowded pub. He asks the Dodger to follow Nancy after he grows suspicious of her. The suspicion is shown clearly on his face, even when he is in the background of the scene. After he learns of Nancy's betrayal, Fagin also becomes suspicious of Sikes. This suspicion is shown to be mutual as shown later in the plot.

Polański's Fagin also checks Oliver if he is asleep before retrieving the box from the floor and also has Nancy followed. However, he is not seen with suspicious glances towards her or any other character. The mistrust of Sikes towards Fagin is also not seen in the film, giving the impression that Fagin is much more trustworthy in Polański's adaptation.

Just as in the novel, Lean's Fagin only has a single candle to light the room they are living in. This is to keep the light from being seen from outside, giving away that there are people living in the house. This is the opposite of Fagin's house in Polański's adaptation. His house is well lit, even at night with nothing blocking the windows. This shows that Polański's Fagin is not afraid of people seeing that the house is occupied, and much less mistrusting than Lean's Fagin.

### Evilness

In the novel, Fagin had several moments during which he could be seen as an evil character, which both Lean and Polański incorporated into their adaptations. An example of this is the scene where Fagin runs towards Oliver with a weapon in his hands when he sees that Oliver is awake and has seen his secret box. Fagin threatens

Oliver into telling him what he saw, angry that the boy has woken up. Both versions of Fagin threaten the Dodger into telling what happened to Oliver and mock Oliver for his clothes after he is brought back by Nancy and Sikes.

### Kindness

What sets the two versions of Fagin's character apart is the kindness that they show. Lean's Fagin was designed to be a dark and manipulative character, while Polański saw him more as a lovable villain who was like a father to the boys.<sup>168/169</sup> This difference is also apparent when looking at both films. Lean's Fagin is not a really lovable character who takes care of the boys and cares for them. In contrast to this, Polański's Fagin can be seen cleaning shoes for Oliver so that he can go outside again, takes care of him when he is shot and even gives him a remedy that has been passed for generations.

Polański also uses Sikes in contrast with Fagin. It is Sikes who wants to get rid of Oliver after the failed robbery, while Fagin is hesitant to do so. When they both hear of the betrayal of Nancy, Sikes grows violent with rage while Fagin tries to hold him back and implores him to not be too violent. Fagin's kindness is also recognised in the film as Oliver tells Fagin on multiple occasions that he has been kind to him and that Oliver will never forget this.

While Fagin still tries to turn young boys into pickpockets, his kind deeds show that he still cares for the boys and wants the best for those around him.

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<sup>168</sup> Williams, *David Lean*, 55.

<sup>169</sup> Sadoff, "Boz and Beyond: "Oliver Twist" and the Dickens Legacy," 35.

### Cinematic effects

During the filming of his adaptation, Lean made use of different camera angles and lighting to highlight how he saw Fagin, an evil villain. By filming Fagin's face primarily from below in combination with his face never being fully in the light, Lean gives a certain level of 'evilness' to Fagin's face. Polański does not use these techniques, resulting in his Fagin being less evil and having a kinder appearance than Lean's Fagin.

Something that both Lean and Polański use in their films to add to the plot is music. In both films, uplifting music accompanies the pickpocketing game scene, giving it a light and innocent feeling. Both directors also use music to show the 'evil side' of Fagin's character. Polański uses it when Fagin is running to Oliver with the scissors in his hand, using the music to make the scene even more intense. Lean uses ominous music after Nancy and Sikes have kidnapped Oliver, ending it when Oliver is in front of Fagin.

What sets Polański apart from Lean in his music is that Polański also uses it to highlight the relationship between Oliver and Fagin and to invoke sympathy for Fagin. After Oliver has managed to steal the handkerchief, the music represents the proud feeling that they are both feeling at that moment for Oliver's achievement. During their final scene together, the music is used to appeal to the feelings of sympathy in the audience. By ending Fagin's story like this, Polański makes sure that the audience will remind Fagin as he wanted them to, a father to the boys rather than the villain of the novel.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I wanted to look at the 1948 and 2005 adaptations of *Oliver Twist* to see how the anti-Semitic elements of the novel had been adapted to the screen.

Additionally, I wanted to compare the two adaptations to see if there were significant differences between the two films in relation to anti-Semitism.

David Lean and Roman Polański gave their own interpretation to the character Fagin in their adaptations of the novel *Oliver Twist*. Both interpretations saw Fagin as a man who manipulated people and events to ensure the best outcome for himself and had a certain evilness to his character, but also major differences can be seen between the two interpretations. Lean used a large prosthetic nose for Fagin to stay as close to the novel as possible, while Polański did not. Polański's Fagin was overall less greedy and suspicious than Lean's, but the biggest difference lays in the kindness that Polański gave his Fagin. By emphasising the family relationship between Fagin and the boys, Polański humanises Fagin, putting him in a positive light.

This research showed that the anti-Semitic elements present in *Oliver Twist* can be changed or left out without changing the entire story. As became apparent from the criticism Lean received on his presentation of Fagin, harsh stereotypes can be hurtful and are not accepted anymore. Polański showed in his adaptation that changes can be made while keeping close to the original narrative.

Further research can be done by looking at other *Oliver Twist* adaptations from different time periods to see how other directors deal with the anti-Semitic elements of the novel. This will give an even better insight into how the film industry handles delicate subjects like anti-Semitism.

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