Re-Viewing the Situation: Staging Neo-Victorian Criminality and Villainy After *Oliver!*

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Abstract:
This essay addresses the difficulties that modern theatrical adaptors of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1837-8) have had in following Lionel Bart's musical *Oliver!* (1960). In particular, it compares the strategies employed by two recent stage productions which seek to re-contextualise the figures of Fagin, Sikes and Nancy: *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* by Peter Ackroyd, and *Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist* by Neil Bartlett. In theorising melodrama as having particular requirements for its plot and characters, the essay examines the ways in which the relationship between villainy and criminality is reconfigured in Bart's musical. The essay also compares the ways in which villainy and criminality have been represented on stage in popular adaptations of two other Victorian novels, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Woman in White*.

Keywords: adaptation, Neil Bartlett, Simon Callow, crime, criminality, Charles Dickens, Fagin, melodrama, theatre, villain.

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In the theatrical entertainment *Dickens Unplugged*, written and directed by Adam Long, which ran in London in May 2008, the death of Nancy is doubly pastiched, both as a fictional episode in *Oliver Twist* and as a performance piece during Dickens' reading tours. Nancy enters, played by an actor in drag, singing 'As Long as He Beats Me' as she clubs herself repeatedly. Later, a pastiche of Lionel Bart's musical *Oliver!* is interrupted by Dickens himself, who tries to convince the assembled performers that his own text is dramatically superior. In the second half of the show, Dickens is shown, elderly and rather forgetful, reciting the Nancy scene but confusing it with the events of other novels, and finally seeming to fall back on the repetition of the word "bludgeoned" to garner applause. *Dickens Unplugged* is a Californian take on the Reduced Shakespeare Company / National Theatre of Brent formula of knockabout performance and (mis-)education for a knowing audience, and it consistently spoofs Peter Ackroyd's biographical play *The Mystery of Charles Dickens*, which enjoyed a successful run in the early years of the new millennium with Simon Callow in the title role.

The pastiche suggests several things about the place of *Oliver Twist* in popular culture.[1] Firstly, the Nancy joke is a trangressive one, based on the questionable taste of making jokes about domestic violence. It is also a commentary on the coyness with which Nancy's predicament is normally addressed in retellings of the story. As such, it is directed more at Lionel Bart's musical *Oliver!*, filmed in 1968 and starring Shani Wallace as Nancy and Oliver Reed as Bill Sikes, than at Dickens' novel, which does not itself shrink from describing Sikes' brutality (Dickens 2005: 364-5). Furthermore, by juxtaposing Sikes, Nancy and Fagin on stage (who all think that the musical version of *Oliver Twist* is the correct, canonical one), with the 'real' Charles Dickens (who must correct their misunderstandings of his novel), *Dickens Unplugged* dramatises the dominance of *Oliver Twist*, the popular-cultural text, over *Oliver Twist*, the early-Victorian work of prose fiction. As such, the lapsing into an 'inauthentic', musical version of *Oliver Twist* when supposedly telling the story of Dickens and his works, makes comic capital from being both transgressive and yet inevitable. How could a popular comic treatment of Dickens *not* mention *Oliver!*, and blur the distinction between novel and musical?

This problem, of how *Oliver Twist* – and its criminal characters in particular - can be made compelling for an audience, particularly in the theatre, in the wake of *Oliver!*, is the focus of this essay. It will examine two recent stage representations of Sikes and Nancy, Neil Bartlett's *Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist* (first produced for the Lyric, Hammersmith in 2004) and Peter Ackroyd's biographical play *The Mystery of Charles Dickens*, previously mentioned. Both these plays, I argue, seek to recover different types of 'authenticity' in Dickens' novel which will short-circuit the cosy criminal associations of Bart's musical. The essay explores theories of melodrama, drawn from Juliet John, Peter Brooks, Jeffrey D. Mason, Ira Hauptman and others, and argues that *Oliver Twist* must be understood in the context of that genre's non-exclusive relationship between villainy and crime. Victorian melodrama also required specific features of both character and plot, which, as I will demonstrate, modern adaptors tend to avoid or dilute. Moreover, there is a particular difficulty in attempting to render melodramatic villainy compelling on the modern stage. Certainly in British theatre, where naturalistic acting styles still tend to dominate, the literalism, superficiality (that is, the absence of subtext) and didacticism of melodrama count against it. However, this essay explores the depiction of villainy and

criminality in two commercially successful adaptations of Victorian novels, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Woman in White*, in order to compare their strategies with those of Ackroyd and Bartlett.

In Linda Hutcheon's book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), she comments interestingly on how, in Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, the vague physical description of Edward Hyde constitutes an absence that has had to be filled by successive screen adaptors, in ways revealing of their own times and contemporary notions of evil (Hutcheon 2006: 28-29). In Hutcheon's terms, by their very nature, adaptations remind us that there is no such thing as an autonomous text or an original genius that can transcend history (Hutcheon 2006:111) - or, in this case, performance history.[2] The story of *Oliver Twist*, and of Dickens' life, does indeed change in the retelling (Hutcheon 2006: 31), so that *Oliver Twist* becomes a 'fluid text' existing in multiple versions (Hutcheon 2006: 95), an especially pertinent point when considering the ways in which the musical *Oliver!* is made to interfere with a more 'authentic' retelling of 'Sikes and Nancy' in the section of *Dickens Unplugged* outlined earlier. Furthermore, the idea of a textual *absence* that needs to be filled, noted by Hutcheon in *Jekyll and Hyde*, can be applied to *Oliver!* if we consider the musical to be, if not the *ur-text*, then the dominant one, the version of *Oliver Twist* that modern adaptors wish to differentiate themselves from. For what is remarkable about *Oliver!* is the absence of true, articulate villainy; Sikes is silenced, and Fagin and Dodger are rendered harmless. In the place of Dickens' characters, whose 'evil' looks, speech and manners are perhaps all too *vividly* and *substantially* drawn by his melodramatic prose, there is an absence, a vacancy to be filled.

Before investigating how Bart's musical does this, and how this absence has subsequently been filled, it is instructive to note the type of villainy that has been erased, and for this we need to survey the recent debates surrounding melodrama and villainy. Some critics, most influentially Peter Brooks in *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976), have sought to define melodrama as a drama of excess which is really concerned with "an intense inner drama of consciousness" and "a manichaestic struggle between good and evil" (Brooks 1976: 5, 12), and hence a modern literary and dramatic form which is manifests itself far beyond its assumed home in the theatres of nineteenth-century Europe. In a similarly expansive vein, James L. Smith's *Melodrama* (1973) proposed that "melodrama is the

dramatic form of the human condition as we all experience it most of the time" (11), and suggested that the dramatic juxtaposition of situation and imagery in Brecht's *Mother Courage* (1941) and Theatre Workshop's *Oh What A Lovely War* (1963) is essentially melodramatic (Smith 1973: 12-13). With rather more sustained analysis, Jeffrey D. Mason in 'The Face of Fear' (1992) makes the case for the films *Batman* (1989) and *Star Wars* (1977) containing echoes or continuations of melodramatic conventions. William Sharp in 'Structure of Melodrama' (1992) even goes so far as to argue: "I think drama can be structurally limited to three forms – comedy, tragedy and melodrama" (Sharp 1992: 269).

What is problematic about these re-classifications of melodrama is that they all foreground structure and, to a greater or lesser extent, neglect the great differences in characterisation (styles of acting and dialogue, particularly) between Victorian melodrama and modern American film or post-war European theatre. Victorian melodrama requires a villain just as much as it requires sudden reversals of fortune, unlikely coincidences or abstract, competing forces of good and evil. As Lothar Fietz points out whilst interpreting the views of Diderot, the villain functions as "the motor for the action … one could say that, on the whole, they serve as stage machinery … for the production and stimulation of the spectator's emotions" (Fietz 1996: 94, ellipses mine). The villain is the essential machinery – no matter how artificial it may seem to modern eyes – through which the notion of evil is channelled. Jeffrey D. Mason perceptively argues that fear is the emotion from which melodrama springs, which in turn inspires a conceptualisation of evil, "and then a villain to mythologize that evil, giving it a form and a voice" (Mason 1996: 213). Even in the drama of the later Victorian period, David Mayer notes, reversals of fortune and stage crises continue to be attributed to "deliberate viciousness – villainy" (Mayer 1996: 229). Maurice Willson Disher in *Blood and Thunder* (1949) draws attention to the fact that the villain was expected, by the mid-nineteenth century, to actively *gloat* over his evil, rather than simply to be villainous through "mere ruffianism" (Disher 1949: 138).

One reason that melodramatic villainy was so compelling on the stage was not because it corresponded to observable reality but, on the contrary, as Hauptman, in 'Defending Melodrama', astutely puts it, "melodrama's morality is derived from a series of spiritual values beyond the world of the senses – that is, it is a kind of religious drama" (Hauptman

1992: 283). Consequently, Hauptman explains, citing Jacques Barzun, what marked the villain off as evil was "a matter of style", his revealing himself to be morally "deformed", as contrasted with the hero's "attractive" way of revealing himself (Hauptman 1992: 285). This idea of villainy being a 'deformed' mirror image of the good and heroic is one which this essay will return to later in considering Fagin and his criminal underworld in *Oliver!*.

I argue that Victorian melodrama, if it is to maintain its cohesion as a genre, must consist of a range of dramatic and escapist situations and plots, but also of particular characters (hero, villain, child, innocent young woman) who announce themselves in predictable, conventional ways; the clipped, modern dialogue that Mason notes in *Batman* (Mason 1992: 221) will not do. By narrowing down what we classify as 'melodrama' to the specific context of Victorian popular culture, which fed into and was, in turn, nourished by theatre, we can gain insights into how twentieth- and twenty-first-century adaptations of *Oliver Twist* have remodelled melodrama into very different forms.

John's book, *Dickens' Villains*, is particularly useful for the purposes of delineating this original melodramatic context. As she points out, "Dickens's novels existed in a circular relationship to domestic melodrama, both adopting its themes and conventions and providing perfect raw material for the adapters" (John 2001: 62). Viewed as a text inspired by stage melodrama - as well as such textual antecedents as the Newgate Calendar - *Oliver Twist* might be said to fall roughly into a category of crime melodrama that John describes as the "quasi-realistic, panoramic view of the underworld in the metropolis" (John 2001: 68). Furthermore, the behaviour of Fagin and of Bill Sikes in the novel is used by John to demonstrate some of the characteristics of the 'passionless' versus the 'passionate' villain; in fact, she argues that the two can be regarded as melodramatic doubles, or alter egos "at the opposite end of the emotional scale to themselves" (John 2001: 9). Thus, Fagin's impassivity and his lack of connection to his surroundings in the trial scene are signs of his passionless nature, while, paradoxically, the murderous but passionate Sikes is made to appear *more* human to us because of his heightened awareness of his environment after dispatching Nancy (John 2001: 118). Again, we might note, melodramatic convention offers us a double, a pair of alternatives, differentiated by style. Both villains must die in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, but it is interesting that the brutal, impulsive Sikes dies suddenly and violently,

accidentally hanging himself in a rooftop chase, while Fagin suffers the protracted process of arrest, imprisonment and trial which mirrors his own confinement of Oliver, and his manipulation of language and people to serve his ends.

There is a striking contrast here with the one-sided treatment of villainy in *Oliver!*. In describing the decline of the vampire as a symbol of what she calls 'The Eroticism of Evil', Roxana Stuart argues that the vampire myth "has finally succumbed, like the dinosaur, to the ultimate insult – it has been made cute" (Stuart 1992: 242). One might say that the same fate has befallen Fagin as a result of *Oliver!*, and the quite understandable wish to dilute the anti-Semitism of Dickens' original characterisation.[3] Also, of course, attitudes towards good and evil have become much more relativistic in the last 150 years, outside the worlds of fiction. Hence, it is much more rare to see characters portrayed as irredeemably wicked, and practically unknown in modern theatre. As Hauptman dryly puts it, "seeing the world as a battleground for good and evil may not be acceptable metaphysics any longer" (Hauptman 1992: 283); he also notes, quoting Lionel Trilling, "the modern tendency to locate evil in social systems rather than in persons" (Hauptman 1992: 285). This is certainly true of *Oliver!*, a cultural product of the mid-twentieth century.

If Fagin becomes cute in *Oliver!*, then the other representative of villainy, Bill Sikes, becomes practically mute (Monks does not feature in the musical). As a result, specially in the 1968 film version, directed by Carol Reed (where Sikes does not sing the song 'My Name', which usually features in the stage musical), villainy becomes a brooding, brutal presence rather than the scheming, gloating 'other' of the good Mr Brownlow's resourcefulness. The musical, from its opening song in the workhouse, 'Food Glorious Food', attacks 'social systems', or institutions, as Dickens' novel did, rendering the face of the institution itself, Mr Bumble, comically pompous and self-regarding; however, it fillets out the element of melodramatic malignity that complemented this social critique in Dickens' prose style. As a result, social evil is discussed, is sung and danced about, more than individual evil. If part of the appeal of *Oliver!* is, as Mason finds in melodrama, that it provides "a ritual of self-reassurance" that all will receive their just deserts (Mason 1992: 219), then it comes in this case partly from an awareness – from the perspective of the 1960s - that the Victorian age is long past, and those social evils ameliorated.

Fagin is therefore depicted much more gently than in Dickens' novel. One might expect musical theatre to have much in common with melodrama in its use of music to underline and direct emotion, and its fondness for the happy ending, but *Oliver!* does not work melodramatically. When Fagin, towards the end of the score, sings 'Reviewing the Situation', there is a quite complex position being staked out by the character in relation to the other characters, and to the audience. A melodrama villain, unless he was on the verge of a Damascene conversion, would not confide to us that he is "finding it hard to be really as black as they paint" (Bart 1960: n.pag.). In fact, by the end of the song, after deciding several times to "think it out again", he decides that "You'll [i.e., the audience] be seeing no transformation"; however, he warns that "it's wrong to be a rogue in every way" (Bart 1960: n.pag.), and so he will not place others in danger for his own benefit. This anti-essentialist character position, with Fagin negotiating his role before the audience and choosing which parts of it he will adhere to and about which parts he has scruples, is replicated by Nancy in her love song 'As Long as He Needs Me'. Indeed, the humour of *Dickens Unplugged*'s treatment of Nancy stems from its blunt undercutting of Nancy's careful reasoning and self-justification in that song. By contrast, even if Sikes is given a musical voice, the lyrics of Sikes' song in the stage musical, 'My Name' – "Biceps like an Iron Girder/ Fit for doing of a murder" – conspicuously fail to humanise or complicate his role (Bart 1960: n.pag.). Finally, then, Fagin is permitted to escape in the musical and film, along with his 'sidekick' Dodger, because he is not a melodramatic villain so much as a sympathetic outlaw like Dick Turpin or Jack Sheppard, who is heading off for more picaresque adventures. The absence of villainy that I identified earlier in relation to Hutcheon, is thus filled in *Oliver!* by social evils and loveable rogues.

In the case of the two other, more recent high-profile adaptations of Victorian novels, the villainy in the stories is also contained, although in notably different ways. The Andrew Lloyd-Webber musical *The Woman in White* (2004) ran at the Palace Theatre, London, from 2004 to 2006, and although there are many aspects of Wilkie Collins' novel (1859-60) that the production re-shapes, of particular note in the context of this essay is the pairing of Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco as villains. In John's terms, they fit neatly into the 'passionate' (Glyde) and 'passionless' (Fosco) categories of villain, although Fosco creates a flamboyant image to disguise

his scheming nature. Glyde is rash, impulsive, a gambler, and unable to conceal his malevolence towards Laura in the song 'The Document'; unsurprisingly, like those other passionate villains Sikes and Sweeney Todd, he meets a violent end, hit by a train whilst attempting to escape justice in the musical's finale, an audacious appropriation of Dickens' short story 'The Signalman'. Fosco himself points out the difference between his own more scheming, manipulative form of villainy and that of Glyde: "Though we'll do whatever dire is required / I'd prefer to have them eating from our hands" (Jones 2003: 28).

However, Count Fosco is played very much for laughs in the musical. The first actor to play the role, Michael Crawford, was encased in an immense "fat suit" (Billington 2004b: n.pag.), whilst Fosco's song 'You Can Get Away with Anything' makes his intentions clear to the audience and, indeed, signals his awareness of his own role as melodramatic villain when he sings, "you'll forgive me if I take a moment to gloat" (Jones 2003: 39). In the song, he has no compunction about admitting to the audience that "I'm a criminal / obsessed with perfect crimes" (Jones 2003: 39), and his singing, with its light-operatic vocal embellishments, seems to underline the character's pomposity and narcissism. Indeed, he can be heard shamelessly 'showboating' on the very line "because I have no shame" on the original cast recording (Lloyd-Webber, Zippel and Jones 2003: 39). These comic elements serve to contain his threat; furthermore, once again there is an absence of ruthlessness. In the musical, Fosco leaves the country, somewhat saddened at his failure to seduce Marian, in 'The Seduction'. He realises that a vital document has been stolen, but simply asks for it back and lets Marian go (Jones 2003: 42). The Fosco strand of the story is wound up quickly in order to concentrate on the demise of Sir Percival, with Marian warning Fosco that "Someday your past will catch you up" (Jones 2003: 42), whereas the finale of the novel is narrates the very process of Fosco's past catching up with him. His reduced importance to the plot, his scene-stealing singing, his outrageous Italian accent, his prosthetic obesity and his misguided seduction attempt mean that the actor playing Fosco, whether Michael Crawford or, later in the show's run, Simon Callow, is essentially burlesquing the melodramatic villain for a contemporary audience.[4]

The approach to melodramatic villainy is very different in David Edgar's adaptation of *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* for the RSC [Royal Shakespeare Company] in 1980, which was revived at

Chichester Festival Theatre in 2006 in a production that subsequently transferred to the West End and toured the U.K. Edgar's adaptation played with self-conscious theatricality in moments such as the set-piece at the end of Part One, a performance by Crummles' theatrical company of an eighteenth-century-style, happy ending of *Romeo and Juliet* where the original audience at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre was, of course, expected to be quite knowledgeable about the deviations from Shakespeare's text that were taking place (Edgar 1982: 2:1: 0.40-50). However, outside of this theatrical world, the audience is encouraged to take questions of good and evil seriously. The adaptation distanced itself from the excesses of melodrama through the famous 'alienation device' of the whole company functioning as actor-narrators. In full view of the audience, they adopt multiple roles and address the spectators directly, meta-theatrically presenting themselves as a company of actors, enhancing the connection between performers and audience whilst drawing attention to the theatricalising process. The main villain of the play, Ralph Nickleby, is not rendered at all grotesque in the vein of Fosco; instead, Edgar seems to have conceived him as etiolated and mean, a life-denying force, and resisted the temptation to make Ralph a wickedly attractive figure. Wackford Squeers, the grotesque, ragged schoolmaster who conspires with Ralph to cheat Madeleine Bray, is a more passionate villain type. A further villain, Sir Mulberry Hawk, proves something more of the melodramatic 'aristocratic seducer' type, with designs on Nicholas' sister Kate; however, in the RSC production, the fact that Hawk was played by the same actor (Bob Peck) who was also the stout-hearted farmer John Browdie, served to imply that even the most wicked of characters possesses a warmer humanity somewhere within him.

Hence, the distancing device of company narration, as Edgar has freely admitted, does not actually prevent emotional engagement. Whilst using Brechtian techniques, the Brechtian distancing is effectively undermined: "The distancing device, which in Brecht is supposed to clear the mind of emotion, had in our case the effect of directing and deepening the audience's own visceral longing for Ralph [Nickleby]'s vision of the world to be disproved" (Edgar 1988: 158). If obstacles to feeling, to empathy, are placed within the theatrical frame, then it seems audiences feel it all the more poignantly, a little like the emotional undercurrents beneath the buttoned-up Englishness of *Brief Encounter* (1945). While steering us

away from melodrama itself, the frame that Edgar provides allows us to 'feel' in a sophisticated, slightly refracted and ironic way, the passion of Dickens' melodrama.

Both *The Woman in White* and *Nickleby* are also worth close analysis for what they tell us about the relationship between villainy and criminality as it was represented then, and how it is represented in these recent adaptations. Firstly, it seems that in these Victorian fictions not all villainy was represented as criminal, nor was all criminality shown to be villainous. It helps, in placing these works in context, to note that Disher and Philip Collins (in *Dickens and Crime*) both mention the popularity in the 1830s of outlaw figures like Dick Turpin and Jack Sheppard, the latter of whom especially, according to Disher, was perceived by the early Victorians as "virtuous despite his robberies" (Disher 1949: 121-1; Collins 1965 10-11). In *Oliver Twist*, as John Sutherland has established, Fagin's trial and hanging is a stark but plausible scenario, given the legal system of early nineteenth-century England (Sutherland 1999: 44-8); however, as he points out elsewhere, the virtuous Losberne and the Maylies are guilty of knowingly harbouring a criminal and obstructing a police investigation (Sutherland 1997: 60). Yet, Sutherland remarks, it is "as unthinkable that Losberne should answer for his actions in court as that Fagin should come to any other end than the rope" (Sutherland 1997: 60). What he presumably means by this is that the logic of melodrama dictates that the good should not be punished for illegal actions carried out in a noble cause, just as Fagin (and Sikes), in their wickedness, must inevitably, somehow, come to a bad end.

Secondly, in as much as these novels draw on the same conventions as stage melodrama, it is significant, as Hauptman observes, that "Melodrama is concerned with poetic justice" (Hauptmann 1992: 288). In the novels, this effect is often achieved through characters' own actions somehow returning to plague the inventor. In *Nickleby*, for instance Ralph is haunted to his grave by the "black clouds", dreams and "restless nights" that seem to torment him for his treatment of his son, Smike, whom he had sent to Dotheboys Hall (Dickens 2005b: 810), and he hangs himself in the lumber room containing the bed where Smike had slept when a boy (Dickens 2005b: 809). It is also poetic justice that the sadistic Squeers is given a beating by Nicholas. Similarly, in *The Woman in White*, there is poetic justice, rather than legal redress, in the way that the wily Count

Fosco, who claimed to always place himself beyond legal punishment, should be executed by fellow-criminals - the sinister Brotherhood - instead, and in the way that Percival Glyde burns to death in a church – as if by divine decree – whilst attempting to destroy the evidence of his illegitimacy.

In a sense, because of its emphasis on the wickedness of the workhouse and social inequality, the 'poetic justice' in *Oliver!* is even less concerned with the law than the plots of these melodramatic Victorian novels are. Instead of being depicted as a dismal, nightmarish hell to contrast with the heaven of Mr Brownlow's house in Pentonville, Fagin's den is presented in the musical as operating a system which amusingly and resourcefully mimics the capitalism of the legitimate business world, with its 'workers' heading out, in the song 'Be Back Soon', to harvest the raw material of silk 'wipes' which are then processed (unpicked) and sold on.

What is interesting about the more recent stage adaptations is the way that, in stark contrast to *Oliver!*, they play up the criminal nature of their villains' wickedness, attaching to them crimes that modern audiences are likely to take particularly seriously. There is a sense in which the poetic justice of Nicholas publicly beating Squeers is the truly satisfying moment of that story strand – justice being seen to be done – rather than Squeers' seven years' Transportation at the novel's end "for being in the possession of a stolen will" (Dickens 2005b: 827). Harsh, fraudulent and parsimonious as Squeers' regime at Dotheboys Hall is, Dickens' objection to such educational institutions is primarily moral rather than legalistic. However, by the time of the RSC's *Nicholas Nickleby* in the 1980s, some fundamental practices of nineteenth-century schooling were being specifically outlawed. Changing notions of the rights of children were altering British public opinion and sectors of society were turning against corporal punishment in schools. Indeed, the practice began to be banned by Local Education Authorities in the UK during the 1980s -as *Nickleby* began its long run in the West End and then on Broadway - although it is indicative of how divided the public remained on this issue that corporal punishment was not completely abolished in 'public schools', (that is, privately funded institutions) until 1999 by the School Standards and Framework Act, 1998, Section 131 (Freeman 2002: 112). In fact, Britain was the last European country to outlaw corporal punishment in schools, and then only because the European Court of human rights insisted upon the ban (Jeffs 2002: 45). Rather less contentiously, calls for reform in the legal status and protection

of children culminated in the 1989 Children Act, establishing the principle of making decisions "in the best interest of the child" (Roche 2002: 60; Franklin 2002: 29).[5]

Thus, the moment where Nicholas turns the tables on Squeers and beats him for beating Smike was considered one of the highlights of the original production, as evidenced by the audience's cheering on the Channel 4 televised performance (Edgar 1982: 1:2: 48.10), not only because of its importance to the good and the wicked characters in the story, but because of its resonance for the rights of children in the 1980s. Effectively, the neo-Victorian play was taking sides in a contemporary debate, enacting poetic justice but drawing attention to the need for such Squeersian brutality, in 1980s society, to be covered by statutes of criminal justice.

In a comparable way, the villainy of Glyde in the Lloyd-Webber/Zippel/Jones adaptation of *The Woman in White* seems to highlight crimes which might be of particular contemporary concern in a society which has benefited from the insights and reforms of feminism, although here this is achieved by altering the events as depicted in the novel. In the musical, we are told by Laura, who is impersonating the dead Anne Catherick in order to terrify Glyde into a confession, that "You beat me and you raped me/ and then you drowned my child" and in Glyde's confession we learn that he murdered Anne (Jones 2003: 48). This is a significant criminal advance on the behaviour implicated to him in Collins' novel, where Fosco tells us only that he (Fosco) *would* have killed Anne if he had needed to (Collins 1998: 628), and where the great 'Secret' is Glyde's illegitimacy, not his being a rapist or being a child-killer (which, as far as the novel tells us, he was not). The characterisation of Glyde as a rapist seems calculated to signal his wickedness in very modern, criminal terms, in case audiences might be tempted to view Glyde's other markers of villainy, such as his gaming and short temper, as forgivable character defects. It also flatters a modern perception of Victorian men as sadists and sexual hypocrites, even though the Victorian text being adapted is concerned with a quite different crime. Sutherland notes that the last television adaptation of *The Woman in White*, screened in 1997, actually went a stage further and suggested that Glyde's secret is that he is a paedophile, preying on Anne when she was only twelve years old (Sutherland 1999: 163). Again, the very substantial crimes of Glyde in the novel, such as forgery and fraud, are topped by perverted, sexual crimes in a way calculated to trigger revulsion

in a modern audience. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a twelve-year-old girl in Victorian times was not legally below the age of consent (see Pearsall 1993: 290), so in the television adaptation Glyde, whilst a villain then *and* now, is committing a legal offence only in modern terms.

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In the second part of this essay, I want to demonstrate how, in escaping from the shadow of *Oliver!*, two recent stagings of Dickens have used comparable effects to those found in *Nickleby* and *The Woman in White*: the 'distancing' of the melodrama, and the 'contemporising' of the crime. To begin, it is helpful to note some tendencies of television and film adaptations of *Oliver Twist* in order to place the stage plays more specifically in context. If the melodramatic elements of Dickens' storytelling presented us with stark choices between innocence and villainy, then *Oliver!* toned this down and reduced the story's threat by locating it in a colourful, carnivalesque, imaginary London of the distant past. As a result of this musical and film's cultural ubiquity, recent adaptations of *Oliver Twist* in film and television have sought to emphasise certain types of 'authenticity' in order to distance themselves from Bart's version, and to justify a new adaptation.

For example, Alan Bleasdale's 1999 serial adaptation for the ITV channel in the UK emphasised psychological motivation; in reintroducing the character of Monks (Marc Warren), the series included an entire episode, prefacing the workhouse scenes, which showed how Monks' wickedness was a result of his upbringing by his vengeful mother (played by Lindsay Duncan). Roman Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (2005) emphasised historical detail, showing the oakum-picking at the workhouse, and allowing tracking and panning shots to take in mud-spattered street scenes. Brownlow's house is depicted as being on the edge of London, and the district as semi-rural, as it was at the time. Most notably, Fagin (Ben Kingsley) is sinister-looking and inscrutable, and the film ends sombrely with Oliver and Brownlow in the carriage as they leave Fagin to his sentence at Newgate. More recently, a BBC *Oliver Twist* serialisation (2007) elevated socio-historical verisimilitude well beyond that provided by the novel, emphasising the innocence of Fagin (sentenced in a blatantly anti-Semitic trial) and the low self-esteem of Bill Sikes (according to the actor

who played him, Tom Hardy, Sikes is "somebody who needs a cuddle" (Arnstein 2007: 8)). This version also offered viewers a sympathetic, understated Nancy (Sophie Okenedo) played by a mixed-race actress because, according to the screenwriter Sarah Phelps, "From the first time you sent a ship across the water, you'd have different peoples in London" (Arnstein 2007: 1).

The level of naturalistic detail that films and television serials offer would be difficult to recreate in the theatre, even if a company or director wished to, but both *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* and Bartlett's *Oliver Twist* can be read as containing their own appeals to perceptions of 'authenticity'. In the case of *The Mystery of Charles Dickens*, there is the appeal that the play is adapted from Peter Ackroyd's monumental and much-praised 1990 biography of Dickens. The one-man show (on which I comment here in reference to the 2002 DVD recording), presents Simon Callow as Dickens, apparently addressing the audience as himself, part actor, part fan, yet his clothes have touches of Dickens' exuberantly theatrical dress-sense, his beard and hair are similar to those of the older Dickens, and the stage is set as if for one of Dickens' public readings. However, the show visually inhabits Dickens' public presentation of himself in order, it seems, to reveal deeper, psychological insights. As such it has something in common with Bleasdale's 'Freudian' adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, mentioned above, and of course, much in common with the biographical and psychoanalytical tradition in literary criticism, from Edmund Wilson and Humphrey House in the 1940s to Steven Marcus from the 1960s on. As House remarks, in a statement that encapsulates this view in relation to Dickens and crime, "It is clear from the evidence of the novels alone that Dickens' acquaintance with evil was not just acquired *ab extra*, by reading the police-court reports … it was acquired also by introspection" (qtd. in Collins 1965: 15). In other words, in order to present wickedness and criminality convincingly on the page, Dickens had to find the darkness within himself. It is this reading of the 'real' Dickens that *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* highlights in its treatment of 'Sikes and Nancy'.

Like a one-man version of *Nicholas Nickleby's* company of actors, Callow snaps into and out of the various characters of Dickens' novels, and addresses the audience directly. So, as in *Nickleby*, the actor appears to survey us with the eye of one who knows that acting is an illusion, and – as when Callow chuckles after his impersonation of Sam Weller (Ackroyd

2002: 1: 0.16), or smiles after quoting Oscar Wilde's famous "heart of stone" comment on Little Nell (Ackroyd 2002: 1: 0.31) – he acknowledges the effect his material is having on his audience. Callow only gives us a brief flash of Fagin as part of a medley of characters, but this is greeted with knowing laughter by the audience (Ackroyd 2002: 2: 0.13-14), as if the fiction of the 'stage Jew' is being momentarily indulged, its absurdity , and yet its hypnotic appeal, acknowledged. In the play, Callow 'is' Dickens, but he is also critic and biographer, in search of the 'authentic' man behind the works, looking to the works to explain the life. Hence, the enactment of the death of Nancy during Dickens' late-life reading tours is framed in terms of psychoanalysis, of drive and sublimation: "He scarcely understood himself why he felt so impelled and re-impelled to enact that savage scene. He simply knew he had to do it. Was it something to do with his wife, or perhaps Ellen Tiernan?" (Ackroyd 2002: 2:1.13).

Callow begins his re-enactment of Dickens' 'Sikes and Nancy' reading calmly, but soon the frantic exchange between Sykes and Nancy comes to sound like one voice. When Callow utters Nancy's famous line, "I have been true to you…" (Ackroyd 2002: 2: 0.32), the voice is so throaty and desperate that it seems in that instant that he is Sikes and Nancy at once, and both a Nancy about to die and one already in the act of dying. Eventually, Callow's narrative voice itself blends with those of the characters, as when the description of Nancy's final raising of the handkerchief seems to be actually voiced by a beaten and bloodied Nancy (Ackroyd 2002: 2: 0.33), or when he becomes as enervated as the characters, as he describes the act of bludgeoning Nancy "again and again and again" (Ackroyd 2002: 2: 034). As the sun rises in the story, so the stage lighting changes to a bloody red (Ackroyd 2002: 2: 0.35); and, as if to draw a line under this performance and Callow's return to the biographer's role, he briefly leaves the stage as he describes Sikes leaving the scene of the crime (Ackroyd 2002: 2: 0.35). Callow himself seems a little exhausted by the act of portraying Dickens' exhaustion. This merging of Sikes, Nancy, narrative and author, this repetition of Dickens' compulsive repetition and Sikes' repeated blows, has the effect of drawing the focus away from Sikes as criminal and instead reconfiguring him as the most savage aspect of Dickens' mind, a mind at war with itself. Thus, on one level, Sikes' crime in presented as 'mere' fiction, but on another Dickens himself is re-cast as a potential killer of either Catherine Dickens or Ellen Tiernan, frantically

sublimating this drive into performing Nancy's death. The melodrama of the *crime passionel* is subsumed into a species of thought-crime. This is a reading that no-one is in a position to prove as 'inauthentic', but which leaves Dickens with an air of misogyny hanging over him ('his wife' *or* 'Ellen Tiernan') which, like the re-modelled Percival Glyde in *The Woman in White* musical, contemporary audiences are likely to find both disturbing, and yet also somehow reassuringly close to modern stereotypes of the Victorian male.

One immediate claim to authenticity made by Neil Bartlett's play *Charles Dickens'* Oliver Twist: *Adapted in Twenty-Four Scenes with Several Songs and Tableax* is that it uses "Dickens' original language and nothing but", as Bartlett states in his introduction to the play; he explains how he wanted to distance the adaptation from the falsity of "psychologised 'literary' theatre", a description which in some ways fits Ackroyd's play (Bartlett 2004: 7-8). In this determination to use Dickens' words, in however stripped-down and stylised a manner, Bartlett shows the influence of Edgar's *Nicholas Nickleby*'s 'company narration' technique. Strikingly, Bartlett's adaptation represents the novel as a 'Penny Dreadful' machine, with shades of Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors (Bartlett 2004: 9), where the cast springs to life and sings Dickens' narrative in chopped-up, staccato choral form. There is a great deal of physical inventiveness and interaction with the audience, with Dickens' words set, to macabre effect, to several nineteenth-century music hall songs For example, the moment where Sikes encounters a pedlar selling a treatment for bloodstains is turned into a "patter number" delivered by Dodger (Bartlett 2004: 80), and when Sikes is hung, the company chorus sings, with unnerving vigour, "With what a noise the drop goes down!" (Bartlett 2004: 85), as bloodthirsty in its own way, as the criminal dispatched for his crime. So, despite the use of Dickens' words, the adaptation seems to de-familiarise Dickens' world, its morality and characters. The 'Penny Dreadful' machine is entertaining and uncanny by turns, but it does not appear to care if we like or admire it or not; it is a world with its own twisted rules. [6]

Hence, where we are distanced from the death of Nancy in *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* by the biographical frame and the fact that there is clearly only a single actor on stage, who is not meant to represent either character singly, in Bartlett's version the distancing might be said to be achieved through a retreat into textual materialism. The incident is

announced by a "freeze-frame, just before the killing begins" – which in the printed play text reads: "THE BLOODY DEATH OF POOR NANCY AT THE MURDEROUS HANDS OF BILL SIKES" (Bartlett 2004: 79). The next lines, shared between Dodger, Rose and the company, pull back towards narrative: "Of all the bad deeds that, under cover of the darkness, had been committed in London that night … That was the worst … The worst" (Bartlett 2004: 79, ellipses mine). In the Manchester Library Theatre production, which I saw in January 2006, the withdrawal from the scene itself to the level of illustration and narrative was made even more explicit. When Nancy died, the chorus crowded round and made the sound of Bill's blows with the smacking of library books against the steps. As they moved away again, we could see that the actress had disappeared and in her place was only her nightgown, which the chorus doused in blood which dripped from their books. Arguably, this staging suggests that each time we read the story, we murder Nancy anew in our imagination.

Hence, there is a further, less obvious way in which Bartlett's adaptation appeals to an 'authenticity' absent from Bart's musical. If Ackroyd's play drew on the biographical criticism of Wilson and House for its framework, Bartlett's could be said to be using the sort of post-structuralist reading practised by J. Hillis Miller. In 'The Fiction of Realism', Miller drew attention to the relationship between Cruikshank's illustrations in the novel and Dickens' text, pointing out that the illustrations "are based on complex conventions which include not only modes of graphic representation, but also the stereotyped poses of melodrama and pantomime" (Miller 2006: 74). Each illustration, he argues, constitutes "a meeting point of a set of incompatible references – the 'real' London, Dickens's text, Cruikshank's 'sensibility', and the tradition of caricature" (Miller 2006: 75). Similarly, Bartlett's *Oliver Twist* is a meeting point of the words of Dickens' text with contemporary intertexts, and with the illustrative, performative, and presentational styles of the nineteenth century. It draws to our attention the representational worlds to which the text was related, and with which it overlapped, in its original reception conditions. In Bartlett's hands, not only the Punch and Judy show, but also music hall and melodrama are made to seem vaguely terrifying forms, more brutal than sentimental, and Dickens' *Oliver Twist* is re-contextualised amongst them, shown to draw its meaning from its interrelationship with them, as much as, if not more than, from the 'real world' of the period.

This approach creates its own barriers to feeling, since, in placing *Oliver Twist* in a nineteenth-century context, we are critically distanced from the action. These barriers are rather more changeable than *Nickleby*'s, and can seem quite heartless in comparison. Unlike in Dickens' description of events, Bartlett does not allow Sikes to be made more human by glimpses of interiority after the murder; the only line given to Sikes that can be described as reflective, rather than based on action or imperative, is his response to the news that Nancy is not yet buried: "Wot do they keep such ugly things above the ground for? Eh?" (Bartlett 2004: 82). Having killed Nancy, Sikes is shown no mercy by the company, which crowds around him to describe his attempted escape, "as if they had all now turned against BILL and were using the narrative against him" (Bartlett 2004: 83). This sense of Sikes and Nancy being hurried along, of these characters being the servants of an insistent plot, means that, as with the theories of melodrama proposed by Brooks, Sharp and Smith, the structure may be melodramatic, but the characterisation of villainy (Sikes in particular) is not. The intertextuality of the staging, and its distancing effect, means that Bartlett's version could be accused of removing the socio-political critique of the causes of crime that *Oliver!* – for all its colourful cosiness - relied on, replacing it with competing rhetorics of fiction. This approach produces the kind of sharply juxtaposed images that Smith characterised as melodramatic in Brecht (Smith 1973: 12), but which, as I have been arguing, seem rather too cool to be melodramatic when the villain is denied a voice with which to present his interiority.

However, Bartlett's treatment of the 'passionless villain', Fagin, is far more detailed, and includes the scene where Oliver visits him in the condemned cell, which is a long single scene for such a fast-moving play (Bartlett 2004: 86-88). It has been noted by more than one reviewer of the Lyric Hammersmith production that Bartlett hints strongly that Fagin is a paedophile (Brown 2004: 231; Sierz 2004: 232; Billington 2004: 230), with his cooing over Oliver having a "face like an angel" and praising his boys, his "good dogs", as his mind unravels, for having "Never told the old parson what the gentleman … Never brought any awkward stories to light" (Bartlett 2004: 86). It can be argued that, with this representation of Fagin, Bartlett achieves a similar trick to Edgar in *Nickleby*, raising the modern folk-devil of the paedophile to create contemporary resonance just as Wackford Squeers represented a repressive education system. Furthermore,

as previously noted, the 'paedophile' label has already been used in the 1997 television adaptation of *The Woman in White* in order to make Glyde's crimes seem more substantial to a modern audience. In using paedophilia to overshadow Fagin's other crimes, Bartlett could be accused of employing a rather cheap trick, trivialising something so painful to so many, in order to create the impression of something 'edgy' and 'contemporary' rather than engaging in a genuine socio-political critique of child abuse.

I cannot wholeheartedly agree with such objections. At least one scholar, Garry Wills, has explored the alternative possibility that Dickens himself was already depicting Fagin as a pederast, using coded language. Wills argues that "there are many things … to indicate that [Dickens] did expect such understanding" and that the crowd's knowledge of Fagin's pederasty explains their rage during the trial scene (Wills 1989: n.pag.). The insistent anti-Semitism of Dickens' original portrayal of Fagin was, according to Wills, conceived "as a blind for the censors", since "the reaction to a child abuser would be 'explained', on the story's literal level, by the resentment at Jewish fences" (Wills 1989: n.pag.). This strategy backfired, however, as the anti-Semitism of the portrait drew more public reaction than the subtext.

If Wills' argument, or something like it, can be read into Bartlett's *Oliver Twist* – which I think it can – then the adaptor has achieved a double coup. He has produced a version which touches on contemporary concerns about youth crime and sexual corruption, but by unearthing something relatively under-explored in popular understandings of the novel. Rather than simply 'correcting' or rationalising the story with a modern eye, he highlights a fresh reading. Bartlett has also succeeded in switching the authorising discourses through which we are permitted to disapprove of Fagin. He (re-)identifies Fagin's evil with his pederasty, rather than his Jewishness. As such, Bartlett's adaptation can be said to occupy a highly ambiguous space, at one and the same time 'correcting' the tale for anti-Semitism and 'restoring' the putative original intentions behind Dickens' characterisation, whilst also playing on the heightened modern awareness of child abuse. (It seems likely that even the children in the audience of Bartlett's show would pick up on his unhealthy interest in the boys.) The ease with which one folk-devil can be substituted for another perhaps tells us how uncomfortably close this clichéd Jew of the anti-Semitic nineteenth-century imagination remains to the stereotypical paedophile of the twenty-

first century, media-fuelled popular imagination: a filthy, ragged, scheming, solitary male of advancing years, preying on the vulnerable; an irredeemable 'other' onto which cultural anxieties can be all too conveniently projected.[7]

Astute and topical as this adaptation's use of Fagin is, and despite his melodramatic speeches, Bartlett's *Oliver Twist* is not, taken as a whole, melodramatic according to Hauptman's or John's notions of Victorian melodrama. That is, the oxymoronic clash of styles serves to create the sense of contingency, of multiple, unreliable narrators, rather than an embodiment of the non-negotiable metaphysics of good and evil. The fact that Dodger begins the story, with the Chorus coming in afterwards (Bartlett 2004: 15) might even suggest that the whole adaptation is Dodger's self-serving account of events. In the RSC *Nicholas Nickleby* the characters embodied might be venal or villainous, but the company's narration had a trustworthiness, a consistency of style, which created a bond with the audience, where the 'Penny Dreadful' company deliberately does not. Perhaps it is most useful to see Bartlett's adaptation as in continual dialogue, not only with the comparable fictions of the 1830s and with Dickens' novel, but with *Oliver!* too, answering its tunes with the Victorians' own popular music, undercutting its certainties, cross-questioning its Fagin. It is perhaps for this reason that Bartlett's *Oliver Twist* is becoming something of an 'alternative classic' adaptation, with a UK tour of the Lyric, Hammersmith production being followed by revivals by the Library Theatre, Manchester, Aberystwyth Arts Centre and the American Repertory Theatre.

Finally, then, the reassuring, 'manichaestic' moral universe of melodrama is not reproduced straightforwardly in any of the adaptations considered in this essay, and without that, the melodrama villain is no longer the 'motor for the action', nor the embodiment of fear. With Bartlett, we are given competing, overlapping styles reflecting the post-structuralist suspicion of grand explanatory narratives and moral injunction. *Nicholas Nickleby* comes the closest in its moral certainty, but, as Edgar remarks, this is turned into a challenge to the audience to rescue the other 'Smikes' of society by the play's radical, hopeful ending (Edgar 1988: 158-9), and so it lacks the 'ritual of reassurance' that Hauptman describes. Like *Nickleby*, *Oliver!* and *The Woman in White* reflect the preoccupations of the period of their adaptation, but the latter two are altogether too enamoured of Fagin and Fosco to represent their villainy melodramatically.

To return to *Dickens Unplugged*, where we began, it is notable that its similarity to *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* lies not only in the obvious sense that one parodies the other, but in that both reaffirm belief in the idea of Dickens the author, the lone genius. *Dickens Unplugged* begins with the repeated, sung reminder that "Charlie Dickens walked the streets of London town" and ends with a version of the folk hymn 'Goodnight, Goodnight', where Dickens is described as disappearing into the distance, crossing Hungerford Bridge and "[l]ooking a lot like Simon Callow" (Long 2008: n. pag.) In calling upon this notion of a 'real' Dickens (withholding a 'mystery' that Ackroyd's play seeks to unravel) and his timeless works, out there somewhere, waiting to be discovered, both the biographical drama and its pastiche seem to wish to cover their tracks, to disguise their status as adaptations grounded in historical contexts, in Hutcheon's terms.

However, that image of Dickens (in the pastiche he is actually *disguised as Callow*), retreating into the distance, suggests a criminal evading capture, especially in the light of my reading of Callow's rendition of Sikes and Nancy earlier. Dickens might also seem a villain because he creates characters, only to ruthlessly sacrifice them to the interests of the plot: the ultimate deployment of villainous, calculating intellect over emotion. Indeed, Callow allows us a glimpse of this Dickens, the cruel puppeteer, when he says, of Little Nell, "I am slowly murdering the poor child; yet it must be" (Ackroyd 2002:1: 0.29). The author, whose art revels in crime and brutality for effect and sensationalism, not to mention selling novels, is in a sense 'responsible' for these acts and yet rewarded by his public for them. But what of the role of the playwright who frames Dickens in this way? Janet Malcolm asserted in her memorable polemic in *The Silent Woman* that biography is "a flawed genre" (Malcolm 2005: 10), and biographers more akin to burglars than benefactors (Malcolm 2005: 9). So, we may quite properly ask, is there not a person – the playwright-biographer - behind this 'criminal' Dickens, ransacking the novels and ruthlessly casting the author, in turn, as a villain?

Notes

1. As a quasi adaptation of Dickens' life and works, I have referred to *Dickens Unplugged* as pastiche rather than parody, recognising the distinction drawn by Frederic Jameson. *Dickens Unplugged* does not posit the existence of "something *normal* compared with which what is being imitated is rather comic" (Jameson 1998: 5) but rather renders all performance styles, including its own, ridiculous through frequent references to hard-rock music, as played on acoustic guitars by men in Dickensian costume.
2. This point of view is also expressed by Imelda Whelehan when she refers to "the preconception that the novelist produces a work of quality, of 'high' art as it emerges from the solitary efforts of the individual to express their distinct vision, untrammelled by concerns about the commercial value of the product", with film, equally mistakenly, supposed to be a purely commercial and collaborative venture (Whelehan 1999: 6).
3. The cuteness of modern, post-*Oliver!* interpretations of Fagin may also be reflected in the casting of Rowan Atkinson in the Cameron Mackintosh London revival of *Oliver!*, directed by Rupert Goold, where Atkinson is primarily known world-wide for his child-like, near-silent comic creation, Mr Bean. It is also reflected, I would argue, by the fact that the 'Dickens World' theme park in Chatham, Kent, featured a 'soft play area' called 'Fagin's Den', where small children can be left to amuse themselves.
4. Fosco's threat was further undermined on the night I saw the show when Callow, the fourth actor to play Fosco, produced the character's pet rat and repeatedly tried, but failed to make it run the length of his arms as it was supposed to do, much to the actor and the audience's amusement ('The Woman in White' 2006).
5. One might also make the connection that one of the bestselling singles in the British charts over the twelve months before *Nickleby*'s premiere was Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in the Wall', with its repeated phrase, "Hey teacher – leave them kids alone", while the nightmarish promotional video depicted a demonic teacher putting children through a meat-grinder ('Another Brick in the Wall' 1979).
6. Judging by Bartlett's previous and subsequent work featuring the Victorians, it seems he has had a long-standing interest in subverting received notions of both the Victorians and the literary canon. Between 1987 and 1990 he wrote and performed various versions of *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep*, a piece about the homosexual Victorian painter

Simeon Solomon, who apparently began a new career in North Devon, giving public readings of the works of Charles Dickens (Bartlett 1990: 101). In its third incarnation, the play featured Bartlett playing a character called Neil, and three drag queens performing the songs of Marie Lloyd (Bartlett 1990: 109-111). In 2007 he directed a production of *Twelfth Night* for the RSC at the Courtyard Theatre, where the actors wore 1890s costumes and the comic characters were performed as music-hall turns, played by female actors cross-dressed as men. It should therefore come as no surprise that, in *Oliver Twist*, he muddies the waters of the melodramatic division between the passionate and passionless villain, giving Fagin the weight of sexuality but making it a complex, hidden, malignant one.

7 . As an example of this, and of the media's continued highlighting of the subject of paedophilia, at the time of writing (August 2008), the television and newspapers continue to trace the international movements of Paul Gadd, a.k.a. Gary Glitter, who has been deported from Vietnam after serving a prison sentence for sexually assaulting children (Irvine 2008: n. pag.). Gadd might be said to make a perfect paedophilic media hate figure, in that memories of his 1970s pop career hark back to the younger years of those adults, parents, and journalists who are themselves now middle-aged, evoking a past innocence that has now seemingly been sullied. The media's scripting of the story creates a rise and fall, and a sinister figure very like Fagin at the centre of it: a flamboyantly-dressed man who seduced the young with false glamour ('glam rock') into joining his 'gang', but who is reduced in the final acts to the frailty of "an old man – an old man" (Dickens 2005: 409), with the crowd baying for his blood (Dickens 2005: 408).

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