



## **“Please, sir, I want some more. . . . Please, sir . . . I want some more”: Unhooding Richler’s Fang to Find Justice for *Oliver Twist* and *Jacob Two-Two***

—Brian Gibson

In an article published a few years after the release of *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* in 1975, Mordecai Richler located the literary origins of his book for children in British literature of the nineteenth century. He explained that he had written the book in large part out of a sense that children’s literature had not come very far from its pre-twentieth-century days of moral instruction:

most children’s books were awfully boring or insufferably didactic or sometimes both. These dreary, ill-written books were conceived for profit or to teach the kids racial tolerance, hygiene, or other knee-jerk liberal responses. . . . In contemporary children’s stories parents were never hungover or short-tempered and the kids were generally adorable. I decided if I ever got round to writing a book for my kids its intentions would be to amuse. Pure fun, not instruction, is what I had in mind. . . .

[T]oo many [children’s books] are written by third-rate writers for children already old enough to enjoy at least some adult books. Say, Mark Twain, some Dickens, certainly *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. . . . (“Writing” 7)

Here Richler gestures to the writer who obviously sparked some of his book’s settings, details, and concerns: Charles Dickens. In his desire to amuse rather than instruct children, Richler also appears to note indirectly just how much *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* reflects late-twentieth-century notions of childhood, whereby children are seen as people in their own right, in contrast to Victorian notions of childhood, whereby children are seen within a religious framework as “little sinners” who require explicit instruction in order to be made into “little angels.”

A careful comparison of Richler’s *Jacob Two-Two*

and Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837–39)<sup>1</sup> reveals not only Richler's debt to Dickens, but also the debt of illustrator Fritz Wegner to George Cruikshank, the illustrator of the initial edition of Dickens's novel. Both sets of illustrations are pen-and-ink satires that are similar in mood, subject, and characters. Through their mockeries of justice and arrogant, unjustified adult power wielded against defenceless minors, Richler and Wegner also demonstrate the changes in cultural attitudes toward children and adult authority that have taken place in the 138 years since the publication of the Dickens-Cruikshank text. In late-twentieth-century England, the setting for Richler's work, changes in the law with regard to the abuse, labour, and education of children have considerably lessened their material suffering. At the same time, however, such improvements have not appeared to alleviate the psychological dread and anxiety that oppressive, prison-like, adult-led institutions such as schools and court systems evoke. Dickens's Oliver is powerless on his own in a harsh, adult world, and even though Richler's Jacob is a "little person" with his own rights, he experiences a sense of powerlessness. Whereas Dickens and Cruikshank show the young person to be trapped in a materially threatening society, Richler and Wegner situate him in a post-Freudian society where he feels psychologically besieged by adults who are threatened by "Child Power."

*Oliver Twist* is one of Dickens's earliest and shortest

books. The story's relative brevity makes for a sharp focus on the figure of an orphan who, as Dickens noted in his Preface to the third edition of the novel, epitomizes "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance" (xxv).<sup>2</sup> Almost everywhere Oliver turns, from the workhouse from which overseers could have children as young as nine apprenticed (Pool 241), to his time with Fagin and his pickpocketing protégés in a London slum, he encounters coldness, nastiness, or a ruthless pragmatism. These cruelties are all key elements in Dickens's scathing criticism of his society's treatment of children. In her study of children in books by Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Eliot, and Dickens, Susmita Bhattacharya suggests that the inclusion of such elements in fiction was not uncommon during the Victorian period: "children [in these books] are portrayed as . . . deprived of parental care and affection and brutally exploited by the adult world" (vi), with the "child's position" in this "cross-section of Victorian fiction . . . one of misery, alienation, and wretchedness" (142). Yet as James R. Kincaid notes, *Oliver Twist* does not focus on a real child, but rather on the "static" Romantic Child who is "placed before our eyes for the watching" (37, 36). Oliver may be exemplary of the "child victim" so common in Victorian literature (Berry 1), but he also departs from this stereotype to reveal adults' surveillance and abuse of, wonder at, and pity for children and childhood, even as he eludes corruption

himself, remaining “magically untouched” by the abuse inflicted on him (Kincaid 37).

While the child in *Jacob Two-Two* is far removed from the Romantic Child whose innate goodness cannot be tainted by a harsh material reality, Richler’s book clearly recalls and reworks *Oliver Twist* in its settings, especially the prison that is part fog-shrouded dungeon—something out of a fairy-tale—and part “grim and forbidding” workhouse—out of *Oliver Twist*<sup>3</sup>—to which Jacob is taken. In an echo of Victorian child prison labour, Jacob and his two friends shovel coal into the prison’s fog-making machine. Arguing for the book’s parodic qualities, James Harrison points out that the sentence “Fog, fog everywhere” in Richler’s novel (29) is reminiscent of the second paragraph of Dickens’ *Bleak House*: “Fog everywhere” (13). The narrator of *Jacob-Two Two* comically doubles the fog, which for Dickens was a hallmark of Victorian London at a time when the pollution generated by coal burning shrouded the city in thick, dirty fogs. Richler similarly repeats Jacob’s request for more bread in prison, which echoes Oliver’s request for more porridge in the workhouse. Jacob’s wrongful apprehension for supposedly mocking adults and his subsequent time in court also clearly respond to Dickens’s novel.

As Jeannie Duckworth has noted, Dickens himself visited a number of adult and children’s prisons between 1835 and 1846 (57–58). His novel is in large part an indictment of the “intolerably dirty” (*Oliver*

*Twist* 62) conditions of British jails (or “gaols”) at the time and, more crucially perhaps, the hardships of jail: “it appears the most harmful time for a juvenile was the period he spent in gaol after he had been arrested” (Duckworth 60). Dickens nevertheless tempers our fear for Oliver by turning to Mr. Brownlow (a man whom Oliver is falsely accused of pickpocketing at a bookstall and who eventually adopts him) as a concerned adult placed between us and the imprisoned innocent. The man peeks in at Oliver after his arrest for the theft and looks “almost as rueful” as the boy; he tries to recall where he has seen him, and among his recollections passes over images of his dead fiancée and others now gone, thinking of their “beauty beyond the tomb . . . taken from earth only to be set up as a light, to shed a soft and gentle glow upon the path to Heaven” (63). Dickens draws attention to Oliver’s tomb-like prison while also looking ahead to the Christian-idealized death of innocents, not least of whom are children. Oliver, then, will be cared for, whether in the narrative or beyond it.

In Richler’s story, Jacob must comfort himself. Richler also sets his novel in England, around “Kingston Hill” (1) near London, where Richler lived with his children from 1963 until they returned to Canada in 1972 (Posner 145, 151, 161). Richler’s choice of setting for his novel leads to an odd statement on the part of critic Maria Nikolajeva: “I can imagine that England is somewhat of a mythical

country for Canadians, the Other country, the magic world" (14). As do other critics, Nikolajeva focuses on the book as a fantasy for children. But to see the book as a mockery of adult institutional authority through a child's eyes means that the setting of England not only amplifies Richler's echo of Dickens, but also offers a less English view of the child's confrontation with adult authority in the very country that acted as Canada's colonizing parent. England is not necessarily an "Other country" for Canadians, but is in many cases the Old country—an ancestral homeland whose nominal head remains a token symbol on Canadian money. Jacob's journey to greater self-assurance is both a postcolonial, twentieth-century journey—with Canada learning to be more self-reliant and determining, and less dependent on the oversight and approval of its imperial parent—and a reflection of children becoming more independent in the eyes of the state.

It is through Jacob's dream voyage that Richler tries to show us not adults' perception of unknown and uncared-for children, as Dickens does, but a child's imagining of adults and their institutions, along with some of the child's inner dreads, fears, and self-maturation. In carrying out an errand for his father early in the novel, Jacob thinks a greengrocer has enlisted a policeman to arrest him for mocking the vegetable shopkeeper, not realizing that the adult is pulling his leg. Later, Jacob spends an entire chapter of the novel imagining a nightmarish world formed

partly by his older brother Noah's scary story of schools as places with punishment cells and judges. The psychological prison of guilt and anxiety into which Jacob places himself has already been built up for children by gruff, serious adults. Yet the room is the first of many confined spaces where Jacob, unmoored from his parents, gains a sense of independence and authority because of his triumph over other adults. Oliver, stuck in callous, cold, early-nineteenth-century London, must rely on adults—from Fagan and Sikes to Nancy and Brownlow—for his survival.

The illustrations for both texts emphasize the sharp contrast between twentieth-century Jacob, psychologically and emotionally stranded, and nineteenth-century Oliver, materially and spiritually stranded. Roderick McGillis notes of Wegner's illustrations for Richler's story that they "remind us of the comic book (or cartoon) quality of the story" (37). They are equally reminiscent of Cruikshank's illustrations for Dickens's novel (Mahony, Latimer, and Folmsbee 38). In his drawings of often non-descript children's faces—two small circles for eyes that stare blankly—Wegner imitates Cruikshank's "bare, almost childlike rendering of facial features, particularly of the children with their hollow, staring eyes" (Steig 206). For Cruikshank and Wegner, the child's posture tells much of the tale. Although Cruikshank's illustrations are etchings and Wegner's are in ink, both illustrators' drawings for the texts are



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black and white, are representational, rely much on shading, and are left unframed, with edges not delineated clearly but left ragged or unclear. As Perry Nodelman argues, such unframed edges appeal for emotional involvement on the part of readers (*Pleasures* 136). Wegner, however, emphasizes that it is the persevering, rebellious spirit of the boys of Richler's text which helps them in their struggles, while Cruikshank's illustrations speak of the wretchedness, confinement, and confrontation with which the boys of Dickens's text struggle.

Cruikshank's illustrations mark singular events at "crucial moment[s]" of the story, whether it be Oliver trapped by Bill Sikes and Nancy in the street or Sikes about to destroy his dog (Paulson 56). Wegner's illustrations also depict key moments, from Jacob standing up to the greengrocer to Jacob and his two friends pulling on the switch that turns off the fog shrouding their island prison. But Cruikshank's illustrations of Oliver and other characters in the book are set physically apart from the text, in plates on their own pages, making the pictorial Oliver seem isolated or cut off from the story about him. Wegner's drawings usually appear on the same page as the text, an arrangement that may encourage readers to develop a sense of Jacob's loneliness from drawing and prose combined; here the pictorial Jacob stands closer to his textual counterpart. The captions for Cruikshank's illustrations (for example, "Oliver asking for more" and "Fagin in the condemned Cell") are summations of, and accompaniments to, a key scene, whereas Wegner's captionless illustrations simply stand across from, above, or below the written scene. In *Oliver Twist*, then, pictures and words are separate but related, while in *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* pictures and words are juxtaposed, with Wegner's pictures making for a more substantial story and more significant visual presence in the book than in Cruikshank's etchings.

While there are only twenty-five plates for Dickens's novel, there are twenty-nine drawings for Richler's much shorter book. A perusal of these drawings, even without reference to the verbal text, gives readers a sense of the action, particularly of Jacob's self-realization.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the first is a snapshot-like portrait of the children, with Jacob in the middle, left hand on his hip, dwarfed by his taller siblings and by the house behind (2), while the last is a portrait of a larger Jacob powerfully alone, left hand on his hip again, in a cape and with two "Child Power" logos emblazoned on his shirt (85). In *Oliver Twist*, Cruikshank's illustrations typically show a plaintive, anxious, or supplicating Oliver with people staring at him, looming over him, or surrounding him, darkness on the edges of the claustrophobic scene. As Anthony Burton notes, "other people . . . form groups from which Oliver stands excluded" (125). Wegner, on the other hand, tends to position Jacob with white space around him, suggesting both his isolation and the open ground he can seize as he comes into his own within his dream world, especially in those moments when he is standing up to adults. He appears to cast out their imposed gloom before he steps fully into the light on his own in the final drawing.

The different layouts of text and illustration reflect the change in readership, too, with Cruikshank's separate illustrations not only reflecting the printing process but also addressing readers more likely to

see words and pictures as separate. By the 1970s, and particularly after the widespread production and distribution of picture books, readers were regularly being offered a more involved, arguably more complex interweaving of words and pictures. So if "Cruikshank's picture is seen as if by a participant who can take in only one thing at a time," as Paulson argues (59), Wegner's pictures are seen by twentieth-century readers who, publishers, writers, and illustrators could assume, were more used to media that combine words and pictures, such as comic books or magazines.<sup>5</sup> The layout of words and pictures in *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, published at a time when and in a place where books had become commonplace and readily accessible to many children, further emphasizes late-twentieth-century assumptions about the interiority and particular mentality of a child's world. Children are left to make their own sense of Jacob's dilemma, melding or separating the words and pictures as they see fit. The fact that a great number of illustrations appear in such a short book reflects, perhaps, the assumption that the late-twentieth-century children have an increasingly visual sense of themselves as people who do not just talk about or speak to adults in a certain way, but who see the world in a certain way, often with themselves in the centre of the frame. Wegner's illustrations, then, add to the sense of a child's psychology that Richler is trying to evoke.

Close comparisons of specific scenes and

drawings in each book vividly illustrate the legal and psychological differences between the nineteenth- and the twentieth-century children created in these books. For example, Dickens's narrator describes Mr. Fang as having "no great quantity of hair: and what he had, growing on the back and sides of his head" (63). In *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, Wegner shows Jacob's lawyer, Louis Loser, his Prufrockian hair thinning and ill-fitting clothes crumpled, sitting on a chair in the darker corner of the bare cell looking worried and dishevelled (15).<sup>6</sup> Wegner's emphasis on the adult victim stands out when set beside Cruikshank's famous illustration of "Fagin in the condemned Cell" (see fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> Fagin looks out at us from his cell, where he is wide-eyed and huddled into himself. Cruikshank's original picture is considerably darker than Wegner's, because the distraught, wild-eyed, gaunt-cheeked, hook-nosed Fagin, staring at a wall of darkness and biting his nails as he sits on a cot in the dingy, close cell, his ankles shackled, knows he will soon be executed—a notice on the wall, "ORDERED BY The Sherriffs [sic]," suggests as much (see fig. 1). As Paulson remarks, "Compression, intensity, and pointed facial-bodily expression are the chief characteristics of Cruikshank's small plates. . . . His proper form is the small vertical rectangle or square with the image growing increasingly clear, dark, and concentrated as the center is approached" (59). Cruikshank heightens this

technique to the utmost here. The shadows, particularly on the left side of the image, gather around Fagin until there, dead centre, are the large whites of his eyes—full of dread and the horror of death—staring into the dark. Wegner's drawing is decidedly lighter in shading and mood (see fig. 2). Perhaps in a reflection of the twentieth-century emphasis on individual psychology, he uses blacker cross-hatching to bring attention to people, not to darken the atmosphere. The wall, then, is darker behind the very glum Loser. Jacob looks as concerned as he does thoughtful, so the focus is clearly on the lost adult bereft of self-esteem whom Jacob must avoid becoming. While Loser wallows in his inept adult-ness, Cruikshank suggests that the Jewish pickpocket leader is spiritually lost—an unopened Bible sits on a shelf above him in half-darkness.<sup>8</sup> Both illustrations reveal, in decidedly different ways, the wretched fate of these self-damned adults whom Oliver has already avoided and whom Jacob must continue to avoid. Fagin's fate, to die a man condemned by God, is both a physical and spiritual one, while Jacob's fate, if he allows it, is psychological—to become as glum, as down in the dumps, and generally as out-of-sorts as Loser.

Richler makes it clear that Jacob's trial is almost wholly psychological and emotional from the moment he meets his feeble legal representative: "the scruffiest, skinniest, and most untidy man Jacob Two-Two had ever seen" (12) is far less equipped for the adult world



**Figure 1:** Cruikshank illustration from the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, first published in 1846



**Figure 2:** Illustration © Fritz Wegner from *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, Tundra Books



than Jacob is. He finds himself consoling Louis Loser for never having won a case, and is pleased to discover that, like him, Loser “can’t sharpen a pencil without breaking it or slice bread evenly” (13). At this point, however, Jacob realizes that the man whose seemingly innate Loser-ness has been fulfilled by his self-pity and complete lack of confidence cannot defend himself, let alone his client. Jacob was “terrified” of the policeman (9) and now is “terrified” of his lawyer (14). The personifications of adult institutions offer him no support and he finds himself, once again, left to realize his own inner “Child Power” (22).

While Dickens offers a caustically satirical look at the system of incarceration, trial, and punishment in his London, Richler provides a comic mockery of arbitrary adult justice through the figures of the self-interested lawyers and the prejudiced juries in his society. The magistrate Fang is a dangerous fool in *Oliver Twist*, but in *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* the judge and jury seem “funny in their malevolence,” as Nodelman notes (“Jacob Two-Two” 31). The legal systems of the 1970s treated and defined the child subject quite differently than did the institutions of Victorian London. Indeed, in Chapter XI of *Oliver Twist*, the suggestion that children are little better than animals is clear from the “sort of wooden pen in which poor little Oliver was already deposited” (63). “[T]rembling very much at the awfulness of the scene” (63), Oliver is overwhelmed by his cold surroundings,

only to be terrorized further by adult authority.

Dickens both notes the incompetence of that authority and points out just how much awful power a man such as Fang can wield. Dickens’s novel targets adult institutions and individuals for indictment more than Richler’s, especially in the case of Mr. Fang, whose character was inspired by a magistrate at 54 Hatton Garden named Allan Stewart Laing. Dickens asked to be allowed to observe his “appearance” surreptitiously while he was writing the novel, “already knowing his character and needing a magistrate whose harshness and insolence would render him a fit subject to be ‘shewn up’ in the next instalment of *Oliver Twist*” (Tillotson 360).<sup>9</sup> After Brownlow expresses his concern about the boy, the magistrate offers his prejudgment as he dismisses Oliver’s illness, saying with a “sneer”: “Come; none of your tricks here, you young vagabond” (65). He demands to know Oliver’s identity even as he declares his criminality: “What’s your name, you hardened scoundrel?” (65). Fang is savagely uncaring, and his preconceived notions harden his heart even in the face of Oliver’s “fainting fit”—“‘I knew he was shamming,’ said Fang, as if this were incontestable proof of the fact” (66). Dickens excoriates the justice system’s utter lack of compassion for, or even interest in, the basic welfare of supposedly “delinquent” children. Steven Schlossman remarks that

“Juvenile delinquency” was increasingly used

to single out the suspicious activities of lower-class (often immigrant) children who occupied a netherworld in the bowels of the nation's growing cities. . . . Well before Dickens set the archetype to fiction, dire portraits of youthful urban predators were quite common among social commentators who popularized the new image of dangerous street urchins. (365)

Dickens shows Fang, a supposed legal authority, exerting a hard, cold, inflexible grip on defenceless childhood. It is only the bookstall keeper's breathless appearance and testimony at the last possible instant that forces Fang to revoke his earlier summary verdict committing Oliver to "three months,—hard labour" (66). Hard labour in children's prisons, which continued to increase the number of prisoners throughout the 1830s (Duckworth 75), was "intended to be punitive" and could entail picking oakum, pointlessly plodding on a treadmill, or working a crank (Duckworth 69), with flogging or straitjacketing possible further punishments for children who did not complete such daily labour; some children died, including some by suicide, after such punishments (Duckworth 70–71).

While Dickens's child protagonist is "insensible" throughout much of his time in court but saved by an adult (*Oliver Twist* 66), Jacob never seems confused or overwhelmed. Oliver needs help in a world far too

brutal, venal, and adult for his control, but Jacob's world is his dream formed by his dread. Once he braves a descent into it, keeps resisting adult control, and escapes this world, he conquers that dread. So Jacob stands up to a jury and the judge on his own. He is both bereft of protection yet independent. Jacob's character reflects the attitudes being formed at the time of the production of this story to children as individuals in their own right, separate from family and state (Archard 45, 47; see also Farson; Holt). Children's rights were increasingly asserted by the legal system in Western Europe and North America from the 1970s onward, meaning that children were not only recognized as non-adults but also had greater recourse to adult law, placing their "Child Power" both further beyond adult limits and more equal legally to adult power. Two historians of British social policy concerning children wrote in 1973 that there was now a "belief incomprehensible to earlier generations that children are citizens who have social rights independent of their parent's rights" (Pinchbeck and Hewitt 637). In their simultaneous outsider-ness and insider-ness, children threaten adults as a group. Not surprisingly, then, they tend to be represented en masse in Richler's book, less as persons than as a chorus of general antagonism toward, policing of, and guarding against children.

In Wegner's illustrations, Jacob enters the courtroom, defenceless and with a self-disbelieving

lawyer whose pitifulness Wegner further emphasizes by drawing him with his back to us and his hands to his head (see fig. 4). The smallness of the drawing, taking up just less than half of the page, adds to Jacob's littleness. While Cruikshank, too, often uses scale to make Oliver's vulnerability apparent, Wegner, in the drawing of Jacob's entry into the courtroom, uses the frame itself to suggest Jacob's littleness in the face of this big room dominated by big people. Yet those big people are sitting and Jacob stands in a defiant posture, resolutely himself even in the face of the tremendous size and imperiousness of the system, emphasized by the high desks, the tall platform for the wigged judge, a coat of arms looking down from above the judge's high chair, walls rising up to no visible end, and legal books stacked up around Mr. Justice Rough, the court clerk, and Louis Loser (18). Some of the books fall while the adults scatter and cower when Shapiro and O'Toole reveal themselves, the frame dramatically enlarged by Wegner, in the double-page spread soon after (22–23). In both of these ultimately reassuring illustrations, children stare down, stand up to, and burst out of the overdressed facade of a basically hollow adult institution.

Cruikshank's depiction of Oliver in court, pleading with a kindly magistrate not to have him bound to a chimney sweep, as Mr. Bumble wishes, is shaded with altogether different sentiments (see fig. 3). Here is a world that is both more intimate and more threatening,

where children must throw themselves upon the mercy of adults in the hope of benevolent justice. A railing and a small desk separate the magistrate from the boy, yet the emphasis is not on the room but on the crowd of adults who control Oliver's fate: Bumble, so sniffingly uncaring that he is taking snuff, the rather nasty-looking Mr. Gamfield, who would be Oliver's new master (and who looks much like Sikes), and two older, kind-looking magistrates. Oliver is shown in yet another variation on his recurring pose of abject supplication. He looks pale, undernourished, and generally pathetic. His cap on the ground, he kneels and clasps his hands, utterly helpless except for a desperate hope in the legal authority's Christian compassion. (The repeated accusations of Oliver as a thief are perhaps foreshadowed by a sign on the wall behind him, its only visible words "REWARD stolen.") As Cruikshank shows it, the justice system always threatens to loom over, accost, and corner the child, whose performance is desperately sincere.

The adult systems and institutions in Jacob's world are more abstract and removed from the child, yet they are also more dependent on the child to assert and sustain their power. In Richler's text, the relations between adult and child are complicated by adult eagerness to maintain the show of power. The representatives of adult power are all set against Jacob from the start of the trial, from "jeering spectators" (17) and prejudiced jury to Mr. Justice Rough himself, who



*Oliver escapes being bound apprentice to the Sweep*

**Figure 3:** Cruikshank illustration from the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, first published in 1846



**Figure 4:** Illustration © Fritz Wegner from *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, Tundra Books

growls that “insulting behavior, not to another brat—I mean, child—but, good heavens, *to a big person*” is so serious because it “could only lead,” if unpunished, “to more monstrous crimes” (18). Nevertheless, children now have the power to show that “big people” can be “WRONG” (18). This is especially so in court, where adults can be found guilty. Yet institutions, from homes to schools to stores, remain adult-run sites of power in which children can still be belittled, put in their place, and reminded of who is truly in charge. Thus, for Jacob, “in this court, as in life” (19), his very child-ness threatens the adult order because, as Nodelman has observed, Richler makes use of the common cultural assumption that children are wise in their innocence, making them all the more unwilling to go along with adults’ built-up pretenses (“Jacob Two-Two” 33–34). It is precisely for this reason that they must be contained, kept in check, even punished. The trial is set up to reassert adults’ infallibility and restore the idea that, as in Fang’s court, “little people are considered guilty, unless they can prove themselves innocent, which is just short of impossible” (19). Here is a satirical return to the idea, prevalent until the 1900s in didactic instruction, that incorrigible children are the bearers of original sin. Yet Jacob’s crime is more obviously psychological, moral, and inborn than the one committed by Oliver, who is made to feel an “unwelcome burden” in the workhouse and elsewhere because he is another mouth to feed in a

utilitarian system (Bhattacharya 37). Jacob’s sense of being a burden is not material and his guilt is not legal but stems from an obligation for simply being born: “‘Everything you have—’ continued Mr. Justice Rough . . . ‘YOU OWE TO US,’ chimed in the big people” (20). Adding insult to injury, Justice Rough declares that the punishment is “for your own good, naturally, and it hurts me more than it hurts you” (21). Adults in the late-twentieth-century West have been largely stripped of their previous right to abuse, mistreat, or discipline the child corporally, but they can and do resort to psychological tactics if they want to keep a Fang-like grip on the young in their charge. When this judge passes sentence, he takes his Dickensian predecessor’s harsh words about Oliver as a “scoundrel” and “shamming” and goes two better: “Jacob Two-Two, you are an unredeemed scoundrel, a charlatan, an ingrate, and a smart aleck to boot” (21). Soon after Jacob is led away from court, he has begun to believe in the guilt imposed on him by adults: “Jacob Two-Two retreated, convinced by his tormentors that there simply had to be a prison for little people as obnoxious as he was” (29).

When Jacob reaches that prison, he discovers that the warden is the Hooded Fang. A former wrestler whose sense of self-worth was shattered after he was laughed out of the ring by children, the Fang is eager to regain their awe and fear of him. It is at this point that Richler most clearly differentiates his representation

of child-adult relationships from Dickens's: the words of the twentieth-century child have much more force than those of the nineteenth-century child. The doubled words of Jacob and another little prisoner to their guards—"No sir. No sir" (34), "Can I have two slices [of bread], please? . . . Can I have two slices?" (34), "Please do . . . Please do" (36), "Please, sir . . . please, I've got a terrible tummyache" (39)—recall and multiply Oliver's most famous request, uttered twice, to the master in the workhouse during a meal of porridge:

"Please, sir, I want some more."

. . . "What!" said the master at length, in a faint voice.

"Please, sir," replied Oliver, "I want some more." (10)

Oliver's request reveals the material neglect (abuse, hunger, and poverty) of children in Dickens's time, when so many went wanting. In the middle-class, materially satisfied modern world of *Jacob Two-Two*, the Hooded Fang takes Jacob's double "No sir" directed at him as a mockery of his own weakened adult power. A child's words have weight and power in a society in which children are now viewed as people with their own rights. In Oliver's world of deprivation, labour, and illiteracy, a world where he is often simply trying to survive, adults can be ridiculous, pompous figures. Regardless, they retain too much authority

over the child's material well-being. In Jacob's world, the "juvenilization of adult characters" reveals the "empowering of the child" (McGillis 35). Adults are generally responsible and socially judged for not only meeting children's basic material needs, but also for nurturing their emotional and psychological well-being. "Good children" thus determine "good parents" as much as "good parents" determine "good children," even if some aspects of being a "good family" are put on for social appearances and expectations.

In the late twentieth century, children and adults expect children to be able to see past and to deflate adult performances of power. In "Writing Jacob Two-Two," Richler notes that his "favourite letter" in response to the book "begins by saying, 'I really liked your book *Jacob Two-Two Meets The Hooded Fang*'" (7, 8; emphasis added). The reader's suggestive characterization of Fang is obviously a gaffe, and yet, in the spirit of Baroness Emmuska Orczy's flamboyant Pimpernel, the book does offer a rather effeminate, campily masculine figure. A former wrestler, the Hooded Fang performs an exaggerated masculinity. He struts and swaggers in a feigned display of toughness, fierceness, and general machismo. The little boy Jacob immediately sees through his performance and ruins the man's image and fragile self-esteem. In his dream world, Jacob is never truly threatened because most of the adult authorities are simply, if reluctantly, going along with their own delusional shows of power. The



Dickens's work  
never exposes adult  
power as a show.



fact that Jacob generates these shows of power in his dream and can dismantle them underlines the absence of any real threat. Wegner's drawings support the sense that Jacob is in a dreamier, internal world of his own making, where he can find greater freedom and movement than Oliver can in his all-too-oppressive material world. These drawings usually offer less depth of field and detail than Cruikshank's, including walls that seem more like backdrops or facades, space around the increasingly powerful Jacob, and few sharp corners (with the exception of the illustration of the adult Mr. Fox being hemmed in by the Child Power of O'Toole and Shapiro). In Mr. Cooper's store, where the greengrocer pretends to be insulted by Jacob's repeated phrases, Wegner depicts Jacob standing as proud and tall as the adults to protest the charge (8). The adult world has no real power over the child but pretends to exercise it, a show that Jacob, too young presumably to understand tongue-in-cheek or ironic humour, takes seriously at that moment early in the story. Jacob's innocent pride, manifested in his willingness to stand up for himself even as he's being taken in by the adult show of authority, attests to the complexity of his psychology while also revealing his need to recognize and demystify adult power better. Jacob must eventually confront the show of adult power in order to mature as a child in twentieth-century Western society.

Dickens's work never exposes adult power as a show. Rather, as the shadowy corners and often crowded spaces in most of Cruikshank's drawings of him suggest, adult power remains darkly real and continues to close in on Oliver. In the picture that clearly inspired Wegner's greengrocer scene, Nancy, a basket in one hand (note the woman with a basket in Wegner's drawing), and Sikes step out of a beer parlour and arrest Oliver, who is shown to be trapped

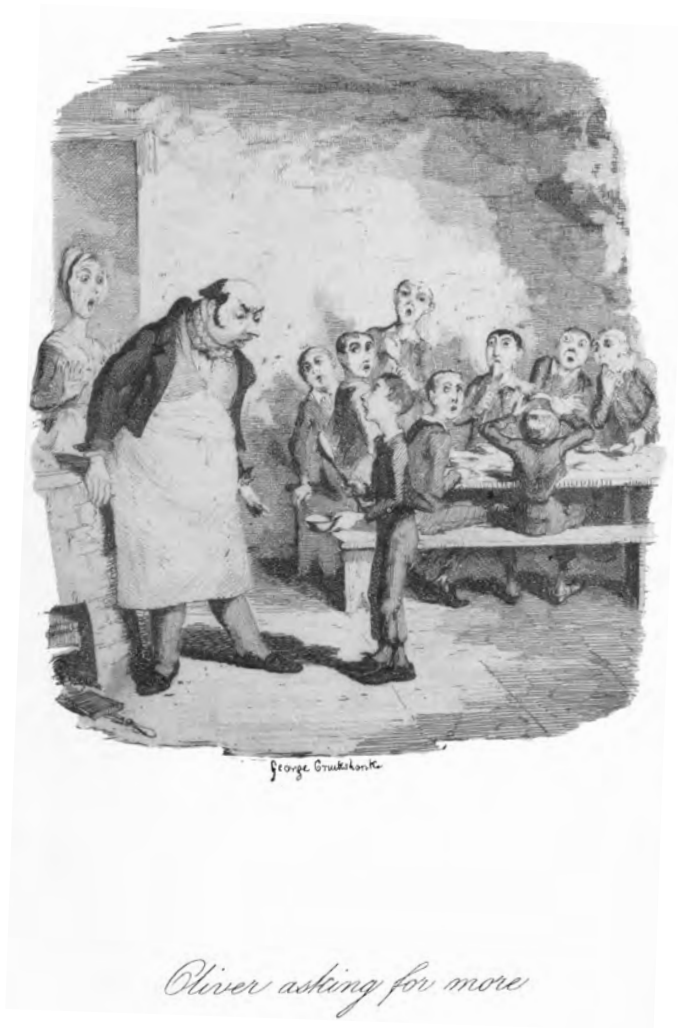
and bewildered (facing 82; the caption notes: “Oliver claimed by his affectionate friends”). Nancy and Sikes wrest him into their clutches by accusing him of running away from his parents, falling in with a bad crowd—ironically, since he has just fallen in with them—and stealing books. The boy appeals for help to those around, but they are all eager to believe him to be a “young villain” (94). Oliver cannot overcome the overwhelming social assumption of his delinquency. Even more than Jacob, Oliver comes to believe in his guilt as a general adult force beyond his control, which leads him into an overwhelming, dark prison of a slum:

Weak with recent illness; stupefied by the blows and the suddenness of the attack; terrified by the fierce growling of the dog, and the brutality of the man; and overpowered by the conviction of the bystanders that he really was the hardened little wretch he was described to be; what could one poor child do! Darkness had set in; it was a low neighbourhood; no help was near; resistance was useless. In another moment, he was dragged into a labyrinth of dark narrow courts: and forced along them, at a pace which rendered the few cries he dared to give utterance to, wholly unintelligible. It was of little moment, indeed, whether they were intelligible or no, for there was nobody to care for them, had they been ever so plain. (94)

Oliver’s passivity and helplessness are compounded with each successive enumeration of what threatens to overcome him, and the cold, claustrophobic trap of the city snaps tersely around him with Dickens’s sharp phrases. It is not even the boy himself but his searching words, floating away from him, that can find “nobody to care for them.” Oliver’s material abandonment is so stark that it is rendered in textual terms; he is reduced to the words he can utter, and only the author-narrator and we the readers are left to care for Oliver and his words.

The man who so easily kidnaps Oliver becomes, in Richler’s book, the man whom Jacob ultimately can best in order to show how much he has matured emotionally and psychologically. Bill Sikes’s appearance is dimly reflected in the look of the Hooded Fang: both give fierce looks beneath knotted brows, and Fang’s long sideburns echo Sikes’s sideburns and mutton-chop whiskers. Likewise, Wegner’s picture of the Hooded Fang looking down at Jacob in prison, his left hand half-clenched (35; see also 61), faintly echoes Cruikshank’s drawing of Sikes looking down at his dog (facing 277). But Wegner’s picture of the Hooded Fang glowering at this insolent new charge (see fig. 6) most obviously recalls the image of “Oliver asking for more,” with the master, also with sideburns and with his left hand rigid in a display of emotion, staring down beneath crossed, bushy brows at this impertinent whelp (see fig. 5).





**Figure 5:** Cruickshank illustration from the third edition of *Oliver Twist*, first published in 1846



**Figure 6:** Illustration © Fritz Wegner from *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, Tundra Books

Wegner repeats Cruikshank's workhouse bench and table, although these taper down without end and are populated by many more children in the children's prison dining hall (45). Jacob takes action by writing a letter to Shapiro and O'Toole, as the inmates are in despair around him (65). Cruikshank's animated, onlooking boys' wide eyes and open mouths in the orphanage serve to highlight the shocking effrontery of Oliver's simple request for a little more (bad) food—comically, one boy is slurping the last morsel out of his bowl. For the most part, the boys present a "bunch of indifferent and hostile faces" (Burton 125), with Oliver now excluded from them. In contrast, the listless despondence of Wegner's other, faintly drawn children only emphasizes Jacob's more facially detailed lack of glumness (45) or resolute heroism, such as the illustration showing Jacob taking action as a budding author (65). Late-twentieth-century Jacob is a special individual. These qualities are foregrounded as Jacob draws on them to become a leader, attracting friends and allies with his growing confidence in a world where only other children, such as fellow prisoners and fast friends Oscar and Pete, can be relied on in a battle against mean-looking adults. These adults are figures who, in greatest imitation of Cruikshank, are rendered slightly cartoonish and over-the-top (such as the scowling, bushy-browed Hooded Fang). Nineteenth-century Oliver must remain connected to a group, but he can also be excluded by it. Whereas

Jacob is first and foremost in the frame, Oliver needs the help of other children and of adults to escape from the clutches of oppressive and malevolent adult authorities. As Burton argues, the "theme of [Cruikshank's] sequence is the repeated captivity and escape of Oliver" (125), with his captivity and escape meant to move adult readers to pity and sympathy for the poor Victorian child. Jacob remains orphaned by Wegner's illustrations, which exclude his parents. In a place and a time in which adult institutions are legally bound to protect children, Wegner reminds us that Jacob's struggle—with unseen, dreaded, even distorted adult forces—is not external but internal and, because no adult can imagine or understand his dread, he must ultimately win the struggle with some help from like-suffering children.

The style of Dickens's and Richler's texts and of Cruikshank's and Wegner's illustrations are, then, reflective of child-adult relations in the 1830s and in the 1970s. Oliver needs adults to help him struggle in a harsh world. Dickens's narrator, moreover, exhibits care for Oliver, protecting him from the harshest of adult realities and punishments by having him faint in court or by referring to him as "poor little Oliver" to sway Victorian readers' sympathy for the child further (63). In a century when, as Malcolm Andrews notes, the child was "politically disenfranchised, economically dependent on the good will of his superiors, possessed of a dangerously undisciplined emotionalism, and



Oliver needs adults to  
help him struggle in a  
harsh world.



demonstrating an instinctive affinity with the folk culture of the poor” (21), Oliver needs help from adults. His challenges are hunger, poverty, neglect, and cruelty from without. Yet Oliver must also rely on his own skills to survive in a late-Georgian/early-Victorian London whose punitive attitude to children leads all too often to children internalizing blame and a growing belief in their innate, irrevocable sinfulness. So Dickens suggests in a book that sees the child in both a material and a religious light. Of course, Oliver is not a legally enfranchised child and so cannot overcome his material suffering nor is he a post-Freudian, self-conscious child and so cannot conquer the psychological ramifications of that material suffering.

Jacob can succeed on his own because, as Nodelman suggests, Richler’s plot is “wish-fulfillment, a depiction of how things ought to be” for the child protagonist (“Jacob Two-Two” 32). Richler takes care to make it clear that Jacob’s predicament arises from the boy’s own fears, though well founded, of adult authority; thus Jacob, almost entirely on his own, can thwart unjust adult authority and find his own “Child Power.” Jacob, however, lives in a time when such material suffering for children has been greatly reduced, and so, despite the persistence of harsh punishments devised by adults, the 1970s child feels less impotent. Nodelman notes that, in Jacob’s dream, “The nastier the judge and the crueller the punishment, the freer Jacob can feel of responsibility for his inadequacies” because “[t]here is no logic in being punished for what you cannot help, or in being punished so extravagantly . . . [and so] there is no need [for Jacob] to feel guilty” (“Jacob Two-Two” 33). Nodelman elaborates that “the world of Jacob’s dream is much *like* Freud’s description of paranoid delusions” but that Jacob

“is a sane and successful user of paranoid delusion” (35, 36).

At a time when the child was much closer to being seen, in the West, as a legally and morally independent person, Jacob can largely resolve his quest for self-assurance and safety by himself. For example, in waking up from his dream adventure he resolves his crisis within by hugging the truly soft-hearted, inner-child-hiding Hooded Fang, thus reconciling the two halves of his personality—the Fang-like “bad days” side (1) and his sunny-days side.<sup>10</sup> Anticipating Marx, Dickens is largely concerned with the material and class suffering of children, while Richler’s Jacob is the post-Freudian child, a figure not only afflicted with obligation to, guilt about, and social shame by the adult authorities in his or her life, but also capable of working through such psychological neuroses—in this storybook case, through a kind of dream therapy. While the “child became, in the Victorian period, an unwitting beacon as the adult sensed a loss of moral direction” (Andrews 25), ever-“virtuous, childlike” Oliver (81) is more a spotless looking glass that reveals the corrupting and corrupted London outside him, an often hellish world in which the material abuse of Fagin, Sikes, and others can spiritually damn the child. In Richler’s book, the “nastier these grownups are, the more ridiculous they become” (Nodelman, “Jacob Two-Two” 33) because they are Jacob’s fearful projections that he learns to control through confrontation, self-

confidence, and laughter. The “big people” world is a fog that Jacob both adds to in his dream (much as he and his fellow prison labourers keep producing fog in the Hooded Fang’s castle) and can also dispel, while the adult world is a bog for Oliver into or from which only adults can pull or rescue him.

All in all, *Oliver Twist* is a book about a child for Victorian adults with the aim of shaming and shocking adult authorities into action, while *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* is a cathartic, “comical attack on adult supremacy” for children to read with the aim of feeling empowered (Nodelman, “Jacob Two-Two” 36). Both stories try to help us “see the children about us not as empty pages . . . but as people, like us, needing not to be blamed” (Kincaid 41) and seeking fairness. Quite clearly by design, in both writing and illustration, *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang* is not merely, as Judith Saltman defines it, a “sly variation” of the generic Victorian children’s cautionary tale (83), but a partial reimagining and elegant reframing of a particular tale—*Oliver Twist*. Dickens offers an attack on poverty and injustice in London through the outward journey of a nearly corrupted (materially, morally, and spiritually), parentless boy; Richler offers an attack on adult anxiety and thus injustice to children in a post-children’s rights world, through the inward journey of a boy who feels he must go beyond his parents to develop a strong sense of self-worth. Cruikshank illustrates a boy besieged by

suspicious, conniving adults; Wegner illustrates a boy who slowly but surely asserts his own little power. The two books, separated by more than a hundred years of legislative, social, and cultural shifts in adult attitudes toward “little people,” offer fascinating visions and

revisions of “the child,” a concept that continues to be crucial to actual children, out there beyond the pages of books, in a world where adults still have “more” and still seem to wield power so unfairly in the form of that still-hooded concept of “Justice.”

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although the novel refers to some people, laws, and institutions that Dickens observed during the reign of King William IV, which some consider to be part of the Georgian period, the initial edition was published the year Queen Victoria took the throne in 1837. Differences between historical eras are obviously never as stark as such simplistic, year-based demarcations suggest, but I nevertheless refer to the novel as one from the Victorian period, mainly because it was being read by Victorian readers upon serialization and for many years in its three editions thereafter.

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from *Oliver Twist* as well as the citation of the Cruikshank frontispiece (as it is more clearly reproduced there) are taken from a 1982 reprint of the readily available 1966 Clarendon edition of Dickens’s novel, edited by Kathleen Tillotson and based on the third edition of the novel, first published in 1846. Citations of Cruikshank’s twenty-four illustrations, many of which are not reprinted in the Clarendon edition, are taken from an original third edition of the novel. Thanks to the Special Collections Room at the Scott Library, York University, for access to that edition.

<sup>3</sup> The workhouses of Dickens’s day, made most dire after 1834,

“were deliberately built to look as grim and forbidding as possible. ‘Their prison-like appearance,’ wrote an assistant commissioner with relish, ‘inspires a salutary dread’” (Pool 245).

<sup>4</sup> It is true that Cruikshank himself, as noted by Robert Shelton Mackenzie in *The Round Table* on 11 November 1865, felt that his series of etchings for the book were independent in their own right and related the story as a whole, but the book he was pictorially summing up was much longer, more detailed, and more involved than Richler’s. For different views of Cruikshank’s claims that these etchings actually formed the basis for *Oliver Twist*, see Stone; Vogler.

<sup>5</sup> Some of Wegner’s pictures, such as the faraway shot of Jacob and his siblings (2), the collected assortment of five methods of conveying Jacob to prison (27), and a bottom two-page spread of Jacob walking past children’s cell doors (38–39), seem reflective of twentieth-century cinema in their long-shot, montage, and tracking-shot qualities.

<sup>6</sup> In appearance, both Richler’s Loser and Mr. Fox, as drawn by Wegner, have hair mostly on the back and the sides of their heads

(12, 15, 43, 52, 72, 75); Mr. Fox may also be Jacob's dream double of Mr. Cooper, whom he resembles (8). In temperament and in authoritative status, however, Mr. Fang is reflected in both Mr. Justice Rough and the Hooded Fang.

<sup>7</sup> That image was perhaps already famous by 1846, for Cruikshank offers a different, smaller version at the centre of the bottom row of pictures for that year's "wrapper of monthly parts" revised and corrected by Dickens (*Oliver Twist* ii).

<sup>8</sup> Loser, like Fagin, is drawn with a long but even more hooked nose, a disturbing replication by Wegner, in a book by the Jewish Richler, of Cruikshank's visual echo of Dickens's anti-Semitic portrayal.

<sup>9</sup> From its first issue on the last day of 1831, writes David Paroissen,

*Figaro in London* . . . had waged an unrelenting campaign against Laing as "the black sheep among the beaks" [and in] the next six years the satirical weekly missed no opportunity

to remind readers of Laing's propensity for bullying witnesses, handing out harsh sentences and making stupid comments.

"Why a man holding a commission of the peace, should feel it incumbent on him to act like a fool and a barbarian, is to us wholly unaccountable," commented one editorial. (Paroissen 117)

This vociferous press campaign—and more directly an incident where Laing ran right into a gentleman on the street, then put *him* in custody—led to the Home Secretary's dismissal of Laing in January 1838 after seventeen years in his office (Paroissen 118–19). He reappeared in a plagiarism, *Oliver Twiss*, as a character named Slang, "with many more examples of his insolence" (Tillotson 360).

<sup>10</sup> Other interpretations of the dual nature of Jacob are, of course, quite possible, ranging from his less gendered, childish side and his tough-seeming, trying-to-act-adult side to his playful, freely imaginative and self-deluding side.

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