

Diabolic Trinity in *Oliver Twist*

Most readers and critics of *Oliver Twist* agree that the villains steal the show.¹ Fagin with his gang of prostitutes and pickpockets, part demon, part engaging domestic crony; Bill Sikes in his brute strength and surliness; even Monks, with his scar and his sensational epilepsy, have a vital presence and an imaginative power that the Brownlows and Maylies never achieve. Oliver, whom Dickens called "the principle of good surviving through every adverse circumstance,"² has for good reason latched onto the world's imagination as a victim, an object of compassion, a vehicle for pathos. But his virtues are of necessity mainly passive. The evil figures are the more evil for their roles vis-à-vis Oliver, in exploiting, terrorizing, and seeking to corrupt him; but in himself he can present no positive force for good. And the virtuous adults who range themselves on his side are colourless and ineffectual in comparison with their villainous antagonists. If in the outcome these faintly-imagined forces are to triumph over such figures as Fagin, Sikes, and Monks, it is only by some very visible string-pulling on the part of the author, and some rather contradictory suggestions that the forces of law and order in this society are better and juster than the rest of the novel has led us to believe.

"This world of Dickens is a world without God," says Graham Greene; "and as a substitute for the power and the glory of the omnipotent and omniscient are a few sentimental references to heaven, angels, [and] the sweet faces of the dead."³ The backing of any sense of conviction in a powerful deity may be absent from the presentation of the good characters; but there is instead an almost theological authority for the conception of the evil triumvirate of Fagin, Sikes, and Monks. For Dickens has as it were taken God to hell, and transformed his attributes to a diabolic inversion of divine knowledge, power, and love. For omniscience, we have Fagin, the informer, with his endless knowledge of what will hang his associates fastest. For omnipotence, we have Sikes, the brutal murderer, whose mode is violence. For

benevolence, there is Monks, motivelessly malignant, consumed with a desire to corrupt and destroy his brother. This "knot of . . . associates in crime," as Dickens called them,⁴ forms a tight ideological pattern which reinforces, if it does not create, the authenticity and extraordinary vitality of the characters in the "dark" half of the novel.

The classification of knowledge (or wisdom), power, and love (or goodness) as the principal aspects of God (and hence of the best faculties of man, made in God's image) was a commonplace of nineteenth-century Christian thought, with a long and respectable tradition going back as far as Augustine.⁵ Even the merely carnal sense of man, Calvin observed, confronted with the Creation, cannot but be aware of "the wisdom, power, and goodness, of the Author in producing such a work."⁶ The concept was given renewed vigour and publicity in Dickens's day by the publication of the Bridgewater Treatises. When he died in 1829, the Earl of Bridgewater left £8000 in the hands of the Royal Society for the publication of a series of works "On the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God, as manifested in the Creation"; a number of prominent scholars, including theologians like Thomas Chalmers and scientists like William Whewell, were duly commissioned to write the treatises, and they appeared with some *éclat* between 1833 and 1840.⁷ The tripartite formulation of the aspects of God, together with their reflection in man, was familiar and useful to several of Dickens's contemporaries. The concept is central to Browning's thought, and elaborated particularly in *Paracelsus* and "A Death in the Desert": and it was of more than passing interest to Wordsworth and Tennyson.

Theologians, philosophers, and even scientists, no less than artists, have delighted in the number three, and the three qualities we have been discussing turn up, with variations, in a number of different contexts. Ficino, the neo-Platonist reconciler of pagan philosophy with Christian thought, pronounces authoritatively, "No reasonable being doubts . . . that there are three kinds of life: the contemplative, the active, and the pleasurable (*contemplativa, activa, voluptuosa*). And three roads to felicity have been chosen by men: wisdom, power, and pleasure (*sapientia, potentia, voluptas*)."⁸ Over the centuries many correspondences have been elaborated between the aspects of God and the tripartite soul of man; the physical, passional, and rational modes of being; the three principal organs of the body, the liver, the heart and the brain, which are respectively the seats of appetite, passion and reason (a set of correspondences between physiology and psychology most memorably laid out by Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*); various chemical substances in alchemy; and so on. William Whitla, in

his study of Browning, has found it possible to devise a whole table of correspondences.⁹

A frequent connection in classical mythology was with the iconographic subject of the Judgement of Paris: Hera, Athene and Aphrodite, the queen of heaven and the goddesses of wisdom and beauty, offer Paris the rewards that are theirs to give, power, knowledge and love. Tennyson's "Oenone" of 1833 was a recent treatment of this subject. Dickens was familiar with at least one parodic version of the Judgement of Paris, the second plate of Hogarth's *Rake's Progress*.¹⁰ Here young Tom Rakewell chooses among the modern temptations of dancing and music, fencing and the martial arts, and sport, while a neo-classical painting on the wall depicts Paris choosing among the goddesses.

The three aspects of God were often, though not invariably, aligned with the persons of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit stood for omnipotence, benevolence, and omniscience respectively. In Donne's devotional poem "The Litanie" the first three stanzas are addressed separately to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; then follows the prayer to the Trinity:

As you distinguish'd undistinct
By power, love, knowledge bee,
Give mee a such selfe different instinct
Of these: let all mee elemented bee,
Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbered three.

The formulation of power, knowledge and love as the three aspects of God, then, was quite familiar in Dickens's day; and with variations the same configuration has formed a strong archetype in mythology and Christian doctrine. It was Dickens's inspiration in *Oliver Twist* to invert these qualities and to make them the dominant aspects of the evil beings in his world. To this extent his vision is indeed Manichaeian, as Greene calls it. Evil has its equal and opposite existence and power that are symmetrically opposed to the good. We are shown the kingdom of Satan as the dark reflection of the kingdom of God, and the Devil as being also a trinity figuring forth the diabolic inversions of "the Power, Wisdom and Goodness of God."

Fagin, as has been often pointed out,¹¹ is a devil, and made recognizable by many features traditionally ascribed to the devil: he wields a toasting-fork, he crouches over a fire, he hates the daylight, he is red-haired, and he leaves no footprints. Moreover, the other characters, like Sikes and Nancy, frequently refer to him as the devil (pp. 136, 338).¹²

But Fagin, though the most obvious incarnation of the devil in the book, is not the only one. Monks too leaves no footprints, and is called "a born devil," (p. 189) and boasts of burning in "hell's fire" (p. 279). The devil imagery is not so insistently connected with Bill Sikes, though he too is set apart from mankind in being "utterly and irredeemably bad."¹³ But he is still part of the knot of associates: the hands of the enterprise, so to speak, the necessary doer of the dirty work. All three are committed to the devil's task of the temptation and corruption of mankind — mankind in this case being represented by Oliver. But they need to specialise. Monks has the hatred and the will to destroy Oliver, but not the power ("I won't shed blood," he declares, although he would be happy to have him dead [1941]); Fagin collects the information and mediates; Bill enacts the burglary with Oliver and the murder of Nancy, but without an understanding of what he is doing.

If Fagin in this trinity stands for knowledge, it is not for knowledge as light and enlightenment. He works characteristically in the dark, and he deals in mysteries and secrets. The knowledge he most covets is knowledge of crime and misdoings, and that which is unknown to anyone else and which will consequently give him most power. As the narrative follows him on his undefined errands, stalking in dark labyrinths that none but he can thread, he is presented as wrapped in mystery, some dark *primaeval* force secretly on the prowl.

The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets. . . . It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal. (p. 135)

We seldom see Fagin eating or drinking—Bill Sikes is disgusted by his abstinence (p. 136)—and the "offal" on which he wants to feast is less likely to be food than some decaying piece of information that he can turn to account. The best repository for knowledge, so far as he is concerned, is in dead men, because they tell no tales. The soliloquy that Oliver overhears is almost a hymn to knowledge safely deposited, knowledge used to destroy the dangerous people, his enemies, and to preserve himself.

'Clever dogs! Clever dogs! Staunch to the last! Never told the old parson where they were. Never peached upon old Fagin! And why should they? It wouldn't have loosened the knot, or kept the drop up, a minute longer. . . . What a fine thing capital punishment is! Dead men never repent; dead men never bring awkward stories to light. Ah, it's a fine

thing for the trade! Five of'em strung up in a row, and none left to play booty, or turn white-livered!" (p. 59)

Among his many activities as gang leader, miser, and receiver of stolen goods, his main business is the getting and using of other people's secrets. There is something of the cannibal or the vampire about him in this activity. He lives and thrives on the deaths of others. As J. Hillis Miller observes, the denizens of Fagin's world live in "general fear of the unseen look that steals one's secret,"¹⁴ and so jeopardizes one's identity and even one's life. In an underworld society of spies, Fagin is the chief. He is always on the alert for more information, incriminating if possible. He has "a restless and suspicious manner habitual to him" (p. 136). And he is sharply aware of the nuances and fluctuations of Nancy's feelings for Oliver, in spite of all her efforts to disguise them. "I shall have it out of you, my girl, cunning as you are," he promises himself (p. 188).

We see in detail the process by which he gains power over Noah Claypole, and again it is by stealing his secret. First he spies on him through the dark window at the Three Cripples, described in detail as a convenient arrangement for watching customers without their knowledge.

Mounting a stool, he cautiously applied his eye to the pane of glass, from which secret post he could see Mr. Claypole . . .

'Aha!' he whispered, looking round to Barney, 'I like that fellow's looks. He'd be of use to us. . . . Don't make as much noise as a mouse, my dear, and let me hear 'em talk — let me hear 'em.'

He again applied his eye to the glass, and turning his ear to the partition, listened attentively: with a subtle and eager look upon his face, that might have appertained to some old goblin. (p. 321)

That is Fagin's *modus operandi*, watching and listening unseen, in a characteristic pose. Presently he overhears some incriminating words from Noah about the till he has robbed and the further robberies he intends, and then he has him where he wants him. He goes in and treats Noah and Charlotte to a drink.

'Good stuff that,' observed Mr. Claypole, smacking his lips.

'Dear!' said Fagin. 'A man need be always emptying a till, or a pocket, or a woman's reticule, or a house, or a mail-coach, or a bank, if he drinks it regularly.'

Mr. Claypole no sooner heard this extract from his own remarks than he fell back in his chair, and looked from the Jew to Charlotte with a countenance of ashy paleness and excessive terror. (p. 322)

Thereafter Noah is utterly under Fagin's control.

Fagin revels in the power over his associates that his cunningly acquired knowledge gives him. He proudly refers to himself as "I, that

know so much, and could hang so many besides myself!" (p. 358) And he contemptuously refers to his associates as "a drunken gang that I could whistle away the lives of!" (p. 189) Being offered Phil Barker as ripe for the taking, by the landlord of the Three Cripples, he enjoys the opportunity to play fate, to propose and dispose on the lives and deaths of his creatures. "Aha! But it's not Phil Barker's time," he responds. ". . . Phil has something more to do, before we can afford to part with him; so go back to the company, my dear, and tell them to lead merry lives — *while they last*. Ha! ha! ha!" (p. 188) If the right evil secret does not yet exist for his purposes, he does what he can to bring it about: so he has corrupted his gang of pickpockets and prostitutes; he tries to make a thief out of Oliver, and a murderess out of Nancy, and he succeeds in making a murderer out of Bill. In his relations with Nancy, particularly, we see him hungry for a determining knowledge of evil. "'With a little persuasion,' thought Fagin, 'what more likely than that she would consent to poison him [Bill]? . . . There would be the dangerous villain: the man I hate: gone; . . . and my influence over the girl, with a knowledge of this crime to back it, unlimited'" (p. 342). This is the demonic inversion of divine omniscience.

As one who exists by spying and informing, Fagin is particularly sensitive to being spied upon, to having his own secret stolen, as we learn early from the scene where Oliver overhears his soliloquy and watches his miserly gloating over his trinkets. As soon as he is aware that Oliver is awake, and watching and listening,

He closed the lid of the box with a loud crash; and, laying his hand on a bread knife which was on the table, started furiously up. He trembled very much though; for, even in his terror Oliver could see that the knife quivered in the air.

'What's that?' said the Jew. 'What do you watch me for? Why are you awake? What have you seen? Speak out, boy! Quick - quick! for your life!' (p. 59)

It is a charged moment. The creature of the slime and darkness, the unseen watcher, the dealer in other people's guilty secrets, cannot endure to be watched himself. He shows similar symptoms of panic when he has exposed more than he intends of himself and his motivation to Nancy (p. 190). To be observed and understood is to be undone, unmade, destroyed.

And here we come to the question of the defeat of evil in *Oliver Twist*, the harrowing of hell. Graham Greene observes that the good, as inadequately conceived in the novel, is too weak and ineffectual to overcome the evil convincingly, and thus that we cannot believe in the quenching of these dark forces. "We read of the defeat of Monks, and of Fagin screaming in the condemned cell, and of Sikes dangling from

his self-made noose, but we don't believe."¹⁵ And yet, although it is hard to conceive of Brownlow and the Maylies as powerful and triumphant, we do believe it - the deaths of Sikes and Fagin have an imaginative force that matches that of their lives. It is not that good triumphs, but that evil, of its very nature, ultimately destroys itself. It is inverted, perverted, monstrous; and as such is bound to explode or collapse, by the same laws of moral physics that make Mrs. Clennam's house fall, in hideous ruin and combustion down, in *Little Dorrit*.

Fagin's end has a dire appropriateness for the diabolic inversion of divine knowledge. He is arrested as the result of a relentless series of self-generating acts of revelation. Fagin the informer employs another spy, Noah Claypole, to spy on another informer, Nancy. With the same obsessive fear that he had shown in other scenes when too much has been brought to light about him, he informs on the informer, letting Bill understand much more than the truth of what Nancy has told Rose Maylie. (In fact she had refused to betray either Bill or Fagin.) It is Bill's brutal murder of Nancy, as instigated by Fagin, and its coming to light as the sun at last rises on the criminal world, that leads to the exposure and collapse of the whole dark fabric, the arrest of Fagin and the pursuit of Sikes.

Fagin at the trial and in the condemned cell is the informer informed on, the peacher peached against. He is suffering a punishment that tellingly matches his crime, and his function as diabolic knowledge. As the workings of his mind are described in detail, it is clear that he is suffering a kind of torture of consciousness, as of fronting the sun with lidless eyes. He is achingly, agonizingly, infinitely aware: aware at the same time of the huge fact of his impending horrible death, the death to which he had sent so many others, and of the minutest distracting detail of the scene surrounding him.

Not that, all this time, his mind was, for an instant, free from one oppressive overwhelming sense of the grave that opened at his feet; it was ever present to him, but in a vague and general way, and he could not fix his thoughts upon it. Thus, even while he trembled, and turned burning hot at the idea of speedy death, he fell to counting the iron spikes before him, and wondering how the head of one had been broken off, and whether they would mend it, or leave it as it was. (p. 405)

With this burden of appalling knowledge already piled on him, he is nevertheless stuck in his old pose of eager spying and listening, as though forever doomed to go on knowing more and more: "He stood there, in all this glare of living light, with one hand resting on the wooden slab before him, the other held to his ear, and his head thrust forward to enable him to catch with greater distinctness every word that fell from the presiding judge" (p. 404). There he is, the watcher

from dark places, the listener, the gatherer of guilty secrets; but now the secrets being exposed are his own, the knowledge he is to gain that of his own condemnation to death. And he is himself exposed, utterly and defencelessly, to the total and terrible scrutiny of the universe:

The court was paved, from floor to roof, with human faces. Inquisitive and eager eyes peered from every inch of space. From the rail before the dock, away into the sharpest angle of the smallest corner in the galleries, all looks were fixed upon one man — Fagin. Before him and behind: above, below, on the right and on the left: he seemed to stand surrounded by a firmament, all bright with gleaming eyes. (p. 404)

"It is a universe which has become all eyes," as Miller says, "eyes which see into every corner of one's soul, and do not have leave any recess which is free or secret."¹⁶ Fagin's role as knowledge of evil in Dickens's presentation of the diabolic trinity is not just part of an abstract ideological pattern: it gives an informing dramatic force to some of the most powerful passages in the novel.

The divine power of creation finds its demonic inversion in the violence and destructiveness of Bill Sikes, the housebreaker and brutal murderer. It is hardly necessary to document his violence and ferocity — he acts them out at every appearance. He has "the kind of legs, which. . . always look in an unfinished and incomplete state without a set of fetters to garnish them" (p. 86). His living quarters are furnished with "two or three heavy bludgeons" and an ironically named "life-preserver" (p. 137), and his favourite playthings are a crowbar and a boxed set of housebreaking tools (p. 142). His speech is largely made up of oaths, threats, and abuse. Here is a sample, from his exclamations when he is on the run and pursued by dogs: "'Wolves tear your throats!' muttered Sikes, grinding his teeth. 'I wish I was among some of you; you'd howl the hoarser for it.' . . . Sikes growled forth this imprecation, with the most desperate ferocity that his desperate nature was capable of" (p. 203). His mind, what there is of it, can linger over fantasies of violent cruelty. Asked what he would do to Noah if he turned informer, Bill responds, "I'd grind his skull under the iron heel of my boot into as many grains as there are hairs upon his head" (p. 358). In the running heads to the chapter on his pursuit and death, he is twice called "the wild beast" (pp. 387, 391). In short, as Fagin tells Nancy, "he's a brute, Nance, a brute-beast" (p. 341).

One can learn more about Bill Sikes from his dog, who also habitually "growls." For Bill's dog is like Miss Havisham's wedding-cake,¹⁷ a metaphoric extension of the character, and a commentary on it. Bill and his dog both have white coats (pp. 103, 287), they show the same signs of getting into violent fights (p. 86), and when Bill drinks hard, the dog gets red-eyed (p. 103). The dog's name, Bull's-eye, suggesting

"Bill's eye," is useful here, as Bull's-eye does indeed act as his master's organ and instrument. When he is tired of a tirade from Nancy, Bill threatens, "if I hear you for half a minute longer, the dog shall have such a grip on your throat as'll tear some of that screaming voice out" (p. 339). And when he has recaptured Oliver from the Brownlow household, he can similarly use his dog as an extension of his own power. "Here, Bull's-eye, mind him, boy! Mind him!" (p. 108). So Bull's-eye enacts for Bill what Bill enacts for Fagin. One might call them both cat's-paws, but that the term is inappropriately feline.

This technique of extension, quite common in Dickens, is psychologically interesting here. For Bull's-eye, while being identified with Bill, is also separate from him, and so their relation is a correlative for Bill's self-estimate, and for his relation with himself. Considering the degree to which their interests and characters seem to be identified, the relation between the man and his dog is stormy and hostile. This is their first entry:

'Come in, d'ye hear?' growled this engaging ruffian 'Why didn't you come in afore? ... You're getting too proud to own me afore company, are you? Lie Down!'

This command was accompanied with a kick, which sent the animal to the other end of the room. He appeared well used to it, however. (p. 86)

If Bill assumes the dog is ashamed of him, it appears to be because he is on no very good terms with himself. This suggestion is reinforced by an apparently gratuitous scene of startling ferocity on their next appearance. Dickens plays upon his readers' sentimental preconceptions about the unquestioning devotion expected of man's best friend. Bill, drunk and surly, has just delivered a kick and a curse on the dog, for no particular reason:

Dogs are not generally apt to revenge injuries inflicted upon them by their masters; but Mr. Sikes's dog, having faults of temper in common with his owner, ... made no more ado but at once fixed his teeth in one of the half-boots. Having given it a hearty shake, he retired, growling, under a form; just escaping the pewter measure which Mr. Sikes levelled at his head.

'You would, would you?' said Sikes, seizing the poker in one hand, and deliberately opening with the other a large clasp knife, which he drew from his pocket. 'Come here, you born devil! Come here! D'ye hear?'

The dog no doubt heard; because Mr. Sikes spoke in the very harshest key of a very harsh voice; but, appearing to entertain some unaccountable objection to having his throat cut, he remained where he was, and growled more fiercely than before: at the same time grasping the end of the poker between his teeth, and biting at it like a wild beast. (pp. 103-104)

This scene of escalating ferocity is the more suggestive for the fact that we have been shown Bill and Bull's-eye as being identified. What we have is a scene of fiercely dramatised self-hatred. Bill's generalised brutality and savagery against the whole external world is an extension of his self-distrust, and so eventually turns back upon himself. The first person that he murders is the one being in the world who loves him, the woman who is closest to being flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. After that he tries again to kill Bull's-eye, this time by drowning. Then, as he had feared, the crowd tracks him down by following his dog, so that Bull's-eye in a sense betrays him. The next being he kills is inevitably himself, in that memorable scene of self-execution. And, in case his own weight has not been enough to break his neck at the end of the noose, the dog leaps down to reinforce it, and thereby destroys also his other self.

So Bill Sikes, the diabolic inversion of divine power, by a kind of inner necessity, turns his brutal power against himself, and is destroyed by it. This aspect of evil, like Fagin's evil knowledge, has been monstrous, ingrown, and must eventually self-destruct.

Monks is clearly not so successful a creation as Fagin or Sikes, and his part in *Oliver Twist* has been much criticized. Dickens has quite unabashedly endowed him with all the conventional marks of the melodramatic villain: he is tall, dark and haggard, and scarred. He even wears a cloak, and uses, among others, the standard villain's oath of "Curses" (p. 245). Moreover, he is inextricably involved in the elaborate mechanism of what Arnold Kettle derogatorily calls "the plot," the final explanation involving Oliver's real parentage, the burned will, and the explanation of Monks' and his cohorts' attempt to corrupt Oliver.¹⁸ (In fact the real plot of *Oliver Twist* is surely much greater and more comprehensive than this mechanical piece of it, and comprehends the whole action of the novel.)

Some weaknesses in the conception of this character being conceded, Monks nevertheless remains a figure of some power. He does not collapse for being recognized as in large part conventional. He has at least one hauntingly memorable scene of almost apocalyptic dimensions, in which he confronts the trembling Mr. Bumble and his wife during a storm. His epileptic seizures, which Dickens uses to suggest some horrible communion with the dark powers, make him more sinister and frightening than the usual moustache-curling villain. And in completing a pattern his presence also enhances the conceptions of the more powerful creations of Fagin and Sikes. Monks is one of Fagin's secrets, and in being unknown is the more effective in precipitating the uncomprehending violence of Sikes.

Until the ending we cannot fathom Monks's motive for his obsessive loathing of Oliver. And to Oliver too he is an inexplicable emanation, a surreal apparition, horrifying, as Magwitch is to Pip, for apparently starting up from nowhere and having no rhyme or reason. Oliver bumps into a stranger, by accident, when he is intent on another errand; and finds he has unwittingly awakened a malignity far in excess of the cause. The man curses him "in a horrible passion"; shakes his fist, and tries to strike him; and then falls down impotently, "writhing and foaming, in a fit" (p. 245). The episode has considerable power, and the more for being unexplained at the time.

Even when we do get the explanation, in the laborious last chapters, it doesn't provide Monks with any very sufficient reason for his hatred of his half-brother Oliver. According to their father's will, the younger brother was to inherit the fortune only if he had behaved himself: hence Monks's pact with Fagin to make a thief of Oliver. But that will, we are further told, was burned, and no evidence remains that it had ever existed. So though Monks' hatred comes across convincingly enough, it remains essentially unmotivated, really an emanation from a being whose whole existence is hatred.

Monks completes the trinity, embodying the diabolic inversion of love as Fagin embodies that of knowledge and Sikes that of power. In his case his allegorical function as hatred is made most explicit. He received as a bequest from his mother, he says, "her unquenchable and deadly hatred," and swears to pursue his infant brother "with the bitterest and most unrelenting animosity; to vent upon it [the child] the hatred that I deeply felt; and to spit upon the empty vaunt of that insulting will by dragging it, if I could, to the very gallows-foot" (p. 397). As Sikes' violence is significantly turned against the woman who loves him, his other half, so Monks' hatred is against his brother.

Unlike Fagin and Sikes, Monks is left alive at the end. But his life also is to be his defeat, the logical self-annihilation that their deaths are, as a prolonged existence of generalised loathing at last centres in himself: he is to go on, we are to suppose, "mutter[ing] curses on himself in the impotence of baffled malice" (p. 397). He is to be like Spenser's Malbecco, Jealousy, or love turned into hatred, forever trying to destroy himself, and never succeeding.

Although I have shown how Dickens uses the traditional configuration of knowledge, power, and love as the aspects of God in order to give additional force and impact to his conception of evil, I have so far skirted the issue of whether he also used the alignments of these aspects with the three persons of the Trinity. Here I must admit to being tentative. Allegorical criticism is a primrose path, and there is great

temptation to be too ingenious. Having admitted so much, however, I will proceed among the primroses.

It seems to me that Dickens did have in mind the presentation of a demonic parody of the Trinity, somewhat in the manner of Milton's Satan, Death, and Sin, the hellish parody of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The analogies are not made explicit, and are not all worked out with equal consistency; but echoes at least are traceable.

To begin again with Fagin, who in this set of analogies would correspond with the Holy Spirit: a major irony is that he, the *spiritus*, the breath, should most fully manifest his power through death by strangulation. The recurrent motif of breathing, suffocation, and death by hanging in the novel,¹⁹ which attaches to Oliver as well as to the underworld characters, centres on Fagin, from his initial paean of praise to the noble institution of capital punishment by hanging to his final terrified vision of "the black stage, the cross-beam, the rope, and all the hideous apparatus of death" (p. 411). For his demonic parody of the Holy Ghost, Dickens has also made Fagin ghostly. The imagery consistently attached to him is that of the spectre, a revenant returned from the grave. Bill calls him an "old skeleton," and "a ugly ghost just rose from the grave" (p. 136), and shudders when Fagin lays his "withered old claw" on his shoulder (p. 338). His body is decayed, with black fingernails, discoloured fangs, and tattered garments. In one of his final appearances, when he is preparing to loose Bill's fury on Nancy, he is described as "less like a man, than like some hideous phantom, moist from the grave, and worried by an evil spirit" (p. 356). From such ghoulies and ghosties, Dickens prompts his readers to pray, good Lord, deliver us.

And what of Monks, the Son, *generatus* as the Father is *generator*? He is aligned with mankind as the incarnation, as Monks is Oliver's brother. He is marked out by a scar, "a broad red mark, like a burn or a scald" (p. 353) on his neck, reminiscent of the "branded and ensanguined brow . . . like Cain's or Christ's" - an archetypal mark for villains as for Christ, as Shelley reminds us: the motif is used again by Melville for Ahab and even by Trollope for his villain George Vavasor.

When God explicitly makes Christ manifest, it is at his baptism. John the Baptist predicts that while he baptises men with water, Jesus will baptise them with the Holy Ghost, and with fire; and when he baptises Jesus, the heavens are opened, the Spirit of God descends on the Son and God's voice is heard (Matthew: 3: 3-7). There are certain infernal parallels to this scene in Monks' midnight assignation with the Bumbles, pitched between the fire of heaven and the engulfing tide of black water below. There is almost a supernatural manifestation: "a

bright flash of lightning streamed down the aperture, and a peal of thunder followed, which shook the crazy building to its centre." Monks covers his face with his hands; and, when he uncovers it, "showed, to the unspeakable discomposure of Mr. Bumble, that it was much distorted, and discoloured" (pp. 279-280). He has undergone, in fact, a kind of transfiguration. Presently he ritually immolates the last proofs of Oliver's identity in the dark water. It is a kind of reverse baptism.

Although Monks as the demonic incarnation is appropriately the brother of Oliver, mankind, we don't hear much about his role as Son. What we do hear, however, is significant. He was the product of a loveless union, and was taught to hate his father by his unredeemed mother. Brownlow calls him "the sole and most unnatural issue" of his parents' marriage (p. 374) — "unnatural," presumably, because of his birthmark, his epilepsy, and his hatred for his father. We have here, I think, some reminiscence of Milton's Death, the monstrous product of an incestuous union of Satan with Sin: an "odious offspring," "dreadful and deform," his parents' "inbredemie," "Son and foe" (*Paradise Lost*, II, 11. 706-804).

There is less to be made of Bill Sikes as the Father, *generator*, except in his role as destroyer, already discussed. But God the Father, the stern law-giving God of the Old Testament, who cruelly tested Abraham and Job, drowned most of the world's population in the flood, and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, was a somewhat unpopular figure with many Victorians; and perhaps Bill, the brutal criminal, rather appropriately parodies the stern lawgiver, the jealous and vengeful Jehovah. But there is one more precise parallel that may have been deliberate: one of God's most memorable appearances on earth was to Moses, in the burning bush: "and [Moses] looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed" (Exodus: 3:2). On one occasion Bill Sikes too appears to be at home in a fire: on his flight after the murder, he joins the fire-fighters, and to the astonishment of the onlookers is not consumed: "in every part of that great fire was he; but he bore a charmed life" (p. 369).

Though my analogies with the persons of the Christian Trinity must be tentative, the trio of Fagin, Sikes and Monks as a demonic inversion of knowledge, power and love seems to me to be too fully developed in the novel to be accidental. That configuration is not only a familiar part of Christian doctrine, but well established in philosophy and mythology. It recurs, in fact, with the frequency of an archetype. Dickens himself was to use it again in another early novel. Kathleen Tillotson has pointed out that there is an "almost allegorical juxtaposition" of the leaders of the mob in *Barnaby Rudge*, Dennis, Hugh and

Barnaby, but does not further elaborate.²⁰ Here we have again a parody of the same configuration: for divine wisdom, Barnaby the idiot; for divine power, Hugh the brute beast;²¹ and for divine love, Dennis the vocational hangman. An evil trio very similar to Dickens's turns up in Conrad's *Victory*, in the refined and intellectual Mr. Jones (who like Fagin is developed through imagery of spectres and corpses), the lustful and savage Ricardo (whose face is also scarred), and the hirsute neanderthal Pedro. As Heyst allegorically introduces them to Lena, "Here they are before you — evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm; the brute force is at the back (*Victory*, IV, chapter 5).

One more instance. It has been often observed that the *Wizard of Oz*, of all the Oz books that Baum wrote, is the only one to have caught the popular imagination sufficiently to have become a classic, and to have achieved for itself something of the status of a myth. This has been attributed to the particular appeal of Dorothy's three cohorts, the immortal Scarecrow, Tin Woodman, and lion (another beast). They represent between them, it has been pointed out, animal, vegetable, and mineral. But their memorable fellowship has a more familiar pattern still: in their appealing quests for a brain, a heart, and courage (Burton would have said a liver)—the very organs and qualities that each signally possesses already—they too are a version of the same allegorical configuration of wisdom, love and power.

Dickens's Fagin, Sikes, and to a lesser extent Monks, are memorable first as superbly imagined and individual creations, invested with vividly evoked physical appearance, speech, action, and mannerisms, and impressive for the concentration of their rendering; but one aspect of their power over our imaginations is this mythic configuration by which they are familiar as well as original, relate to each other not only as individuals but as part of a whole, and are terrifyingly effective as the dark shadow of divine omniscience, omnipotence, and benevolence.

NOTES

1. I single out, as the most memorable statements of the vitality of Fagin and the dark side of *Oliver Twist*, Arnold Kettle's chapter on *Oliver Twist* in *An Introduction to the English Novel* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1951), I, pp. 115-129; and Graham Greene's "The Young Dickens," in *Collected Essays* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969), pp. 101-110.
2. Preface to the third edition, 1840.
3. Greene, p. 108.
4. 1840 preface.
5. See the informative discussion of this concept by William Whittle, *The Central Truth: The Incarnation in Browning's Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp. 46-51.
6. *Institutes*, I, pp. xvi, 1. John Allen's translation of 1813.

7. See Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), I, pp. 560-61.
8. See Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries of the Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), p. 82.
9. Whittla, p. 48.
10. In the 1840 Preface to *Oliver Twist* Dickens mentioned Hogarth as his precedent for the realistic depiction of scenes of low life; and he had been delighted by reviews that compared him with Hogarth. See [The Pilgrim Edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965-), I, p. 538. We know that Hogarth's engravings became household objects for Dickens in later life: a set of forty-eight reproductions, framed and glazed, adorned the hall, and later Dickens's bedroom, at Gadshill. See Harry P. Martin, "The Visual Imaginations of Dickens and Hogarth: Structure and Scene," *Studies in the Novel*, 6 (1974), p. 145.
11. See Mary Hamilton Law, "The Indebtedness of *Oliver Twist* to Defoe's *History of the Devil*," *PMLA*, 40 (1925), pp. 892-7; and Lauriat Lane, Jr., "The Devil in *Oliver Twist*," *The Dickensian*, 52 (1956), pp. 132-3.
12. Page references are to *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* in the Oxford Illustrated Dickens.
13. 1840 Preface.
14. *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 50.
15. Greene, p. 109. Arnold Kettle too, surprisingly, finds Fagin's last scene unconvincing, because it has been made subject to the inadequate "plot" of the novel. Kettle, p. 128.
16. Miller, p. 65.
17. See Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1953), p. 131.
18. Kettle, p. 140 ff.
19. This is discussed by Miller, p. 38 ff.; and by Mary Rohrberger, "The Daydream and the Nightmare: Surreality in *Oliver Twist*," *Studies in the Humanities*, 6 (1978), pp. 21-28.
20. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen and Co., 1957), p. 86.
21. On the consistent characterization of Hugh as an animal, see R. D. McMaster, "Man into Beast in Dickensian Caricature," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 31 (1962), pp. 354-61.