



Oliver Twist

Charles Dickens

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Oliver Twist, subtitled *The Parish Boy's Progress*, is the second novel by English author Charles Dickens, published by Richard Bentley in 1838. The story is about an orphan, Oliver Twist, who endures a miserable existence in a workhouse and then is placed with an undertaker. He escapes and travels to London where he meets the Artful Dodger, leader of a gang of juvenile pickpockets. Naïvely unaware of their unlawful activities, Oliver is led to the lair of their elderly criminal trainer Fagin. Oliver Twist is notable for Dickens's unromantic portrayal of criminals and their sordid lives. The book exposed the cruel treatment of the many orphans in London during the Dickensian era. The book's subtitle, *The Parish Boy's Progress*, alludes to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and also to a pair of popular 18th-century caricature series by William Hogarth, *A Rake's Progress* and *A Harlot's Progress*. An early example of the social novel, the book calls the public's attention to various contemporary evils, including child labour, the recruitment of children as criminals, and the presence of street children. Dickens mocks the hypocrisies of his time by surrounding the novel's serious themes with sarcasm and dark humour. The novel may have been inspired by the story of Robert Blincoe, an orphan whose account of hardships as a child labourer in a cotton mill was widely read in the 1830s. It is likely that Dickens's own early youth as a child labourer contributed to the story's development. Oliver Twist has been the subject of numerous film and television adaptations, and is the basis for a highly successful musical play and the multiple Academy Award winning 1968 motion picture made from it.

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