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TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

**An Analysis of Dickens' Cinematic Language  
in *Oliver Twist* Film Adaptations:  
Blackton, Cowen and Lean.**

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## Abstract

Since the beginning of cinema, scholars and filmmakers have been interested in film adaptations of literary works, whose history is as long as cinema itself. Pioneering auteurs such as Eisenstein or Griffith assert that the key element of the relationship between literature and cinema lies in Dickens' narrative language. An exceptional illustration of this kind of language can be found in Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* (1838), on which this research has been based to identify and analyse not only its cinematographic language but also the role of Cruikshank's original illustrations included along with the text. Research on how these aspects have been conveyed to the film adaptations by Blackton (1909), by Cowen (1933) and by Lean (1948) demonstrates that success lies in the understanding and identification of the linguistic techniques that bring up the cinematic nuance.

**Keywords:** cinema, language, film adaptations, Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, Cruikshank.

## Resumen

Desde los inicios del cine, los académicos y cineastas se han interesado por las adaptaciones cinematográficas de obras literarias, cuya historia es tan larga como el cine mismo. Autores pioneros como Eisenstein o Griffith afirman que la clave de la relación entre literatura y cine reside en el lenguaje narrativo de Dickens. Un ejemplo excepcional de este tipo de lenguaje se encuentra en la novela de Dickens *Oliver Twist* (1838), en la que se ha basado esta investigación para identificar y analizar no sólo su lenguaje cinematográfico, sino también las ilustraciones originales de Cruikshank incluidas en el texto. Posteriormente, la investigación sobre cómo estas se han transmitido en las adaptaciones cinematográficas de Blackton (1909), de Cowen (1933) y de Lean (1948) revela que el éxito radica en la comprensión e identificación de las técnicas lingüísticas que dotan al texto de un matiz cinematográfico.

**Palabras clave:** cine, lenguaje, adaptaciones cinematográficas, Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, Cruikshank.

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## Introduction

Numerous studies on film adaptations of literary works have been constantly produced, ever since the early twentieth century. The times that the film adaptations of any of Dickens' novels have been critically discussed are also multiple, ever since Eisenstein unveiled to the general public the intrinsic relationship between Griffith's cinema and Dickens narrative. Since then, some of the monographs that stand out are, for instance, Linda Sharan's *The relationship between Dickens' novels and the Language and Conventions of the Cinema* (1977) as well as Adrian Wootton's *Adapting Dickens* (2012). Hence, many of the secrets and unknowns about this amazing process have been already revealed to the public. Most of these studies, though, are focused on one film adaptation only or a particular aspect of the cinematographic production and, in fact, in none of them a comparative analysis of several films based on the cinematographic language of the original text has conducted.

Our personal interest is centered on the novel *Oliver Twist* and the film adaptations based on it that have been produced throughout history, a total of thirteen, especially those closest to the critical and cinematographic production of Griffith and Eisenstein, in the first half of the twentieth century. This dissertation, therefore, deals with film adaptations of *Oliver Twist* and, specifically, focuses on those produced by James S. Blackton in 1909, by William J. Cowen in 1933 and by David Lean in 1948.

To that aim, I have first read and learned about the different trends on film adaptation that have been developed in parallel with the ongoing evolution of cinema, and about the cinematographic language in Dickens' writings; concluding that, in regard to the theory of adaptation in recent times, which contrasts with the earliest theories, the fidelity to the source story is not the most relevant element to consider; and that in Dickens' language there are many cinematographic features such as the use of descriptive detailed language and the simultaneity. Then I have watched each film and I have analysed it according to those parameters to unfold what has been taken into account from the original novel for its production.

The results of this analysis are organized into four chapters: in the first one, I not only summarize the different theoretical trends regarding film adaptation theory from

the early nineteenth century up to the present, but I also reveal the cinematographic features found in Dicken's and in *Oliver Twist*'s language. In the second, third and fourth chapters, I analyse the original text's cinematographic features that have been resorted to for the transfer from the written to the film form, such as the descriptive language used for characters' appearance and behaviour and for geographical locations, or the narrated simultaneity, and how they have been carried out by Blackton, Cowen and Lean respectively. In addition, I also discuss the decisive role the Cruikshank's illustrations proved to play in the cinematic form.

An attempt is made to show that the success for a film adaptation based on Dickens' *Oliver Twist* to be accepted and even acclaimed or, instead, to be not well received by the audience and critics is very likely to lie in understanding the text source and extracting the linguistic techniques that provide the cinematographic feature.

I would not like to conclude without first acknowledging my father for all his unconditional support, my tutor for her constant attention and assistance, Professor Francisco J. Domínguez Burrieza, from the Department of History of the Art, for his kind collaboration and, last but no least, TIMMIS Emprendedurismo for providing the professional component to my dissertation.

## Film Adaptations, Dickens and *Oliver Twist*

### Adaptation theory development

The relations between literature and cinema are characterized by reciprocal influences generated during the creative act of screening or writing, and it is possible to affirm that such relationships, insofar as they take on more and new nuances, could be studied from different approaches through which I will go later on, from the conveyance of faithfulness to the study of intertextuality between a film and its literary source. Since its earliest days, cinema has found a key ally in literature that has contributed in many of its best screenplays as these arts might share some of their narrative techniques. Over the past century, the multiple connections they establish have been the scholars' area of study. However, they have had to hang on for a fuller development of the seventh art for a steady scientific-literary discussion on the transmission from page to screen.

The challenge of transposing literary works into film is one of the most striking and engaging aspects that interests the specialists within the world of filmmaking. Among the varied kind of studies considering literature and film relations, the most overriding and frequent one is the adaptation of literature to cinema. The methods and criteria used are very diverse, and they are not only influenced by the peculiarity of the adaptor's perspectives, but also by the direction of evolution in which this field has been developed, from a prior consideration of fidelity from the film to the text source, to the study of the connections and intertextuality between both.

Since the breakthrough of cinema in the late nineteenth century, it does not take long until the creation of "Faust", by the Lumière brothers in 1896, the first motion picture in the history of cinema adapted from a literary source (qtd. in Gómez 246). Early cinema has the strong motive of screening "narrative material" (Buchanan 9) to get the viewer's feeling of being reading a film. In any case, it appears that the common trend of thought until the early twentieth century is based on the idea that the screen adaptation must keep utmost faithfulness to the literary work, so that adapting existing literary works is just a practice of story-telling. Correspondingly, filmmakers depend upon the audience's familiarity with the original as the brevity of the films of that era is



such that the project consisted in showing “cinematically animated, brief, visual quotations from a work” (Buchanan 21). However, in the 1920s, Bela Balázs makes a ground-breaking statement asserting that “film script is an entirely new literary form”. He considers the novel is “a potential raw material to be modified at will by the writer of the screenplay” (in Mukherji 94). Thus, the adaptation is regarded for first time as a new independent entity which is not at a lesser level when comparing it with its narrative source.

The study of film-literature relations is deepened and, in mid-twentieth century, the well-known and reputable Eisenstein adds that he observes shooting scripts in many narrative texts. He recognizes montage and camera techniques in novels such as *Oliver Twist*, through which “equal effects can be achieved both on page and screen” (Mukherji 99). However, a few years later, George Bluestone goes further regarding film adaptation theory. He not only considers both the film adaptation and literary source, but also the adapter, a figure never mentioned before and who is said to become “a true author, not a mere translator of another’s work” (in Mukherji 100). His theory lays down a linking point between the two media that shifts amongst them both to understand and overcome the conflicting conventions between page and screen.

Moving onto the 1960s, several sorts of approaches are undertaken for the development of film adaptation. Some of the most significant instances are Bruce Morissette’s and André Bazin’s theory. On the one hand, Morissette asserts that the literary work and the screenplay share something aesthetic and meaningful in itself, beyond the form they have, and its common aim is “the conveyance of images” (in Mukherji 97). Hence both the word on each page and each scene in every film are created to cross the material nature and get into the reader and viewer respectively. On the other hand, André Bazin retakes Balázs’ theory and suggests that rather than working upon a ‘raw material’, in the process of adaptation the screenwriter shall maintain the ‘spirit’ from the literary source. He does not regard the term ‘faithfulness’, but ‘fidelity’ when considering that, although the adaptation is a new entity, the process for its creation consists on translating “from a linguistic medium to a visual medium” (in Mukherji 108), and so the adapter is not seen as a true author, but an interpreter.

In attempting to discern a sharper study focused on film adaptation, it is not until one century after the beginning of filmmaking that the concept of adaptation is outlined in categories. Dudley Andrew makes a clear distinction among the types of relations between the screenplay and the written text, and he states that these are three: borrowing, by which the core of the original is conveyed without creating a replica of it; intersection, which consists on an aesthetic transposition of what is adaptive from the source work; and adaptation, in which the film form is a skeleton that is being suited to an existing text with the aim of making the audience see “the world it comes from and the world towards which it points” (in Mukherji 107), so this relation goes further implying also a sociological concern. Hence, from now on filmmakers realize that there is no single kind of conveyance between page and screen.

From the beginning of the twenty-first century onwards, the adaptation process is becoming increasingly prominent, and now the scholars’ study area is focused on the intertextuality of both mediums, rather than regarding their correspondence in terms of fidelity. Eisenstein’s theory about ‘cinematic’ literary works is retaken but considering more aspects such as the story and the discourse, as suggested by Linda Hutcheon (2006), for whom an adaptation is a “repetition without replication” (in Leitch 101). This new assertion is about reaching the study of both a cinematized novel and a literary film that questions the apparent mismatch regarding page and screen, trying to bridge firm connections between the written and the film form.

### **Dickens as transitional writer from photography to moving pictures.**

If there is a literary period that has witnessed the transition from photography to moving picture and that has been present since the beginning of cinematography times is the Victorian era. We could even consider the idea that contemporary readers of late nineteenth-century literature might coincide with the first viewers of cinematic language. In fact, in accordance with Antonija Primorac’s essay *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation*, it is the “continuous generation of adaptations which proves – as much as it ensures – that the Victorian texts remain relevant and alive” (457). Consequently, narrative texts written during the Victorian period have been conveyed to screen since the earliest days of film adaptation.

And if there is a central Victorian writer whose novels played a key role for the great renowned David Wark Griffith to finally state the basis for film language, that is Charles Dickens. Griffith himself acknowledges that in Dickensian narrative he finds something about cinematic language and techniques that is not achieved by any other writer. He underscores this information in the following interview by A. B. Walkey in *The Times* in 1922, which is compiled in Eisenstein's essay *Dickens, Griffith and the film today* (1977):

His best ideas, it appears, have come to him from Dickens, who has always been his favorite author... Dickens inspired Mr Griffith with an idea, and his employers (mere "business" men) were horrified at it; but, says Mr Griffith, "I went home, re-read one of Dickens's novels, and Came back next day to tell them they could either make use of my idea or dismiss me." Mr Griffith found the idea to which he clung thus heroically in Dickens. (...) The idea is merely that of a "break" in the narrative, a shifting of the story from one group of characters to another group. People who write the long and crowded novels that Dickens did (...) find this practice a convenience. You will meet with it in Thackeray, George Eliot, Trollope, Meredith, Hardy, and I suppose, every other Victorian novelist. Mr Griffith might have found the same practice not only in Dumas (...) but also in great artists like Tolstoy, Turgeniev and Balzac. But, as a matter of fact, it was not in any of these others, but in Dickens that he found it; and it is significant of the predominant influence of Dickens that he should be quoted as an authority for a device which is really common to fiction at large.

### **Dickens' cinematic techniques**

Not in vain can we assert that Dickens' literature offers, perhaps involuntarily, some clues for the first steps in the film adaptation theory development. Considering this statement, one may wonder what is so special and unique about Charles Dickens' novels that makes them so cinematic. Indeed, this is what Linda Sharan wonders herself and tries to find out a response in her Doctoral Thesis *Dickens Cinematic Techniques* (1977). She asserts that "what distinguishes Dickens from his contemporaries and successors is his ability to 'see'" (1), and it certainly is his early working experience as journalist that enabled him this capacity of great visual imagination and contributed on him to become, as Stefan Zweig recalls in Sharan's, "a visualizing genius" (75).

Sharan's thesis together with some other scholars' ideas help recognize many cinematic features in Dickens' writings. At first blush, this writer focuses his narrative

style on a remarkable closely detailed observation. In a deeper reading, however, it is observed that Dickens' works are so compelling for filmmakers as they lend themselves “to film adaptation because of the way he constructed his stories, the dramatic larger than life creation of his most famous characters and the way his descriptive brilliance created scenes that were innately cinematic, almost like screenplays for a medium yet to be invented” (Wootton 2012). The novelist hence gets a narrative technique by which, as it were film montage, links together different scenes geographically separated without losing sight of every detail.

Moreover, Dickens' writing is also characterised for depicting, as he does in *Oliver Twist*, the street-scenes of the different cityscapes of London as it had never been done before. Gifted with a journalistic sharpening eye and additionally to the foregoing, his narrative technique, likely to the camera lens, helps the novelist provide a precise description not only of the simultaneous acts that are taking place, but also of the different characters involved. This simultaneity is an inner feature of cinema when dealing with ‘screening’ as in the same way it broadens one single way of seeing, in accordance with Eisenstein, we find an ‘atmosphere’ of “always and everywhere” (199) in which Dickens raises many different modes of visual perception and tries to dismantle the frame of the visible (qtd. in Sharan 40, 52). He therefore anticipates cinematographic techniques on his writing upon which, together with close-up, he develops an outstanding talent for description as if each detail is zoomed.

In addition, Dickens expected his novels to go hand-in-hand with illustrations, done by George Cruickshank, which “are not a separate dimension of the text but an integral part of it” (Sharan 3,4). These illustrations further embellish the narrative in such extent that, when they are omitted, the reader misses part of the plot effect. It could be said that Dickens himself, indeed, monitored the illustrators the same way a filmmaker instructs a working team. Thus, in Dickensian literature written and visual elements cannot be separated as the illustrations provide a meaning which may not be explicitly expressed in the text.

Looking now at the socio-historical context surrounding Dickensian and Victorian novels in general terms, with the industrialization, nineteenth-century British society must move to the urban and adapt themselves to the speed-up of modern life.

Art was also affected by this alteration and so writers had to foster “a philosophy of progress” (Sharan 49). But it must be born in mind the fact that, within a framework where only cultivated people had access to literary texts, Dickens’ popularity spread along and reached also an illiterate audience “due to the mass-availability created by cheap serial publication as opposed to the half-guinea volume” (Sharan 5). Readers were expected to have an active role to engage the visual component of his writing, and so novels could be read aloud “in middle-class households by the head of the house to an assembly of family and servants. In this way, the consumption of Dickens' novels by the nineteenth-century audience more closely resembled a performance” (5). This, together with the illustrations, contributed to the visualization of his narratives and, afterwards, to be taken to the big screen.

### **Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* on screen**

As the literary narrative of Charles Dickens is considered among “the most highly adaptable and regularly adapted literature appropriated for the screen” (DeBona in Holt 254), film adaptations based on his novels are amazingly useful for displaying the wide variety of possibilities they might have to be screened. Regarding Dickens’ most famous novels, the three that stand out among the remainder for the numerous times they have been brought to the big screen are *Oliver Twist* (1838), *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *David Copperfield* (1850), well above upon other such as *Hard Times* (1854) or *Little Dorrit* (1857). Film directors face a great challenge when adapting such popular classic novels since the audience is already familiar with the source text and they have some prior expectations. Additionally, the film story is generally made in accordance with the contemporary social concerns. Hence, when dealing with adaptation, it should be considered that it is not only about conveying a literary text to screen, but also adapting the screened production to the present-day audience.

The case in point of Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* seems paradigmatic as one might like to understand how its film adaptations have evolved over the time. There exist thirteen cinematographic productions based on this novel, from the earliest in 1909, directed by J. Stuart Blackton, to the latest in 2005, by Roman Polanski, and as in parallel with the remainder film adaptations of Dickens’ novels, *Oliver Twist* versions have changed significantly. First *Oliver Twist* films, well into the 1910s, are commonly composed of

‘tableaus’ that simply take to stage the iconic scenes from the novel as, for instance, the 1909, 1912 or 1916 films do. In the first case, Blackton’s film is a speed-up version clocking of just over 10 minutes long production and so the audience is trusted “to keep up across the narrative leaps” (Buchanan 21). Reviewers agree with this statement and even add that they “don't really know what to make of this piece other than it being a crowd pleaser, for it zips along too fast to really savour anything” (Deepbluefunk on letterboxd) or, contrarily, that “a long description is scarcely necessary. Everyone knows the story of *Oliver Twist*, and has sympathized with him in his difficulties. They will do so more than ever after seeing this picture” (Deickemeyer on IMDb).

Then Thomas Bentley’s *Oliver Twist* (1912) is a four-reel film that comes out amidst a rash of many other tributes honouring the centenary of Dickens’ birth. This production was appreciated for its set, story-telling, cast or costume, and noteworthily Bentley retains the original Cruikshank’s illustrations but with “the additional advantage of working in a living medium instead of in pen, pencil and paints” (Bioscope on Buchanan 23). In this production the adapter maintains total fidelity to the text source and so the audience can esteem this animated novel, in which apart for including everything essential, there are also some instances of innovation particularly of material consideration (Buchanan 23).

From the 1920s onwards, films become more sophisticated and complex. A very engaging instance is Frank Lloyd’s *Oliver Twist* (1922), the last silent film adaptation with a formidable Lon Chaney portraying Fagin and a magnificent embodiment of *Oliver Twist* by Jackie Coogan, one of the child stars of the silent era. This adaptation was considered lost until the 1970s, when it was found in Yugoslavia and included in the ‘Dickens Before Sound’ collection by the British Film Institute. Some reviewers assert that “for this version screenwriters (...) have attempted to cram in just about every subplot and minor character, quite a feat for a 74-minute runtime. As such there are a lot of title cards quickly glossing over some point, with characters popping up and disappearing without really being introduced” (Steffi\_P on IMDb) and that “there is a real effort to bring about the dinginess and poverty of 19th century London” (kidboots on IMDb).

The arrival of sound in the 1930s allows several studios to expend many resources in voicing the awesome language of Dickens' dialogues. In 1933, the earliest sound film of *Oliver Twist*, by William J. Cowen, comes out but it is, however, a low-budget American production around 80 minutes long that might be addressed to demonstrate that sound *per se* does not make a film to be better. Most people criticising the film agree that there is a lack of production values and emphasize the unsuccessful poor casting of Dickie Moore as Oliver Twist. For instance, Judy Rimmer asserts in her blog 'Movie Classics' that this version is one of the weakest and disappointing Dicken's films she has seen although she recognises that it has some powerful sequences. Moreover, J. Luis Rivera shares Judy's view and adds in his blog 'W-Cinema' that this film left a lot to be desired. Finally, another reviewer, Editor Eric, concludes in his website that overall this film is a good attempt as the spirit of Dickens is retained but recommends watching it first to then being able to appreciate the greater film to come, referring to David Lean's.

Moving into the 1940s and 1950s, film industry creates more inner and authentic adaptations of Dickens' novels reflecting the social and political changes of post World War I context (qtd. in Wootton). Retaking our study case, David Lean takes on *Oliver Twist* in 1948 after his success in adapting *Great Expectations* in 1946, in which the actor Alec Guinness played Herbert Pocket in his screen debut. Two years later Guinness has a starring role as Fagin in Leans' second film adaptation from a Dickens novel. This version is widely praised in most countries although it is controversial in some others such as the United States, where the film was banned for three years arguing that Guinness' portrayal of Fagin is anti-Semitic (Britannica Encyclopedia). Finally, only after some modifications the film is firstly screened in 1951. Many critics venture to claim that this is the best adaptation of Dickens' *Oliver Twist* ever made. For instance, Andrew Pulver asserts in *The Guardian* that Lean creates a rhythmic style and sets the story right from the start:

Lean, however, makes much of the dank alleyways and noisome garrets that provide many of the story's locales - no doubt touching a nerve with a British audience becoming inured to postwar privation. False-perspective sets and occasional expressionist camera techniques (...) are key in establishing Lean's cinematic equivalent to the Dickens grotesque.

Jumping into the 1980s, the Marxist adaptation of *Oliver Twist* by Clive Donner (1982) is a critical reading of the source text that contributes to fully understand the story plot, and to prove that it is possible a variety of different interpretations. Its contemporary audience is highly influenced by their current social and historical context and, consequently, Donner emphasizes the socio-political implications of the novel “evoking parallels between Victorian social dilemmas and the economic crisis confronting 1980s audiences who were caught in worldwide recession” (in Holt 254). Thus, Donner’s 103-minute film essays a different approach of the narrative never explored before and, according to Ans Wijngaarden’s review in *Cinemazine*, it

shows the rough and violent side of the underworld in which Oliver ends up.

The most recent adaptation of *Oliver Twist* is taken on by Roman Polanski and released in 2005 partly because “Dickens [sic] stories and characters have a timeless appeal for audiences” (Wootton “Adapting Dickens”). Polanski himself recognizes that only after watching David Lean’s film he started being interested in the story of *Oliver Twist* (qtd. in Ciment). He intentionally produces a film focused on detail that could be seen, understood and enjoyed not only by the general audience, but also by the children, including his own. Polanski declares that admires Dickens techniques for writing and so he contracts his cinematographic version implying a clear reverence to the original text. Critics such as Ann Hornaday identify this aim and conclude that the film is a “high-toned, handsomely mounted, scrupulously literate adaptation of a beloved classic novel” (Hornaday “Straight-Arrow ‘Oliver Twist’”). Conversely, she points out the fact that such a reverence to the book actually makes the production to render inert. Consequently, “the story remains unsullied” (Hornaday) and there is a mismatched production as contemporary society might claim a movie adapted to the current social concerns.

### **What makes *Oliver Twist* story timeless?**

Most Dickensian novels deal with social and political issues that, far from going away, have remained for many years as relevant as when they were published for first time. The author himself declares in the 1841 Preface that he wished “to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at



last” (in Horne “Crime in *Oliver Twist*”). In fact, this pursuit of happiness is a timeless concern for any society without due date. Cinema and the techniques used for film production, in contrast, cannot remain in the past and must evolve together with the technological and social progress. Filmmakers shall be capable of prevailing the core ideas they want to convey when taking on a film adaptation from a literary source since the final production should success in bridging the classic with the latest advances.

Among all the cinematographic adaptations based on Charles Dickens novels, the ones I will be working on to study and analyse the conveyance of cinematic language from the original text to screen are the 1909, 1933 and 1948 films. They are respectively the first *Oliver Twist* screened adaptation ever made, the first sound film production and the best considered cinematographic adaptation. Firstly, I will delve into the cinematic techniques present in *Oliver Twist* novel. Then I will analyse *Oliver Twist* film adaptations and how cinematic language is transferred from the text to the screen to, finally, conclude with the core reasons that make the novel that much suitable for cinema.

### **Cinematographic techniques in *Oliver Twist* (1838)**

The film techniques used by Dickens in his novels have been a matter of deep and repeated discussions as I have already mentioned. Everything that has been said on this subject in general terms can perfectly be applied and observed particularly in the novel *Oliver Twist*. In this masterpiece, Dickens not only makes an extraordinary use of language, notably regarding descriptions and the selection of adjectives, but also accompanies the narration of little Oliver’s story with a total of 24 sharp illustrations by Cruickshank that perfectly correspond to the words used for each description. These descriptions and illustrations may be the key elements to look at to convey the written story to screen, so that it may be argued that the broadcast method chosen by the filmmaker will cause the success or failure of the final production.

Dickens’ great achievement towards the readers is that, without necessarily regarding the illustrations, they could perfectly depict in their mind a detailed image of every scene. It has to be ascertained that a single term, *description* in this case, might be used to refer to several aspects. Interestingly, this term is, according to Philippe Hamon in Seymour Chatman’s essay ‘What Is Description in the Cinema?’ (1984), “a figure of

thought by development, which, instead of simply indicating an object, renders it somehow visible, by the vivid and animated exposition of its most interesting properties and circumstances” (4). That rendered visibility, indeed, highly contributes to make written words and illustrations in *Oliver Twist* that much suitable for screened productions. There are three main types of descriptions continuously recurrent throughout the novel which deal with characters appearance, characters movements and behaviour, or geographical locations.

#### **a) Selection of adjectives**

The author’s selection of adjectives might influence the feelings of readers the same way that a film director’s literary script could do with viewers. For instance, the reader might sympathise with Oliver as easily as he arouses a feeling of rejection towards Fagin from the first time they are respectively mentioned. On the one hand, still in the earliest lines, Oliver has difficulties in breathing since the first moment after birth. The reader, therefore, might already have a feeling of agony and concern for Oliver’s survival that is going to remain active until the last page of the novel. Additionally, this idea of a weak but triumphant character is reassured in Oliver’s description, once he turns eight, of a “pale, thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference. But nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver’s breast” (7). Readers henceforth may have a singular regard towards Oliver and be engaged with his story. On the other hand, Fagin’s depiction begins with “a very old shrivelled Jew, whose villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair” (64). This implies much more beyond a simple appearance description since the reader might already have a preconception about Fagin’s personality or morality before reading the forthcoming lines and events.

## b) Language for characters appearance

It is commonly known the saying ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’ but it could be asserted, however, that in this case it is the reverse as every word contributes to bringing the characters and locations from paper to life. Dickens’ descriptions for characters appearance could perfectly be used for film cast and clothing indications. Looking at the particular instance of Mr Brownlow, he is introduced in scene by “the old gentleman was a very respectable-looking personage, with a powdered head and gold spectacles; dressed in a bottle-green coat with black velvet collar, and white trousers: with a smart bamboo cane under his arm” (74). This detailed description is indeed used for an actor’s costumes in films adapted from the original text, such as Blackton’s (1909), as well as it could well be applied to dramatization for a theatrical performance. Additionally, the description goes together with an illustration (Fig. 1), so both words and the image meet all needs for shooting that scene, as it happens in the twenty-three remaining illustrations as well.



Fig.1 Cruikshank’s *Oliver* amazed at the Dodger’s mode of ‘going to work’  
(David Perdue’s CDP)

### c) Language for characters movements and behaviour

All the illustrations contribute in the filmmaking process to not only the physical aspect of characters, but also to how they behave, where they are placed, and what the mise-en-scene is like. Despite illustrations are static, they come alive in Dickens' words. Hence, a simple image is enough to represent a complete cinematographic scene. In order to describe Fagin's den, for example, Dickens uses the following words:

The walls and ceiling of the room were perfectly black with age and dirt. There was a deal-table before the fire, upon which was a candle stuck in a ginger-beer bottle; two or three pewter pots, a loaf and butter, and a plate. In a frying-pan which was on the fire, and which was secured to the mantel-shelf by a string, some sausages were cooking; abs standing over them, with a toasting-fork in his hand was a very old shrivelled Jew (...) dressed in a greasy flannel gown, with his throat bare, and seemed to be dividing his attention between the frying-pan and a clothes-horse, over which a great number of silk handkerchiefs were hanging. (64)



Fig. 2 Cruikshank's *Oliver* introduced to the respectable *Old Gentleman*  
(David Perdue's *CDP*)

This illustration perfectly exemplifies a ‘static movement’ since readers not only could very easily imagine Fagin turning his head back and forth and his face expression by reading the text, but also, they can see the direction he is turning to due to the visual element provided by the image. Consequently, readers might instinctively give movement to the paper drawing, and so it comes alive. It is a matter of reading Dickens cinematographic language, and film directors act as readers that bring the novel to life in their own way in the film adaptations.

#### **d) Language for geographical descriptions**

Considering now the language Dickens uses for describing geographical locations, it is characterized for achieving such a sharp point that readers’ eyes are focused on through those of the characters, this way the former might see what the latter see. Looking at the passage, for instance, when Oliver Twist is taken by Bill Sikes and another man to commit a burglary, they leave London and pass “Kensington, Hammersmith, Chiswick, Kew Bridge, Brentford” (172) until they reach the public-house *Coach and Horses*, from where

they turned round to the left a short way past the public-house, and then, taking a right-hand road, walked on for a long time, passing many large gardens and gentlemen’s houses on both sides of the way, and at length crossing a little bridge which led them into Twickenham; from which town they reached another town, in which, against the wall of a house, Oliver saw written up in pretty large letters ‘Hampton’. Turning round by a public-house which bore the sign of the Red Lion, they kept on by the river side for a short distance, and then Sikes, striking off into a narrow street, walked straight to an old public-house with a defaced sign-board. (173)

Readers can see and plot the route the characters follow and go hand-in-hand with them as they were just one more in the narration. Therefore, readers are active participants in the story and their five senses go together with those of the characters to share a complete experience. Specifically, readers empathise with little Oliver and accompany him in all his misfortunes wherever they take place.

### e) Simultaneity

One of Dickens' great achievements in writing regards the simultaneity of the space-time relation. Yet well Griffith argued in 1953, according to S. Eisenstein's article *Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today* (1977), that suggesting parallel 'cut-backs' for his first version of *Enoch Arden* (1908) does not differ much from Dickens' writing and when Linda Ardivison replied "but that's Dickens; that's novel writing; that's different", he assured "Oh, not so much, these are picture stories; not so different" (201). Griffith does appreciate this cinematographic narrative technique in Dickens' novels, as much as Eisenstein does, and then he uses it for his own film productions, a novelty never done before in cinema.

In the case of *Oliver Twist*, this interplay of events in different geographical locations can be observed from the middle-part of the story, since Oliver is taken to Mr Brownlow's. Dickens retrieves characters and scenes from where he last left them so that readers can follow the analogous but interconnected stories. He uses an introductory title for each chapter to help readers get their bearings on the framework of the different scenes. However, it is to be noticed that the complexity of the simultaneous stories increases in Chapter 1 of Book II when Mr Bumble and Mrs Corney are retaken in the story and, in fact, they are reintroduced with the chapter's title "Which contains the substance conversation between Mr Bumble and a lady; and shows that even a beadle may be susceptible on some points" (184). From then on, the plot of the story becomes more intricate and, at first blush, readers might feel bewildered until they know the reason why the narration backs up to some characters and that uncertain complexity is progressively being unfolded.

The simultaneity of the multiple sets and the jumping about in the narration of the story is very suitable for film adaptations but not that much, instead, for dramatization. The main issue deals with structuring the stage, as due to its limited space it would be too complicated to accommodate at the same time several playing areas.

Concluding with Dickens' cinematic language in *Oliver Twist*, it is to be noted that readers could go beyond the paper page and get involved in the narration. Details, descriptions, the narrator's point of view and the simultaneity between them along the

story, among some other techniques, are key elements to bridge connections of closeness between characters, locations and readers. They then are conveyed to screen and so presented to an audience in film form.

### **James Stuart Blackton's *Oliver Twist* (1909)**

The British filmmaker J. Stuart Blackton comprises such a complex story into a 14-minute film produced by Vitagraph Company of America. This production is the first screened version of the novel *Oliver Twist* ever made. It is based on twenty different scenes and most of them are preceded by an introductory title, so viewers are supposed to keep up across the leaps from the text source and to follow the film story. Considering how the production is filmed, a static camera films the scenes from a long shot and, as in theatres, the actors perform their role in a stage with a background perhaps inspired, in most cases, in that of the illustrations the novel includes.

This adaptation stands out for recreating Cruickshank's illustrations with living characters. In fact, ten out of the twenty scenes of the production are based on these illustrations and they show up the most representative events the novel is made out of. Since the very beginning the audience is told that it is a production based on a literary work as the first screening that viewers see seems to be a book cover in which it is clearly read *Oliver Twist*. Then the forthcoming scenes will emphasize the connection of fidelity from the film to the text source.

Analysing the twenty scenes of this film, the setting in all of them might be considered a stage flat where actors perform their role, so the three core parts of any play are easily distinguished as there is an introduction from scenes 1 to 5, a middle from 6 to 18 and an ending in scenes 19 and 20. Although the film does not strictly follow the order of the novel, it does maintain fidelity to form and content from the text source. Firstly, in the introduction, the earliest screened scene shows Oliver's mother entering the workhouse holding her son in her arms and then she is being assisted by two women. Curiously, the door through which Oliver's mother enters remains open during this scene and viewers can see an undefined dark background so that it is maintained, as in the novel, the uncertainty of not knowing where she comes from.



The introductory part of the film ends with Oliver, after asking for more food, running away from the workhouse. The scene of Oliver asking for more food is, if not the most, one of the most iconic of the story. Therefore, in this production, a living representation of Cruickshank's original illustration is screened with the same setting, and characters are exactly placed and clothed. The only difference we can notice is that the camera focuses the scene from a different perspective than that of the illustration's, in which the other children are facing the reader (Fig. 3), whereas in the film they are turning their back on the audience (Fig. 4). Nevertheless, this tiny difference does not influence the effect upon the audience because if the illustration transmits what Dickens describes in words, this screening does as well.



Fig. 3 Cruickshank's *Oliver asking for more* (David Perdue's *CDP*)



Fig. 4 Blackton's *O.T.*: 2'10''

Moving into the middle of the story, there are several key scenes which are critical to identify the narration's chapters and characters. The first scene that is a calque from Cruickshank's illustrations is Oliver's introduction to Fagin, which I have already mentioned in the previous section of my study. Both the novel (Fig. 5) and the film (Fig. 6) show the same image to the reader or viewer respectively and the latter is, again, a living representation of the former so that each character is easily identified despite there are many of them.



Fig. 5 Cruikshank's *Introduction to Fagin*  
(David Purdue's *CDP*)



Fig. 6 Blackton's *O.T.*: 3'16''

At the end of the film, however, each character has his own deserved ending and it is similar to that of the film: Oliver returns with Mr Brownlow, Fagin is jailed, and Nancy dies in hands of Sikes. Nevertheless, Sikes' ending differs from the novel to the film as, in the first, he hangs himself with a rope, but in the film Sikes goes back home and gets frightened of Nancy's phantom, so he runs away.

It could be argued that generally the visual language of the film is highly dependent on Dickens' language. The simple staging of this film is enough to show in a new and innovating way Oliver's story. In the case of the scene below, there are the same setting and characters focused from the same perspective, and the only difference is that one is written (Fig. 7) and the other screened (Fig. 8). Indeed, if both images were zoomed, it could be appreciated that characters have the same face expression.



Fig. 7 Cruikshank's *Oliver* amazed at the Dodger's mode of 'going to work'  
(David Purdue's CDP)



Fig. 8 Blackton's *O.T.*: 5'42''

The last point to look at in this production is the conveyance of Dickens' simultaneity. Already in this first film adaptation viewers find two different actions simultaneously screened: *Oliver Twist* being recaptured by Nancy and Bill Sikes and retaken to Fagin's den meanwhile Mr Brownlow and Mrs Bedwin are waiting for Oliver to come back from the bookshop. This simultaneity is one instance of the many that can be read in the novel, in this case it can be read in Book I, first in Chapter 14 and then in the last four lines of Chapter 15. Blackton appreciates this narrative technique in Dickens' writing and conveys it to film form as early as the first decade of twentieth-century cinema.

To conclude with Blackton's *Oliver Twist*, the filmmaker maintains fidelity to the source story but simplifies it. He skips many of the narrative chapters which just contribute to make story more complex, but they are not relevant *per se*. The illustrations seem to be used as guidelines on which the film is based, thus there is a continuous recognition of scenes along the film since it gathers the basic illustrations by which the story can be followed. The final resolution of the film story, instead, sets up some distance from the source text as it is more open-ended. Blackton only uses the long shot type along this production so that viewers seem to be seeing a play with many

different stages and mise-en-scenes, he takes advantage of the new media to produce a film-play in which cinematographic elements such as the multi-scene are brought in.

### **William J. Cowen's *Oliver Twist* (1933)**

The first sound film adaptation of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, released in 1933, is produced by the American firm Monogram Pictures Corp. and directed by William J. Cowen. This seventy-minute production is starred by Dickie Moore as Oliver Twist, but there are also some other famous names such as Doris Lloyd performing Nancy Sikes and Irving Pichel as Fagin. This film, apart from incorporating sound dialogues between characters, which in many cases correspond to those of Dicken's novel, Cowen includes a music at both the beginning and ending of the production that might make these parts more gently presented to the audience.

Before the film begins as such, the audience already knows that Cowen's film is based on Dickens' *Oliver Twist* novel as the earliest screening shows the cover of a book where *Oliver Twist* is written which includes an image of the famous Victorian writer. Afterwards, the credits and director of the film are shown while the pages of the book are turned. Once the film starts, the first screening focuses on shooting for a few seconds the page with the first lines in Chapter 1 of Book I of *Oliver Twist*. Thus the main aim of this introductory part might be to stress the direct dependence of the film adaptation from the original text. Besides, it is not only at the beginning that a fragment of the original text is shown to the audience, since the lines in which Oliver is described after his ninth birthday are also filmed before the shooting of Mr Bumble taking Oliver to the board to decide his occupation.

By 1933, cinematography had already made great strides in terms of quality and filming techniques. Some novelties already developed formerly but very noteworthy in this production are the camera shift and the switch of shot type depending on the requirement for each scene. In fact, at the beginning of the first scene the camera films a close-up shot in motion from the rocking chair where Oliver is and climbs up to a medium close-up of Oliver. These film techniques are very frequently used all along the film.

Cowen's film adaptation maintains fidelity to the original work mainly in content as it shows Oliver's story with only a few variations. The filmmaker does not break the original order of the story, but he shortens it by omitting several chapters from the original text. The final production comprises thirty-six scenes, twelve of which correspond to the scenes represented in Cruickshank's illustrations.

The scene of Oliver dining and then asking for more is the first that corresponds to one of the original illustrations. The scene being shot is the same although the camera in the film focuses from a different perspective. It might be worth noting that costumes of the characters are more modern and that, in this particular case, the woman has been replaced by more men. Then instead of filming the scene from a long shot in which all characters can be seen, here a close-up is used for every character. Therefore both the illustration (Fig. 9) and the film (Figs. 10-12) show the same scene, but the second plays with film framing and exploits the breakthroughs about this technique so that, instead of filming the scene as a whole, each scene is fragmented and filmed with different shots. Cowen resorts very often along the production to the fragmentation of the scene and sequences, and uses many medium and close-up shots instead one long shot, for instance, this cinematographic technique is also used for the scene of Oliver being introduced to Fagin, as illustrated in Figs. 13-16.



Fig. 9 Cruickshank's *Oliver asking for more*  
(David Purdue's *CDP*)



Fig. 10 Cowen's *O.T.: 7'56''*



Fig. 11 Cowen's *O.T.*: 8'27''



Fig. 12 Cowen's *O.T.*: 8'31



Fig. 13 Cruikshank's *Introduction to Fagin*  
(David Pursue's *CDP*)



Fig. 14 Cowen's *O.T.*: 13'11''



Fig. 15 Cowen's *O.T.*: 13'26''



Fig. 16 Cowen's *O.T.*: 13'53''

However, Cowen also uses the long shots for the recreation of some scenes such as the underground meeting between Nancy and Mr Brownlow, in which although Fagin's pauper appears on Cruickshank's illustration (Fig. 17), he is only represented by his shadow in the film (Fig. 18). Additionally, the scene of the burglary in which Oliver enters through the window of Mrs Maylie's in the novel (Fig. 19), and Mr Brownlow's in the film (Fig. 20), is also filmed with a long shot. Is to be noticed that this particular film scene is a recreation whose setting and furniture are more modern than that in the novel.



Fig. 17 Cruikshank's *The Meeting*  
(David Pursue's *CDP*)



Fig. 18 Cowen's *O.T.*: 50'21''



Fig. 19 Cruikshank's *The Burglary*  
(David Pursue's *CDP*)



Fig. 20 Cowen's *O.T.*: 43'45''



Retaking the film's chronological order, in the scene following that of asking for more, Oliver is coming out of a window and then he lays next to a milestone in which the audience can read that London is eleven miles away. Hence, in the film Oliver passes to being shoot in the workhouse to directly being running away to London, thereby overlooking Oliver's passage as apprentice with Mr Sowerberry. The audience, therefore, might be expected to be already familiar with the novel so that they can keep up across the story and not loose its track with the jumps nor with the variations in recreating the scenes from the text source.

Regarding Dickens' cinematographic techniques in *Oliver Twist*, it is worthy to mention that some characters' appearance in this adaptation do not seem to fit Dickens' descriptions. I will focus on two characters to exemplify this point: Oliver Twist and the Dodger. Looking first at Oliver's eighth birthday detailed description of "a pale, thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference" (7) contrast with Oliver's film charcater (Fig. 21), who seems younger in age but does not seem to suit the description of being thin and small in circumference, perhaps more in consonance with the audience's preference.



Fig. 21 Cowen's *O.T.*: 8'28''



Fig. 22 Cowen's *O.T.*: 11'59''



Fig. 23 Cowen's *O.T.*: 13'24''

Then when Dodger approaches Oliver, the first one is described in Dickens' novel as a boy "about his own age, (...) snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced (...) as dirty a juvenile (...) but he had got about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age, with rather bow-legs, and little sharp ugly eyes" (60). Nevertheless, in the film, Dodger is older and taller than Oliver, as well as well-dressed and clean in appearance (Figs. 22, 23). These two different portrayals of the Dodger contrast one another and might confuse the audience, if literate, when viewers try to identify the character to whom they are already familiar with.

In this production, interestingly, Cowen also shows simultaneity of scenes more than once. The filmmaker weaves the scenes he chose into the film as Dickens' does in the novel. For instance, viewers find simultaneity for first time in the scene of Mr Brownlow taking Oliver to his place while the Dodger and Bates return to Fagin's Den to inform him about Oliver, which in the novel is narrated from the last lines in Chapter 11 to Chapter 13 of Book I.

However, this is not the only example as there are many others such as the simultaneity of the scene of Oliver being recaptured and retaken to Fagin's den while Mr Brownlow and Mr Grimwig are waiting for Oliver to return, which I have already mentioned where this is read in the novel, the scene of Bill Sikes sleeping while Nancy meets Mr Brownlow, which in the novel is known by readers because Nancy confesses "I gave him a drink of laudanum before I came" (385) in the meeting, or the last scene of Sikes before he dies, in which he is with some of Fagin's paupers at Fagin's den while several policemen and a crowd reach the entrance to catch them, which in the novel it is narrated that they stay at Fagin's den, in Chapter 12 of Book III, when consecutively it can be read that "There were lights gleaming below, voices in loud and earnest conversation, the tramp of hurried footsteps – endless they seemed in number – crossing the nearest wooden-bridge" (423). This simultaneity, indeed, allows Cowen to produce a more complete adaptation about the different stories narrated in *Oliver Twist*. In this way he gets much more out of Dickens' essence and film resources.

To conclude with Cowen's film adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, the production is fairly complete in terms of plot representation from the original story although he opts for a freer modern setting, perhaps guided for his own interpretation. The filmmaker, in addition, uses a more wide-ranging variety of different shot and framing types and increases the number of scenes shot in parallel. Cowen still relies on Cruikshank's illustrations for long shots, while for shot and medium shots he can take advantage of shooting techniques advances to emphasize Dickens's linguistic descriptions.

### David Lean's *Oliver Twist* (1948)

David Lean's *Oliver Twist* (1948) is the second attempt of the filmmaker to bring Dickens to the big screen after *Great Expectations* (1946). This 116-minute film adaptation is produced by the British firm Cineguild Productions and it counts with some film stars such as Alec Guinness performing Fagin, John Howard as Oliver Twist or Robert Newton as Bill Sikes.

Considering the fidelity of Lean's film adaptation to the source text, there are significant omissions such as the burglary chapters, which is not shown although it is filmed instead how they get ready and go to commit it, and all related to the character of Rose Maylie. However, these cut-ups do not influence the flow of the film story and, in general terms, it could be said that it fairly represents in detail Oliver's adventures and misfortunes. Indeed, Lean's version is the first to include chapters from the novel such as Oliver's at Mr Sowerberry, and others that are additional to Dickens' narrative such as Oliver's mother approaching the workhouse from the distance.

The film-novel relationship is reinforced by the dialogues between characters since they correspond very frequently to those written in the novel, albeit the audience might not be aware of it. Hence, the film maintains fidelity in terms of content and film script, but viewers, though, do not need to be familiar with the text source to be able to properly follow the film story and not missing information. Nevertheless, some lines from the novel are screened in the first minutes of the production after the child is born, warning that "Oliver Twist cried lustily. If he had known that he was to grow up under the tender mercies of the Beadle and the Matro, he would have cried even louder" (5). This quote from the text source might be used to emphasize that Oliver has to overcome misfortunes since he is a child.

Lean, apart from filming *Oliver Twist* story, also provides information about the Victorian London in which the novel is set. Thus not only Oliver's misfortunes are shown, but also those related to the social context and, curiously, those of women and child working conditions as well. Although some characters might appear on screen, the protagonism is left to the background in which they are found. This kind of screenings

can be seen several times since the beginning, filming women working in a factory (Fig. 24), child labour (Figs. 25, 26) and the huge difference between children's meal (Fig. 27) and that of their caregivers (Fig. 28). These scenes might provide some realism to the fiction involved in literature or cinema since they show real facts about Victorian London.



Fig. 24 Lean's *O.T.*: 10'30''



Fig. 25 Lean's *O.T.*: 9'39''



Fig. 26 Lean's *O.T.*: 12'01''



Fig. 27 Lean's *O.T.*: 12'21''



Fig. 28 Lean's *O.T.*: 12'37''

The audience may enjoy the visual spectacle of the detailed skilful composition along the film scenes, which could be mostly based on the pictorial characterisation described in Dickens' writing. The visual element plays a key role in this film and, in fact, just looking in detail at the lighting, we can understand how Lean uses it for scenes and locations to perhaps represent the bright and cheerful side of life whereas, in contrast, he might use obscure scenes to depict the dark side of life. Fagin's den (Fig. 29) and Mr Brownlows' house (Fig. 30) exemplify pretty well this idea. Additionally, in the route through which the Dodger takes Oliver to Fagin's den, when they cross a bridge, viewers can appreciate that the lower buildings of the screening are darker than the others, as illustrated in Fig. 31. It is to be noticed that most places where Oliver stays, such as the workhouse or Mr Sowerberry's, are dark until he is taken to Mr Brownlow's. This is the first instance in which the little child is taken care of.



Fig. 29 Lean's *O.T.*: 37'04''



Fig. 30 Lean's *O.T.*: 60'45''



Fig. 31 Lean's *O.T.*: 34'48''

The visual impact of the film is reinforced by the musical soundtrack, which is very relevant in this production as music goes hand-in-hand with the screenings along the whole film. Lean provides different music depending on each scene. For instance, he uses more accelerated sounds for scenes at Fagin's den and more relaxing music for scenes of Oliver with Mr Brownlow. In addition, he also uses some background music, for instance, at the very beginning of the film, when Oliver's mother is approaching the workhouse and seems to be walking through a terrifying world. In this case, the storm sound, some extreme close-up shots and the lighting make the audience to put themselves in her shoes and feel the way she would. Silence emphasizes this bleak beginning of the film story and it is given a very important role as there are about six-minutes of silence before the first word in the film is said.

Focusing on film characters, they correspond very accurately to Dickens' linguistic descriptions and to Cruikshank's illustrations. They are a living representation of what is transmitted through words in the novel. However, it is worth noting that there is a correspondence between some characters such as Dodger, Oliver or Fagin both in the novel and in the film. I have already illustrated beforehand how these characters are described in the novel, so that looking now at their representation in Lean's film adaptation (Figs. 32-37) would be enough to appreciate their clear similarities.



Fig. 32 Lean's *O.T.*: 32'52''



Fig. 33 Lean's *O.T.*: 33'30''



Fig. 34 Lean's *O.T.*: 35'33''



Fig. 35 Lean's *O.T.*: 37'10''



Fig. 36 Lean's *O.T.*: 11'05''



Fig. 37 Lean's *O.T.*: 10'04''

Considering cinematographic techniques, Lean uses new shots and perspectives in some scenes of this adaptation. For instance, the camera films what Oliver's mother sees once she is awake while being convalescent after giving birth (Fig. 38), so now viewers see what some characters do perhaps to involve them in the film and make them feel part of it. This is also seen in the scene of Oliver being taken to Fagin's den, viewers have Oliver's perspective of some stairs from the bottom (Fig. 39) and later on, Oliver is filmed while going up-stairs from underneath (Fig. 40). Regarding the camera shot perspective, the particular scene of Oliver going to ask for more is filmed showing in first place a stick (Fig. 41) which is used to hit the children when they are considered to misbehave. This image might be used to symbolize the cruelty and violence used upon them because they are educated through violence.





Fig. 38 Lean's *O.T.*: 04'55''



Fig. 39 Lean's *O.T.*: 34'12''



Fig. 40 Lean's *O.T.*: 34'34''



Fig. 41 Lean's *O.T.*: 14'40''

Finally, in this film the number of scenes filmed in parallel increases significantly. Lean often resorts to simultaneity, and the first instance viewers see is the scene in which old Sally, the woman who was at the beginning of the story with Oliver's mother after giving birth, is about to die and her last will is to speak to Mrs Corney, so she is being called meanwhile the old woman is laying on bed. This scene is narrated in the first two chapters of Book II in the novel, without simultaneity and all focused on Mrs Corney, as she is being called while she is with Mr Bumble at her place in Chapter 1, and then she goes where old Sally is in Chapter 2. In this case, Lean might have resorted to simultaneity to give more coherence to the film story and allow the non-literate audience, if any, to be able to follow and understand the interweaving without any difficulty.

However, there are also other simultaneous scenes such as Oliver being locked up into the dust-cellar while Noah Claypole goes to find Mr Bumble to talk to the little boy, which is narrated in Chapter 6 and 7 of Book I. In addition, all related to Oliver's and Fagin's fellow's situation is filmed in parallel: from Oliver being taken to Mr Brownlow's while Dodger and Bates go back to Fagin's den, to Oliver being retaken by Nancy and Sikes while Mr Brownlow, Mr Grimwig and Mrs Bedwin are waiting for Oliver to return. I have already mentioned where these scenes can be read in the novel, but in this film we find in between of those a scene in which Nancy goes to the police-office to ask the officer about a little boy while Oliver is in a trial, then she sees how Oliver leaves the office in Mr Brownlow's arms. In the novel, instead, Oliver's trial and resolution are narrated in Chapter 11 of Book I, and Nancy going to the office in Chapter 13 of the same Book.

To conclude with Lean's *Oliver Twist*, this is a very complete production that films scenes never shown before such as Oliver's stay at Mr Sowerberry or Nancy going to the police-office. In addition, the filmmaker innovates in using new shot types, such as the point of view shot (Fig. 38), and perspectives, such as the high-angle (Figs. 27, 28) and low-angle (Fig. 39) shot, and in shooting more scenes simultaneously perhaps to emphasize the feelings and reactions on the audience. He also makes of lighting a resource that, if the audience focused only on it, they would understand much of Lean's message. Apart from the cinematographic techniques, Lean also uses different music according to the requirements of each scene and maintains in most cases the original language of Dicken's novel to send a specific message to the audience in each scene.

This film adaptation is very content-rich since Lean not only shows the adventures and misfortunes of little Oliver, but also incorporates information about the socio-historical context of the Victorian London, as I have previously illustrated. Thus, Lean overall maintains fidelity to the source text although he incorporates many cinematographic and editing improvements to his production, and uses very different ways to convey the meaning to viewers, so that they could get a full meaning of the story and feel as they were one more.

## Conclusion

Cinema has been a ground-breaking art that has been resorted to very frequently by visual producers since it comes out in the late nineteenth century. Filmmakers have produced films either dependent on something previously created or independent and innovative. This distinction, however, is not as clear as it might seem at first glance, since there are films completely independent from what has been created before but not pioneering at all, and films that maintain fidelity to something produced before but which are very revolutionary in other aspects. From the 1920s onwards, a critical trend has emerged on how to approach the process of conveyance from literature to film form. This has stirred the interest of critics throughout the twentieth century from Bela Balázs to Linda Hutcheon. One of the authors whose narrative is one of the most analysed is Dickens, whose writing is considered to have many cinematographic characteristics: descriptive detailed language for geographical locations and for characters' movements and physical appearance, the narrator's point of view and simultaneity.

The three different film adaptations of Dickens's novel *Oliver Twist* I have worked on are James S. Blackton's *Oliver Twist* (1909), William J. Cowen's *Oliver Twist* 1933 and David Lean's *Oliver Twist* (1948). They all base its film story on the same source text but they, in fact, differ one another very much. In the case of Blackton, he produces the first film adaptation, which is still very close to the beginning of cinema. The audience of the time is most probably literate, and they are already familiar with the original novel so, although the cinematographic techniques have not significantly evolved yet, the filmmaker does not need to make a large investment in this production. It maintains fidelity to Dickens's novel and has such a degree of dependence on it that most of the scenes are a representation of Cruikshank's illustrations, which are included in the novel.

Then in the case of Cowen, his production also relies heavily on Cruikshank's illustrations, but he also includes some variations which deal with content, sound and shot and framing type, so that the film is less dependent on the text source and more innovative than the previous one. The audience does not need to be familiar with Dickens' novel since some fragments are incorporated in the film from the text source,

but it would be, indeed, a disadvantage if the audience were illiterate because the filmmaker skips part of the plot that might contribute to understand entirely the story.

The most recent version I have analysed, produced by Lean, is the least faithful to the source text, although it also includes a fragment from it at the beginning, but it is, instead, the most complete in terms of content. This production stands out not that much for its fidelity to Cruikshank's illustrations, whose influence is still visible, but mainly to Dickens' descriptive language. The filmmaker, as well as Eisenstein or Griffith, has seen and understood Dickens' cinematographic language and he succeeds in conveying it to the big screen so that the audience can perfectly follow the film without being familiar with the novel.

Focusing now on characters, the three films include almost the same principal ones despite figures such as Mr Sowerberry or Noah Claypole only appear in Lean's. This film also highlights the characterization of the characters, which is a representation of Dickens' linguistic descriptions and, as a result, the film characters and their features and behaviour correspond very well to those described in the novel. In the other two films the characterization of the characters is different. Firstly, in Blackton's production the characters are a representation of Cruikshank's illustrations rather than of Dickens' text. For this reason, they are not descriptive, but visual figures easily to be recognized by the audience. Next, in Cowen's film, the characterization of the characters occasionally corresponds to Cruikshank's illustrations, but they do not fit in with Dickens' textual descriptions, which may be one of the reasons that cause this production not to have been well received.

Finally, regarding the cinematographic techniques used in these three film adaptations, it should be borne in mind that from the first in 1909 to the third in 1948, there have been many advances in filming techniques, methods and technology which imply a huge contrast in the earliest fifty years of cinema. Cinematographic techniques in Blackton's film are very basic since he only uses the long-camera shot, which might make the audience seem they are seeing a theatre performance on a screen, and he neither changes the film framing along the production. This is a silent film, but characters transmit the visual language of Dickens' novel and the simultaneity that distinguished it can be already seen in this production.

Then in Cowen's film, a great deal of progress has already been made with regard to cinematographic techniques and the most relevant fact is that he incorporates sound into the production, both as the music in the introduction and resolution of the story, as well as dialogues between the characters. The filmmaker, in addition, uses more shot and framing types than in Blackton's, and he films more scenes in parallel, what might contribute to reinforce the meaning of the film story.

Finally, Lean's film also includes sound and, in this case, he succeeds in using different possibilities afforded by the musical soundtrack in each scene, which is a perfect complement to the images that may make the viewers to get into the story, and he also uses sound to reproduce the dialogues between the characters. In addition, the prior two films are far outdone by Lean's in shot and framing types, which is very revolutionary in this aspect, as I have already illustrated, and also he increases the number of scenes filmed in parallel, a technique also taken from Dickens' novel.

To conclude with this research, I can state that the success of a film adaptation based on Dickens' novel *Oliver Twist* is very closely linked to the source text, not so much in reproducing the text word by word or Cruikshank's illustrations, but in understanding the text and extracting the linguistic techniques which provide it a cinematic nuance. This could be the reason why Lean's production has been so successful and acclaimed by critics not only in the first decade of cinema, but among all the versions released to date.

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