



OLIVER TWIST
BY CHARLES DICKENS

ADAPTED FOR THE STAGE
BY
LAURENCE SACH

Extract

A SMITH SCRIPT

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**OLIVER TWIST
OR
THE PARISH BOY'S PROGRESS**

**BY
CHARLES DICKENS**

Dramatised by Laurence Sach



Introduction

This adaptation of 'Oliver Twist' was first produced by The Castle Players, based in Barnard Castle, County Durham. The production opened at The Witham, Barnard Castle on Saturday 6th January, 2018 before touring to nine local village halls and community centres.

This version of Dickens' novel was envisaged as an ensemble piece, with members of the company contributing to narration, and indicating change of character by a simple change of costume - eg a change of hat (flat caps for the workhouse boys, top hats for the workhouse guardians etc).

Although the script is set out with thirty-three separate scenes every attempt should be made to ensure that scenes flow as seamlessly as possible from one to another. To facilitate this, and to enable the company to adapt the performance to a wide range of venues (some with a permanent stage, many without) the setting on stage was kept as simple as possible. The only furniture on-stage throughout were two benches and a wooden crate. These were quickly moved and rearranged for the various scenes - in a row up-stage for the workhouse boys, one beside the other to form a bed, one on top of the other for the counter in Sowerberry's funeral parlour, and in a line across the front of the stage for Sikes' final rooftop climb.

Music, lighting and sound played an integral part in the production, and a row of footlights proved to be especially useful and atmospheric.

This was an enormously enjoyable production to produce and received a very enthusiastic reception from the local audiences.

Oliver Twist Cast

ACTOR 1	-	Oliver Twist
ACTOR 2	-	Mr Sowerberry, Mr Brownlow
ACTOR 3	-	Mr Bumble
ACTOR 4	-	Fagin
ACTOR 5	-	Noah Claypole, Charley Bates
ACTOR 6	-	1st Gentleman, Bill Sykes
ACTOR 7	-	The Artful Dodger
ACTRESS 1	-	Agnes, Charlotte, Nancy
ACTRESS 2	-	Mrs Sowerberry, Policeman/Officer, Annie, Mountebank
ACTRESS 3	-	Mrs Bumble, Doctor,
ACTRESS 4	-	Fang, Mrs Grimwig, Bet, Old Female Pauper
ACTRESS 5	-	Limbkins, Bullseye puppeteer
ACTRESS 6	-	Old Sally, Bookseller, Mrs Bedwin

For the first production, Oliver and Dodger were played by young people (Oliver by a 10 year old boy). All other roles were played by the adult cast, including the other 'boys' in the workhouse.

Mr Grimwig became Mrs Grimwig and Fang (a male character in the novel) was played by a female.

Everyone, other than Oliver Twist and Fagin, contributed to the narration, crowd scenes, and playing of all other minor characters not listed above.

SCENE ONE

(Music, and the cast assembles on stage.)

NARRATOR: Ladies and gentlemen,

NARRATOR: It is 1839,

NARRATOR: and we, the poor of the parish workhouse, present -

NARRATOR: Oliver Twist,

NARRATOR: or

NARRATOR: The Parish Boy's Progress,

NARRATOR: By Mr Charles Dickens.

(Music. The cast set up for the opening.)

NARRATOR: Seventy miles from London

NARRATOR: In a town typical of numerous other towns,

NARRATOR: there was a workhouse,

NARRATOR: typical of numerous other workhouses.

NARRATOR: And in that workhouse a child was born.

NARRATOR: A not unusual occurrence it has to be admitted.

(Music. A 'baby' is produced and cradled by a Narrator.)

NARRATOR: For a long time the child's survival was a matter of considerable doubt;

NARRATOR: such difficulty there was in inducing it to take on the office of respiration.

NARRATOR: A troublesome practice, but one essential for its existence.

NARRATOR: For some time it lay gasping,

NARRATOR: poised between this world and the next -

NARRATOR: Until -

NARRATOR: After some not inconsiderable struggle,

NARRATOR: It breathed,

(Narrators take in a breath)

NARRATOR: sneezed,

(NARRATORS sneeze)

NARRATOR: and finally -

(‘Baby’ lets out a single, loud cry)

NARRATOR: advertised itself to the world.

NARRATOR: And a new burden was imposed upon the parish.

(More cries, then music. The Narrators part to reveal the mother, Agnes, lying on a bed. Old Sally is in attendance. She is the last Narrator to have hold of the ‘baby’ .)

OLIVER’S MOTHER: *(raising herself)* Let me see the child.

(Mother stretches out her hand. Old Sally passes the baby to her. The mother holds it, kisses its forehead.)

OLD SALLY: Oh, the poor dear! She was only brought in last night. Found lying in the street, she was, her shoes worn to pieces. Nobody knows from where she came.

SURGEON: No wedding-ring, I see. *(To audience)* The old story!

(The Surgeon exits and the Narrators turn away)

OLIVER’S MOTHER: *(to Sally.)* Take this locket... Look after it for the child. Promise me you’ll look after it.

OLD SALLY: I’ll look after it.

(Sally takes the locket.)

OLIVER’S MOTHER: The boy...the boy...

(Old Sally takes the baby as Oliver’s mother falls back dead. Sally looks at the locket again.)

OLD SALLY: *(realising.)* Gold!

(More interested in its value she pockets the locket. During the following the baby is passed un-ceremoniously along the line by Narrators members.)

NARRATORS: The child was wrapped in calico robes/
badged and ticketed/
—a parish child/
 —an orphan of the workhouse/
 —the humble, half-starved drudge/
 —to be cuffed and buffeted through the world/
 —despised by all,
 and pitied by none./

(Oliver cries loudly. Mr Bumble steps forward.)

NARRATOR: Mr Bumble, the beadle.

BUMBLE: I name our fondlings in alphabetical order. The last was a S, - Swubble, This is a T, - I name him Twist. I have got names ready to the end of the alphabet, and when we come to Z, we go all the way back to A and start again.

(Oliver cries loudly once more.)

NARRATOR: If he could have known he was an orphan,
left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and overseers,
he would probably have cried the louder.

NARRATOR: And so, Oliver Twist, parish boy, presented himself to the world!

(The Narrators part and the new Oliver steps forward. Music and the scene is set for the Parish Board who enter and sit.)

BUMBLE: *(tapping Oliver on the head)* Look lively, there. The parish board has ordered you to appear before it, forthwith.

(Gentlemen of the Board, now sitting, stare gravely at Oliver)

(to Oliver) Bow to the board, Oliver.

(Oliver bows.)

LIMBKINS: *(at the top of the table)* What's your name, boy?

OLIVER: *(quietly)* Oliver, sir.

LIMBKINS: What?

OLIVER: *(louder)* Oliver, please, sir, Oliver Twist

1ST GENTLEMAN: The boy's a fool. A fool.

LIMBKINS: Bumble, what do we know of this boy?

BUMBLE: Nothing, sir. Notwithstanding a offered reward of ten pound - afterwards increased to twenty pound; notwithstanding the most superlative, and, I may say, supernat'ral exertions on the part of this parish; we have never been able to discover who is his father, or what was his mother's name.

LIMBKINS: Well, Oliver Twist, we may assume then that you are indeed an orphan.

OLIVER: What's an orphan, sir?

1ST GENTLEMAN: The boy is a fool!

LIMBKINS: It means you have no father or mother and you have been brought up by the parish. You know what that means, don't you?

OLIVER: No, sir.

LIMBKINS: It means you have also come here to be educated, and taught a useful trade.

OLIVER: Yes, sir.

LIMBKINS: So, tomorrow morning you'll start picking oakum.

OLIVER: What's oakum, sir?

LIMBKINS: It's the fibre obtained by untwisting and unpicking old rope. A fine trade, to be sure.

1ST GENTLEMAN: You're not crying, are you, boy?

OLIVER: *(trying not to)* No, sir.

2ND GENTLEMAN: *(gruffly)* I hope you say your prayers at night, and pray for the people who feed and take care of you.

OLIVER: Yes, sir.

LIMBKINS: Now, off to bed with you. Work begins at six o'clock.

OLIVER: *(somewhat overawed)* Yes, sir.

(Music. The parish board leaves.)

NARRATOR: Poor Oliver! What a novel illustration of the tender laws of England!

(During the following the 'boys' line up. Bowls and spoons are handed out.)

NARRATOR: The members of the parish board were very sage, deep, philosophical men; they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative, either of being starved by a gradual process *in* the workhouse, or by a quick one *out* of it.

(Bell rings for mealtime.)

NARRATOR: *(as the boys assemble.)* With this in view, they issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll on Sundays.

(Bell rings a second time.)

BOY 1: I'm so hungry.

BOY 2: So am I.

BOY 3: If I don't get more to eat than a basin o' gruel I just might 'appen to wake up one night and eat the boy sleeping next t' me.

BOY 2: Then why don't you go and ask for more.

BOY 3: Not me.

BOY 2: Why not if you're so hungry. I dare you.

BOY 3: No! Not me!

(Boy 2 looks expectantly at the other boys but there are no volunteers.)

BOY 1: Nor me.

BOY 4: Nor me.

BOY 2: Then we'll draw straws to decide who does.

(They draw straws and Oliver ends up with the shortest)

Twist, it's you. You have to go up a second time.

(The bell rings again. A pot of gruel is carried in. The boys queue to be served. Watched over by Bumble they sit and eat. Then the boys whisper and nod at Oliver. His neighbours nudge him. Oliver rises and advances hesitantly towards the master, bowl and spoon in hand.)

OLIVER: Please, sir, I want some more.

(Bumble stares in astonishment.)

BUMBLE: *(faintly)* What.

OLIVER: Please, sir, I want some more.

BUMBLE: More!

(Oliver drops his bowl and dashes away.)

Hold him! Don't let him go!

(Oliver is chased and finally caught and held, pinioned in Bumble's arm.)

Wait 'til the Board hear about this!

(Music. The board assembles with Mr Limbkins in the chair.)

Mr. Limbkins, sir! Mr Limbkins! Oliver Twist has asked for more!

(The board react in horror.)

LIMBKINS: More! He asked for more, after he had eaten the supper allotted by the dietary?

BUMBLE: He did, sir.

1ST GENTLEMAN: That boy will be hanged. I know he will. Yes, and probably drawn and quartered too.

3RD GENTLEMAN: Send him to sea.

2ND GENTLEMAN: Ship him off to a good unhealthy port.

3RD GENTLEMAN: Let the skipper flog him to death -

2ND GENTLEMAN: for fun -

3RD GENTLEMAN: Or knock his brains out with an iron bar.

ALL BOARD GENTLEMAN: Send him to sea without delay!

LIMBKINS: Confine him this instant! And tomorrow offer a reward of five pounds to anyone who will take him off the hands of the parish.

BUMBLE: Come, Oliver! Wipe your eyes and don't cry. That's a very foolish action, Oliver.

(Bumble and Oliver exit.)

LIMBKINS: *(to audience)* Let this be a lesson to you all. We entreat you to be good, virtuous, contented, and obedient, and to be guarded from the sins and vices of young Oliver Twist, who is distinctly under the exclusive patronage and protection of the powers of wickedness, and an article direct from the manufactory of the very Devil himself.

ALL BOARD GENTLEMEN: Here, here!

(Music.)

SCENE TWO - Sowerberry's Undertakers' Parlour

NARRATOR: Next morning, the public being informed that Oliver Twist was 'To Let', and that five pounds would be paid to anybody who would take possession of him, Mr Bumble visited the parochial undertaker, Mr Sowerberry.

(A shop doorbell rings. Bumble enters holding Oliver by the hand. Oliver, cap on head, carries all he owns, a brown paper parcel six inches square by three inches deep. Sowerberry enters.)

SOWERBERRY: *(shaking Bumble's hand.)* Mr Bumble, sir, a pleasure. I have taken the measure of the two women that died last night.

BUMBLE: You'll make your fortune, Mr. Sowerberry. Yes, indeed, you'll make your fortune, I know.

SOWERBERRY: You think so? The prices allowed by the board are very small, Mr. Bumble. Very small.

BUMBLE: So are the coffins, Mr Sowerberry.

SOWERBERRY: That's true, but well-seasoned timber is an expensive article, sir.

BUMBLE: Every trade has its drawbacks.

SOWERBERRY: Of course, of course. Though I must say it is the stout people that go off the quickest, and three or four inches over one's calculation makes a great hole in one's profits.

BUMBLE: No doubt, sir. No doubt. And speaking of financial matters, *(pulling Oliver forwards)* you don't know anybody who wants a boy, do you? A parochial 'prentis. Liberal terms, Mr. Sowerberry, liberal terms.

SOWERBERRY: How much?

BUMBLE: Five pounds. (*Pushing Oliver back*). At present he's a dead-weight - a millstone, as you might say - round the parochial throat?

SOWERBERRY: Well, Mr Bumble, as I pay a good deal towards the poor rates, I suppose I've a right to get as much out of 'em as I can. (*Calling off*) Mrs. Sowerberry, will you have the goodness to come here a moment, my dear?

(*Mrs. Sowerberry enters.*)

(*deferentially*) My dear, this boy is from the workhouse.

(*Oliver bows to her.*)

He is offered on liberal terms. I am considering taking him on as an apprentice.

MRS SOWERBERRY: (*disdainfully*) He's very small.

BUMBLE: He *is* rather small, there's no denying it. But he'll grow, my dear—he'll grow.

MRS SOWERBERRY: I dare say he will, on our victuals and our drink. Parish children always cost more to keep than they're worth. (*Looking from Sowerberry to Bumble*) However, men always think they know best.

SOWERBERRY: I'll take the boy, Mr Bumble.

BUMBLE: Mr Sowerberry, he is yours 'upon liking'.

(*Bumble holds out £5.*)

MRS SOWERBERRY: (*intercepting the money.*) I'll take that, thank you.

SOWERBERRY: Yes, my dear.

MRS SOWERBERRY: Not that it'll go very far.

BUMBLE: (*To Oliver.*) Now, Oliver you are to be a prentice to a coffin-maker's. Don't go complaining of the situation, because if you ever come back to the parish again, you will be sent to sea, there to be drowned, or knocked on the head, as the case might be. Now, hold your head up, sir.

OLIVER: (*holding back the tears.*) I will be good. Indeed I will, sir!

BUMBLE: Are you crying, Oliver?

OLIVER: I feel so lonely, sir! So very lonely!

BUMBLE: *(hems three or four times huskily before muttering.)* Troublesome cough. *(To Oliver)* Now, dry your eyes and be a good boy. *(To the Sowerberry's)* And good day to you, sir; ma'am.

(Bumble exits)

MRS SOWERBERRY: *(shouting coarsely off-stage)* Charlotte!

(A slatternly girl, enters)

Give this boy some of the cold bits that were put by for Trip. I dare say he isn't too dainty to eat 'em—are you, boy?

OLIVER: No, ma'am.

MRS SOWERBERRY: And mind you behave yourself. Your bed'll be under the counter.

You'd better not mind sleeping among the coffins. Although it doesn't much matter whether you do or you don't, you can't sleep anywhere else.

(The Sowerberry's exit. Charlotte brings in a plate with some bits of meat on it.)

CHARLOTTE: 'Ere you are. Don't eat it all at once.

(Oliver tears at them 'with all the ferocity of famine'.) (Music. Lights go down to just footlights.)

SCENE THREE - Sowerberry's

(During the following Oliver's 'bed' is constructed.)

NARRATOR: Oliver gazed about him with awe and dread. Coffin shaped boards, like ghosts, were ranged along the wall. The shop was close and hot, and the recess beneath the counter more like a churchyard grave.