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CHARLES DICKENS'S *OLIVER TWIST*: BETWEEN OBJECTS AND CONSCIOUSNESS (CLOTHES, BEDS, PORTRAITS, COFFINS)

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The text proposes a phenomenological analysis of Oliver Twist's consciousness and its way of experiencing objects in the world. The objects we are going to pay close attention to are clothes, beds, portraits, and coffins. I have chosen these objects because they occupy a symbolically liminal space between the animate human being and the inanimate, empty human form. They are going to be seen as both substantiating and annihilating the child's consciousness of time, producing a midway spatiotemporality on the borderline between *Leib* (a living body with consciousness) and *Körper* (the body as an ordinary object among other objects).

Key words: objects, consciousness, Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, phenomenology

I would like to begin with a few very precious remarks by the brilliant Dickensian scholar John Carey, which made me think about the potential of a possible phenomenological analysis of specific objects in *Oliver Twist*. In his work, *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens' Imagination* (1973), he observes: "Corpses, coffins, waxworks, portraits, clothes, wooden legs, speakers of strange tongues […] are related in that they are neither impersonal objects nor fully human" (Carey 1973: 101). Although Carey does not make a direct reference to phenomenological paradigms of research, his analysis marks some key starting points for such an endeavour. The objects he describes "populate the border between people and things" (Carey 1973: 101). For instance, coffins "are disturbingly crude approximations to the human shape" (Carey 1973: 101) while staring eyes on the faces of corpses or portraits "stare intently, but there is no personality behind them to communicate with" (Carey 1973: 103). Because of these functions, they are "the optic counterpart of dislocated language" (Carey

1973: 103). They do not speak, but the intention to speak is clearly extant. This makes them appear as ideal phenomenological objects that indicate pure intentionality without being able to bring it into execution. We could claim that they are *bearers of intentionality* (cf. Husserl 1983: 75) that are different from the other such bearers.

While other bearers of intentionality bear "data of sensation" (cf. Husserl 1983: 75) like whiteness, hardness, fluidity, etc., then objects like beds, portraits, clothes, and coffins are data of consciousness that is nowhere to be found, a consciousness that is imprisoned in the loop of its ticklishly absent corporeality. It points at a double absence – first, we have an index of a corporeality without consciousness, and then we have a mould for a corporeality that is missing and is expected. But who expects the corporeality? Probably, the objects? How could an object expect, and what makes its expectation so disturbing to the mind? The answer is simple and yet not so simple. For instance, the intentionality that we detect in other objects is somehow "alive" and relies on our consciousness fully and completely; it marks **a point in the world** – the vinyl is to be listened to, the TV is for watching, the bowl is for fruits. But with the liminal objects, there is not only a "living" intentionality, or the "living" intentionality is hidden behind a layer of "dead" intentionality. Coffins, portraits, clothes, and beds in *Oliver Twist* mark **a point that is out of this world** and bear the traces of both worldly and unworldly objects. I aim to see how such objects are perceived and experienced by the child's consciousness as it is presented in *Oliver Twist*. I also want to exemplify how such objects emanate intentionality without being able to bring it into execution. While perceiving them, the child's consciousness detects this intentionality and finds it too tempting, yet frightening, to realise a contact. The latter produces a haunting and ghostly effect just like hearing a voice without seeing an initial source of the sound.

Clothes

Clothes play a significant part in Oliver Twist's story. Carey does not mention them in his list of liminal objects, but they do follow the logic of his categorisation and prove to be a prolific fit. They are not fully animate and yet not fully inanimate. They connect with the personality and with the social status of the one who wears them. Elizabeth Wilson sees them as an "uneasy territory" because they make the boundaries of one's body "unclear" (cf. Wilson 2003: 2). When Oliver is born, the narrator exclaims, "What an excellent example of the **power of dress**, young Oliver Twist

was!" (Dickens 2016: 3, emphasis added). While the child is still "wrapped in a blanket" (Dickens 2016: 3), one could not possibly tell whether he is the baby of a rich or a poor family. However, his identity and presumably fate, become clear when he gets "enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service [of wrapping unwanted parish babes]" (Dickens 2016: 3). The way in which they dress him instantly makes him "badged and ticked" as a "parish child", an "orphan of a workhouse" (cf. Dickens 2016: 3). This demarcation is made possible through the phenomenon of the dress which "is an extension of the body yet not quite part of it [...] Dress is the frontier between the self and the not-self" (Wilson 2003: 3). As bodily extensions, clothes seem to possess the power to "transform" the body and "transcend its limitations" (cf. Wilson 2003: 3). From the beginning Oliver is "unequally poised between this world and the next: the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter" (Dickens 2016: 1). Such an initial positioning makes one suspect a bond between Oliver's recurring liminality of consciousness and between and betwixt objects such as clothes, coffins, beds and paintings that communicate through pure intentionality. Just like Oliver's initial existential fragility, these objects are also wavering between the two worlds. They "speak" or they are "saying" something about the body's states of presence and absence, consciousness and unconsciousness, life and death. A particularly striking example of this could be found in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* when Scrooge realizes that he witnesses his own death through clothes. Mrs Dilber, who has stolen Scrooge's belongings, is selling them to Joe. Scrooge, to whom the clothes most cruelly betray the identity of the deceased person, sees the two people taking advantage of his death by bargaining over his clothes, bed curtains and blankets, as "obscene demons marketing the corpse itself" (Dickens 1915: 122). Shirts, blankets and bed curtains are interpreted as equal to the body itself. Then, the scene changes and Scrooge almost touches a bed with a corpse lying on it. Scrooge cannot see the corpse because it is covered but there is no doubt that it is a corpse because of the way the bed is described: "a bare, uncurtained bed – on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language" (Dickens 1915: 123). There, just like in *Oliver Twist*, beds, clothes, blankets, curtains and sheets act as a language "speaking" instead of someone, through someone's absence and of one's liminality.

In a further part of the story, Oliver is recovering from a feverish condition in Mr. Brownlow's house. A gesture that affects Oliver's mood and hopes for the future positively is connected with the man making sure that Oliver has new clothes: "a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair

of shoes" (Dickens 2016: 94). Oliver asks the servant to sell his old clothes to a Jew and to keep the money. The boy feels great relief when he is parted from his old clothes: "[…] he felt quite delighted to think that they were safely gone, and that there was no possible danger of his ever being able to wear them again. They were **sad rags**, to tell the truth […]" (Dickens 2016: 94, emphasis added). Unfortunately, with Nancy's help, Oliver is returned to Fagin. Charley Bates accompanies Oliver to his old bed, exulting severely in taking Oliver's new suit away from him and giving him his sad old clothes instead:

> […] he [Bates] produced the identical old suit of clothes which Oliver had so much congratulated himself upon leaving off at Mr. Brownlow's; and the accidental display of which, to Fagin, by the Jew who purchased them, had been the very first clue received, of his [Oliver's] whereabout.
>
> (Dickens 2016: 117)

The clothes served as a trace, as crucial indexes, pointing to Oliver's location. We could say that then Oliver recognises "the power of dress" which the narrator hinted at in the beginning of the novel. They speak of one's social status, absence, presence, health, location, life or death.

Meanwhile, Dick, one of Oliver's friends, is suffering under the same repression of clothes as indexes of social position and emblems of suffering: "The child was pale and thin; his cheeks were sunken; and his eyes large and bright. The scanty parish dress, the livery of his misery, hung loosely on his feeble body; and his young limbs had wasted away, like those of an old man" (Dickens 2016: 121). In this description, we can see how the dress is actually pointing at the scarcity. Dress and human child are somehow joined in the act of withering away. The dress reflects the social position and is "worn like a 'second skin'" (Entwistle 200: 138), paralleling the child's bodily decay. The dress is described as "scanty" and is connected to the child's condition – misery and limbs that are "wasted away". The way in which it hangs "loosely" is connected to the child's "feeble" body. Moreover, the child is compared to an old man. According to Yana Rowland, when a child is compared to an adult, this "speeds up its finale" (Rowland 2019: 107). The acceleration of the child's temporality is emphasised through the means of dress and so is the suffering's ideality. Dick appears almost as a Christ-like figure bestowing Oliver with his blessings just as an old man would have done. A child-figure, a parental figure, and a figure of an old dying man, somehow patched together, come to form the Dickensian Christ – Dick. This figure bears resemblance to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's child-Christs, outlined by Rowland as aporetic figures around whose deaths hovers the

aura of reaching ultimate comprehension of oneself, something as a superior consciousness and wisdom of oneself and the world:

> […] death shall emerge as a goal and a starting point of self-comprehension, a fulcrum of rational thought and of poetic inspiration, a remembrance yet an anticipation, a retention yet a protention. Knowledge – a panacea against frail health yet an admission of one's own imperfection.
>
> (Rowland 2019: 99)

Similarly, Dick appears as a synthesis of remembrance and anticipation, retention and protention. His child's consciousness of time is a dialectic one, not merely a phenomenological because he experiences in and out of the world, within and outside his own temporal and experiential horizon.

The idea of clothes being fields in which past experiences, people, and lives crop up, also appears in Dickens's impressionistic *Meditations on Monmouth Street*. There, he talks about the "emporium for second-hand wearing apparel" (Dickens 1976: 106) in a way that prescribes the human experience of mortality to the clothes possessed by various people. The clothes are the "illustrious dead" (Dickens 1976: 106). There is a "deceased coat", a "dead pair of trousers", some "mortal remains of a gaudy waistcoat" (Dickens 1976: 107). Before he embarks on deducing some boy's lives out of their clothes, and, by such means, treating the clothes as objectifiers of lived experience, he remarks: "There was the man's whole life written as legibly on those clothes, as if we had his autobiography engrossed on parchment before us" (Dickens 1976: 107). Clothes as cornerstones of autobiography, as marking the journey from childhood into adulthood, from low status to high status, as marking the child's consciousness of death and the passage of time, could also be observed in Dickens's novels *Little Dorrit*, *Great Expectations*, and *David Copperfield*.

Beds

While lying in beds Olive often experiences darkness and loneliness in a very tactile and intense way. Once Oliver gets locked in a room of the workhouse for daring to ask for more food, which is recognised by the parochial board as an act of ingratitude and rebellion (Cf. Dickens 2016: 12). When he is locked, he tries to get some sleep and that is how his feelings are described at this particular moment:

> He only cried bitterly all day; and, when the long dismal night came on, **spread his little hands before his eyes to shut the darkness**, and crouching in the corner, tried to sleep: ever and anon waking with a start and tremble, and **drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to**

> **feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom of loneliness** which surrounded him.
>
> (Dickens 2016: 14, emphasis added)

I think that this is one of Dickens's most powerful images of loneliness that he evokes in the reader's consciousness. The darkness of the outside world appears frightening at first, but then materialises to provide some comfort in loneliness. Eugéne Minkowski[1], while attempting to make the first steps to a "phenomenology of space", (cf. Minkowski 1970: 406) tells us that the "lived space" is different from the physical and it can "touch" us with its own materiality: "But I no longer have the black night, complete obscurity, before me; instead, it covers me completely, it penetrates my whole being, it touches me in a much more intimate way than the clarity of visual space" (Minkowski 1970: 405). The lived space becomes something as an extended externalised part of the consciousness, a ghostly clone, accompanied by the feeling of warming presence and revealing oneself when one is completely alone. In such a friendly and cajoling darkness, Oliver achieves union with his own consciousness. This consciousness seems to be doubled because it seeks connection and communication with something outside of itself. The space, in such vein of thought, becomes a silent confidant mirroring a deep-seated desire of sharing oneself with the world and being silently and unconditionally accepted by it, which is also a self-acceptance, an affirmation of one's own Self's worth: "The dark night also has something more personal about it in relation to the ego; I remain face to face with it; it is more "mine" than clear space, which is, if we can put it this way, a public domain" (Minkowski 1970: 405). The dark space helps Oliver enter the world of the dreamy, brooding, internal consciousness after the violent intrusions of the outer world's darkness. He places his hands before his eyes, and every person who reads only the facts would say that placing his hands before his eyes would make the gloom even more intense. However, the darkness, which comes from within, the protective darkness that his hands offer while placed fast on his lids, is the very thing that transforms the cold wall into a symbol of protection and soothing. If we follow Ricoeur, who dialogises with some Sartrean ideas on imagination, such an action could be read as a form of self-deception caused by strong desire: "The self-deception of desire by the magic of quasi-presence constitutes the paradigm of the imaginary life" (Ricoeur 2024: 222). It could be said that Oliver experiences the wall and the darkness as quasi-presence because of his strong desire not

[1] Minkowski (1885-1972) was a psychiatrist who applied phenomenological methods to the field of psychiatry.

to be alone. Imagination turns darkness into a tactile companion. In *Oliver Twist*, loneliness is something more terrible than a ghostly presence. Therefore, brooding in bed, touching the cold walls, and letting the darkness penetrate you seems to be preferable to being simply there, alone and untouched.

The images of beds that appear in *Oliver Twist* are also images of temporality because they are closely related to mortality. Even Fagin cannot be cruel before the image of the sleeping, dead-like Oliver. When the coarse man sees Oliver in his sleep, he seems to feel unarmed. It is because the combination of a bed and a death-like child on it impresses Fagin with its universal message conveyed through the universal language of the mortality and the transience of the human body:

> The boy was lying fast asleep, on **a rude bed upon the floor**; so pale with anxiety, and sadness, and the closeness of his prison, that he looked like death; not death as it shows in shroud and coffin, but in the guise it wears when life has just departed; when a young and gentle spirit has, but an instant, fled to Heaven, and the gross air of the world has not had time to breathe upon the changing dust it hallowed.
>
> (Dickens 2016: 143, emphasis added)

Finding Oliver in such a condition, the Jew, most surprisingly, stops himself from intruding on Oliver's death-like sleep: "'Not now,' said the Jew, turning **softly** away. 'To-morrow. To-morrow.'" (Dickens 2016: 143, emphasis added). The villain becomes soft before an image that presents the intermingling of death and dreaming on the pale, exhausted face of a child. This, even in Fagin, causes suspension of the boorish nature which was accumulated through many years of crime and connects him with innocence and humanity. However, I do not think that he is merely softened by the image of a sleeping child. There is a kind of awe in his reaction, a kind of religious fear not to interrupt a sacred communication. These feelings are evoked by what Fagin perceives – an imagery combining bed, death, and a child.

Beds appear to be symbols of regaining one's strength and communicating with oneself, but they also appear as places of suffering, exhaustion, passivity and perpetual swinging between life and death. The description of Oliver's fever when he is in Mr Brownlow's house also manifests the closeness to death that the child experiences. Oliver is described as "stretched on his **uneasy bed**, dwindling away beneath the dry and wasting heat of the fever. The **worm** does not his work more surely on the **dead body**, than does this slow creeping fire upon the living frame" (Dickens 2016: 76, emphasis added). Beds in *Oliver Twist* seem to be never

comfortable and always cradling the one who is in them between the entering in the dreaded coffin and the sporting of new clothes. Beds, clothes, and especially coffins are such objects that make the body part of them and join the body and the object. Body and object become one, dissolved into each other, and producing another category of objective bodies or bodily objects. Such duality of the body as being able to play the role of both an object among other objects and of an embodiment of active consciousness is remarked by Husserl whom Stefano Marino has in mind while writing the following words: "[…] we can refer to our own body both as *Körper* (an objective body, i.e. a mere object, a thing among things examined from a third-person perspective) and as *Leib* (a lived body, the body of a living organism experienced from a first-person perspective) […] (Marino 2020: 37). Dickens's description of beds as rude, uneasy and overall unwelcoming somehow maintains Oliver's active consciousness. The continuous suffering, hunger, and change of clothes prevent his Leib from completely falling into an objectified Körper even when this passive condition is subliminally suggested through the adoption of the third-person narrative voice. Due to this fact, his subjectivity is incessantly under the threat of objectification.

When it comes to analysing the consciousness of a character in a literary world, we cannot skip discussion about how the choice of a narrative technique affects the presentation of the said consciousness. In the previous paragraph, we connected the third-person narrative voice adopted in *Oliver Twist* with passivity and objectification of the consciousness because it is not the character himself but another person's voice that describes his inner experiences. Alternatively, we could see the third-person narrative voice as an "external appreciation in capturing Self as process rather than product" in comparison to the "self-certainty" (Rowland 2020: 51) with which the first-person narrative could conventionally be characterized (with the implication that the Self is a product already achieved). If we apply this "dynamic" perspective on the way we interpret *Oliver Twist*, we could claim that it is even more fruitful to analyse works in which the child does not speak for itself because in such works the child does not imply a Self at a distance. For instance, in *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* grown-ups seem to go back and visit their childhood experiences while comfortably placed in the temporality of being adults so that consciousness and body do not seem to go hand in hand. Unlike these, in *Oliver Twist*, the child's consciousness appears more authentic because Oliver Twist's voice is not the voice of the author, nor the voice of the grown-up Oliver talking about little Oliver – it seems to be an autonomous child's voice and, moreover,

there are no discrepancies between experiencing consciousness and objects that are experienced by the described consciousness. The narrative voice presents Oliver's consciousness as a process-oriented one, not burdened by the urge to accumulate stories, refresh memories, or accounts of experiences. In a conversation between Oliver and Mr. Brownlow, the child tells the old man that he is not intent upon becoming a writer. Oliver's consciousness is directly interacting with objects in a way that does not imply an inherent opposition between objects and consciousness. As Ernst Cassirer explains: "The Ego recognizes itself in the necessity of the object; it recognizes the force and the direction of its spontaneity" (Cassirer 2000: 143). Therefore, the category necessity applies to the object and the category possibility to the subject. The child's consciousness of time, as presented in *Oliver Twist*, intertwines the modalities of the two categories in a way that adorns the objects' necessity with productive possibilities. It happens because the child presupposes the existence of a disembodied consciousness that the objects seem to emanate, not recognising it as its own consciousness trying to grapple with the paradoxes of death and absence.

When Oliver witnesses and becomes an involuntary part of the housebreaking committed by Toby, Barney, and Sikes, he is mortally injured and left by his fellow criminals in a ditch that is likened to a bed. He is first described as being unconscious of the world around him: "The rain came down, thick and fast, and pattered noisily among the leafless bushes. But Oliver felt it not, as it beat against him; for he still lay **stretched, helpless and unconscious, on his bed of clay**" (Dickens 2016: 206, emphasis added). Once again, Oliver finds himself between this world and the next. This could be taken as an example of how Dickens transcribes his own perception of mortality to his characters. He had the chance to see the Paris Morgue and the corpses exhibited there. In his text *Lying Awake*, he describes his observations. He focuses his attention on the "ghastly **beds** and the swollen saturated **clothes** hanging up, and the **water dripping**, **dripping all day long**" (Dickens 1930: 38, emphasis added). In the description of Oliver, we can notice the image of the bed and the sounds of rain, which are just like the sounds of water dripping from clothes. Oliver's clothes are, logically, sodden because he is lying in the ditch during the rain. The sounds of dripping water are also significant because they are rhythmic and, as such, allude to an uncertain but incessant passage of time that could not possibly be controlled.

Coffins

We have seen that Oliver often finds himself in liminal situations between consciousness and unconsciousness. Fevers, injuries, and bodily exhaustion are the things that are customarily the cause of these conditions. This in-betweenness of being reappears in the narrative as a constant "framework of reference[2]" (Ricoeur 2024: 221), just like the objects that accompany the form of the body under such circumstances. When Oliver is old enough to leave the workhouse and to work as an apprentice, he is led to his undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry, who is a coffin maker. The first night when Oliver sleeps among the coffins, the same liminality of his consciousness is made visible by his bed resembling a coffin and therefore, his sleep resembling death: "The atmosphere seemed tainted with the smell of coffins. The recess beneath the counter in which his flock mattress was thrust looked like a grave" (Dickens 2016: 29). When he observes his bed, the bond between sleep and death becomes even stronger because he imagines death as a dream by dreaming of being dead: "and he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be lain in a calm and lasting sleep in the church-yard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep" (Dickens 2016: 29).

Oliver can also see an empty coffin that is not completely finished and that makes him scared: "[…] a cold tremble came over him, every time his eyes wandered in the direction of the dismal object: from which he almost expected to see some frightful form slowly rear its head, to drive him mad with terror" (Dickens 2016: 29). The human-like but nonhuman objects proceed to appear and provoke dreadful associations in Oliver's mind: "Against the wall were ranged, in regular array, a long row of elm boards cut into the same shape [as the coffin]: looking in the dim light, like high-shouldered ghosts with their hands in their breeches-pockets." (Dickens 2016: 29). An interesting element to be observed here is that ghosts are described as wearing clothes and being able to put their hands in their "breeches pockets[3]". The haunting imagery is additionally adorned by

[2] Ricoeur's term "framework of reference" could be interpreted as an inner logic that is created in a personalized manner for each work of art or for each product of one's imagination. This logic navigates all the images that will appear within the framework and builds a sense of shared dynamic, or a shared rhythm between them: "There must always be some broad project encompassing the production of imagination" (Ricoeur 2024: 221).

[3] This image looks very similar to the way in which Pip harbours the memory of his little brothers who died very early: "[…] I am indebted [to the five lozenges] for a belief

something as a painting on the wall: "…the wall behind the counter was ornamented with lively representation of two mutes in very stiff neckcloths, on duty at a large private door, with a hearse drawn by four black steeds approaching in the distance." (Dickens 2016: 29). Therefore, Oliver witnesses an amalgam of coffins, beds, clothes, and paintings that makes his consciousness disquieted with tacit and mysterious intentionality, evoking points of reference to the world of the dead.

Mr Sowerberry wants to familiarise Oliver with "the mysteries of the trade" (Dickens 2016: 33), and that is why Oliver has to go with him to see what is needed for the funeral of a woman who died of starvation. Let us examine the child's reaction when he feels that he is a spectator of a dead person: "…and in a small recess, opposite the door, there lay upon the ground, something covered with an old blanket. Oliver shuddered as he cast his eyes towards the place, and crept involuntarily closer to his master; for though it was covered up, the boy felt that it was a corpse" (Dickens 2016: 35). This marks that Oliver is conscious of the solemnity and the grave mystery surrounding this event, while the others seem to be either overacting (like the dead woman's mother) or manifesting inadequacy. Examples of the latter could be observed on the following day, the day of the burial, when the other children are playing games among the gravestones, and the adults responsible for the rituals are late. The only consciousness that seems to be perceiving the absurdity of all these is the consciousness that observes and narrates about "the bier on the brink of the grave" (Dickens 2016: 37), the grave-digger who "stamps" the coffin down "with his feet" (Dickens 2016: 38), the children's "loud complaints at the fun being over so soon" (Dickens 2016: 38) and the old woman "occupied in bewailing the loss of her cloak" (Dickens 2016: 38). The one who observes these events, the narrator is not pronouncing a judgement on them, he just lists them cinematically, but the very choice of listing these particular instances is telling of the attitude that is adopted – an attitude recognising the absurdity. The narrator is omniscient but seems to partially reflect Oliver's observations and feelings. We can say that Oliver was conscious of all these things while observing them, mainly through the hesitancy in his voice that betrays his doubt in the world and the ways of the adults.

I religiously entertained that they [his brothers] had all been born on their backs **with their hands in their trousers-pockets**, and had never taken them out in this state of existence" (Dickens 2010: 1, emphasis added).

> 'Well Oliver,' said Sowerberry, as they walked home, 'how do you like it?'
> 'Pretty well, thank you, sir,' replied Oliver, with considerable hesitation. 'Not very much, sir.'
>
> (Dickens 2016: 38)

The conclusion of what the narrator makes as observations is provided through the voice of the child, Oliver. So, he acts as the voice of reason, assessing the event as not likeable at all and adopts the role of an important extension of the narrator, an extension that reveals what was implied in the events listed beforehand. Minkowski notes: "It is not my own death but simply my mortality that I witness in the presence of the death of someone else" (Minkowski 1970: 144). He sees the death of another person as an event producing "a split in time" that mirrors "an inevitable event in the future" (Minkowski 1979: 144). From the events that Dickens describes in his narrative, we could draw the conclusion that only Oliver (one of Dickens's children, preoccupied with mortality) is consciously experiencing this split in time and finding this experience of negative value.

Portraits

The imagined care of the already deceased people always lingers as a shadow over the consciousness of the child. When he wakes up from his feverish condition, Oliver tells Mrs. Bedwin, the woman who sits beside his bed, that he recollects his mother sitting next to him by the bed. Then he realises that this must have been only a dream, but he still believes in the compassion she would have felt: "If she had seen me hurt, it would have made her sorrowful; and her face has always looked sweet and happy, when I have dreamed of her" (Dickens 2016: 77). After that, we learn that Oliver's dreams are not very far from the reality perceived because the portrait of his mother really hangs above his bed. That is why he felt astonished by the picture because he perceived in reality, something which he had only seen till then in his dreams. Oliver regards the painting with a "look of awe" which surprises Mrs. Bedwin very much and then the child says: "but the eyes look so sorrowful; and where I sit, they seemed fixed upon me. It makes my heart beat … as if it was alive and wanted to speak to me but couldn't" (Dickens 2016: 80). Here Oliver projects his dreams onto reality, which makes him connect with the truth about his origin, even though the communication between the painting and the human being cannot happen, because "an image is a limit", as Rowland states, "some loss of a primary entity", a kind of "learning how to live with a foreignness" (Rowland 2025: 129) that could appear in the realm of likeness. The aura of intentionality is

so strong that it could be read utilising intuition and mystic feelings. His consciousness of "Now" is not familiar with the "horizon of Before" (cf. Husserl 1983: 195), but still manages to maintain the temporal continuum, even though with the ungainly and yet powerful stitches of intuition.

When Mr. Brownlow sees Oliver next to the painting, he is startled by the resemblance: "As he spoke, he pointed hastily to the picture above Oliver's head, and then to the boy's face. There was its living copy. The eyes, the head, the mouth; every feature was the same. The expression was, for the instant, so precisely alike, that the minutest line seemed copied with startling accuracy!" (Dickens 2016: 81). This phenomenon could be explained with the help of Ricoeur and his differentiation between phenomenology of recognition and phenomenology of discovery. According to him the mere recognition of a particular concept is not enough for performing a conscious creative act which will forge a model capable of changing our reading of reality: "To speak of recognition, to speak of application, to speak of instantiation implies no genuine displacement of concepts as will happen when we build a model of something that will change our reading of reality" (Ricoeur 2024: 223). The phenomenology of recognition is just a stage in the phenomenology of discovery. He gives an example of two friends who have not seen each other for a long time. The phenomenology of recognition is only an act of "mutual adjustment," which works only with images. If we want to produce new interactions and new dynamics from these images, we have to employ imagination, which will lead us to the more productive phenomenology of discovery: "...we have to reidentify the old in the new without changing the old. In recognition, finally, the old prevails over the new. When we have to reshape old concepts in order to deal with new situations, then there will be complex procedures in which imagination will itself have to be more creative" (Ricoeur 2024: 223). The fact of the narrative that Mr. Brownlow blocks his imagination and labels it as a force which could not possibly relate to reality blocks his discovery that Oliver is the child of his best friend, who left the portrait of his beloved in Mr. Brownlow's house before his departure from England and before his death. He sees only the striking resemblance of the images, but he cannot move this phenomenology of recognition a little bit further, with the assistance of his imagination, to the phenomenology of discovery, which would bestow him with a new reading of reality.

Concluding remarks

We could say that employing a phenomenological platform in the analysis of *Oliver Twist* is a productive move. Oliver Twist's consciousness seems to be the humanised counterpart to liminal objects as clothes, beds, coffins, and portraits. The clothes in the narrative appear as indexes of social fate and autobiography, but they also mark the union between object, body, and consciousness of transitoriness. Beds are usually described as uncomfortable in order to prevent the fatal union between loss of consciousness, object, and an exhausted body. Coffins are seen as the middle cradling stage between clothes and beds. Portraits appear through a tacit intentionality that disturbs and triggers imagination as a substitute for memory in Oliver's consciousness. The common thing between these objects is that they are both ordinary objects of intentionality pointing to things in the world and also objects of intentionality that direct one's consciousness to points that are unworldly and impossible to deal with. The child's consciousness of time is always under the threat of objectification because of the adoption of a third-person narrative voice, and also due to many instances of loss of consciousness. Overall, Oliver's consciousness, as presented in the novel, could be described as a consciousness on a threshold: between this world and the next, between the author's omniscience and the character's subjectivity, between the body as a place within which a living consciousness resides and the body as a mere object among other mere objects.

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