

## **I- Food and nourishment : animalistic aspect of a dehumanizing system that turns nameless boys into animals**

### 1) Food as a central motif and a means to control the children

- Ceremonial of the meal with the master serving food at one end of the hall (1.1-2) and the children on the other side = a line that should not be crossed once the food has been received (1.23-24)
- Food is strictly measured and described through fragments : underlines the scarcity of the food given to the boys (1.3 'one porringer, and no more', 1.10 'any stray splashes of gruel')
- 1.9-10 : hyperbole to underline the depths of the boys' hunger

### 2) A 'slow starvation' that strips the boys of their humanity

- 1.12 'the tortures of slow starvation' = alliteration in 's' which illustrates the length of the process which drags on for several months
- 1.12-13 'voracious and wild with hunger' : boys become a pack of animals, uncontrollable and potentially vicious = foreshadows the threat of cannibalism that comes next (1.16) with the repetition of 'wild, hungry eye' + echoes 'desperate with hunger' (1.23) = hunger slowly deprives people of their humanity and drives them to desperate actions
- Oliver = sacrificial lamb given to the master and the board = metaphorical devouring in order to escape the very tangible threat of cannibalism

### 3) A food deprivation that hides a deeper hunger

- Lexical field of want / deprivation / lack throughout the text = the lack of food actually echoes the lack of attention / love / care (cf 1.23, parallelism 'desperate with hunger and reckless with misery')
- None of the boys have a name in the text because their names are not important ; they are considered as a non-discriminate mass that have no right to a say in their future.
- 'I want some more' = reaction to a request for food shows that a deeper request is at stake here : a request for attention and care which is denied = when Oliver dares to ask for more, the board decides to give him away to anyone who will take him for whatever use they deem fit.
- When Oliver asks for more = physical violence (1.30-31) which echoes the violence inflicted upon the boys through food deprivation

## **II- A narrator that uses irony throughout the text to criticize the poor's treatment**

### 1) A criticism of the treatment of children in the workhouses

- 1.3-4 'Of this festive composition' : antiphrasis to highlight the meagerness of the meals and the cheerlessness of the settings
- 'the bowls never wanted washing' (1.6) = hyperbole to underline how hungry the boys are
- 'a long grace was said over the short commons' (1.21) = antithesis that points out the irony of giving grace over such a stingy meal + giving grace in general when one lives in such dire conditions
- 'Boys have generally excellent appetites' = general truth that here strikes a sharp contrast with the food restrictions imposed on the children.

### 2) Asking for more food = triggers a seemingly disproportionate reaction

- master who clings for support when hearing Oliver's request for more food + apparently disproportionate reaction of the assistants and the children (1.26-27) + 'Mr Bumble rushed into the room in great excitement' (1.32)

- Use of exaggeration, first to describe the reaction of the board 'There was a general start. Horror was depicted on every countenance' (1.35) and then the reaction of specific members
- Decision to get rid of Oliver ; narrator rephrases to better explain to the reader that the board is actually sort of selling a little boy to whomever will take him (1.44-45) without any care regarding his well-being
- 'the gentleman in the white waistcoat' who repeats twice, with emphasis, that Oliver will ultimately be hung (1.39, 1.48) = seems to be a bit of a shortcut + situation blown out of proportions YET, irony and exaggeration allow here to show the rigidity of a system where people are tightly controlled and prevented from rising above their social condition.

#### **IV- Figures of authority + An act of rebellion that threatens the hierarchical order of the workhouse and the social order**

##### 1) A strictly hierarchized system dominated by men

- figure of the master, assisted by women (1.2) who are 'pauper assistants' = double inferiority
- Organized and ritualized system in which everybody has their assigned place (1.19-21 : parataxis that underlines the fact that the actions are taking place smoothly, without being questioned because everything always happens in the same order.
- the master < the beadle < the board < Mr Limbkins sitting in 'the high chair' like some sort of Godlike figure who decides the fate of each person living in the workhouse + the board sitting 'in solemn conclave' (reference to the election of the pope by the cardinals and shows what a high opinion of their importance the members have)
- 'the boys', 'the master' = no names, just pawns in the system of the workhouse and the general social order

##### 2) Oliver as a trouble maker who disrupts the whole order of things

- Request for food depicted as a sort of David and Goliath confrontation : inversion and parallelisms to emphasize the burden of misery and responsibility heaped on such a young human being (1.22-23 'Child as he was...') who confronts the 'fat, healthy man' and indirectly the whole system, as illustrated by the chain of events that unfolds afterwards.
- introduces disturbance and chaos ; isolate himself from the mass of the other boys
- 'I want some more' = will, willpower implied by 'want' = Oliver chooses to assert a desire for more rights rather than a physiological need = implies a deeper criticism of the whole social order
- Oliver put into 'instant confinement' and likened to a criminal = fear that he will contaminate and influence the other children and make the system implode, hence reactions that can appear disproportionate (astonishment, fear, anger)

##### 3) Different figures of authority that seem to disagree

- the gentleman in the white waistcoat and his prophetic announcement : no name either, because symbolizes the opinion of many people / the social order and the reaction to poor people that dare criticize their situation
- Yet, the narrator, as another authority figure, feels the need to comment upon that assertion (1.49-51) and seems to hint that Oliver will have a different fate = two figures of authority with a different take on things : the gentleman who is convinced that he knows what will happen to Oliver, and the narrator, who actually knows what will happen but chooses not to disclose it in order to keep the reader interested (reflection on the process of writing and the authority of the narrator figure)