The extract is taken from the second chapter of Charles Dickens' novel Oliver Twist, published between 1837 and 1838.

The text is organized into three sections: the first is the introduction; the second is the fact and the last the reaction.

Starting from the analysis of the title the reader can understand that the text speaks of a boy / child / man, named Oliver, who is looking for something, or probably he has just got this something that “but he wants to more.”

In that case the title refers to the main character, who is a kid living in a workhouse and almost dying of starvation. In the text is used the third person omniscient narrator with a prevalence of the telling (as a narrative technique).

The extract is set in a London workhouse, where Oliver Twist is living, during the lunch time. The intention of the narrator is that to presented the life conditions of the poor children during the Victorian Age. Indeed Dickens presented Oliver such as a nine-years old boy, extremely thin and pale, due to his living conditions, but also full of a very strong will.

Dickens used a formal language to describe the master and his simple action. Indeed the narrator tells the fact using grotesque, that is the exaggeration of tones, in order to make the reader delight and interested in the story.

The expression “at meal time” suggests that the narration is refer to an everyday occurrence.

Right from the start Dickens research for a setting, his intention is to created a strange atmosphere that convey the asymmetrical relationship between adults and the children.

The reader could see that the narrator in the first three lines focuses the attention on two elements: a large stone hall (that permit to give to the reader an idea about the place where this children live) and master (that implies that this poor kids are commanded by someone). This implies that this children have a passive rule, such as possible to see continuing reading the text. They have few food, and live in a very disgusting house. This s accentuated by the use of the irony, creating a grotesque effect. What he is trying to do in the first chapter is to make the reader imagine the setting where they lied and also, with the irony criticism the conditions of life during the Victorian Age.

The irony is used to underlines the differences that are between the poor that “had one porringer, and no more” and the master that “dressed in an apron for the purpose, and assisted by one or two women, ladled the gruel at mealtimes.” The language uses to connoted the master is in excess. Dickens indeed wanted to make this exaggeration, to ridicules the master. From this passage the reader could find out two aspects of the life during Queen Victoria reign: the first is the conditions of the poor children and the second the rule of the women that “assisted” the master.

The ironic continues also in the fourth line were he connotated the lunch time and what is served during it such as “festive composition”, also there he uses an exaggeration.

The sequences that follows underline the no freedom of the children, they can one more portion only during the “important occasions”.

“The bowls never wanted washing.” is an another exaggeration used there to connotated that the kids are very hungry. This is also underlined by the alliteration of the sound “w”, that gives to the reader the idea of that blows with the food. Such as the subsequently sequence narrated. Here he uses the irony for two motives: the first is to make the reader laugh, the second is to criticize the life conductions of that era.

“Boys have generally excellent appetites.” is the topic of this first part: They will died for food, they lustrated the blows and the fingers, and f they could they would eaten also the copper. In this case the alliterations such as “e” of “eager eyes” and “s” such as “spoons till they shone again” underlines this concept.

Going on with the analysis the reader could understand the conditions od life: they are passive they passively undergo and obey their master “suffered the tortures of slow starvation for three months”. But they could not bear this condition for long, as one of their son, the son of a man who owned a farm, said he would eat his bed companion. Here, then, that children are moved as a camel, much more like animals.

This is also connoted by the words “voracious and wild with hunge”. The hunger made the kids regretted to the animalesque state “He had a wild, hungry eye”.

Obvusly from a external reader or for a reader of the middle classes this sound such as an ironically think. But the children here characterized aren’t stupid they held a council. It seems to be a contradiction the children are in the same time descriptived such as animola and adults.

After the introductory sequence, the narration starts in a new setting, which is a room where the children are having supper. Here, with irony and grotesque the author underlines the famine that afflicts every child there. To achieve this result he uses an extremely high and rhetoric language that is in conflict with the low condition described. In this sequence there's also the description of Oliver Twist's master, who is not similar to the children as he's healthy and fat and as a consequence cannot be sympathetic to the reader. After the dinner Oliver goes to his master to ask some more, obliged by the other kids. The request leads to an out of scale reaction of the master, who is both shocked and surprised and violently hits Oliver. The reaction is due to the workhouse mentality, where every benefit was banned to discourage laziness. The entire scene is used to further criticize in a indirect way the social institution of workhouses. After the kid rebellion, the narrator changes again setting, describing the workhouse council where the event has brought concerns and fears. Oliver Twist is seen as a criminal, as in Victorian society who wants to destroy the social order can only be a villain.

The grotesque generating irony: Dickens is using it in order to criticize the Victorian society and report children’s ad condition of living in workhouses. All this together explains why reader in that period could gain an alibi. They could do it because the novel presents a more dramatic society than reality. Another important choice in the novel is to tell how children watched at the copper: their eyes provides an indirectly information: they are starving. Dickens plays on sight and taste and inserts onomatopoeias in the narration: the description creates a mental image in reader’s mind. The image is usually exaggerated to create a distance between the character and the reader.

 It is interesting to notice the master and children’s different behaviour: the man imposes his authority, while the children act together. The description reminds to the theme of the struggle for democracy, a problem present during the Victorian age.

Dickens use a celebrative tone to describe Oliver’s walk towards the master: he seems to be a little hero facing the evil. The concept is reinforced by the use of the verb to rise, usually used to describe the sun: the narrator’s aim is to convey that Oliver is a symbol of change and progress for his companions. The basin and the spoon the guy held are two symbols of power.

By the use of the grotesque Dickens creates the caricatures of the two main characters: the choice initially makes the reader laugh, but next it also provokes the reader’s reflection about the problem of children’s bad conditions of living in the workhouses.