**TEXTUAL ANALYSIS: Oliver wants some more, (p. 303)**

**The extract is taken from Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist,* one of his famous novels.**

**The narration is told by a third person narrator.**

**The extract starts in a room of a workhouse (“a large stone hall”) where there was a “copper”: indeed copper was the material of which the object in question, a caldron, was made.
Dickens presents three characters: a master and two women who were serving meal. The narrator does not identify them with their proper names, but he only describes their aspect and their actions. Dickens uses a high formal language describing the master (“in an apron for the purpose”): the language used is clearly too formal to describe the master’ 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 does not refer to a specific day, but it is an everyday occurrence. In describing children’s meal he uses again the narrative technique of grotesque: he distinguishes festive meals from meals of “occasions of great public rejoicing” as portions would be relevantly different, when they verily were not. The description is focused not on people, but on things: indeed characters do not show a specific identity, but they are all conformed. In order to describe boys’ hunger the narrator describes the bowls: they initially shone and after the children have eaten the soup, they shone again insomuch as the narrator says “the bowls never wanted washing”. The register used is a rhetorical language that creates a contradiction between what children are supposed to do in the novel and what they really do. 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.**

**The adjective “excellent” juxtapose to the word “appetite” sounds a bit strange: the adjective is usually used to value an object.**

**At line 12 the reader identifies a boy by the use of his proper name: Oliver Twist. Since Oliver is a single character, he impersonates all the Victorians children living in the workhouses. It is said that Oliver was tall for his age: this information suggests he previously had a better sustenance than his companions and so he could grow better. Indeed his father had kept small cookshop, but he suddenly lost it. This caused his damnation following the Manichean vision. Moreover Oliver’ starvation makes him aggressive and a potential cannibal. Dickens does not adopt the language of children but a very high register (Latin language): this creates a comic effect.**

The boy chosen to ask for a second portion of food is Oliver Twist. The scene can be now divided into three sequences.

The first one focuses on the fact itself: Oliver is convinced by the other children and is also pushed by his own childish naivety. The use of grotesque in the description conveys a rigid and austere atmosphere: meal-time seems to be a sacred ritual (“took their places”, “cook’s uniform”). “Evening arrived” expresses the wait. It is interesting to focus the attention on the contraposition between the “long grace” and the “short commons”: once more Dickens uses exaggeration of tones and irony. The narrator wants to underline the importance of appearance over substance for the Victorians.
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.