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# Is the Precariat the New Proletariat?

A comparative study of justice in Charles Dickens's Victorian novel *Oliver Twist* (1836) and Guy Gunaratne's contemporary novel *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018).

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# Abstract

This thesis, *Is the Precariat the New Proletariat? A comparative study of justice in Charles Dickens's Victorian novel Oliver Twist (1836) and Guy Gunaratne's contemporary novel In Our Mad and Furious City (2018)*, argues that the precariat, a term coined by Guy Standing, is a new emerging social class that is represented in modern literature and is a continuation and modern equivalent to the previously established idea of a proletariat class in Victorian Britain. This thesis first discusses the existence of the Victorian proletariat as it is presented by Dickens in *Oliver Twist* in light of its historical context. Then the contemporary precariat, as presented by Gunaratne in *In Our Mad and Furious City*, is analysed using Guy Standing's theory of the precariat as a new emerging social class. After conducting a thorough analysis of both *Oliver Twist* and *In Our Mad and Furious City*, I observed similar themes related to social issues such as crime, cross-cultural communication, and the portrayal of marginalized voices. These observations suggest that the precariat is a modern-day manifestation of the Victorian proletariat. In the thesis' final section, I have discussed how the ideas of the novels as well as the theory used to analyse them relate to education and the LK20.

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# 1 Introduction

Literature has long been recognized as a powerful tool for reflecting and critiquing society by exploring the flaws and injustices that exist within it. Through their writing, authors are able to explore and illuminate the social and political issues of their time. They also have the ability to challenge existing ideologies and belief systems, as well as bring to light the inequalities and injustices present that saturate society. This ability of literature to both illuminate and criticize society has made it a valuable medium for social commentary, allowing writers to challenge the status quo and hopefully inspire change. By presenting characters, settings, and events that are representative of the social and cultural norms of a particular time and place, literature is able to reflect society. By examining these literary elements, readers can gain insight into the social and cultural values that shaped the world in which the author lived. Examples of this are the thesis' primary literature, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens (1836), and *In Our Mad and Furious City* by Guy Gunaratne (2018). These literary works provide a window into the societal norms and values of the time in which they were written and meant to reflect. Thus, allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context in which these works were created.

Justice is a complex, ever-changing, and ever-evolving concept that has been a topic of discussion among scholars, writers, and philosophers since the time of Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Nicomanchean Ethics. While the concept of justice may be perceived as synonymous with legality, what is legal and what is just are two different and frequently opposing ideas. Existing in the intersection of law and morality and exploring the relationship between the two, justice as a concept is in the unique position to shed light on the difference in the values imposed on a society and the values created by a society. While legality depends on the law of the land, rights, and practices of the state's legal system, the idea of justice is more of a moral, ethical, and philosophical issue. This means that people who are bound by the same laws may have a different idea of what is just. Through the use of storytelling, character development, and symbolism, an author may critique, praise, or analyse how justice plays a part in their society. Readers of justice-oriented literature, just literature, may gain new insight or start thinking critically when encountering issues of justice in their own life or societies, regardless of whether or not the novel is set in their own backyard.

As capitalism has developed, so too has the workforce, with changes in social status and new forms of labour. However, the rise of neoliberal policies in recent decades has also led to the creation of a new class – the precariat. The precariat is a term coined by the economist Guy Standing and describes individuals who have lost access to stable employment, regular income, and social welfare. As the precariat is a new emerging social class, much is yet to be done to adapt British society to accommodate the precarious people, much like the societal changes that were sparked by the industrial revolution during the Victorian era.

The treatment and care of vulnerable individuals in Victorian and contemporary Britain is an evolving process. However, there are times when the perceived justness of this process is subject to criticism. Criticism is frequently levelled at the viewpoints of those in power or the dominant group in society, and how these viewpoints impact individuals who do not have a voice by scholars and the public. The progress made since the industrial revolution may have gradually changed the British majority culture's idea of what is just. The establishment of human rights, insight into bureaucratic processes and legal procedures, accountability for the people involved, and more open society and law-making have made a continuance of the social inequality depicted in *Oliver Twist* unlikely to occur in modern-day Britain. However, that does not mean that British children and youth are safe from institutionalised injustice, the risk factors may simply have changed. The change is well illustrated in *In Our Mad and Furious City*, where children may be more at risk of radicalisation, violence within the home, and becoming outsiders.

The novels this thesis will discuss, *Oliver Twist* and *In Our Mad and Furious City,* are set in different eras, in the early Victorian period and the start of the new millennium, respectively, but in similar locations, London. Also, both deal with questions of social justice and the struggles of disenfranchised youth. Through the perspective of these two novels, the goal is to gain insight into the shifting attitudes and beliefs surrounding the existence of the Victorian proletariat and the precariat and how these are reflected in this literary cross-section.

This thesis will argue that the precariat is a new emerging social class that is represented in modern literature and is a continuation and modern equivalent to the previously established idea of a proletariat class in Victorian Britain. The justness of the existence of both the proletariat and precariat classes, as they are depicted in this thesis' primary literature, will be the main topic of discussion. This thesis then investigates how and why the evolution of justice as a theme in literature may have changed between Victorian times and today and which factors lead to this change through a comparative analysis of the portrayal of justice in the novels *Oliver Twis*t and *In Our Mad and Furious City*. In order to conduct this comparative analysis, I will identify comparable macro social units through close reading and textual analysis. I will first present the historical context of *Oliver Twist* depicting how the Victorian justice system governed their poorer, disenfranchised population through reform and new legislation and how this could represent the Victorian sense of justice. I will then present the Victorian proletariat and Guy Standing's theory of the precariat as a new emerging social class. Subsequently, I will discuss the similarities and differences between the two social classes. Following this presentation and discussion, I will investigate how the legacy of Victorian justice may have continued into the twenty-first century by analysing the novels in turn and follow this up with a comparative discussion of the themes that define the two literary works in light of their respective relevant theory.

Although this thesis is not written with the intention of being directly converted into classroom teaching, I will discuss how its literature, ideas and theory relate importantly to education in the final section. By utilizing the core element *Working With Texts in English* from the English LK20 curriculum and the interdisciplinary topic of *Democracy and Citizenship*, I will argue this thesis' relevance for grades eleven through thirteen in the Norwegian school system.

# 2 Methodology

In order to argue my thesis statement, that *the precariat is a new emerging social class that is represented in modern literature and is a continuation and modern equivalent to the previously established idea of a proletariat class in Victorian Britain*, I have chosen to utilize the comparative method, as defined by Ragin, as well as close reading and textual analysis.

In social scientific fields, the comparative method is defined in a narrow sense as a comparison of macro social units from at least two societies. Research is then applied to compare significant cross-societal differences or similarities (Ragin 1). The claim that the comparative method should be narrowly defined in this way has been criticised (Ragin 1-2). Most scientific research can arguably be based on some form of comparison and is not distinct enough to warrant it being considered an independent form of study. However, Ragin highlights how the "gulf" (2) is wider between qualitative and quantitative findings in comparative work than in any other social science field. Another distinct feature of the comparative method is that while other qualitative research seeks to compare wholes, the comparative method compares and analyses societal configurations (Ragin 2), meaning all the aspects that make up the whole. Additionally, the comparative method is also often "historically interpretive" (Ragin 3). This means that the comparative method is less empirical and, more often than not, interested in problems of meaning and hermeneutics. This makes the narrow interpretation appropriate in humanist studies.

In literary humanist studies, close reading and text analysis are widely accepted as academic research methods. Close reading and text analysis allow for imaginative interpretations and act as a creative and critical space for interpretation. The researcher's horizon will heavily influence the work that results from close readings and text analysis. The likeliness of influence from the researcher’s horizon must therefore be acknowledged and taken into account when reading.

Gadamer writes that a horizon is “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point (Gadamer 313). In this context, the horizon of this thesis includes everything that I, as a writer and textual analyst, can see in the material I am reading and writing about. The use of the word “includes” opens for an antithetical interpretation of Gadamer’s definition, meaning that everything that is not within the vantage point of the analyst will be *excluded*. Gadamer refers to this when he continues to write about the “narrowness of horizon” (Gadamer 313). A pitfall for people with a too narrow horizon is that they can have a tendency to over-value what is nearest to them. On the other hand, having a wider horizon means that the writer is less likely to be limited by what is closest to them. To ensure I avoid the pitfall of a narrow horizon, I have chosen to utilise my previous experience in the field of law and history to add to my English literary understanding of both *Oliver Twist* (1836) and *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018).

The comparative method may serve as an academic anchoring of the close reading and textual analysis that will be done in this thesis. This thesis aims to compare and analyse two societies depicted in literature. If these two societies were entirely fictional, close readings and textual analysis would have been sufficient to reach a conclusion. However, the societies in the two literary works are supposed to reflect their real contemporary counterparts as social criticisms. It is, therefore, necessary to treat them not only as works of fictional literature but also as cross-sections of the societies they are depicting.

The analyst and reader need to be mindful of several important differences between literature, historical documents, and legislation when using them as sources in a comparative analysis. While literature refers to works arguably considered to have some artistic or intellectual value, historical documents provide factual information or records of past events. The main difference relevant to this thesis between literature and historical documents is the level of analysis and interpretation necessary to understand the source. Both need interpretation, and the work of a historian entails challenges on its own. However, interpreting literature requires a deeper understanding of literary devices such as symbolism and metaphor to find its deeper meaning. This is because literature often is, first and foremost, meant as a form of entertainment or thought provocation instead of a source of straightforward information. Literature can therefore give a view of justice that legislation and other historical documents cannot. I have decided to utilise both scientific research methods to answer my thesis statement.

A potential weakness of only using two books is that the findings will only give a cross-sectional view, which may not provide a complete picture. However, the historical context of the Victorian period and the theoretical framework where the proletariat and precariat are described will serve as validating factors that will be the groundwork for the text analysis as well as the close reading.

# 3 Victorian Justice and its Legacy

In this chapter, I will first establish the historical context of the primary literature before venturing further into the theoretical framework concerning the Victorian proletariat and Standing's precariat, and subsequent analysis and discussion for this thesis. The historical context will first include a clarification of what this thesis will define as the Victorian period. Then, a description of events that influenced the Victorian period followed by a detailed description of both legislation and debates on justice in the early Victorian era. Lastly, a discussion on how this jurisdiction represents or does not represent the Victorian societal majority’s idea of justice. How can injustice be justified? The official takes on justice in a society may be determined by a ruling minority and, therefore, would often not be representative of the idea of justice for the majority. In the Victorian era, this was more often than not the instance, which will be discussed further below.

## 3.1 Victorian Society

Victorian literature, especially Dickens’ novels, offers interesting literature for examining justice because of its imaginative and critical representation of the rapid societal changes caused by the industrial revolution. While the Victorian period is technically defined as the period of Queen Victoria’s reign from 1837, Cazamian (1) points out that the reign of her predecessor, Willian IV (1830-1837), is inseparable from it as it marked the beginning of what Cazamian describes as a “New England”. I will therefore use Cazamian’s parameter of the years 1830 to 1901 as my definition of the Victorian period.

The 1830s did not only mark the beginning of the Victorian era, but the decade also marked the beginning of a revision of legislature concerned with the rights of the large, poor, working-class population and special rights for child labourers (Goose and Honeyman 1). The era was a time of significant judicial reform due to the rapid societal changes that resulted from the industrial revolution.

One important piece of historical relevance that was new at the beginning of the Victorian period is the establishment of the first organised British police force following the *Metropolitan Police Act* of 1829. The Act was drafted and implemented by Sir Robert Peel and was a direct response to a serious increase in crime rates in London during the beginning of the 1800s. On the 29th of September 1829, England's first organised police force took to the streets, one thousand men strong. Peel based the *Metropolitan Police Act* on a firm set of principles. Among these were that the police should perform their duties regardless of public opinion. They should limit the use of physical force and be an impartial service to the public. Despite these principles, during the first two years of service, three thousand out of eight were dismissed due to being unfit in different ways, such as abusing their position, incompetence, or drunkenness. The Police were object to public opposition, but slowly, as crime rates declined, so did the public opposition. However, in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens is critical of the London police and their handling of the poorer members of London's population. This will be discussed in section 5.1.3 concerning criminality in *Oliver Twist*. (Everett 243-248)

## 3.2 Victorian Legislation

### 3.2.1 Poor Law Reforms of 1834

Before the nineteenth century, "poor relief" had been the responsibility of local parishes, who were obligated to care for their poor (UK Parliament Paragraph 2). How the parish did so would have been up to them. An outbreak of violence caused by taxpayers frustrated with the increasing number of poor people for them to support made it clear that some sort of reform was needed. However, many MPs wondered whether or not it was right for the state to intervene and seize responsibility in this matter (UK Parliament Paragraph 4). Regardless of whether poor relief should be a stately issue, the year 1832 marked the start of what Victorian contemporaries would perceive as a possible radical change in the English and Welsh poor relief system, or as Dunkley writes: "the New Poor Law must be regarded as a genuine watershed in the approach of government to poverty and the poor" (Dunkley 124).

A royal commission was selected to investigate how England and Wales's current poor laws were functioning. Their findings would be the basis for the Poor Law Reform of 1834. Prior to the reformation of the poor laws, a commonly held view amongst contemporary thinkers was that the system of poor relief itself was one of the leading causes of pauperism (Dunkley 125). Bentham and Malthus, amongst others, were some of the critics of the poor laws. They would argue that it reduced motivation to work and to save and deterred employers from investing in areas with high unemployment rates. They also argued that subsidising wages would cause unsubsidised wages to be lowered and pointed to how the welfare system discouraged labourers to move in search of jobs, resulting in residential areas where unemployment was the norm (Clark and Page 222). One of the solutions to these criticisms was to make financial aid less attractive than the lowest-paying independent work and that welfare would be given through a workhouse (Clark and Page 222).

An unfortunate consequence of the New Poor Law of 1834 was the creation of the Workhouse to “oversee the national relief of the poor” (Newman 123). The workhouse was a place where the genuinely impoverished people could go, be admitted and live free of charge and receive food and shelter. Newman (123) highlights how creating a workhouse as the medium for poor relief distribution was indicative of Victorian values as they considered idleness the root cause of poverty. This idea is in line with Malthus and Bentham’s criticism of the New Poor Law (Clark and Page 222), so the workhouse would likely have been an acceptable way of distributing poor relief in their eyes if poor relief was to be given at all.

The issue with workhouses was that while they were implemented throughout Britain to give the poorest Briton relief, the workhouses followed the New Poor Law’s policy of making the conditions of the people receiving relief worse than that of the poorest independent labourer. This was meant as a deterrent from becoming poor in the first place. This made what should have been a safety net become both a shameful and frightening prospect. Shameful because of the Victorian view of paupers being lazy and self-begotten. Frightening and dangerous because of the conditions people in the workhouse were living in. Newman uses a quote by a workhouse inmate named Wells, who testified to the workhouse conditions in 1845. Wells could testify, "I have seen the men gnaw at the bones, they broke the pig chap bones to pick the fat and gristle out … The men were very glad to get hold of them; they were so hungry” (123). The question that must be asked is if the New Poor Law was taking the idea of making the workhouse less desirable than being a low-paid worker too far. What was meant to deter people from idleness only created fear in the people who were unable to keep steady work for various reasons. The way the New Poor Law failed to consider the disenfranchised part of the proletariat speaks of the lack of “real” world knowledge the people in power had on the circumstances of the Victorian proletariat.

Before the implementation of the New Poor Law, both parents were responsible for the upbringing of a child born out of wedlock. However, the introduction of the bastardy clause of the New Poor Laws aimed to shift the responsibility solely to the mother, in an effort to decrease the number of such births. This meant that fathers were no longer held accountable for their illegitimate children. As a result, the burden of raising a child born out of wedlock fell entirely on the mother (Zlotnick 131). When an unmarried woman had a child, she could go to the parish and name the child's father. The father would then be obligated to pay for the child (Zlotnick 131), much like today. When the framers of the New Poor Law’s bastardy clause aimed to discourage out-of-wedlock births, they were influenced by the Malthusian theory of a population explosion (Zlotnick 131). It is hard to comprehend why Poor Law believed that transferring responsibility would limit population growth from a modern standpoint. Zlotnick highlights how detractors of the bastardy clause referred to it as the "philanderer's charter" (131) because it accurately depicted how the clause was implemented. The clause essentially acted as a legal form of birth control for Victorian men and did not effectively reduce the growing population. Instead, it resulted in pregnant women facing dire circumstances and potentially contributed to a larger orphan problem, as seen in *Oliver Twist.*

### 3.2.2 Child Labour Laws of the 1830s

The protection of child labourers became a significant issue during the Victorian era in England, leading to increased attention and debate surrounding laws. Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and social changes in prior years led to a growing demand for cheap labour. Ineffective child labour laws were leading to the mistreatment of children in the workforce. The Sadler Committee of 1832 depicted and exposed the gross exploitation of child workers and would spark the rise of social consciousness and public outrage regarding child labour in its contemporaries (Goose and Honeyman 1). However, not all shared in the outrage. Apologist Andrew Ure defended child labour and its benefits by claiming the children's work was comparable to sports and described them as “lively elves” (Goose and Honeyman 1).

The Factory Act of 1833 was an important piece of legislation that aimed to regulate child labour (Kirby 143). It established limits on the number of working hours for children, with a maximum of eight hours per day for those aged nine to thirteen, and twelve hours per day for those aged thirteen to eighteen. The act also required employers to provide two hours of daily education to child workers (Creighton 233). In Victorian legal justice, it was significant to prohibit the employment of children under the age of four in hazardous and physically demanding jobs. Previously, these children worked for long hours and received little compensation.

In *An act for the better regulation of chimney sweepers and their apprentices, and for the safer construction of chimneys and flues* from 1834, the reason for the new legislation is stated in the opening paragraph. The act states that while there is already a law in place to regulate the chimney sweeper profession and their apprentices from the “Twenty-eight Year of the Reign of His late Majesty King George the Third” (“Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices” Clause 1) making the year 1788; the previous act has been found “insufficient to guard and protect Children of tender Years apprenticed to Chimney Sweepers against various Casualties incident to the Practice of cleansing Flutes by climbing” (“Chimney Sweepers and Their Apprentices” Clause 13). In addition, the thirteenth paragraph of the act utilises the words “willing” and “desire” when describing how the child, or boy, has a say in whether he is going to become a chimney sweeper's apprentice. The admission of the failure of the previous act and the inclusion of the stipulation that the child needs to be willing and desire the position can be a written example of the change in the view of children and childhood as a result of the debates concerning child labour of the 1830s and 1840s (Creighton 231). The acknowledgement of special rights, exemptions, and accommodations made for children in the chimneysweep profession could then be considered an early step in the development of universal children’s rights.

Additionally, Van Manen (98) points to how the usage of “will” and “desire” suggest a genuine desire from the legislators' side for the child’s wish to be heard and acted upon. Although the lawmaker's desire does not necessarily reflect the will of the society they are representing, in the case of better regulations for chimney sweep apprentices, the legal reform could be a reflection of both the lawmaker and the society they are imposing laws upon. While the lawmakers' intention can be seen and interpreted through the legislative text itself, the perception of the unjust treatment of child chimney sweep apprentices can be found in literature such as William Blake’s poem The *Chimney Sweeper – When my mother died* (1789). To what extent poetry or literature can be a reflection of a society’s consciousness is not set in stone. However, the object of an author's focus will often be indicative of either their morale or priority. So, when an author like Blake chose the life of little Tom Dacre, the orphan chimney sweep, as the object for his poem, there would have been an intention behind it and the expectation that the portrayal would resonate or stir feelings in his audience. The

Poetry Foundation also writes, “Yet Blake himself believed that his writings were of national importance and that a majority of his peers could understand them.” (Poetry Foundation, paragraph 1).

The introduction and emendation of child labour laws at the beginning of the Victorian era arguably significantly impacted British society. They could have set the standard for how child labourers would have been treated elsewhere. Although child labour laws did not end exploitation, they are indicative of Victorian moral values and how they wanted to move away and distance themselves from the practices of the past. The Factory Act of 1833 is also an early sign of legislation that guaranteed children's right to an education that we see today as a moral given.

## 3.3 How To Argue For the Justness of Social Inequality in Victorian Society?

The Victorian idea of justice, as the new factory and poor laws make clear, shows a genuine intention to take care of children and, in part, the poor. Regulations and policies are seemingly in place to aid the disenfranchised. The attitudes of the ruling class can play a determining part in how policies are implemented, and the success of those policies may differ based on perspective. Despite this consensus, intention does not necessarily lead to action. In the later chapters of this thesis, I will discuss the portrayal of early Victorian society by Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist*. The social critique in the novel does, in large part, address the discrepancy between legislation and the reality of Victorian justice. In this part of the chapter, I will, however, look at how some Victorians would argue for this discrepancy and explain the justness of social inequality.

In his article *Whigs and Paupers*, Dunkley claims that the main argument for the poor relief being a cause for pauperism was that it blurred the distinction between independent workers and the workers subsidised by governmental aid. The subsidising, or allowance system, as Dunkley refers to it, was making a group of people that were physically able to work but could decide not to. This subsidy system created both a morale and a moral problem which would lay the groundwork for critics such as Malthus.

Strand highlights how Malthus argued that poverty was a sign of individual moral failure (Strand 538). Malthus then creates an illusion of poverty being a choice. Granted, if poverty were a choice, then it would be easy to dismiss the proletariat on the basis that they brought poverty on themselves. However, this notion of a choice implies an equal opportunity and reward for the labour one would do and does not consider factors such as inherited wealth. If poverty is a sign of individual moral failure, then all wealthy are to be considered moral and all the poor as not. Then this could, in turn, justify why the wealthy minority could monopolise the government as they, based on this logic, would be morally infallible. In her article, Strand does stress that in the context of the New Poor Law, it would have been "unthinkable to put elites and the poor on the same moral plane" (Strand 561).

Strand continues to write that formulas for social justice in the nineteenth century can be seen as different "pronouncements of equality" (Strand 561). This does not mean that people would be considered equal. Strand uses the phrase "character as the condition for conditions", meaning that your cultural capital or your "character" would determine your opportunities and be the baseline for what you could achieve. Consequently, the rewards from your work should be a reflection of this baseline. An aristocrat and a factory worker, for example, could work equally as hard and be rewarded proportionally for their position in society. Because the aristocrat would always have the moral high ground, according to Malthus's theory, they would also be considered to be of a higher character, meaning this proportion would likely be significantly larger than that of the proletariat worker.

# 4 Proletariat and Precariat, Similarities, and Differences

## 4.1 The Victorian Proletariat

The Victorian proletariat class was a group of working-class people who laboured in factories, mines, and other industrial settings during the years of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840). In this book, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson highlights a quote from Engels from 1844 where he claims that "The first proletarians were connected with manufacture, were engendered by it … the factory hands, eldest children of the industrial revolution, have from the beginning to present day formed the nucleus of the Labour Movement" (Engels in Thomson 209). This description of the proletariat indicates that they can be considered a new form of working class as a result of the industrial revolution.

The majority of the people of the proletariat class lived in relative poverty and would likely have struggled to make ends meet. Overcrowding and unsanitary housing in urban slums would have been the norm (Clark and Page 222). While child labour was no new phenomenon, the children of the Victorian proletariat were often sent to work in factories and mines at a young age, further worsening the poverty and hardship experienced by Victorian proletariat families. The depiction of this type of excessive labour and social destitution is a large part of Dickens's fiction. It can not only be found in *Oliver Twist* (1836), which this thesis will discuss in-depth, but also in his other work, such as *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and his canonical work *Hard Times* (1854).

However difficult their circumstances would have been, the proletariat class of the Victorian era did play a substantial role in shaping British society and politics. They formed labour unions and actioned to fight for better working conditions and wages. Their efforts eventually led to the lawmakers passing both new legislation and reformed existing regulations to better their working environment and, subsequently, quality of life. Today, the legacy of the Victorian proletariat class continues to influence discussions about social and economic inequality, labour rights, and the role of government in protecting workers' rights.

## 4.2 The Precariat

The Victorian era's ingenuity and growing market economy sent ripples that would eventually become a wave of competitiveness, resulting in a global economy and workforce. This ever-increasing global workforce is, in many ways, loosely regulated, similar to the workforce that grew from the industrial revolution. While the growing workforce and changing society of the Victorian era sparked significant judicial change such as the New Poor Laws, the same has yet to be true in several areas for the societal change that is currently happening. Those who fall outside the societal safety nets and have become the new lowest social class constitute the emerging precariat class.

The term “precariat class” was coined by British economist Guy Standing at the beginning of the 2000s. The term is a derivation from the word *precarious,* meaning, for example, uncertain or dangerous and *proletariat,* suggesting a connection to the earlier proletariat class (Standing *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 11). Standing does not say that a modern proletariat does not exist but that there is a new class structure where the proletariat is no longer at the bottom. The emergence of a new global market and the increased global labour force has created a new social class, namely the precariat (Standing “The New Dangerous Class” 1). Based on Standing’s theory, the precariat is defined by three dimensions: the absence of stable labour and living, they have to depend on their wages alone and that the precariat is the first class in history who are losing rights (Standing “The Precariat” 2:30-5:18).

The absence of stable labour and living is described as a lack of employment and job security. While these kinds of security may look similar, Standing stresses the difference between the two. Employment security refers to having long-term employment contracts or, in other words, the guarantee of having a job. On the other hand, job security refers to the work's character. Will the worker have a defined role in the company? Is the worker unlikely to be moved to another branch of the company and be forced to move? Given the answer to these two questions is no, then the worker is likely experiencing job insecurity and will be without “an anchor of stability” (Standing “The New Dangerous Class” 1 & 11). Another issue connected to the lack of employment and job stability is that the worker will, in many cases, not be able to develop an occupational identity. While some can identify themselves by their occupation by being able to say that “I am a teacher” or “I am a part of a sales team”, people doing precarious work may not. The absence of an occupational identity can make it harder to see the meaning in the work one does. It may have adverse psychological effects on the worker leading to what standing refers to as a precarious state of mind (Standing “The Precariat” 2:30-3:49). The ability to see the meaningfulness in one's work is one of the main criticisms of the Fordian industrial assembly line, which prioritises efficiency over humanity and became the object of criticism already in 1936 in Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*.

Standing uses the term “social income”, or a lack thereof, to describe the situation of the precariat worker where they have to rely on money wages alone. Social income is what one can expect to receive should they need it. Standing divides this into several categories, but the most relevant for this thesis are his third and fourth, which are the support the person may receive from their family and community and the welfare they can receive from the state (Standing “The New Dangerous Class” 11). The precariat is vulnerable in this context, where the instability they may experience can affect their social income. Some lose their community when moving domestically, and some may even lose their welfare rights if they are forced to move internationally as a part of a globally flexible labour market. This leads to the third part of Standing’s definition of the precariat.

The precariat is the first mass class in history to lose rights (Standing “Not a bogus concept”). Standing writes that one way to depict the people of the precariat class is as “denizens” (Standing “The New Dangerous Class” 14). The word “denizen” is not universally understood as people with fewer rights. To some, the term is simply another way of describing a citizen. Standing does, however, define the term “denizen” as “someone who, for one reason or another, has a more limited range of rights than citizens” (Standing “The New Dangerous Class” 14). This loss of rights may become the cause for many of the challenges that the people of the precariat class face and can be tied to the other two dimensions of the definition of the precariat. The loss of rights is a significant factor in the loss of social capital as well as being an equally substantial factor in the decrease or absence of employment and job stability.

In addition to defining the precariat by three dimensions, the absence of stable labour and living, having to depend on their wages alone and the loss of rights. Standing also describes the precariat as consisting of three factions: the Atavists, the Nostalgics and the Progressives. The Atavists are those with parents or families who have had stable, identity-forming work. Standing mentions miners and steelworkers as examples. The Atavists are then looking backwards, wanting that kind of identity-forming work. Standing adds that this part of the precariat often does not have a university degree and is the faction of the precariat that is most prone to listen to extremist points of view. The Nostalgics are the migrant workers, refugees, and minorities. Standing describes them as people without a sense of "home". They may have a sense of belonging, but likely to several places simultaneously. Lastly, Standing describes the ones he refers to as Progressives. The progressives are the faction of the precariat that seeks higher education because they have been promised a bright future. What makes this group of people a part of the precariat is that they may experience a disconnect between the promised bright future and the reality of life after university. The jobs they were expecting to go into may no longer be available. They may live for an extended period of time without job or employment security and can then feel anger stemming from the disappointment of what they may consider broken promises. (Standing "The Precariat" 5:19-7:51)

Standing refers to the precariat as a new dangerous class as indicated by the title of his works. He makes an important point in the discussion of how the precariat is becoming a new dangerous class when he highlights how the unemployed members of the precariat are viewed by society. He points to how official thoughts on unemployment have drastically changed. He writes that:

> In the neo-liberal framework, unemployment became a matter of individual responsibility, making it almost 'voluntary'. People came to be regarded as more or less 'employable' and the answer was to make them more employable, upgrading their 'skills' or reforming their 'habits' and 'attitudes'. This made it easy to go to the next stage of blaming and demonising the unemployed as lazy and scroungers. (Standing *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 77)

This derogatory view of the precariat can be a part of what isolates them. Standing also implies that this view can become identity-building for the younger precariat generation. Making it acceptable for them to adopt the image of "idle irresponsible poor" (Standing *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 77). While adopting this image is not necessarily danger-inducing, the social divide that this relationship can create is. The divide and inability to see commonalities with other social classes can cause the misrepresented party to seek representation outside the mainstream. Standing points to a tendency to seek either the far-right or far-left. Being prone to extremist views is likely one of the main causes why Standing has chosen to call the precariat a "dangerous" new class.

The existence of a precariat class is not uncontested. In his article, *The Precariat: A Class or a Condition,* Peter Frase of the City University of New York challenges the idea of the precariat as a class. He raises three questions about the proposition of the concept of a precariat class. The first question is whether there is empirical evidence showing that the global job market has become precarious. If this is the case, the next question is whether the affected people can be considered a class. The last question is, "What implications increased precarity have for the demands and strategies of workers and their organizations?" (Frase 11). To the first question, Frase answers yes. However, this yes is based on Standing's broad definition, which includes a wide variety of forms of precarity. The inclusion of many different forms of precarity is the main argument against there being a precariat class consisting of these individuals. In Frase's eyes, the attempt to include too many "heterogeneous strata" of a population in one class is problematic. He also highlights how Standing's definition of the precariat is entirely negative. Meaning that what constitutes the precariat is defined by what they lack and not positive commonalities (Frase 12). Frase shows caution when he answers the last question of what implications the precarity may have for workers and organisations. However, he points to how long-term employment is no longer the norm. The decrease in long-term employment may be problematic as the welfare and labour unions system are based on this and may answer why the precariat, as Standing defines it, is the only class losing rights. Frase concludes by saying that he does not consider the precariat to be a new class but rather a politically unifying identity (14).

Standing's research on the precariat emphasises the pressing need for policymakers and lawmakers to address the increasing problem of job insecurity and the precariat's loss of rights. Without significant action to address these issues, the Precariat will likely continue to face significant challenges in their pursuit of economic stability and security (Standing "The Precariat" 8:32-9:00). Like in the Victorian era, the beginning of the 21st century has been and still is a period of significant change, and like in the Victorian era, the justice system and policy are not yet equipped to handle or in place to tackle these changes. The issue with a growing precariat can become what sparks a change on par with the radical social change that happened in Britain in the 1830s.

## 4.3 Similarities and Differences

The proletariat and the precariat are both the result of societal change. The Victorian proletariat came to be as a result of the industrial revolution, as described by Engels (in Thompson 209). The Victorian proletariat did not appear out of nowhere, the increase in the British working class saw to the increased number of the new Victorian labour force. Because, while the middle-class population grew substantially, the percentage of the population belonging to the proletariat grew at a disproportionate pace as the overall population grew by double partially (Robinson 154-155). I will therefore claim that the Victorian proletariat was a new, growing social class at the time of the Victorian era, as I have defined it based on Cazamian. Likewise, the precariat is an emerging social class which is a result of the societal changes caused by the new globally flexible labour market.

Both the Victorian proletariat and today's precariat arguably lived and live without an adequate safety net should they find themselves without work. Granted, the proletariat had social welfare from the New Poor Laws in the form of workhouses. However, the workhouses were designed as deterrents from idleness, not necessarily as insurance for the worker. The conditions described in the workhouse can arguably not be considered humane enough to be considered an option for those who cannot work. This is further accentuated by the shame and fear associated with the workhouses. Similarly, the precariat class often lacks social protections, such as access to healthcare, retirement benefits, and job and employment security. In addition, members of the precariat are more likely to become "denizens" and to lack the "social income" Standing describes as benefits that come from belonging to a community (Standing "The New Dangerous Class" 11).

What Standing writes about new attitudes to the precariat, where they are seen as unemployable, lazy, and that unemployment was voluntary is eerily similar to the Malthusian ideas of poverty being the result of personal moral failure. If this is the case, it would be reasonable to expect that the relationship between the Victorian bourgeoisie and the Victorian proletariat would bear a resemblance to the relationship between the modern-day middle class and the precariat.

The main difference between the Victorian proletariat and the precariat class is that the Victorian proletariat class is characterised by stable employment in industrial or manual labour jobs, like Engels describes (In Thompson 209). In contrast, a lack of steady employment and income is in large part what characterises the precariat class. The proletariat class emerged during the Industrial Revolution and included workers employed in factories, mines, and other industrial settings. They had relatively stable jobs with set hours and wages although they often worked in harsh conditions. In contrast, the precariat class is a more recent phenomenon and includes workers who have less stable and secure employment. This can include temporary or part-time work, freelancing, or gig work, where income and employment are often irregular and uncertain.

Another critical difference between the Victorian proletariat and contemporary precariat classes is that the Victorian proletariat class had a more defined sense of identity and solidarity. As a result of the Labour Movement, they could organise themselves into labour unions and other organisations to fight for better wages, working conditions, and political representation (Thompson 211). The precariat class, on the other hand, can be seen as more fragmented and disconnected, with less of a shared sense of identity or collective action.

Overall, while the proletariat and precariat classes share some similarities in terms of their working-class status, their experiences and challenges are distinct due to differences in the nature of their employment and the broader social and economic contexts in which they exist.

# 5 Primary Literature

*Oliver Twist* (1836) by Charles Dickens and *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018) by Guy Gunaratne constitute the primary source material for this master's thesis. Both novels depict disenfranchised children in London and give insight into the lives of the proletariat in Victorian England and the British precariat at the start of the new millennium. *Oliver Twist* is set in the first half of the 19th century, while *In Our Mad and Furious City* is set in the 2010s. The books' difference in time and similarity in themes, place, and, to a degree, characters, offers an interesting foundation for the comparative analysis in this thesis as I wish to investigate how justice in literature may have changed over time. The greater the core similarities are, the more validity can arguably be offered to the findings.

## 5.1 *Oliver Twist*

The first novel I will discuss is *Oliver Twist* (1836). *Oliver Twist* is a chronological episodic narrative of the titular character Oliver Twist's life from being an orphan and a pickpocket to becoming the heir of a gentleman's fortune. The novel is largely inspired by Dickens's own experiences. It is considered a powerful critique of England during the eighteen hundreds, particularly the treatment of society's disenfranchised youth and the criminal justice system. *Oliver Twist* was published in 1836 and offers social critique of pre-Victorian society as Dickens's novel was basically published in tandem with several reforms to law and social justice. The publication of the monthly instalments in *Bentley's Miscellany* close to coincide with the major "Poor Law Reform" of 1834 and the changing conception of childhood following the Sadler Committee of 1832, as well as new regulations for chimney sweep apprenticeships from 1834 (Goose & Honeyman 13). Oliver Twist and his life experiences directly comment on and criticise both the "poor law reform" of 1834 and the debate on child labour laws. In the following discussion, I will use close reading and text analysis to find the macro social units relating to justice for the Victorian proletariat that later will be used for the comparative analysis between *Oliver Twist* and *In Our Mad and Furious City*. I have selected a set of events in the novel that each represent different aspects of Victorian justice as they are described in chapter three.

The novel is host to a large number of characters, and the majority of them can be interpreted to represent different aspects of the early Victorian era. Although a critique of the novel can be that the novel's characters are simple and lack depth, I would argue that it is precisely this simplicity and pertinent caricatures that empower the social critique Dickens wished to promote. The characters themselves will not be the main focal point for the discussion in this thesis. However, they will serve as examples to underline and illustrate points made about aspects of justice for the Victorian English proletariat.

Just as important to note as the close reading of the text itself is the social impact the material of the novel had on its contemporary reader and the role it played in promoting the portrayal of the Victorian proletariat in literary fiction. Cazamian writes about the implicit social comments in Dickens's novels and makes an important point about the portrayal of the lower classes in Victorian literature. In a chapter about Dickens's "good" characters, he writes, "It is actually a worthy note that the common people should have been represented at all in literature (…) There were profound social implications in Dickens's elevation of a whole social class to the dignity of artistic representation" (Cazamian 155). Cazamian does clarify that *Oliver Twist* was not the first time the lower working class had been depicted in literature. However, no novel had previously purposefully shifted its focus of interest below the "line dividing opulent living, ample leisure and cultivated manners from the steady pursuit of wages and a means of living" (Cazamian 156). *Oliver Twist* is one of the first novels with a working-class perspective that portrays the social group in a not entirely negative light. Granted, Oliver Twist, the character, does in a way have one foot in one social class and the other in another, but for the majority of the novel, he is all orphan working class as far as the reader knows.

The inclusion of the lower working class in the literary and artistic space did not happen without notice or criticism. Because of the aforementioned legal reforms at the time *Oliver Twist* was released, it was impossible not to see the novel’s break with literary norms as another symptom of a changing society. One critic from a journal called the *Quarterly Review* went as far as accusing the novel of being written "for brutes” like the ones depicted in the novel (Cazamian 156). On the other hand, the novel received praise for writing about the working class with an until then unknown nuance. Cazamian cites the *Manchester Guardian* from 1849 as reporting that Dickens “tend[s] to bring the poor into the fairest position for obtaining the sympathy or the rich and powerful, by displaying the goodness and fortitude often found amidst want and wretchedness, together with the intervals of joyousness and comic humour.” (Cazamian 156). Judging from the mixed reviews highlighted by Cazamian, it would not be unreasonable to say that the way Dickens portrayed the lowest social class sparked emotions in the reader. Likely, the negative reviews were fuelled by unfamiliarity and resistance to a changing literary space that, in tandem with societal change, may have made parts of upper society uncomfortable. This discomfort was clearly expressed by Lord Melbourne, The Queen’s prime minister, as he with revulsion wrote: “It’s all among Workhouses, and Coffin Makers and Pickpockets… I don’t like those things; I wish to avoid them; I don’t like them in reality, and therefore I don’t wish them represented.” (Horne xiii). Conversely, the people who until then had no part in the Victorian literary space would likely have felt a justness in the newly found inclusivity in the artistic representation of the lower working class. This representation did undoubtedly cause ripple effects that can be felt in Dickens’s literary characters today, as well as in its engagement with the marginalised and socially deprived working class, the Victorian proletariat, *Oliver Twist* enacts radically with law reforms and social changes from its publication until this present day.

### 5.1.1 The Workhouse

Oliver Twist was born in a workhouse to a mother whose identity was unknown and who died in childbirth. Oliver is then declared an orphan because no one can claim him or knows his identity. Without the social capital his father would have provided, he was forced to stay at the workhouse. Due to the bastardy clause of the New Poor Law, should his father have known about him, he would regardless have had no obligation to claim Oliver, making him an orphan no matter what. The workhouse provided a poor standard of living, and the children living there were slowly starved. The children were subject to the workhouse authority and their judgment and considerations. Because Oliver was still an infant, a slight effort was made to find a female caregiver, but it was soon decided that he was to be sent to a "branch workhouse" where children his age could "roll(ed) about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, under the parental superintendence of an elderly female, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week" (Dickens 4-5). Being raised in a workhouse is the first instance of governmental intervention in Oliver's life.

The workhouse may have been one of the greatest injustices the proletariat experienced at the hands of the ruling minority and was, therefore, one of the first and main aspects of Victorian society criticised in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. Dickens writes: "It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop" (Dickens 5). In this quote, "The system of farming" refers to the workhouse's practice of providing the bare minimum of food to the children, which was in line with the idea of the workhouse being less eligible than the lowest paid work, and how this resulted in the majority of the children dying from malnourishment or complications caused by it. Farming terms such as "system of farming" and "crop" are not commonly associated with childrearing. As the Kantian philosophy of not using people as bare means would not be uncommonly accepted as moral, using "crop" to describe a child would arguably be considered morally detestable by both most Victorian and modern readers of Dickens's work. However, the terminology could be indicative of the late industrialist time *Oliver Twist* was written.

The treatment of the children in the workhouse is also a social critique of the middle and upper class by Dickens of how the state saw the workforce as a resource, not individuals with rights. In the explanatory notes of the *Oxford World Classics* edition of *Oliver Twist,* the practice of "farming" is described as "a system of contracting out the care of pauper infants" (Dickens 426). The practice was seen as a scandal in Victorian England (Dickens 426), lending to the ideas and morals criticised in the novel *Oliver Twist*, which was not representative of the average Victorian Englishman or woman.

By the end of the book's second chapter, Oliver has asked for more gruel at dinnertime. The following chapter with an acidic comment from Dickens where he describes the incident as "the impious and profane offence" (Dickens 15). Considering Dickens's personal experience in a workhouse, this is an apparent jab at the workhouse's set of ethics, where hunger is viewed as an offence. The additional juxtaposition between the fat cook, that looks appalled when Oliver asks, and the starved mouths he feeds further underlines this criticism. This is the first incident where the reader is invited to see the extent of the despair the people in the workhouses would have felt. As Oliver is sent to a dark room after asking for more, Dickens alludes to Oliver being suicidal. However, as handkerchiefs are luxury goods unavailable for pauper children, he has no way of hanging himself. This is a grim portrayal of the conditions of the workhouse that likely was meant to arouse feeling in the contemporary reader. Dickens is, in a way, saying that being forced to live in a workhouse, regardless of the reason why the person ended up there, will make even the purest of souls consider the sin of suicide to escape the injustice.

By using Oliver Twist as his focal point Dickens could be consciously in opposition to Malthus's statement of pauperism being a sign of individual moral failure (Strand 538). For how can Oliver, or any other orphan, be blamed for their situation? Is the moral failure Malthus speaks of a trait that can be inherited? In that case, the suggestion would indicate that Dickens accused the Malthusian theory of claiming that pauperism was an inheritable trait that would effectively make social upwards mobility impossible. Dickens later finesses this argument by revealing that Oliver's father was a wealthy gentleman, questioning this possible argument of inherited morality. In addition, making the reader think that Oliver was an ordinary orphan and letting the reader make their initial judgements just to later reveal that he, in reality, was gentry would possibly be a powerful way of making Victorian readers question their preconceptions of what differentiated the proletariat from the bourgeois.

### 5.1.2 The Chimney Sweep's Apprentice

Chapter three of *Oliver Twist* is, in essence, a written practical example of the *An act for the better regulation of chimney sweepers and their apprentices, and for the safer construction of chimneys and flues* from 1834 in action. From start to finish, chapter three relates the wording of *the chimneysweep act* as described in this thesis's chapter 3.2.2. Following "the impious and profane offence" (Dickens 15), Mr Bumble decides that Oliver is more work than he is worth and seeks to find him an apprenticeship. Chapter three's description "relates how Oliver Twist was very near getting a place, which would not have been a sinecure" (Dickens 15). This refers to how Oliver Twist was nearly sold to a chimney sweep as his apprentice.

This practical example of the chimneysweep apprentice act begins already when Mr Bumble and Mr Gamfield discuss Oliver's apprenticeship. Mr Bumble gives the impression that he already knows what kind of fate he would be condemning Oliver to, should he let him go with the chimney sweep. Mr Bumble even uses the fact that chimney sweep apprentices had become more challenging to find as a negotiating tactic to lower the reward he would have to pay the chimneysweep to take Oliver. The beginning of the chapter then depicts a boy whom the state or workhouse is failing to care for, reflecting the admission of failure at the beginning of the Chimneysweep apprentice act. Then, Oliver is almost sold to Mr Gamfield, the chimneysweep, against the child's wishes, but the parish board must approve the apprenticeship. Even after the deal has been made between the parish and the chimneysweep, a price is agreed upon, and all the gentlemen agree that this apprenticeship makes financial sense, the open lack of "willingness" and "desire" from the child is enough to save him from becoming an apprentice to the chimney sweep.

Oliver did not have to defend himself or take any action to prevent this fate other than saying that this was not his desire. The fact that The Magistrate sees this lack of willingness and desire to go with the chimneysweep on his own accord and then asks with implied compassion, "Now, boy, tell us what's the matter: don't be afraid" (Dickens 22) without having Oliver's wishes pointed out to them by others can be interpreted to represent the trust Dickens put in this piece of legislation. Granted, Oliver is crying on his knees, so his feelings are not subtle. However, considering the miscommunication between classes expressed throughout the novel and found in the historical references, this level of overt expression of emotion would arguably have been necessary. This is coincidentally the only time the law protects Oliver without the interference of a character such as Mr Brownlow and may be an acknowledgement from Dickens that the Chimneysweep apprentice act was indeed working and for the betterment of the situation of proletariat children of the time.

The Malthusian justification of societal inequality is represented in the talks between Mr Gamfield and the parish board on why they should let Oliver go with the chimney sweep. When asked to explain why the apprenticed children smothered to death inside chimneys under the supervision of the chimney sweep. Mr Gamfield then says:

> That's acause they dampened the straw afore they lit it in the chimbley to make'em come down again (…) that's all smoke, and no blaze; vereas smoke ain't o' no use at all makin' a boy come down, for it only sinds him to sleep, and that's wot he likes. Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy, gen'lmen, and there's nothink like a good hot blaze to make 'em come down vith a run. It's humane too, gen'l'men, acause, even if they've stuck in the chimbley, roasting their feet makes 'em struggle to hextricate theirselves (Dickens 18).

The explanation is grim when considering the seriousness with which the chimney sweep is giving this justification. That the reason why the children choke to death is because the straw in the fireplace is damp before they light it. Depicting the children as enjoying being put to sleep in a warm smoke-filled chimney because they are inherently lazy is an effective way of undermining the seriousness of the death of the apprentices. It speaks to the little regard some of the adult Victorians had for its society's industrial orphans. Mr Gamfield then takes his explanation one step further by explaining that this is a mistake and would not happen under his care. There would instead be a motivating blaze lit underneath the children's feet, causing them to free themselves. This can all be seen as an allegory for the proletariat situation where financial aid will lull them to sleep, but being rightly motivated by the fear of death could save them from their own laziness and force them to get ahead in society.

An interesting point to note about this interaction is that this is one member of the Victorian proletariat describing another member of the Victorian proletariat to a gentleman. Mr Gamfield is perpetuating the stereotype about the working class being lazy and unwilling to work, fuelling the fire of the Malthusian argument of pauperism being the result of moral failure. It would make sense if this were for his own gain. By feeding the bourgeoisie's own misconceptions about the working class back to them as fact, the bourgeoise would possibly be more likely to trust the chimney sweep as he is then seen sharing their values. The lack of intercultural communication would then be in the chimneysweep's favour as the gentleman would likely not be familiar enough with the average pauper orphan to say anything about their morals or values. This point can be further underlined by the gentleman's reaction to Mr Gamfield’s depiction, as he “appeared very much amused by this explanation” (Dickens 18).

### 5.1.3 Criminality in *Oliver Twist*

The social aspect of criminality in *Oliver Twist* is represented throughout the novel. Criminality is present, but not limited to, when dealing with the character Fagin and his associates as well as in the execution of justice in the novel.

Unknown to the reader at the time of introduction, Fagin is employed by Oliver’s elder brother, known to the reader as Monks, to corrupt Oliver and lead him towards a life of crime. This is because the will left by Oliver and Monk’s father left the inheritance to Oliver. The inheritance came with the stipulation that should Oliver be born a boy; he could only inherit the estate if he had not committed any crimes. Conversely, there was no such condition if he was born a girl. Fagin's employment by Monks can be interpreted as implying that those born above a particular social class level would have to be actively influenced by a negative element in order to act immorally. However, this stipulation in the will of Oliver's father raises questions about the view on gender-based morality in Dickens's work. Is the Victorian girl exempt from the Malthusian connection between poverty and personal morality?

Only the boys in *Oliver Twist* are ever depicted as overtly criminal or delinquent. They may be teaching children the art of pickpocketing like Fagin. They may be pickpockets like the artful dodger, robbers like Sikes or criminal gentlemen masterminds like Monks. The female characters like Nancy or Mrs Corney are in the meantime as much part of the criminal action but are not defined by their criminality like the men in Dickens's writing. In his article *The Boys Are Pickpockets, and the Girl Is a Prostitute* Larry Wolff discusses how the criminality in *Oliver Twist* differentiates according to gender. In his opening example, Wolff highlights how the novel never formally declares the issue of Nancy's occupation. However, in the preface of the 1841 edition of the novel, Dickens gives the following statement: "It is, it seems, a very coarse and shocking circumstance, that some of the characters in these pages are chosen from the most criminal and degraded of London's population; that the boys are pickpockets, and the girl is a prostitute." (Wolff 227). Prior to this statement, Nancy's occupation was not entirely a mystery but never directly addressed. Dickens likely did this deliberately in order to keep her morality ambiguous, thus side-lining the women in the Victorian morality debate.

The choice to side-line the women in the morality debate in *Oliver Twist* is an interesting move on Dickens's part, considering the bastardy clause in the New Poor Law and the role it plays in the novel. Tying the responsibility of children to the woman in accordance with the bastardy clause while killing the female presence of Oliver's mother as well as making the other female characters in *Oliver Twist* morally ambiguous, essentially gives the women a ghostly appearance.

In chapter 11, Dickens introduces the reader to the Victorian justice system. After the Artful Dodger and Charlie Bates leave Oliver to an angry mob after a failed pickpocketing attempt, Oliver is put in a holding cell to await his trial in what Dickens describes as "a very notorious metropolitan police-office" (Dickens 76). Dickens then goes on to give a detailed description of the state of the cell that is meant to hold people awaiting trial and of the Victorian handling of petty crime.

> This cell was in shape and size, something like an area cellar, only not so light. It was most intolerably dirty; for it was Monday morning; and it had been tenanted by six drunken people, who had been locked up elsewhere, since Saturday night. But this is little. In our station-houses, men and women are every night confined on the most

> trivial charges – the word is nothing – in dungeons, compared with which, those in Newgate, occupied by the most atrocious felons: tried, found guilty, and under sentence of death: are palaces. Let any man who doubts this, compare the two. (Dickens 76-77)

The explanatory notes of the Oxford World Classics edition of *Oliver Twist* elaborate on what is meant by "a very notorious metropolitan police-office" (Dickens 76). It is referencing the Hatton Garden office, which was presided over by Magistrate Allan Laing. Laing was a notoriously vicious man who would be dismissed for his abuse of power in 1838 (Dickens 468). In preparation for his writing and the creation of the character of Mr Fang, Dickens smuggled himself into Laing's court in order to see his cruelty first-hand (Dickens 468). Similarly to Dickens's critique of the workhouse and New Poor Laws, he saw injustice in the execution of justice. He chose to highlight this in his writing, making *Oliver Twist*, in large, a comprehensive social critique of Victorian justice.

After Mr Brownlow, in the role of accuser and victim, clearly state to the police officer that he does not believe Oliver is the culprit, the police officer swiftly ignores him and shows Oliver to a cell by saying, "Now, young gallows." (Dickens 76). This is a clear reference to hanging, suggesting the implication of guilt even before a trial and after his accuser has dropped the charges against him. It is like the police officer is saying that even though he might not have done what he is accused of, he is most definitely guilty of something. The issue of guilt versus innocence is further underlined as Mr Brownlow walks away. Afterwards, he contemplates the familiarity he sees in Oliver. The reader still does not know that Mr Brownlow knew Oliver's father and that it is the resemblance to him that he recognises. Mr Brownlow then asks himself, "*Can* he be innocent?" (Dickens 77), implying that he also, like the police, still thinks he might be guilty of another crime even though he does not believe Oliver took his handkerchief. The italicising of the word "can" is also noteworthy in this instance as it suggests a sort of philosophical "can". *Can* this boy, whom he has never met but feels a kinship with, be innocent? In this case, what is he innocent of? Is he innocent of this singular crime, or is he *an innocent*? Because it is the feeling of familiarity that makes Mr Brownlow ask this question, it does imply that being identified with the middle or upper class offered an assumption of innocence where the opposite would have been true should he belong to the working class.

The way Victorian trials were held could be seen in light of an expanded interpretation of Strand's (561) "pronouncements of equality". The people on trial in the Hatton Garden court district, and generalised across Victorian England, could have fallen victim to the idea of “character as the condition for conditions” (Strand 561). The characters Hatton Garden and areas like it would have hosted would have been the very poorest of society. This could have been the cause for why the incarcerated people in other police districts would have been treated better or differently. Jones points to how “class divisions became geographical divisions” (13) in London at this time, so assumptions about one's social stature based on the area they frequented would arguably not have been uncommon. This is implied when Dickens compares Hatton Garden to Newgate in the excerpt above. The moral baseline would have been comparably lower, and therefore the justice would have been executed accordingly. This could explain why it would take nothing to convict, as suggested by “the word is nothing” (Dickens 76).

When the trial commences, the pages take on a hopeless note when Mr Fang enters. Knowing that Dickens moulded the character on a real-life Magister, Allan Laing, makes it feel like the dialogue could have been taken straight out of a Victorian courtroom. As the name suggests, Mr Fang is hostile from the beginning. He is hostile towards Mr Brownlow, the officer and Oliver and reluctant to let anyone speak, all while demanding that they explain themselves. This inability to speak the truth is what I mean by the pages taking on a hopeless note. It is possibly the atmosphere Dickens was out to recreate from his preparatory visit to Magister Liang’s courtroom. The reader immediately understands this will not be a “fair” trial. Although Mr Fang is arguably not treating Mr Brownlow with the respect his social stature would expect. The idea of “pronouncements of equality” (Strand 561) is still in action. When in fact, the only person in the room who has committed an actual crime is Mr Brownlow himself, as he had forgotten to pay for the book he was reading when the pickpocketing incident happened. Mr Brownlow’s social capital allows him to be perceived as innocent even after being proven guilty while an innocent child was just sentenced to three months of hard labour.

### 5.1.4 The Intercultural Relationship Between the Proletariat and Bourgeoisie

The intercultural relationship between the proletariat and bourgeoisie in Victorian England is well illustrated in a conversation between Mr Brownlow and his friend Mr Grimwig who visits as Oliver is on his way to pay for a set of books. There is an inherent distrust of the poor in Mr Brownlow's friend as well as a dead sure assertion that he knows what the poorer class is like based on his own impression. Jones states in *Outcast London*, “class divisions became geographical divisions” (13), and therefore social contrast would naturally become more prominent. The difference would be dramatic and abrupt at towndistrict borders, as there would have been little communication between the classes across these borders. Such a prominent geographical class division could perpetuate distrust or miscommunication between social groups and then give room for the Malthusian ideas of class-based morality.

The distrust Mr Grimwig shows the proletariat is most apparent when he and Mr Brownlow discuss how there are only certain kinds of boys. Oliver must fall into a category that Mr Grimwig recognises. Mr Grimwig recalls a random boy who works for a friend of his whom he does not like and argues that Oliver is likely just as bad, if not worse.

> He may be worse, I say, repeated Mr Grimwig. Where does he come from? Who is he? What is he? He has had a fever. What of that? Fevers are not peculiar to good people; are they? Bad people have fevers sometimes; haven't they, eh? I knew a man who was hung in Jamaica for murdering his master. He had a fever six times; he wasn't recommended to mercy on that account. Pooh! Nonsense! (Dickens 107)

The generalisation of proletariat boys and the seemingly senseless conclusion he draws between fevers and morality show that Mr Grimwig trivialises the character of those of a lower social class than himself. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that Mr Grimwig has little contact with such people and can see them from what he might consider a reasonable distance. At the same time, Jacob's Island, which is where most of the members of the proletariat in *Oliver Twist* live, is an isolated slum made from dug ditches that there likely would have been no reasonable reason for the middle class to visit. The geographical, and social divisions written about in Jones' *Outcast London* are likely in effect here.

While it is not required for a writer of fiction to be an impartial conveyor of a story to the reader, the lengths Dickens goes to portray the average bourgeois as immoral and physically unpleasant is striking. However, the representation of an entire class – the middle class – as immoral and obnoxious challenges the Malthusian idea of poverty being due to personal moral failure. Dickens's point of view criticises the injustice done to the proletariat by the bourgeoisie and the rising middle class. The portrayal of the middle class and people in power is deliberately saturated with misunderstanding and an unwillingness to challenge their established opinions of the proletariat to highlight their lack of knowledge of the people whose lives were in their hands.

The distrust of the proletariat is not reserved for the more unsavoury middle-class characters in *Oliver Twist*. Mr Brownlow, who is meant to be a sympathetic exception to the rule of bourgeois social mismanagement, is shown to harbour distrust towards those in a lower social class than himself. When Mr Brownlow speaks to Oliver about never deserting him, Mr Brownlow states that he never will if Oliver never gives him a reason. Mr Brownlow then goes on to say: “I have been deceived, before, in the objects whom I have endeavoured to benefit; but I feel strongly disposed to trust you” (Dickens 104). In essence, he is saying, “I trust you, but not others like you.” Why? Is Oliver’s true heritage and resemblance to his father in the eyes of Mr Brownlow shining through again, like when he was accused of stealing a handkerchief or is the sick orphan proletariat boy proven trustworthy in a short amount of time? Regardless of the reason, Mr Brownlow is inclined to trust Oliver but not others in his position. This shows that no matter how good a person might be, they may not be aware of their inner prejudices.

This mentality of wanting to help but with an internalised distrust reflects the good intentions of legislation such as the chimneysweep act. The chimneysweep act admitted the previous iteration of the act’s failure to protect society's children. However, the reluctance of some, like Mr Bumble, to implement the act, as shown in *Oliver Twist,* reveals that good intentions do not always lead to good governance. The same can be said for the New Poor Laws of 1834, where the aim was to lower unemployment and therefore reduce the level of pauperism in Victorian England. Instead of creating incentives to work, the laws created what appeared as horrors for the people affected, such as the workhouse where those wholly unable to work then would end up. This shows what can happen when those at whom a law is aimed at have no part in creating the legislation. Considerations that should be taken are not considered because the ruling minority are not aware of their existence, and their impression of a situation may be factually untrue.

## 5.2 *In Our Mad and Furious City*

The second literary work I will focus on is *In Our Mad and Furious City* by Guy Gunaratne. Gunaratne’s novel is set in contemporary London and is told mainly from five different perspectives, but mainly from the perspectives of the three main characters, Selvon, Ardan, and Yusuf. The novel begins in the aftermath of the murder of an off-duty soldier by an Islamic extremist. This plot point mirrors a real-life event from 2013 when attackers claiming to be Islamists murdered Fusilier Lee Rigby on a South London street (McGregor). As the real-life event the novel is referencing, this event serves as a catalyst for increased social tensions and conflict between the far right and fundamental Islam. The plot builds on these tensions, and the novel concludes with the far-right movement marching against a Muslim partially radicalised community after their mosque is set on fire. The twist is that it was one of the Muslims that set fire to the mosque, but this is not known by either party. The clash between the groups resulted in an innocent Muslim teenager being trampled to death by the group at no particular individual's fault. While no individual could be blamed for the death, the teenager was still a casualty in a conflict he was unsure he wanted to be a part of. *In Our Mad and Furious City* shares a connection with *Oliver Twist* as the portrayals of the precariat and proletariat in the two respective novels are highly reminiscent of each other, and both novels depict the most vulnerable children in their time periods.

The novel is situated in Neasden, which is an area of London where the city council have built several housing estates that serve as the central location for the novel's plot. Neasden is described as highly multicultural: "For my breddas on Estate, they were from all over. Jamaicans, Irish pikeys, Nigerians, Ghanaians, South Indians, Bengalis. Proper Commonwealth kids, ennet." (Gunaratne 3). The reference to the commonwealth may act as a reminder of the border crossing and global reach of the former British empire from much of Britain's multiculturalism stems. The narrating voices also reflect the speech of the person narrating, meaning that most of the novel is written in different vernaculars. Regardless of Neasden's multiculturalism, the area is poorer than average, and many of the estate's inhabitants are low-income families. Yusuf, one of the main protagonists, calls the area they live for the "Ends" (Gunaratne 26), as in living on the edge of the city. This can be seen as a direct reference to living on the edge of society or living in precarity when using Standing's terminology. This description, in many ways parallels Dickens's presentation of the marginal and deprived Jakob's Island in *Oliver Twist*.

While the novel likely was not intended as a specific criticism of the new emerging precariat class, the inhabitants find themselves in different kinds of precarity. The different storylines are representative of several of Standing's descriptors of the precariat class. In the following sub-chapters, I will discuss how justice in relation to Standing's theory of different kinds of precarity and the precariat class is represented in the novel *In Our Mad and Furious City* by looking at the specific portrayals of precarity the novel presents.

This novel is relatively new, and while it was the winner of the University of Swansea's Dylan Thomas Prize as well as shortlisted and longlisted for several other literary prizes (Gunaratne Front Cover), there is little referencing to the novel in academic discussion as of now. This means that the analysis of the novel will be more reliant on close readings of the material in relation to Standing's idea of the precariat class and interviews by the author than on academic scholarship. Also, I will relate the relevant plot points of the novel to real-life counterparts in order to see how this novel criticises justice in modern Britain.

It must be emphasised that the presence of female characters in *In Our Mad and Furious City* is severely lacking. Most of the women portrayed in the novel are there because of their relation to one of the main characters. It is difficult to say if this was an intentional choice made by Gunaratne because there is no reference to him addressing this in any interview. The most fleshed-out character is Caroline, Ardan's mother. However, her passivity and tendency to live in the past make her more of a ghost in Ardan's life than any character of consequence. The same can be said of Yusef's mother, who is depicted as completely being at the mercy of the men around her. The other female characters are either passers-by, or women Selvon fantasises about. Given the exclusion of independent female characters with an active choice, this could either be a commentary on the particular degree of precarity some women live with, or the author could make a comment on a form of internal segregation or differentiating within the precariat. If the latter is the case, and the experiences of female members of the precariat is different to those of the men, it would make sense to exclude them from the main narrative as the novel is heavily based on the author's personal experience. The unwillingness to interpret the female experience can then be forgiven. It is highly unlikely that the novels depiction of women is meant to be interpreted as them being merely sexual beings and consequently side-lined in the discussion of justice within the precariat.

### 5.2.1 The Precarious Mind

The precarious mind, which Standing discloses in his research, is the result of a combination of factors from living in precarity. It can stem from a lack of occupational identity that comes from the absence of job and employment stability and security. It can be a symptom of the progressives, who are living with the disappointment of broken promises and therefore lack a sense of meaningfulness in the work they are doing. A precarious mind can also stem from having a split sense of identity that being an immigrant or having an immigrant family may cause. This is the case with Selvon and Ardan in Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City*. (Standing "The Precariat" 2:30-3:49)

The beginning of the novel gives a good description of how the younger generation at the estate experience a split sense of identity.

> We'd all spy those private school boys from Belmont and MilI Hill and we'd wonder, how would it have felt to come from the same story? To have been moulded out of one thing and not of many? There was nothing more foreign to us than that. Nothing more

> boring and pale to imagine. Ours was a language, a dubbing of noise, while theirs was a one note, void of new feeling and any sense of place. (Gunaratne 3-4)

Selvon is a second-generation immigrant, where both of his parents emigrated from Monserrat when they both were young. Selvon was therefore born in England and has lived there all his life. However, the excerpt displays a curiosity of envy coming from the boys from the estate of the middle-class people their age who grow up with a more tangible idea of their identity. They grow up with a singular moulding voice and do not have to question their identity in the same way as the boys who come from a more diverse community. The flux the boys experience also describes the social divide between the classes. This perpetuates the idea that those living within the estate are isolated, as Gunaratne alludes to when he describes the Stones Estate as being cordoned off by police tape and how the children must go through tunnels to get out of Neasden.

Unlike the rest of the cast of characters in the novel, Selvon and his family live off the estate. Nonetheless, Selvon is just as much a part of the estate community as his friends and equally as much a part of the precariat due to his parents' precarity, which will be discussed in section 4.2.2 concerning immigrant precarity. He can be said to have a precarious mind mainly because of his background but also because of his split sense of identity. First, he is both Montserratian and English. Then, he is a part of the estate community but not living in it, making him exist in the space between. Lastly, he is a talented athlete with a scholarship to study at Brunel University, meaning a real possibility for upwards mobility making his time at the estate limited. He is also understanding that his scholarship comes with conditions, causing him to isolate himself in order to train excessively.

Gunaratne writes that he wants to highlight the multiplicity of identity through his characters (292). Using Ardan, Gunaratne can discuss what Englishness is through the lens of the poetry of a second-generation immigrant.

> But then daylight comes. Shows me everything don't no-one want to see. The Ends, Stones Estate, Neasden. This drab and broke down place. Better if the sun stayed buried, ennet, leaving, us to the blackness to disappear inside, still. (Gunaratne 19-20)

In the excerpt above, Ardan is sitting on the top of a building overlooking the Stones Estate, where he lives. He expresses a form of shame when he describes "The Ends" while also including himself in the overall picture by using "us". So, while there is a shame there, he does not try to distance himself from his precarity. Instead, he suggests leaving the estate buried in darkness, isolating it. This self-isolation is indicative of an apathetic attitude towards making change and can be reflecting Standing’s emphasis on the precariat’s need for representation in policymaking.

An interesting point to note is that the Irish name Ardan means to soar high or to have high aspirations. In contrast to Ardan’s apathetic attitude towards the possibility of change in the precarious community, this is quite descriptive of the character itself. No matter how the meaning is interpreted. While Ardan seemingly has a bird's eye view of Neasden and the estate, literally from sitting on rooftops and figuratively through this observational writing, he is also one of the only characters that experience a real opportunity for upward mobility, with Selvon being the other, and to leave the precariat class. This opportunity to leave the precariat makes his future membership in the nostalgic faction uncertain. I would argue that from the moment he went to the audition for the music label, he is more likely to belong to the progressive class. Not because of any education but because of the hope for the future and the opportunity the music label presents. Granted, Standing claims that the progressives will eventually be disappointed. So, labelling Ardan as a progressive could, based on Standing’s definition, be interpreted to mean that his career is doomed to fail. Farse’s critique of Standing’s negative view of the precariat is highly relevant in this case. An extended interpretation of Standing’s factions would be applicable in the case of Ardan. The multiplicity of identity goes beyond defining Ardan as a multicultural man, it can also refer to a multiplicity within the precariat. The multiplicity of Ardan, being both Irish and English, is representative of a current generation of Standing’s Nostalgics. He is not a migrant worker, not an immigrant but rather a part of a societal minority with a split sense of belonging, despite having been born and raised where he belongs to said minority.

### 5.2.2 Immigrant Precarity

Precarity indicates a type of inequality that amounts to social injustice beyond the individual. *In Our Mad and Furious City* presents several examples of precarity associated with immigration. The most prominent example is the story of Nelson. In this sub-chapter, I will present the case and analyse the situation’s portrayal of questionable justice in concordance with Standing’s idea of immigrant precarity. Because Nelson’s immigration story takes place during the 1950s and there is no direct example of immigrant worker precarity apart from Nelson, I have chosen to include an analysis of how new legislation resulting from Brexit would affect people living in the Stones Estate in Neasden. This can illustrate how legislation can affect the precariat adversely when they lack representation in the legislative process.

Nelson is the father of Selvon, one of the three main protagonists. Nelson came to England from Monserrat in search of work during the 1950s, imagining it as a land of opportunity and possible riches. He was told that if he emigrated, he would no doubt find work, and in time he would earn enough to bring his wife to England and start a family. However, his feelings for England changed after experiencing continuous racism leading up to the Notting Hill race riots of 1958. He then explains that he begins to feel a "deep-down shame. Sorta how it feel like when I realise that this Britain here did not love me back, no matter how much I feel for it." (Gunaratne 79). Nelson became increasingly ostracised from mainstream British society after this point. His eventual, complete removal from society is made explicit from the beginning, as Nelson narrates in retrospect. The reader gradually understands that at the time the book is set, Nelson has been confined to a wheelchair and rendered unable to speak after suffering a stroke.

Nelson is a heavy-handed example of immigrant precarity. Despite not being a part of the "new" global workforce as Standing most often refers to, there is little doubt that Nelson belongs to the faction of the precariat Standing has named the Nostalgics. He was part of a wave of immigration to Britain from the Caribbeans and can therefore be representative of immigrant precarity. The chapters narrated by Nelson display a clear split sense of belonging between Monserrat and England. This split sense of belonging, when he was younger and without a family, may have left him with no sense of home. There is no doubt that Nelson experienced both job and employment insecurity when he was working. He is described as taking odd jobs and taking work where he could. An attempt to create a substitution for an occupational identity can have led him to become more active in the Black unions. Furthermore, the disconnect between his expectation of London and his experiences have probably left him feeling meaningless and, like Selvon and Ardan, suffering from Standing's "precarious state of mind".

Considering the symbolism of his eventual confinement to a wheelchair with no voice, Nelson may represent the sense of social injustice the people that participated in the Notting Hill riots of 1958 felt. His life and condition can serve as a criticism of the fates of the people involved. Nelson's chapters in the novel tell the story of his life, and how his view of society changes.

> This outing make me tired already. Does nothing to ease me off my worry. Seeing this side of the worn out patch only make me worry more. And my side hurts from the wheelchair (…) With all the upset and strife in this place. See it in the paper, on the telly. The city burn again. See it on the road, full up, teeming with rab and ruin. What

> sorta man my son become under this sorta tide? I know it's all my fault. That the boy is out there now because of my pride. (Gunaratne 34)

This excerpt is taken from the first chapter narrated by Nelson. He is on a trip to the shops with his wife a short time after the soldier was killed by the young extremist. The way he narrates gives the reader a sense that he is seeing history repeating itself while he has no control or ability to stop what is happening. His condition has silenced him, and he must see a new generation fight the same fight he and his friends fought during the fifties. When he mentions that "I know it's all my fault" (Gunaratne 34), he is referencing an instance that is described later in the novel when he is faced with the decision to stand up to the police or not during the Notting Hill riots.

The silencing of Nelson is in line with Standing's description of a frustrated precariat. This silencing of an immigrant voice can also be a comment on the lack of representation the precariat has in the legislative process. While the modern proletariat can organise in labour unions and gain a collective voice, the precariat is still in the process of gaining representation. This, Standing argues, is a phase of struggle that follows any "Great Transformation", such as the societal transformation that is occurring with the emergence of the flexible global labour market (Standing "The Precariat and Class Struggle" 15). He continues to write that "The subjectivity of the precariat must be asserted, so that bureaucracies can no longer treat its members as failures to be reformed, made more 'employable' or punished." (Standing "The Precariat and Class Struggle" 15). This statement is highly reminiscent of the Malthusian attitude towards the Victorian proletariat, and the comparison will be further discussed in the next chapter. The lack of representation and knowledge of the view of them as less desirable may cause the members of the precariat to seek representation outside the mainstream, this will be discussed further in relation to the precariat's vulnerability to extremism.  The fact that the precariat may not have representation does not necessarily mean they are not political. The political aspect of the precariat is exemplified in *In Our Mad and Furious City* through its depictions of demonstrations and protests.

The lack of representation can have an adverse effect on the precariat in the modern legislative process, especially in the wake of the new legislation for workers' immigration after Brexit. The Stones Estate in Gunaratne's novel, for example, is described as a place where the population consists of continuous rotations of immigrant workers.

> Used to say how it was all Irish around here. Irish names cut into wood back then. Everything just switched hands at some point, like bish-bash-bosh to the next lot. Polish settled this time. Might be the Somalis next, or Albanians. (Gunaratne 58)

As this area is mainly populated by immigrants, it would arguably have felt the repercussions of Brexit in a much more noticeable way than more economically diverse areas. Since the book was written in 2018, some of the repercussions of Brexit would already have come into effect. The vote would already have been cast in 2016, meaning that the knowledge and uncertainty of what was to come would have been present. Since immigration was one of the major reasons why people chose to vote "leave" (Wong 113), there would likely have been a comparable tension between migrant and non-migrant communities at the time the novel was written. Those parts of the population the EU referendum vote would then affect the most were also not eligible to vote because only citisens of Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth were allowed ("EU Referendum."). Whether or not the vote should have included UK residents is not a question that will be debated in this thesis. The main point to take from this observation is that they did not have that right, resulting in a lack of representation and consequently losing the right to work in the country. In a way, Brexit caused the UK to take a step away from being a part of the globally flexible labour marked by instituting immigration restrictions.

This change in immigration policy can also cause the precariat to lose additional rights, making their "denizen" status more precarious. The Migration Observatory writes that the post-Brexit restrictions may cause some jobs to become ineligible for work visas. This exclusion may cause an increased illegal migrant population where people who were entirely lawful at one point will find themselves with no legal rights. Additionally, those EU citizens who can apply for work visas and British citizenship may have to wait five to ten years before their status is legitimised, leaving them in precarity for the duration of that period. The Migration Observatory also shows concern that the new migration restrictions will have an impact on discrimination and create more social stigma associated with being an immigrant in the UK. This will likely cause a greater divide between the precariat class and the rest of British society. A sequel to *In Our Mad and Furious City* will likely have to consider how Brexit impacted estate communities such as the Stones Estate in Neasden. (Sumption and Kierans 2-4)

The last section of *In Our Mad and Furious City* is titled "The Englishness of Street Verse". In this last inclusion to the novel, Gunaratne discusses the parallels between William Blakes's poetry to contemporary grime. This is noteworthy as Blake's influence offers a historical connection between *In Our Mad and Furious City* and *Oliver Twist.* Blake’s two poems, “The Chimney Sweeper – When my mother died” from *Songs of innocence* (1789) and “The Chimney Sweeper – A little clack thing among the snow” from *Songs of Experience* (1794), are textual relatives to *Oliver Twist* as they depict much of the same issues Dickens problematises by including Oliver's close call with becoming a chimneysweep's apprentice. Both Blake and Dickens upbraid socially and judicially accepted but ethically condemnable exploitation of children and the socially suppressed. It is clear from what Gunaratne writes that Ardan is meant to embody a modern William Blake. While there are some large dissimilarities between the two, like Blake not being Irish and coming from a middle-class family, Gunaratne still compares their views on society. Gunaratne delineates how Blakes's poetry was influenced by street ballads, popular songs, and hymns and how he imagines Blake walking around London, pen in hand and writing about what he saw (Gunaratne 293). This image of Blake is directly reflected in Ardan’s life and how he walks around with his notepad, always ready to commit words to paper and create verse. In addition to these influences, Blake and Ardan’s writings share similarities. Blake’s presentation of social injustice and industrial grime through poems like “The Chimneysweeper”, or the silent surrender to a predetermined course and alienation, like in the first line of the third stanza of “London”, in which the persona also hears “how the chimney sweepers cry”. These themes are also found in the pieces of Ardan’s writing, which are found throughout the novel. Blake writes:

> I wander thro' each charter'd street,
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
> And mark in every face I meet
> Marks of weakness, marks of woe. (Blake “London” lines 1-4)

Compare these four lines to Ardan’s bars as he sits on top of a building overlooking Neasden:

> North Block rooftop spitting early
> Nobody sees me, nobody hears me
> So I drop my shoulders like
> The city gives the road their light. (Gunaratne 20)

Both poems give a dark depiction of life in London, where individuals have surrendered to either the streets or the roads. Blakes and Arden’s poem focuses on the weakened proletariat and precariat masses of London and both poems express a sense of resignation to the current state of affairs, it is unclear whether they are accepting this situation or protesting against it. If the poems are interpreted as acceptance, they represent the despair of the precariat due to the loss of rights and lack of representation. However, interpreted as a form of protest, they could be seen as Ardan's attempt to raise his voice. Both writers include presentations of alienation and marginalisation of the proletariat and precariat, and both express the precarious situation of the socially deprived. The fact that both authors debate the same issues with over two hundred years separating them shows how injustice done to the weakest in a society is not limited to the past but remains a social and judicial issue. In Gunaratne's case, the immigrated precariat has become the weakest. The search for Englishness in a society that does not give the voiceless a voice causes alienation in those who try to make England their new home.

Gunaratne writes that Blake's *Jerusalem* makes him think about how language is used and reinvented to "evoke a sense of place" (Gunaratne 291). This sense of place can mean different things depending on the reader. The last four lines are especially ambiguous.

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land. (Blake "Jerusalem" lines 13-16)

On the one hand, the poem can be used to justify immigration and reinvention and become an anthem for the precariat. The mental fight to build a new home is entirely in line with the struggles of the precariat class of immigrants. On the other, the verses can be used to narrowly define Englishness as something that already exists and needs protecting, sword in hand, and then is used to justify the exclusion of the precariat in English society. While British nationalists have appropriated this poem, it would be hard to imagine that Blake would condone his work being used as justification for violence and exclusion. Jerusalem is meant as a sanctuary and should continue to function as such.

The way Gunaratne portray generations of precarious immigrants shows how their situation can be changing. While Nelson came to Britain as a part of a Caribbean immigration wave, being met with hostility by the Britons already living in London, the current generation is depicted as making London their home. By comparing Ardan and Blake's poems, it becomes clear that the social alienation and marginalization of the impoverished classes have persisted from the Victorian era to contemporary England. However, the comparison Gunaratne makes between Ardan and Blake when interpreting the poem *Jerusalem* shows how, for some, the idea of England as a new land of opportunity and sanctuary is still alive.

### 5.2.3 Extremism As a Result of Precarity

No matter how connected the world has become, society may fail to see individuals belonging to the precariat class and their struggles, as Standing's presentation of the precariat makes clear. The unseen may feel disenfranchised and frustrated, an experience that carries the possibility of radicalisation, which might cause them to act out to get attention or to create alternative groups of belonging. Such a reaction is in line with Standing's idea of the precariat as a potentially dangerous class where an inability to see commonalities with other social groups can lead to marginalisation and self-isolation of the precarious groups (Standing The *Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 77). Two kinds of extremism are depicted In *In Our Mad and Furious City*. Gunaratne depicts both Muslim radicalisation as well as white nationalism. While the main focus in the novel is on the multicultural community of the Stones Estate, there is a looming presence of white nationalism in the background, which arguably plays a part in the radicalisation of Yusef, who is one of the three main protagonists. This is a major plot point in the novel, as the two factions clash in the novel's climax. In this sub-chapter, I will first discuss Gunaratne's views on radicalisation in Britain and then describe and analyse how Yusef's gradual radicalisation is depicted in the novel and relate it to Standing's ideas of the precariat.

In an interview, Gunaratne comments on the issue of social alienation due to multicultural attachment. In this case, a young woman had been radicalised. She left England in favour of joining an Islamic group in Syria and was told she would lose her UK citizenship, effectively leaving her stateless. Regardless of the moral debate a case such as this can spark, Gunaratne had this to say about her potentially losing her citizenship: "Assert our belonging as being grounded in law. Anything less and we abdicate our collective responsibilities as members of civil society" (Gunaratne in Armitstead paragraph 17). Gunaratne also had this to say about her radicalisation: "It was here, in Britain, that she was radicalised. And it is here that she should face justice. The only way we can begin to understand the pathologies behind those who choose to follow ideologies of hate groups is to bring them home." (Gunaratne in Armitstead paragraph 17). It is interesting that Gunaratne petitions the authorities and the law-makes to bring her "home". The precarity that follows from social alienation may cause doubt in a person's idea of what exactly "home" is. Standing stresses the danger of precarity enough to make the claim that the precariat is a "new dangerous class" primarily due to the risk of radicalisation. The story of Yusuf in *In Our Mad and Furious City* offers an insightful depiction of how this process may work.

Yusuf comes from a Muslim household where his father is an imam, and his mother stays home. His father believes that he must show Yusuf and his brother the culture and beauty of Islam and how they can find personal comfort in religion. However, during Yusuf's childhood, he could see a change in his father and his relationship with the religion.

> He became muted. Disturbed by a brand of worship that became less about history and art, the Islam he loved, and more about the hate curdled up in the present. (…) Mosque too became colder and unforgiving after that. The place had changed hands, ennet. I began to notice raised voices between my father and those other men in kameez who would shuffle in and out East Block for prayer and tea. (Gunaratne 91)

This change in Yusuf's community ends in his father dying and another Imam taking his place. This Imam is a part of the faction of the community that Yusuf refers to as the "men in Kameez". With Yusuf's father gone, so went his resistance to radicalisation and the moderation of the Mosque. The religious focus changes and The Stones Estates Muslim community starts to become more and more radicalised. In the aftermath of the Muslim boy shooting the soldier, tensions in the estate community are growing. There is a clear "anti-Islam" sentiment rising in the far-right faction of the outskirts of London.

There is a direct parallel between how close Yusuf is to wearing the Kameez and his radicalisation. The change is subtle in the beginning, when Yusuf makes a note of how many in his mosque have begun to dress differently. While the "men in Kameez" is ever present, Yusuf still stays clear of them. Throughout the story, he is continuously presented with the traditional garment but refuses to wear it. He still retains connection and commonality with mainstream society, as Standing describes as important to avoid radicalisation, and with his friends to outweigh the pressure for him to put on the iconic garment. It is not until the protest at the end of the book that he chooses to give in to radicalisation and put on the Kameez during the ensuing chaos.

The question that must be asked is why does he eventually put on these politically contested clothes? Is it an inherent sense of justice that makes him do it? Does he feel like he is obligated to atone for his brother's mistakes, and does he know his brother lit up the Mosque? While being pulled in two different directions, is his succumbing to the extremist protest an attempt to cling to a remanence of his father's memory, or is the deciding factor merely a feeling of obligation to his family that eventually makes the decision for him?

> I placed the kameez over my head. I extended my arms, my body, my palms into it. There was not a thought in my mind in that moment. It was as if were performing some rite. I wandered into the row of Muhajiroun then and took my place next to the

> others. My sleeves were uneven and I felt the back of my neck itching against the coarse fabric. Nevertheless I stood solid still like the rest of my brothers. *His blood is your blood now*. (Gunaratne 250)

The excerpt illustrates quite overtly the discomfort Yusuf feels when he makes the choice to wear the kameez and agrees to everything wearing the garment entails. His sleeves are uneven, and the kameez is itching, but still, he describes putting it on as a rite. He takes *his* place and stands with *his* brothers. Yusef feels a sense of ownership over his community but also struggles with his dual identity. He considers the place to be his own in the end.

If Standing's theory of why members of the precariat can be drawn towards extremist views is applied in the case of Yusuf, there are clear correlations between theory and practice. Standing highlights a derogatory view of a social group as an isolating factor (Standing *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 77). Yusuf describes his Mosque as taking on an increasingly dark tone. This dark tone directly reflects the public's view of Muslim communities and the shame at least his father felt in the aftermath of 9/11. While this has nothing to do with their economic or employment situation, as in the example Standing uses to illustrate the appeal of extremism, the isolation factor based on public opinion is directly transferrable. The factor that eventually makes Yusuf join the ranks of the protest might be the realisation that he would never be accepted as part of any other community than the Muhajiroun following the arson in his Mosque. There is a possibility that he didn't know about his brother's role in causing the fire. Likely, he assumed the fire was the work of the far right.

While Standing claims the nostalgic faction is more likely to listen to extremist views, I do not interpret this to mean that the Atavist or Progressive factions of the precariat are immune to the pull of extremist points of view. I would argue that Yusuf belongs to the Atavist faction of the precariat, differentiating him from his two friends. He is the child of someone whose occupation previously brought with it a sense of pride. His father was an Imam, a man that was respected by most when he was young and did not know life outside of his community. As Yusuf grew older and grew to know more of London, he would likely have started to see that his father's profession did not demand the same respect regardless of where he went. This realisation, combined with the pull from his increasingly radical Muslim community, could have deepened the social divide and caused him to accept the representation he gained from being part of the radicals, the only group he had a self-perceived connection to.

Based on Gunaratne's interview with *The Guardian* and his portrayal of Yusef in *In Our Mad and Furious City,* it seems that Gunaratne believes radicalisation is inflicted upon individuals rather than being something they seek out without reason. Although he does not condone violence, he sees the process of radicalisation as a complex issue. When he says that the people who choose to follow hateful ideology should be judged in Britain, as he suggests that this is a problem that stems from Britain. Combined with his appeal for people with multicultural backgrounds to assert their belonging as if by law, based on my interpretation, the likely explanation seems to be that Gunaratne and Standing share the belief that radicalisation originates from a sense of not belonging or being represented. This is reflected in the internal conflict Yusef is experiencing. He is constantly drawn between belonging to two different communities. Only when the push away from being "British" becomes stronger than the pull towards radical Islam is when he turns to the radical. The high threshold Gunaratne sets for turning to the radical fringe of society, combined with Yusef's senseless death as a result, is indicative of the lengths they feel they must go to in order to be seen in British society and the injustice done to the precariat as a result.

### 5.2.4 The Precariat, Police, and Injustice

The novel *In Our Mad and Furious City* discusses the tense relationship between the police and the precariat. This relationship is marked by mistrust, conflict, and violence. The author, Gunaratne, examines how the precariat perceives the police both in the past and present, revealing that their negative view of the police remains unchanged. In the novel, the police are depicted in various ways. They are seen as riot control during Nelson's participation in the Notting Hill riots, and they play a significant role in the climactic scene where Muslim and nationalist protests collide.

In one of Nelson's recollections, he and his companions were on the brink of joining the Notting Hill Riots when one of them cautioned him about the police's potential intervention. "Police are the arm of the oppressor, remember that boy. To the white man, the black man always been a violation here." (Gunaratne 130). This statement implies that the police enforce laws that keep the precariat class in a vulnerable position, making them unwitting allies of the oppressor. Which, in this case, would be the British government. Furthermore, Gunaratne's portrayal of the precariat class as a group that is frequently excluded from mainstream society and often subject to discrimination and marginalisation highlights the inherent socio-economic divide that exists within British society.

Although policing is a significant aspect of Nelson's past and the protest towards the novel's end, the police are noticeably absent for most of the story. For the majority of the story, the police are only mentioned and seen on television. There is also police tape separating the Stones estate from the rest of London in the wake of the shooting that marks the beginning of the novel, as referenced by Caroline "Sure the police lines are cutting off the North Gate. I have to lift the police tape to pass under." (Gunaratne 16). The combination of police absence and border marking creates a feeling of lawlessness and the impression that The Stones Estate is not a part of London, but a separate state beyond ordinary law and civilisation. Interpreted in light of Standing's theories of the precariat class, it is reasonable to draw lines between the idea of denizenship and lack of governmental presence, which the police's absence indicates.

Throughout the novel, the residents of the Stones Estate maintain a consistently negative attitude towards the police, regardless of who narrates the story. This is evident as they all make explicit allegations on collusion between the police and the nationalist mob. All three protagonists' comment on this, the most noteworthy being the ones from Yusef and Ardan. In the first excerpt, Yusef listens to the new Imam rousing his congregation before the final protest. "The white menace. The infidel Kemp. He should be hanged, he said. His thugs hanged too. They were being protected by the police, he said, and were due to hold another march this afternoon." (Gunaratne 251). The language used, like "infidel" and the firm claims that the person in question should be hanged, are strong indications that the Imam seeks to create even more of a distance between social classes. The Imam is not necessarily a part of the precariat, but he is a good portrayal of the extremist voices Standing warns about in his writing. Standing warns that the nostalgic precariat will turn to these voices in order to find an identity and representation where they feel they have none.

On the other hand, Gunaratne's novel presents an example of how Ardan considers the new police presence as an intrusion. "The police are letting the goons protest through here. Fuckers, the lot of them. They allowing them skinheads to pass right along this road. Our road. Them feds are as racist as the marchers mate." (Gunaratne 254). Ardan feels a connection and sense of ownership to where he grew up. Meaning this is the place he considers home, not Ireland as his mother likely would. As I have already assigned Ardan to the Progressive faction of the precariat, this suggests that being a part of the precariat is not necessarily only based on what a person lacks. This interpretation is in line with Frase's critique of Standing's definition of the precariat and could point to the precariat being a unifying identity rather than a new social class.

The portrayal of the police in *In Our Mad and Furious City* is a powerful social commentary on why representation and trust are necessary for a multicultural society. The police's treatment of the precariat members of community causes feelings of unfairness and resentment, leading to more hostility and animosity. The critical presentation of the police as “the arm of the oppressor” in Gunaratne’s novel emphasises the importance of the police developing better comprehension and collaboration with the communities they serve, particularly those belonging to the precariat class.

# 6 Comparative Discussion of the Two Primary Novels

In the previous chapters, I have discussed how *Oliver Twist* presents the relationship between justice and the Victorian proletariat and how *In Our Mad and Furious City* displays Standing’s ideas of the precariat and the social injustice of this new class, or group of classless denizens, in modern-day Britain. This thesis aims to compare the two works and examine how changing perceptions of justice are depicted in these two novels. This chapter compares and contrasts the attitudes towards justice presented in the previous chapters. It is interesting to note the reception that these two novels received upon their release, as this instant commentary provides insight into what the broader society deems acceptable issues of social justice in these two novels. While both discuss very real and, at times, complex themes of their respective societies, their reception was very different.

*Oliver Twist* was not recognised as culturally significant or appropriate when it was first published. Cazamian wrote during the seventies that what Dickens did was elevate “a whole social class to the dignity of artistic representation” (Cazamian 155). However, at the time of *Oliver Twist's* release, the novel was subject to mixed reviews and even caused revulsion in some, as in the case of Lord Melbourne. As Cazamian highlights and I discuss in 5.1, the *Quarterly Review* accused the novel of only being fit for brutes, and some praised the depiction of the positive and more nuanced portrayal of the proletariat (156). The mixed reception could indicate the substantial class divide in Britain. While many members of the upper classes argue(d) the proletariat had and has no artistic role to play, the proletariat themselves would undoubtedly have felt a sense of justification for being represented in this nuanced way. It is important to note the closeness *Oliver Twist* shares with the legal reforms that occurred when the novel was released. It would be short-sighted to separate the artistic novel from the real-life changing society it reflects. Social changes may cause disagreements that are reflected in literature, a type of literature, such as Dickens’s, which also contributes to the social changes it interacts with. It is likely that those wanting to perpetuate the status quo did not like revolutionary thoughts being mass distributed to the previously voiceless. In *In Our Mad and Furious City,* the importance of representation and engagement with established law and society becomes much more apparent and immediate to today's readers.

*In Our Mad and Furious City* did not have to wait to have its cultural relevance officially recognised like *Oliver Twist*. At the time of its publication, the novel quickly amassed critical acclaim and praise for its depiction of disenfranchised voices. As the winner of the University of Swansea's Dylan Thomas Prize as well as shortlisted and longlisted for several other literary prizes (Gunaratne Front Cover), this novel is undoubtedly commonly accepted as having literary relevance and merit. However, the novel discusses themes that could be very controversial, and the publication of the novel caused Gunaratne to be requested to make statements to the media pertaining to similar precarious cases. The example here is the woman who regretted leaving England to join a radical Muslim group (Armitstead). Being considered an authority on a subject based on fictional literature could point to the lack of representation both Standing and Gunaratne imply in their work. That is not to say Gunaratne's experiences do not make him qualified to speak but this is an expression of absence of sociological research on the topic of the precariat. It is also important to note that this novel is aimed at young adults and teens. The novel's intended audience could be a cause for it not to gain the attention of groups like the British aristocracy as Dickens's *Oliver Twist* did. This could also be a result of a more saturated literary market, causing each new piece not to shout as loudly as perhaps they would during the Victorian Era. It is likely that if the novel had been presented as biographical that the discussion would have been more two-sided. Similarly to *Oliver Twist*, *In Our Mad and Furious City* is written at a time of great societal change. While the change is not legislative, which is a part of the problem, the change is instead in the societal class system. The fact that the novel points to a lack of legislation may also be a reason why the book is still not part of a more public debate. Should the time come when the governing body is forced to make large changes in favour of the precariat, then this may change. This does not take away from the fact that *In Our Mad and Furious City* discusses and highlights important topics that affect a large part of modern British society.

While the novel *Oliver Twist* is saturated with governmental influence, such as the extensive comments on the New Poor Laws and strict law enforcement, the characters in *In Our Mad and Furious City* are experiencing a total lack of overt governmental interference or protection. As the two novels both critique their respective societies, it is natural to interpret the portrayals of either too much or too little governmental involvement as a wish for the opposite. During the Victorian period, orphaned children frequently encountered challenging circumstances, including institutional management in workhouses, apprenticeship sales, and heightened oversight from law enforcement. Charles Dickens's depiction of these conditions may have served as a plea for greater individual freedom for the exploited and the socially disadvantaged. Conversely, the absence of governmental interference underlines the characters of *In Our Mad and Furious City's* status as "denizens", as Standing defines their social status, or lack of such (Standing "The New Dangerous Class" 14). The social and legislative tendency to not infringe on someone's individual rights can easily result in some individuals' rightlessness. Or this tendency reflects apathy and unwillingness to cause meaningful change by legislators in the circumstances that cause denizenship in those unaffected by precarity. This apathy is reminiscent of Lord Melbourne's in his declaration of disgust at the portrayal of the proletariat in *Oliver Twist* (Horne xiii). The negative attitudes of Selvon, Ardan and Yusef, the main protagonists of *In Our Mad and Furious City,* displays towards police, combined with the police being the only overt governmental presence in the novel, makes the unwillingness and apathy of the British legislators the likely explanation to the precariat's status as denizens.

However, there is one covert element of governmental influence hiding in plain sight: the estate itself. Housing estates such as the Stones Estate are affordable housing initiatives the British government subsidises. In a way, the housing estate can be considered a modern workhouse. Both the most destitute of the Victorian proletariat and the contemporary precariat are sometimes left without options but to seek the workhouse or affordable housing. Although modern affordable housing may be less intrusive, it still carries with it a negative social stigma similar to the one labelling the people who had to turn to the workhouse. Malthus argued that poverty was due to personal moral failure (Strand 538). Standing writes about the neo-liberal idea that poverty is caused by laziness (Standing *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 77); both can have similar negative impacts on those who are part of the precariat. This can be observed through the dangers and challenges that arise from the precarious mindset, which is similar to the effects experienced by those who are forced to submit to the workhouse system. Similarly to the workhouse, the Estate dictates where the precariat may live. Jacobs Island in *Oliver Twist* and Neasden in *In Our Mad and Furious City* disclose very effectually such housing policies or lack thereof. As well as the social stigmatisation and unwillingness or incapacity to incorporate the precariat in ordinary legislation, social development, and democratic attitude.

The theme of geographical isolation is a major plot point in both novels. Each novel represents the social divide between the proletariat/precariat and the rest of their particular society. The social divides in both novels are relatively explicit but for different reasons. In *Oliver Twist*, while separated by social and geographical borders, there is some intercultural interaction where different social classes are represented. For example, Mr Brownlow and Mr Grimwig represent the gentry, and Mr Bumble represents the middle class. Their authority relative to the Victorian proletariat is represented in how they interact with Oliver Twist. It is clear that the bourgeoisie has little knowledge of those of a lower social standing, as represented by Mr Grimwig. Likewise, there is a clear power structure in place, and there is no doubt that the proletariat is at the bottom of the social, legislative, and democratic hierarchy. This inequality is represented in how Oliver is continuously at the mercy of those of a higher social class than himself. The combination of class divides and little knowledge of the Victorian proletariat results in an explicit, powerful critique of the Victorian bourgeoisie. The case is different in *In Our Mad and Furious City*. The main parts of the novel focus exclusively on the precarious characters, and there is no mention of other social classes, except for the working-class nationalists at the very end of the novel. The absence of other social classes may be just as effective in commenting on the geographical and social divide in a society as directly illustrating a diversity of social groups.

The bubble-like description of Neasden with borders marked by police tape and the sense of ownership of the place, as illustrated by Ardan, shows how a community without representation is both isolated by society and can be self-isolating in search of identity. This is in line with Standing's description of an identity-seeking precariat (Standing *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 77). The self-isolation is also found in the descriptions of Yusuf turning to extremism while being slowly more isolated from his friends. Both the Victorian proletariat and modern precariat are, to varying degrees, isolated and non- and misrepresented, as depicted in the novels. The modern precariat, as presented in *In our Mad and Furious City*, has more in common with Dickens’s proletariat – the precariat of his time – than with today’s proletariat, which has, at least to a certain degree, been incorporated into social development, legislation, and democracy for a long time.

Similarly to how the novels illustrate the lack of understanding or communication between social classes due to geographical divides, both novels comment on the societal majority's views of the Victorian proletariat and the modern precariat. These views in both *Oliver Twist* and *In Our Mad and Furious City* are mainly negative. First, it needs to be mentioned that in the case of *In Our Mad and Furious City*, the novel does not claim that the societal majority are white nationalists or inherently racist. However, throughout the novel, the voices of white nationalists are dominant, and the majority of society does not intervene or object to the unfair treatment of the precariat. Even worse, large parts of the precariat regard the police as gatekeepers protecting society against the precariat, often by excessive law enforcement and even collusion. Although this may not necessarily reflect reality, the novel suggests that many precariat characters interpret the world as lacking in intervention.

In *Oliver Twist*, there is a significant emphasis on the usefulness of the proletariat children in the workhouse. They are referred to as "crop", and the workhouse as an institution is referred to as a "system of farming" (Dickens 5). The depiction of children as crop, (or as I interpret it,) a future cheap labour force, shows that the newly industrialised Britain was struggling to view the proletariat as individuals but instead saw them as a source of mass labour. In addition, the Malthusian views of poverty being caused by moral failure stretches beyond the stigma associated with the workhouse. An expanded interpretation would allow the bourgeoisie to expect all members of the Victorian proletariat to be morally corrupted and, therefore, likely criminal. This view is highlighted in Oliver's time at the local jail, where the police officer exclaims that while he may not be guilty of stealing Mr Brownlow's handkerchief, he is more than likely to be guilty of other types of crime. The internal struggle of Mr Brownlow when he ponders if Oliver can indeed be innocent, even though he is certain Oliver did not steal from him, further emphasises this assumption. The view of the Victorian proletariat as disenfranchised could, at times, be overshadowed by the criminality also associated with this social class. However, Oliver is a difficult character to place. He is innocent and pure, but he is not a true member of the Victorian proletariat as he enjoys aristocratic heritage, connections, and privilege. Nevertheless, the way Fagin is hired to morally corrupt Oliver could then speak in favour of the Malthusian idea of a connection between immorality and poverty, which would go against most of the rest of the novel's message. Still Oliver represents hope, personal probity, and the future. In a very mixed and rapidly changing society, the exploitation, the trial, and the happy ending also reveal social injustice and the changes in law and democratic development to the benefit of the working class.

Conversely, while the precariat is, according to Standing, the result of a growing global labour force (Standing "The New Dangerous Class" 1) the work aspect of the precariat is set aside in *In Our Mad and Furious City*. This is mainly due to the main focus being on the children belonging to the precariat. However, the inclusion of Nelson's story still gives the reader insight into how early immigrant workers were greeted during the 1950s. The disconnect between Nelson's expectation of living and working in England and the reality he eventually faced is likely comparable to the experiences of today’s precariat. Gunaratne implies this continuance of precarity by making history repeat itself by including protest clashes between the same social groups in both Nelson’s flashbacks and the novel's climax. The negative reception precariat immigrant worker experience may point to an end of the perception of the lower classes being useful or a resource. Instead, they may be perceived as taking jobs and resources away from the societal majority. It appears that in Britain, there is still an issue with recognising immigrant workers and their children as British enough to be adequately represented, leading to their classification as part of the precariat. Perhaps the reason why there is such opposition to the presence of the precariat class is that the social changes brought by the creation of the precariat class do not stem from within British borders. While the changes referred to during the Victorian period were happening to the people already living there, the creation of the precariat class is instead due to the influx of outside labourers and, therefore, also their cultures. This, in the case of *In Our Mad and Furious City*, creates an “us versus them” mentality and consequently does not result in integration but rather segregation with limited to no representation in the majority of society.

In contrast to the justice thrust upon the Victorian citizens by governmental magistrates in *Oliver Twist*, justice in *In Our Mad and Furious City* tends to be an elusive phenomenon the precarious citizens must seek for themselves. As both novels comment heavily on law enforcement, either through the judicial system or the police, a comparison between the portrayal of the two will be most relevant on the topic of official justice within the novels. By official justice, I am referring to justice wielded by the constitution, the Parliament, and official societal institutions, such as courts or police.

In *Oliver Twist*, there is an emphasis on the lack of agency Oliver, as a representative of the disenfranchised proletariat, possesses. Oliver is first at the mercy of the workhouse, then the magistrate, then the undertaker, then the proletariat as represented by Fagin, the Court system represented by Mr Fang and, finally, the invisible hand of the aristocracy, represented by Mr Brownlow. The only time Oliver’s wishes are taken into account is when the magistrates see his lack of “willingness” and “desire” to go with the chimney sweep (Dickens 22). This instance offers a glimmer of optimism from Dickens, but the rest of the novel is quite clear on Oliver’s position in Victorian society. This optimistic view is later heavily contradicted when meeting Mr Fang and his court. Considering the grim death sentence statistic at the time, the pickpocketing incident could just as likely have ended in Oliver being sentenced to hang instead of hard labour had no one spoken on his behalf. This mixture of optimism and grim statistics indicates that being a part of the Victorian proletariat was just as precarious as being a part of the precariat today.

The absence and presence of police in *In Our Mad and Furious City* can be interpreted to reflect both the precariat's view of themselves as well as the majority's view of criminality within the precariat, respectively. The way Neasden is geographically and socially isolated and the way Ardan portrays the police as intruders indicates that the precariat exists outside the realm of official justice. The use of police only in an antagonistic, responsive, crowd-controlling manner further emphasises this point. The perception of the police as antagonistic is commented on in a powerful way when Yusef listens to the Imam accusing the police of protecting the white nationalists. The way the Imam's speech, in the end, makes Yusef feel like he does not belong with mainstream England and seeks brotherhood with the radical Islamists shows the importance of representation for the precariat. Especially seen in light of Standing's warnings about the potentially dangerous precariat. Neasden, like Dickens's Jacob's Island, highlights the denizens of a stigmatised and deprived community. Such exposure, like the comments on Dickens's *Oliver Twist* by representatives of the clergy and the authorities, offers a radical plea for social integration and just legislation.

Both novels present disenfranchised voices in their respective eras. In some respects, the novels do not reflect the real-life counterparts they seek to comment on or criticise. One of the main differences between the Victorian proletariat and the modern precariat is that the Victorian proletariat was gaining representation through labour unions and new legislation, and the precariat is described as having no discernible voice in mainstream society. In the novels' portrayals of the two social classes, Oliver Twist is portrayed as having no voice and little representation and precarious characters such as Ardan in *In Our Mad and Furious City* are given a very clear voice through his poetry. Granted, Ardan's poetry is of no consequence to the larger society during the course of the book, but he is in the process of receiving a record deal, giving him a possible future voice in mainstream society. This slight optimism from Gunaratne is similar to the positive connotations the inclusion of the Chimney Sweep Apprentice Act had for the future in *Oliver Twist*.

# 7 Conclusion

This thesis' aim was to argue that the precariat, as defined by Guy Standing, is a continuation and modern equivalent of the Victorian proletariat through a comparative analysis of Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1836) and Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* (2018). During my (thesis) research, I discovered a series of similar societal factors that suggest the modern precariat is comparable to and likely a continuation of the Victorian proletariat. These factors include the reception of the novels during their publishing, the level of governmental influence depicted in the novels, the correlation between social and geographical divides, the representation of how other social classes view the Victorian proletariat and contemporary precariat, the portrayal of law enforcement in both novels and how disenfranchised voices are depicted in each novel. All these factors indicate clearly that the precariat constitutes a new version of the proletariat.

The reception the novels received upon their release may speak both in favour of the precariat as the new proletariat and against this claim. The literary awards given *In Our Mad and Furious City* as critical acclaim and praise for its depiction of disenfranchised voices offer a stark contrast to the Victorian view that claimed the lower classes had no artistic role to play and, therefore, should not be represented in literature. This is a clear dissimilarity between the two novels and should speak against the precariat being a new proletariat. However, the elevation of the lowest societal class to "the dignity of artistic representation" (Cazamian 155) is one of the greater similar themes the novels share. As both novels are set in times of great transformation and saw the emergence of their respective lower social classes, the emphasis and importance placed on including them in literary fiction can speak to a similar social significance between them.

The saturation of governmental influence in *Oliver Twist* contrasts with the absence of governmental influence in *In Our Mad and Furious City* but still argues the point that the precariat is the new proletariat. The lack of a governmental presence can be perceived equally as controlling and intrusive as the execution of the New Poor Laws. The similarities between the workhouse and the Stones Estate show how governmental subsidies can have adverse effects on the citizens they aim to aid. The comparable social stigma created by both the Victorian workhouse and contemporary subsidised housing is a big indication of a continuance of the Victorian proletariat in the precariat. Likewise, the individual freedom lost by being forced to submit to the Victorian workhouse is comparable to the precariat becoming denizens as a result of the apathy and unwillingness to cause meaningful change of contemporary legislators, pointing to the same continuance.

Geographical isolation is a significant theme in both novels, with a clear divide between the proletariat/precariat and the rest of society. Both novels critique the inequalities connected to this geographical, social isolation but in different ways. *In Our Mad and Furious City* especially critiques the self-imposed social isolation that the sense of ownership of a place or group can cause in the precariat's search for identity, as well as the imposed isolation the police markings imply. *Oliver Twist* does not show the proletariat to be self-isolating, but the lack of intercultural communication and lack of understanding result in a similar geographical border between areas like Jacob’s Island and the rest of London. So, while the “why” is different, the outcomes are the same.

The perspective of the precariat held by other social classes differs significantly from the Victorian proletariat, thereby speaking against the claim that the precariat can be considered the new proletariat. While the Victorian proletariat was considered a necessary resource, although in a dehumanizing manner, the precariat, as immigrant workers, are instead perceived as taking jobs and resources away from the societal majority. This difference can be due to the difference in how the Victorian proletariat and contemporary precariat came to grow and be. During the Victorian period, societal changes following the industrial revolution affected the people who were already living in England. However, the creation of the precariat class was due to the arrival of outside labourers and their cultures. This led to an "us versus them" mentality in *In Our Mad and Furious City* and can be a reason for the precariat’s lack of representation in mainstream society. Conversely, the Malthusian view of the Victorian proletariat being poor due to moral failure is highly reminiscent of Standing’s explanation of how the neo-liberal framework made “unemployment a matter of individual responsibility” (Standing *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* 77), causing the unemployed part of the precariat to be regarded as lazy scrounges. The similarities between these perspectives suggest that other social classes during those respective periods held and holds similar opinions on the morals of the Victorian proletariat and the precariat despite the disagreement on the classes' status as a resource.

The perceived criminality of the Victorian proletariat and the precariat also share similarities. The question of Oliver’s capacity for innocence in the care of the police contradicts any notion that the Victorian proletariat was less precarious than today's precariat. Likewise, the assumed criminality implied by the antagonistic, responsive, crowd-controlling way the police is depicted by Gunaratne, leaving the precariat outside the realm of justice, is comparable to the implied criminality of the Victorian proletariat.

Both novels illustrate their protagonist's lack of agency. *Oliver Twist* portrays the lack of voice and agency that the disenfranchised proletariat, represented by Oliver, possesses. The only time Oliver’s rights are taken into account and his voice is heard is when he nearly is sold to the chimneysweep as his apprentice. Unlike Oliver’s lack of voice and agency, Ardan, as a representation of the precariat's voice, shows how the precariat likely has a louder voice than the truly disenfranchised Victorian proletariat through his poetry and likely record deal.

Showing possible progress and hope for future representation of the precariat in mainstream society.

It is important to acknowledge that this thesis is limited in its scope, as it only focuses on a small literary cross-section. Therefore, further research will reveal more correspondences and complexities between the Victorian proletariat and the precariat. Future research into more novels and more relevant theory is bound to develop the research of this thesis. Potentially, this literary research could be combined with political theory and economic history. For this reason, I would implore others to either choose different literary works of fiction representing the same social classes and execute comparative analyses or conduct further comparative research on *Oliver Twist* and *In Our Mad and Furious City*. Hopefully, this could identify gaps in this thesis or elaborate on the ideas presented here in order to further understand the cultural significance of the emergence of the precariat social class.

Both *Oliver Twist* and *In Our Mad and Furious City* reveal very forcefully how democratic policies, or lack thereof, can easily fail those members of society who need support temporarily, and social justice and democratic possibilities on a permanent basis. They also point to the Malthusian and neoliberal mindsets that contend with forces of solidarity in socio-democratic development. Considering the similarities and differences between the portrayal of the Victorian proletariat and the contemporary precariat as they are analysed and discussed in this thesis, I judge the similarities to outweigh the differences. Additionally, the differences are reflective of a changing society, and a comparison based solely on similarities would be suspiciously subjective. I will therefore end my thesis by restating my claim that the emerging precariat is indeed a modern iteration of the Victorian proletariat.

# 8 Literature and LK20

This thesis focuses on the iteration of socio-democratic inequality of the Victorian period in our time, as presented in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City*. The Victorian proletariat faces many of the same challenges as the precariat. These themes and social commentary correspond appropriately with the Norwegian LK20 English classroom as a means of teaching justice and democracy.

According to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, the new curriculum now highlights a more exploratory approach to language learning (Utdanningsdirektoratet "Core Elements" Paragraph 3). The English curriculum for LK20 places significant emphasis on the core element *Working With Texts in English*. This core element states:

> By reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. (Utdanningsdirektoratet "Core Elements" Paragraph 3)

This core element aims to foster social and cultural competence, as well as language skills, through the analysis and interpretation of texts. The word "text" can refer to a range of different types of media, and literature is no longer explicitly mentioned in the curriculum as of LK20. Literature presents a logical choice of text to promote critical reading and curiosity. Literary works of fiction still engage the readers and develop their knowledge and communication capacity. This thesis inspection of the proletariat and the precariat aligns with LK20's interdisciplinary theme of *Democracy and Citizenship*, which in turn aims to "open for new ways to interpret the world and promote curiosity and engagement" (Utdanningsdirektoratet "Interdisciplinary Topics" Paragraph 2). In order to produce critical and insightful citizens, the principles of Norwegian English education rely on the integration of core elements and interdisciplinary topics. The critical interpretation of socio-democratic aspects of English literature, especially in such novels as Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist* and Guy Gunaratne's *In Our Mad and Furious City* helps to achieve the aims of LK20.

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