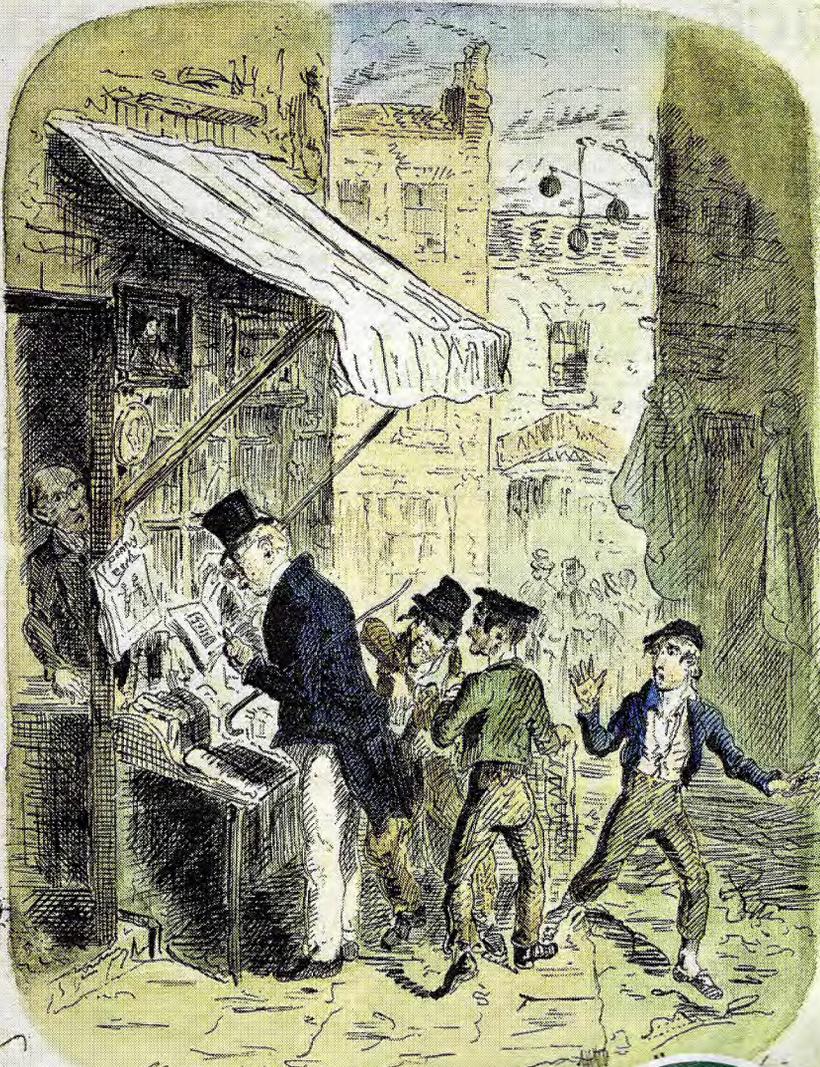


ALAMY



*The Omnibus
Oliver arranged at the Dodger's mode*

Dickens plagiarists twisted his titles

There are books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts, Charles Dickens wrote in *Oliver Twist*. He did not

name any titles but few books infuriated the author as much as the shameless rip-offs of his own work, which he was powerless to stop (Lucy Bannerman writes). Take for example *Oliver Twist*, *Martin Guzzlewit*, *Barnaby Rudge* and *Nickelberry*, which flooded the market at the height of his popularity. Although long forgotten, these plagiarised serialisations



Dickens fought in vain to ban rip-offs such as *Oliver Twiss*, which features a gangmaster called Solomon

were so popular that Dickens went to court to halt their publication. He failed.

Rohan McWilliam, of Anglia Ruskin University, rediscovered the counterfeit copies while researching the life of Edward Lloyd, the press baron who published them. Not only did they help to make Lloyd a very rich man, the cheaper alternatives may have been the first experience that the poorer reading public had of Dickens's work: they were sold for a penny, compared with a shilling for the originals.

From 1837 to 1850 Lloyd employed ten to fifteen writers to churn out tales of London orphans, misers and tubby gentlemen. To Dickens's frustration the rip-offs often came out before the final instalments of the originals, allowing the plagiarists to imagine alternative fates for the characters. Mr Pickwick travels to the US and becomes a plantation owner, while *Oliver Twiss* gets caught up with a gangmaster called Solomon. "These are not lost classics; they were pretty bad," Professor McWilliam said.

As *The Times* reported in June 1837, Dickens's publishers took Lloyd to the Court Chancery in an attempt to ban *The Penny Pickwick* but the judge, Sir Lancelot Shadwell, concluded that the rip-off was so bad that no one would be fooled. Dickens is regarded as a big influence on the final creation of copyright law in the UK.

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