

Jack dawkins by terry
ward



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Charles Dickens' well-known classic, *Oliver Twist*, Jack Dawkins, also known as The Artful Dodger, is seen toward the end of the 43rd chapter during his trial reducing the courtroom to hysterics with his derisive and rumbustious behavior. He goes as far as to threaten the magistrates, warning that he wouldn't show them a half-penny worth of mercy as his, "attorney is a-breakfasting this morning with the vice-president of the House of Commons..." He insists that he will, without a doubt, make a parliamentary business out of it. Jack is then last seen being whisked away, wearing a grin of great glee and self-approval. Terry Ward's *Jack Dawkins* picks up from that last scene of the Dodger, taking readers back to the times of Oliver and Jack. But this time, Jack Dawkins is the central focus of the narrative, while *Oliver Twist* and Mr. Brownlow are featured as supporting characters. Other characters from *Oliver Twist* as well as some characters from other books by Charles Dickens play minor roles while others are mentioned in passing. In revisiting the amusing and memorable character of Jack, Ward's novel offers a compelling account of the adventures and misadventures that may have befallen Mr. Dawkins after his sentencing. But not before readers are propelled to the forefront of a buzzing crowd pressing on a scaffold, attempting to get the best view of the cut-throat execution of Fagin and two other thieves. When Oliver receives news of Jack's sentence, he pleads with his adoptive father to intervene with the mandatory transportation of Jack to Botany Bay, Australia. Although reluctant, his father agrees, but on the condition that Jack abides by his terms – one being that Jack leaves London and its temptations for Romney Marsh, where he'll be given the opportunity to start afresh and earn an honest living.

While on his way there, he meets a girl that he is quick to fancy, however, before he can settle into his new life and its rules. All hell breaks loose when a murder occurs, and someone rather familiar with Jack and his history aims to pin the murder on him to cover his own tail and dealings with the real killer. Adding to Jack's worries, the girl he adores has been taken hostage by murderous villains. Having life deal him another bad hand, he struggles not to go back to his old antics as he sets out to rescue the girl he loves. Also, Jack's dreams are increasingly haunted by images of his mother. This further stirs his desire to find his parents. Given how much time has passed since he last saw his mother and the fact that he has no clue of his parent's whereabouts, will Jack ever reconcile with his family, and are they still alive? The narrative is told from Jack Dawkins' point of view in a conversational tone. This style of narration brought me closer to the character, as I felt like I was reading his diary when he shared his thoughts, actions, feelings, and the unfolding events. Through his account, Jack comes across as someone who isn't proud of the trade that his circumstances had led him to. And although he appears to have some semblance of remorse and is more considerate and thoughtful than the Artful Dodger we once knew, he's still plagued with doubt about his character, as he sometimes finds himself fighting the urge to use the skills he mastered while in Fagin's gang. I very much liked the character of Mr. Brownlow in the original, and I'm happy to report that even in Jack's story and version of events, he is still the same good-natured and benevolent character we loved.

Historical figures such as Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington make their way into the story, giving us a glimpse of fascinating historical

moments that impacted the characters' lives, as well as Jack's viewpoints on the events of his time. The author's commendable use of description impressed me. His words painted vivid images of the characters and places they visited. I also appreciated the naturally flowing dialogues and especially enjoyed the humorous asides. The narrative moves along at a good pace with twists and turns that kept me glued to the book. I loved the element of surprise and the shock I felt due to a few events that transpired, which caught me completely off guard. Even though I initially felt that the development of Jack's romantic relationship was a bit rushed, I eventually bought into their relationship and was rooting for them. However, down the line, another aspect that had influenced how their relationship had developed was brought to light; this new information stirred my emotions all the way to the end. The strong accent/speech patterns and slang I had come to associate with Jack Dawkins felt diluted in this account. Given that he is the first-person narrator, I expected his narration to have the same level of dialect (complete with the grammatical errors and misspellings that Charles Dickens intentionally infused into Jack's dialogues), especially because this story kicks off after his sentencing, thus, in my mind, his speech patterns should still be the same. I did encounter a few minor errors, including those in the French dialogues the characters used while visiting France.

Additionally, the table of contents and the glossary that would come in handy for those not familiar with some of the words/slang used in that period, including some of the other characters in books by Mr. Dickens are sadly placed at the end of the book. All things considered, I rate this book 3 out of 4 stars. I thoroughly enjoyed catching up with Jack Dawkins. The plot is intriguing and I believe readers who haven't known Jack through Oliver

Twist can still read and enjoy this one. And those who have read the original that inspired the author will appreciate the familiarities of old characters and get a fill for their curiosity of what may have become life for the Dodger after his trial.