

A Stereotyped Fagin——A Juxtaposition of Dickens' s Christianity in Oliver Twist

对外经济贸易大学/裴培

1.Introduction:criticisms of Dickens as an antisemitic writer.Mentioning the word antisemitism,the mean vicious Shylock presented by Shakespear and the big-nose villain Fagin by Charles Dickens in Oliver Twist are generally regarded as the beginning in English literature.We can easily identify a number of characteristics typical of the then jewish people in him.Fagin' s name has become a synonym for meanness and depravity.This makes a series of letters from Mrs.Davis censuring Dickens' s antisemitism in his masterpiece Oliver Twist.Dickens replied that Jewish people are less sensible and less good-tempered than thought.It can be deduced from the excerpts that Dickens could find no reason for others' accusations of his antisemitism.especially as he went on to make a series of claims.In the following year,Dickens changed anew his portrayal of Jews by introducing a kindly one---Riah,in Our Mutual Friend.He also made some careful revisions of Oliver Twist by substituting many "the Jews" in the novel for Fagin' s name.lessening the heaviness of the nove' s antisemitism.Dickens is not a representative of antisemitic writer in English literature.Fagin,the Jew,is stereotyped,but that does not mean Dickens disrespect,or to be more unpolite,despise the Jewish people.

2.Literature review concerning Charles Dickens.Dickens did not remove Fagin' s Jewish identity from the novel.The negative portrayal of the Jewish Fagin is paradoxically intertwined with the essence of the novel---the goodness in Christianity.Few critics have touched upon Dickens' s religious Christianity itself.John Gross commented that Dickens' s Christianity is more relevant than one tends to think nowadays (Gross,1962).Joseph Gold combined Christianity in Oliver Twist in relation to Dickens' s treatment of Fagin (Gold 1972).And the following context will be devoted to expound on the relationship between Dickens' s impolite description of Fagin and his christian nature.

3.Fagin and Dickens' s Christianity.In Oliver Twist' s opening chapters,Dickens set the background of the novel in the town of Oliver' s birth,forming a sharp contrast to the symbol of virtue he represents.Weakness,greed and cruelty,all the negative words that one may think of in English can find their places in them,indicating that these people are distinctly at odds with the tenets of Christianity.They are professed christians,behaving in a nominally christian manner.When the background is shifted to London,the focus of the nove shifts from the nominally christian behavior to unchristian Fagin.Still darker sides to the character's nature are shown when he beats the artful Dodger for not bringing Oliver back,making Charley cry for mercy: in his attempted

beating of Oliver for trying to escape after the thieves have kidnapped him; and in his own involvement with various plots and schemes throughout the story.

Fagin is condemned to death because his role in the novel is to incarnate all that is evil and unchristian.Christianity advocates redemption and resurrection,but in the case of the Jew---Fagin,redemption is out of his reach.His ymbolic death leads to disappearance of the anti-christian forces in the novel,allowing Dickens to creat a purified Christian English village that stands against the flawed Christian farm in the opening chapters.Harry Maylie gives up his aspiration for money and wordly success. Instead,he chooses to marry Rose and retreat to his purified christian village.Through Fagin' s death,the village is able to restore itself in peace and embrace its virtuous religious belief.Dickens ends the story with a redemptive image of Oliver' s mother to convey that Christianity' s greatness lies in humanity such as a mother' s selfless love for her child.Then Rose and Oliver learn from sufferings to extend mercy and benevolence to all the things that breathe.Dickens corrects the Victorian life vision to an English village,centered around a church and its inhabitants are characterized by mercy and benevolence toward the poor.

4.Conclusion.In conclusion,the uninviting portal of Fagin as a Jew does not justify the protest that Dickens is antisemitic.Dickens simply bases the character on the archtype of the then Jewish criminals.While Dickens did not eradicate Fagin' s Jewish background from Oliver Twist in his 1867 revision of the novel because he simply could not do so.The Jewish nature of Fagin is deeply rooted as part and parcel of the novel,to form contrast to satirize the degrading Christianity of those days in England,to give way to the Dickens' s humanitarian theme and to meet the novel' s social ends,to improve the treatment of the English poor.Juxtaposing the stereotyped Fagin with Christianity,contaminated and purified,Dickens produced a marvellous novel in English literature history.

References:

- [1]Dickens,Charles.Oliver Twist.Ed.Fred Kaplan.New York:Norton,1993.
- [2]Gold,Joseph.Charles Dickens:Radical Moralst.Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1972.
- [3]Gross,John.Dickens:Some Recent Approaches.Dickens and the Twentieth Century,1962.
- [4]Stone,Harry.Dickens and the Jews.Victorian Studies 2 (1959).