

A Jew in Britain: Reading the Images of Fagin in Dickens's *Oliver Twist*

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Abstract

Oliver Twist is one of the representative works of Charles Dickens (1812-1870), which describes the tragic life and experience of an orphan—Oliver and reflects the miserable life of the people at the bottom of British society in the 19th century, and exposes many social problems at that time. In the novel, Fagin—an old Jew—is the representative of the villains and the leader of the thieves in London. He is a ruthless thief who could sacrifice everything to achieve his goals, while there is still a trace of warmth in Fagin's deep heart. He cares about children's lives, teaches them the ability to survive, and also gives them spiritual attentions. This paper analyzes such different images of Fagin in combination with the current situation of British society in the 19th century and the survival of the Jewish people in Britain. The study finds confirms that Fagin is an image of both good and evil aspects, and he is a true portrayal of the poor people at that time. In addition, this paper also detects Dickens's tendency of antisemitism in creating the images of Fagin-a Jew in Britain.

Keywords

Oliver Twist, Fagin, Antisemitism.

1. Introduction

Oliver Twist is Dickens's second novel. At the age of 25, Dickens tried to expose the miserable life of those poor children under the Poverty Relief Act through his own literary creation and protest against social injustice, as as to arouse the attentions of public and help the poor people at the bottom with the kindness and sympathy. The opposition between good and evil fills the details of the novel. The whole work is unfolded in the confrontation between "benevolence" and "tyranny," in which the author not only describes the good and evil in human nature by portraying characters, but also exposes the various evils in capitalist society and mercilessly lashes out at the darkness and hypocrisy of social reality in Britain at that time.

In the novel *Oliver Twist* Dickens has successfully creates a number of villains, including the domineering parishioner Bumble, the jealous and overbearing coffin-shop clerk Noah, the tough and vicious Sikes, the villainous thief Fagin and Monks. Among them, Fagin is a controversial and complex figure. On the one hand, he is the head of the London Thief's home. He instigates the use of homeless children to steal for him. He is a full villain undoubtedly. On the other hand, he takes care of the children with his tender side. In Dickens's view, due to biological inheritance, every Jew has undoubtedly inherited the despicable and hateful qualities of his ancestors in varying degrees, and his appearance and nature are irreparably unchangeable, which is the inevitable biological fate of the Jewish people.

Kana et al. (2016) said, "Dickens thought that he didn't discriminate against the Jewish people when he wrote this in the novel but he was just telling some truth. Due to the influence of the times and the environment, Dickens could not avoid racial discrimination against the Jewish people, unfairly portrayed the Jewish nation and fell into the trend of antisemitism." In 1946,

Robins and Rohde instigated an extensive poll in New York City with four groups of interviewers. The poll showed that anti-Semitic views tend to be withheld from interviewers of Jewish appearance or name. Lower educational and economic groups were more influenced by the appearance of the interviewer. Indirect questions reveal less anti-Semitism. It is possible that the lower classes show more anti-Semitism when directly questioned because of a tendency to agree with stereotyped anti-Jewish statements.

Ann (2021) said that in her 2017 testimony before the US House of Representatives on the Judiciary, historian Pamela Nadell described the present as a moment when “the volume on antisemitism... is turned way up.” Nevertheless, she opposed the idea that a “climate of fear” so “severe, pervasive, or persistent” existed on US college and university campuses that it “impinge upon Jewish students’ learning and thriving.” Drawing on social scientific studies, experiences on her own campus (American University), and impressions of her colleagues’ encounters (bolstered by a term as president of the Association of Jewish Studies), Nadell concluded that antisemitic incidents were the exception, rather than the rule, and that higher education had not become the hotbed of antisemitism that some journalists and pro-Israel groups claimed. Instead, Nadell contended that when such instances occurred, university leaders quickly and forcefully intervened, as they did in response to racist incidents, to condemn them and counsel distraught students.

Weltman (2011) stated that Fagin never performs his Jewishness in the novel. Unlike Barney, he has no nasal twang; and he certainly observes no Jewish rituals or religious commandments, which is what makes Timothy Spall’s performance in the recent BBC adaptation so bizarre: his Fagin wears a yarmulke, says Hebrew blessings over his food, and won’t eat the sausages he cooks for the children. Nevertheless, even if every identification of him as “Jew” were removed from the text (and certainly Dickens removed many of them), Victorian readers would still recognize the common stereotype.

This paper attempts to re-examine this classic literary figure through analyzing the evil and good aspects in Fagin’s character, and explore the author’s shaping techniques and intentions. The tendency of antisemitism of Dickens will be discussed as well.

2. Overview of the Jewish People in Britain

2.1. The Social background of Britain

Oliver Twist was written in Victoria Era. During this period, Britain had just finished the first industrial revolution and developed its economy and industry rapidly, thus becoming the top powerful country in the capitalist world. However, with the prosperity of economy, Britain’s social contradictions were gradually deepening. The bourgeoisie, also acting as the ruling class, sought for profits and fame crazily and dreamed to make great fortune overnight. They exploited a large number of workers, which made the workers cry bitterness without ceasing and even unemployed or homeless. The life of the laboring masses was increasingly difficult. With time going by, the relationship between people was surrounded by wealth, fame and status (Zhang, 2016, p. 101).

Under this circumstances, Oliver Twist was written when the Poverty Relief Act was passed. Under the old law, the excessive dependence from some poor people on government relief caused huge financial pressure. The view that poverty was equal to laziness had become popular in British society. In this context, the reform of the social relief system had absorbed the experience and lessons of the old poverty relief law, and the new poverty relief law has been issued. However, the focus seemed to have shifted from “relieving” the poor to “punishing” the poor. The principle of “Workhouse Test” and “Less Eligibility” were proposed in the new poverty relief law. The poor must enter the workhouse to obtain relief, and the living treatment in the hospital could not be better than the lowest level workers. The lives of the poor had not

been improved, and the lives of the children in the hospital were still difficult. The poverty relief act allowed the poor to seek for help for public assistance. However, it also required them to finish the necessary work. The act asked the recipients to stay in the almshouse and refused to distribute monetary to the unemployed poor. Those who stayed in the almshouse had to be engaged in heavy and poorly paid jobs. Therefore, a lot of the poor would prefer to die before getting help from the public because of the notoriety of the almshouse and their unfair policies (Wang & Wu, 2022, p. 205).

The Poverty Relief Act did nothing to improve the life of the poor. Instead, the act brought endless pain and pressure to the poor. As time went by, the social atmosphere was getting worse and worse and all kinds of crimes emerged (Subuhi, 2017, p. 126). Dickens keenly discovered this social reality, and exposed and criticized it in his book. Four years after the implementation of the New Poor Law, *Oliver Twist* was published. It seemed that there was a certain connection between the two.

2.2. The Circumstances of the Jewish People in Britain

Most Jewish people had been engaged in the activities of some traders. They often took some old clothes and accessories to the streets for sale. The Jewish people bought these second-hand clothes from the upper class and sold them. Due to the influence of the social environment, many people in the British society could not afford new clothes at that time. Therefore, Jewish second-hand clothes gradually became popular and the market was pretty good. However, this behavior of the Jewish people also met with the shame from the British. They thought that the occupation that the Jewish people were engaged in was very despicable. Also, this way of peddling in the street was really humiliating, which was completely inconsistent with the temperament of "English gentleman". Sometimes Britain even linked some criminal acts with the Jewish people. Even though most Jewish people were engaged in formal work, they had to deal with some "stolen goods". This situation had lasted for a long time. Until the 19th century, with the development of the British economy, some rich people in Britain began to make financial investments and the Jewish people became their economic agents. It was also from this time that the role and status of the Jewish people had undergone major changes. The number of the Jewish people engaged in street trade had been decreasing, turning to manufacturers or wholesalers, and gradually becoming the middle class with certain property. Before the 19th century, most of the Jewish people had a low economic status and could not openly conduct religious activities, obtain equal citizenship. It was not until the 19th century that the social status of British Jewish people gradually changed. In both Christian countries and Muslim societies, the Jewish people who stick to their own religion and culture were regarded as "the alternative ones". Even those who had converted to Christianity or Islam are also not trusted and even suffered the same persecution as other Jewish people. Their state had been eliminated. Their land on which it depends had been deprived. They were also prohibited from participating other decent industries. Illegal Lending and business enabled the Jewish people to have a large amount of money, which had also become one of the root causes of their contempt and persecution. In the eyes of some Christian people, the originally mean and dirty Jewish people were even more filthy, disgusting and hateful after being engaged in money. Since the Jewish people resettled in Britain, their economic status had changed. But they were still in the status of second-class citizens. Until the 19th century, their economic status had changed. It was mainly manifested in two aspects: first, the changes in the occupation of British Jewish people---from the initial vendors to the later business owners and capitalists, and even to become the industry leaders; second, the living environment had been improved, —moving from the heavily polluted East End of London to the West End and other areas (Cui, 2020). The change of occupation and residential area showed the improvement of Jewish economic status.

2.3. Reasons for the Low Status of Jewish People

From ancient times to now, the Jewish people have always been the object of discrimination, hatred and persecution in European society due to differences in religious beliefs, lifestyles and other aspects. They had little political rights and were prohibited from owning land. They could only engage in the lending industry. Once there encountered crisis and turbulence, the Jewish people's being expelled, persecuted or even slaughtered was even more common.

First of all, Christianity, born in the 1st century AD, can be considered largely as an offshoot of Judaism, but in rebellion against Judaism. In 136 A.D., in order to settle the Jewish question once and for all, the Roman army again conquered Jerusalem and completely destroyed the city. Soon after, the Roman Emperor Hadrian (76-138) decreed that all the Jewish people shall not return to the Jewish provinces or to Jerusalem. At this point, the Jewish people lost their country, their holy city and their capital, and became wanderers in the true sense of the word. With the establishment of Christianity as a state religion, the Jewish diaspora in Europe had to live with the dual identity of pagan and wanderer. As time went on, discrimination and persecution against the Jewish people became more and more intense.

Against this backdrop, some Jewish people began to set their sights on the money lending industry. According to Islamic and Christian teachings, Muslims and Christians were forbidden to engage in the money lending business. However, Judaism only forbade the Jewish people to lend and take profits from each other and allowed the Jewish people to lend to non-Jewish people. As a result, a number of usurious merchants of Jewish origin emerged within Europe. For the vast majority of the European public, the Jewish moneylender was a distasteful, even hateful, character. Thus, the idea that "the Jewish people are economic grabbers" and "the Jewish people are unproductive parasites" quickly became a widespread consensus among all segments of the European population. In the 13th century, the Christian church gradually relaxed its restrictions and allowed Christians to enter the financial field. Soon they overtook the Jewish merchants in terms of wealth accumulation and scope of business. Over time, Jewish usury quickly drowned in the tide of banking.

It is important to note that the Jewish role of moneylender is still essentially a product of anti-Semitic ideology. First of all, according to the Jewish trade, the Jewish people were not allowed to work on Saturdays (the Jewish Sabbath). At the same time, European countries forbade the Jewish people to work on Sundays (the Christian day of worship). In the context of limited productivity, agricultural production was extremely demanding in terms of time and seasonality. Therefore, this "double holiday" system, which is mandatory, is not conducive to promoting agricultural production. Secondly, according to the Jewish religion, the Jewish people are not allowed to keep the Jewish people as serfs. As a result, they had to hire freedmen who were paid more and were always in short supply to assist in the work. Thus, after the 9th century, the vast majority of the Jewish people gradually left agriculture and became urban dwellers, mainly engaged in commerce and handicrafts. In addition to crafts, the Jewish people had a strong presence in the commercial sector. Jewish merchants could often be found within the towns, fairs and trade markets of Europe - they took advantage of their diaspora to become a liaison between the different national, ethnic and religious worlds. But after the Crusades, the trade routes between Europe and the Eastern world were opened up. At the same time, Christian merchants gradually took control of the commercial trade in the eastern Mediterranean, and the advantages of Jewish merchants quickly disappeared. In addition, many Jewish merchants were restricted to their own countries, and some countries even enacted laws that "forbade the Jewish people to do business".

In fact, not only were the Jewish people discriminated against and ostracized in their professional development, but even in their daily lives, they were often subjected to extortion and blackmail. First, in exchange for a place to stay, the Jewish people were required to pay a

large tax to the local government. "They had to pay a myriad of poll taxes, protection taxes, special taxes, passage taxes, marriage taxes, production taxes, funeral taxes and even prayer taxes, as well as countless fees and donations, in exchange for permission to stay by the Christian rulers" (Andrew, 2021, p. 14). Second, the security of Jewish property, was not adequately guaranteed. In France, "the Jewish people were frequently prosecuted under various names, sentenced to high fines, or had their property confiscated and deported, only to be recalled again under the name of an amnesty granted to them after they had paid large sums of money" (Andrew, 2021, p. 16).

In times of social unrest, the Jewish people became a source of evil in the eyes of Christians. According to some scholars, more than 20,000 Jewish people were killed in France, Spain and Italy combined, nearly 10,000 were killed in the Germanic areas, and more than 10,000 died on the Polish border; there is no way to estimate the scourge of expulsions and plundering. As time went on, the gap between the Jewish people and the mainstream European society deepened. Their uniqueness in food, clothing, housing, culture, language and writing, as well as their devotion to Judaism, made all classes in Europe feel more and more frightened. "During the three and a half centuries of the existence of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition, 400,000 Jewish people were tried and 30,000 of them were put to death in those countries" (James, 2021, p. 101).

In general, the reasons for the low status of Jewish people in Europe are extremely complex and include religious, social and cultural factors. The "quantum entanglement" of religious hostility, economic plunder, social exclusion, racial discrimination, and even political extermination initiatives has made antisemitism extremely negative.

3. The Images of Fagin in Oliver Twist

3.1. The Positive Image of Fagin

Being the contradiction of humanity, the good and the evil are always in opposition and unity. There is no absolute good or bad in humanity. If Fagin merely deduces the wickedness of humanity, then Dickens will not be a great writer. Luckily, Dickens didn't just label the characters with "face-like" (Liu, 2018). While exposing the villains' crimes, he also showed his warm and kind side to the readers.

A thief as Fagin is, he provides shelter for many poor children. In this peaceful environment, the children are neither hungry nor cold. Although the environment was dirty and poor, they enjoy this harmonious and warm environment more than the outside world. Sitting around a warm stove and chatting, it is undoubtedly the best environment for the kids who have been out in the cold. Especially when they are having a meal, each of them would take what they need and hand it over to other people. Even though they speak in casual English, it is still a reflection of the nature of the child. In Fagin's house, the children are all very happy (Fang, 2014). When Oliver first steps into this place, Fagin greets him with a friendly smile and nod. Although Oliver is not an expert in stealing and had no source of income, he is still able to enjoy the food that his companions made. Because of this, no one blames him for being useless, which is in stark contrast with the government's relief station. At the relief station, the poor orphans are considered to be a social burden, and they are blind, abused and even killed. "The food of the workhouse consisted of a bowl of thin soup three times a day, with a piece of bread on Sundays. The boys ate everything and were always hungry. The bowls never needed washing. The boys polished the bowl with their spoons until they shone" (Dickens, 2005, p. 58). Especially when Oliver asks for more porridge, he is severely beaten. Over time, the group of children also learn to endure. Through such a comparison, Fagin's goodness far outweighs those of these gentlemen. Compared to gentlemen who view unfortunate orphans as a burden, Fagin brings them more kindness.

When Fagin firstly sees Oliver, he “grinned; and, making a low obeisance to Oliver, took him by hand, and hoped he should have the honour of his intimate acquaintance” (Dickens, 2005, p. 57). Even though this smile contains an unknown plot, it is enough to make Oliver feel like he is in a difficult situation. Although Fagin aids the children in their theft, he is also responsible for their lives. Even the den is filled with laughter. In Chapter 18 of the novel, it is written that “The old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his young days: mixed up with so much that was droll and curios, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings” (Dickens, 2005, p. 127). It can be seen that even Oliver isn't always hostile with Fagin's cheerful nature. Fagin is often portrayed as an old man or a monster, but he rarely looked fierce or spoke ill of a child. When Fagin teach the kids how to steal, he makes them laugh with funny gestures instead of shouting and physical punishment. When Fagin organizes a group of kids to steal from the Bronlu's home, Oliver is too weak to steal, and Oliver is badly injured. When all the readers thinks Fagin is going to punish Oliver harshly, the story develops differently. Fagin does not punish Oliver, but binds him up. It can be seen from this act that Fagin is not a villain with no conscience, and he has a kind side. At the end of the novel, “Fagin’s last night alive,” Oliver goes to the jail, drops to his knees, and weeps before the old Jew who has taken him in, “Oh, God! Forgive this wretched man” (Dickens, 2005, p. 402). Here we see not only Oliver’s kindness but also Fagin’s kindness to him. He tells Olivier of the location of the treasure he has accumulated for many years, and wants to leave those things to him. For a man like him, who is desperate for money, it is a little unexpected and also a little moving to leave those things to Olivier. It can be seen that the good and evil of this old Jew coexist in Oliver’s heart. Fagin does a lot of shady things in the dark. But as a person at the bottom of the society, he takes care of orphans and does not abandon any children who have served him wholeheartedly at the time of crisis. His ferocity is written on his face, and his kindness is scattered in the corner. Perhaps this kind of crime is not comparable to his crime, and it may even be diluted and concealed by the shadow of evil. However, the bright side of humanity allows us to see the true and complete character of the writer.

3.2. The Negative Image of Fagin

Fagin trains many apprentices who worked for him. These apprentices are supposed to enter the school for education, but they are doing these treacherous things in the society. They work for Fagin, while Fagin stays home and enjoys his success. Once anyone doesn't do as he has intended, he will scold at them and even start fighting. After Oliver is taken away by the police, he is afraid of losing his action. So he vents his anger on the children who work for him. In order to satisfy his personal interests, regardless of the safety of others, and in order to obtain more and more valuable wealth, he asks Oliver to steal the big house. He asks Nancy to go to the police station to inquire about Oliver's whereabouts. Once mastering Oliver's whereabouts, he, together with Sikes and Nancy and other associates, kidnap Oliver and even conspires with Oliver's half-brother to frame Oliver. After he notices Nancy's abnormality, he sends smart ghost to follow Nancy and tells Sikes the news of Nancy's leak. His behavior of killing Nancy by any means for his own benefit is enough to reflect his inner ugliness and gloom. In the end, when he is facing the result of being hanged, he still does not know how to repent. He hopes that someone could rescue him from the prison and help him escape. A series of vivid examples in the article show Fagin's image of villain little by little. The author vividly portrays the image of an old Jewish man who is as thin as wood, holding a toasting-fork, and had matted red hair. “The greasy flannel gown” and “the grinning smile” (Dickens, 2005, p. 60) are obviously not a kind old man, but a typical villain image, with a fierce face. Next, this “good teacher” begins to teach the little Oliver the skills of stealing and tried to train him to be an excellent pickpocket. Fagin chooses a way of making a living that is full of sin. He controls some teenagers, abets them to steal and shared the loot and even hid small coffers. He makes use of the children's ignorance to make them commit crimes in order to fulfill his personal desires. Fagin cannot be forgiven,

and the notorious chief thief has even become a synonym for the instigator in English. Then Oliver is received by Mr. Brownlow. For the first time, he feels the warmth of the world. The thieves fear that Oliver might give away the secret, so Fagin makes every effort to instruct Sikes and Nancy to recapture Oliver while he himself goes out to retrieve the books. Later, Fagin uses threats, inducements and indoctrination to try to pull Oliver onto the ship of thieves and become his own cash cow. Fagin also uses claustrophobia to make loneliness and melancholy to edify an innocent and pure soul. "Slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and changed its hue for ever" (Dickens, 2005, p. 376). It is clear that Fagin's behavior is evil and inhumane.

Fagin, as the representative of the evil forces in the novel, is the dirtiest, the most disgusting and the most hateful. The author's description of him is filled with wickedness and filth, from his living environment to his livelihood. As the leader of the thieves, he is the instigator of the petty thief, the greedy miser, and the cunning shameless villain.

3.3. The Antisemitism of Charles Dickens

Oliver Twist gives the reader two impressions: First, whenever evil forces are involved, the Jewish people must be involved, either as masterminds or as protagonists. For example, Fagin, is the leader of the shadowy and secretive "bandit cave"; the "Three Cripples Hotel" is also a bandit's den which is repeatedly described in the novel, and Barney, the Jewish waiter, appears frequently in it. In general, whenever the novel shows the sordid, dirty and rotten social life, the participation of the Jewish people is absolutely indispensable. Secondly, even if the Jewish people in the book are not the most brutal and vicious, they are certainly disgusting and hostile nasty images. The two thieves in the novel, Sikes is a ferocious and daring figure who is not afraid of death, he is not afraid to go to the gallows, and even dares to kill his lover, Nancy. Fagin, on the other hand, only dares to punch his apprentice and Charlie Bates down the stairs, as the two return empty-handed. One is a murderer, a mere miser, the two men's ferocity naturally can not be compared. But in Dickens' writing, the portrayal of these two men seems unconventional. In the description of Fagin, Dickens used all the language that can denigrate, mockery, contempt, even the appearance is as ugly as the face. But in the description of Sikes is much more polite, at least not scandalous image of his appearance. And in arranging the storyline, Sikes seems to be much better than Fagin at all times; although Fagin and Sikes often work together, but in Dickens' depiction, Sikes has always looked down on Fagin in his heart. In that society where people are divided into different levels, Fagin's status is much lower than that of Sikes (Guo, 2012).

Dickens made Sikes superior to Fagin in two ways, one is to shape Sikes tall, masculine physical appearance, in the book describes him as having a deep voice, thick legs, sturdy body, this physical external advantage also makes Fagin's old, dry, small body in front of him lower; second, Sikes is not a Jew, in Dickens's portrayal, naturally not lower than the Jewish Fagin inferior. In other words, it is because of the racial concept that Dickens deliberately portrayed Fagin as inferior to Sikes. This is also an important basis for Dickens' portrayal of these two characters. Of course, in Dickens' view, Sykes's tall and imposing size is due to his superior Jewish ancestry (Cao, 2013). In the context of the literary world of the era as a whole, pedigree dictated that the portrayal of characters in books was not the preserve of Dickens, but an implication and reflection of the artistic concepts of society as a whole. Dickens's portrayal of the Jewish people in Oliver Twist is not just to racially define and identify individuals for Fagin and Barney, but to use individuals as symbols to represent a group. In order to associate the Jewish people with the devil, Dickens uses red hair and beard to depict Fagin, in a deeper sense, to denigrate this peculiar Jewish physiognomy with the emphasis on the external image. Dickens' depiction of the Jewish people in his novels is so satirical and contemptuous that he makes it a habit of writing throughout his novels. In his novel, Dickens describes a young Jew

out of thin air, though he was younger than Fagin, his evil in fact, this Jew only appeared once in the book, without the preceding and following text and excessive description, but because he was a Jew, Dickens identified him as the image of abominable. In Dickens' writing, it is not only the young Jew who is evil and hateful, but also Fagin's father's generation, who must be evil and hateful as long as they are related to the Jewish blood (Alexander, 2021, p. 254). "Your father is the only person in the world who can have an ugly face like yours, and I guess he is in hell right now being tortured by fire, with his red beard all burned and curled, unless you don't admit it, unless your mother gave birth to you directly and you don't have any father" (Dickens, 2005, p. 292). What he was trying to say was that the wicked and abominable Fagin could only have been born to an equally Jewish father, and that the young Jewish people who came after him were also bound to be evil and hateful.

From the whole book we can also see that Dickens is very stingy about using the name Fagin throughout the book, unless specific scenes must be used, most of the time it is called "the Jew". Many people do not pay attention to this subtle switch, but in fact it contains a profound implication: that the author is discriminating against the entire Jewish people, not just against Fagin alone. Mrs. Eliza Davis had written to Dickens in 1863, 25 years after the publication of *Oliver Twist*, "with a vile prejudice against the much discriminated against Hebrews," in which he accused Dickens of this. He believed that Dickens had created the character of Fagin in his novel in order to express his racial prejudice, and that this represented another discrimination against the Jewish people. Dickens, of course, had to refute this accusation, because it was against his style of true reflection of life. During this period, a wave of social Darwinism was rising in academia. In the field of sociology, social Darwinism was based on biological heredity and natural selection (Lv, 2022). It naturally follows that biological nature is what is considered to be the human nature and behavioral habits. In other words, no race or nation can be changed or eliminated, regardless of whether it has merit or inferiority, because it is inherited by the race. This theory of evolution gave Dickens a reasonable excuse to explain and defend himself. Since the classification of the Jewish people as an inferior race from the ancient Greek and Roman times determined the basis of the Jewish people's inferiority, he portrayed Fagin in *Oliver Twist* with the image of evil and abominable and made him hateful because he was using the true reflection to portray this race that should be discriminated against. (John, 2022, p. 312) Therefore, the portrayal of Fagin as a Jew is not for religious reasons, but because this race is inherently despised, and he replied to Mrs. Davies' letter with such a view. Dickens always considered himself to be writing on the basis of social reality. In other words, all the characters in his novels are well-founded reflections of real life. But whatever Dickens's defense, there is no doubt about the racial prejudice he shows in *Oliver Twist*.

4. Conclusion

Fagin is a cute old Jew among the children and then a thief who instigates crime. On the one hand, he is a greedy and fierce demon; on the other hand, he is a warm and kind old man. He plans to assassinate Oliver, meanwhile he is enthusiastic about healing his wounds. At times, he is normal, but at other times, he is insane. He is a slave of money, an accessory to lust, and a product of the corruption of English society. Through his successful portrayal of Fagin, Dickens accurately reflects the corruption of society, and reveals the true nature of the capitalist cannibalism.

The Jewish people were humiliated because of their failure in the religious struggle, which means that they could not resist the oppression and destruction of the Christian forces. This kind of religious disputes have also affected the European literary, making the image of the Jewish people in the European literary and the legendary stories much more criticized and discriminated. From Dickens's writing style, we can see that he believed that the despicable and

hateful quality of the Jewish people could be derived from the inheritance of the race, which is the cause of biological inheritance and cannot be changed. *Oliver Twist*, as a typical work of critical realism, reflects the social situation at that time in all respects and has great literary value. However, what is also reflected in the novel is the social prejudice against the Jewish people, which is unfair to the Jewish people as well as shows discrimination against this race. Critical realistic works reflect the social life and the essence of the spirit of that period. That is to say, the novels also bear the social responsibility of correctly guiding the orientation of society. Therefore, writers have the responsibility to indicate social injustice, help weak people and lead social ideological trends.

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