

Oliver twist

[People](#), [Charles Dickens](#)



Critical Realism in Oliver Twist Abstract: Charles Dickens is one of the greatest representatives of English critical realism writers in the 19th century. Oliver Twist is a masterpiece of critical realism of Charles Dickens. In this novel Charles Dickens took Oliver's experience as a clue showing the miserable life of the poor, exposing and criticizing the hypocritical Poor Law and the cruel child labor institution, as well as showing sympathy to the poor and appealing the upper to help the poor. This novel is worth to be read and researched. The phenomenon that was criticized by Charles Dickens are worth to be reflected upon by modern people. This paper will analyze the historical background, the life of the author and the features of critical realism in Victorian age as well as how did those features showed in Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens. Key Words: Charles Dickens Oliver Twist Victorian age Critical Realism Contents Introduction 1 1 Critical realism in the age of Victoria 1 1. 1 The historical background 1 1. 2 Introduction of critical realism 2 2 Charles Dickens and Oliver Twist 3 2. 1 Introduction of Charles Dickens 3 2. 2 Introduction of Oliver Twist 3 3 Critical realism in Oliver Twist 4 3. 1 Criticism on the hypercritical Poor Law 5 3. 2 Criticism on the child labor institution. 6 3. 3 Criticism on the crime. 7 3. 4 Sympathy to the poor 8 Conclusion 9 Bibliography 10 Critical Realism in Oliver Twist Introduction Charles Dickens, the greatest representative of English critical realism, was born in 1812. At that time, a great many of corruptive institutions and a lot of injustices appeared. Charles Dickens was not satisfied with the society and attacked the social reality with his pen. Oliver Twist is the production of this period and reflects the time. Oliver Twist is the second novel of Charles Dickens, and also his masterpiece of critical realism. In this novel Charles

Dickens used the way of critical realism to reveal a dark corruptive society which caused a lot of poor and crimes and took Oliver's experiences as a clue showing the miserable life of the poor, exposing and criticizing the hypocritical Poor Law and the cruel child labor institution. At the same time, Charles Dickens showed his sympathy to the poor and appealed the upper to help the poor. It is worth to be read and researched. The phenomenon that was criticized by Charles Dickens are worth to be reflected upon by modern people. This paper will analyze the historical background, the life of the author and the features of critical realism in Victorian age as well as how did those features were showed in Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens.

1 Critical realism in the age of Victoria

Marxism believes in that works always exists in time and space, the history and the society, and it must have social dimension and the mark of the historical period in which the work was created. So firstly this paper should tell the history background, then, the features of the critical realism will be understood better.

1.1 The historical background

The intensifying of Market competition caused a large number of the poor, the inequality and poverty phenomena appeared in the society of England. In the heyday of laissez-faire capitalism bourgeois despised human rights and treated the employees and poor people inhuman. They believed in that poverty was caused by personal laziness, so the responsibility should be taken personally. With such ideas as a guide, in the year of 1834, driven by the industrial bourgeoisie, the government established a Poor Law. According to this law the government built workhouses everywhere in the country and people, whoever without source of income, and needed social relief, were forced to enter into the workhouse. However, the helped were forced to do

numerous hard physical labors. Furthermore, the living conditions inside was extremely harsh. Bourgeois believed that if the living condition of relieved people was equivalent to the people who earn one's own living, then, the relief system would fundamentally make all the people lose motivation to work hard and diligently. If this system was really carried out and established as the supplement, an organized labor system to force those without the portrait of independence to work like a dog was needed. It was visible, that these methods actually bring "relief for the poor' into "means punishing the poor'. The ultimate goal was to get rid of burden of poor rate and provide sufficient labor source for the capitalism production. Capitalists, in order to seek the maximum profit, always increased the labor hours, improved labor intensity, and reduce wage, and even hired women and children by giving lower wages. Various savage scenes in coal mines: women and children worked under the cruel condition of long hours with no safety facilities and under bad health conditions that was extremely sickening. Critical realism was just the production of the social background. 1. 2 Introduction of critical realism With changing of relations and the intensifying of the Social conflicts between the labor and the capital, reality is so far removed from the belief of utopia of Enlightenment age. A lot of insight writers popped up using their pens to re-examine the relations between class and the social institution, and mercilessly exposed and criticized corruptive system and overflowed egoistic moral values and sins. From a humanitarian standpoint expected deep sympathy to the unfortunate people. Under the circumstance critical realism was raised up and became the main stream of Victorian age in the field of literature. Generally speaking, the features of the critical realism are: 1)

exposing and criticizing the social darkness and corruption, 2) showing sympathy towards the poor, and appealing the society to help the poor, and 3) coming up with some improvement measures to solve the contradictions, which often can not solve the problem thoroughly. Those features are the reflection of the social background of Victorian age. So, how those features showed in Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens? 2 Charles Dickens and Oliver Twist Before analyze that how the critical realism showed in Oliver Twist, this paper will tell the life of the writer's that makes him witness the true life of the poor and the whole society and put them in the story of the Oliver Twist. Then we can easily understand the reason of the forming of critical realism writing style of Charles Dickens. 2. 1 Introduction of Charles Dickens Charles Dickens born Feb. 7, 1812, Portsmouth, Hampshire, Eng.-died June 9, 1870, Gad's Hill, near Chatham, Kent is considered the greatest of the Victorian period and an outstanding writer of critical realism in the history of English literature. He is regarded by Marks as the top one in the list of ' the splendid novelists in modern England'. The defining moment of Dickens's life occurred when he was 12 years old. With his father in debtors' prison, he was withdrawn from school and forced to work in a shoes-polish factory in London. He was forced to work 10 hours a day. This experience in his childhood let him witness the misery life of the low. In Oliver Twist Dickens told the story following the step of and from the view of Oliver Twist's to reflect and criticize the contemporary society and show Dickens' sympathy to the poor. 2. 2 Introduction of Oliver Twist Oliver Twist was born Orphaned for his mother's death in child-birth and his father's conspicuous absence, and he is brought up in workhouse by little food, where Oliver breeched

regulations by requesting more gruel, and was sold to an undertaker after an abuse as a punishment. While in the service of the undertaker, Oliver was abused by Noah Claypole, and ill-treated by the undertaker's for attacking Noah who insulted the orphan's late mother. The orphan decided to flee from the undertaker. And he arrived in London, finally. Oliver encountered Jack Dawkins, therefore, unwittingly stumbled into the thieves association leaded by a Jewish criminal named Fagin. When, Oliver goes out for a pick-pocketing with two of Fagin's underlings without knowing of what they would do. Oliver was accused of stealing by misunderstanding. He was eventually freed from accusation and put under the nurturing custody of an old gentleman named Mr. Brownlow (an old friend of Oliver's father), who he was previously thought to have stolen, after falling ill in court. Oliver resided with Mr. Brownlow in great happiness. His bliss, however, was interrupted when Nancy kidnapped him according to the order of Fagin and Oliver was employed in an illegal operation which was carried by Bill Sikes, a violent thief uses the boy to break into a house via a small window. Oliver intentionally went wrong to inform the host of the house where Sikes wanted to rob, however, Oliver is shot. After being abandoned by Sikes, wounded Oliver ended up under the care of the people he had attempted to rob: Rose Maylie and the elderly Mrs. Maylie. Meanwhile, a mysterious man named Monks (half brother of Oliver) had found Fagin and was plotting with him to destroy Oliver's reputation for the grabbing the heritage which was belonged to Oliver Twist. Nancy, fearing their intentions, went to Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow to reveal their plot. Angry at the notion of his plot being foiled, and believing that she has betrayed him, Sikes murdered Nancy in a fit of rage,

and then he accidentally hanged himself. Monks was forgiven by Oliver and be given half of the heritage, however, he died finally by his bed nature.

Fagin is arrested and hanged for his misdeeds. Rose Maylie turned out to be the long-lost sister of Oliver's mother. Rose is therefore Oliver's aunt. She marries her long-time sweetheart Harry, and Oliver lives happily with his

saviors. 3 Critical realism in Oliver Twist Oliver Twist is one of the most important social novels in Dickens' early works. It was the first time that Dickens led readers into a very sad world. This novel which had deep effected on the society of that time in England was very popular and admitted by people. The novel mainly talked about little Oliver who suffered a lot in his childhood, and exposed the hypocrisy and cruelty of parish workhouse through the description of the little Oliver's childhood in it.

Dickens drew a realistic picture of the horrible existence in workhouse. One of the important characteristics of the novel is the real and specific description of people who lived at the bottom of society. Their miserable lives are just the vivid reflection of the dark sides of British society. This made a lot of readers at that time get interested in social reform. People started to think about social reasons for all of those criminal phenomena. 3.

1 Criticism on the hypercritical Poor Law After Oliver's mother's death in child-birth, Oliver was brought up in a branch of the workhouse, for the children under nine. The female to whose protecting care Oliver Twist was delivered over, at the very moment when the child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered

by accident; in any one of which cases, the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world. No one really care whether the life of those children, what the society care was only to save money to feather her nest on the cost of the health and even life of those orphans. Oliver was taken to the workhouse after he was nine, where also ladled the gruel at mealtimes. Of this festive composition each boy had one porringer, and no more--except on occasions of great public rejoicing, when he had two ounces and a quarter of bread besides. The bowls never wanted washing. The boys polished them with their spoons till they shone again; and when they had performed this operation (which never took very long, the spoons being nearly as large as the bowls), they would sit staring at the copper, with such eager eyes, as if they could have devoured the very bricks of which it was composed; employing themselves, meanwhile, in sucking their fingers most assiduously, with the view of catching up any stray splashes of gruel that might have been cast thereon. Lots fell to Oliver Twist, asked for more gruel for a new comer, a stronger one, who threatened to eat boy, if he couldn't get more. "Please, sir, I want some more." The master was a fat, healthy man; but he turned very pale. He gazed in stupefied astonishment on the small rebel for some seconds, and then clung for support to the copper. The assistants were paralyzed with wonder; the boys with fear. 'What!' said the master at length, in a faint voice. 'Please, sir,' replied Oliver, 'I want some more.' The master aimed a blow at Oliver's head with the ladle; pinioned him in his arm; and shrieked aloud for the beadle. (Wu Weiren: History and anthology of English literature, 2007.) A hungry boy just wanted more gruel, was treated as he committed an impious and profane offence. Oliver remained a close prisoner

in the dark and solitary room. As for exercise, it was nice cold weather, and he was allowed to perform his ablutions every morning under the pump, in a stone yard, in the presence of Mr. Bumble, who prevented his catching cold, and caused a tingling sensation to pervade his frame, by repeated applications of the cane. They by any excuse ill-treating these orphans both physically and psychologically while announced that they were doing those for the benefit of those orphans, hypocritically. The experience in the workhouse of Olive Twist, for anyone in this world, even those with stony heart would drop sympathetic tears and the most dignity one will swear the parish beadle. By telling the miserable life of those orphans in the workhouse, Dickens criticized the Poor Law. 3. 2 Criticism on the child labor institution. After the impious and profane offence for asking more, the workhouse wanted to send him out by cost 5 ponds. At the beginning, Oliver was narrowed to be chimney-sweeping boy. The conversation between the head Mr. Limbkins and Gamfield, chimney-sweep "'Young boys have been smothered in chimneys before now,' said another gentleman. 'That's accuse they damped the straw afore they lit it in the chimney to make 'em come down again,' said Garfield; 'that's all smoke, and no blaze; whereas smoke aren't no use at all in making a boy come down, for it only sends him to sleep, and that's volt he likes. Boys is very obstinate, and very lazy, Gentlemen, and there's nothing like a good hot blaze to make 'em come down with a run. It's humane too, gentlemen, accuse, even if they've stuck in the chimney, roasting their feet makes 'em struggle to extricate their selves. '" (Wu Weiren: History and anthology of English literature, 2007.) This plan failed, then, the workhouse wanted to send him to sea without

delay, because the skipper would flog him to death, in a playful mood, some day after dinner, or would knock his brains out with an iron bar; both pastimes being, as was pretty generally known, very favorite and common recreations among gentleman of that class. Young man of great families had such a fate. Finally, Oliver was sent to the undertaker. At there not mention the living place, even the food that nobody will have a notice even dog. These showed that the society ignored the child labor and took them inhuman. For money or for fun the child labors were dead, by accident or murder, nobody will care and ask. The capitalist took these child labors just as the tool which could make money, but not a living. Dickens showed the reality of the living condition of the child labor to his cotemporary, to appeal to the society to care and help the poor child and criticized the constitution of the child labor.

3. 3 Criticism on the crime. Fagin, the master mind among the criminals, is as ugly in appearance as he is disgusting in feature. He is not a figure of unmixed simplicity. In Fagin, Dickens has attempted to describe a character displaying some of the complexities of normal human nature. When he is angry, the old man may conform to savage rage, but on ordinary occasions he is satisfied in a critical humor, which earns him the nickname of "the merry old gentleman's Fagin is outstanding among the thieves. For money, he made lot of younger people steal or rob. It was Fagin who taught the waifs to steal, and brought Oliver Twist back to the thieves den again from Bronlow's. It was also he who was doing evil things in collusion with Monks, wanted to maintain Oliver among the thieves or hoped Oliver was hanged some day. And it was still he who made the Sikes killed kind Nancy, the girl whose childhood was also ruined by him by being

abetted theft. Finally this evil man failed and fell into the jail and sentence to be hanged. In the ending Fagin was dead that wretched painful sadly. Fagin was not only himself, but also the synonym for the crime. By giving him such an ending, Dickens showed us the attitude to the crime that was the crime would always ended with pain and punishment, people should pursue kind and hate crime.

3. 4 Sympathy to the poor

When Oliver worked in the workhouse, they offered service for a poor family. A woman tottered towards the undertaker and said "'She was my daughter,' said the old woman, nodding her head in the direction of the corpse; and speaking with an idiotic leer, more ghastly than even the presence of death in such a place. 'Lord, Lord! Well, it _is_ strange that I who gave birth to her, and was a woman then, should be alive and merry now, and she lying there: so cold and stiff! Lord, Lord!--to think of it; it's as good as a play--as good as a play!' As the wretched creature mumbled and chuckled in her hideous merriment, the undertaker turned to go away. 'Stop, stop!' said the old woman in a loud whisper. 'Will she be buried to-morrow, or next day, or to-night? I laid her out; and I must walk, you know. Send me a large cloak: a good warm one: for it is bitter cold. We should have cake and wine, too, before we go! Never mind; send some bread--only a loaf of bread and a cup of water. Shall we have some bread, dear?' she said eagerly: catching at the undertaker's coat, as he once more moved towards the door. (Wu Weiren: History and anthology of English literature, 2007.)

Death is no longer a desperately pain for the poor, but a normal and a thing that could get bread and a temporarily worm given by cloak from the parish, which would get back after the funeral. What a terrible and terrified reality when death had become common and

inevitable to the poor and people care food more than the life of their close kin. It was a Human tragedy. It was a profound sympathy to the poor.

Conclusion Dickens is the greatest representative of English critical realism.

The historical background and the experiences in his childhood were all influence his literature creation. His masterpiece Oliver Twist is just the production and reflection of that time. He told a story of the miserable life of Oliver Twist, the orphans who was ill-treated in the workhouse, as child labor or in London slums and even to be taught as thief. It was the reflection of the real social reality witnessed by Charles himself. It aimed at exposing and criticizing the black and the hypocritical society and the institution, and showing his sympathy to the poor and appealing to the upper to help the low. It is a masterpiece of critical realism. It is worth to be read and researched the phenomena that were criticized by Charles Dickens were worth to be reflected upon by modern people. Bibliography [1]Grebanier Bernard D. N. The Essentials of English Literature. [M] Stanford CA: Stanford UP, Volume 271, 1980. [2]Johnson E. D. H. Charles Dickens: An Introduction to His Novels. Random House Study in Language and Literature Series [M]. New York: Random House, 1969. [3] Kaplan, Fred. Dickens: A Biography [M]. New York: Morrow, 1988. [4]Slater, Michael. Dickens and Women [M]. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983. [5]Smith, Grahame Charles Dickens: A Literary Life [M]. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. [6]Wu Weiren: History and anthology of English literature [M] Beijing: Foreign language and research press, 2007.