"The Other Woman" – Eliza Davis and Charles Dickens

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The letters Eliza Davis wrote to Charles Dickens, from 22 June 1863 to 8 February 1867, and after his death to his daughter Mamie on 4 August 1870, reveal the increasing self-confidence of English Jews.[1] In their careful and accurate comments on the power of Dickens's work in shaping English culture and popular opinion, and their pointed discussion of the ways in which Fagin reinforces antisemitic English and European Jewish stereotypes, they indicate the concern, as Eliza Davis phrases it, of "a scattered nation" to participate fully in the life of "the land in which we have pitched our tents.[2]"

It is worth noting that by 1858 the fits and starts of Jewish Emancipation in England had led, finally, to the seating of Lionel Rothschild in the House of Commons. After being elected for the fifth time from Westminster he was not required, due to a compromise devised by the Earl of Lucan and Benjamin Disraeli, to take the oath on the New Testament as a Christian.[3]

1 Research for this paper could not have been completed without the able and sustained help of Frank Gravier, Reference Librarian at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Assistant Librarian Laura McClanathan, Lee David Jaffe, Emeritus Librarian, and the detective work of David Paroissien, editor of *Dickens Quarterly*. I also want to thank Ainsley Henriques, archivist of the Kingston Jewish Community of Jamaica, Dana Evan Kaplan, the rabbi of the Kingston Jewish community, for their help, and the actress Miryam Margolyes for leading the way into genealogical inquiries. My colleagues John Jordan, Paula Daccarett, and Bruce Thompson have also offered invaluable help.

2 Cumberland Clark , ed. *Charles Dickens and his Jewish Characters* (London: Chiswick Press, 1918) 18, 19. Subsequent references to Clark's text will incorporate corrections and emendations made after an examination of the autograph letters in the Special Collections of University College Library, London. We wish to thank Mandy Wise for an opportunity to consult the letters and for her generous cooperation and help.

3 For a history of Jewish Emancipation in England, see Todd Endelman, "The Englishness of Jewish Modernity in England," in *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model*, ed. Jacob Katz (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1987), and Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941). Also,

And Eliza and her husband, James Phineas Davis, had in 1860 become the inhabitants of Tavistock House, purchasing it that year from Charles Dickens. In the eyes of the law, English Jews now received the same treatment, privileges and rights as Christian English folk.

Yet the Jews were not exactly at ease in England.

During the negotiations for his house, Dickens mentions to a friend, that "the purchaser of Tavistock will be a Jew Money Lender."[4] Three days later he writes, "If the Jew Money Lender buys (I say 'if' because of course I shall never believe in him until he has paid the money.)". A month later he writes to Arthur Stone, "I hope you will find the Children of Israel, good neighbours" (*Letters* 9: 307).

Slighting remarks, these. Yet Dickens also adds, that "Mrs. Davis appears to be a very kind and agreeable woman. And I have never had any money transaction with any one, more promptly, fairly, and considerately conducted than the purchase of Tavistock House has been" (*Letters* 9: 306–07). Praising Eliza Davis, Dickens overcomes the thrown-off comments he had made. Obtuse and unthinking, they derive from the lurking antisemitism and fear-ridden Jewish stereotyping of his era and culture.

That stereotype Eliza Davis confronts in her forthright correspondence with Dickens when she notes that "there are other oppressions, <~~far~~> much heavier other things far sharper, than the fetters and goads of Damascus Lebanon or Russia" (Clark 1918, 17).

How Literature Matters

"Emboldened by your Courtesy," Eliza Davis began her first letter to Charles Dickens on 22 June 1863, initiating a correspondence that would extend throughout the rest of his life and even beyond. It is one of the most sustained exchanges of letters we have between Dickens and someone outside his immediate circle. All her letters to Dickens bore her address: Tavistock House, while Dickens's came from Gad's Hill Place and Bradford, Yorkshire, where he was traveling as part of his reading tour. In 1870 after his death, the "Letters from a Jewess" as they were headlined, were excerpted in several newspapers, including *The Observer,* the *Daily News*, and *The Jewish Chronicle*.

Like other diligent correspondents, Eliza Davis kept copies of her letters

see the Rothschild website for a full discussion of the history of Lionel Rothschild's efforts to be admitted to represent his Westminster constituents in Parliament.

4 "To Thomas Mitton 16 August 1860, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 9: 286. Future references to this edition will appear in the text.

and interleaved them with Dickens's responses.[5] At Eliza Davis's death in 1903,[6] the full set of letters was included in the Estate Sale and purchased by a friend who passed them on to Cumberland Clark, a journalist, traveler throughout the Empire, and man of letters.[7] In 1918, Clark published the complete set of letters as *Charles Dickens and His Jewish Characters.*[8] Dickens's letters are included in the Pilgrim Edition; and the entire correspondence was republished in 1921 in *The Dickensian*. Since then the rethinking of Dickens's achievement, and his public life, as well as the relative obscurity of this exchange, make the chance to revisit them and explore their impact a welcome opportunity.

Cumberland Clark prefaces his 1918 publication of the letters with a brief statement, noting that the recent liberation of Palestine by General Sir Edmund Allenby from the Ottoman Empire has given them a timely interest, for the "conquest of Palestine and the fall of Jerusalem has directed the attention of the civilized world to the problem of the Jewish people." Clark is aware of the historic importance of the British overthrow of Ottoman rule for what he calls "the problem of the Jewish people," but does not mention the Balfour Declaration. That letter of 2 November 1917 from the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland, was a transformative moment for Jews and the modern Middle East. The letter states that "His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," as it underlined Jewish rights to Zion. And the subsequent phrase put the weight of British policy behind it: "and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country." The text of the letter was public knowledge, for it was published in the press on 9 November 1917.

5 George Alexander Kohut includes most of the letters published in *The Jewish Chronicle,* as well as a listing and account of representations of Jews in Dickens's writing in *Charles Dickens and the Jews: A Contribution to the Dickens's Centenary,* (February 7, 1912), reprinted from "The Review," Philadelphia 1912.

6 See the obituary in *The Jewish Chronicle, May 29, 1903,* which lists her family history, and notes that she was "one of the Founders of the Judith, Lady Montefiore Convalescent Home. She was "extremely generous, not only to public institutions, but particularly in dispensing private charity." Calling her "reticent," the article also notes that she was of "a sweet disposition."

7 Israel Solomons, *Miscellanies of the Jewish Historical Society of England*, Part 1, 1925.

8 London: Chiswick Press 1918.

Though Clark gestures at international and Zionist politics in his comment, it is rather a literary issue that intrigues him: "This little book is now published to commemorate a minor problem, which owes much of its importance to the fact that Charles Dickens was concerned with it." What becomes clear from Clark's preface is that in writing to Dickens, Eliza Davis had entered the inner circles of British literary, social and cultural networks. Calling her "a prominent Jewess and deeply interested in her co-religionists," Clark yet minimizes her importance; for the significance in Clark's view of this exchange of letters lies in how it illustrates "the sensitive and generous spirit of the novelist, which led him to at once attempt to repair even a far-fetched or fancied wrong done to anyone by his writings" (5). Celebrating Dickens's "generous spirit" Clark emphasizes the "handsome expression of his feelings" evident in the apology: "There is nothing but goodwill," Dickens assures Eliza Davis, "between me and a People for whom I have a real regard" (Clark 12, 13).

Eliza Davis's complaint, Clark notes, led to the introduction of the character of Riah into *Our Mutual Friend*. It was "evidently meant to atone for that villainous and yet most arresting 'bad Jew' portrayed in his earlier 'Oliver Twist' – the immortal 'FAGIN – .'" He is, Clark comments, "the 'dreadful Jew whom Cruikshank drew' with such wonderful imagination and force that perhaps to many of us still the word 'Jew' recalls that terrible old scoundrel."

Even as he deploys the stereotype, Cumberland Clark denies its importance. He insists that we should not regard Fagin as a libel of the Jews; rather only Eliza Davis's "misapprehension" leads her to write Dickens and request an apology. Note Cumberland Clark's phrasing – "To one of his readers, at any rate, it appeared that Dickens considered the word 'Jew' and 'rogue' to be synonymous, and it is owing to this curious misapprehension that we have this interesting series of letters, which places on record the famous author's real sentiments towards the much-maligned Jewish race" (Clark 6).

And Clark accounts for Dickens's responses by saying that "Dickens was sensitive to any imputation of unfairness." For Clark, Eliza Davis's "accusation, that because one of the many bad characters Dickens has portrayed in his novels happened to be a Jew, meant that Dickens considered all Jews to be bad characters, was, to say the least far-fetched." Furthermore, "some authors might not have considered the complaint worthy of even a reply" (Clark 8). And a bit later Cumberland Clark attributes Dickens's response and apology to his "vanity, both literary and personal," and that led him to apologize, even though Clark, dismissing her intervention, claims that "Mrs Davis' reproach was absurd" (10).

For Clark Dickens is a national treasure, whose writing articulates what

it means to be English. How and in what ways the Jewish people, now brought to notice by the conquest of Palestine, and the earlier complaint of Eliza Davis, might figure in his England is not elaborated.

Clark evades Eliza Davis's pointed comment that "Charles Dickens the large hearted, whose works plead so eloquently and so nobly for the oppressed of his country" has yet "encouraged a vile prejudice against the despised Hebrew." Clark does not acknowledge Eliza Davis's notice of Dickens's grasp of the warping effects of the social system, nor her interest in knowing why the oppressed Jews are excluded from the Inimitable's sympathy. Her comment reminds us that though Dickens writes for the cause of human freedom, the antisemitic stereotyping central to Fagin stands against him. Apologizing, Dickens yet justifies his representation of Fagin, though he unlike Clark will later seek to change its impact by his representation of another character, the beneficent Riah.

Clark quotes G. K. Chesterton approvingly, that Riah's role – "the kind old Jew" – is "a needless and unconvincing character" (9). By contrast, in our own day scholars note that Riah is the hinge of the central themes of *Our Mutual Friend.* He is "integral to the larger philosophical and topical concerns" of the novel, as Deborah Epstein Nord notes. Riah, like Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, "grows naturally out of Dickens's preoccupations in *Our Mutual Friend,* especially his fascination with forms of urban labor and his interest in the possibilities of personal and social transformation, and so cannot be explained only by the character's usefulness in negating or exposing anti-Semitic thinking." Furthermore, both Riah and Fagin before him "mark Dickens's working out of the connection between 'the Jew' and forms of economic life and exchange."[9] Riah brings city grime and the garbage of modern industrial civilization, generically known as "dust" in the novel, together with the Jew-hatred implicit in the economic stereotyping of his role as usurer, which the novel's plot will transform. Riah thus also reinforces and plays out the issues of Englishness as national identity and the role of class in defining it, that other characters – Veneering, Twemlow, Wrayburn come to mind – in the novel engage directly.

Clark apparently is also ignorant of the public glare around Dickens's private life at the time he was writing *Our Mutual Friend*. He does not notice Dickens's oblique mention in his preface to *Our Mutual Friend* of the deadly Staplehurst railway accident where the final monthly number of the novel almost perished. And we now know that Dickens was not alone on the train, but was accompanied by Ellen Ternan and her mother.

9 Deborah Epstein Nord, "Dickens's "Jewish Question": Pariah Capitalism and the Way Out," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011): 27 – 28.

Photograph of Eliza Davis

The Other Woman: Letters of a "Jewess"

Recent biographers have revealed much about Ellen Ternan's influence on *Our Mutual Friend*, and their work has been featured in a film, *The Invisible Woman*, which owes much, including its title, to Claire Tomalin's account. Is it not now time to acknowledge Eliza Davis as the other woman shaping this great novel?

The literary detective work that has brought Ellen Ternan into focus, beginning with Ada Nisbet's path-breaking work in 1952,[10] leads us to ask questions about Eliza Davis. Who was she? Where did she come from? What brought her to public notice? What does her intervention mean for the history of Dickens's reputation? And what was her role as a communal representative? For while she never met Dickens, as she tells his daughter, but did attend two of his readings – and even so she made a major difference in his understanding of and writing about the Jews of England.

Moral Questions

In Eliza Davis's letter we hear an insistent moral voice, "emboldened" by the thought that Dickens might hearken to her views. And perhaps the urging of that moral impulse and the courteous note on which she begins her letter led Dickens to respond even though they had not met. Recall that after moving from Tavistock House to Gad's Hill Place in Rochester Dickens had burned "the accumulated letters and papers of twenty years" (*Letters* 9: 304),[11] evidence of his eagerness to control his legacy and public image. And as rumors were now circulating about his secret relationship with Ellen Ternan, was not this letter an opportunity to touch up and even regain his standing with the English public?

Eliza Davis jogs his memory of their prior connection. Reminding him in that opening sentence of "my correspondence with you," her phrasing indicates her role in the negotiations leading to "the transfer of Tavistock House to Mr. Davis," her solicitor husband, James Phineas Davis in 1860, more than two years earlier (Clark 17).

While Dickens had responded to his friend Mitton with the Jewish stereotyping remarks, in his second letter he also admitted that the deal had been satisfactory: the negotiations leading to the sale had gone smoothly. His comments reveal that the stereotype was not legal but social, the taken-

10 Ada Nisbet, *Dickens and Ellen Ternan* (Berkeley: U of California P 1952).

11 4 September 1860, To William Henry Wills, sub-editor of *Household Words*. Also see http://www.web40571.clarahost.co.uk/wilkie/Burning/burn.htm, which includes Dickens's justification and his desire to maintain his privacy.

for-granted antisemitism rooted in a class society. And could the need to deal with the "Jew Money-lender" have tapped into the imagery Dickens had himself helped to define in 1837–38 when he wrote *Oliver Twist*? Note that James Phineas Davis was not a banker but a solicitor, but note also how easy it was to sweep him into the stereotyped category.

That powerful textual and visual representation of antisemitism was to be reinforced a hundred years later by Alec Guinness's portrayal of a menacing Fagin in David Lean's postwar film (1948). And despite protests, some forty years after that Philip Roth would confront social versions of that antisemitism in his evocation of English behavior in *The Counterlife* (1986).

But in 1863 Mrs. Davis did not begin by directly raising the question of antisemitism, talking rather about "a Subject in which I am greatly interested" (Clark 17). In the second paragraph of her letter she raises the issue of the planned Memorial to "the late Judith, Lady Montefiore," and her work alongside Moses Montefiore, her husband, "to relieve her oppressed people in distant lands" (17).

Her phrasing implies a common understanding of the general human right to freedom and justice, which has now been extended to include the Jews. And a sentence later she moves to the impact of Dickens's writing "In this country <~~in which~~> where the liberty of the subject is fully recognized." England, now home to the Jews, is "where the law knows no distinction of Creed," – yet "the pen of the novelist, […] is still whetted against the 'Sons of Israel'" (17–18).

And now Eliza Davis begins what amounts to a moral indictment: "It has been said that Charles Dickens the large hearted, whose works plead so eloquently and so nobly for the oppressed of his country and who may <~~now~~> justly claim credit as the fruits of his labour, the many changes for the amelioration of the condition [of the] poor now at work, <~~has~~> has encouraged a vile prejudice against the despised Hebrew" (18).

Citing the then relatively new turn in productions of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* initiated by the acting of Edmund Keen in 1819, [12] which featured a sympathetic and abused Shylock, she turns on Dickens: By contrast with these sympathetic portrayals of Shylock, "Fagin I fear admits only of one <~~reading~~> interpretation; but [while] Charles Dickens lives the author can justify himself or atone for a great wrong on a whole though *scattered nation*" (18).

12 Edwin Booth also portrayed Shylock sympathetically in 1861, as did Henry Irving in 1881.

Jewish Difference and Ethical Discourse

Eliza Davis's letters will lead to a significant effort by Dickens both to justify and atone for this "great wrong" – but this, the beginning of their conversation about English antisemitism, leads Eliza Davis to an explicit request, and an easier one: "May I, then, Dear Sir, presume to ask of you permission to place your name on the list of Donors to the Lady Montefiore Memorial, which is to take the form of a Convalescent Home for the Jewish poor, whose dietary laws exclude them from participation in the existing institutions <~~of the kind~~> for the recovery of health" (18).

The choice of a Convalescent Home as a memorial for Judith, Lady Montefiore, is worth considering, especially by contrast to other Victorian memorializing activities like that which led, for example, to the Albert memorial then in the planning stages. As Eliza Davis notes, this Convalescent Home will serve the Jewish poor, who are excluded from non-Jewish institutions that do not observe the Jewish dietary laws. Choosing to memorialize Judith, Lady Montefiore by building a Convalescent Home for the Jewish poor echoes as it reinforces her generous outreach. Such a Convalescent Home will make it possible to observe *kashrut.* Furthermore, this memorial Convalescent Home also directs us to *The Jewish Manual,* which Judith, Lady Montefiore wrote and published anonymously in 1846.

The recipes of the *Jewish Manual* are accompanied by commentary that tells the reader what it means to be Jewish – what non-Jewish cookbooks do not. "Among the numerous works on Culinary Science already in circulation, there have been none which afford the slightest insight to the Cookery of the Hebrew kitchen. Replete as many of these are with information on various important points, they are completely valueless to the Jewish housekeeper, not only on account of prohibited articles and combinations being assumed to be necessary ingredients of nearly every dish, but from the entire absence of all the receipts [recipes?] peculiar to the Jewish people."[13] The domestic work of preparing food leads here to directions for Jewish living.

And note how Judith, Lady Montefiore characterizes Jewish women – "The various acquirements, which in the present day are deemed essential to female education, rarely leave much time or inclination for the humble study of household affairs." Yet there are, she adds in this preface, "happily so many highly accomplished and intellectual women, whose example proves the compatibility of uniting the cultivation of talents with domestic pursuits, that it would be superfluous and presumptuous were we here to urge the propriety and importance of acquiring habits of usefulness and

13 "Preface," *The Jewish Manual:Or Practical Information* In *Jewish and Modern Cookery With a Collection of Valuable Recipes & Hints Relating to the Toilette,* by Judith Cohen Montefiore, project Gutenberg ebook.

household knowledge, further than to observe that it is the unfailing attribute of a superior mind to turn its attention occasionally to the lesser objects of life, aware how greatly they contribute to its harmony and its happiness" (Preface, *Jewish Manual*).

This manual directs its readers how to practice Judaism as it articulates within English culture a discourse of Jewish Difference. It is addressed to "accomplished and intellectual women" among whom we can surely include Eliza Davis, as well as the members of the Montefiore Memorial Committee, whose names are included in the *Jewish Chronicle* of Friday, September 11, 1863 – Elul 28, 5623, when the subscription for the Judith, Lady Montefiore Memorial Convalescent Home is announced.

Then as now the list of donors to worthy causes was an efficacious way of encouraging public donations. And the cause – a Convalescent Home for the Jewish poor – must have reminded Dickens of his own work in 1846 with Angela Burdett-Coutts in establishing and running Urania Cottage, a home for fallen women.

Eliza Davis continues, offering the carrot that accompanies the stick of accusation: "The amount of donation is unimportant; but we wanderers from the far East desire to shew that we have found friends in the land in which we have pitched our tents." And she concludes by citing the honor accorded to Moses Montefiore, Judith's husband: "Sir Moses Montefiore the husband of the deceased lady has been honoured through many years <~~with~~> by the friendship of Her Majesty Queen Victoria – " (Clark 18–19).

To add his name to the donation list will reinforce Dickens's legacy of benevolence. From an enemy he will now justly be acclaimed a friend of the Jews, as he follows in Montefiore's footsteps. "The acts of benevolence of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore were never limited by distinctions of Creed as Sir Moses' benefactions to the town of Ramsgate and his frequent <~~noble~~> liberal subscriptions towards building Churches will prove" (Clark 19).

Like the Montefiores Dickens will thus participate in English virtue and national benevolence, applicable across all creeds. He will thus be counted among the "party of humanity," that revolutionary Enlightenment group espousing the principle which became among other things the driving force of the campaign by William Wilberforce to end slavery throughout the English empire.

Note that as Eliza Davis is writing this letter in 1863 the American Civil War is in its third year and English newspapers are full of news of the war. The Emancipation Proclamation has just been signed and promulgated. And northern English workers, their cotton mills idled by the closing of Confederate ports, are accepting starvation rather than giving in to the Confederate slave-holders. Abraham Lincoln thanked them in a famous letter.

> […] I know and deeply deplore the sufferings which the working people of Manchester and in all Europe are called to endure in this crisis. It has been often and studiously represented that the attempt to overthrow this Government which was built on the foundation of human rights, and to substitute for it one which should rest exclusively on the basis of slavery, was unlikely to obtain the favour of Europe.
>
> Through the action of disloyal citizens, the working people of Europe have been subjected to a severe trial for the purpose of forcing their sanction to that attempt. Under the circumstances I cannot but regard your decisive utterances on the question as an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country. It is indeed an energetic and re-inspiring assurance of the inherent truth and of the ultimate and universal triumph of justice, humanity and freedom.
>
> I hail this interchange of sentiments, therefore, as an augury that, whatever else may happen, whatever misfortune may befall your country or my own, the peace and friendship which now exists between the two nations will be, as it shall be my desire to make them, perpetual.
>
> – Abraham Lincoln, 19 January 1863

A statue of Lincoln with excerpts from his letter stands in Manchester to commemorate the common struggle against slavery.

The Civil War against slavery in the United States must have stirred memories of her youth for Eliza Davis. Born in Jamaica in 1816, where her maternal grandfather Eleazar Magnus had gone in 1774 to serve as Reader of the Kingston Synagogue of the German and English congregation, her family had left Jamaica for England in her youth. There the nineteen-year old Eliza had on 15 June 1835, married her cousin, James Phineas Davis, in the Great Synagogue in London. At that time newspapers were filled with discussions of the Act of Parliament abolishing slavery throughout the Empire, including Jamaica.[14]

It is also worth noting that Montefiore's relatives, Isaac Goldsmid and Nathan Meyer Rothschild, floated the loan for 20 million pounds that enabled the British Government to pay off the slave-holders of Jamaica.[15]

14 Though slave-holders – notably plantation owners – received grants of up to £20,000 for freeing their slaves, we know they continued to rely on them as a labor-force and little significant freedom apparently resulted. The American situation would be somewhat different, with Reconstruction failing and Jim Crow enforcing old habits. In England, emancipation began with the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act, and was feared by many to be another hoax.

15 Adam Hochschild, "*Bury the Chains:" Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (New York: Houghton Mifflin 2005) 347. Also see Cecil Roth, *History of the Jews in England, (*Oxford: Clarendon, 1941) passim; also see Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish Liberator, Imperial Hero* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010) passim; and Moses Montefiore's wife, Judith Barent-Cohen's brother-in-law was Nathan Rothschild,

And Nathan Rothschild was Moses Montefiore's brother-in-law and a partner in various business dealings, whose astute advice made it possible for Moses to retire in 1825 at 41.[16]

Eliza Davis reinforces her claim for the pathbreaking work of the Montefiores with an appended postscript in her letter to Dickens: she praises Sir Moses for being "the first to open by a munificent gift the subscription for the relief [of] Syrian Christian sufferers from the cruelty of the Druses" (Clark 19).

It is hard to imagine how Dickens could not have been moved by Eliza Davis's resolve to change the distorting, even perverting, English stereotypes of the Jews. For her phrasing echoes the principled universalism of Enlightenment understanding (not always put into practice, especially with regard to the Jews) that claimed to extend general moral sentiments to all. Dickens must have hearkened to the subtext in her letter of the views of Adam Smith, reinforced by the arguments of Francis Hutcheson for the benevolent theory of morals, and he responded with the benevolence of a man of feeling.[17]

The exchange of letters has a further interest. It led Dickens to justify his portrait of Fagin as a Jew. As Dickens notes in his response on 10 July 1863, "Fagin in *Oliver Twist* is a Jew, because it unfortunately was true of the time to which that story refers, that that class of criminal almost invariably *was* a Jew." Dickens goes on to comment that "all the rest of the wicked dramatis personae are Christians." He then seeks to distinguish between religion and race: Fagin "is called 'The Jew', not because of his religion, but because of his race". Dickens then generalizes his comment: "[…] I make mention of Fagin as the Jew, because he is one of the Jewish people, and because it conveys that kind of idea of him, which I should give my readers of a Chinaman by calling him a Chinese" (*Letters* 10: 269–70).

Eliza Davis will respond to him four days later, raising objections that led him in subsequent editions to amend and revise the epithets used for Fagin. She notes that the bad Christians in *Oliver* "are at least contrasted with <~~favourable~~> characters of *good Christians*," while "this poor wretched Fagin stands alone 'The Jew'" (Clark 24). Speaking directly she notes that perhaps Jews "are over sensitive, but are we not ever flayed?" And she adds,

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with whom he founded the Alliance Assurance Company in 1824.

16 Lionel Kochan, "The Life and Times of Sir Moses Montefiore," *History Today,* 23.1 (1973): 46. Also see Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore,* passim.

17 For Adam Smith, see his *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* and for Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), as well as later works. Sir Henry Mackenzie's novel *Man of Feeling* 1771 was a popular success, initiating the career of the sentimental benevolent hero. Also see Fred Kaplan, *Sacred Tears* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987).

"We <~~abide~~> dwell in this country very little known, our domestic customs entirely unknown." She notes that "I have myself been greatly <~~surprised~~> astonished at the ignorance of <~~the English generally~~> my countrymen, concerning, what they appear to think an entirely foreign people. Look at the blood accusations from time to time rising up against us, even such a popular paper as Chambers' disseminating <~~such a~~> that calumny (24).[18]

In his letter Dickens responds positively to the request to be included in the Montefiore memorial: "The enclosed is quite a nominal subscription towards the good object in which you are interested, but I hope it may serve to shew you that I have no feeling towards the Jewish people but a friendly one. I always speak well of them, whether in public or in private, and bear my testimony (as I ought to do) to their perfect good faith in such transactions as I have ever had with them.[19] And in my 'Child's History of England', I have lost no opportunity of setting forth their cruel persecution in old times" (*Letters* 10: 270).

Dickens had been reproached for the portrayal of Fagin in 1854. The *Jewish Chronicle* asked "why Jews should be excluded from the sympathizing heart" of Dickens, the "powerful friend of the oppressed."[20] At that time he

18 See, for example, "The Mystery of Metz," *Chambers' Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art* (September 14, 1861): 172–76. Note how the strategy used in reporting the existence of "the Mystery of Metz" gives the existence of the murder of a Christian child credence: As David Paroissien comments in a personal communication, "This piece opens with a reference to 'a large old cloudy daub,' that existed 'within the recollection of continental travellers of the present century,' on the wall of one of the galleries of the Hotel de Ville, Frankfort. The painting sought to commemorate 'one of the fearful atrocities affirmed by Baronious, the Chronicle of Nuremburg, and other authorities,' the 'sacrifice of a Christian child.' In the following paragraph, the author concedes that while at least some of these 'alleged crimes' committed by Jews were nothing more than pretexts for oppression, 'records of an age of ignorance and blind fanaticism' furnish credible evidence 'that the origin of this new and hideous form of murder must rest with them.' Furthermore, the author then mentions instances of the blood libel dating from the 13th century before noting 'that the picture heretofore alluded to has now disappeared from the walls of the Römer of Frankfort,' perhaps 'in consideration to the feelings of the Jewish community,' or perhaps, 'because, like many another prejudice, it had become at length totally obliterated.' That concession made, he presents in full 'The actual incident' the picture was intended to illustrate, despite the fact that scarcely any evidence exists, other than 'some discursive notes, thrown together by M. —, parliamentary advocate,' whose materials he has 'sifted.'"

19 Dickens must have then been remembering his comment to W. H. Wills of 4 September 1860: "Tavistock House is cleared today, and possession delivered up to the House of Israel. I must say that in all things the purchaser has behaved thoroughly well, and that I cannot call to mind any occasion when I have had money-dealings with a Christian that have been so satisfactory, considerate, and trusting" (*Letters* 9: 303).

20 See also Murray Baumgarten, "Boffin, *Our Mutual Friend*, and the Theatre of

had responded: "I know of no reason the Jews can have for regarding me as 'inimical' to them," and cited his remarks in the *Child's History of England*.[21] While his response to Eliza Davis echoes his earlier comment, it now leads to a more direct effort to make amends. It was, in effect, and taken as such by Davis, an apology.

The "best of friends"?

Eliza Davis's intervention apparently led Dickens – who was planning out and writing *Our Mutual Friend* at that time – to invent Riah as a benevolent Jew, beginning with the seventh monthly number. Throughout the novel Riah plays a key role as the benefactor of Jenny Wren and Lizzie Hexam. That has been often noted and remarked upon.[22]

Making amends, Riah is intended to redeem the figure of Fagin, the Jew-devil of *Oliver Twist*. Yet in *Our Mutual Friend* Riah has a constrained position, first being taken by the other characters in the novel to be the blood-sucking usurer. Then Jenny Wren's keen eyesight discovers Riah is the (unwilling) employee of the Christian loan-shark, Fascination Fledgby. Riah apologizes for his unthinking mis-representation: It is an eerie echo of Shylock – did Dickens hearken to Eliza Davis's comment about the new turn in productions of *The Merchant of Venice*? – and will be reinforced in two speeches that echo Shylock's Shakespearean soliloquies. In the novel Riah is an isolated figure. He finds sympathy and fellow-feeling only when, after her discovery of the role he has been forced to play, Jenny Wren befriends him, and invites him to join her and Lizzie on the roof – "'Come up and be dead,'" she says.

Sally Ledger contrasts the aggressive sexuality of Wrayburn and Headstone to the feminized kindness of Riah: the grasping qualities of Fagin are also not his – rather, he figures, as Ledger points out, in "Jenny's almost surreal account."[23] Riah, the response to Fagin, is more dead than alive: of Riah,

Fiction," *Dickens Quarterly* 19 (2002): 17–23.

21 Cited by Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, 2 vols. (New York: Simon & Schuster 1952) 2: 1010. Also see Edgar Johnson, "Dickens, Fagin, and Mr. Riah," *Commentary* 9 (1950): 47–50.

22 Deborah Epstein Nord, "Dickens's 'Jewish Question': Pariah Capitalism and the Way out," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 39 (2011):27 – 45. Jonathan H. Grossman, "The Absent Jew in Dickens: Narrators in *Oliver Twist, Our Mutual Friend, and A Christmas Carol," Dickens Studies Annual* 24 (1996): 37–57. See also Harry Stone, "Dickens and the Jews," *Victorian Studies 2:*3 (1959): 223–253, and Murray Baumgarten, "Dickens and the Jews/the Jews and Dickens*:* The Instability of Identity," in *Dickens, Modernisme,Modernité,* 2 vols., ed. Christine Huguet and Nathalie Vanfasse (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire,2013) 2: 179–80.

23 Sally Ledger, "Dickens, Natural History and *Our Mutual Friend*," *Partial Answers:*

Jenny remarks,"'I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low door so bent and worn, and looked all round him at the sky, and wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over!'" (bk. 2, ch. 5) At this point in the novel Riah is not quite alive, almost in Jenny's vision a benevolent zombie – the not-quite-human alien whom Edgar Rosenberg has called to our attention in his discussion of Du Maurier's Svengali.[24]

How to acknowledge the ironies of this portrayal? How much and what kind of an apology for "a great wrong" is this?

For as Fred Kaplan notes, Dickens uses the "powerful Jewish-Christian motif of redemption in *Our Mutual Friend,*" but reverses the stereotypes. Dickens depicts "Christianity as responsible for the fiction of the materialistic perversion of the Jew in Christian culture. Under economic pressure, oppressed by racial and cultural stereotypes, Riah, the good Jew, is forced to become the front man for the Christian moneylender and slum landlord, Fascination Fledgby. Dickens conceives of the Jew in stereotypical Christian terms and the Christian in stereotypical Jewish terms. As fiction, it is brilliant," Kaplan notes. "As racial apologetics, it is limited."[25]

Kaplan also notes, that "when he received the gift of a Hebrew-English Bible from Mrs. Davis," Dickens "stressed that he would not 'wilfully' have done such an injustice to the Jewish people 'for any worldly consideration.'"[26] But he could not get beyond the cultural evasion inherent in the word 'wilfully,' nor escape subtly associating material terms with those to whom he was supposedly apologizing" (Kaplan 473).

Shall we call it a half-hearted apology? Yet Eliza Davis thanked Dickens for the generosity of spirit it revealed. By contrast Chesterton and Cumberland Clark dismiss the need for any apology, citing the authorial right of representation. Has not their dismissal of the charge of antisemitism a touch of Podsnappery to it? And how, after the Holocaust, can we dismiss the power of writing to stereotype and the real-world consequences of stereotyping?

Literary stereotyping, as Bernard Harrison reminds us, is a social practice and has consequences in social behavior.[27] That was part of what Eliza Davis understood when she noted that the attack of a great writer on the "sons of Israel" must be responded to. "I hope we shall not forfeit your opinion of our sense and good temper; perhaps we are over sensitive, but are we not

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Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas," 9.2 (2011) 376.

24 Edgar Rosenberg, *From Shylock to Svengali: Jewish Stereotypes in English Fiction* (London: P. Owen, 1961) *passim.*

25 Fred Kaplan, *Charles Dickens* (New York: William Morrow, 1988) 472.

26 Clark 36.

27 Murray Baumgarten, "Reading Dickens: Pleasure And The Play Of Bernard Harrison's 'Social Practices,'" in *Reality and Culture. Essays on the Philosophy of Bernard Harrison*, ed. Patricia *Hanna* (Amsterdam/New York, NY:Rodopi Press, 2014) 49–63.

ever flayed? Are we not constantly irritated by the small gnats who may fret us, yet are in themselves too insignificant to be annihilated. It is only when a great mind appears to be against us that we plaintively appeal" (Clark 24).

The figure of Riah extends the range of characters in the novel, as Eliza Davis notes. Now there are not only class but ethnic differences in situations charged with historic and religious tensions. The echoes of Shylock's great speeches and Riah's acknowledgment that as a Jew his actions always redound on all Jews, implicitly echo Eliza Davis's comment.

As for Eliza Davis, we find her again in 1893 writing to Walter Besant, as she has read his novel, *The Rebel Queen*, which had just been published.[28] Her letter, as David Paroissien notes, "goes right to the point, expressing 'fervent admiration' for Besant's fictional Emanuel Elveda, a handsome, gifted Sephardic Jew of great intellect and great integrity. The novel opens when he separates from his wife, his equal in beauty and talent, but inexorably committed to working for women's rights, a late-nineteenth-century feminist and 'the High Priestess of the great cause' of women's rights. Neither will submit to the other, so after a brief union, which resulted in the birth of a daughter, not initially known to Emanuel, the two part, a mutual separation which time fails to heal. When he returns 17+ years later in the novel and they meet again and exchange views, Emanuel reiterates convictions emphatically spoken in the opening: that women are inferior, that their status is sanctified by teaching, tradition and consistent with what he sees as 'the Eternal Laws of Nature'."

Eliza Davis offers "no criticism of Elveda's militant sentiments; rather it's what Emanuel had to say in chapter 23, where he expresses exalted sentiments for his people that caught her attention. Eliza Davis comments in the letter that she was impressed that a writer not one of 'Us' could express himself so fervently and eloquently about Jews as a race."[29]

Besant, in reply, thanks her for her praise, and notes that he had been advised on Jewish matters by "one who knew the people." He expresses the hope that he will be able to correct errors in his description of the preparation of pastry, in which his cook put butter into the flour, even though it was to be served in a meat meal. Davis's letter is dated 30 April 1893 and it is on letterhead with this address: Elbeden Lodge, 5 Marlborough Road, St John's Wood, N. W [London], presumably her domicile at this point.

The letter reinforces our view of Eliza Davis. She had no qualms about taking on Charles Dickens for his inadequate treatment of Jews; she was equally quick to praise when praise was due, as in the case of Walter Besant's *The Rebel Queen*.[30]

28 Chatto & Windus, 1893, 3 vols.

29 Letter of Eliza Davis to Walter Besant, University of Southampton Archives.

30 My thanks to David Paroissien for locating and communicating the contents of

Jewish Difference and the Cultural Imaginary

Eliza Davis accepted Dickens's apology. After Dickens's death, and the publication of the correspondence between them in "The Observer" and "The Daily News," Mamie Dickens wrote her a "very kind letter" (Clark 37). On 4 August 1870 Eliza Davis responded: "I <~~cannot express~~> cannot tell you how pleased I am at the cordial good feeling expressed by yourself and your family – ," and though as she noted she already had a photograph, she added "but shall prize most highly those you have sent me – and the kindly sentiments you record of his having entertained towards me" (37).

Then she continues: "Without being a lavish admirer of your great & good father's works I have noted through passing years the wonderful humanizing effects of his powerful pen." A personal comment launches further praise: "Our lives were contemporary, and I can better than yourself know the good he has wrought for the present generation –. " Insisting that she is not "a lavish admirer" her praise grows out of personal feeling: "Strange that although I had some correspondence with your father, I <~~have~~> only saw him twice at his readings – the <~~impression~~> effect then created I can never forget," and punctuates the observation – "but it was his own act in writing the character of 'Riah' that impressed me thoroughly with the nobility of his character" (38).

The nobility of his character: Eliza Davis here honors Dickens's memory and his achievement and his apology for Fagin in creating the character of Riah. But can we concur?

One of the clearest and most balanced claims that we should agree with her is by Edgar Johnson in a brief article in *Commentary*,[31] written as part of his work on his important biography of Dickens. Like Davis's comment, it speaks to the character of Dickens. Yet the question remains: does Riah cancel Fagin?[32] Does the benevolent Jew who in Deborah Nord's phrasing "must, above all be converted away from allowing himself to be regarded

this letter of Eliza Davis's, and to Karen Robson, Senior Archivist of the Hartley Library at the University of Southampton, where the archive – MS116/41 AJ127 – which includes a photo of Eliza Davis, resides.

31 Edgar Johnson, "Dickens, Fagin, and Mr. Riah: The Intention of the Novelist," *Commentary* (January 1950): 47–50.

32 In its laudatory obituary notice of Dickens, *The Jewish Chronicle* of Friday 17 June 1870, notes that neither Fagin nor Riah are "unreal." "And surely, in a Jewish journal, some recognition of grateful memory is due to the generous spirit of that writer who, because in the very early days of his life and his writings, he had touched the Jewish character with a somewhat rough and undeserved severity in the unreal character of FAGIN, made ample amends in his later, wiser, more chastened days, by the beautiful, even if equally unreal characrer of RIAH, and brief but forcible references to the Jewish manufacturer and his wife in Our Mutual Friend."

as a man who makes money like a Jew – through exploitation, greed, and hoarding – toward the renunciation of even the taint of usury; and then he must enter fully into the economy of redemption, rebirth, and artistic transmutation. He must abandon the Jewish realm of pariah capitalism and inhabit the Christian world of rational and redemptive labor" (43). In what way does this make up for the malevolent criminal? In life? In literary history? In the cultural imaginary?

Anthony Julius focuses on English literary antisemitism: *Our Mutual Friend*, he notes, is "a negative imprint of the blood libel" that drives *Oliver Twist*. Riah, intended as the apology for Fagin, is the "fairy godmother." Wearing skirts, he is feminized into the "fairytale rescuer." Julius suggests that the literary apology remains a wish-fulfillment.

The Merchant of Venice and *Oliver Twist* are, as Julius notes, "two canonic works" of English literary antisemitism. Each bears "the name of the Gentile victim of a Jew, and they thrive in a continuous present, endlessly circulating in the culture, studied, performed, adapted." Furthermore, "if one asks the question of English culture, which Jews today are the most potently, most vividly present? The answer will be Shylock and Fagin. They represent a character-prison from which actual Jews still struggle to escape."[33] In the twentieth century, Philip Roth evokes that "character-prison" in the England his characters visit in his 1986 novel, *The Counterlife*.[34]

For stereotypes have a way of living on, even when confronted. And this stereotype lives in English literary history, from Shylock to Svengali, as Edgar Rosenberg reminds us. The mythic power – the pull of this stereotype, which continues to live under the rational surface of English polite civilization – is neither contained nor overturned by other responses, not even by Dickens's own Riah. *Oliver Twist* is one of the most famous and most widely read of Dickens's novels; by contrast *Our Mutual Friend* is less known, at least outside the circle of committed Dickens readers.

Edgar Johnson asks us to read Fagin in terms of "the intention of the novelist." Eliza Davis also speaks to the writer's purpose, addressing her contemporary and asking for redress of injuries – while Johnson the biographer wants to put the reader in the writer's shoes. Different generations, differing purposes. Julius however asks as Eliza Davis had about the cultural and social impact of the writing.

Julius reminds us that Fagin imprisons the Jews in a mythic stereotype. In addressing Fagin's creator directly, Eliza Davis asked for apology, and in the figure of Riah got amends of a sort. In cultural terms, however, Riah does not make up for Fagin, as Kaplan's analysis reveals. To turn the tables and

33 Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England (*Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010) 203–04.

34 See especially pp 279–82 for a discussion of modern English literary antisemitism.

award the Jewish figure Christian virtues is brilliant fiction but leaves the cultural practice – the social system – intact. Fagin still lurks in its depths and the blood libel thus still remains a present possibility awaiting a shout to emerge.[35] Social practices and social systems intertwine, as Bernard Harrison reminds us. Perhaps only a reading that puts the reader into the stereotyped figure's subjectivity – that helps us talk like a Jew in an act of sympathetic imagining – can release us from the clutches of oppressive stereotyping, be it psychological, sociological, historical and cultural.[36]

Perhaps the interest in Ellen Ternan in the new feminist readings of Dickens's life, and the film, the *Invisible Woman*, will also lead to a renewed interest in "the other woman" – in Eliza Davis and her relationship with Dickens, and the Inimitable's effort to reverse course.

Much has been written about Dickens and the sources of his inimitable genius. Little, however, is known about Eliza Davis – and in a day when women were home schooled by private tutors, she displays significant knowledge of English literary history and of Jewish practices. She knows how to write Hebrew, and includes the Tetragrammaton in Hebrew letters in one of her letters to Dickens, and discusses other Jewish customs, including the mistakes he has made in some of Riah's actions. Note that we do not know the extent or depth of her Jewish learning; it is doubtful as Todd Endelman notes in a private communication that her grandfather, the Reader of the Kingston synagogue, gave her "any kind of serious instruction in Hebrew or Judaica. Women were not expected to know these things."

Perhaps we might think of Eliza Davis as a Carlylean figure, suddenly emerging at a moment of crisis, and then just as suddenly lost in the mists of history. Yet what we can find out about her from genealogical records indicates that Eliza Davis (1817 – 1903) and James Phineas Davis (1812 – 1886) had nine children. One of her daughters, Miriam Isabel Davis (1856 – 1927) was a painter and a founder of the Society of Women Painters. Her sister, Edith Annie Davis (1857 – ?) formed the Lady Guide Association in 1891, which trained and hired middle class women as guides and shoppers.[37] She too is one of those accomplished and intellectual women of whom Judith, Lady Montefiore speaks.

And in her fine writing we can locate Eliza Davis's pivotal work as part of the lineage of the Jewish women novelists of the day. In the words of Nadia

35 See, for example, Howard Jacobson, *The Finkler Question,* which won the Man Booker prize in 2010.

36 See Murray Baumgarten, "Reading Dickens: Pleasure and the Play of Bernard Harrison's 'Social Practices,'" in *Reality and Culture,* ed. Patricia Hanna, 50 – 63.

37 See Palgrave's *Dictionary of National Biography*. Also see a report in a New Zealand newspaper, "London's Lady Guides," *Tuapeka Times*, Vol. 23, Issue 1678, 29 March 1890, p. 4.

Valman, they were "spurred to publish, in the first instance, as a response to the concerted campaigning of Christian conversionists." Furthermore, "women writers were the first Anglo-Jews to produce literature on Jewish themes in England."[38] And Heidi Kaufman notes that, following Cecil Roth's lead in *The Evolution of Anglo-Jewish Literature*, "in more recent years scholars have recovered a prominent Anglo-Jewish women's literary tradition that sprang from the middle decades of the nineteenth century, at a point when English Jews had become better established within their English communities, and when Jewish writers, such as Grace Aguilar, began responding to the dominant literary culture's depictions of Jewish people and culture."[39]

To Besant as to Dickens – as she was when a member of the Judith Montefiore Memorial Committee – like the Jewish women writers who founded Anglo-Jewish writing – Eliza Davis speaks out for her people. Like Moses Montefiore she responded to the cries of distress of an embattled people. From her diasporic domicile she talked back to those cultural practices that continued to imprison the Jews in criminal stereotypes. Inserting herself into English history, she sought to overturn the habits that were intended to keep the Jews in their subordinate place, insisting on their right to make England their home.

38 Nadia Valman, entry in *Jewish Woman's Archive: Encyclopedia*. And Valman notes that "Grace Aguilar went on to become the first bestselling Anglo-Jewish author. By the end of the nineteenth century, literature by Jewish women had expanded to encompass not only works defensive of the dignity and rights of Anglo-Jewry, but also satirical novels critical of the community's materialism and marriage practices." She also directs us to the work of Celia and Marion Moss. See also Michael Galchinsky, *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer: Romance and Reform in Victorian England* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1996).

39 Heidi Kaufman, "England's Jewish Renaissance: Maria Polack's *Fiction Without Romance* (1830) in Context," *Romanticism/Judaica. A Convergence of Cultures,* ed. Sheila A. Spector (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2011) 69 – 70.

Eliza Davis's letters to Charles Dickens

[No. 1] TAVISTOCK HOUSE
22nd June 1863.

Dear Sir,

Emboldened by your Courtesy throughout my correspondence with you, on the transfer of Tavistock House to Mr. Davis I venture to address you on a Subject in which I am greatly interested.

You may perhaps have noticed in the Columns of the 'Times' some short time since an announcement that the Jewish people in England are desirous of raising a Memorial to the late Judith, Lady Montefiore, a lady who conjointly with her husband exerted herself at great personal sacrifice to relieve her oppressed people in distant lands; for this <a~~nd her many~~[*illegible*] ~~sisters~~> her Hebrew brethren and sisters desire to testify their respect and admiration and to perpetuate her memory amongst them, But there are other oppressions <~~far~~> much heavier other things far sharper, than the fetters and goads of Damascus Lebanon or Russia. In this country <~~in which~~> where the liberty of the subject is fully recognised, where the law knows no distinction of Creed, the pen of the novelist, the gibe of the pamphleteer is still whetted against the 'Sons of Israel'. It has been said that Charles Dickens the large hearted, whose works plead so eloquently and so nobly for the oppressed of his country and who may <~~now~~> justly claim credit as the fruits of his labour, the many changes for the amelioration of the condition [of the] poor now at work, <~~has~~> has encouraged a vile prejudice against the despised Hebrew.

We have lived to see the day when Shakespeare's Shylock receives a very different rendering to that which was given to it fifty years ago. The great Master has at last found an exponent –

Fagin I fear admits only of one <~~reading~~> interpretation; but [while] Charles Dickens lives the author can justify himself or atone for a great wrong on a whole though *scattered nation*.

May I then, Dear Sir, presume to ask of you permission to place your name on the list of Donors to the Lady Montefiore Memorial, which is to take the form of a Convalescent Home for the Jewish poor, whose dietary laws exclude them from participation in the existing institutions <~~of the kind~~> for the recovery of health.

The amount of donation is unimportant; but we Wanderers from the far East desire to shew that we have found friends in the land in which we have pitched our tents.

Sir Moses Montefiore the husband of the deceased lady has been honoured through many years <~~with~~> by the friendship of Her Majesty Queen Victoria

– The acts of benevolence of Sir Moses and Lady Montefiore were never limited by distinctions of Creed as Sir Moses' benefactions to the town of Ramsgate and his frequent <~~noble~~> liberal subscriptions towards building Churches will prove.

I must again apologize for intruding so long on your very valuable time and awaiting a favourable reply,

I remain

dear Sir
Faithfully & sincerely yours
ELIZA DAVIS.

It may also be remembered that he was the first to open by a munificent gift the subscription for the relief [of] Syrian Christian sufferers from the cruelty of the Druses.

TAVISTOCK HOUSE.
14th July 1863.

DEAR SIR,

Pray receive my best thanks for your kind letter and its enclosure.

I have a great dislike to making myself troublesome, yet trust you will pardon my venturing a few words on the subject of the Jewish Character. It <~~happens~~> is a fact that the Jewish *race* and *religion* are inseparable, if a Jew embrace any other faith, he is no longer known as of the *race* either to his own people or to the gentiles to whom he has joined himself.

Does any one designate Mr. D'Israeli as "the Jew"? I cannot dispute the fact that at the time to which "Oliver Twist " refers there were some Jews, receivers of stolen goods, and although in my own mind it is a distinction without a difference, I do not think it could at all be proved that there was one so base as to train young thieves <~~as~~> in the manner described in that work. If, as you remark "all must observe that the other criminals were Christians" they are at least contrasted with <~~favourable~~> characters of *good Christians*, this poor wretched Fagin stands alone "The Jew". How grateful we are to Sir Walter Scott and to Mrs. S. C. Hall for their delineations of some <~~Jews~~> of our race, yet Isaac of York was not all virtue!

I hope we shall not forfeit your opinion of our sense and good temper; perhaps we are over sensitive, but are we not ever flayed? Are we not constantly irritated by the small gnats who may fret us, yet are in themselves too insignificant to be annihilated. It is only when a great mind appears to be against us that we plaintively appeal.

We <~~abide~~> dwell in this country very little known, our domestic customs

entirely unknown, I have myself been greatly <~~surprised~~> astonished at the ignorance of <~~the English generally~~> my countrymen, concerning, what they appear to think an entirely foreign people. Look at the blood accusations from time to time rising up against us, even such a popular paper as Chambers' disseminating <~~such a~~>that calumny. I <~~venture to express myself~~> hazard the opinion that it would well repay an author of reputation to examine more closely into the manners and character of the British Jews and to represent them as they really are to " Nothing extenuate nor aught set down in Malice."

The enclosed extract is a specimen of the elegant wit <~~itticism~~>of a comic publication the first number of which appeared yesterday.

By post I have forwarded you some tracts which a Society <~~amongst our~~> in our Community distribute for the improvement <~~of the ignorant amongst us~~> and elevation of our own people. They are chiefly moral and not doctrinal, and I should be gratified by your glancing over them.

Once more let me thank you earnestly for having <~~accorded~~> complied with my request, your name on our list of donors to the Lady Montefiore Memorial will <~~confer a highly gratifying~~> be a high gratification to the whole body of British Jews, and faithfully promising not to trouble you any more with my correspondence,

I remain,
dear Sir,
Yours Sincerely & obliged
ELIZA DAVIS,

TAVISTOCK HOUSE
Novr 13 1864.

DEAR SIR,

I am, I fear, breaking through a promise not again to trouble you with my correspondence; but your introduction of the Jew Riah in the 7th No. of "Our Mutual Friend", impels me to thank you very earnestly for what I am so presumptuous as to think a great compliment paid to myself and to my people. Yet I must ask you to pardon my offering a few remarks.

Riah is made to say, "they curse me in" Jehovah's name. You are not then aware that no Jew ever utters this appellation of the "Creator", even in his prayers – In our ritual where it is written in Hebrew יהוה which would sound in English '' Yehovoh " we never pronounce it, but, read '' Adounoi '' which signifies the Lord – we sometimes say the "Eternal". In the common English Bible you would find on comparing the text with the Hebrew that יהוה with rare exceptions rendered L.O.R.D. the capital letters distinguishing it

as a proper name. I believe since the dispersing of the Hebrew Nation, the Jews have never used this distinctive and pre-eminent name of God, with the pious intent of preserving it from profanation. For the same reason you may observe that throughout the book of Esther the name of God is never once mentioned. When themselves penitent for their frequent relapses into idolatry the Jews were always careful not to use the Ineffable name, lest it should be perverted to idols.

Even now if called upon in a Court of justice to swear by this Sacred name the conscientious Jew will decline doing so, he will use the English word 'God', and be equally bound by it – but he never uses ''Jehovah".

The Jew in his ordinary parlance when alluding to the Creator will say, 'the Creator blessed be his name' the "Almighty Father, 'Adounoi', 'Almighty God'.

I cannot even faintly guess how you intend to use the character of Riah, it is very prettily commenced and very picturesque, I am acquainted with an aged Hebrew living not far from the house in St. Mary Axe whose physique and Courteous deportment it very well describes, the costume however differs, ordinarily these people dress as their neighbours do and before the present fashion of beards prevailed did not wear theirs unless, indeed, they are Polish Jews. I conclude from his language that Riah is an English Jew, but the action of kissing the hem of a garment is strictly Polish. A Turkish Jew might use it, but we have few of them in England. I have never myself seen it practised but by a Polish Jewess; these also will kiss the hand of a benefactor.

The phrase "generous Christian Master" is not characteristic. The kindness to the two girls the indifference whether they be of his own faith or another is very truthful[.]

I believe we do perform the enjoinder to "shew kindness unto the stranger because ye know the heart of the stranger for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" – and to a certain extent we are yet strangers here. You will I hope excuse the liberty I have thus taken and rather receive this as a tribute of my admiration.

With respects, I remain, faithfully yours
ELIZA DAVIS.

Tavistock House,
Tavistock Square,
8th Feby 1867.

To Charles Dickens Esq^re^

My Dear Sir,

You will favour me by accepting for your library the vols: which accompany this. they were intended for a New Year offering, the binder frustrated that intention.

The selection is made, because with regard to the contents of those sacred volumes we both stand on the same ground and have in them an equal inheritance, and I thought it possible you might not possess a copy of the Scriptures in Hebrew.

It is the only complete translation into English, that we have, <~~it may not be the best we possessed~~> collated with the Hebrew, it may not be all that is desired, but it is the best we possess. If you do not disapprove of the inscription placed on the first page – I should be gratified by your inserting it – It does but faintly express how highly I appreciate and how profoundly sensible I am of the nobility of character <~~possessed~~> evinced by him who depicted " Riah " in contrast to Fagin – Most gratefully do my people accept the spirit of the work.

With earnest wishes for your health and happiness and that the 'shadow' of your fame may never be less, nor your power to do good diminished.

I remain,
My dear Sir,
Faithfully and sincerely yours
ELIZA DAVIS.

TAVISTOCK HOUSE
TAVISTOCK SQUARE.
4th Augst 1870.

DEAR MISS DICKENS,

Being unused to "Newspaper" correspondence I was a little vexed at seeing my name appended to the letters in the "Observer" and the ''Daily News "as I expected the contradiction would have been put in another form, now however, my little annoyance has become a source of positive pleasure through its having elicited your very kind letter, I <~~cannot express~~> cannot

tell you how pleased I am at the cordial good feeling expressed by yourself and your family – I am already in possession of a photograph of your much lamented Father; but shall prize most highly those you have sent me – and the kindly sentiments you record of his having entertained towards me.

Without being a lavish admirer of your great & good father's works I have noted through passing years the wonderful humanizing effects of his powerful pen. Our lives were contemporary, and I can better than yourself <~~bespeak~~> know the good he has wrought for the present generation – That he was so early removed from the sphere of his labours is a dispensation of the <~~Divine Power~~> All Wise which we dare not question – and to which we must humbly submit.

Strange that although I had some correspondence with your father, I <~~have~~> only saw him twice at his readings – the <~~impression~~> effect then created I can never forget – but it was his own act in writing the character of "Riah" that impressed me thoroughly with the nobility of his character.

Tavistock House will again be changing owners or occupants in the Spring of next year. If at any time my dear young lady you would give me the pleasure of a call I should indeed be very glad – Thanking yourself and the other members of your family for your friendly feeling

I remain
dear Miss Dickens
Very sincerely yours
ELIZA DAVIS.

The original design kept by Mrs. Davis of the Presentation Inscription inserted in the Hebrew Bible presented by her to Charles Dickens

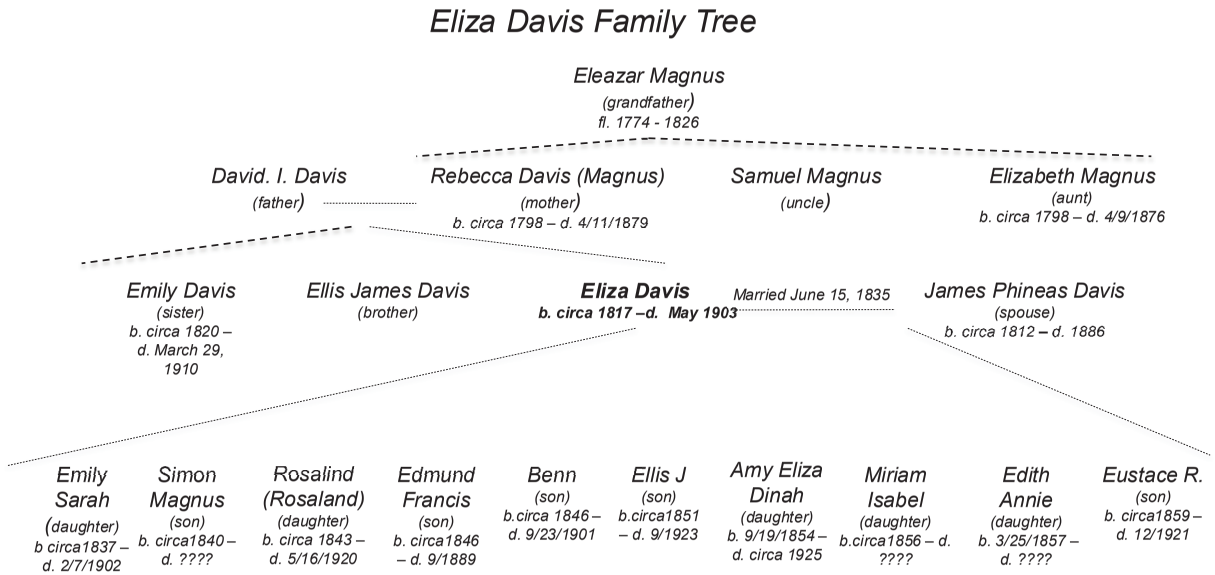
6th February 1867.

Presented to

Charles Dickens Esqre

In grateful and admiring recognition of his having exercised the noblest quality man can possess; that of atoning for an injury as soon as conscious of having inflicted it,

by a Jewess



Family Tree courtesy of Frank Gravier

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