

# 查尔斯·狄更斯及其《双城记》赏析

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**摘要:** 阅读欣赏优秀的文学作品是重要的认识和审美活动, 是我们精神文化生活不可或缺

的组成部分。通过对狄更斯《双城记》的赏析, 可以更好地理解和欣赏其作品。

**关键词:** 《双城记》; 狄更斯; 欣赏

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## I. Introduction

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was a great English novelist and one of the most popular writers of all time. His best-known books include *A Christmas Carol*, *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens created some of the most famous characters in English literature. Many of his works reflect the actual life of English society in the 1830s and '60s. He exposed the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the capitalist society. His works offer a vivid and realistic picture of English society of the 19th century. It was not until he had his first work under the name of *Sketches by Boz* and *Pickwick Papers* published that he attained eminence all over the world.

## II. Background and purpose of the novel

Since the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 18th century, the class structure in the English society had undergone radical changes. The industrial capitalists began to play a more important role and fought for political power with the old aristocracy. Due to the support of the people, this struggle for power ended in the victory of bourgeoisie over the aristocracy. With the development of capitalism, there arose a powerful working class, though the conflict between labour and capital was for some time kept in the background of the struggle between the feudal and bourgeois classes. But ever since the thirties of the 19th century, the struggle between the workers and capitalists became the main contradiction in the English social life.

Now England became a typical capitalist country. Having consolidated its positions at home, the British bourgeoisie intensified its policy of its colonial expansion to all parts of the world, successively competing for markets with other powers of the world. At home, they exploited workers by all means, and the working people became poorer and poorer. Class contradiction was increasingly intensified. After Britain was defeated by the American in 1781, tariff policy was put into use, and Britain lost the American market, which it could export industrial products. Thus overproduction occurred, many factories and enterprises went bankrupt, the unemployment rate increased rapidly and prices went up abruptly. People's living condition were unimaginable. Chartism which lasted for 20 years came to an end in failure, and revolution was at a cease. But behind the facial prosperity and peace, a wide gap between the rich and the poor in the country was increasing. Class contradiction was intensifying. The ruling class still constantly unleashed wars to plunder colonies which led to a new strengthening of the English working class movement. Dickens, who had observed the society for years, witnessed the fact that it was capitalists' exploitation and oppression that made the working people poorer.

### III. Characterization of the novel

*A Tale of Two Cities* is much more than a social documents. It is a fascination tale of motivation and counter-motivation of fate and accident. It is a richly plotted novel with constant surprise to keep interest high. The two cities, London and Paris, are compared and contrasted. Characters from both cities begin to touch each other's lives, until they are inextricably bound together. The characters themselves are colourful and memorable. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens carefully plots his tale from the opening of the story on the lonely Dover road to its ending in Paris. Nearly all characters, even minor ones have important roles to play in the novel. No one is introduced just for show. When a character wanders into the story and out again, you may be sure to hear of him again, perhaps at crucial moment later in the story.

There remains in *A Tale of Two Cities* an abundance of Dickens at his best. Every aspect of his art and thought is here represented, irony, tragedy and comedy all could be found between the covers of one book. But most of all its greatness lies in his matchless portray of revolutionaries and his feelings for and against them.

Dickens depicts a doctor called Manette as a typical petty bourgeois intellectual with great learning but also with an innocent mind. His character is changeable along with the plots.

Dr. Manette has great sympathy for the working class. On witnessing what the Evremond brothers have done, an innocent idea comes to his mind: he writes an account of atrocities of them and delivers it to the Ministry of State. He doesn't realise the relation between them, so he is taken into Bastille. During his eighteen years' imprisonment there, his reason gives away, "In the submissive way of one long accustomed to obey under coercion, he ate and drank what they gave to eat and drink and put on the cloak and other wrappings, that they gave him to wear." (P79). When he is released after the eighteen years, he changes much. One of his characters lies in his humanism. He writes in his accusation "But, now I believe that the mark of the red cross is fatal to them, and that they have no part in His mercies. And them and their descendants, to the last of their race," (P361). But when he learns that Lucy is courted by Darnay, a Frenchman, a descendent of his own oppressors, and they will get married, he forgets that he has written in the accusation and agrees to their marriage. When he learns that Darnay is put up to the revolutionary tribunal, he sets off at once to Paris to save him. He said to Lorry, "it all tended to a good end, my friend; it was not mere waste and ruin. As my beloved child was helpful in restoring me to myself, I'll be helpful now in restoring the dearest part of herself to her; by the aid of Heaven I'll do it!" (P300). From here we can come to a conclusion: it is Lucy under whose care Manette recovers and in order to bring his daughter happiness he does all this for only his daughter's sake.

Another characteristics of Dr. Manette is his innocence. His deliverance of accusation to the Ministry of State shows that he is an empty-minded man. If he hadn't delivered it, he wouldn't have been imprisoned for eighteen years in Bastille. So after suffering a lot in the prison, he gains in his wit, and becomes more vigilant, he doesn't even tell his daughter for what he had been imprisoned, he only contributes his love to his only daughter. He tries to persuade the revolutionaries not to take Darnay as a "fugitive aristocrat". What he has done is for bringing peace to the family because he wants to lead a peaceful life after suffering such a long time.

Darnay, one of the main hero in the novel, a descendent of the aristocrat's, is an ideal figure who betrays the family Dickens portrays. Dickens praises Darnay for his smartness, good nature and virtue. He makes a comparison between him and his father and uncle.

Darnay is from an aristocratic family, but is himself guiltless of any sin. On seeing the decadence of the aristocratic life and people's awakening, he realises that the people's revolution is inevitably to happen. Because he is concerned about the evil reputation of his family, he'd like

to undo the wrongs done by them and wants to find a new way of life for himself. So just to execute the last request of his mother's lips and obey the last look of his dear mother's eyes, he tortures by seeking assistance and power. The property are lost to him and he renounces all his right in France. I think he is a little influenced by the Enlightenment, so he betrays his class for he is powerless to change anything. He migrates to England and earns his own living by teaching French and later becomes a capable and successful tutor of French. He should deserve praise for his excellent behaviour. But he has no action to resist the aristocratic class. That shows he is discouraged. Dickens describes him as a philanthropist. We can see this from what he has done to Lucy and Dr. Manette. He remains honest to Dr. Manette. Without being asked his background, he volunteers to tell the Doctor his real name and his reason of living abroad. He is human in his faint dislike of his rivals, but he is obviously in love with Lucy and seems to love her unselfishly. He is unreservedly devoted to Lucy and grateful to her for the home she has made. As a Doctor, Manette wants to head a peaceful life and condemns the Revolution while hating the life the aristocrats lead.

The most inspiring thing is his action to save the former steward. Darnay has a strong sense of right and wrong, as we have seen. Failing to heed Gabelle's cry for help would be the act of a coward, he thinks. So when he receives Babelle's plea for help after the success of the French Revolution, he sets off immediately to Paris without anticipating the perils he may encounter. No matter whom he wants to save, the spirit should be praised because he believes in the new revolutionary government and has confidence in the new ruler of the country. In a sense, Darnay is a humanist. Maybe, that's why the author doesn't want him to die.

Carton is a defense attorney. By Carton, whom Dickens calls a "forlorn wanderer", Dickens wants to show how a very good-natured and generous youth may sink, through lack of regard and of self-regard into a drifter, and finally a waster in an evil society. Carton's life is aimless, without any goal. He seems to be indifferent to what goes on around him. And so he wanders, regretting but doing nothing about changing himself a lot. From what he says to Lucy we can conclude that he is leading a swamped life. "But the life I lead, Miss Manette, is not conducive to health. What is to be expected of, or by, such profligates? ... I'm like one who die young. All my life might have been." (P180). Although he knows that Lucy is engaged to Darnay, he still loves her at one side, and often goes to turn anew lease of life but doesn't know where to begin. But in his ultimate self-sacrifice Dickens shows his virtue. At the end of the novel, he goes to guillotine instead of Darnay because he wants to realize the promise he has made to Lucy. "For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything. If my career were of that better kind that there was any opportunity or capacity of sacrifice in it, I would embrace my sacrifice for you and for those dear to you. ... Think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you!" (P183). We may say that when he chooses death, he is not as heroes do in the prime of life, but when he already abandoned all hope of a meaningful existence. Before he dies physically, he has already died in spirit. He sacrifices himself, not for Darnay's sake but for Lucy's, because he has no hope for her. The instruction which leads him to do so is what he learns from the New Testament which are "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, ... shall never die." (P403). In Dickens' view, Carton is the greatest one who sacrifices himself for the others. He conforms with what Dickens expects, he is not an egoist, he is a religious humanist. But today, the figure of Carton is considered not to be convincing. An ordinary people's going to guillotine instead of an aristocrat is not worth praising. Dickens' creation of this figure just reflects his world outlook, because he himself is a bourgeois humanist. He insists that people should be kind to each

other and live in peace. The figure of Carton is a good comparison with the Defarges.

The revolutionaries in the novel are represented by Mr. and Mrs. Defarge. Mrs. Defarge was the younger sister, the one surviving member of the peasant family that had been cruelly wiped out by the Evremonde and thus infused with an all-consuming hate. The Defarges remain loyal to the Doctor. But when the revolution arrives, they put themselves into it and forget the relation between them and the Doctor. When the trial of aristocrats begins, they even want the Doctor's son-in-law to die. And she would like to destroy Lucy and even, we learn later, Dr. Manette himself.

“Madame Defarge was a stout woman of about his own age, with a watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything, a large hand heavily ringed, a steady face, strong features, and great composure of manner. There was a character about Madame Defarge, from which one might have predicated that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided.” (P63~64). She records the aristocrat's evils by knitting and never be mistaken. She and her husband are the revolutionary leaders of St. Antoine. Their wine-shop is the meeting place of Jacques where they organize revolution secretly. Mrs. Defarge has deep hatred for the enemy than Defarge does, and is much more firm for revenge. The irony of her apparent indifference and thoughtless self-absorption sharpens the dread with which we look at her. The deferent actions of the men suggest that she is one of the foremost in the revolutionary group. “The one woman who had stood conspicuous, knitted on with steadfastness of Fate.” Once again we are reminded of Madame Defarge's knitting as well as her courage and determination.

The two Defarges differ in their attitude toward the coming revolution. The husband is despondent, pessimistic, impatient. Madame Defarge is quietly confident, patient, implacable. She says somewhat ironically, “Oh, the men, the men! You are faint to heart tonight, my dear!” (P161). When Darnay is brought to the revolutionary tribunal and sentenced to death, Defarge is upset. He hopes that Darnay never comes to France. He still shows affection and concern for Doctor Manette and Lucie. But Madame Defarge shows no such concern or sympathy. She says, in fact, that Darnay and Barsad have their names in the knitting “for their merits”. She is worthy of her name of “A great woman, a strong woman, a grand woman, a frightful grand woman!” (P216).

In general, the Defarges are devoted revolutionaries, determined to destroy the ruling class. They are courageous and vigorous leaders. They are intelligent and very much aware of human weakness. They are bitter about conditions and resolved to improve the poor. But the Defarges display a taste for violence and physical brutality. Wherever there is a raging mob, they are sure to be in the front. As the story goes on, Madame Defarge becomes more violent. When “Darnay” is sentenced to death, she goes to “see” Lucie, even wants to kill the whole family. That shows that the revolutionaries like Madame Defarge like to go to extremes after the success of the revolution. Lucy admits, “That dreadful woman seems to throw a shadow on me and on my hopes.” At the end of the novel, Dickens let her die when she was fighting with Miss Pross because the author himself hates violence. Before 1792, Mrs. Defarge is praised by Dickens, but by the time Jacobean is in power, she is described negatively. The author even regards her as a “queen of revenge”. From this figure, we can conclude that Dickens obviously condemns the revolutionary movement.

#### IV. Comment

*A Tale of Two Cities* is probably the most widely read of all the novels of Charles Dickens, though it is perhaps the least typical and one of the shortest. This immense popularity is certainly due in part to the tight and speedy plotting, in part to the vivid picture it paints of London and

Paris in the bloody days of French Revolution and in part to the way the story reflects Dickens' passionate anger against cruelty, humbug and injustice. The plots are full of humanism.

When the revolutionary storm rises through wild tumults to a red phantasmagoria of horror, Dickens' emotions are divided: he pities the victims but understands people driven mad by oppression, at one movement weeping tears of sympathy and joy for Dr. Manette and the next howling for more heads as they float in a river of blood. As a compassionate human being, he sickens with the cruelty of mass murder, but in his heart there is sympathy for suffering turned wolfish. And so there is in the dreadful and ruling pageant of the Revolution both horror and exaltation. It races from the storming of the Bastille, with its seven gory heads on pikes, to the attack on the Hotel de Ville, where naked and starving women, hair dishevelled, beating their breasts, urge on with wild shrieks men who are terrible in their bloody mind fury.

Here is destroyed the aged Foulon, "who told the famished people they might eat grass!" screams ring out. "Foulon who told my old father that he might eat grass, when I had no bread to give him! Foulon who told my baby it might suck grass, when these breasts were dry with want! O mother of God, this Foulon! O Heaven our suffering! Hear me, my dead baby and my withered father: I swear on my knees, on these stones, to avenge you on Foulon! ... Give us the heart of Foulon, Give us the body and soul of Foulon, Rend Foulon to pieces, and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him!" (p. 252).

So, like a tempest, like an earthquake. The Terror rises, even when the innocent were among its pray.

In the end, Dickens portrays its agonies as seminal. He was not terrified by the Terror. But neither did he glorify it. He saw that amid its tempestuous plunging the noble vision in which the Revolution had been born was not entirely lost, but born fruit in a future at least partly redeeming the sufferings of the past. "I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come. I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out." *A Tale of Two Cities* rises above both the gloating hatred of the Jacobin and the sick fear of the revolutionary, voices a positive historical affirmation of hope for the future of mankind. Dickens' revolutionary vision sublimates rage and rebellion to the height of aspiration and love.

In Carton's death, Dickens frees himself, to some extent, from the good characters' initial constraint, their attempts to suppress rivalry. Instead, Dickens represents a release that operates through a relationship of rivalry at the same time that he dissociates it from motives of recognition and aggression. This tension is what makes Carton's death so enigmatic; it seems to be a romantic victory, both sensual and heroic—especially in light of the warm tone of the concluding paragraphs – and a chaste, virtuous renunciation at the same time, one which affirms the community of others as a cardinal value. The important point, though, is that Carton's death keeps these two satisfactions separate. Only the reader is allowed to integrate the thrill of Carton's self-abandonment with relief at Darnay's and Lucy's survival. The image of a double Carton – his imagined grandson – points toward this doubled satisfaction, placing a version of Carton in both world.

This kind of separation of dialectically opposed desires for expenditure and for conservation is one way – ultimately, an inadequate way – for Dickens to moderate the presence of rivalry in his heroes. In this way Dickens manages to affirm separately both impulse as desires for transcendence, without allowing them to fuse completely in the satisfactions of rivalry. Through a figure like Carton, Dickens circumvents problems of rivalry by insuring that neither expenditure

nor conservation seeks to become the condition for individual reward; both are expressed as the possibility of a total renunciation.

Although this bifurcation may present us with aesthetically satisfying alternatives to the problem of rivalry like that of *A Tale of Two Cities*, there remains something unsettling in Dickens's strategy. Since Carton must die for Darnay to survive, we are left with no real model for action. In other novels, as the satisfactions of violent expense and more conservative, self-sacrificing forms of release are pushed further apart, prescriptive images of moral character become even less satisfying. Characters like Carton, Nancy in *Oliver Twist* who sacrifice themselves completely for the sake of others, are always morally compromised; their association with acts of transgression seems to require that they be sacrificed completely. But that atmosphere of moral compromise also helps taint their self-sacrifice, making their figures whose acts are conducive to awe but not imitation. Conversely characters who commit themselves to work or other forms of renunciation in service of others are often trivialised because their satisfaction are so narrowed. And in a novel like *A Tale of Two Cities* the separation of violent release through the self-sacrificing conservation of others jeopardises the effectiveness of all of Dickens's heroes.

Taken as a whole, Dickens's novels offer a most complete and realistic picture of the English bourgeois society of his age. In his works are found types representing all strata of the British society. He created unforgettable characters typifying the vices of the bourgeoisie. While criticising the rich, Dickens presented a picture of the people's sufferings under capitalism. The decaying petty bourgeoisie and the rising working class were depicted by Dickens as victims of capitalist greed and exploitation.

Dickens's social criticism cannot be understood without taking into account the mass movement of the working class, Chartism. His works are reflections of the people against capitalist exploitation. He felt the class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He saw the contradiction of the capitalist society. Yet Dickens was himself a petty bourgeois who couldn't overlap the limits of his class. His petty-bourgeois limitation found expression in a definite tendency for recognition of class contradictions, and in the happy endings of many of his novels.

Such limitations were typical of the English critical realists. They criticised capitalism from the viewpoint of bourgeois humanism. They wanted, in most cases, to improve social conditions by means of reforms. Particular stress was laid on the moral criticism of the ruling classes, and education was thought to be the chief remedy for all social evils. The positive ideals of the critical realists were often idealistic and unpractical, and their work is significant mainly for its vigorous social criticism. Yet with these limitations the works of Dickens remain the highest achievement in realism in the 19th century English literature. Ralph Fox, the revolutionary English critic, said, "In Dickens they (the English writers of the 19th century) had a genius who restored to the novel its full epic character, whose teeming mind created stories, poems and people which have forever entered into the life of the English-speaking world. Some of his characters have assumed an almost proverbial existence, they have become part of our modern folklore, and that surely is the highest any author can achieve. He can only do it by genius, humanity and a feeling for the poetry of life." John Forster once said Charles Dickens was the most popular novelist of the century and one of the greatest humorists that England has produced.

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## Charles Dickens and his *A Tale of Two Cities*

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### Abstract

Reading and enjoyment of good literary works is an important activity of understanding and appreciation, which is an essential part of our cultural life. By reading and analyzing *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, the reader will be able to understand and appreciate fully the work.

**Keywords:** *A Tale of Two Cities*; Charles Dickens; appreciation

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