

## Examining the Impact of Social Classism and Sacrifice in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*

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**Abstract:** The present study examines the social stratification in the novel of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). It shows how the novel traces the conflict between different categories of society. In so doing, the study discovers the core ideas that shape the disparity that exists between the working class and the aristocrats. In his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens discusses the role of cultural domination in France and England as well as demonstrating the goals of the aristocracy. According to Marx's theory of social construction depends on class relationships and division. These relationships are explained using the two terms exploitation and appropriation. This will include the bourgeois class controlling the working class, which would mean that the mode of production and the productive forces of society would be determined by the aristocracy. The study has used a literary model in an attempt to produce a clear view of the relationship between power and the weak in this novel. Having this literary model to Dickens's novel, the findings of this study reveal how the individuals compete each other to attain social power as represented in their social structure.

**Keywords:** *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens, Marx theory, social stratification, working class, bourgeois.

### 1. Introduction

The extended reign of the Queen Victoria (1837-1901) contributed to set up the period known as the Victorian period. During this extended era there are many changes occur in British history. The most obvious changes have been caused by developments in science and medicine, urbanization, population growth and sex roles. It is confirmed by Fatima (2013), where she describes the Victorian age as "a period of progress and reform, industrialization and social upheaval in which England witnessed a sweeping changes across Victorian time .Changes that influenced English society in culture, politics, economy and social norms"( p.7)

Consequently, the literature in Victorian age portrayed its role in the opposite direction. The rise of literature had an impact as the world moved to reflect and approve the social realities that arose in England. In other words, it reveals " the intellectual patterns of the Victorian age, dealing with the status question through on the examinations of society, the law, industrialism and historical ideals" (Fatima, 2013, p.5). Hence, the Victorian literature depends on a realism manner of expression which is an essential core why it has grown to be an important resource for historical information and the way of life in 19th-century England.

Charles Dickens is a renowned English novelist who also wrote about injustice and other problems of society. On February 7, 1812, in Portsmouth, he was born during the beginning of the Industrial Era in Landport, Hampshire. He is one of the most significant social critics who used his novels to expose the moral, social, and economic injustice of the Victorian age. In addition, Dickens supported several significant social reforms and demonstrated understanding and sympathy for the powerless individuals and more marginalized members of British society.(Kaur,2013,p.75)

Consequently, Dickens believed in the politically aware and moral prospect of literature, and the novel in particular, because he thought that literature, and the novel in particular, had the ability to advance politics and ethical issues. In his prominent novels, he tackles the social analysis to become an outspoken critic of unfair economic and social conditions. Dickens became an outspoken critic of unfair economic and social conditions in his books of social critique. His deeply felt social commentary contributed to the reading public's increased awareness. In addition, Dickens' novels are preoccupied with industrial society, such as racial inequality, poverty and the ills of the city. A novelist who is widely known for writing about social issues and class division. The main theme of his works focus on the interpersonal interactions. (Kaur,2013,p.76)

Considering issues that are preoccupying society as a whole offers Dickens's main concern, both in his works and in his own real life, themes and his style, is how to bring about significant societal change void of chaos and disruption. He believes that the institutions that control people's life have an important effect on their mentality. In other words, the oppressed do not find a new way to govern, rather they simply repeat the practices of the previous rulers, the very practices that led the oppressed to revolt in the first place” (p.495 )

Dickens's genius changed literature both in England and around the world. He was considered one of the most significant and influential novelist of the 19th century, Charles Dickens is recognized for his works. Dickens attracted huge spectators, including both people who frequently avoided the theater as impolite or even morally immoral and those who enthusiastically supported other Victorian theatrics. (Ferguson, 2001, p.730) The impact of environment, is one of most important problems which Dickens tackled in his novels especially during youth, on behaviors and character. There are two cases at odds with another, which are the need to highlight the severe harm that a poor environment and upbringing may cause and the urge to highlight how human nature's inherent goodness can endure nearly anything (Pudelko, 2021, pp.492-493).

Nonetheless, He is best known for thirteen novels, the first series of "*Sketches by Boz*," a collection of short tales, was first published in 1836. It was genre of lighthearted humor that has been widely read for more than a century. Charles Dickens' first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), was preceded by a popular series of entertaining stories about people and scenes in London. He also produced plays that are equally successful, such as *A Christmas Carol* (1843) is considered a vocal point mixing the elements of gothic and it is traces how the conflict among different social classes is crystallized in his novel (Carter & McRae, 2016, p.245)

Among his prosperous works concentrating on children's difficulties is *Oliver Twist* (1837–38) who, being grown up in a workhouse. He also produced plays that are equally successful, *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41), *The Man of Feeling* (1841), *David Copperfield* (1849–50) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) has semi-autobiographical elements that allude to some facts of Charles Dickens (Carter & McRae, 2016, p.246)

*A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) reveals how aspirations, especially for the novelist who scarifies his own life. First published in (1859). *A Tale of Two Cities* is preoccupied with the cultural issues which concerned with not only the disparity between classes but also the political climate in society, especially as it relates to the poor's calamities as well as "the condition of poverty which might provoke a mass reaction on the scale of the French revolution" (Syamsuri, 2007 , p.xvii) Dickens explores the internal essence and explains how people come to the valley of human sensations, where fear and rage rule, as well as what might happen if we allow these emotions to fester within of us. In addition, the very theme of love is the core idea in Dickens' work. He demonstrates to us the regrettable tendency of human nature to make some of us spiteful and too ambitious. It serves as an illustration of literary social criticism.(Zahia, 2014, p.26)

## 2. Problem Statement

Numerous critics have already studied and discussed *A tale of two cities*, however there is still a gap focusing on its study of the work. In this regard, the study will focus on the conflict between different classes within the social structure. Such a conflict between dominant and subordinate ranks of society will be used to illustrate this struggle of social classes. This is because "the issue of class is a matter of inequality, and it inevitably entails issues of hegemony and resistance" (Dönmez, 2012, p.102). What makes Charles Dickens a creative one because he has regarded the greatest writer and critic of his era as well as to his works which considered unequalled through his life.

## 3. Literature Review

Ahmadi (2014), highlights in his article, Cultural hegemony in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, specific situations, such as instances of cultural authority, domination, consent, and the mapping of language and intellectuality in dominance., based on Antonio Gramsci theories. Ahmadi sees that Gramsci views the common people's constitution through both cultural and political instruments, in which they are under the control or oppression of hegemonic forces, whether by coercion or consensus.

Soetirto (2022) analyzes the effects of the French Revolution on both countries as well as how it affects the lives of the French and English people. Her article gives a historical retrospection of Dickens's novel *A tale of two cities*. The novel is preoccupied with how the past and present are related, portraying analogies and conjuring up pictures through a succession of historical reflections performed by both the novelist and the protagonists.

Li (2013) in his article "A Comparative Study between *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Great Gatsby*— The Self-sacrifice Spirits in Romanticism" discovers the comparative study between Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). *A Tale of Two Cities* one of Dickens' most significant works, it is a novel with clear political hints. Since the author compares Paris to London in the novel, its name represents what the novelist believes. In that period French society was in disarray. While, *The Great Gatsby* shows the period was known as the Jazz Age. At that time was the most prosperous and valuable moment of brilliant tension during which the author lived, from the World War to the decade following the economic collapse.

Connor (2014) in his book *Charles Dickens*, considers Charles Dickens a creative novelist. The book is really valuable, covering topics such as Dickens' life, writings, and new critical perspectives during the last two decades. This book is an essential source for this study because it concentrates on Dickens' life, novels, and his style.

Oliver (2018) in his article "Challenging Society in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *Bleak House*" analyses the novels which written by Charles Dickens, it may be inferred that the author is presenting a similar idea of compassion in order to enable readers to experience what other people sense with problems are experiencing. In addition, Dickens in his works demonstrates the necessity for social reform by highlighting the negative effects of Victorian society brought on by the disregard for charitable organizations' and the educational system's duties, as well as the constricting gender roles that were reinforced by a hierarchical and indifferent class mentality.

Zahia (2014) reveals the characteristics of Victorian era which deals with the matters and difficulties of the time including the economic, social, religious, and philosophical subjects surrounding the Industrial Revolution, on class conflicts, the early feminist movement, and the demands for political and social reform. She explores that Victorian England's basic standard of living was based on a social class-based framework that was formed by traditional ideas of

lifestyles. English society in the nineteenth century was still very stratified, however by the end of the century some of the old ranks lines were starting to vanish by the end of this era.(p.1)

In their book *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism*, Bidet and Kouvelakis (2008) present numerous views of this doctrine provided by different writers. It is divided into forty chapters every one of which focuses on a different component of this philosophy, highlighting Marx's omnipresence in contemporary cultures' consciousness.

Mishra (2022) in *A Marxist Analysis of Class Consciousness in Bong Joon-ho's Parasite*, sees that the ideology of the capitalist classes can be reinforced through modalities of representation such as values of social society, arts , habits and literature. These principles are quickly assimilated by the lower classes, and power hegemony happens when the ideology is promoted and preserved through language and modes of expression through naturalization.

#### 4. Significance of the Study

This study will offer an original viewpoint on the analysis of Charles Dickens's *A tale of two cities*. Despite the fact that several studies achieved on the same concern, they do not convey all these features together, as is the case in this study. The previous researches do not tackle the novel in details, as this study sets out to do.

#### 5- Marx's Theories

A set of theories that see social change as being influenced by economic issues. One fundamental doctrine is that the economic foundation that shapes or determines political activity is the means of production. It is believed that the ruling class in capitalist society "has the means of material production at its disposal, consequently also controls the means of mental production"(Marx and Engels, 2010, p. 59). Therefore, people from this class will rule over other classes because they are the ones whose thoughts "lack the means of mental production [and hence] are on the whole subject to it" (Marx and Engels, 2010, p. 59)

Therefore, according to Marx, the structure of a culture is based on relationships and the distinction of classes. These relationships are explained using the ideas of exploitation and appropriation. This would imply that the ruling class will control the working class, as well as the mode of production and the productive forces of society. Thus, Marx and Engels claim "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (2010, p.18). The idea of ideology of the capitalist ranks is supported and shown through various means of representation, such as social life, art, habits and literary works. The lower classes quickly adopt these ideas, and the dominance of power happens when the ideology is maintained and continued to exist through language and modes of expression by naturalization (Mishra, 2022, p.2).

In Marx's view, man is basically a natural being. He is endowed with natural qualities, vital powers, and he is a living natural being . All of these qualities appear in him as instincts, propensities, and capacities. In other words, as a natural being man is considered "a social being, nature too is recognised as human and social. Nature is the basis for his presence in the world, the link with other men, an aspect of his social existence" (Jakubowski, 1936, p.9). This interpretation of Marx's theory emphasizes his idea of the base and superstructure, which dominates the social construction. According to Marx's idea, people in their social order "enter into particular, necessary relations independently of their will, relations of production which correspond to a particular stage of development of their material productive forces" (Jakubowski, 1936, p.10). In other words, Marx suggests that the structure of society can be evaluated in terms of economic fulfillment. The economic system in any society is made up with "the real [reale] base upon which a legal and



political superstructure rises and to which particular forms of social consciousness correspond"(Jakubowski, 1936, p.10).

However, the idea of "relations of production" refers to the economic ties that developed among society's members as a result of how they participate in the procedure of social production; it cannot be used to describe how production is regulated within one company. Thus, these economic relationships are "the original unforeseeable product of an aggregation of voluntaristic impulses from individual consciousnesses; the final result does not correspond to the will of any single individual" (Jakubowski, 1936, p.12)

Nevertheless, hypotheses regarding the nature of ideology and ideological behaviors find out their peer in recent philosophical works. Since ideology is something that intrinsically hinders the reproduction of life, it is no longer viewed negatively. The best way to create and produce all social and economic realities is through ideology idea.

## 6- Discussion

*A Tale of Two Cities* is one of the most important and popular novel of Dickens's works. The purpose of its written in order to depict the positive and negative aspects of the French Revolution. The extensive broadness of this work encompasses the two major countries of the eighteenth century, which was a highly exciting time in human history. England was starting a peaceful revolution that was shifting the country from one that was mostly agricultural to one that was largely industrial while France rose up in a violent revolution against the elite. Dickens was interested in and wrote about the significant issues that these two conflicts provoked. (Bruxvoort ,1965, p.3)

*A tale of two cities* opens with its prominent lines " It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom,..... it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope,....., we had everything before us, we had nothing before us"(Dickens,p.8 ) to explain the dualism of nature of Dickens's time, which has some characteristics of French Revolution. The novel depicts events that occur during a period of more than two decades. The novel's setting goes from the tyranny of the authoritarian regime terrible violence that releases in Paris to the rule of justice in London as a safe resort. Dickens gives a realistic impression and "a vivid picture for the readers through his description of the setting in both cities and gives them the opportunity to imagine how the two cities were at that time" (Bouthaina and Fouzia , 2022, p.44)

Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* shows the sum of capitalist standards will be investigated to demonstrate how the Marquis' discussion with people reveals the aristocracy as a cruel. In one hand, Dickens in his own novel depicts the conflicts between those who face many troubles when they endeavor to achieve their dreams of having the privileged life that aristocracy people who have privileged and power. In other words, The French middle class had an essentially unrestricted power to oppress and deprive individuals in the lower classes. As an instance of such a situation is Jerry Cruncher's persistence that the harsh and brutal punishment of quartering is barbaric:

"I suppose they'll be trying Forgeries this morning'? 'Treason '? 'That's quartering,' said Jerry. 'Barbarous '?!...It is the law.' 'It's hard in the law to spile a man, I think. Ifs hard enough to kill him, but it's wery hard to spile him, sir.'" (Dickens, p.82).

Dickens's view, therefore, evokes the poverty in that society was getting progressively worse because of the terrible economic structure and how unkind the upper classes was toward the adversity of the lower class. This situation revealed how members that belonging to the aristocrat social class prevent the aspirations of those from the working class to have privileged life: "You dogs!" said the Marquis, ..... "I would ride over any of you very willingly, and exterminate you

from the earth. If I knew which rascal threw at the carriage, and if that brigand were sufficiently near it, lie should be crushed under the wheels." (Dickens, p.157).

However, the distinction between the rich and the impoverished one is clearly exposed in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Though, one requires four workers to prepare his hot chocolate every day, others have to crawl on the ground in the street to sip up wine that has been dropped, are left with nothing to eat, and are left to die from hungry. Dickens highlights the necessity for liberty for the French peasantry and expresses his sympathy for their plight. Dickens decries this injustice, but he also criticizes the peasants' tactics for overcoming it. By engaging in brutality against cruelty, the peasants failed to earn the readers' respect. This is because that France's population are so poverty "the tax for the state, the tax for the church, the tax for the lord, tax local and tax general, were to be paid here and to be paid there, according to solemn inscription in the little village, until the wonder was, that there was any village left unswallowed" ( Dickens,p.120 )

What the poor do not possess, the rich keep taking. To enable the wealthy to live an extraordinarily luxurious life, the poor are sacrificing everything they own. Rich people have a chance to reduce class difference, but instead they make it worse in order to improve their own circumstances. "Repression is the only lasting philosophy. The dark deference of fear and slavery, my friend," observed the Marquis, "will keep the dogs obedient to the whip, as long as this roof," looking up to it, "shuts out the sky." (Dickens,p.130 ) In addition, repression refers to exerting dominance or control. According to Marquis wants common people to be his slaves and compares them to dogs. On one hand, he endorses the French aristocracy's practice of abusing the peasantry by whipping them like dogs in order to keep them submissive. On the other hand, he intends to convey that people should be treated like dogs in order to instill in them a dread of the upper class.

According to Ahmadi (2014) Dickens depicts in his novel the aristocracy as being superior over the lower class. In his *A Tale of Two Cities* , Dickens asserts that dominance over the individual and the rabble is a legacy. Upper class stratify exercising their hegemony over and in several institutions through the schools and church, and other institutions, and they also use authority and persuasive as social orders.(p.99). Such a situation shows that "the capitalists' power relate with the ideological power to control the institutions such as (church, school)" (Coffey et al, 1977, p.93) . Therefore, Dickens depicts the destitution of the dwellers in the village where the Marquis is the lord in order to show that the proletariat is not naturally impoverished; rather, it is made impoverished by tyranny and exploitation. In addition, he discusses the disparity that exists between the working class and the ruling class and demonstrates how the former are forced to choose a violent revolution by this specific inequity.

## 7. Conclusion

In presenting *A Tale of Two Cities* , Dickens in his novel reflects the class stratification between the upper class and lower class. Dickens endeavors to draw special attention in his novel to the unequal relation between the rich and the impoverished people, which he rejects. Throughout *A tale of Two Cities*, the novelist reveals the injustice of the upper class contrasted to the working class. These inequalities and injustice life led to rebel against the unfair social policies. He attempts to describe how people belonging to working social rank inhibit any ambitions and have struggled to gain a high position on the social structure. Generally, it is proven that like many other creative novelists, Charles Dickens " has a distinct writing style that attracts readers because his writings mirror the social life of his time and other times" (Bouthaina and Fouzia , 2022, p.58)

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