

CLASS STRUGGLES IN CHARLES DICKENS' A TALE OF TWO CITIES

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Abstract

There must be a background that influenced an author to create a literary work. Charles Dickens got inspiration for his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, which categorized as a historical novel. The novel has historical background that makes people got interested to know more about the novel. It is believed that Dickens' portrayed the class struggle of the characters in this novel, thus this study is aimed to analyze the class struggles in this novel by using Marxism theory. This research is a library research. The result of this study is that class struggles truly reflected in Charles Dickens' novel.

Key words: *A Tale of Two Cities*, Class struggle, French Revolution, Marxism

INTRODUCTION

A creation of a literary work is an attempt to get either entertainment or education, or both (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020), (Adelina & Suprayogi, 2020). The main purpose of the creation of a novel, as a kind of literary works, is to entertain the reader in which the author must recognize what the needs of society are and what they demand to (Pranoto, 2021), (Nurmalasari & Samanik, 2018). Thereby, the author can entertain people through his/her work for it matches the characteristics of the society (Kuswoyo, Sujatna, et al., 2022). On the other hand, it is not only to entertain people, but also to educate them (Kuswoyo & Siregar, 2019), (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019). In making a work, the author must have reasons of why the story should be delivered (Kuswanto et al., 2020). The reasons are obvious. A literary work is not made by the author's full imagination (Qodriani & Wijana, 2021), (Suprayogi & Pranoto, 2020). There must be things outside it that give contribution to the story. Just like a novel entitled *A Tale of Two Cities* written by Charles Dickens that inspired by the French Revolution.

A Tale of Two Cities, as the title of this novel, is set in two cities, France and London. It depicts the historical background of the war between France and London, also the rise of the French Revolution (Abidin et al., 2022), (Fithratullah, 2021). (Ahmad et al., 2021)

stated that although the background of *A Tale of Two Cities* is French Revolution, the real society of England is reflected in this novel. This novel, which set in the French Revolution, illustrates the upheaval of the lower class people towards the cruelty and greed of the aristocratic groups during their rule (Gulö, 2019), (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018). There are many things that the writer wants to convey through this creation of literary work (Amelia et al., 2022). Great sacrifice is needed to achieve something better (Suprayogi & Pranoto, 2020). And sacrifice could be applied both in love and in the fabric of life. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens tries to demonstrate how rich the rich actually are (Aminatun et al., 2021). As what Dickens demonstrates in this novel that the French Revolution began as a critique of the aristocracy (Setri & Setiawan, 2020).

A Tale of Two Cities offers the reader to the Marxist perspective on the social realities of England and France in the 18th century. Class struggles portrayed in novel *A Tale of Two Cities* are the things that will be analyzed in this recent article through Marxist perspective (Suprayogi & Eko, 2020), (Qodriani, 2021). As stated by (Fakhrurozi & Puspita, 2021) that, “Marx himself had written little directly on the Revolution, but it was easy enough to fit a movement which had begun with an attack on nobles and feudalism into a theory of history that emphasized class struggle and the conflict between capitalism and feudalism.” (Kuswoyo, Budiman, et al., 2022). Previous studies have been conducted by Hartono (2012) entitled *A Fight Against the Social Injustice in Charles Dickens’ The Tale of Two Cities: A Marxist Approach*. Another study conducted by Utomo in 2013 entitled *Marxist Analysis of French Revolution in Charles Dickens’ A Tale of Two Cities*. Hartono tried to find out how a fight against social injustice is reflected in the novel through Marxist approach (Asia & Samanik, 2018), (Yulianti & Sulistiyawati, 2020). And the result shows that the way of fight against the social injustice in Charles Dickens’ was inspired by the French Revolution during 1789 to 1793 (Suprayogi et al., 2021), it involved an overthrow of the aristocratic ruling order by the lower classes and followed by a period of terror and the author concluded that *A Tale of Two Cities* clearly reflected the Marxism theory (Mertania & Amelia, 2020), (Choirunnisa & Mandasari, 2021). Meanwhile, Utomo conducted the research in 2013 to find out what triggered the revolution in France, what the result of the revolution, and what ideology reflected by Dickens in the novel (Oktaviani & Mandasari, 2020). The result shows that the French revolution was motivated by economic factors that become the cause of the gap among Aristocrats and peasants and

the common people (Puspita, 2019), (Wahyudin, 2018); the author indicates his ideology that he is a man who cares about the fate of the workers and lower class as follower of Marxism in general, but he still take the positive side of feudalism (Wardaniningsih & Kasih, 2022), (Pradana & Suprayogi, 2021).

Based on those two previous studies above, therefore the writer wants to analyze the social struggles portrayed in the novel *A Tale of Two Cities* through Marxist perspective; since none of the two previous studies analyzed specifically about the class struggles in the novel. The writer chooses this novel for it matches to analyze the novel by using Marxism approach to comprehend the conflict between the two social classes during the French Revolution portrayed in this Dickens' novel. Thus, this study can be a modest attempt to understand the class struggles of the characters in the novel through Marxist perspective.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this recent study, in order to analyze the data, the writers used Marxism theory. To Abrams, Marxists view literature "not as works created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria, but as 'products' of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era" (Samanik, 2018), (Puspita & Pranoto, 2021). Marxism theory is a social theory which focuses on the representation of social conflicts between capitalist (bourgeoisie/aristocrat) and working classes (proletariat) (Afrianto et al., 2021). These two classes of society are related to each other because of their continual conflict. (Kuswoyo & Audina, 2020) stated that, class struggle is a struggle in which one class has entered into the action against another. In addition, according to (Fithratullah, 2019), each class struggle is a political struggle. Class struggles happens when the rich or the aristocrat pay the proletariat to make things for them to sell (Fakhrurozi & Adrian, 2020). And the proletariat has no say since they need money and that is the only job for them. However, what they done for the aristocrat make them live a hard life, while the rich who get richer only doing a simple work. As stated by (MULIYAH et al., 2021) that, "The Socialist Party, accordingly, struggles, not for any class privileges, but for the abolition of classes and class-rule, for equal rights and equal duties for all, without distinction of sex or race. In conformity with these principles it opposes in present day society, not only the exploitation and oppression of wage-workers, but also every form of exploitation and oppression, be it

directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race (Oktaviani, 2018).”

By means that class struggles happens because of the unfairness of the rich to the worker. According to Marx, as cited in Harnecker (p.33), Class struggles appeared in three forms, as follow:

1. Economic form: a proletariat struggle with the bourgeoisie through laborers’ organization.
2. Political form: through democracy, a proletariat has their party to change the system.
3. Ideological form: the proletariat tries to adapt the old system to the new social situation.

In this analysis, the writer used the term aristocrat rather than bourgeoisie since this novel is about feudalism not capitalist. Feudalism means that one person owned an entire area of land and used workers in order to help them make money, and the workers only get the land to work while they have freedom that the slaves do not have.

METHOD

The researchers use library research in conducting this study. According to Kothari (2004), the method used in library research is analyzing documents. The primary data of this research are taken from Dickens’ novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, published in 1859. The secondary data are taken from the theory of social class by Karl Marx and some other critics in the forms of journal articles and internet sources. In order to collect the data, the researchers have to read and understand the novel to find out any sentences that indicate the issue of class struggle. The data will be analyzed by using Marxism theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the finding of this research. As stated previously, this study focuses only on class struggle portrayed in the novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, using the theory of Marx. The novel, which set in two different countries, is truly the portrait of class struggle that society experienced during the time. As a novel which included as a historical novel, this novel has a background of French Revolution. This novel tells an aspect of a major historical event of the French Revolution, a story that focuses on the effects of political upheaval more than on character development. *A Tale of Two Cities* is related to class

struggle because those who feel the negative effects of social injustice begin to struggle against it. In the beginning of the novel, Dickens tells the condition of the two cities, French and England, that experienced the economic, social and political instability which causing the people in England brake the laws due to economic instability.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.” (Dickens, 1859, p.1)

In the very beginning of the novel, Deckens start the narration by comparing two different lives. This paper discusses the struggle against the aristocracy in the novel. The opening of the novel itself reflects the contrast between the aristocracy and the poor. Through the first paragraph itself, Dickens shows our attention to the fact that while it is the best time for the aristocracy, it is the worst time for the poor and oppressed.

“France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, rolled with exceeding smoothness down hill, making paper money and spending it. Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, because he had not kneeled down in the rain to do honour to a dirty procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards.” (Dickens, 1859, p.4).

Dickens describes the political condition in France through the sentences above. In France, the ruling class had oppressed the people for so long that many were starving. The peasants were treated cruelly by the corrupt ruling class, who lived luxuriously. In England, an aristocracy also rules, and the harsh punishment imposed is a measure of government oppression of its people. Both countries reap what they sow, because a group of revolutionaries in each country committed violence to overthrow the ruling class. This is

also a kind of class struggles in the novel. In France, the nobles under the guidance of Christian pastors used their power to act arbitrarily, punish and torture innocent people. The quotation above is a narration that tells how the conditions in Paris. How the nobles tortured people. She in quotation refers to the queen. Under such deplorable conditions, there was a rebellion from peasants and workers who would change the future of Paris and France.

“In England, there was scarcely an amount of order and protection to justify much national boasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital itself every night; families were publicly cautioned not to go out of town without removing their furniture to upholsterers’ warehouses for security; the highwayman in the dark was a City tradesman in the light, and, being recognised and challenged by his fellowtradesman whom he stopped in his character of ‘the Captain,’ gallantly shot him through the head and rode away; the mall was waylaid by seven robbers, and the guard shot three dead, and then got shot dead himself by the other four, ‘in consequence of the failure of his ammunition:’ after which the mall was robbed in peace; that magnificent potentate, the Lord Mayor of London, was made to stand and deliver on Turnham Green, by one highwayman, who despoiled the illustrious creature in sight of all his retinue;”
(Dickens, 1859, p.5)

While in England Burglaries and robberies spread all over England. The quotation above shows the condition of people in England that due to economic problem, people tend to do a crime, robbery, in order to survive themselves. Even they do not feel hesitate to kill people. Any kind of ways have been tried by lower classes people to be able to fulfill their needs. As written by Dickens in the novel in the beginning of chapter 5,

“A large cask of wine had been dropped and broken, in the street. The accident had happened in getting it out of a cart; the cask had tumbled out with a run, the hoops had burst, and it lay on the stones just outside the door of the wine-shop, shattered like a walnut-shell. All the people within reach had suspended their business, or their idleness, to run to the spot and drink the wine. The rough, irregular stones of the street, pointing every way, and designed, one might have thought, expressly to lame all living creatures that approached

them, had dammed it into little pools; these were surrounded, each by its own jostling group or crowd, according to its size.” (Dickens, 1859, p.39).

In chapter five, in front of a wine shop, a cask of wine falls from the cart to the road. Poor hungry people rush to get the wine leaked. One of them wrote 'Blood' on the shop wall with the wine. This voiced the sentiments of millions who were starving. Dickens described how the people in the neighborhood at Saint Antoine struggled to get the wine, and they were so desperate that they ended up spending mud with the wine. The peasants were so hungry and thirsty that they were forced to take wine from the ground; the scenery illustrates how terrible their situation is. After that, Dickens noted that the road was so clean that it was as if a street cleaner had visited, even though no street cleaner came to this neighborhood. This scene is the first indication of severe farmer poverty. While the poor hungry people were struggling to fulfill their needs, on the other side, one of the great lords in power at the Court live his life differently.

“Monseigneur, one of the great lords in power at the Court, held his fortnightly reception in his grand hotel in Paris. Monseigneur was in his inner room, his sanctuary of sanctuaries, the Holiest of Holiests to the crowd of worshippers in the suite of rooms without. Monseigneur was about to take his chocolate. Monseigneur could swallow a great many things with ease, and was by some few sullen minds supposed to be rather rapidly swallowing France; but, his morning’s chocolate could not so much as get into the throat of Monseigneur, without the aid of four strong men besides the Cook.” (Dickens, 1859, p.146).

The quotation above shows how Monseigneur get what he wants easily. Even for serving his morning’s chocolate, he needs 4 servants to prepare it. That is how Dickens portrays Monseigneur, a man in power among French aristocrats. We see the greed of this person in particular, and Dickens compares it to the greed of the French aristocracy in general. Monseigneur has many servants, four of which are needed to make and serve chocolate in the morning. When comparing this advantage with the despair of food and wine from people at Saint Antoine, we can see the difference between classes in France. This sharp contrast explains why the lower classes are so angry with their living conditions. The selfishness of the aristocrat, Monseigneur, also written by Dickens in chapter 9 of this novel.

“I would not be sure of that. A good opportunity for consideration, surrounded by the advantages of solitude, might influence your destiny to far greater advantage than you influence it for yourself. But it is useless to discuss the question. I am, as you say, at a disadvantage. These little instruments of correction, these gentle aids to the power and honour of families, these slight favours that might so incommode you, are only to be obtained now by interest and importunity. They are sought by so many, and they are granted (comparatively) to so few! It used not to be so, but France in all such things is changed for the worse. Our not remote ancestors held the right of life and death over the surrounding vulgar.” (Dickens, 1859, p. 172)

The cruel philosophy of Monseigneur illustrates the mindset that has penetrated into the most privileged classes and shows how power can be damaged. The contrast between his philosophy and his nephew's beliefs reinforced the suffering of the masses. Although the upper classes were meant to be good for the country, their existence led to the bloodshed of the revolution. By blaming their high positions on "creation" and "eternal arrangements," we can see that the upper classes were not aware of their own actions in bringing about a revolution. While they believe that the world is designed for their happiness and comfort, they do not consider that depriving others of the same comfort can lead to their own death.

“Mr. Stryver shouldered his way through the law, like some great engine forcing itself through turbid water, and dragged his useful friend in his wake, like a boat towed astern. As the boat so favoured is usually in a rough plight, and mostly under water, so, Sydney had a swamped life of it. But, easy and strong custom, unhappily so much easier and stronger in him than any stimulating sense of desert or disgrace, made it the life he was to lead; and he no more thought of emerging from his state of lion's jackal, than any real jackal may be supposed to think of rising to be a lion. Stryver was rich; had married a florid widow with property and three boys, who had nothing particularly shining about them but the straight hair of their dumpling heads.” (Dickens, 1859, p. 300)

“The polite rejection of the three lumps of bread-and-cheese had quite bloated Mr. Stryver with indignation, which he afterwards turned to account in the training of the young gentlemen, by directing them to beware of the pride of Beggars, like that tutor-fellow. He was also in the habit of declaiming to Mrs. Stryver, over his full-bodied wine, on the arts Mrs. Darnay had once put in practice to ‘catch’ him, and on the diamond-cut-diamond arts in himself, madam, which had rendered him ‘not to be caught.’ Some of his King’s Bench familiars, who were occasionally parties to the full-bodied wine and the lie.”
(Dickens, 1859. p.301)

From the quotation above we can see that the narrator describes Mr. Stryver by emphasizing his wealth as a rich man and create the boundaries with beggars which includes to lower class society. The narrator also highlight about his marriage with a florid widow with propoerty, hinting that Mr.styver get married with an advantage.

“Saint Antoine was clamorous to have its wine-shop keeper foremost in the guard upon the governor who had defended the Bastille and shot the people. Otherwise, the governor would not be marched to the Hotel de Ville for judgment. Otherwise, the governor would escape, and the people’s blood (suddenly of some value, after many years of worthlessness) be unavenged.”
(Dickens, 1859. p.311)

The narrator shows that the revolution has started and the peasants agreed now is the time for the people who was in charge to be treated by justice as they deserved. They brought the governor to their prison were "for judgment," because they belive they’re now in power, the life scorched by the lower classes deserves revenge. ‘Does everybody here recall old Foulon, who told the famished people that they might eat grass, and who died, and went to Hell?’ (Dickens, 1859. p. 315) Lack of social justice caused some characters tried to earn equality like what Defarge said above, and there’s another example of madame Defarge while she tried achieving justice for her family by saying: ‘Then tell Wind and Fire where to stop,’ returned ma- dame; ‘but don’t tell me.’ (Dickens, 1859. p. 487)

“Monseigneur (often a most worthy individual gentleman) was a national blessing, gave a chivalrous tone to things, was a polite example of luxurious and shining life, and a great deal more to equal purpose; nevertheless, Monseigneur as a class had, somehow or other, brought things to this. Strange that Creation, designed expressly for Monseigneur, should be so soon wrung dry and squeezed out! There must be something short-sighted in the eternal arrangements, surely!” (Dickens, 1859. p. 322)

The quotation above describes how the situation of France after revolution begins. Even though the society of upper class is one of the good things in France, their existence caused conflict of the revolution. The system of justice in the country was flawed because it couldn't differentiate whether it's serious or insignificant crime, both of which constitute capital punishment. Dickens clearly stated that the French Revolution was inevitable according to his narration: “Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind.” (Dickens, 1859. p. 529). If a government regulates and treat their people badly, then the people are bound to rebel against the injustices they receive. In other words, the oppressed will seek for the justice.

CONCLUSION

A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens is a novel that covers periods in British and French history from 1757 to 1793. This story illustrates the historical background of the war between France and England and the rise of the French Revolution. Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* offers readers a Marxist perspective on social reality in eighteenth-century England and France. This story raises issues of liberation from social tension, the weakness of capitalism, and class struggle in a society where the nobles oppress the people of the proletariat. The clear class struggle between aristocrats and the proletariat in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens through the eyes of Marxism illustrates the superiority of aristocrats in society. Aristocrats, compared with the proletariat, do not need to face difficulties in life to meet their needs and desires. The nobles inherited money and wealth through the highest hierarchical inheritance in society. So far, the aristocrats also have political power in society, which of course has total control in the government to fulfill

their own desires. The novel talked about the social injustice among society and those who got affected found a will to fight against the issue. They've had enough struggling and feeling unfair previously. Dickens maintained a complicated perspective on the Revolution because he did not have special sympathies with difficult and reasonable results; he certainly sympathized with the difficulties of the lower social order. Dickens clearly described the completion of lower class aristocrats, such as the compilation of Monseigneur only releasing stops to throw a coin at the father of a child he had just hit. Due to difficulties in France, Dickens thinks of the situation of the working class in England as something rather difficult, more difficult than in other works such as *Hard Times* or *Oliver Twist*, which also emphasizes class struggle.

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