

# A Comparative Study between *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Great Gatsby*— The Self-sacrifice Spirits in Romanticism

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**Abstract**—*A Tale of Two Cities* by Dickens reflects the sharp class contradiction and class struggle. Through the analysis of the characters, this novel shows the rationality of revolution and the injustice of oppression. He feels that the old ways of oppression must be changed, and that much oppression and much misery inevitably lead to revolution, but when the revolution actually comes, he thinks that it is too violent and that the less bloodshed the better. And he considers that people should show tolerance and kindheartedness instead of fierce hatred. *The Great Gatsby* takes the First World War as its background, when people were suspicious about the traditional notions and intended to break out them. Firstly, because of different social backgrounds, the authors have different understandings of the reality. But both them admire the spirits of self-sacrifice. Secondly, the characters have symbolisms in the novels. Even different people have similar meaning in the society. Finally, through compare the reasons of their self-sacrifice, we can see different endings of them.

**Index Terms**—romanticism, self-sacrifice spirits, love, money, disillusion

## I. INTRODUCTION

*A Tale of Two Cities*, which has obvious political views, is one of the most important works in Dickens' career. Although the background of the novel is the French Revolution, the novel reflects the real society of England. And this novel's name has changed many times before it is confirmed as *A Tale of Two Cities*. In the novel, the writer compares Paris with London, so the name reflects what the writer thinks. In 19th century, the French society was in chaos. Feudal aristocracy was cruel to the people. They were barbarous and atrocious, and they treated the peasants as slaves. The public people were subjected to extreme brutality. They maintain their feudal privileges of the aristocracy by force. The historical meaning or social significance the novel reflects has important values for us to discuss and discover.

*The Great Gatsby* is also a significant novel in Fitzgerald's career. It describes the Jazz Time in American history. People are greed and lechery at that time. The novel reflects the contemporary society. And this novel is significant in the literature at that time. From 1980s to 1990s, there were various new critical theory and methods. And all these methods were used to illustrate the research of *the Great Gatsby*. New groups, new ideas create something new and original. Many papers which use post-modern ideapost structuralism, new historicism, culture criticism methods to illustrate *the Great Gatsby*. With the simple introduction mentioned above, we know the development of critical methods in American literature. And at the same time, we can find that this novel can stand test of time. It will continue to survive — at least surviving among human emotion.

Though there are many people write researches about *A Tale of Two Cities* (George Newlin, 2008) and *The Great Gatsby* (Dalton Gross, Mary Jean Gross, 2008), they are concerned on the contrast of characters and subjects. The paper makes a comparative study of the self-sacrifice spirits of the two novels.

## II. THE COMPARISON OF *A TALE OF TWO CITIES* AND *THE GREAT GATSBY*

### A. *The Resemblances between A Tale of Two Cities and The Great Gatsby*

Though *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Great Gatsby* are written by different authors in different time, they actually have many resemblances.

#### 1. The Background of The Contemporary Society

*A Tale of Two Cities* was created in fifties of nineteenth century, when is Dickens' creative peek. And at this time, the British capitalist economy also developed rapidly. Evils of capitalist development and the impoverishment of working people's live made the British society stand in the brink of a social revolution. And the failure of Chartism made Dickens clearly aware of the 50's Britain is very similar to the 18<sup>th</sup> century French society. There is a pervasive resentment and discontent in lower masses, and the people's revolutionary sentiment triggered on the verge. Because of these reasons, he decided to create a novel set in the French Revolution to criticize the British social reality and to provide reference for contemporary Britain. Under this circumstance, *A Tale of Two Cities* came out.

Fitzgerald said his time was from World War to the decade between the economic crisis, as the Jazz Age that this decade was the most luxury and value of brilliant era of stress. As the poet laureate of the Jazz Age, his delicate vivid

description reflect Rights middle class and small bourgeoisie's feel for this era, especially for the upper bourgeoisie discontent.

The two writers are both living in a chaos society. There are strong class antagonisms. And these conflicts caused many problems and also the origin of the stories. In addition, the two stories all happen in big cities which are in chaos. At that time, money and authority is the most important to the people. They oppress the public or make money from illegal ways. But there is still love in the world. That is the last flash of hope. The two stories describe the self-sacrifice spirits in romantic times.

## **2. The Characters in The Two Novels**

### **2.1. The Figures in A Tale of Two Cities**

The first figure is Carton who is set as the representative. He is a hero in the novel. Carton is simple, kind, talented and incompatible with the bourgeois egoism, lacking of appreciation of the social forces, so he is lonely. Nobody in the world cares about him, and he does not care about anyone in the world either. The society distorts his character and leads to his depression. Carton is one of the most attractive characters and also is one of the most complex roles. Decadent and negative at school, he only works hard for the students, otherwise, at the society, even with a talent, he still selects to work for other lawyers. However, in his cold appearance, there is deep tenderness.

With the gentle love for Lucy, Carton makes a significant decision that uses his life to exchange the life of Darnay, and to exchange the happiness of a family and smiling faces. This is the guardian of Lucy and this performance is for the love and sacrifice, which in that era, and even contemporary, is a very noble gesture, and is the ultimate praise humanitarian written by the author.

The second category emerges as the ideal figure is the doctor's daughter Lucy, who is a beautiful, intelligent, tender and sentimental. She is the embodiment of the sentimental paternalism. Lucy's warmth, tolerance and fraternity is in sharp contrast with the thirsty-blooded Mrs Defarge. With the exaggerated descriptions, the novel displays Lucy's magic of moderationism. She makes the delirious doctor bring back to life, and makes vagrom Darnay feel happy. And she also makes uninhibited Carton sacrifice. Her sad, tender expressions and statements in London court, and a sad cry and talk in a new apartment in Paris has won widespread praise and sympathy. She uses sad tenderness to reunion and to obtain the support of friends, but she has to bear the suffering. Her spirit is the pillars of bourgeois humanism. This type of character, there are moral and noble kind gentleman Laure.

The third figure is the avenger image of Mr. and Mrs Defarge. Through their life and struggle, we can know the inevitability of the revolution of oppressed peoples. Mrs. Defarge is the daughter of a farmer whose family are killed by the Marquis Brothers, and she is the only one who survived. When growing up, she marries to Mr. Defarge who is the servant of the doctor Manette. She has a lasting enmity with the aristocracy, and she is a strong revolutionary. She shows courage, firm and resolute character in the revolutionary, showing a high degree of organizational skills and wisdom courage. In the novel, she is a dazzling plump flesh and blood character, but the author also clearly reveals the fear of her aversion. She ruins the hard-won happiness of Manette doctor, breaks up the Lucy's happy family, and finally wants to kill the family of Lucy. At the end of the novel, Lucy's maid Pross kills Mrs. Defarge, and this illustrates the author's humanitarian ideas and intransigence on the revolution that is if Mrs. Defarge is reluctant to give up revenge and hatred for love, then let her destruction.

The fourth category is Marquis Brothers noble characters. They are tyrannical, serve the farmers as slaves, and carry out inhuman persecution to the farmers. Especially the uncle of Darnay, who is extremely cruel and tyrannical. He occupies the women with his authority, runs over the poor children by carriages, kills innocent people by random, persecutes Manette doctor, and maintains his privileges of the feudal aristocracy by force. Marquis brothers are always on behalf of oppressed people of nobility, is the ugly image which focuses on whipping.

### **2.2 The Characters in The Great Gatsby**

At 17 years old, he decided to change his name to Gatsby, which is said to be the pronunciation of "Jesus, God's boy". Ironically, after he changes name from that moment, he begins his life tragedy. He puts his pursuit of Daisy as a kind of beauty. At the first sight when he sees her, he knows that he has combined his ineffable ideal with the breath of her together. He knows that his heart is subjected to the heart with God. He must be specific and must not be greedy. When he first kisses her, "She is like a flower which is only blooming for him, so the embodiment of this ideal is complete." Gatsby's dream to become flesh and blood because of Daisy. He wants to achieve his dreams with Daisy.

Gatsby makes more pure ideal of loving money than before, because he wants to make up for the past. He believes that he can buy the love of Daisy. The result is that he died under the plots planned by his goddess Daisy and her husband Tom. Maertel wants to fight for the last glimmer of hope, but buried under the wheel. Wilson wants to revenge for his wife and thinks that suicide is the show of love. They all die, but the most irony is that Wilson's wife never knows that her husband is the person who loves her, and Maertel and Gatsby never knows their loved ones' life still go on happily after their death. The social reality of the times --- "money worship" deep impact on people view of Love. Love became the worship of money and moral bankruptcy of slavery. No money and status they did not have love at all.

Daisy and Tom are noble and outstanding, and they belong to the old aristocracy. With rich family background, they live in a very extravagant life. They treat money as God and think motion is nothing. Has climbed the highest level of socio-economic ladder, Tom and Daisy is not happy at all. They are floating in a cycle that is material first, the money first. They are famous as a Playboy and the courtesan before marriage. All people know that Tom had a mistress, of

course, including Daisy. On behalf of traditional values, in Nick view, Daisy should take their children out of the house immediately --- but apparently she does not have this idea. In the traditional view of love that if a woman knows her husband had an affair out of marriage, she should break out with that man immediately. But Daisy is indifferent to this, and she is not jealous. Their marriage is just a shell which supplies material and money.

Wilson expects to improve the social status by earning money through their own efforts. He feels that only the rich person can marry with Maertel, so he let Maertel mistakes that he is rich. He has had marriage, but does not get love. Whether in the marriage, no matter how Maertel sorts of obstacles, he is obedient to Maertel and believe in his wife. Even under the eyes of him, Maertel is flirting with Tom. When he turns to pick up a chair, Maertel makes the time and place to meet an appointment with Tom openly. In order to let his wife to be able to better enjoy, he has been in discussions to buy the old car with Tom. But his wife has betrayed his true love. The way he dealt with family crisis is to constrict on his wife, and then move for not letting her has the chance to contact with her lover. After his wife death, he listens to others to kill an innocent person, and suicide. His behavior reflects his stupid treatment of love and death.

There are many symbols in the novel, the most noteworthy one is the eyes of the doctor Eichelberger. He overlooks the lifeless, immoral world. He is an ophthalmologist, and he is to advertise for himself. However, he never opened his dispensary, so the blind eyes are the signs of blindness which can not be corrected, and they are not signs of God as Wilson thought. Just as the voice of Daisy and the green light on the pier of her family are not signs of hope. Her voice is full of sound money and the light is invisible in the vast fog. This pair of eyes is the main symbol of the novel, because the novel's main characters are blind. They are blind about themselves and the people around them, and their actions are also blind. Gatsby can not see the emptiness and the ugly of Daisy, yet treats her as the incarnation of the United States to pursue. Daisy's feelings of Tom and Gatsby are also blind. Tom is even more ignorant of his hypocrites and their hypocrisy.

### 2.3 The Similarities of The Characters

By contrasting the figures of the two novels, we can see that the first categorizes are similar in the novels. Both Carton and Gatsby die for their lover. The only difference between them is that the sacrifice of Carton is meaningful, otherwise Gatsby's sacrifice is just a joke to others. And the second categories in two novels are the people who represent the ideal images. What different between Lucy and Daisy is that Lucy is real images of beauty and wise, then Daisy is the images of money and power. The third figures are the people who display the antagonists. They destroy the peaceful of the society.

### 3. The Romanticism

Both the two novels belong to romantic style. The writers focus on people's inner world when they write. They express their pursuit of ideals. In these two novels, the authors use romanticism to show their pursuit. They put their motion and ideal in the novel.

#### B. *The Differences between A Tale of Two Cities and The Great Gatsby*

##### 1. The Background of A Tale of Two Cities

One day, Mr. Jarvis Lorry tells Lucy Manette that she is not an orphan. He says that he will travel with her to Paris to meet her father, who has recently been released from the Bastille.

Five years later, Charles Darnay is tried in London on a charge of treason for providing English secrets to the French and Americans during the outbreak of the American Revolution. The dramatic appearance of Mr. Sydney Carton, who looks remarkably like him, precludes any positive identification and allows Darnay's acquittal. Darnay, Mr. Carton, and Mr. Stryver all fall in love with Lucy Manette. Although they all make an attempt to her, she favors Charles Darnay and marries him. Carton comes to her house alone and declares that while he expects no return of his love, he would do anything for her or for anyone whom she loves. Darnay has ominously hinted to Doctor Manette of his concealed identity, and he reveals to his father-in-law. But at the urgent request of Monsieur Gabelle, Darnay returns to Paris. He is arrested as a nobleman and an emigrant and thrown into jail.

Doctor Manette, Miss Pross, Lucie, and her small child follow Darnay to Paris, where the Doctor is almost successful in using his power among the revolutionaries as a former Bastille prisoner--like the people, he was oppressed by the ruling regime--to secure Darnay's release. But Darnay is once again denounced by the Defarges, a charge which is made even stronger by Monsieur Defarge's revelation of a paper document that he found in Doctor Manette's former cell in the Bastille. The document recounts that Manette was arbitrarily imprisoned by the Evrémondes for having witnessed their rape of a peasant girl and the murder of her brother. Darnay is brought back to prison and sentenced to death.

Carton also has travelled to Paris because of the selfless love that Lucie has inspired in him. He resolves to sacrifice himself to save her husband's life. Carton overhears the Defarges discussing a plan to kill Lucie and her child, and he figures out that Madame Defarge is the surviving sister of the peasant girl who was raped and of the boy who was stabbed by the Evrémonde family. Carton arranges for the Manettes to leave immediately. He uses his influence with Barsad, who also works as a turnkey, to get into Darnay's cell. He drugs Darnay and exchanges places with him, having Barsad carry Darnay out of the prison to safety. Carton dies in Darnay's place at the guillotine, satisfied with the knowledge of his good deed.

##### 2. The Background of The Great Gatsby

*The Great Gatsby* is a picture of Jazz Age at that era, all the corruption in American society are made a vivid portrayal. Such as the sale of the alcohol, gangs rampant. The farmers who are uprooted from their homes are flooding

into eastern cities, social agriculture is defeat. In addition, the consequences of industrialization and urbanization reveals and the trend of politics becomes extreme conservatism. The writer used rich symbolism to describe that impoverished Gatsby who are in pursuit of lover because of the gap the wealthy and the poor. But the result of the tragic love story is the death. And the novel reproduces the Rights of the Jazz Age vividly about their cruel, cold, selfish, ruthless social reality. Background is very important in writer's creation.

The background of the society can give a writer inspiration or motivation of producing works. And the background of a writer's family or education can provide experience to him or her. With these conditions, the novels will be full of motions and can be described vividly. Only by these, a good novel can be handed down to generations. When we want to compare two novels, we should analyse the background firstly.

### III. THE REASONS OF THEIR SELF-SACRIFICE

#### A. *The Reasons of Carton's Sacrifice*

Carton and Darnay look exactly the same, but the fate of two people are quite different. He plays with the one who is on depression. And in his world, light is always omitted discouraged. He is to be a person who is disappointed, cold and miserable. Carlton who as a lawyer, is talented but he is willing to just hide behind others, and to do the stepping stone of others' success. Carton, this ideal person, is a great mind of Dickens who respects the self-sacrifice. He is talent, informed, perceptive and moral, but he is not appreciated by the society. He can only lean on Le Royal counsel and to be a assistant. Life makes him become lazy, indifferent and cynical. His personality is distorted by the society, but his mind is still full of humanity and kindness. He falls in love with Lucy, and he is willing to sacrifice everything for her. But Lucy loves Darnay instead of him. He is suffering but not jealous. He tells Lucy: "For you, for your love, I am willing to do anything. If my life is worth the expense of the possibilities and opportunities, I am willing for you and your loved ones to make any sacrifice!" Finally, he realizes his promise that he will make Lucy happy at all costs even paying his life. Embarking on a guillotine with smile, he finishes the last step of the way of life. With his not strong body as shield, Carton fends off a wave that no one can resist the perverse and violent force which may hurt Lucy. Carton expressed his dew west to the extreme of love and regrets completed breathtaking feat.

#### B. *The Reasons of Gatsby's Sacrifice*

Gatsby's love continues on for five years after Dasiy's abandonment. In order to win back Daisy's love, he takes risks to buy bootlegging venture. After obtaining a fortune or buying a luxury, he will hold a party every Friday, waiting for the visit of his goddess. In Gatsby heart, Daisy always wears a beautiful white dress and looks holy. She has never thought it was a matter, and she is only a frivolous woman. After they meet each other, Gatsby is aware that this woman's voice is full of sound money. But he does not give up the heart of the goddess. After a showdown in a New York hotel, Daisy drove to kill Maertel, Daisy and Gatsby stay in the room and Daisy is outside the fear that she will be beaten Tom. Gatsby's life is full of beautiful fantasy and yearning passion. This is evident in his relentless pursuit of the ideal. Gatsby's love, in mind of the author, is the embodiment of his dreams. And at last, Gatsby is still not aware of his ideal and the reality.

#### C. *The Comparison of Carton and Gatsby*

Identically, Gatsby loves Daisy in all his life. He betrayed his d They die because of love. Both of them want to protect their lover who does not love them. But they do not regret.

Carlton is deeply in love with Lucy, but Lucy has fallen in love with Darnay who looks exactly the same with Carton. Although Carton is suffering the pain, he is not jealous of Darnay, and he is just quietly concerned about Lucy. When Darnay is sentenced to death at that time, Lucy is going to suffer the pain of losing her husband. And in order to protect Lucy, Carton goes to embark on the guillotine instead of Darnay. This is altruistic behavior of love, and Carton is only doing it for Lucy. Although Lucy does not agree with Carton's idea, but he sticks to save Darnay. Among these, Carlton and Intel that have no relatives, and between them there are no "mutually beneficial" relationship, but Carlton's unilateral pay, he does not seek anything in return, just to let their loved one happiness.

Gatsby betrays his dream and faith in order to win Daisy back. She is his goddess, though she is mammonite in the chaos society. All he has done want to win Daisy's love, even pay his life. He knows Daisy married to Tom because of tom is rich, but he still sticks to the faith that Daisy loves him. They can not get together because of the society, so he needs to be rich enough.

Quite different to Carlton, Gatsby is just a joke to his lover. Owing to Carton, Lucy has a happy family. And in Lucy's left life, she will remember that there was a person who loves her too much to pay his life for her happiness. But to Daisy, Gatsby is just lamb to the slaughter. She may remember him sometimes, considering him a joke.

### IV. CONCLUSION

In commercial society, because of the remote relationships, broken families, vagrom senions and children, many people become mental-sicken. And o fierce competitions and pressing life cause people to feel anxiety and lonely, even make them physical psychological and charaters contorted. These phenomena effect the peaceful of the society. If

things over time, the world seems to be only a place for beast or god,

Aristoteles says. In today's society, we should be none other his spirit will long be maintained. We praise for the deeds of those courageous and to encourage advanced personnel who serve the people wholeheartedly. For the humanitarian spirit of the people in society today is very strange, we need to do is to make the impact of the humanitarian spirit of the more far-reaching changes, broader.

In this paper, the author discusses the self- sacrifice spirit in *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Great Gatsby*. The paper is centered on the comparison of the plots and characters of the two novels to illustrate the point. I hope this study will help the readers gain a better understanding of Charles Dickens and Fitzgerald and their great works.

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