

# The Critical Realism in Little Dorrit

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**ABSTRACT.** *In British literary history, Charles Dickens is one of the most important classic writers except William Shakespeare, and is also one of the most famous writers in the world. Meanwhile, Charles Dickens is a representative writer in critical realism literature. Dickens was born and grew up in the middle-lower classes of British capitalist society, with his impoverished and tough personal experience, together with the deep observation and grasp of the Britain social situation in industrial times, he created numerous popular works. And his novels are mostly acclaimed which exposed and deprecate the social evils, injustice, hypocrisy, corruption and so on.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Critical realism, Charles dickens, Little dorritchapter 1 introduction*

## 1. Introduction

Charles Dickens(1812-1870) was one of the brightest representatives of critical realism in English and the world literature. Dickens worked as a junior clerk in a lawyer's office at 15, this job made him familiarity with lawyers and criminals. In 1832, he became a journalist, it gave him an opportunity to know inside stories of corrupt government. What's more, he founded Household Words magazine in 1850 and All The Year Round magazine in 1859. Charles Dickens enjoyed a wider popularity than any previous author had done during his lifetime. Much in his whole works could appeal to simple and sophisticated, to the poverty and to the rich, and the technological developments as well as the qualities of his work enable his fame to spread worldwide very quickly. Charles Dickens was buried in the Poet's Corner in London. The words of his grave read as follows: "He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world"(http://www.arlde.com/dickens.htm, par 5).

*Little Dorrit* is a strikingly innovative novel, Bernard Shaw (1908:3) wrote that "when the English nation realizes that it is a great book and a true book, there will be a revolution in this country." While this book did not become a extremely popular one in the 1850s or nowadays, and there are a few Chinese did research about it. Wang (Translated by the author,2011:91)said that "Charles Dickens extensive used symbolisms while he produced this book, and that made characters, sites, sceneries were shrouded in mystery". Moreover, the reversed relationship between little Dorrit and her families make her ideal mother image highlighted

(Huang, 2011:98). In addition, critical realism is a significant literature style which can be found throughout all of Dickens's works. Lots of Dickens's novels like *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* and *A Tale of Two Cities* have been analyzed from this literature style except *Little Dorrit*. This thesis aims to help readers have a better understanding on *Little Dorrit* through discussing how critical realism reflects in this novel.

## **2. Critical Realism**

“Literary Realism is the trend, began with 19th century French literature and extended to late 19th and early 20th authors, towards depictions of contemporary life, society as it was, or is”(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realism, par.1). The concept of critical realism literature was adopted by Soviet literary and art criticism from M. Gorky, who used the expression critical realism in 1934 to describe the stress on expose in realistic literature of the 19th century. However, the revelatory themes by no means exclude an element of reaffirmation in the realistic art of the 19th and 20th centuries. The name critical realism was given to it because of its treating the social reality in a strong criticizing way.

### ***2.1 The Critical Realism in England***

The period of critical realism in English literature was flourished in the Victoria era(1837-1900). The critical realism literature resulted from the capitalist victory and consolidation in west Europe and North America. In the other hand, the English unreasonable government and the country which suffered from severe economic depression all lead to the class contradictions. Especially the class contradictions between the workers and the capitalists became increasingly intense. Besides the main struggle between the capitalist and the proletariat, the contradictions between the big capitalists and the middle or petty bourgeois class were also fierce.

Along with the capitalist system, the social politics, economy and morality greatly changed as well. The value regulation and the free competition dominated the world and money can controlled everything. Facing the complicated social contradictions and the cruel reality, people became very serious about their life, and they analyzed social problems objectively in a critical way.

Otherwise in the technical area, the age of realism also the age of railway, telegraph, wireless and a large numbers of inventions that made the society get progress in a short time. Those innovation push people got a historical leap in recognizing the nature. People commence doubt their religious at the past. In 1848, based on the critic absorbing to the focuses of the German classis philosophy, the British political economics and the French ideal socialist theory, worker's revolutionary theory Marxism appeared. And all the facts helped the progressive writers who were deeply influence by the bourgeois political economic theory, protest against the dictatorship by their vivid descriptions and deeply criticism to the

decaying social. Thus, a new type of literature genre developed rapidly in Europe and as a main literature stream of Europe in the 19th century.

## ***2.2 The Features of Critical Realism Literature***

The basic point of critical is to expose and criticize the evil social reality in humor or satire language. The criticized target from the government, the law, the church to the punitive system which made the novel became the most widely read and challenging expression of progressive thought at that time. Moreover, its accusation of utilitarianism that seeks for a greatest economic profit by any kind of ways and the action usually harm themselves as well as others. Thus, utilitarianism was a subject should be abolished particularly what the poor minority would agree with. Beyond that, the ugly money worship caused people have a crazy love to property is also be criticized strongly. As Threapleton (1936:586) pointed out “Not money, but the love of it, is the root of evil”.

Besides, critical realists usually have a vivid description of characters through depicted their appearances, actions, speak etc. Readers could even feel those characters are standing just in front of them. In addition, the exquisite depiction of details is standing out, it made those novels not only dramatic stories but also convincing to readers. Meanwhile, critical realists good at establish a relationship between characters and the background of them. They considered what people went through would determine individual destiny.

The last one is the humanism which is also involved in the critical realism literature, even the essential of it is to abuse the existing vicious phenomenon at that time, and writers often pay sympathy to proletariat unlike their attack to inhuman exploiter. The humanism also reflected their believe of good side of human nature and their wish to the cruelty world that while people find their lost loftily morality, the society would be better.

## **3. Critical Realism in Little Dorrit**

### ***3.1 William Dorrit-a Money Slave***

Charles Dickens titled William Dorrit The Marshalsea’s Father in the novel, “his reputation has a satire meaning which is actually a despicable status and given by his long time locked in the debt prison”(Translated by the author,Sun,2007:60).Even it’s a title that actually far away from honor, William regarded it a title which made him feel proud. What’s more, the reason he has been locked in the prison was money-his debts, and it insinuates that he was a money prisoner not only in physically but also mentally. William even used his reputation to hide his moral corruption, he would call others gentlemen only in the situation that they paid tribute to him and the tributes always were money. Dickens used an irony way to point out William’s desire to money by the case of when others could not give him enough money, he would be “feebly burst into tears”(Charles,1998:67).

Moreover, after William became the heritor of a large amount of property, he still devoted himself to the program of seeking every gold by took part in Mr. Merdle's investment-a speculative trade, and the result of his investment was totally a failure. It seems like that the money is a flash in the pan to him, he owned it in a second and lost it in a second.

In conclusion, William is a representative of the kind of people who are driven by materialism, and they gave up their finest nature and self-esteem in this progress. However their insatiably wish of property would destroy their reputation and life eventually.

### **3.2 Mr. Merdle-a Liar**

Bar described Mr. Merdle as "one of the greatest converters of the root of all evil into the root of all good" (ibid:238), and this allusion to "For the love of money is the root of all evil"(Adam,1836:586)-demonstrated the extent to which English society has turned to the worship of false god. Merdle's name, with its reference to merde, the French word for shit, indicates that what he represents is not the glitter of gold but the color and smell of waste matter, a truth brutally exposed by his suicide.

Dickens did describe Mr. Merdle as a mystery character in the beginning of the novel, and he meant to let readers hold an unreachable impression to Merdle, and the evaluation to Merdle at the beginning of the novel was that he was a person "who turned all he touched to gold"(ibid,235). Merdle also deemed himself a distinguished person, he said "Why, in the name of all the infernal powers, who does more for Society than I do"(ibid,375). The character gave himself a hero status to the society even what he had done have no relationship with contribution but only led to the brink of a broken society financial system in his country.

Mr. Merdle was related to the most humiliated personality in the 19th century which had a morbidly love for money, and their soul have been poisoned by money worship. So they would do everything for their financial profits and the upper class status, the result of their madness accumulate wealth by unfair means was ugly, and their reputation would not be respected but only be blamed. Besides, those wildcatters would be the most dangerous people who could destroy their country through ruined people who participated in their speculation.

### **3.3 The Circumlocution Office**

With the failure of the revolutionary movement in English and with reactionary forces of the bourgeoisie running more rampant, Dickens was more alive to the social reality and became more doubt about the efficacy of English democracy, his speech have been raised that "representative government is become altogether a failure with us"(K.J:197).The Circumlocution Office in the novel was just like its name, it let people feel confused about what the officers said and people would never know what they could do for them. The Circumlocution Office was a most powerful organization in Little Dorrit, nevertheless it was a most useless one.

Dickens's novels offered a most complete and realistic picture of the English bourgeois society of his age. And author showed his attitude to the shortcoming of society which was strongly criticized by the protester among the government in the novel. The Circumlocution Office represented the disappointment law system and the unreasonable social phenomenon in Britain. What the office had done was not for their citizens, and only the upper class people could benefit from it. So the social problems would not be solved because they have been ignored and the society progress would not come true in such unsuccessful government system.

### **3.4 Conflict between the Poor and the Rich**

“During the Chartist Movement numerous Chartist organization published newspaper and magazines which, besides articles on political and economical issues, contained poems, short stories and essays on literature”(Liu,2007:391). The Chartist writers introduced a new theme into literature--the struggle of the proletariat for its rights. As a realist Charles Dickens was quite unsatisfied with the cruel reality of the times. The Victorian Period covered the great part of the 19th century. That's a time while English was developing into a rich, advanced industrial country. And it was also an age that saw the sharpest contrast between the poor and the rich.

In *Little Dorrit*, there was a group of poor people who lived in “Bleeding Heart Yard”, the name of their living place sounds extremely miserable and the following words from the novel expressed their life was difficult.

All in all, Dickens described the struggle of the poor and their helplessness in the society with a sympathy mood, but he criticized the exploiters who never stopped squeezing for their tenants' hard-earned money. The social confliction was presented lively to readers, meanwhile the author's attacks to unfair social have been understood. In the cold-blood world, the poor would not be protected but lived under the richness' suffering. During the intense class relationship, the conflict has been exposed, the conflict also representative author's hope of abolish the inhuman social situation.

### **4. Conclusion**

*Little Dorrit* was a novel that consists of different writing styles like gothic and comedic styles. However critical realism was the most outstanding one in this novel. The characters in this work presented that writing style, there are still many other examples such as Ms. Clennam pretended a pitiful old lady but she actually took a cruel revenge on Mr. Clennam, and little Dorrit's lazy brother represented a group of people who always relied on others' help to live. They expressed Dickens's strong critique to the inaccuracy moral standards in his era. Several places that have been build up in *Little Dorrit* also spoken for Dickens's eager to refresh the society system. For example, the debtor's prison showed an imperfect law system in the corrupt society. Therefore, with the analysis of how critical realism has reflected in *Little Dorrit* could ensure a better understanding of it. What's more, critical realism

was the foundation of the novel and it expressed Dickens's attitude to the Victorian society.

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