

SOCAL DF GREETINGS



May 2023 Volume 15, Issue 4

NEXT MEETING

Date: Saturday, May 13, 2023
Time: 2:00 pm – 4:00 pm PST

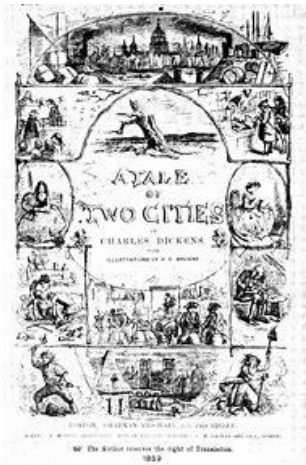
Place: ZOOM

Link:

<https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/95287561007?pwd=TURzRGZlbitrSFR5UWtOTzZoaSsyQT09>

Discussion: **A TALE OF TWO CITIES**
(CONCLUSION, BOOK THE 3RD, CH. 1-15)

Presenter: Kendall Mattern



A Proud Branch Member since 1984

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Happy Merry month of May fellow Dickensians!

We are concluding our reading and discussion of our chosen novel through the winter and spring, *A Tale of Two Cities* this coming Saturday, May 13.

This will also be a SoCal DF business meeting, with our agenda specifically pertaining to scheduling and calendaring our readings and meetings (both Zoom and live) for the rest of the year. This we will address once Kendall has concluded his presentation.

We present Kendall's brief essay on page 2, "*How Political was Dickens?*"; along with his The GRIND contributions that feature presentation questions and Dickens political observations of noted literary figures.

Please also check out our back page for upcoming Dickensian zoom-related events.

We look forward to seeing you on zoom (the link is provided opposite) this Saturday, May 13th.



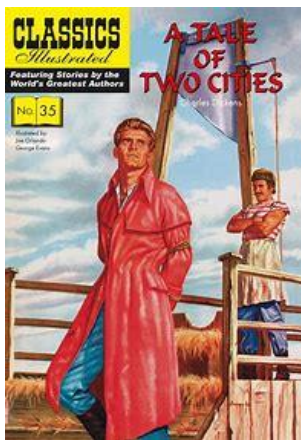
How Political was Dickens?

By Kendall Mattern

Politics and class are vital components to be considered when reading Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. Numerous scholars today agree that Dickens's concerns for reform would not allow him to be apolitical, but at the same time it is difficult to pin any specific political label to the author.

Dickens wrote in *Hard Times* (1854), "...the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you!" (p. 235). This passage, of course, is a classic example of Dickens's interest in employing "The Condition of England" style of novel.

A Tale of Two Cities (1859) further follows along these same lines. In Book the Second Dickens wrote, "...Any one of these partners [Tellson's Bank] would have disinherited his son on the question of rebuilding Tellson's. In this respect the House was much on a par with the Country; which did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable but were only the more respectable" (2.1.2). And in Book the Third the young woman about to be beheaded states, "...What I have been thinking as we came along, and what I am still thinking now, as I look into your kind strong face which gives me so much support, is this:—If the Republic really does good to the poor, and they come to be less hungry, and in all ways to suffer less, she may live a long time: she may even live to be old." (3.15.35).



So is Charles Dickens actually some kind of closet radical who wants to betray his class and tear down the walls of British tradition? I do not think so. He is probably best described as some sort of "mash up" involving both conservative and liberal values, with a dollop of radical thinking on the side.

Algis Valinius wrote in the *Claremont Review of Books* (2012), "...When the conversation turns to Charles Dickens (1812-1870), however, politics implicit or explicit is unavoidable. As George Orwell declared, in the celebrated opening sentence of his 1939 essay "Charles Dickens," "Dickens is one of those writers who are well worth stealing." Orwell sets out to rescue Dickens from the clutches of Marxist bandits who would turn him into "a bloodthirsty revolutionary" and Catholic zealots who would canonize him quite against his will. Orwell's Dickens is sensible yet impassioned, endlessly fertile because transfixed by the joys and pains of humanity: "For you can only create if you can *care*."

The closing sentence of the essay (also celebrated) presents Dickens as a sort of prototype for Orwell himself: "It is the face of a man who is always fighting against something, who fights in the open and is not frightened, the face of a man who is *generously angry*—in other words, of a nineteenth-century liberal, a free intelligence, a type hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls...."

Valinius, Algis . "Left, Right, and Dickens." *Claremont Review of Books* (Upland, CA), Vol. XII, Number 2, Spring 2012. <https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/left-right-and-dickens/>



THE GRIND

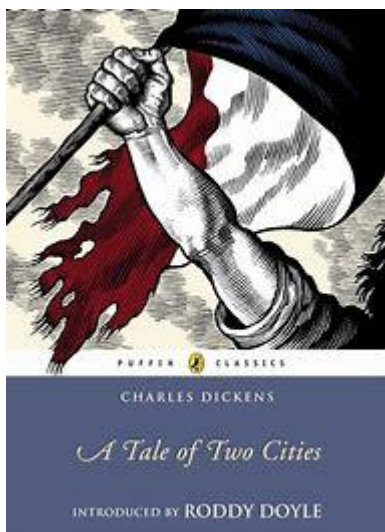
Compiled by Tim Clark, Chairman



As Kendall presents and concludes our reading and discussion of TTC:

Questions

1. Historians are always concerned with change over time. Does Sydney Carton change all that much from beginning to end?
2. Do you have a favorite illustration drawn by Phiz? If so, which one, and why?
3. I ask again, did Dickens intend this novel to be more about France or England? Does it really matter?
4. Does the romantic plot line in *A Tale of Two Cities* take a back seat to Dickens's "The Condition of England" plot line?
5. I ultimately believe that both "honor" and "rape" become indispensable subtexts to the novel. Comments?



Here is how a few other Literary notables tried to reckon with Dickens's place in the sphere of Victorian politics:

Walter Bagehot (1858):

He is often troubled with the idea that he must reflect, and his reflections are perhaps the worst reading in the world. There is a sentimental confusion about them; we never find the consecutive precision of mature theory, or the cold distinctness of clear thought.... He began by describing really removable evils in a style which would induce all persons, however insensible, to remove them if they could; he has ended by describing the natural evils and inevitable pains of the present state of being, in such a manner as must tend to excite discontent and repining. The result is aggravated, because Mr. Dickens never ceases to hint that these evils are removable, though he does not say by what means.....

G.K. Chesterton (1911):

It is not true to say that Dickens was a Socialist, but it is not absurd to say so. And it would be simply absurd to say it of any of the great Individualist novelists of the Victorian time. Dickens saw far enough ahead to know that the time was coming when the people would be imploring the State to save them from more freedom, as from some frightful foreign oppressor. He felt the society changing; and Thackeray never did.....

George Bernard Shaw (1912):

Clearly this is not the Dickens who burlesqued the old song of the 'Fine Old English Gentleman,' and saw in the evils he attacked only the sins and wickedness's and follies of a great civilization. This is Karl Marx, Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris, Carpenter, rising up against civilization itself as against a disease, and declaring that it is not our disorder but our order that is horrible; that it is not our criminals but our magnates that are robbing and murdering us; and that it is not merely Tom All Alone's that must be demolished and abolished, pulled down, rooted up, and made for ever impossible so that nothing shall remain of it but History's record of its infamy, but our entire social system.....

George Santayana (1922):

Love of the good of others is something that shines in every page of Dickens with a truly celestial splendour. How entirely limpid is his sympathy with life—a sympathy uncontaminated by dogma or pedantry or snobbery or bias of any kind! How generous is this keen, light spirit, how pure this open heart! And yet, in spite of this extreme sensibility, not the least wobbling; no deviation from a just severity of judgment, from an uncompromising distinction between white and black.....

SoCal Dickens Fellowship Officers

Chairman

Tim Clark poochclark@earthlink.net
(909) 225-2834

Corresponding Secretary

Vikky Pickett vikky.pickett@twc.com
(951) 805-2621

Corresponding Secretary Emerita

Jean Eggen jeeggen@ca.rr.com
(310) 645-5554

Recording Secretary

Faye Russell
flybyfrye@gmail.com
(323) 630-3784

Treasurer

David Pickett davidpickett@icloud.com
(951) 805-6099

Web-Mistress

Laura Seiple Brummie86@aol.com

Future SoCal DF Meetings

- **May 13:** *A Tale of Two Cities*
Book the 3rd, Ch. 1-15
Kendall Mattern
- **July 8:** *Old Curiosity Shop* (part I)
- **Sept. 9:** *Old Curiosity Shop* (part II)

This is our monthly request for you to consider our Annual Fellowship dues. Nothing has changed, \$20 for a single, \$30 for a duo. Memberships are rolling, so once you pay, your renewal is not due until a year has elapsed. And of course, we do not discourage any donation that exceeds the renewal! Aside from our annual International Fellowship dues, we donate the balance to local charities and sponsorships.

Upcoming Dickens Fellowship Zoom Events

- **Saturday, May 13th**, 2:00 pm PST: **Southern California Dickens Fellowship (SoCalDF)** www.gladfellowship.org
Kendall Mattern presents *A Tale of Two Cities* (conclusion, Book the 3rd, Ch. 1-15)
- **Wednesday, May 17th**, 7:30 pm GMT: **Aberdeen**
eadsummers@me.com
Eric Summers presents *Summers, Collins & Scotland*
- **Saturday, May 20th**, 1:00 pm EST: **Dickens Fellowship of New York (DFNY)** www.dickensnewyork.com
Mark Halperin moderates *Martin Chuzzlewit* (Ch. 1-6)
- **Sunday, May 28th**, 1:00 pm PST: **Santa Cruz Pickwick**
<https://dickens.ucsc.edu/resources/pickwick-club/index.html>
Tyson Stolt presents *Dickens and Victorian Psychology* (registration required)
- **Saturday, June 3rd**, 1:00 pm EST: **Friends of Dickens, NY (FDNY)** www.thefriendsofdickens.org
Kate Foster presents *Oliver Twist*, Ch.51-53 (Hybrid)
- **Tuesday, June 6th**, 1:00 pm EST: **Montreal**
www.dickensmontreal.ca
Ellie Clavier moderates an Open Discussion for the next novel of choice.
- **Saturday, June 10th**, 1:00 pm PST: **Santa Cruz Pickwick**
<https://dickens.ucsc.edu/resources/pickwick-club/index.html>
Prof. Deanna K. Kreisel presents *Ecological Utopia: from the Victorians to the U.S pt. 3.* (registration required)
- **Monday, June 12th**, 3:00 pm GMT: **Canterbury**
canterburydf@gmail.com
Prof. Louis James presents TBA. (registration required, hybrid)
- **Saturday, June 17th**, 1:00 pm EST: **Dickens Fellowship of New York (DFNY)** www.dickensnewyork.com
Mark Halperin moderates *Martin Chuzzlewit* (Ch. 7-10)
- **Scheduled for Summer 2023:**

The 2023 Fellowship Annual International conference in London, July 26-29, themed "*Dickens, Law and Disorder*"

The 2023 42nd Annual Dickens Universe at U.C. Santa Cruz, July 23-29, featuring *A Tale of Two Cities*

