



A Tale of Two Cities

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Mr. Jarvis Lorry, an agent for the Franco-British banking house of Tellson & Co., brings young Lucie Manette from London to Paris to find her father. He was imprisoned in the Bastille for 18 years, but is now being kept above the wine shop of Mme. and M. Defarge until he can be taken safely back to England.

Back in England, Lucie becomes engaged to Charles Darnay, the nephew of a murdered French aristocrat much hated by the revolutionaries in France. Lucie and Charles are married and have a child. During the revolution, Charles returns to Paris to save an old family servant imprisoned by the revolutionaries. Charles, however, is seized and brought to trial. Denounced by Defarge, he is condemned for the crimes of his family against the people.

A close friend of the family, Sydney Carton, who strongly resembles Charles and secretly loves Lucie, now acts to save Charles. Through deceit, he gains entrance to the prison and has Charles carried away, while he remains behind, in his place. The Defarges also try to denounce Lucie and Dr. Manette, but they manage to escape. Lucie and Charles return to England, but Sydney Carton dies at the guillotine, choosing to sacrifice his life to secure the safety of his friends.

Although well researched, this book--Dickens' only historical novel--is popular chiefly because of the momentum of its ingenious plot. Seldom in literature are so many interesting characters swept along at such a pace.

Bibliography:

Beckwith, Charles E., ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of "A Tale of Two Cities."* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972. A collection of scholarly critical essays followed by commentaries on the novel by such literary figures as George Bernard Shaw and George Orwell.

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988. Contains a useful chronology of the French Revolution, as well as information on the history of the novel.

Glancy, Ruth. *"A Tale of Two Cities": An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993. An invaluable tool for both the student and the scholar. The references to the novel are arranged under the general headings of text and studies.

Glancy, Ruth. *"A Tale of Two Cities": Dickens's Revolutionary Novel*. Boston: Twayne, 1991. This in-depth study places the novel in its historical and literary context and provides a careful analysis of the plot.

Kaplan, Fred. *Dickens: A Biography*. New York: William Morrow, 1988. Scholarly and well-written. It is particularly valuable in addressing Dickens' personal identification with the characters of Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay.

Nelson, Harland S. *Charles Dickens*. Boston: Twayne, 1981. An excellent introduction to Dickens' life and works.

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