

## **An Analysis of Heroine's Character in *Little Dorrit***

Xiu-Jie NI and Hong-Yan YIN

No. 45 ChengDe Street, LongTan District, JiLin City, JiLin Province, China

394188588qq.com

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**Abstract.** By analyzing the influence of her family and the society, the thesis intends to reveal the causes to her character's formation. Her family made the "mother's" image more profound. Then the society allowed Amy Dorrit having inherited the asset, which reveals the social reality. In addition, this essay explains why Amy Dorrit has the same life experience as Charles Dickens and the value of the analysis of the characters.

### **Introduction**

This thesis will start with the creation of the dual images (both a child and a "mother") or characters of the protagonist, such as kindness, innocence, etc. The second part analyses the influence of her family and the society to her character's formation. Then this essay analyzes the social causes, the influence of her neighborhood and the people around her. In addition, this essay analyzes why Dickens gives the mother image to Amy Dorrit, and why Amy Dorrit has the same life experience as Charles Dickens. Finally, this work studied on the influence on British society, and the social value of this work. The third part explains the value of the analysis of the characters.

### **The Images and Her Characters**

The era of Charles Dickens's life and creation was the early and middle stage of the Victoria period when the realism trend of thought was formed and developed. His works profoundly expose and criticize the social contradictions and problems during the Victoria period. *Little Dorrit* is also one of important novels of Charles Dickens's later works, which is of great value to us in understanding the social outlook of Britain in the middle of the nineteenth Century. Although it is written in narrative style, it is not paid more attention to than Charles Dickens's other works, Amy Dorrit is special among Dickens' children images in his works.

### **The Dual Images**

Under Charles Dickens's pen, Amy Dorrit is the youngest child in the family. Dickens devoted much to the description of her physical appearance when the first time Amy Dorrit comes out on stage. After reading the whole novel, we can still clearly recall Arthur Clennam's first and long-standing impression on Amy Dorrit and Maggy, and a street woman's spontaneous revelation of human feeling for a child when meeting up with Amy Dorrit in the street late at night. The childlike description for Amy Dorrit arises from her fragile physical figure and timid manner in dealing with others. In prison, Amy Dorrit's father didn't take care of his own children. Amy Dorrit lacked fatherly love and lacked motherly love. She loved her father, and at the same time she resented him. She needed love, but she didn't get. She regarded the prison as her home, and she regarded it as an emotional bond. Her need for security is a reflection of her child's image. Growing up in such a family makes Amy Dorrit's second personality.

Although Amy Dorrit is a child, she is also bearing the ideal mother image in Charles Dickens's mind. Charles Dickens uses the "role reversal" approach, which highlights the maternity of Amy Dorrit. The children are naive and capricious, but in the novel, Amy Dorrit's father is just like a child. For the character of Amy Dorrit's father, only a kind mother can bear it.

Maggie is an idiot in the novel. She rarely appears on the stage. But she let Amy Dorrit's mother image more distinct. For Amy Dorrit, Maggie is not only good at intelligence. Their relationship was so natural that Maggie had been calling Amy Dorrit "little mother". Maggie's IQ made her like a child, a child eager for motherly love, she is attracted by the maternal instincts of Amy Dorrit. After her mother died, Amy Dorrit began to take care of her brother and sister, not out of kindness, but because of the mother's duty to take care of the child, which made little Tully's mother more perfect. And her brother and sister took care from Amy Dorrit as well. They also often get spiritual solace from Amy Dorrit. Because of her father's business failure, the small family owed huge debts and were punished by a prison sentence. Although she is of humble origin and facing the hardships, she acts as a mother as well as a docile girl. Amy never bothers people around herself, also not ashamed of her poverty. Unknown to his father, she found a job at the age of 21 to support the family. On the contrary, William Dorrit Ali, her father, is the kind of person just like the words "the poor people must be hateful". He lost freedom when in Marshalea Prison. Claiming to be a gentleman, but he is not in fact. He always tries to get social recognition; the result is just a whisper, and deception, finally died in the madness. In Amy Dorrit's family, she has a very good character, but the rest of the family are often relatively selfish, such as her sister or her brother without learning nor skill etc. The different characters' circles, which are related to each other because of blood or other social relationships, also have important influence on the creation of Amy Dorrit's character. In contrast to the hypocrisy and selfishness of the characters, Amy Dorrit's personality is more impressive.

### **The Images in Comparison**

Born and grown up in the UK, she is thin and very strong, shy and kind, diligent and considerate to his family. She holds kindness and even forgets she is a cute little girl. Even in the middle of the story, she got unexpected legacy to become a member of the higher class, but she still maintains kind or pure, especially compared with her father, brother and sister before and after the change.

Charles creates the image by comparison with other characters to reflect the particular process of development. Roll, the daughter of the prison guards, shows her sympathy to the prisoners, so-called "birds", and you can see that the jailer's daughter is actually a small projection of Amy Dorrit. Such a scene description shows that Amy Dorrit is just like the vague women, born of the lower class in the society, the inner world full of helpless and vulnerable mood, which determines women's tragedy. Amy Dorrit, like these women, was deprived of the right to speak with the world. They became a centralized class that were oppressed and exploited by the whole society.

In *Little Dorrit*, the author also uses contrast description between Miss Wade and Amy Dorrit to shape the figure. Wade is not welcomed by others as Little Dorrit, but Miss Wade has her own independence as well as her own thoughts and views. In front of the public, she is also very mysterious and silent. Although Amy Dorrit is a young woman with her own thoughts, Amy Dorrit often has no way to get rid of the shackles of the secular, and she is often deterred in different interpersonal circle, making her independent thought into Miss Wade's.

The different characters indicate Amy Dorrit's confused mental state. When Amy Dorrit faces the social groups in the process of communication, she is even more confused. All these description

suggests that in the rapid development of the industrialization of London or the UK, people inevitably tend to be noisy. By this way, the author makes the image, Amy Dorrit more vivid and active instead of a plain figure.

### **The Heroine's Character**

The image is shaped by wide use of comparative and contrast descriptive method to reflect her specific growing process as well as to express her changes in personalities.

The important part of her characters lies in her unyielding spirit, which is developed from her living environment and is quite different from others. Generally, as the youngest child of the family, she is to be cared by others. Facing many difficulties in life, she has to be independent and has to take care of all the family members, which is not traditionally accord with the common sense. Also, her sister's attitude to what she did for them suggests that her unyielding spirit is developed in the selfish family situation. Moreover, her character is also developed gradually in the hardships without loves which is displayed in her fighting with Mrs. Modell. Without her relatives or friend's help, Amy has to face all those by herself and has to question or challenge anything by tuition. The author also employs the comparative method to sharpen Amy's character by describing another lady, Wade, who is tender and virtuous and is loved and behaved like an angel by the family in the era of Victory. They have the same age, but the different situations.

Having grown up in the prison for many years, Amy experienced all kinds of hardships, which makes her clear the people's difficulties living in the society. So she got hurt, but she was easily able to forgive others for she thinks they are the same kind to survive in the world painfully. And this can be seen from Mrs. Clennam. Because of envy or greed, she concealed and refused to return the money to Amy by her husband's will. She lived painfully in a dark house and locked herself more than ten years in order not to communicate with the out world and remind of her inner guilty. Finally, she asks for Amy's forgiveness and Amy forgives her even though she was under long-time poverty. From this situation, we can understand that the real reason is that Amy realized that Mrs. Clennam took such action just for the revenge for her husband's disloyalty and she was also oppressed in the patriarchy society. In a word, Amy's kindness is not normal but a kind of virtue behind the sufferings. She knows that Mrs. Clennam is also a tragedian, and she keeps a conscience in her heart and should be forgiven and paid mercy. So her kindness or sympathy is of noble-minded characteristics.

In the end of the novel, Amy and Arthur walks out of the prison and makes for the church for wedding. Besides, the author adds some lines to readers to consider how they would deal with their life after wedding. Many puzzles occurred: Could her sister be likely to take the responsibility of taking care of the child considering her young sister's kindness to her in the past? Could Tip help the young couple? Actually, Amy is quite clear what she has to face, but she is calm enough to meet the challenge, which shows her actual character. She is not only kind but she keeps innocent as a child. She always believes anyone round her and never questions or rejects anyone no matter how their characters are. From this point we can understand that Amy's innocence is born by nature and is valued highly and the author intends to suggest that is human's nature not to be robbed much profits on purpose that does not belong to himself. Obviously it is ironic of the reality, especially in the quick developing industrialized world and it is worthy of thinking deeply.

### **The Family and Social Influence**

This thesis mainly analyzes Amy Dorrit's character from two aspects . First, analyze the influence of

the family over her. Then, analyze the social environment of Britain in the Nineteenth century, what was the impact of the social environment on Amy Dorrit?

### **The Family Influence**

As a result of debt, the whole family lived in prison, so she grew up in prison. Amy Dorrit takes Marshalea Prison as her home, and she is very attachment of her family, which shows the child's innocence and lovely. Amy Dorrit's mother died when Amy Dorrit was eight years old. After Amy Dorrit's mother died, Marshalea Prison was as warm as the mother's care. In her family, Amy Dorrit's father often complained to her of other people's laughing at him just like a child in order to get her comfort and understanding. Amy Dorrit was always trying to understand him. She loved her father very much, but when he faced her father's reproach, she was always pale and trembling, asking for her father's forgiveness. In addition, Amy Dorrit had to face the complaints of her brother and sister. Her sister had a dream to be an actor regardless of their family life, and when her sister was in difficult time, Amy Dorrit had to comfort her. In all, she had to take care of the whole family but her brother and sister seldom took care of her.

Otherwise, the entire family's economic expenses were earned by Amy Dorrit alone. So the whole family is dependent on the heroine. The Dorrit's family, who had been living at the bottom of the society, received an inheritance one day. Although Amy Dorrit has no blood relationship with Mrs. Clennam, she is able to get the heritage, because Clennam's grandfather knew the truth and in order to punish the daughter-in-law, he delivered the legacy and made poor Amy Dorrit possess the equal property. The official legacy saved their family out of trouble. But a rich life does not change the nature of Amy Dorrit. She is still keeping kind, unyielding and innocent.

### **The Social Influence**

Charles Dickens lived in England from a feudal society to a capitalist society. The development of capitalism made large numbers of small assets poor and bankrupt, and the proletariat was ruthlessly exploited and reduced to extreme poverty. The proletarian revolutionary movement in Britain at the time of the Charter movement, giving great influence to Charles Dickens, his works reflect the Chartist Movement era, the emotions of the masses and the request, but he is always a reformist. He sympathizes with the laboring people and fears the revolution. He attacked the capitalist system and constantly exposed its evil, but he did not advocate overthrowing it. He hoped to transform the exploiters through education and influence, and to rely on their kindness and charity to eliminate social contradictions. With vivid and humorous brush strokes, he reflects life truly and profoundly. In the novel, the changes of many characters profoundly criticizes the traditional social moral ugliness. Seen in the novel *Little Dorrit*, Amy Dorrit's character is in the rapid development of industrialization of London city, and the author achieves this by comparing the industrial city environment with Amy Dorrit character. At the same time, the rapid development of industrialization brings anxiety and lack of faith, and it is also in the evolution character of Amy Dorrit. So, Dickens's *Little Dorrit* as well as Amy Dorrit is shaped by contrast, reflecting Dickens thinking for human nature under the rapid development of industrialization.

Otherwise, the author's personal experience is involved in the creation of the main character. They share a lot in the novel. Charles Dickens has a well-off family in his early years, when he was young, he obtained a period of education once in a private school, but his parents often held large banquet and spent money without restraint. At the age of 12, Charles Dickens's father is put in prison for debt problems, and the family with his father moved to live in a cell, so as a boy, Charles

Dickens was sent to London as an apprentice, working ten hours a day. Perhaps due to the experience of the taste of the hardships, and seeing human sentiment changes in temperature, those make Dickens' works is more focused on the underlying social labor's living condition. But later because his father inherited a legacy, the family economic conditions improved, but Dickens also didn't have a chance to return to school. At the age of 15, he graduated from Wellington college, then walked into a lawyer line to work, then he turned to become a news reporter that caused the parliamentary debate. Charles Dickens didn't accept a lot of formal education, essentially by self-taught. These experiences are embodied in Little Dorrit. The protagonist behaves strength and independence as Dickens did in the novel.

Meanwhile, Dickens gave Amy Dorrit the mother image, representing his love and hatred for his mother, and this resentment constituted the second Charles Dickens's himself. In Charles Dickens's heart, there has always been a child who has never had a mother's love. This is Charles Dickens's wish that all children should live happily.

### **Summary**

Some people think that, in Charles Dickens's works it can be seen his own a paradoxical view of the world. In my opinion, he is not only to promote the humanitarian and political improvement, expectations, but to indicate his soul of goodness and tolerance. He advocates forgiveness and benevolence in his works, and tries to prove that love is much stronger than hatred. It opposes the oppression of the ruling class against the lower classes, and also opposes the violent overthrow of the existing system. This is just the soul of goodness and tolerance, he makes the reformism stick at the same time, the improvement of capitalist society itself is really making the social form maintain and perfect, therefore, Dickens critical realism literature in Vitoria during the period of social contradictions expose, criticize or promote to some extent the capitalist system maintenance and sound.

Moreover, his realistic writing style is to expose the upper class and bourgeois hypocrisy, greed, humiliation, brutality, anger and deep sympathy to show lower society, especially the plight of women, children and the elderly, and in a serious and prudent attitude towards the awakening struggle. At the same time, he also praises the true, the good and the beautiful of human nature, and looks forward to a more reasonable society and a better life with idealism and romanticism.

In conclusion, he is not only to promote the humanitarian and political improvement, expectations, but just indicates his soul of goodness and tolerance. He advocates forgiveness and benevolence in his works, and tries to prove that love is much stronger than hatred. It opposes the oppression of the ruling class against the lower classes, and also opposes the violent overthrow of the existing system. This is just the soul of goodness and tolerance, he makes the reformism stick at the same time, the improvement of capitalist society itself is really making the social form maintain and perfect, therefore, Dickens critical realism literature in Vitoria during the period of social contradictions expose, criticize or promote to some extent the capitalist system maintenance and sound.

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