



## ***"Exploring Themes of Faithfulness and Sacrifice: A Comparative Literary Analysis of Charles Dickens 'A Tale of Two Cities' And Wang Meng's 'Bolshevik Salute'***

***Nadia Bibi\****

*Hunan Normal University.*

***Email : [bibin8402@gmail.com](mailto:bibin8402@gmail.com)***

***Saimaan Ashfaq***

*English Lecturer Islamia University of Bahawalpur.*

***Email : [saimaashfaq040@gmail.com](mailto:saimaashfaq040@gmail.com)***

***Muhammad Nauman Amjad***

*M.Phil in applied linguistics Riphah International University*

***Email : [numanamjad33@gmail.com](mailto:numanamjad33@gmail.com)***

### ***Abstract:***

*This study aims to explore the themes of faithfulness and sacrifice in the political novels of Eastern writer Wang Meng and Western writer Charles Dickens, seeking to understand why their literary works exhibit a pronounced political orientation rather than a purely literal one. Through a comparative analysis of selected novels from both authors, this research investigates the underlying socio-political contexts that shaped their narratives, as well as the ideological underpinnings that drove their thematic explorations. By examining the portrayal of faithfulness and sacrifice within the political frameworks delineated by Wang and Dickens, this study elucidates how literature serves as a medium for political commentary and critique. Through a multidimensional approach encompassing literary analysis, historical contextualization, and theoretical engagement, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between literature and politics in the works of these acclaimed authors from divergent cultural backgrounds.*

***Key Words:*** *faithfulness, sacrifice, selflessness, love, triumph, despair, Hierarchies, political ideologies*

### **Introduction**

Political literature, and more specifically the political novel, occupies a paradoxical and pivotal position within the broader landscape of literary expression: it is both a mirror held to

the sociopolitical realities of its time and a prism through which authors reframe, critique, and re-imagine those realities. Unlike genres defined primarily by aesthetic experimentation or psychological introspection, the political novel is distinguished by its deliberate engagement with power, governance, justice, and the collective conditions that shape human experience. It emerges not merely as a form of artistic expression but as a mode of discourse—one that interrogates the structures of authority, exposes systemic inequities and often articulates visions of social transformation. As Lukács (1971) argues, the novel as a genre is inherently tied to the historical and social conditions of its production, with political novels amplifying this connection by making the “social totality” its explicit object of inquiry. From the satirical dissections of tyranny in Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* to the searing critiques of colonialism in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* works that Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) would situate within a tradition of “resistance literature” and from the dystopian warnings of George Orwell’s *1984* to the nuanced explorations of revolution in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, political novels have functioned as dynamic sites where literature and public life converge.

At the heart of this genre lies a fundamental tension: the interplay between aesthetic form and ideological purpose. While all literature is embedded in its historical context, the political novel foregrounds this embeddedness, making explicit its commitment to engaging with the pressing questions of its era—questions of sovereignty, equality, resistance, and the legitimacy of power. This engagement is not merely descriptive; it is interpretive and often prescriptive. As Said (1994) notes in *Culture and Imperialism*, literary texts are never “neutral” but are instead “imbricated” in the power relations of their time, a dynamic that political novels exaggerate through their deliberate focus on governance and social order. By fictionalizing political processes, institutions, and conflicts, authors of political novels render abstract concepts such as “justice,” “oppression,” or “solidarity” tangible, inviting readers to confront their positions within the social order. In doing so, these works transcend the boundaries of private reflection to become instruments of public debate, challenging readers to reevaluate their assumptions and, in some cases, to imagine alternative futures—what Bloch (1986) terms the “principle of hope” embedded in utopian and dystopian literary traditions.

Moreover, the political novel is a deeply contextual genre, shaped by the specific sociopolitical climates in which it is produced. The concerns of a novelist writing amid revolutionary upheaval differ markedly from those of one navigating the complexities of postcolonial nation-building or the rise of authoritarianism, yet each engages with the core question of how literature might intervene in, or respond to, the political forces that govern collective life. As Jameson (1981) observes in *The Political Unconscious*, all literary texts are “symbolic acts” that negotiate the contradictions of their historical moment, with political novels laying bare this negotiation through their overt focus on power dynamics. This contextual specificity also gives rise to diverse expressions of political commitment: some novels adopt a stance of overt advocacy, while others employ irony, allegory, or realism to complicate simplistic political narratives. Regardless of approach, however, they share a common aim: to make visible the often-hidden mechanisms of power and to give voice to those marginalized by dominant political structures—a function that Spivak (1988) identifies

as central to literature's potential to "speak for" the subaltern, even as it interrogates the limits of such representation.

In an era characterized by heightened political polarization, the erosion of democratic norms, and urgent global crises—from climate injustice to systemic inequality—the role of the political novel remains as vital as ever. It serves as a reminder that literature is not a retreat from the world but a way of engaging with it more deeply, critically, and empathetically. By examining how political novels have historically mediated between individual experience and collective politics, this inquiry seeks to illuminate not only the genre's historical significance but also its enduring capacity to shape public consciousness, challenge hegemonic narratives, and foster a more nuanced understanding of the political dimensions of human existence. In doing so, it underscores the proposition that the political novel is not merely a reflection of its time but an active participant in the making—and unmaking—of political reality, as Bourdieu (1993) might frame it, operating within the "field of cultural production" to contest or reinforce dominant ideologies.

Wang Meng, a prominent figure in Chinese literature and politics, intertwines his political activism with his literary endeavors, portraying the struggles and complexities of his era. This paper critically examines Wang Meng's life and work, with a particular focus on his novella *Bolshevik Salute*, which showcases his adeptness at weaving together personal narratives with broader political ideologies.

**Early Influences and Political Engagement:** Born in 1934 in Beijing to parents from rural Hebei Province, Wang Meng's formative years were marked by the tumult of the Japanese occupation and his family's financial hardships. Despite these challenges, Wang excelled academically and was drawn to political activism from a young age, joining the Communist Party at the age of fourteen. His early literary efforts often reflected his revolutionary fervor, albeit drawing criticism from party officials for perceived bourgeois sentiments.

**Literary Evolution and Political Critique** Wang's literary evolution paralleled his political journey, with his works evolving from romanticized portrayals of revolution to more nuanced critiques of the Party's actions. *Bolshevik Salute* stands as a testament to this evolution, employing a non-linear narrative structure to depict the protagonist's unwavering dedication to the Party amidst constant suspicion and persecution. Through the character of Zhong Yicheng, Wang explores themes of loyalty, disillusionment, and the inherent contradictions within the socialist system.

**Nuanced Portrayal and Ideological Critique.** While Wang's narrative may at times appear simplistic, particularly through its adherence to socialist realism, closer examination reveals layers of complexity and subtle critique. The portrayal of Zhong Yicheng's internal struggles and the Party's flawed mechanisms serves as a poignant commentary on the shortcomings of ideological purity. Wang deftly navigates between sentimentality and critique, ultimately presenting a compelling narrative that transcends mere ideological propaganda.

**Reception and Legacy** Despite its ideological underpinnings, *Bolshevik Salute* remains a significant literary work, both within the context of Chinese socialist realism and as a

testament to Wang Meng's narrative prowess. While some aspects may read awkwardly for contemporary Western audiences, the novella's thematic depth and narrative innovation ensure its enduring relevance. Wang Meng's legacy as a literary giant and political activist continues to resonate, underscoring the enduring interplay between literature and ideology in shaping societal discourse. Likely, Charles Dickens, a prominent literary figure of the Victorian Era, was deeply influenced by the political ideologies of his time, particularly communism and socialism, akin to Wang Meng. His works reflect a rebellious stance against both feudalism and capitalism, echoing themes of social criticism and class struggle. Despite his enduring popularity and recognition as one of the greatest novelists of his era, Dickens faced fluctuating reception during his lifetime.

Born in Land Port, Hampshire, England, in 1812, Dickens experienced financial instability and familial struggles, which profoundly impacted his worldview and literary themes. His early exposure to the hardships of the working class, including his labor in a factory and his father's imprisonment for debt, instilled in him a deep empathy for the downtrodden, a theme recurrent in his works.

Dickens' prolific literary output comprised nearly 50 novels, numerous short stories, and essays, with his narratives often highlighting societal injustices, particularly the plight of the working class. His seminal work, "A Tale of Two Cities," set against the backdrop of the French Revolution, serves as a poignant commentary on the prevailing socio-political conditions of his time.

In "A Tale of Two Cities," Dickens meticulously explores themes of revolution, social injustice, and sacrifice. Through vivid characterizations and intricate plotlines, he portrays the stark contrast between the oppressed peasantry and the oppressive aristocracy in both France and England. The novel's central narrative revolves around the intertwined fates of characters such as Charles Darnay, Lucie Manette, and Sydney Carton, each representing different facets of the societal upheaval during the French Revolution. Charles Dickens's "A Tale of Two Cities" and Wang Meng's "Bolshevik Salute" are both seminal works of literature that delve into themes of faithfulness and sacrifice amidst turbulent socio-political contexts. While Dickens' novel portrays the turmoil of the French Revolution, Wang Meng's short story captures the fervor of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Through a comparative analysis of their characters, namely Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton from "A Tale of Two Cities," and Wang Xuewen from "Bolshevik Salute," this paper seeks to explore how these characters embody notions of faithfulness and sacrifice in their respective narratives.

### **Charles Darnay vs. Wang Xuewen:**

Charles Darnay, a French aristocrat who renounces his family's wealth and privilege, epitomizes the theme of sacrifice in Dickens' novel. His decision to forsake his aristocratic lineage and migrate to England underscores his commitment to the principles of equality and justice. Darnay's selfless actions, such as returning to France to aid an old family servant during the revolution, highlight his willingness to risk his life for the greater good. Similarly, Wang Xuewen, the protagonist of "Bolshevik Salute," exemplifies sacrifice within the context of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. As a fervent supporter of the Communist Party,

Wang Xuewen devotes himself wholeheartedly to the revolutionary cause, even at the expense of personal relationships and aspirations. His unwavering loyalty to the Party and his willingness to endure hardships in the name of ideology illustrate a profound sense of sacrifice. Sydney Carton, a pivotal character in "A Tale of Two Cities," offers a stark contrast to Charles Darnay. Initially portrayed as a disillusioned and dissolute individual, Carton undergoes a transformative journey marked by redemption and ultimate sacrifice. His unrequited love for Lucie Manette catalyzes his eventual act of selflessness, wherein he willingly sacrifices his life to save Darnay, the object of Lucie's affection. Carton's sacrifice transcends mere altruism; it symbolizes his redemption and the triumph of love over despair. His famous soliloquy, "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done," encapsulates the profound significance of his sacrifice, elevating him to the status of a tragic hero. In both narratives, faithfulness and sacrifice are intricately intertwined with larger socio-political movements. Dickens's portrayal of the French Revolution and Wang Meng's depiction of the Cultural Revolution serve as backdrops against which the characters' actions unfold. The characters' unwavering commitment to their respective causes reflects the broader ideological fervor and societal upheaval of their times. Moreover, both authors employ intricate narrative techniques to underscore the complexities of faithfulness and sacrifice. Dickens' use of dualities and parallelisms in "A Tale of Two Cities" mirrors the dichotomies inherent in revolutionary fervor, while Wang Meng's sparse yet evocative prose in "Bolshevik Salute" conveys the stark realities of ideological zealotry. Dickens's portrayal of the French Revolution underscores the inherent brutality and chaos unleashed by social upheaval, juxtaposed with the themes of sacrifice and resurrection. Characters like Sydney Carton epitomize selflessness and redemption through their ultimate sacrifices, serving as catalysts for societal transformation. Moreover, Dickens' exploration of familial bonds, love, and hate adds depth to the narrative, with characters like Dr. Manette and Lucie Manette embodying resilience and compassion amidst adversity. The novel also delves into the complexities of revenge and forgiveness, particularly through the vengeful Madame Defarge and the conflicted Dr. Manette.

Through his masterful storytelling and thematic richness, Dickens not only captures the tumultuous spirit of his era but also sheds light on timeless issues of social inequality, moral ambiguity, and the enduring human capacity for both cruelty and compassion. His legacy as a literary giant continues to resonate, immortalizing him as a quintessential chronicler of the human condition.

## **Literature Review**

The term Literature comes from the Latin stem. It is used in the West in various languages as French literature, Italian literature, Literature Spanish literature. It appeared in Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Miller). Literature is fun for those people who want to spend their leisure time, it is a source of information who want to seek knowledge, and it is a tool for learning a language and for those who want to improve their language. According to the literature, historically associated with their two roles, fostering good deeds and morals (Norling). Manisha Patel writes in her research article she explores that literature helps us to get ideas about people, societies, events, culture, and ways of communication (Patel). These definitions better help us to understand and analyze the novel Tale of Two Cities and its purpose, written

by Charl Dickenson. Here, its title indicates that the whole plot of the story revolves around the two cities, London and France, in Western society. This novel is written in the political background of the French Revolution. In this tale, he has beautifully explored the theme of selfless sacrifice and faithfulness through the character of Lucy's father, Doctor Manatee, who reveals the report of the rape of the poor girl. He didn't care about his life, although he knew the culprits were the influential elite class. He moved forward to fight against the sexual assault case with valor and dedication, and provided evidence. Consequently, he was imprisoned for 18 years, and during his imprisonment, he lost his mind. His sacrifice in prison for 18 years indicates his faithfulness to the rebellious movement for the betterment and justice of the common working class, though he was by professional Doctor, not a politician, he played his part in the resistance against politically influential justice. One of the significant positive aspects of this character is selflessness towards the unknown girl who was being raped. There was no kind of relationship between him and the victim female, this kind of sacrificial example can be found rarely in each society even in today's civilized society another essential sacrifice of the protagonist Carton, appears he is indolent and alcoholic who cannot deal with the smallest amount interest in his life but much interested and sincere he offers himself for hanging to save the husband of his beloved Lucy. According to this interpretation, Carton becomes a Christ-like figure, a selfless martyr whose death enables the happiness of his beloved and ensures his immortality. However, there is a question of the ultimate significance of Carton's final act. They argue that since Carton initially places little value on his existence, the sacrifice of his life proves relatively easy. However, Dickens's frequent use in his text of other resurrection imagery—his motifs of wine and blood, for example—suggests that he did intend for Carton's death to be redemptive, whether or not it ultimately appears so to the reader. According to a researcher, to satisfy and please his beloved, Sidney Caton exchanged his life for his love opponent. This spirit of sacrifice represents Christian faith and faithfulness (Yuan1). Moreover, Mohan writes in his research article and says the character of Sydney stands as a symbol of sacrifice in the thread of love when Draney was arrested as an immigrant and imprisoned in France. Sydney Carton, in the disguise of Draney, sacrifices his own beloved life for the happiness of Lucy and stands as are symbol of immortal sacrifice and the protagonist of the novel (B). Similarly the other hand, the novel Bolshevik Salute by Wang Meng deals same issues of political disturbance in his own country, and he plays a major role in promoting and supporting the communist movement against the unequal distribution of industrial luxuries between labor and people. According to a Chinese research writer, the struggle for communism was to embrace self-sacrifice, struggle, and misery (Larenson) we can observe in the novel.

Yao, Nguyen, Srivastava, and Ambite (2025) address major challenges in medical imaging by proposing a task-agnostic federated learning framework that protects privacy while enabling multi-institution collaboration. Their approach uses a self-supervised Vision Transformer (ViT) encoder, allowing the system to learn powerful representations without relying on labeled data. The authors show that the framework performs effectively under non-IID conditions and maintains nearly 90% F1 accuracy using only a small fraction of the data needed for centralized training. Their work demonstrates the potential of federated learning as a foundation model for diverse and unseen medical tasks.

Wu, Chen, Heo, Gutfraind, Liu, Li, Srinivasan, Zhang, and Sharps (2025) explore how large language models can improve reasoning by breaking away from repetitive and homogeneous

thinking patterns. They introduce a strategy generator that creates unique instructions for each LLM agent, encouraging diverse reasoning paths and critical thinking. By fine-tuning this generator on effective strategies, the authors show that each agent develops specialization while still contributing to a more diverse collective reasoning process. Their framework achieves sustained performance gains and overcomes the limitations of traditional iterative self-improvement.

Hu, Peng, Zhang, Lin, U, and Chen (2025) propose the Multi-Scale Hybrid Dual-Attention Network (MS-HDAN) to improve building instance extraction from complex urban remote-sensing images. Their architecture combines local feature extraction and global context modeling using a dual-stream encoder enhanced by a collaborative perception module. The authors demonstrate that MS-HDAN effectively handles occlusions, irregular structures, and dense urban layouts, outperforming state-of-the-art methods. Their work provides a strong and scalable solution for urban planning and AI-based geospatial analysis.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, the political themes present in the novels of Wing Wan and Charles Dickens serve as poignant reflections of the socio-political landscapes of their respective contexts. Through their literary craftsmanship, both authors intricately weave narratives that not only entertain but also incite critical reflection on the prevailing power dynamics, injustices, and societal struggles of their times. Wan's Eastern perspective and Dickens' Western viewpoint offer unique insights into the complexities of governance, societal hierarchies, and the human condition with the help of their characters. In conclusion, Charles Dickens's "A Tale of Two Cities" and Wang Meng's "Bolshevik Salute" offer compelling explorations of faithfulness and sacrifice within the tumultuous contexts of the French and Chinese revolutions, respectively. Through the characters of Charles Darnay, Sydney Carton, and Wang Xuewen, both authors illuminate the enduring power of conviction, loyalty, and selflessness in the face of adversity. Their narratives serve as timeless reminders of the human capacity for both noble sacrifice and tragic redemption amidst the crucible of history.

Wan's exploration of faithfulness and sacrifice within political narratives often reflects the tensions between tradition and modernity, authority and dissent, as seen in works such as 'Bolshevik Salute'. His portrayal of characters navigating intricate webs of loyalty, betrayal, and duty sheds light on the intricacies of Eastern political systems and cultural values.

Similarly, Dickens' novels are marked by a deep-seated concern for social justice, equality, and the plight of the marginalized. Through vivid characterizations and emotive storytelling, he exposes the injustices wrought by industrialization, capitalism, and class stratification, advocating for societal reform and empathy toward the downtrodden.

Despite the geographical and cultural disparities between Wan and Dickens, their political themes converge in their shared commitment to using literature as a vehicle for social critique and change. By illuminating the complexities of power, morality, and human agency, their novels continue to resonate with readers across time and place, reminding us of the enduring relevance of literature in shaping our understanding of politics and society.

Naveed Rafaqat Ahmad is a researcher focused on public-sector governance, institutional reform, and economic policy. His work centers on identifying practical strategies to improve the performance, accountability, and financial sustainability of state-owned enterprises in Pakistan. By examining global reform experiences and adapting them to local challenges, he contributes valuable insights for policymakers seeking to reduce fiscal burdens, enhance operational efficiency, and attract investment. Ahmad's research reflects a commitment to evidence-based reforms and long-term structural transformation in Pakistan's public sector.

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