

## Analysis of the Civilian Consciousness Reflected in *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*

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### Abstract

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is the founder of the English realistic criticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* is the first novel of Dickens. It uses the contemporary life as the writing material and regards the ordinary people as the hero in the novel, which makes the contribution to the English literature. This thesis analyzes on civilian consciousness which reflected in this comedy so as to understand Dickens' thoughts deeply.

**Key words:** Language of common customs; Thought; Civilian consciousness

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### 1. THE ROOT OF CIVILIAN CONSCIOUSNESS REFLECTION

Charles John Huffam Dickens (1812-1870) is one of the greatest representatives of English critical realism of the Victorian Age. Dickens's literary success began with the 1837 serial publication of *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. He is particularly famous for his perfect artistic generalization and vivid physical detail. His masterpieces, the realistic pictures of the poor and unfortunate, unfolded a comprehensive social life picture of England in 19<sup>th</sup> society. Dickens' s style is also a mixture of fantasy and realism, and this kind of style

makes a great impact on the Chinese modern novels. *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* takes the contradictory between the old gentleman Mr. Pickwick and the hoodlum Golden Ghale as the main line, and takes Ghale's breaking with his past and being a better man as the ending. The story explains the simple truth that "Justice will triumph over injustice", exposes and criticizes the injustice and inhumanity of capitalist society from the point of bourgeoisie, and shows the sympathy for the lower class. Dickens's literary works not only reflect the extremely broad life, but also raise a significant literary revolution, that is, portraying the real common men in the background taken from the real life.

Charles Dickens, the great portrayer of the poor child life, had a sad, painful childhood. As a humanistic writer from a poor family, Dickens certainly possesses the civilian consciousness to show the positive or miserable aspects of the lower. There are three aspects to show this kind of consciousness. Firstly, the contempt for the bigshots; secondly, the sympathy for the poor and the lower; (for instance, the realistic description of untold sufferings in Debtor's prison.) thirdly, the praise to the quality of common men. Before Dickens, in English literature, the ordinary poverty-stricken people did not have status, since they were depicted as stupid Babbitts or scurvy wretches. But Dickens started to change this situation and used vivid, warm brushwork to demonstrate the common men's good nature that had been ignored for a long time, such as simplicity, loyalty, selflessness, etc..

### 2. THE ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERIZATION ON CIVILIAN CONSCIOUSNESS REFLECTED IN THE NOVEL

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The novel of *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* came out of a serious of strange adventure stories which

were interrelated. The story was about a club in London. The protagonist in the novel was an old, single gentleman named Mr. Pickwick who was a celebrity in scholars with a lofty virtue worthy of respect. He founded a gentleman club named by his family name—Pickwick club and held the post of proprietor personally. He led the establishment of the communications department which had altogether four members including him. The other three were Mr. Tracy Tupman who was old but still keen on talking love; Mr. Augustus Snodgrass, who owned a fame of great poet among friends but never published any works; and Mr. Nathaniel Winkle who boasted himself as a master of sports and safaris. Their tasks were to travel the whole country to make the interview and investigation of folk customs and situations so as to write something to report to the club. The adventures of these childish, naive and quixotic gentlemen along their travels made up the main plots of the novel.

Mr. Pickwick was an old gentleman. He was just and kind, ignorant of worldly affairs. He fought against injustice and took pleasure in helping others. The writer intentionally created him as a typical character of mercy and caritas, but objectively he had the characters of small potatoes and represented the civilians. Most of the humor in the novel comes from the disharmony between his heart and his appearance. Pickwick was facing the challenge of how to keep his pure innocence in the reality of the challenges. As the story unfolded, he also gradually became mature. When the novel began, Pickwick was an outspoken and bombastic “celebrity”. He was keen on collecting anecdotes in the traveling and eager to make some discoveries in science; but later, he became a thoughtful gentleman, he learned how to cope with all kinds of complicated situations and made great progress in dealing with problems. Not long after they began their journey, they met Ginger who was an incarnation of evil in life, an adventurer and also a liar. In the process of the struggle with Ginger, Mr. Pickwick met a clever shoeshine boy—Sam Vile in the hotel and employed him as his servant. In this process, Sam Wheeler and Ginger played the role of guide, the two men gave Mr. Pickwick profound lessons from the pros and cons which opened his eyes to see the reality, which let him learn a lot of common sense that could not be studied from books. However, in the lawsuit, the two evil lawyers—Dawson and Fog framed a case against Mr. Pickwick and made him in trouble, from which Mr. Pickwick saw the evil of humanity and the darkness and tragedy in the bottom of society. Finally, Mr. Pickwick rendered good for evil, saved Gingle from his hopeless situation. He helped Gingle to keep away from coldness and hunger as well as

to restore his dignity to be a man. Such a quixotic style, funny and quirky characters with strong faith and noble motives, Mr. Pickwick always wanted to do things in accordance with the guidelines of conscience no matter what time it is. He was a person with admirable personal charisma. This precisely reflected Dickens’s style in shaping the excellent qualities of people.

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## CONCLUSION

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As it known to all, warm and comic style was the way that Dickens adopts to praise the optimistic spirits of Englishmen in their boring life, especially in their dilemma. Based on reflecting the extremely broad life at that time, he is interested in glorifying the characters of “a sound heart and a deformed conscience” while criticizing the corrupt society of the money-worship and inhumanity. Dickens is such a talented writer that inspires people to read his masterpieces to know more about the confused but hopeful world, since he infuses the “hope” into the world, just as he infuses the lofty morality into our brain and sense of beauty into our soul. Thanks to his civilian coconsciousness and undecorated language can readers appreciate these good aspects of human nature.

*Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* is really the breakthrough point from which people can recognize his mastery of humor and comedy. Dickens was enthusiastic about discovering something interesting and beautiful from the ordinary life and making his writings full of funny characters and attractive elements. The publication of *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* helps him cultivate an ability to sustain interest through all kinds of literary devices, such as, simple but rich language, comic technique, satire, symbolism, absurdity, fairy tales and exposure of the reality, etc. In some way, *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* is the perfect fusion of all these above elements by Dickens’s character-portrayal and matter-depiction. Therefore, this kind of civilian consciousness containing pureness, simplicity, and friendliness flows in the veins of Dickensian comedies.

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