

Significance of the Lion and Jackal in "A Tale of Two Cities"

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What is the significance of the lion and the jackal in "A Tale of Two Cities?" [NU: 2013]

In the novel "A Tale of Two Cities" (1859) by Charles Dickens (1812–1870), the nicknames "Lion" and "Jackal" are used for Mr. Stryver and Sydney Carton. These names carry symbolic meaning. These show their personalities, roles, and relationships.

The significance of The Lion and the Jackal

The Lion (Mr. Stryver): Stryver is called the "Lion" because he is bold, confident, and enjoys taking the lead. In court, he takes credit for work done by others, especially Carton. He appears as a strong leader. Dickens writes,

"At length, the jackal had got together a compact repast for the lion, and proceeded to offer it to him." (Book Two, Chapter V)

The lion symbolizes visible power, authority, and ambition. The qualities Stryver likes to display.

The Jackal (Sydney Carton): Carton is called the "Jackal" because he works behind the scenes. He prepares legal cases for Stryver but gets no recognition. He is like a jackal that serves the lion in the wild. Carton uses his intelligence and skill to help Stryver succeed. Dickens writes:

"Although Sydney Carton would never be a lion, he was an amazingly good jackal." (Book Two, Chapter V)

Symbolic Meaning:

The Lion (Stryver) stands for visible success, confidence, and authority. The Jackal (Carton) stands for quiet hard work, support, and sacrifice. These nicknames also reflect their

personalities. Stryver is proud and ambitious, while Carton is careless about himself but deeply intelligent.

Deeper Contrast: Although Carton is underestimated, he later shows true greatness. His final act of sacrificing his life to save Charles Darnay proves his moral courage. This makes him far nobler than Stryver, despite being in the “Jackal” role earlier.

In short, the “Lion” stands for pride and power, while the “Jackal” stands for hidden talent and sacrifice. Dickens uses them to show the difference between open success and silent bravery.

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