

The Roles of French and English Characters in Dickens's Representation of the French Revolution; 'A Tale of Two Cities'

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Abstract

The novel, "A Tale of Two Cities" is the portrayal of dilemma of peasantry of France demoralised by the aristocracy of France in the year led to the revolution. The novel spotlights the unjust French culture against the fair English system that transforms the life of all characters (some belonging to England and others having their origin in France). The novel borrows the idea of French revolution to support the story.

This paper consists of three sections; the first section is the core that holds critical analysis, arguments and assessments of the characters and their roles such as Charles Darnay, Dr. Alexandre Manette and some others. Next the paper presents the relations among the characters; how the characters tie together through the events that launch in the story. This section spots the themes that can be drawn out of the whole plot and the significance of characters can be drawn from there – tying characters into commonalities and meaningfully assigning the weight that Dickens has intended to grant each character with. In addition, the last section will shed light on the critical analysis of Charles Dickens "A Tale of Two Cities" with Rousseau. Finally, the paper ends with a brief conclusion and a list of references.

I. Character's Scrutiny

Charles Darnay

Dickens shows the role of Darnay as a man of honour, courage and respect. Charles Darnay plays many roles in the novel; he is a prominent position holder in the story. Darnay is the male romantic lead in 'A Tale of Two Cities'. Darnay can be put to analysis from the starting point of the mystery in his name. Darnay's actual name is St. Evremonde. He happens to be French born and an English man by his preferential choice, turning up as bicultural man.

This statement defines Darnay's origin as to be from the French Dunes, his forefathers belong to France but Darnay was a Tiff as opposed to their cruel ways of dealings with the innocent people, not fond of the culture followed by his maiden family, Darnay chose to change his surname and move to England, where her served as a French Tutor. He is a decent good natured man struck by the circumstantial events that were beyond his control. Darnay did not wish nor opted to be a part of the French revolution, but he was caught and pulled by the revolutionaries in that revolution. There on he was at the mercy of destiny.

"A very few French leagues of his journey were accomplished, when Charles Darnay began to perceive that for him along these country roads there was no hope of return until he should have been declared a good citizen at Paris. Whatever might befall now, he must on to his journey's end. Not a mean village closed upon him, not a common barrier dropped across the road behind him, but he knew it to be another iron door in the series that was barred between him and England. The universal watchfulness so encompassed him, that if he had been taken in a net, or were being forwarded to his destination in a cage, he could not have felt his freedom more completely gone" (Dickens 1859, p.266).

Through Darnay's character, with reference to the above quotation Dickens explicates the novel in terms of repudiation and forfeiture. He surrenders his property and estate in France that he inherited from his ancestors, for the sake of sustaining non aristocratic ideology, replacing his customary family privileges. Darnay's aim of politically turning independent and earning his living by providing pedagogic services to English people in French and Literature – had put him at a cross with his uncle Marquis

St. Evremonde, due to his way of thinking and performing withstanding clashes with his uncles. Understanding Darnay would become easier for a reader by getting into his shoes, suffering a difference opinion with an elderly family member and then multiplying the arousing miseries by 100 times. Darnay and his uncle Marquis are residents of varying idealistic worlds. Darnay becomes the innovational order (but not the French revolution) and older Marquis adheres to his fundamental wicked means maintaining the status quo (Alison 1984: p. 19).

Readers sometimes assume Charles Dickens and Charles Darnay to be the same name or man in some ways as Darnay purports the vibrant side of Dickens. In the 'Carlyean' critical review of Dickens's novel, the aspirations that Dickens took refuge into while narrating the novel and its characters were revealed. Dickens sketched a character of Lucie Manettes to be her diehard love and the perfect man Charles Darnay. While adding blissful appeals into Darnay's character, Dickens portrayed himself, attributing Darnay to be exactly resembling Dickens in characteristics, features, and struggles of life, nature and attitude – the perfect hero for the perfect heroine. Despite of undergoing trail and incarcerated misery, Darnay ultimately gets the girl and leads a blessed life. The proclaimed happiness that Darnay accomplishes is what Dickens has craved for through the years of his real life journey. The following quotation spell out the integrity of Darnay's love for the woman, similar to how Dickens fell for Ellen;

"He had loved Lucie Manette from the hour of his danger. He had never heard a sound as sweet and dear as the sound of her compassionate voice; he had never seen a face so tenderly beautiful, as hers when it was confronted with his own on the edge of the grave that had been dug for him". (Dickens 1859, p. 138).

This quotation is the reflection of love of Darnay for Lucie Manatte. In the time of danger, he could only sense his love for Lucie Mannette. Her voice soothed him and her beauty mesmerised him in the time when his life was at risk. There have been serious arguments over Darnay being a wholly realized man or just a handsome marionette. However, every reader has to go through the novel and take their decision about Darnay after grasping the story and forming their own perceptions. But the environmental facts must also be considered where in Dickens worked this novel onto the paper, 'A Tale of Two Cities' happens to be his shortest novel precisely and written with very little space available to Dickens. The critical evaluating to explain the preceding statement is that Darnay at the start of the novel is the central character, a noble man loathing the customary cruelty in behaviour of his peer of the realm blood relations, then towards the midst of the novel Darnay is a loving better half, munificent son in law and a very concerned friend and father. But by the third book where Darnay endangers his life returning to his homeland – France, his character fattens (Alison 1984: p. 20).

Dr. Alexandre Manette

The role of Dr. Manette is used for the illustration of dominant objectives of the story, i.e. the essential mystery surrounding all humans. There is a series of resurrecting events in the novel, one of which is Dr. Manette's freedom from solitary imprisonment of eighteen years duration. This sets of the tales plot on the move. The novel opens with the ragged of Dr. Manette. The following quotation endorses the words versed to Dr. Manette by Jarvis Lorry when after being released from long imprisonment, he meets his daughter Lucie Manette who is bent upon taking her father home, whom Lorry informs of her not being an orphan. When she sees her father for the first time, he is working as a shoe maker in Paris;

"Buried how long?" "Almost eighteen years", "you had abandoned all hope of being dug out?" "Long ago". "You know that you are recalled to life?" "They tell me so." "I hope you care to live?" "I can't say." "Shall I show her to you? Will you come and see her?" Book 1, (Dickens 1859, p. 12).

The climax of the story is Charles Darney's death sentence verdict for the viciousness his ancestors committed. Dr. Manette is a white haired man, with fears and blank ponders on his face. Dr. Manette is spell bound by amnesia that takes him back to the shoe making work he did after being released from captivation in prison. This part is not close to realism rather adds artificiality. Why is it shoemaking that Dr. Manette falls back to whenever he suffers a shock?? He has been subjected to unjust solitary confinement, why not that trauma is where mental disturbances take him back to?

"I, Alexandre Manette, unfortunate physician, native of Beauvais, and afterwards resident in Paris, write this melancholy paper in my doleful cell in the Bastille, during the last month of the year, 1767. I write it at stolen intervals, under every difficulty. I design to secrete it in the wall of the chimney, where I have slowly and laboriously made a place of concealment for it. Some pitying hand may find it there, when I and my sorrows are dust" (Dickens 1859, p. 346).

Dickens has unveiled how Dr. Manette recalls himself and his experiences through his journal, his writings tell the audience what a sane, intelligent and a sensible man Dr. Manette was and not that he has lost it, he is still the same educated doctor who has recovered after remaining under long down trodden state. The journal that Dr. Manette composed astonished a lot of readers, that he drafted in blood and alacrity and then he hidden it in the chimney of his cell. The journal is found to be melodramatics by some critiques and instance of the dying Gaspard's boy to the avenging soliloquy seems as a happening of drama has been traded off for realism.

From the stand point of the French revolutionaries Dr. Manette is a living reminder of coercion. They hold him in the highest regard for his sufferings of unjust imprisonment at Bastille. This value he earned with the revolutionaries is what he enchased in Paris to keep his jailed son in law

Darnay alive and prevented of any injustice. That enables Dr. Manette to revive back to his Doctors status with rehabilitated sense of mission he had lost at Bastille. Concluding his dynamic character Dr. Manette's character experiences courses of swaps and changes through the novel and author Dickens has given his role complete touches. At the opening of the novel Dr. Manette is segregated, abandoned and demented of the long unjust and undeserved solitary imprisonment, due to pestilences of horrifying crime that the grand's of France Evremonde's committed. By the second book and midst he is back to his generous, loving and selfless being that he originally was while serving as a doctor, due to the untiring efforts of his daughter Lucie on bringing her father to recover. Dr. Manatte has severe hatred for Evremonde's and is wishful of avenging himself, but when the son of the Evremonde family (Charles Darnay) becomes his son in law – Dr. Manette forgets all his vengeance and is a satisfied man who puts up the best of efforts to save his son in laws life.

Madame Defarge

The role of Madame Defarge possesses a remorseless blood lust, embodying a chaos of French revolutions. Madame Defarge's role is of interweaving a record of those whom she targets as pinned for death. Then when the French revolution happens she ties her custom to the destiny of characters in the novel. Defarge can be characterized as the Greek goddess (Fates) who kindles the rope of human life on loom and then she chops it off. Dickens simply explicates Defarge's portentous craft with Lucie Manette's golden thread that is her blond hair. Lucie binds her family together with her love and light weaving; in contrast Defarge knits no apparel but death of others (Alison 1984: p. 23).

Although the character of Madame Defarge is less prominent in the novel but she has been proclaimed as the most unforgettable character. She and her husband believe in modernism with inquisitiveness in the air. Madame Defarge can be thought of as Guerrilla Fighters of today's times battling with the less developed belt of countries. Madame Defarge professionally knows how to cause biased propaganda. On the way to fieldtrip to Versailles with a road mending worker she recognizes the attired graciousness as 'dolls and birds'. She tames the roads mender to identify his prey for future. Her registering and knitting plots are reflected in following quotation:

"When Saint Antoine had again enfolded the Defarge's in his dusky wings, and they, having finally alighted near the Saint's boundaries, were picking their way on foot through the black mud and offal of his streets, Madame Defarge spoke to her husband: "Say then, my friend; what did Jacques of the police tell thee?" "Very little to-night, but all he knows. There is another spy commissioned for our quarter. There may be many more, for all that he can say, but he knows of one." "Eh well!" said Madame Defarge, raising her eyebrows with a cool business air. "It is necessary to register him. How do they call that man?" (Dickens 1859, p.190).

Dickens has portrayed Madame Defarge as the staunch the French revolutionist; who has her own inner motives, in the above quotation she inquires her husband about "John Barsad" who she identifies as a Christian by his name and then she questions about his physical characteristics that she could perceive his image with. She needs to register him as her target too. She has a muscular face, well-built body and brawny features articulating herself to the elements of storm, fire and the earthquake because these natural elements are agents of power and capable of causing destruction violently, Madame Defarge tends to be unstoppable similar to the natures strong elements and is as callous as a hurricane sabotaging human existence.

"In a word," Madame Defarge went on, "my husband has not my reason for pursuing this family to annihilation, and I have not his reason for regarding this Doctor with any sensibility. I must act for myself, therefore. Come hither, little citizen". (Dickens 1859, p. 393).

Dickens in this quotation is awaking his audience on how he has carved Madame Defarge to be so determined about achieving her goals, how she reveals her restlessness just over a hint that comes to her regarding those on her hit list, if be granted any chance of survival, this she cannot withstand, she is unwilling to trust her husband even who might have mercy on her and let them go. Madame Defarge does not want Dr. Manette to be released of his shoe making curse. With regards to the French revolution she knits the names of the royal aristocrats on her planner whom she targets to expire in the event of revolution. She is the revolution icon in a clear way, full of hatred and revenge against the St. Evremonde family – whom she holds responsible for the death of her siblings. She is poised on the outer and very successful on concealing her dangerous inner intents. She decides Darnay has to pay in terms of losing his life for being born to Evremonde family and thus she knits his guillotine plot towards the end causing him to be rearrested. She is left all alone with her anger and intents when she finds out Dr. Manette with his daughter, son in law (Darnay) and others have escaped successfully, she heads to the lodges where Dr. Manette and family were staying in Paris to kill Lucie, but there she encounters Miss. Pross and in the violent struggle Madame Defarge is shot dead by her own revolver (Alison 1984: p. 24).

Miss Pross

Miss Pross is a character with red hair and disgraceful loyal servant. She has a heart of gold and immensely faithful servant. Miss Pross occupies space in the novel by the linking thread of her long lost brother, Solomon Pross who is discovered as John Barsad, an old Bailey agent and sheep dog to the prisoners.

To define the character of Miss Pross, her dedication to Lucie and Solomon can be counted at the top. When Madame Defarge bashes in armed to allegedly assassinate Lucie and her family, Miss Pross immediately grasps the Frenchwoman's killer intents and she simply refuses to

learn French. This leads to the doubtful circumstances for the character of Miss Pross. The following quotation carries Miss Pross's protective words for Lucie while conversing with Madame Defarge at the end of the novel;

"I am a Briton; [...] I am desperate. I don't care English Two pence for myself. I know that the longer I keep you here, the greater hope there is for my Ladybird. I'll not leave a handful of that dark hair upon your head, if you lay a finger on me!" (Dickens 1859, p. 84).

These are the words expressed in quotation when Dickens has presented Miss Pross to be stating her loyalty for her mistress Lucie Manette, sort of exhibiting her spell bound attachment to the lady whom she not only serves but protects by word of mouth to physically keeping Lucie safe. In the above quotation, the language of Miss Pross gives the idea that she is French as she said Briton instead of British. Miss Pross is diehard patriot and assigned to yield advantages of her work. She authoritatively loves Madame Defarge mistakes Miss Pross's tears for signalling Achilles' heel and moves on to the shut doors. When the struggle between the two happen Madame Defarge is shot by her own revolver. Although 'A Tale of Two Cities' is not written to be anti-France or pro-England but Miss Pross's victory depicts the winning of her country. Since, the story is considered as an anti-France sketch by some critique, however, Miss Pross wins in the story which shows that story is not anti-France.

Jarvis Lorry

Throughout the tale Jarvis Lorry only projects himself to be an English businessman (by Dickens imagination). He claims to have no time for feelings, employed at Tellson's Bank for over forty years. Behind the proficient business man – Lorry hides his caring heart.

"Even when he had satisfied himself that he was awake, Mr. Lorry felt giddily uncertain for some few moments whether the late shoemaking might not be a disturbed dream of his own" (Dickens, 1859: p. 214).

This quote is from the chapter 'an opinion' where Mr. Lorry acts as the caretaking figure to Dr. Manette where he hits his first amnesia attack. Dickens has uploaded worries upon Lorry who is wondering why Manette is talking like a shoe maker, is it a dream or reality upon him. After which Lorry abandons his work for nine days and serves Dr. Manette to his recovery.

When in wake of one event that Dr. Manette falls back into amnesia, Lorry abandons his job and work for full nine days and nursed him with absolute care. Although Lorry honours bank above himself – behaviour considered orthodox by some (Alison 1984: p. 22). Lorry can be compared to two other professionals in scene, Stryver – the dominatingly pushing lawyer and Jerry Cruncher – the straightforward tradesman, who digs out dead bodies and sells them for research and studies to medical science.

"A place of business in London like Tellson's place of business in Paris, would soon have driven the House out of its mind and into the Gazette. For, what would staid British responsibility and respectability have said to orange-trees in boxes in a Bank courtyard, and even to a Cupid over the counter?" (Dickens, 1859. p. 278).

The quote is from the scene when Dickens has brought upon the happening start of the French revolution - broken loose and the French aristocrats, businessmen and other individuals tend to move to England from France and Tellson's Bank has huge range of clients to cater. Bank is all set and welcoming the influx of business. When the revolution broke, Tellson's Bank became the ultimate resort for French aristocrats – the ones found culpable in earlier chapters, quenching the innocent peasant's funds to dry. How shall one regard Tellson for providing refuge to a tyrannizing class? Dickens has expressed that spasm bank is capable of resisting changes of all sorts. How does the audience rank Jarvis Lorry, in spite of his non-interventionist politics and prolonged serving the bank, does lorry portray any type of mainstay? (Against the new revolution started by the French mob). That is for the readers to decide.

II. Relationship among the Characters in the Novel

Each character in the novel holds certain significance, but the degree of dramatic magnitude and substance varies that Dickens has assigned to each character. This study reviews the weight of characters by sampling them into themes:

1. Theme of Surveillance and Secrecy

Secrecy is the common factor amongst characters discussed in the paper. We can count secrecy as a trait here and then appraise the characters that all seem to have it. Dr. Manette details his experiences in a journal that he keeps secretively concealed from everyone. Charles Darnay keeps his biological roots secretive that he belongs to Evremonde family. Regarding the business that Tellson's bank conducts Jarvis Lorry keeps his lips sealed. Due to political instability and unrest – Madame Defarge keeps her streamlining French revolution activities secret. Being at a severe cross with one another the French revolutionists and the French aristocrats deploy secret undercover agents to find out moves, details, motives, intents and action plans of one another and to put any of the enemy's men surrounding them with a mission. Due to so much of secret keeping environment, each character suspects the other. Dickens through his novel promotes that 'reliance' and 'feeling affection for' are the only two tools that can eliminate the negativity from minds and relationships. Moreover, in such an atmosphere, one can say, everyone suspects everyone else, and ultimately everyone feels that they must keep secrets in order to survive.

2. Theme of Times Gone By and Destiny

Dickens has symbolized Madame Defarge with knitting, continuously forming a net like intrigue. Then Lucie weaves her golden thread – these two concepts Dickens seems to have picked from Greek Mythology that reveals that the goddesses had the ability to control human lives with threads. In the novel Dickens has plotted characters – attempting to grant fate to other characters (whether optimistic or pessimistic) (Alison 1984: p. 30).

Then another interesting commonality is the characters attempting to omit some part of their history that they do not desire to be a part of them or their present and affect their destiny. For example Dr. Manette and Charles Darnay bear the same wish to change their past or reshape in a manner that makes them feel better, as they have an aristocratic image Charles takes refuge into professional practice in London to earn an individual identity after fleeing away from his cruel French aristocrat family. Then towards the end when Dr. Manette attempts to save Charles, his own written historic journal becomes the cause of dooming Charles. Dickens purports; “history can be broken not by earthly appeals to justice or political influence, but only through Christian self-sacrifice” (Dickens 1859).

3. Theme of Sacrifice

Charles Dickens has enriched his novel ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ with incidences of sacrifices. Charles Darnay lets go his family and inherited wealth to lead a life clean of cruelties that a customary in his family and to save himself of guilt. Then Dr. Manette opts for conserving his integrity sacrificing his freedom when the Evremondes wanted him to hide their wrongful sin, Dr. Manette embraced imprisonment as a consequence of not becoming party with the criminals. Dickens suggests: “while painful in the short term, sacrifice leads to future strength and happiness” (Dickens 1859).

In fact, one can say that the novel is about two types of sacrifice, both personal and national. Both Dr. Manette and Charles Darnay make sacrifice. The first for his own personal integrity, the latter for living a free life.

4. Theme of Imprisonment

Dickens has symbolized Bastille with “Abuse of Authority, Control and Supremacy” (Dickens 1859) that the French people held. Dr. Manette’s undeserved imprisonment that St. Evremonde family got him subjected to exemplifies the concept that Dickens has explicated in the imprisonment theme. Synonymously La Force prison where Charles Darnay was unduly captivated is parallel to Bastille where French Revolutionaries wished to put Darnay to Guillotine for the cruelties his uncles has been shedding around on the civilian natives. Imprisonment theme has links chained to history them in the sense that unveiling history brings injustice upon an innocent twice in the novel. Therefore, one can argue that both the revolutionaries and the nobilities abused their power when they imprisoned people. This abuse of power was unjust (Alison 1984: p. 32).

III. The Comparison and Critical Analysis of Charles Dickens “A Tale of Two Cities” with Rousseau and in the light of Thomas Carlyles “The French Revolution”

In the nineteenth century in Europe, the drastic ideas of the French Philosopher Rousseau were highly inspirational upon the European community. He put forward his views in the following words; “the civilization corrupted the natural good man and children were best educated in natural surroundings” (Rousseau 1781-8, p. 159-60).

Rousseau was popular among the French revolution advocates for his votes pro parity and widespread and deep rooted impartiality. Dickens integrated Rousseau’s ideas in his novel where he drafts Dr. Manette to be writing his journal during his imprisonment (“A Tale of Two Cities” Book II, Ch: 10) whereby Dr. Manette arises while bringing to mind the events he witnessed at Evremonde Chateau where a civilian boy (Madame Defarge’s brother) shared with him that how his family had to blockade their home so that the Evremonde people did not take away their bit of meat.

Rousseau’s eternal soft corner for the country men with a generous heart is reflected in the passage where he explicates that many people are forced to live under subsistence levels because of the unjust tax system. Dickens has shared the Revolution as “a must over spilling of corruption”. Dickens has conceded his indebtedness to Rousseau in his letter to Edward Bulwer Lytton (Contemporary Documents p. 48 – 49).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that on one hand, the initial chapters of the novel are patience testing as the long carriage journey never ends. On the other hand, overall ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ can be deemed dreadful in comparison with Dickens’s other compelling novelistic pieces of works that Dickens has crafted. However, the characters and the story show that the violence and the finishing old regime in France provided new ways for better life in Paris. Although the novel discuss majority the outraged peasant’s and aristocracy’s atrocities, ultimately it illustrates the belief that violence is a means to provide ways to new and better life to the whole society.

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