

Tale of two cities argumentative essay



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“ It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... ” Charles Dickens used this famous phrase to introduce one of his most well-known novels, *A Tale of Two Cities*. This phrase also introduces an important motif of the novel, which is the foil. In literature, a foil is a character that contrasts with another character and therefore brings certain parts of each character’s personality into focus. Madame Therese Defarge and Miss Pross are an example of Dickens’ use of this writing technique.

Near the end of the novel, Madame Defarge goes to Lucie’s house with a plan to denounce her for mourning Charles Darnay’s impending death. Madame Defarge is portrayed as a strong, stubborn, and ruthless woman. She will go to any lengths to avenge the deaths of her siblings, including killing Lucie Darnay. Madame Defarge is intended to be the main example of evil and hatred in the novel. Lucie has already made her escape before Madame Defarge arrives at her house. However, Miss Pross remained behind to finish preparations for her own trip back to England.

She faces Madame Defarge alone. In the resulting fight, Madame Defarge is killed with her own gun. The two women are similar in the sense that they are both very strong and determined. Miss Pross’s total devotion to Lucie is her driving force, while Madame Defarge is driven by her complete hatred of the Evremondes and the aristocrats. The conflict of Miss Pross and Madame Defarge also symbolizes England and France. They are both very patriotic. “ You shall not get the better of me. I am an Englishwoman,” Miss Pross says at one point.

In contrast, Madame Defarge is very loyal to the French Republic, and is proud of being a part of the resistance effort. The broad theme of good versus evil is also apparent in their struggle. Miss Pross's overwhelming love for Lucie enables her to prevail over Madame Defarge. Dickens writes " Miss Pross, with the vigorous tenacity of love, always so much stronger than hate, clasped her tight, and even lifted her from the floor in the struggle that they had. " Miss Pross's victory did not come without a sacrifice, however. The gunshot that killed Madame Defarge left her permanently deaf. In a way, Madame Defarge symbolizes the anarchy and destruction of the French Revolution. She is determined to get rid of all trace of anyone remotely connected to Darnay's father and uncle. The fact that they are innocent does not make a difference to her. In her mind, someone must pay for the crimes against her family. Even her physical appearance betrays her true nature, as she has dark hair and eyes. This contrasts the fairness of characters that are considered good. Miss Pross can be seen as a symbol of order and loyalty.

Charles Dickens' use of foils is a very important part of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Even the title of the novel is a double. The story takes place equally in the two cities, Paris and London. Dickens uses the contrasts in foils to get across the main themes to the reader. One of these themes is the need for sacrifice. Madame Defarge is a selfish person, and considers compassion to be a weakness. Miss Pross' selflessness is what allows her to win the battle between her and Madame Defarge, and her deafness which results from the struggle emphasizes this theme.