

The application of duality in a tale of two cities

Business



Sharp differences in concepts and characters are the basis of duality, and traits such as kindness and brutality, or passiveness and aggressiveness, certainly contrast one another in this fashion.

However, interpreting these traits, whether it be in society or in a novel, is infinitely more difficult than the perceived outside picture. While kindness could be seen as a strength or a weakness, brutality could also be seen as either a righteous act or one of wickedness depending on the judgment of the viewer. By putting these subjective attributes in influential people, not only are single characters affected by these paralleling qualities, but also whole groups. Certain novels feature contrasting characteristics in their headlining characters, who can apply their traits in a way that not only separates single characters, but also full sets of characters who can be divided into two distinct groups. In Charles Dickens' historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, duality is seen in the characters of Lucie and Madame Defarge through their complex emotions and behaviors as well as their defining actions. Naturally empathetic, Lucie's regular emotions are not just generated for herself, but also for others.

Using her power as the center of this novel's English society, Lucie attempts to better the life of anyone she can. This spirit to rejuvenate others can be clearly seen in this excerpt, "' Without [love], can I not save you, Mr. Carton? Can I not recall you- forgive me again! -to a better course? Can I in no way repay your confidence?...

I know you would say this to no one else. Can I turn it to no good account for yourself, Mr. Carton?'" (Dickens 200). Although this quote does accurately

describe Lucie's empathy for respecting Mr. Carton's courage, the compassion and tone in which she speaks to Mr. Carton is of a loving nature, one which she had no obligation to give with the acknowledgement that he had done nothing for her at the time.

Even so, Lucie still performed the action of rejecting Mr. Carton's advances in the most caring and admirable fashion possible. To the contrary of Lucie, Madame Defarge displays not only an obvious sense of cruelty and bitterness, but also an independent mindset that contrasts herself to the extroverted Lucie. Her self-centered approach to life is seen when speaking to her posse, "[M]y 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" (Dickens 477). Madame's ruthlessness is coherently visible in this excerpt, accounting for the fact that she sought to murder an entire family lacking full blood relation to her enemies, but her self-dependence is not to be gone unnoticed either.

By being only worried about the opinions of herself, Madame Defarge allowed her remorseless thoughts to flourish in a manner uncheckable by others. Unlike Lucie who is reliant on others for her own happiness, Madame is perfectly fine without the opinions and thought of others, even those closest to her. These acute behavioral differences also led into the resulting actions of both of these characters. Love and hate parallel the two aforementioned characters, and the emotional traits of Lucie are evidently visible in her own actions that truly defined her as a character. Lucie passively attempts to comfort those she loves, seen in her support of Charles

during his imprisonment, “ From that time, in all weathers, she waited there two hours.

As the clock struck two, she was there, and at four she turned resignedly away. When it was not too wet or inclement for her child to be with her, they went together; at other times she was alone; but, she never missed a single day” (Dickens 366-367). Although this quote does pay tribute to Lucie’s main role as an assister of others, it also symbolizes how Lucie is not the person actively creating change. Even though Lucie is the clear center of this novel’s English world, her actions show her emotional sensitivity and gentleness when she resides into her role of helping only by being present. On the opposite spectrum, Madame Defarge not only displays a violent and bloodthirsty attitude in her actions, but she also makes it straightforward that she is a leader of the French, and not one willing to be passive when action is needed. At the storming of the Bastille, Madame’s true colors bleed out, when, “[H]e dropped dead under it, that, suddenly animated, she put her foot upon his neck, and with her cruel knife—long ready—hewed off his head” (Dickens 293).

The vicious nature of Madame is evident in this passage, but her demand in wanting to be in charge is also visible. In the hectic killing of guards at the Bastille, Madame would not be willing to take a backseat and simply knit, but instead decided to take actions that represented her emotions when the time was right. Contrasting the passive and aggressive natures of Lucie and Madame Defarge, their corresponding actions truly paralleled not only their personal emotions, but also their effect on the novel as a whole. From the perspective of this novel’s narrator, Lucie is a perfect darling, while Madame

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Defarge is a heartless villain. However, the perception from which these characters are viewed upon changes how significant their actions and emotions were, and also affects the interpretation of the legacies of these characters as a whole.

A righteous character could be seen as one who takes action and doesn't shy away from conflict, while a righteous character could also be viewed as a person who consistently performs the correct moral duties. Duality can separate and parallel character traits, but it cannot decide on its own who is right and who is wrong. Perspective outlines how not just characters, but also life in general, can be viewed and why a subjective purpose can change a persona's true meaning.