

# The role of mythology in a tale of two cities

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



"A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens is one of the most debated and criticized novels of his career. This novel was produced in Dickens' transition stage and is considered to be trivial, poorly written, and structured. Dickens would go on to write "Great Expectations" and "Our Mutual Friends". These novels were highlights in the bulk of his work and continue, today, to inspire authors and readers. A close reading of "A Tale of Two Cities" reveals a number of intricacies and themes which are overlooked during the initial reading.

One of the most interesting of these motifs is the present of myth and more specifically the extremes of human nature. Dickens, in "A Tale of Two Cities" uses mythology, duplicity of the motherly matriarch, and symbolism to demonstrate the universal human experience of good versus evil. Setting is of incredible importance in "A Tale of Two Cities" and takes place in the cities of London and Paris. It is London which is represented as the hub of new thought and freedom. London contrasts strikingly with Paris which is overrun by the cruel aristocracy.

It is within Dickens' articulate and vivid descriptions of both cities that the true theme of this novel is revealed. This can be seen in the opening dialog of the book which shows images of "Light"/"Darkness," "Heaven"/"Hell," "good"/"evil" (1). Each city represents an extreme, good or evil, that has existed in the world since the beginning of time. This duplicity is continued in the two female characters through which much of the action within the novel is inspired. Lucie Manette and Madame Defarge are female characters that represent one of the two motherly matriarchs.

Lucie Manette is benevolence personified and her double, Madame Defarge is malevolent. It is the struggle between these two women which brings about the good and bad that occur in the story. Just as this universal conflict has brought change throughout history. Dickens uses two specific mythologic imagery to support this motif – weaving and knitting. In the title of the second book, The Golden Thread, is when Lucie becomes associated with with weaving. Lucie is said to have golden hair and is the “ thread” which holds herfamilytogether.

She is dedicated to the greater good of her family and society. She nurtures all the people in her life and through this profound commitment she brings about one of the greatest transformation in literature. Carton begins this novel as an indolence and indifferent man with no direction and no values. However, through the love of Lucie he finds his purpose in life and dies a hero who will forever be embedded in the hearts and minds of those he died for. She nurses her father back tohealthboth mentally and spiritually.

She is ultimately responsible for creating a new country, building France into a strong nation with is based not on oppression but the open sharing of ideas and the inclusion of all people. Weaving has always been associated with women, throughout history. It is implied that women weave the web of life. The Fates, the sisters who were said to determine fate in mythology were weavers and Dickens' does a good job of making the parallel to good mothers like Isis and Demeter, The second extreme of female matriarchs is that of Madame Defrage. She does not weave but she does knit.

She wishes not to nurture but to destroy. Madame Defrage knits a list of the people she thinks should die when the new powers are established in France.

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She is so dedicated to the cause that she wants to win at any cost. She is associated with The Furies from mythology who were women who applied tortures to condemned souls. They were associated with vengeance and The Furies are personified in Madame Defrage. Through the characters of Lucie and Madame Defrage Dickens' links universal struggle of good and evil, and mythological matriarchs through imagery.

Lucie and her weaving is associated with light, life, and warmth. While Madame Defrage and her knitting are associated with darkness, death, and revenge. Through the integration of these images Dickens' makes "A Tale of Two Cities" not just a novel for entertainment but a real literary work which takes on one of the most universal themes known to mankind. I agree with this criticism. One of the first things I noticed was the mythological hints within the text. Madame Defrage is definitely evil and this is represented in her knitting.

Knitting involves "cutting", "pointing", and "tearing". "The fingers of the knitting women were vicious, with the experience that they could tear" (220). Madame Defrage even yells at her husband because he feels kindness toward to Lucie. Lucie is again and again seen as good. "Ever busily winding the golden thread that bound them together, weaving the service of her happy influence through the tissue of all their lives, and making it predominate nowhere, Lucie heard in the echoes of years none but friendly and soothing sounds" (209). During Darnay's trial Lucie is seen as a golden angel.

I think that critics were extremely hard on Dickens for this novel. It was a book that was overlooked for many years as being badly written, poorly

structured, and a literature for the masses. However, as you can see, after you really take the time to read and understanding the text there are several complex themes and motifs that Dickens takes on in a very subtle way. Perhaps Dickens wanted a novel that was both fun and also profound. He was comfortable enough with his writing skills to understand that for his messages to get across to the reader that he must first interest the reader.