

Tale of two cities essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



“ It was the best of times, it was the worst of times [...] we were all going directly to Heaven, we were all going directly the other way” (Dickens 7). Charles Dickens “[influenced] the development of the serial novel” and created many classics (Pool 389). Only Shakespeare used the same writing techniques as Dickens (Engel). The novel “ A Tale of Two Cities” is a grand example of character foils and doubling within one of Dickens’ novels. The use of England, France, and the characters makes the novel better because they add to the intensity of the plot “ between the two eternally paradoxical poles of life and death” (Charles Dickens 421).

As part of the doubles Dickens uses the countries England and France as opposites.

There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France. In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general were settled forever (Dickens 7).

England is tranquil and prosperous while France is in turmoil. The major difference between the two is that the people are not happy with France’s government. For the people of France, England has become a safe haven, somewhere that the people could be safe and out of harms way. While England is peaceful France has become a warzone with a government that is steadily eroding. Both countries could be viewed as an allusion to heaven and hell.

Characters throughout the novel are seen as foils. Darnay and Carton are the most obvious doubles in the novel. Carton has no self-confidence where Darnay has plenty to spare, thus making them opposites. “ A terrifyingly demonic villainess and an impossibly angelic heroine”, Mrs. Defarge and Lucie are also opposites (Schama vii). With her constant knitting of names of people to kill Mrs. Defarge is perceived as a wicked person who seeks “ vengeance and retribution” without mercy (Dickens 181). Lucie on the other hand, is kind and caring often perceived as the angel to Mrs. Defarge’s devil. The monsignors’ of town and country have the same title but this in no way makes them similar. In fact, they are complete opposites.

Town Monsignor is laidback compared to the Country Monsignor who is easily excitable. An unlikely pair of opposites is Cruncher and Lorry. Lorry has a very direct moral compass and does what he can to help others. Cruncher on the other hand, only does what has some sort of positive effect on him and has no sense of morals. All of these same and opposites add to the novel’s hidden parallels. For example Carton at first seemed to be Darnay’s lesser but manages to transform himself into a hero whose goodness equals or even surpasses that of the honorable Darnay by the end of the novel.

Perhaps one of the most important foils is the relationship between the Town Monsignor and Country Monsignor. They are important because they have influence on how people live. Town Monsignor is very relaxed and has servants to help him drink his chocolate everyday. His people have plenty to eat and have a busy bustling town. The people of the town see no reason to hate their Monsignor or to cause a war. Country Monsignor on the other

hand, is easily angered and does what he can to make others lives miserable so that he can see how much better his own life is. “ It [often] appeared, under the circumstances, rather agreeable to him to see the common people dispersed before his horses, and often barely escaping from being run down” (Dickens 113). His people eat very meagerly and are constantly rebellious. They see no reason to feel grateful to their Monsignor and do all they can to cause disruption in his life.

The most important foil of the novel is the relationship between Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton. Darnay and Carton find out early on in the novel that they look very similar. In fact, they look almost exactly alike, just like twins. This likeness helps Darnay to get out of an execution since they couldn't prove him to be the culprit if another looked exactly like him. Darnay is an exceptionally confident person. He shows this confidence throughout the novel. When Darnay asks for Lucies hand in marriage without any hesitation he reveals just how confident he is. His confidence is also shown when he goes to London without once thinking that he wont make it back home. The thought of dying should have crossed his mind since he knows all of the people of France and even some in England are out to kill him. The reason they want to kill him is he is the next in line to be Marques. Completely opposite of Darnay, Carton has no self-confidence. He thinks he is worthless and has wasted his life, so he gets intoxicated everyday and drinks at all times.

When Carton decides he is in love with Lucie he has to ask others if it's a good plan and then doesn't even tell her how he feels under the belief that

he doesn't deserve her and that she deserves better than him. Throughout the novel Lucie takes pity on Carton seeing how fragile he is and that he wants to make something of himself and that he just doesn't know how. In the end Carton sacrifices himself for Darnay. The action of taking Darnay's place in the prison execution line raises Carton above Darnay and all others. Carton feels that after this sacrifice his life will have meaning and so he may die happy knowing that down the line people will remember him. "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known" (Dickens 380). Before he is hanged Carton even imagines that Darnay and Lucie name a child after him. And so Darnay and Carton went from being similar opposites to the same Dickens wants everyone to remember at the end.

The use of foils skillfully placed throughout the novel add to the intensity of the plot. If Dickens had not used foils his book, "A Tale of Two Cities" may not have turned out to be so popular. Imagine that Darnay and Carton could have just been two completely individual characters. Darnay would not have been acquitted and the entire book would be entirely different if not for the similarities. The moral of the story would have been significantly altered as well. Instead of sending the message of choosing light over darkness the moral would have been drastically different. The novel's diversity and generalness of characters allows people even today to relate to the novel. This use of universal characters has made the book famous throughout time. "A Tale of Two Cities" is truly a magnificent piece of literature that is and always will be a true classic.

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