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## The plot structure and theme in Charles Dickens's famous novel "A Tale of Two Cities"

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### Abstract

The present research work deals with the development of 'plot' and 'theme' of Charles Dickens's famous novel "A Tale of Two Cities" 1859. It is one of the famous novels by Dickens which set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution. However, this novel follows the lives of several characters through these events but it has fewer characters and sub-plots than a typical Dickens novel. The forty five chapter novel was published in 31 weekly instalments in Dickens's new literary periodical titled "A Tale of Two Cities". The first weekly instalment of it ran in the first issue of "All the Year Round" on 30 April 1859 and the last ran thirty weeks later, on 26 November 1859. "A Tale of Two Cities" is one of only two works of historical fiction by Charles Dickens. In this essay we discussed the plot construction and the themes of the novel "A Tale of Two Cities" written by Charles Dickens.

**Keywords:** Dickens, A tale of Two Cities, plot structure, theme.

### 1. Introduction

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is a creator of realistic novels. The picture which he painted of the English social world is one of the richest in the whole range of literature. His perception of things and of characters is remarkable for its direct keenness and fresh vigour. Coloured as it is big the writer's personality, it possesses the quality of an incomparable liveliness. At the first glance our eye is caught by the swarming host of human figures who give to every part of Dickens's novels the pulsation of life itself. Dickens has written the following great novels: "The Pickwick Papers", "Oliver Twist", "Nicholas Nickleby", "The old Curiosity Shop", "Barnaby Rudge", "Martin Chuzzlewit", "Dombey and Son", "David Copperfield", "Bleak House", "Hard Times", "Great Expectations" and "Our Mutual Friend".

"A Tale of Two Cities" (1859) is one of the Dickens most popular novels what makes it really interesting is not so much the story of the private individuals in it, except of course the final escape of Lucie and other and the supreme self-sacrifice of Sydney Carton, as the episodes and incidents of the French Revolution and the character of Monsieur and Madame Defarge. The Scenes of French Revolution remains in our minds long after we have put aside the novel and the portrayal of Madame Defarge. With her all seeing and vigilant eyes and her sinister knitting is unforgettable.

### 2. Discussion

"A Tale of Two Cities" is essentially the story of a group of private individuals but the story has been told against the background of the French revolution (1789-93). A number of scenes and episodes in the novel relate to the French Revolution and are therefore historical in character. Dickens's real skill in the writing of this novel consist in the manner in which he has closely interwoven the domestic life of private individuals with the terrible events of the great convulsion known as the French revolution.

The private individuals with whom the story largely deals are Dr. Alexandre Manette, Lucie, Charles, Evremonde, Sydney Carton and Mr. Jarvis Lorry. The characters who belong to French Revolution are Monsieur Defarge and his wife, Gaspard and the furious revolution of France the story moves like this: In starting Mr. Lorry and Miss Lucie Manette go to Paris where they find Lucie's father Alexandre Manette released from the Bastille jail, the circumstances of Dr. Manette's imprisonment, Evremonde brothers were responsible for his imprisonment, Dr. recall to his wife and with his daughter Lucie settled in London, Darnay's trial at old Bailly, Carton's promise to Lucie that he will remain faithful to her at anytime in future but Lucie married to Darnay, conditions deteriorating in France, Lucie's vague fears and on the other hand Monsieur Defarge and Madame in the Paris and result the storming of

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the Bastille and the governor of the Bastille murdered by Madame Defarge and the hanging fallen who was the enemy of the people, Mr. Lorry send to Paris by his bank to handle the accounts of French customers and London dwellers, Darnay's departure for Paris and his arrest then we find Dr. Manette and Lucie followed him in Paris and received warmly by the revolutionary crowd, Darnay sentenced to death at his second trial because his father was responsible for Dr. Manette's imprisonment and everyone family was monstrous tyrant but in last Carton's substitution for Darnay surprises the all readers, Madame Defarge killed by a bullet from her own pistol and in last we can see the self – sacrifice of Carton.

So, from the above passage we can imagine that the lives of private individuals are mingled with French revolution scene. Both stories are mingled because the wrongs done by the Evremonde brothers. Dr. Manette had been thrown into a cell of Bastille in a most arbitrary and unjust manner. He had reported to the authorities the grave murder and extreme cruelty of two Evremonde brothers towards the young daughter, and young daughter and young son of the tenant families on their land. The two brothers had their own seized Dr. Manette. Ironically enough, the man who married with Dr. Manette's daughter turns out to be the son and nephew of the very Evremonde brothers who had turned Dr's life into hell.

Charles Darnay's father having died, his uncle becomes Marquis Evremonde and the owner of the family and property in the French countryside. He was also very haughty and callous. His killed a child in the Paris, so he is murdered in his sleep by the father of the child so the Evremonde property now belongs to Charles Darnay. On the other hand the people in France have been growing under the oppressive rule of the government of King Louis XVI and forced by their poverty and hunger to organise themselves against the government to seek freedom. The time for action comes soon and one day in the July of 1789, an armed mob led by the Defarge couple, makes an assault upon the, releases the prisoners, murders the governor of the prison and several other officials and takes possession of the notorious prison which had become a symbol of cruelty by the Aristocracy. By circumstances Darnay pays a visit to Paris but by chance revolutionary arrested him because of his father and uncle's barbarous behaviour. But it was the deep devotion of Carton to Lucie that he substitutes himself in place of Darnay. So, lastly we find the private of the characters in the story merging with the political event which are taking place around them. We feel no discontinuity at all because the connection between private and political events is shown to be very close. It's very tragic that because of revolutionary accesses Darnay has to remain for fifteen months in prison and hundreds of noble men have already been executed in France. It is but natural for Madame Defarge with her vindictive nature to try to have Lucie and her child also sentenced to death, though she fails in this effort Geoffrey Thurley gives his views on the theme of the merger of public and private in "A Tale of Two Cities". Both themes are affected by means of a series interlocking equivocations, ambiguities, and ambivalences.

According to John Forster, "The interviewing of domestic life with a great public event by Dickens is fantastic though there are excellent traits and towhees all through the revolutionary scenes, Dickens speaks of his design to make impressive the dignity of Carton's death and by doing this he

succeeded beyond his imagination. Every incident of the story is beautifully told by the writer. Ernest A Baker praises the terror, suspense and sensational events in the novel. G. Robert Strange highlight the theme of imprisonment that runs darkly in the whole novel.

Charles Dickens fame was not confined to continent as in his home country. He received admiration and applause in America, Russia, Italy and Germany. Dickens possessed creative imagination of a high order and that accounted for the popularity of his novels. The plots of Dickens's novels are incoherent and lack unity. They are marked with discursiveness and diffuseness. His novels are "often like shapeless bags in which all manner of different objects of varying shapes and sizes have been ruthlessly crammed. But in "A Tale of two cities" he develops something like coherent plots. As a narrator of his tales Dickens is admirable David Cecil says, "He may construct the story well, but he tells it admirably". "A Tale of two cities" has proved to be one of his most popular stories. Undoubtedly the story of this novel is convincing and realistic. The novel has a well constructed plot which doesn't suffer from any interruptions or digressions. The author has shown a remarkable capacity for condensing his material, so that the narration of the story is marked by an economy which gives to the plot a remarkable compactness. The novel contains a single plot without any sub-plot. The novel is free from prolixity and from diffuseness which often match the novels to Thackeray. The story of this novel concerns a group of private individuals who are somehow drawn in the whirlpool of a great public and political event "French Revolution". Two dominant themes of the novel are resurrection and renunciation. Resurrection implies death and rebirth. For example: - Dr. Manette, "Recall to life" from his prolonged imprisonment in the Bostille and soon he recovers his sanity also. Thus there is a double resurrection in the case of this man who from the physical point of view had been buried alive in prison cell and from the mental point of view had lost his sanity. Then there is resurrection in the case of Darnay who is saved from impending death as many as three times in the course of the novel. Next example is Carton that does not escape death, is to be imagined as having passed to another world to lead a new life. Darnay's relinquishment of his ancestral property and Carton's sacrifice of his life for the sake of Lucie whom he loved constitute the theme of renunciation in the story.

The real skill of the author in constructing the plot of this novel lies in the manner in which he has interviewing private life in public events. According to John Foster, "the domestic life of a few simple private people in the novel is such a manner knitted and interweaving without break of a terrible of public event our curiosity about what will happen next is always kept on edge. The very beginning of the story mystifies us we are rushing along the road to Dover, in the dead of night, to what distant event we don't know. There are some questions and suspense in the novel for example: - why was Dr. Manette imprisoned? Who is Charles Darnay? Why Dr. Manette does feels so disturbed by something in Darnay's appearance and manvers? Whose are the footsteps that echo in Lucie's ears? What did Defarge find in his search of cell no. 105?

Dickens in his novels generally makes use of three ingredients to maintain: Melodrama, pathos, humour. There is a fantastic shifting of London to Paris and Paris to London. The elements of sentimentality here for example: - Lucie

Manette's Heart – rending union with the father she has never known is simply not prepared for;

“And if, When I shall tell you to my name, and of my father who is living, and of my mother who is dead, you learn that I have to kneel Tomy, honoured father, and implore his pardon for having never for his sake striven all day end lain, awake and wept all night, because the love of my poor mother hide her torture from me, weep for it, weep for it!”

The illustrious analogue here is the re-union of Cardelia and Lear, but to define the differences between the two scenes is merely to become impatient with Dickens.

The climax of this novel is prepared for and built up in a more conscious fashion than in any other story by Dickens. The last three chapters are chronologically adjusted for this effect. In chapter 13, Carton substitutes himself for Darnay and the drugged man is hurried away from the city by Mr. Lorry, Lucie and Dr. Manette. Chapter – 14 describes the death of Madame Defarge during her tussle with Miss Prose, and then goes on to show that she and Jerry escape too. In chapter -15, Carton goes to the Guillotine and that is the end. An important feature of the plot of the novel is the use of parallelism or doubling. Charls Darnay and Carton are doubles. They closely resemble each other in physical appearance and they loved the same Madame. The use of symbolic imagery in the novel is significant. For eg: - The spilling of wine outside Defarge's shop is an incident which prepares us for the subsequent spilling of blood in the streets of revolutionary France. The Bastille jail is symbol of Tyranny. The “Echoing foot – steps” which Lucie hears in her house symbolize the misfortunes and dangers which are in store for her family. Madame Defarge is also a symbol of hatred and evil. Vilkie Collins was not satisfied with the way in which Dickens handled his plot. William H. Marshall admires the parallelism is plot construction. Taylor Stochr thinks the importance of concrete objects and physical settings.

### 3. Conclusions

To conclude, we can say that Charles Dickens has integrated the personal lives of his characters with the wider pattern of history. The lives of both Dr. Manette and Sydney Carton are parables of the Revolution and of social re-generation through suffering and sacrifice. In the broadest sense, at the end of the novel Dickens foresees a resurrected social order in France, sizing from the ashes of the old one. The novel concludes with the guillotining of Sydney Carton. As he is waiting to board the tumbrel, he is approached by a seamstress, also condemned to death, which mistakes him for Darnay but, upon getting close, realises the truth. Awed by his unselfish courage and sacrifice, she asks to stay close to him and he agrees. So, we say that Dickens is the creator of realistic novel and his style of writing is of the 18<sup>th</sup> century picaresque novels. His style of writing is marked by a profuse linguistic creativity.

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