

Resurrection in A Tale of Two Cities

RÉSURRECTION DANS UN CONTE DE DEUX VILLES

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Abstract: *A Tale of Two Cities* is one of Dickens' most important masterpieces and is one of the famous novels taking the French Revolution as its background in British literature. Dickens' works always convey his deep sympathy for the plebeian and pitilessly reveal the social vices. With *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens asserts his belief in the possibility of resurrection and transformations both on a personal level and a society level. This article, in accordance with the plot of the story and the characters' personalities as well as the relation between the characters, analyses the specific embodiment of "resurrection" in three main characters with details. By this, the author points out that resurrection is a powerful theme which is applicable outside of the novel's setting but can be read between the lines.

Key Words: Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Resurrection, Rebirth

Résumé: "Un conte de deux villes" est un des plus importants chefs-d'oeuvre de Dicken, un des contes les plus connus de la littérature anglaise sous le contexte de la Révolution française. Les oeuvres de Dicken montre toujours sa sympathie pour de simples gens, et révèlent sans merci les vices sociaux. Avec "Un conte de deux villes", Charles Dickens affirme sa croyance à la possibilité de la résurrection et de la transformation non seulement au niveau personnel mais aussi au niveau social. Ce texte, en concordance avec l'intrigue de l'histoire, les caractères des personnages, ainsi que la relation entre les personnages, analyse de façon détaillée l'incarnation spécifique de "Résurrection" dans les trois héros principaux. A travers cela, l'auteur affirme que "Résurrection" est un thème puissant qui est applicable en dehors du contexte du conte, et peut être lu entre les lignes.

Mots clés: Charles Dickens, "Un conte de deux villes", Résurrection, renaissance

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *A Tale of Two Cities* and its theme of Resurrection

A Tale of Two Cities has long been one of Charles Dickens' most favored books. It was first published in the pages of Dickens' new periodical *All the Year Round*. *A Tale of Two Cities* taking the French Revolution as its background opened in the year 1775 by contrasting two

cities: Paris, France and London, England. While the revolutions in America and France had happened many years earlier, there was still great social tension in England during these times. Work conditions for the poor were horrid, often resulting in strikes that ended in violent clashes between the police and the workers. Unlike both his earlier and his later novels, which were largely concerned with events within the Victorian society in which he lived, *A Tale of Two Cities* was set during a period some seventy years earlier. It could be seen as a warning to British society of the mid-nineteenth century. Dickens calls attention to the extraordinary violence of the French Revolution, while

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showing that the overthrow of a government by violent means inevitably led collapse.

Throughout this book, many of the characters are involved with the interweaving themes of love, redemption, good versus evil, and resurrection. The theme of resurrection drawn a connection between characters and the society involves certain aspects of all of these themes and brings the story together. In this novel, resurrection is a powerful and predominant theme throughout the plot.

1.2 The literal meaning of the word RESURRECTION

The word RESURRECTION is defined as “rising up from the dead, the resumption of life”. It is translated from the Greek word “Anastasis” in *The New Testament*, which means “rising up” or “standing again”. So far human beings can tell from natural things, once a person dies, that person’s thoughts and identity no longer exist. However, various religions offer the idea that the identity of a person lives on in some other form. Resurrection is an idea that is seen through *The Bible*, which always refers to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to *The Bible*, Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish prophet who claimed to be the Christ prophesied in the Jewish Scriptures, was arrested, was judged a political criminal, and was crucified. The body of Jesus, in accordance with Jewish burial custom, was wrapped in a linen cloth. After the body was placed in a solid rock tomb, an extremely large stone was rolled against the entrance of the tomb. A Roman guard of strictly disciplined fighting men was stationed to guard the tomb. This guard affixed on the tomb to the Roman seal, which was meant to “prevent any attempt at vandalizing the sepulcher”. Anyone trying to move the stone from the tomb’s entrance would have broken the seal and thus incurred the wrath of Roman law. But three days after Jesus’ death and burial, some women who went to his tomb found the body gone. In subsequent weeks, his disciples claimed that God had raised him from the dead and that he appeared to them various times before ascending into heaven.

2. RESURRECTION IN THE NOVEL

However, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the word resurrection’s meaning is extended, which means rebirth. Unlike the process of actual birth, rebirth is associated with rejuvenation. Rebirth is a second or new birth and in the case of *A Tale of Two Cities* it is deserved. It means saving or redeeming in one’s soul, renewed interest in and zest for life, salvation from death, harm, or “nothingness”, etc. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, many characters are “reborn”, meaning that they have had a new chance at life. Dr. Manette, Carton, Darnay are all saved at life or spirit.

2.1 The importance of Lucie for the possibility of resurrection

As far as resurrection is concerned, the central woman, Lucie is responsible for the resurrection of two main characters, Dr. Manette and Carton’s lives. Lucie is a compassionate and benevolent character that aids in the resurrection of Dr. Manette and Carton. She is the ideal Victorian lady, perfect in every way. Lucie is gorgeous, with long beautiful golden hair. She is very positive and unselfish, always willing to help others. She does not look down upon anyone and sees the best in which some may see the worst. These qualities in Lucie are what make possible the resurrections of Dr. Manette and Carton’s lives.

During a time of lost hope, death and war, the “golden thread”, Lucie plays the role of a heroine doing everything she can to make sure the important people in her life are loved. She provides not only warmth towards her father, Dr. Manette, but also towards the man that yearns for her love, Carton. She gives them inspiration and loves to help them to recover from their seemingly hopeless states. Despite all the negativities and difficulties that surround Lucie and her loved ones, she does not fail to lead her father and Carton to rebirth. In turn, Carton gives up his own life in order to save her lover, Darnay. The lives of Dr. Manette, Darnay and Carton are all resurrected at times when hope is lost.

2.2 The resurrection of Dr. Manette

Dr. Manette is the first person to experience resurrection in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The phrase “recalled to life” sounds the first note in the theme of resurrection with Dr. Manette’s release from the Bastille after 18 years of solitary confinement, and sets Dickens’ plot in motion.

Dr. Manette was taken from his pregnant wife and then imprisoned in the Bastille for eighteen very long years, driving him to insanity. Over the years, Dr. Manette’s condition deteriorated until he forgot his real name and mindlessly cobbled shoes to pass the time. He was put in jail because he knew information that the Marquis St. Evremonde did not want to get out. In Book the First, Dr. Manette is released by the French government and then brought by the Defarges to their wine shop, where Dr. Manette is then picked up by his daughter Lucie and family friend, Mr. Lorry. Dr. Manette is suddenly recalled to life.

However, Dr. Manette’s rebirth has just begun and does not become complete until he is reunited with his daughter. At the time when Lucie and family friend bring Dr. Manette back to his home, he is insane. He refers to himself as “One Hundred and Five, North Tower”. He knows nothing other than his prison life and frequently reverts to busily making shoes, a hobby he picked up while jailed. He is completely incapable of functioning in the outside world; having entirely

forgotten what life outside of prison is like. Lucie loves him unconditionally and help him regain his sanity.

Although the rebirth of Dr. Manette does not take place immediately, Lucie shows her love for her father from the beginning of his arrival. In chapter 6 of Book the First while Lucie is greeting her father for the first time in 18 years, she tells him that the agony is over and she has come there to take him from it. This is where the rebirth starts because this is where Dickens lets the reader know that Lucie is going to do all she can for her father and give him only love. Dr. Manette recovers gradually with the help of family and friends. It is a long process, but Lucie is dedicated to her father and assists in recovering from his crazed state. After Dr. Manette's return to England, it is obvious that the doctor is slowly returning to sanity when Dr. Manette is able to make full conversation at Darnay's trial. As time passes, Dr. Manette becomes more mentally stable and his regressions to shoemaking become less often.

In chapter 7 of Book the Third, the narrator updates the reader on Dr. Manette that there is no garret, no shoemaking, no One Hundred and Five, North Tower, now! He had accomplished the task he had set himself. By the end of the book, Dr. Manette's return to sanity has been completed; he is once again a fully functional person. Lucie's love and determination nurse Dr. Manette back to normality. While Lucie continues to care for her father, another man, Carton, makes it known that he as well needs Lucie to cure him.

2.3 The resurrection of Sydney Carton

Carton's life is made meaningful by the hope that he receives from Lucie. At the beginning of the story, Carton's life has no significance. He is a drunkard with a seemingly worthless life. Carton is working as a clerk for the lawyer C. J. Stryver (Darnay's attorney), and though Carton is the real brains behind the ideas, the attorney receives all the credit. Carton has had an unfavorable life and has no inspiration, nothing to live for. Carton really wants for his life to have served some purpose, for him to have made a difference.

Just as she did with her father, Lucie will try and do all she can to help her dear friend Carton. In chapter 13 Carton stops at the Manette's house, he has a conversation with Lucie in which Carton professes his love to Lucie and tells her how he feel about himself. Carton describes himself as a "self-flung away, wasted, drunken, poor creature of misuse" and in chapter 4 of Book the First when Darnay comments to Carton that he thinks Carton has been drinking. To this, Carton responds "Think? You know I have been drinking. I am a disappointed drudge, sir. I care for no man on earth and no man on earth cares for me"(Charles Dickens, 1994). He also states that there is no hope for bettering his life, however, Lucie explains that she believes in him. At the peak of this conversation, Lucie entreats Carton to believe again and again most fervently and

tells him he is capable of bettering things. Lucie does in fact use her love and sympathy to lead Carton to rebirth. With Lucie's unflinching belief in him, as Carton leaves her he tells her, "For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything." (Charles Dickens, 1994). Carton feels much better about himself knowing that Lucie, the woman he loves, believes in him. He strives to be a better person and tries to change his life around. He stops getting drunk and begins to lead a respectable life. Because Lucie sees potential for him, Carton is inspired to better his life.

Carton is the character that is most involved with the theme of resurrection in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Carton is a man of very little self-esteem, but a tremendous amount of courage and devotion. Carton has led a miserable life and he has always looked up to Darnay. In Carton, love is deeply involved with the theme of resurrection. He is in love with Lucie, even after she marries Darnay. His love for Lucie is similar to the knights during the age of Chivalry. He vows to give his life for her or anyone she loves. Carton soon realizes that he may have to make good on the promise he made to Lucie. Darnay is taken prisoner for a second time in France and Carton knows that the French rebels will stop at nothing to kill this time. Carton realizes that he may be able to use his influence over Barsad to switch places with Darnay. Carton looks remarkably similar to Darnay and he knows that this given by fate may be his only chance to save Darnay. As Carton organizes the switch, the inner purpose of his actions can be seen. Carton has never succeeded in his life like he wanted. His vow to Lucie is not the only thing that drives him to endanger his own life; he also sees it as a way to redemption. The switch is done successfully and Carton then realizes fully what he has done. He does not back away from his inevitable death, but embraces it. Carton is content in knowing that his action will allow Lucie to live happily. In his final moments before death Carton is portrayed as a sort of Messiah. He is giving up his own life so that others with purpose may enjoy theirs. While Carton awaits his death he thinks that it's a far, far better thing that he does than he had ever done; it's a far, far better rest that he goes to than he has ever known. Through these words he realizes that by sacrificing his life for Darnay, he will be doing the best thing that he has ever done and can do. After Carton is beheaded, Darnay and his family escape to England. The reader gets a brief glimpse of their life after they escape and how Carton is literally resurrected. The theme of resurrection appears earlier on with Carton's prophecy, where he envisions a son to be born to Lucie and Darnay, a son who will bear Carton's name. Thus he will symbolically be reborn through Lucie and Darnay's child. Also, Carton will never truly die because in his death, he will have resurrected his own life, giving it purpose and meaning. Carton is finally satisfied with himself. He is no longer a drunken fool, but a hero that now can live or die with himself.

2.4 The resurrection of Charles Darnay

Another instance in which someone is “reborn” involves Darnay. Carton twice saves him, first from prison and then from death. Darnay is a wealthy aristocrat, but he chooses to live a more modest life. He marries Lucie. In the beginning of the book Darnay is put on trial for treason in England. He has just been traveling back and forth between France and England and is thought to be a spy. The people in the crowd are sure that he will be found guilty, the punishment for this crime being death. Things do not look hopeful for Darnay, but then the court notices a remarkable resemblance of Darnay to Carton. Darnay is luckily set free because of this similarity. Had Carton not been present, Darnay would have almost surely been found guilty. Darnay is later imprisoned and sentenced to death in France because of something his uncle and father did many years before. All hope is lost after attempt to set Darnay free ends up in failure. The day of execution, Carton has a plan of his own that is completely unexpected. He goes to the prison and trades places with Darnay. Darnay safely leaves the prison while Carton stays in his place, awaiting his own death. Carton does this because of his promise to Lucie earlier, that he would do anything for her or for anyone dear to her. Carton bravely sacrifices his own life for Darnay, and Darnay is given an extra chance at life, and therefore he is “reborn”.

3. CONCLUSION

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens uses a variety of themes, including revenge, revolution, fate, and imprisonment. Though these are very important themes, and are integral elements of this novel, resurrection serves as the main theme aside from the obvious one, which is revolution. The theme of resurrection is applicable outside of this novel’s setting and the theme

of sacrifice is closely tied into it. This theme allows the reader to see the characters’ traits being used by them and to understand how much a character would do for another. When Carton represents Darnay on trial and saves his life the reader sees how smart Carton is. In the last instance of “recalled to life” the reader sees how much Carton really feels for Lucie when he saves Lucie’s husband’s life in return for his own. The power of love and determination is clearly exemplified by the resurrection of Dr. Manette, Carton, and Darnay. Dickens uses the power of love to oppose war that is surrounding all of France and England. Resurrection is a very clever theme for Dickens to use because if the characters in this novel could not be recalled to life, they would simply die off.

With *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens asserts his belief in the possibility of resurrection and transformations both on a personal level and a society level. The narrative suggests that Carton’s death secures a new, peaceful life for Lucie, Darnay, and Carton himself. By delivering himself to the guillotine, Carton ascends to the plane of heroism, becoming a Christ-like figure whose death serves to save the lives of theirs. His own life thus gains meaning and value. Moreover, the final pages of the novel suggest that, like Christ, Carton will be resurrected—Carton is reborn in the hearts of those he has died to save. Similarly, the book implies that the death of the old regime in France prepares the way for beautiful and peaceful Paris that Carton supposedly envisions from the guillotine. *A Tale of Two Cities* can be seen as a warning to British society of the mid-nineteenth century. Dickens calls attention to the extraordinary violence of the French Revolution, while shows that the overthrow of a government by violent means inevitably leads collapse. Although the novel dedicated much time to describing the atrocities committed both by the aristocracy and the outraged peasants, it ultimately expresses the belief that this violence will be give way to a new and better society.

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