



LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

A Reading of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* in Psychoanalytical and Marxist Perspective

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Abstract

Today, novel is the dominant literary form, and a serious novelist is automatically regarded as being a serious artist. Throughout the eighteenth century, novel was regarded by critics and reviewers as an underdeveloped genre, not really worthy of being considered as art at all. The rise of the novel, in both popularity and esteem, during the nineteenth century was largely owing to the success of two novelists: Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, whose enormous success penetrated to all levels of society, raised him from obscure to a high stature among the eminent Victorians. The present paper analyses, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens in the light of Marxism and Psychoanalysis.

Keywords

Charles Dickens; *A Tale of Two Cities*; Repression; Transference; Regression; Displacement; Sublimation; Screen Memory; Collective Unconscious; Self; Shadow; Anima; Animus; Base; Superstructure; False Consciousness;

Capitalism; Socialism.



Today, novel is the dominant literary form, and a serious novelist is automatically regarded as being a serious artist. Throughout the eighteenth century, novel was regarded by critics and reviewers as an underdeveloped genre, not really worthy of being considered as art at all. The rise of the novel, in both popularity and esteem, during the nineteenth century was largely owing to the success of two novelists: Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, whose enormous success penetrated to all levels of society, raised him from obscure to a high stature among the eminent Victorians.

Dickens childhood had been marred by poverty and social uncertainty. Dickens never hesitated to use his novels as vehicles for social ideas, usually exhibiting the suffering endured by the innocent as a result of authoritarian heartlessness. He was not alone in using the novel as an instrument of propaganda, but the practice did not become really widespread until the 1840s. Although he was not a systematic political thinker, Dickens was on the whole temperamentally opposed to the established authority, and strongly sympathetic to the poor.

Twentieth century is marked by a great change in the perception of writers in both Western and Eastern cultures. The change is mainly due to the result of the First World War. The traditional, harmonic and peaceful writing swayed from its path and took new dimensions like realistic plays, naturalistic plays, psychological plays and expressionistic plays. Psychoanalytic plays gained popularity in the 20th century which dealt with the psyche of human beings, their inner conflicts, sorrows, happiness, the unknown conflict between the conscious and unconscious mind. The pioneers in the field of psychoanalysis are Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, Carl Gustav Jung, Karen Horney, and Joseph Breuer.

Psychoanalysis can be defined as the investigation of the unconscious mind. Though the application of psychoanalytical principles to literature is new

it was followed by Schlegel and Nietzsche before Freud. Freud gave the tripartite model of the mind- the id, the ego and the super-ego. He dealt with the problems laid deep in the unconscious mind. According to him, people are motivated by desires, fears and conflicts of which they are unaware. These forces are stored in the memory and are repressed. This is unconscious mind. In the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, the mob of France turned against the aristocratic and the Monarch due to the repression present in them. Transference is another element of psychoanalysis, in which, the emotions are redirected to someone else. In this novel this kind of emotion can be viewed when the servant of Charles Darney was arrested only because he was the servant of the Marquis Evremonde family that the transference occurred in the mind of the mob.

The people of France live in the state called regression which is reliving the past and each time they guillotine the French aristocrat they relive the torture and abuses they faced and they behaved very cruelly that they are not satisfied with the punishment. The readers can also see regression in Dr. Manette when he comes to know the true identity of Darney. He thinks about the rape of the woman by two Marquis brothers (the father and uncle of Darney) and the sight of her dying brother. Though Dr. Manette is safe and alive he recognize himself as “one hundred and five, North Tower” this is again a sign of regression. Even after his recovery and resumed his practice in England, as a doctor, keen of intellect and upright in bearing, there is still a noticeable, mournful note in his voice and occasional fits of abstraction. Sometimes he walks up and down his bedroom at night, as if still in his cell. The struggle against prison- consciousness is a constant one for him, reflected even in the determined lines on his face when asleep. Displacement is another element and in the final chapter Sidney Carton was seen disguised as Darney for the trial and faces it with courage because of the love for Lucie in which the love for Lucie was displaced with the love for death.

Sublimation is the repressed material which is promoted into something grander or is disguised as something noble. The whole lot of revolution was the

effect of the sublimation present in the minds of the roaring mob thinking that the revolution and the punishment are the noble deeds. The screen memory or the Freudian slip is the repressed material in the unconscious which finds outlet through everyday phenomena as slips of the tongue, slips of the pen or unintended actions. Madame Defarge is by herself a Freudian slip. The actions done by her, the sharp looks of her by observing people can represent this Freudian slip. Even the knitting is a Freudian slip, representing the cold-blooded vengefulness of the revolutionaries. The readers of the novel can also notice Sidney Carton's dialogues throughout the novel as Freudian slip- always wallowing in misery even in his actions and thoughts. There is again the element of ambivalence present in the novel. The two female characters present this notion to the readers. They are, Lucie, the embodiment of love and care and Madam Defarge, the epitome of hatred and blood-thirst.

According to Jung's perception the angry mob of France can also be listed as those with Collective unconscious. They carry the same emotions and feelings and share them as one. They all acted as if they all belong to the same Self, the archetype used by Jung. The more and more introverts, they become, the high and high extroverts. The Marquis Evremonde is an archetype of an evil and corrupt social order. Every character in the novel has a shadow behind them. This shadow according to Jung is the animal nature within them. Madam Defarge as knitting appears harmless but there is a shadow in her. The whole mob of peasants appears harmless by their look but they are determined to be the hardest ones in the revolution. The readers can also observe the masculinity in Madam Defarge in which she is more determined than Monsieur Defarge in the revolution, which in Jungian term is called as animus. Whereas, Monsieur Defarge though determined as Madam Defarge, is not so furious about leading the revolution. This is the feminine aspect which is called by Jung as anima.

Marxism is a method of understanding events and happenings in life, studying in the process the complex social phenomena that the readers encounter in history. Karl Marx, a German philosopher, and Friedrich Engels, a

German sociologists were the joint founders of this school of thought. The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society. Marx proposed a model of history in which economic and political conditions determine social conditions. It was also developed by the eighteenth-century German philosopher Hegel. Marxism was also built upon the socialist thinking which was produced in France at the time of the French revolution. The simplest Marxist model of society sees it as constituted by a base (the material means of production, distribution, and exchange) and a superstructure, which is the 'cultural' world of ideas, art, religion, law, and so on.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, the readers can notice the class distinction as the reason for the revolution. The brutalities caused by the aristocrats of France against the working class, heavy taxes levied upon the poor in spite of their low wages, the poor working conditions in the industries and bad sanitation of the welfare houses are the various reasons for the outburst of the French revolution. The summoning of the parliament was not made for nearly 176 years. The nobility of France- forming a much larger percentage of the population than in England- cruelly oppressed the peasants. The harsh laws associated with feudalism still remained, and the peasantry in France lived a life of misery, dominated by their lords. The privileged Clergy and nobility lived in luxury without paying a penny towards the revenue of their Country.

The courts of France offered no protection to the middle and lower classes. A man could be arrested and condemned to a cruel imprisonment on a *lettre de cachet*- which was no more than a mere order from a noble or from one of the King's ministers that a man can be condemned to gaol for a long term. This can be seen in the arrest of Dr. Manette. Again the noble were given all the good positions in the country in spite of the educated middle class people. Meanwhile, France was sailing in abject debt resulting from its luxurious life style of the King and the nobles. It was because of this that the government started collecting tax from the middle class and the lower class people.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* the lot group of the aristocratic people can be called in the Marxian term as the one with false consciousness. The major character Madame Defarge was seen knitting always throughout the novel and was watchful on all types of customers she receives. In the wine shop run by the Defarges, they had a group of people who use the word 'Jacques' which was a secret code used by the revolutionaries. In the novel the readers can notice the mob's anger against Darney was because he belonged to the Marquis family. The main reason for her vengeance against the Marquis family is that she was sexually harassed by the Marquis brothers as a small girl and her concern for Dr. Manette is because he is the one who gave her the treatment and saved her life.

The theories of Marx and Engels are dwell within the realm of economics, suggesting that history has been shaped through the struggle of the working class to achieve equality and fairness. The history of the world has been one of dynamic change from the principles of aristocracy and feudalism to capitalism and socialism. Capitalism, they observed, is a system in which the majority of people work to produce goods and services but do not share equally the benefits of their labor with the ruling class who own the means of production. Capitalism reproduces itself and keeps the exploited working class from rising up and overthrowing a system designed to exploit and alienate them not through the brutality of totalitarianism but rather by institutional naturalization of the process via religion, the legal system, the educational system, and the government. What Marx and Engels could not have foreseen was the extraordinary influence of the media in perpetuating the idea that capitalism is the way things are supposed to be. The naturalization and mass acceptance of untruths is a necessary component in transforming ideology into a state-sponsored system; unless, of course, one can make people do what one want through sheer force.

The old aristocratic rules and people are really about the outdated feudal system coming into conflict with the new economic system that promises more

equality for the disenfranchised working class. The angry French mob represents the new economic system. Thus the readers can understand the novel better through Marxism and Psychoanalysis.

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MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Eileen Brisha, M. L. "A Reading of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* in Psychoanalytical and Marxist Perspective." *Literary Quest* 1.4 (2014): 96-102. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.