

## A Tale of Two Cities - Narrative Techniques

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Charles Dickens, born in 1812 in Hampshire, England, and who passed away in 1870, was a renowned English novelist. His notable works include A Christmas Carol, David Copperfield, Bleak House, A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend. His novels are deeply rooted in the context of Victorian England, highlighting its stark contrasts between morality and hypocrisy, grandeur and squalor and wealth and poverty. His writing resonates with both ordinary readers and the best, bridging the gap between the common and the sophisticated. The technological advances of his time, combined with the compelling nature of his work, allowed his reputation to spread rapidly around the globe.

### Plot:

The opening lines of the novel gives us the dual thought: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way."

'A Tale of Two Cities' by Charles Dickens, published in 1859, is set during the French Revolution and takes place in London and Paris. The novel explores themes of love, sacrifice, and the impact of social injustice amidst historical chaos. The story begins with Mr. Jarvis Lorry informing Lucie Manette that her father, Dr. Manette, who had been imprisoned in the Bastille for 18 years, has been released and is now living with the Defarges in Paris. Lucie travels to Paris, reunites with her father, and they return to London together. Five years later, Charles Darnay, a French aristocrat who has rejected his title, faces charges of espionage in London but is acquitted thanks to the intervention of Sydney Carton, a dissolute lawyer who bears a striking resemblance to Darnay. In spite of their differences, Carton reveals his deep love for Lucie Manette and promises to do anything for her.

Darnay's hidden identity as a member of the Evrémonde family, which has a history of oppressing the French peasantry, leads to his arrest when he returns to Paris to help a

servant. In Paris, the revolutionary Madame Defarge, who seeks vengeance against the Evrémondes, accuses Darnay of crimes against the revolution. Doctor Manette tries to save Darnay using his influence, but Madame Defarge uses a letter written by Dr. Manette during his imprisonment to condemn Darnay. As a result, Darnay is sentenced to death. Sydney Carton, motivated by his love for Lucie, devises a plan to save Darnay. He uses his connections to gain access to Darnay's cell, drugs him, and switches places with him. Darnay is smuggled out of prison, while Carton faces execution in his place. Carton's self-sacrifice is portrayed as a noble act of redemption.

In the end, Darnay and the Manettes return safely to London, while Carton meets his end at the guillotine, fulfilling his promise and finding his own form of salvation.

### Characters:

**1. Charles Darnay:** A French aristocrat, who rejects his title and moves to England. He marries Lucie Manette and is characterized by his honesty and idealism. In spite of his noble heritage, he strives to live a life of moral and social responsibility. His return to France during the Revolution leads to his arrest and ultimate death sentence.

**2. Sydney Carton:** A dissolute English lawyer who initially appears to be aimless and self-destructive. Instead of his outward behaviour, he is deeply intelligent and ultimately reveals a capacity for profound love and sacrifice. His love for Lucie Manette motivates him to make the ultimate sacrifice by exchanging places with Darnay, thereby saving Darnay's life.

**3. Lucie Manette:** The daughter of Dr. Manette, Lucie is depicted as compassionate, virtuous, and deeply devoted to her family. She is the emotional centre of the novel, bringing stability and love to those around her. Her relationship with Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton drives much of the story's emotional depth.

**4. Dr. Alexandre Manette:** Lucie's father, who was imprisoned in the Bastille for eighteen years. His imprisonment causes him to lose his sanity, but his reunion with Lucie helps him recover. He is a dedicated and skilled physician, and his past plays a significant role in the novel's plot, especially concerning his connection to the Evrémonde family.

**5. Madame Defarge:** A key revolutionary figure, Madame Defarge is vengeful and harsh in her desire for justice against the aristocracy. She is the representative of the revolutionary zeal and maintaining a list of people who are to be executed. Her personal vendetta against the Evrémonde family fuels much of the novel's conflict.

**6. Monsieur Defarge:** Madame Defarge's husband, who runs a wine shop in Paris and is involved in revolutionary activities. He is less extreme than his wife but supports the revolutionary cause and provides support to the Manette family.

**7. Mr. Jarvis Lorry:** A banker and loyal friend of the Manette family. He is active in helping Lucie reunite with her father and later plays a supportive role in the story. His character is portrayed as practical, loyal, and compassionate.

**8. Miss Pross:** Lucie Manette's devoted servant and protector. She is fiercely loyal to Lucie and plays a critical role in protecting the Manette family from Madame Defarge's wrath.

**9. Charles Darnay's Uncle, Monseigneur:** A wealthy French aristocrat whose cruelty and disregard for the suffering of the common people contribute to the revolutionary anger. His murder represents the violent reaction against the aristocracy.

**10. John Barsad (Solomon Pross):** A British spy and the dissolute brother of Miss Pross. He plays a key role in the plot, especially in Carton's plan to save Darnay.

## Themes :

**1. Resurrection and Redemption:** The theme of resurrection moves throughout the novel, symbolized by the character of Dr. Manette, who is released from eighteen years of unlawful imprisonment and gradually recovers his sanity. Sydney Carton's sacrifice is the ultimate act of redemption, as he gives his life to save Charles Darnay, demonstrating his personal resurrection and moral rebirth.

**2. Sacrifice:** Sacrifice is the key theme, symbolized by Sydney Carton's selfless act of exchanging places with Darnay to save him from the guillotine. Carton's ultimate sacrifice reflects the novel's broader exploration of the personal cost of love and honor.

**3. Social injustice and Class struggle:** The novel critically examines the stark inequalities between the wealthy aristocracy and the impoverished masses in France. The French Revolution serves as a backdrop to the story, illustrating the consequences of deep social and economic disparities and the desire for justice and equality.

**4. Violence and Repression:** Dickens portrays the violence and chaos of the French Revolution, highlighting the brutal methods employed by revolutionaries and the repressive actions of the ruling classes. The novel depicts how both sides of the conflict are consumed by violence and revenge.

**5. Fate and Free will:** The concept of fate versus free will is explored through the characters' choices and their consequences. The novel often suggests that individuals' destinies are shaped by both their actions and the larger forces of history.

**6. The Double and the Duality of Human Nature:** The idea of duality is reflected in the novel's structure and characters. The contrasting settings of London and Paris represent different aspects of society. Characters like Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton also represent

## **1. Double Narrative Structure:**

**Concept:** The novel alternates between two major settings—London and Paris—throughout its narrative.

**Purpose:** This duality emphasizes the stark contrasts between the two cities, reflecting the themes of social inequality and political disturbance. London represents stability and order, while Paris symbolizes revolutionary chaos and social turmoil.

**Impact:** By contrasting these two cities, Dickens highlights the changing experiences of different social classes and the impact of the French Revolution on both societies. This structure helps to highlight the universal nature of the themes explored in the novel.

## **2. Previous Realism:**

**Concept:** Dickens weaves real historical events and figures from the French Revolution into the fabric of the novel's plot.

**Purpose:** By incorporating actual historical details, Dickens provides a sense of authenticity and credibility. The novel reflects the real social and political tensions of the time, creating a vivid backdrop for the fictional narrative.

**Impact:** This combination of historical fact with fiction allows readers to engage more deeply with the novel's themes and provides a richer understanding of the period. It also helps to contextualize the characters' experiences within a broader historical framework.

## **3. Prophecy:**

**Concept:** Dickens uses prediction to hint at future events and build suspense throughout the novel.

**Purpose:** Prediction creates a sense of anticipation and tension, preparing readers for significant plot developments. It also emphasizes the inevitability of certain outcomes, particularly in relation to the themes of fate and destiny.

**Impact:** For example, the opening line of the novel sets up the contrasts that will be explored, while later instances of prediction, such as the frequent references to the guillotine, build suspense around the characters' fates.

## **4. Imagery**

**Concept:** Dickens employs various symbols to convey deeper meanings and themes.

**Purpose:** Symbolism enriches the narrative by adding layers of meaning and highlighting key themes. For example, the broken wine tub in the opening scene symbolizes the dripping



of blood and the coming revolution, while the guillotine represents the destructive power of revolutionary zeal.

**Impact:** Symbols such as the wine cask and the guillotine enhance the thematic resonance of the novel, linking personal and political violence and underscoring the inevitability of the revolution's impact.

## 5. Mirror image :

**Concept:** Dickens explores duality through characters who mirror or contrast with each other.

**Purpose:** The most notable example is the resemblance between Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton. Their physical similarity contrasts with their very different personalities and life choices. Darnay is honourable but naïve, while Carton is dissolute but capable of profound sacrifice.

**Impact:** This technique highlights themes of redemption and the potential for transformation. Carton's ultimate sacrifice for Lucie and her family serves as a powerful demonstration of personal redemption and the idea that true nobility can emerge from the most unlikely places.

## 6. Flashback:

**Concept:** Dickens uses stream-of-consciousness and flashbacks to reveal characters' inner lives and past experiences.

**Purpose:** This technique allows readers to understand characters' psychological states and the impact of their pasts on their present actions. For example, Dr. Manette's fragmented memories of his imprisonment are revealed through his erratic behaviour and distressing flashbacks.

**Impact:** By providing insights into characters' thoughts and memories, Dickens deepens the readers' empathy and understanding of their motivations. It also adds emotional depth to the narrative, particularly in relation to Dr. Manette's trauma and recovery.

## 7. Narration Omniscient:

**Concept:** The novel is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view.

**Purpose:** This narrative style allows Dickens to provide a comprehensive view of the characters' thoughts, feelings, and motivations, as well as broader societal issues.

**Impact:** The omniscient perspective helps to create a sense of distance and objectivity, while also allowing readers to engage with multiple viewpoints. This technique enhances the novel's thematic study and provides a more rounded understanding of the characters and their circumstances.

## 8. Conversation:

**Concept:** Dickens uses dialogue and monologues to develop characters and advance the plot.

**Purpose:** Through conversations and soliloquies, Dickens reveals character traits, motivations, and relationships. Sydney Carton's final monologue is a particularly powerful

example, summarizing his personal transformation and the novel's themes of sacrifice and redemption.

**Impact:** Dialogue and monologues provide insight into characters' internal struggles and emotional states, enriching the narrative and contributing to character development. Carton's final speech, in particular, leaves a lasting impression on the reader, highlighting his ultimate act of selflessness.

## 9. Mockery:

**Concept:** Dickens employs irony and satire to critique social and political conditions.

**Purpose:** Irony and satire expose the contradictions and absurdities of the social and political systems of the time. For instance, Dickens uses irony to highlight the hypocrisy of the ruling classes and the often excessive zeal of the revolutionaries.

**Impact:** This technique adds a layer of critique to the narrative, prompting readers to reflect on the broader implications of the characters' actions and the social structures depicted in the novel. It also provides a sharper edge to Dickens's social commentary, making the novel both a dramatic and critical examination of its historical context.

## Conclusion:

The novel concludes with a reflection on the enduring power of sacrifice and the hope of renewal. Through Carton's ultimate act of selflessness, Dickens illustrates the possibility of personal redemption and the impact of compassion. The story of "A Tale of Two Cities" ends on a note of optimism, despite the turmoil and suffering depicted throughout the narrative.

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