

Name

Instructor

Course

Date

A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens

Did Dickens tell something different than a historian about the French revolution since he was a novelist and did leave something out because of his job as a novelist?

During the eighteen-fifties, Charles Dickens emphasized that in England, social problems, particularly those associated with the conditions the poor were going through, might have provoked a huge reaction on a French Revolution scale. For example, considering a letter that was composed in 1855, Dickens referred to the time unrest in the following way: "I trust the discontent to be much worse smoldering, rather openly blazing, that it is just like a France General mind before the first Revolution breaking out and is at a danger of being turned into a conflagration devil as never has happened since then."

In regards to the start of the *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens showed his concern through an expression. Notably, the novel starts in 1775, having a comparison between pre-revolutionary France and England. While showing parallels amongst the two nations, Dickens further alluded to his present time: "the time was far just like the current period, that its noisiest authorities emphasized on its to be received, for evil or good, using the superlative comparison degree only" (Dickens, 23). Going through the entire chapter, it is evident that Dickens termed the situation to be "evil" since it portrayed both nations as rife with violence, injustice, and poverty caused by the ruling elite irresponsibility. Furthermore, as the novel unfolds, Dickens writes about how



England turns out to be a haven for the people who were escaping the violence committed by the French Revolution. In this essay, I will argue to show how Dickens told something different than a historian about the French revolution since he was a novelist and left something out because of his job as a novelist.

Remarkably, even though *A Tale of Two Cities* can be termed as a greatly successful example of a historical fiction genre even today and was extensively popular with modern readers, it was not specifically acknowledged by the critics of Charles Dickens on its publication. For example, a review of Sir James F. Stephen's was a notable negative critical response of *A Tale of Two Cities*, published in 1859. He stated, "It would be perhaps difficult to picture a clumsier or a disjointed framework for the tawdry wares display that form Charles Dickens' stock-in-trade. The broken-back form in which the story takes from 1775 to 1792 and then back again to 1760 or even thereabouts, making an excellent example of a full disregard of the literary composition rules that have marked the entire career of Mr. Dickens as an author. No part of his popularity is as a result of intellectual excellence because his main popularity sources are his working power on the feelings through the coarsest stimulants as well as his setting power of common occurrences in an unexpected and a grotesque light" (Hemphill et al., 34).

It is quite evident, considering the quote above, that James did not term Dickens to be qualified to handle historical contents in an unbiased and rational fashion. Instead, Stephen accused Dickens of lacking the intellectual as a novel writer in examining historical subjects asserting that "with more practice and a better determination deal, it would be easy for Dickens to harrow the feelings of people as to start the fire. The entire art was about considering a melancholy subject, and trying to rub the nose of the readers in it" (Hemphill et al., 56). Thus,



he does not consider *A Tale of Two Cities* as a work with intellectual merit for Stephen. Rather, he made ridicules of the work to engage readers' emotions instead of appealing to their reasoning sense. For Stephen, an ordinary novelist having little writing talent could have composed *A Tale of Two Cities* in a better way. Considering the opinion of Stephen, who holds to the idea that there a strict conventions set involved in historical fiction composition, these set conventions are what gives the difference between a historical novelist from other hacks.

Regardless of Stephen's opinion of Dickens not being qualified to compose historical text, Henry James made critics of Dickens' work have lacked the philosophical vision breadth important in handling historical subjects. He stated that "Mr. Dickens is an admirable and honest artist, he is a great humorist and an observer but has nothing to do with a philosopher" (Henry and Martin, 54). Although James appreciated the talent of Dickens for being a careful observer and praised him for effectively presenting the context of the events in the novel, he claimed that Dickens did not mention historical forces' general grasp at the French Revolution in his book. Additionally, Aldous Huxley, another critic, and a novelist pointed out the deficiencies of Dickens in the technique of writing *A Tale of Two Cities*. In his article where he attacked the rampant sentiment of Dickens in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Aldous articulated the perspective of the twentieth century that Stephen had earlier remarked in his review of *A Tale of Two Cities*, stating that Dickens played with the reader's emotion and thus violated the sincerity principle.

Thus, Huxley went a step further in contrast to what Stephen said regarding Dickens' style being both artificial and insincere. For Huxley, Dickens' novel controlling voice tends to be extremely emotional. However, Dickens received much criticism due to the lack of literary quality in his book and perhaps due to lack of formal education, specifically, his failure to have a



background in university education. Through a letter to his friend Kunzel, Dickens discussed his somehow light background in the education of which he supplemented by reading broadly.

Importantly, even though Dickens did not get what contemporary readers would term as regular education, he widens his historical writing context through extensive reading, specifically in the British Library. In essence, Dickens was a popular novelist and a great leader of his period like Sir Walter Scott, who in the time of Dickens was regarded as the British novel initiator. Notably, Dickens read the novel by Scott such as the "Kenilworth" with high delight than ever in his lifetime, as well as the dairy Scott wrote and made a record of his impressions in his personal diary so as to better understand the style and technique of the immense Romantic novelist. In his Saturday diary in 1838, Dickens wrote that in reference to the Scott's Diary, which I read in the morning, there exist thoughts that are mine by night and by day. Thus, it was evident that Dickens had lots of devotion to reading the work of Scott and was reasonably aware of the importance of Scott in developing British fiction and acquired more influence from him.

For that reason, it would not be wrong to state that the interest of Dickens in knowledge and history of historical context was insufficient for the historical task of writing novels. Impacted by the works of Scott, Dickens used various Scottian ideologies in composing his historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Like Scott, before writing his piece, Dickens conducted a thorough, accurate historical subject research where he was interested. After getting enough historical background on his subject, Dickens gave the proper place and date of the different historical events explained but further made the previous vivid through accurate political and social commentaries in the same manner as Scott.



Succinctly, however, even though not all the critics appreciated Dickens' work in his lifetime, some other novelist did. They admired the honesty and humorist talent he had as well as a great leader of his time. Although he lacked a deep mastery of writing context with historical background, perhaps due to lack of a deeply educational experience, before starting his work on writing the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, he broadly read and researched more historical events. Furthermore, he broadly read the work of popular historians of the time, expanding on his knowledge in historical contexts. Generally, this gave some basic information in composing the historical contexts in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Works Cited

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. London: James Nisbet, 1902. Print.

Hemphill, James F., Robert D. Hare, and Stephen Wong. "Psychopathy and recidivism: A review." *Legal and Criminological Psychology* 3.1 (2014): 139-170.

Henry, James A., Kyle C. Dennis, and Martin A. Schechter. "General review of tinnitus: prevalence, mechanisms, effects, and management." *Journal of speech, language, and hearing research* 48.5 (2015): 1204-1235.

EssayFreelanceWriters.Com

Place your order

to get similar papers from our writers

