

# The Influence of Compassion in Charles Dickens' Selected Novels

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**Abstract**— The novel shall include different personalities to have a compelling story knot, which shall tighten the reader to read the story and even get touched with it. In Charles Dickens' novels particularly, which usually resembles agony, poverty, and suffering, a compassion side of the society of the novel shall be presented in contrast to suffering. This paper is presenting three common novels by Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*. It deals with the comparison between the personalities which are showing compassion in the novels and the sequential order of the events which are driven by psychology compassion in these three novels. The novel *A Tale of Two Cities* actions are going in France, during the French revolution, while *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist* are starting in England. *David Copperfield* was said to be the autobiography of the novelist Dickens himself, and the compassion is shown in multiple personalities, specifically his aunt, his first love Dora, and her second love Agnes. Whereas compassion, in *Oliver Twist*, offered by the personalities is starting from the doctor in the orphanage sponsored by the Diocese where her mother has started the story before she is giving birth to Oliver and die. Compassion is shown in different characters even in some criminals. However, the novel *A Tale of Two Cities* has clearly the main characters like Draney and Lucie who will finally live a happy life due to the compassion of several characters mainly Cartoon. To sum up, compassion is one of the important novel's parts, even in some evil or changing characters. Its psychology is complex to study along with its impact on novel actions.

**Keywords**—Compassion; suffering; novels; Dickens.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This report aims to examine and deconstruct the concept of compassion that has been presented by the well-recognized novelist i.e., Charles Dickens. He has his own style of writing which is also something that has made his work quite unique as well as out of the ordinary. The three texts that have been selected for further analysis include *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Oliver Twist*, and *David Copperfield*. The reason behind selecting these three texts is the common theme that exists in all of them i.e., compassion.

In addition to that, one of the most crucial aspects that get reflected in most of his writings includes the class and the society that further leads to the amalgamation of compassion in his writings. This report shall cover the literature that is already present on the subject besides the writings of the author and how they relate further to the theme area that has been selected for further analysis.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before examining the works of the author, the basic concepts shall be discussed and deconstructed to have an in-depth analysis of the topic. Compassion is defined as sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others (Singer & Klimecki, 2014). In the psychological terms, the concept of compassion is also close to empathy, and it is also constantly highlighted to understand the issues that the other people are going through (Raab, 2014).

When the same aspect of compassion is examined and analyzed from the standpoint of the novels written by Charles Dickens, it could be implied that the similar notion of compassion is being presented by the author in order for the other people to feel how the people with problems are feeling (Oliver, 2018).

This is also the school of thought has been skillfully portrayed by Karl Marx who highlighted class distribution

in which the rich are becoming richer while the poor are becoming poorer and made this concept part of the capitalism as well as the communism (Jain, 2019; McBride, 2018; Milios & Dimoulis, 2018).

With the indulgence of class distribution and the other prevailing issues in the process, the concept has been rightfully presented by the author thereby allowing the readers to know about the problems that people without the resources tend to face in their lives. It could be resolved by compassion and by understanding their problems in the long run.

The similar issue has been highly talked about in the novels which is further related to the notion of compassion by Dickens. The class distribution, as well as the presentation of the unequal lifestyle of the people, has been one of the major issues of all times in history. It has also been the central theme for most of the writers and novelists that has helped in addressing and identifying the issue in the long run (Storey, Tillotson & Easson, 1981).

Moreover, Block (2000) besides Clark et al. (2017) have also suggested that people tend to look for misery as a theme in the novels to connect with the issues and see the character's way of dealing with the issues in the long run.

As far as the writings of Dickens are concerned, he has been highly focused on presenting the issues of people in the best way possible (Schwab, 2019). In addition to that, he himself has undergone and lived the life of an ordinary worker besides walking alone in the streets of London thereby making him very well aware of the issues that the common people within the society tend to confront (Oliver, 2018).

He has also undergone emotional wounds throughout his life which was something reflected in his writings as well (Frenk & Steveker, 2019). All the life events made it possible for him to connect with people besides showing compassion towards their issues that they had been facing which is also something that could be found in the majority of his writings (Schwab, 2019).

Furthermore, one of the interesting aspects that have been recorded by the academics and researchers about Dickens is the fact that he was seen as a vulgar enthusiast by most of the people in those times. Nonetheless, he was prospecting and looking in the forward direction concerning the area of the societal changes that were approaching (Hamdan & Jalaluddin, 2019). Also, he is seen restraining his compassion then lets it go which is also an intriguing aspect of the novels.

Compassion is presented in his writings as a feeling of hope and a connection that binds all the people together.

For a case in point, he shows a theme that allows the readers to think compassionately of people besides accepting the people from the lower class (Azhari, 2016; Hakim, 2016).

This is something that is also admired as a central theme thereby allowing the readers to make a sense out of their lives and do something for the betterment of the society side by side. However, there have been some gaps to deconstruct the concept of compassion in his writings that shall be further examined and reflected upon in the subsequent section of the report.

### III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Upon examining the theme areas that exist in the writings of Dickens, there are two significant questions that get raised against the concept of compassion being presented in the novels. One of the primary aspects that emerges in the process is the severity of the extent of compassion that is being presented whether it is common in all the three novels that have been selected for further analysis.

Secondly, the crucial factor that requires a serious level of consideration is the fact that how the concept of compassion could be further decoded in order to make a sense out of the characters that are presented in the selected three novels i.e., *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Oliver Twist*, and *David Copperfield*. Therefore, to examine these aspects further in the detail, this report shall examine and critically evaluate the different parts of the novels as well as the characters thereby allowing them to deconstruct the notion of compassion in his writings.

### IV. PAPER'S QUESTION

Upon examining the preliminary aspects of the novels that have been presented by Dickens, there were several gaps that had been identified and had been focused on the current research. Therefore, to fill out the gaps besides examining the study further in the detail, the following are some formulated questions that shall be addressed and examined in the process:

- Why is there a common theme of compassion in the selected novels written by Dickens?
- What is the commonness within the concept of compassion being presented in the novels?
- What other factors or aspects could be reflected further into the concept of compassion being shown in the characters and the storyline?

All the above questions shall be focused upon in the novel. The methodology that has been used in this report to

examine the concept of compassion in Dickens' writings further in the detail would be analyzed in the following section.

## V. METHODOLOGY

As far as the use of methodology is concerned, the comparative descriptive method has been used in this report that has assisted further in examining the innate context of compassion in the three selected novels. This methodology also assists in identifying and analyzing the invariance that exists and, in this case, the invariance or the intersections existing amid the three texts have been examined in the detail via this methodology.

In addition, the nature of the research involved examining the concept of compassion which also required the use of the method that would help in identifying the most intricate details of the text. Therefore, this method had been selected for the research.

This methodology also allows the researcher to ascend from the initial level of the case analysis thereby allowing the study to be more of an exploratory in nature. Moreover, the inclusion criteria had also been set out for the study in which the texts that presented the highest content of compassion by the author were selected.

Likewise, the time restrictions were also focused upon which is also one of the major reasons behind selecting the three texts thereby allowing the research to be more focused and well organized besides being descriptive at the same time.

## VI. DISCUSSION

In this section of the report, the overall findings of the study shall be condensed and analyzed in detail. Further discussion on each of the novels would be carried out in the following point followed by a cumulative discussion on the theme area:

### 6.1 A TALE OF TWO CITIES

“Constant goodness and purity can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, love and compassion bring people together, and often transform them” Albert Schweitzer (Bartleby, 2018). This is the kind of a central idea that has been reflected throughout the text. In this novel, there are a number of areas that reflect the element of compassion in the story thereby allowing the readers to know about it in addition to making a sense out of it.

For a case in point, Lucie has been shown as a compassionate person who shows good behaviour towards the people that are pining for her. Despite the character

who is not being nice to her, she still invites him to the house. She was also presented as an epitomic perfect woman who could be idealized by the readers.

Moreover, it has also been taught to the readers that regardless of how the other person treats you, there is always a need to show compassion for your own peace of mind and good. It is not necessary to fight evil with the evil that would keep spreading if a person does that. In addition, it has also been projected in the novel that love and compassion are the elements that bind people in addition to bringing them together side by side.

Regardless of the fact that there are starvation, treason, and terror, Dickens shows a ray of light with the element of compassion that is the guiding factor allowing all the people to be united. Ultimately, this power helps in eradicating and combating against the prevailing issues of the society.

These are some key areas of compassion that have been presented in the novel which is also somewhat similar to the next novel that shall be examined further in the detail in the subsequent section of the report.

### 6.2 OLIVER TWIST

Compassion is the root of this text in which the readers are given a sense of compassion by looking at the issues from a broader perspective. They are also persuaded by the author that the issues could be present in people (which in this case was Oliver) however, it ought to be addressed by good use of teaching and convincing power of compassion. Because of that, the issues could be subsided to a much larger extent.

Dickens has also emphasized in this text that the use of compassion could help in eradicating several emotional issues because it helps in addressing the issue on the spiritual level. Many people who cannot afford the material things could afford to bring each other up besides bringing positivity around them which is something that is quite an interesting aspect being identified throughout the novel.

For a case in point, Brister (2016) has also stated that “throughout the narrative of young Oliver Dickens criticizes the care of orphans under the Poor Law. Corruption and carelessness run rampant—the doctor attending Oliver’s birth “did such matters by contract,” Oliver’s first nurse “appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use,” the local beadle “invariably swore whatever the parish wanted” and does not stand up for the children under his jurisdiction. Through these examples, Dickens conveys to his readers that the union systems in place under the Poor Law are run with the minimum of both expense and compassion”.

These are some areas that have been highlighted by the author and are also close to him due to the fact that he has personally undergone and experienced through these issues of society. Therefore, it could be further implied that despite the issues that prevail within a society, the problems could be addressed by indulging in compassionate practices thereby allowing people to be less deprived.

### 6.3 DAVID COPPERFIELD

Akin to the above-mentioned novels, this novel is also the perfect representation of the miseries and issues that people tend to face in an industrial society. In addition to that, Dickens has also presented the problems that are being confronted by mentally disabled people, orphans, and women in general.

Despite being morally good people, they face a lot of problems because of the debts, restraints, and inhumanity of the labour which ultimately impacts them. The children are also shown as helpless beings who are being manipulated and controlled by the people on the higher authorities which is also something that is being objected by Dickens in the novel in which the character is shown standing against this issue.

Coming back to the theme of compassion which is central to the novel, it has been implied throughout the text that compassion is something that seems to have been missing in the working class and ought to be regained back by standing against the power. This is also something that provides comfort and freedom to the people especially the three kinds of people i.e., mentally disabled people, orphans, and women who need it the most.

Moreover, exploitation, as opposed to pity and compassion, is shown as the major driving force in the working industrial society which is also causing a lot of problems in the process. In this novel, the theme of spirituality has also been linked to compassion in a way that it is presented as the best way to deal with the misery of people who are suffering in the process.

He has also emphasized the element of compassion which is something that people under suffering require the most and are thirsty for kind gestures. Moreover, it is also something that is devoid of the hearts of most people that ought to be regained thereby allowing more people to be saved in the process.

When the key theme area of compassion in all the three novels is examined and compared against each other, it could be stated that Dickens is essentially asking people to be kind to each other and sees it as a countering healing practice of the issues that the society faces.

He also allows readers to believe in all the three novels that even though the material gains are important and helps in easing the livelihood but on the other side of the argument, it is not the sole way of achieving happiness in the long run. There is also an additional aspect of compassion which helps people to find their ways of attaining self-actualization besides allowing them to help the other people around them.

Being part of the suffering and misery himself, Dickens has thought beyond the societal issues and makes the reader reflect their behaviour positively towards other people which sometimes changes the lives of people. The findings of all the three novels shall be further discussed and condensed in the following section:

## VII. FINDINGS

As per the analysis of all three novels, there are several aspects that have come out to the front. One of the most integral aspects that could be examined here is the fact that the notion of compassion has been discussed and displayed in all the three novels, however, on the contrary, each novel gives out a different message although compassion is the sole aspect that has been focused upon (Schwab, 2019).

For a case in point, it has been argued in the novels that there is a misery situation in the society particularly caused by the differences in the social classes in which the rich are becoming richer whereas, the poor class of people is becoming poorer with the advancement of time.

To deal with the issues that are caused by the class distribution, the element of compassion acts like water for the thirsty people who are hungry to be loved and looked after (Oliver, 2018). This is the central aspect, and it also answers the questions that had been formulated for the research.

Besides, the reason behind focusing primarily on the element of compassion is because of the miseries that Dickens himself had confronted from his early childhood. Moreover, he had also personally seen and confronted all the issues that people from the working class within the industrial society tend to go through and what are the factors that help in rising back to the ground.

These aspects have been discussed and focused upon in the novels thereby allowing the readers to know about the ways to display when it comes to dealing with someone who is undergoing misery. Also, some key factors that have been identified in all three novels include the social injustice being faced by the working class whereas the rich people seem to be unaffected by all of it.

Furthermore, it is also something that has caused a lot of issues in the society which is something that requires a lot of attention. Consequently, it would help in resolving the issues being faced by the people who could live a free and happy life. Further concluding remarks shall be presented in the following section of the paper to condense the overall research findings.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Upon analyzing all the three novels for this research, it could be implied that the central theme of compassion is being shown by Dickens because it seems to be absent in society. It is also something that ought to be inculcated into the minds of people via texts that would eventually allow the readers to think about the problems that most the people face and they do not.

With the indulgence of compassion into the lives of people, the equilibrium in the society could be regained thereby allowing the issues to be countered, and it is also the reason behind emphasizing this aspect by Dickens in the long run.

In addition, the analysis of the texts allows the researcher to reflect upon the issues or the theme areas mainly because of the dimension of the study. Similarly, the research outcomes may have some biases in interpreting the concepts which is something that could be regarded as inevitable however, they are certainly present in the text. It could be concluded that the role of compassion was something that Dickens found as of having paramount importance and it has also been the major reason behind inculcating it into the texts.

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