

The Concept of Suspense and Mystery with Some References to Dickens's Novels: A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations

Asst. Instructor: Enas Subhi Ameri*

Abstract:

Throughout his distinctive use of mystery and suspense techniques, Dickens asserts himself to be an original writer. This technique might have worked for 19th century people with nothing better than to read, but it doesn't look suitable for a 20th century person.

Dickens's originality lies in his distinctive use of these techniques, which attract even a 20th century person. He divides his story into episodes and this little scheme might work for television serials in which the viewer has a whole week between episodes to think about possible out-comes. Dickens also allows his characters to be general, and uses the theme of doubles. In this way, Dickens paves the way for detective fiction. He seeks to penetrate the mystery of appearances. Accordingly, Dickens reveals hidden truths about the universe throughout his characters and also reveals at the same time moral and spiritual conditions.

The research attempts to study Dickens's use of mystery and suspense in his two novels *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*, since both novels show a distinctive use of these techniques.

1.0 Foreword

The term suspense is used to express a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety about the outcome of certain actions, most often referring to audience's perceptions in a dramatic work¹. The term mystery is used to designate a work of prose fiction in which the element of mystery or terror plays a controlling part. According to the famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle in his book *Poetics*, suspense is an important building block of drama². In his book *Aspects of the novel*, E.M. Forster states that:

This element of surprise or mystery – the detective element as it is sometimes rather emptily called – is of great importance in a plot. It occurs through a suspension of the time-sequence; a mystery is a pocket in time, and it occurs crudely ... Mystery is essential to a plot, and cannot be appreciated without intelligence³

1-1 Historical Background

The test for suspense and mystery is growingly felt when reason is inadequate to express experience. Historically speaking, suspense and mystery are associated with the Gothic novel. However, each writer has his stamp or impression on it. The 18th century stresses both the "supreme value of reason"⁴ as well as "strong appeal to the emotions without restraint by the reason"⁵

The beginning of this century denotes an interest in "repressing emotion and the more mysterious forces in the personality"⁶. While it is later on in the same

* Baghdad University - College of Education for Women English Dept.

century that a new tendency toward Gothic revival has shown itself. It is advanced by Thomas Carlyle's *Past and Present*, and John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*.

A writer who uses the technique of suspense and mystery is not necessarily a writer of Gothic novels. Here one has to define Gothic as a lit every term as it is:

A group of novels written between the 1760 and the 1820s... it emphasis on portraying the terrifying, archaic setting, a prominent use of the supernatural, heroines preyed on unspeakable terrors, the blackly lowering villains, the attempt to deploy techniques of suspense and a style given to ornateness, hyperbole and violent exclamation⁷

Thus, suspense and mystery are parts of a set of characteristics which mark a gothic novel.

Supernatural atmosphere mixed with gloom, horror and suspense are remarkable features of eighteenth century Gothic novel. In an Age of Reason in which reality, scientific progress and new discoveries assert itself, Man shows curiosity and lurking love of mystery, superstition and interest in magic and witchcraft.

In *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Mrs. Ann Radcliffe reveals interest in combining supernatural and mysterious effect on her writings. Controlled by reason, she rationalized the supernatural and "Throw a psychological and rational colouring on the supernatural"⁸. This combination shows itself when we hear mysterious voices in the chamber of Udolpho, but we are told that they were the wanton trick of a prisoner. She improved the detective interest in her reader.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1817) is another novel in which Frankenstein, a Swiss student of natural philosophy, fabricates a human figure and discovers the secret of bringing it to life, only to find that he has created a murderous monster⁹, and brought it into a powerful representation of the moral distortion imposed on an individual who, because he diverges from the norm, is rejected by society¹⁰.

Unlike the Gothic fiction of the Romantic age which is marked by a tendency to exit from the real into the other world and to remove the barriers between the physical and the supernatural, the Victorian Age gothic fiction gives more space to "Healthier fiction dealing with real life".¹¹

The expression of low social life by Dickens as in *Oliver Twist* exceeded gothic in its vigour and excitement¹². The Bronte's *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* show Mrs. Radcliffe's suggestive method for creating the Gothic atmosphere but differ in the sense that they both liberate feeling of awe and fear instead of establishing them. Emily Bronte's Heathcliff's passion is motivated by ruthless greed. Catherine turns away in horror after looking at his wild angry looks.

Mystery and suspense in Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* provides a crucial element to the reader's interpretation of the novels allowing Bronte to help the reader in foreboding coming events. Bronte successfully creates mystery and suspense in her novel through the use of both features of plot and narrative techniques. Bronte's features of plot which allow her to create mystery and suspense are the esoteric nature of Grace Poole, the visit of the fortune teller at Thornfield, and the fire in Rochester's bedroom and the subsequent mystery of what is in the attic Bronte's narrative techniques are the use of literary symbolism and dreams, both of which are used to convey a Gothic and supernatural setting. Through the use of these literary devices, there are screams in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. We are thrilled to listen to wild cry piercing the calmness of a moon – lit night:

"What have you heard? What do you see?" asked St. John.
 "I saw nothing, but I heard a voice some where cry"
 "Jane! Jane!" -nothing more.
 "O God! What is it", I gasped.

I might have said, "Where is it?" for it did not seem in the room,
 nor in the house, nor in the garden; it did not come out of the air,
 not from under the earth, nor from over head.

I had heard it – where, or whence, for ever impossible to know.
 And it was the voice of human being – a known, loved, well –
 remembered voice – that of Edward fair fax Rochester; and it
 spoke in pain and woe, wildly, eerily, urgently¹³

Scientific progress sheds its light on the mysteriousness of the modern age; it has become mere frightening. Modern detective fiction still has the impression of a Gothic fiction. Modern "Gothic novelists enlarged the sense of reality and its impact on the human beings"¹⁴ Modern approach to suspense and mysteriousness proves that literature with such narrative technique is not merely utilitarian and that outside the real world there is also a world of wonder and delight.

In *The Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad draws unknown depths of suspense and mystery that seem to be associated with the dilemma of modern Man. This whole book is full of mysteries. Marlow has a heart that is full of mystery when he is stuck in Africa, and looking for a man named Kurtz. Marlow is enthralled with mystery. He has heard some aspects about the place, and the way it seems to suck the visitors in. All the people getting diseases. One would go insane there, people:

Were dying slowly ... it was very clear. They were not enemies,
 they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now... nothing
 but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in
 the greenish gloom¹⁵

Kurtz's personality is mysterious for "the darkness of his heart"¹⁶ the mystery of the Congo river expresses many ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence.¹⁷

1.2 The Victorian Novels: Tales of Mystery and Suspense

In part two Dickens's novels, namely *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectation* will be tackled, with concentration on the element of mystery and suspense which is more or less pronounced in them. This is an interesting aspect of the Victorian novel for two reasons: Firstly because in it we can see the germ of the detective story which was to become one of the most popular twentieth – century genres, and secondly because the fact that this is such a pronounced aspect of so many Victorian novels invites interesting questions about the concerns and anxieties of the society in which they were produced.

Ann Radcliffe's (1764-1823) work *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* (1817) have so much use of suspense and mystery. Suspense and mystery in these two works are mixed with some supernatural elements, where as

Dickens colours the field of novel by assembling suspense and mystery with reality. Dickens's use of suspense and mystery is merely as a technique to keep his readers interest in the novel. Dickens's novels of this sort enable him to be one of the most important pathfinders who paved the way for modern detective fiction. His plot is a "highly organized"¹⁸ one. Dickens intends to use his novels as "a vehicle for more concentrated sociological argument"¹⁹. Not only that but he intends to go further by making history a realm from which he obtains some of his novels. *A Tale of Two Cities* exemplifies the enduring "passion for the past"²⁰. In fact Victorian writers "tended to choose their historical and exotic themes with an eye to their present day relevance"²¹.

Throughout the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens creates suspense and mystery to try to keep his readers interested. To get the novel this suspense and mystery, Dickens divides his story into episodes, allows his characters to be general and as broad as possible so that readers can make up their own opinions and possibilities. Also Dickens uses the theme of doubles to let his reader's minds wonder, thus creating some kind of suspense and \or mystery.

Ernest A. Baker in his essay "Terror; Suspense; Sensational Events in *A Tale of two cities*" argues that in *A Tale of Two Cities* one can see "the romance of terror and suspense in a purer form"²².

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens employs a great variety of symbols, he does not always explain, at different points what the location is, what year, month, day, or hour it is, or which characters are involved in the given context. Thus, readers may wonder in mists shadows, past human forms and inanimate objects, without being wholly certain what is happening, where and to whom .e.g. the introduction of the first chapter "The Period" in Book the first "Recalled to Life" provides an immortal passage, puzzling yet, brilliantly gives an accurate analysis of the novel's historical and geographical setting:

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 the other way-in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.²³

The previous quotation shows that it is a great piece of fiction in which domestic life of a few simple private people interwoven with the outbreak of a terrible public event. Martin Fido in his book *Profiles in Literature*, Charles Dickens declares that in his:

Magnificent opening Dickens seeks to hold the reader's attention by reducing chaos to disguised order. His opening sentence-really a series of unpunctuated sentences-gives the appearance of chaos by its speedy contradictions; actually it is almost blatantly ordered

in that the pairs of opposites make every second clause completely predictable²⁴.

Then Dickens begins Chapter Three "The Night Shadows" with an interesting observation in which he seeks to penetrate the mystery of appearances that is all that the city discloses to the onlooker:

A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it. Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this In any of the burial-places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me or than I am to them?²⁵

In Chapter four, Dickens continues his use of suspense and mystery as a technique to seize the attention of his readers. Chapter four, Book Two, Doctor Mantte suspects that he has seen Charles Darnay's face before. Dickens tells us that Doctor Mantte's face:

had become frozen, as it were, in a very curious look at Darnay: an intent look, deepening into a frown of dislike and distrust, not even unmingled with fear. With this strange expression on him his thoughts had wandered away.²⁶

This suspension and mystery is going to be solved when Darnay will confess before marrying Mantte's daughter about his real identity which will confirm Mantte's suspicion – In this case, In his book *Some Reflections on Genius*, 1960 in a paper called "Dickensian Diagnoses", Lord Brain states that Dickens:

was not content with vague diagnoses like brain fever, which figure in the works of some of his contemporaries and even those who wrote later. Dickens looked on disease with the observing eye of the expert clinician ... Perhaps the most remarkable example of Dickens's psychiatric insight is the case of Dr. Mantte in *A Tale of Two Cities* ... the characters in the world of Dickens's imagination are so real that they have recognizable diseases of body and mind, described with the accuracy and insight of a great clinical observer.²⁷

Chapter fourteen "The Honest Tradesmen" in Book the Second "The Golden Thread" gives reason to any reader to suspect that either Roger Cly's body is not in the grave or that there is something wrong with Cly's body which makes it worthless. Mr. Cruncher's behaviour with his wife though she is innocent of any guilt indicates

"Something had gone wrong with him... knocking the back of her head against the head board of the bed".²⁸

Again suspension in Mr. Cruncher case will be solved. In chapter Eight, Book Three, Jerry Cruncher's grave – robbing activities importance shall be realized. Roger Cly is neither executed nor buried but instead of his body, Barsad "buried paving – stones and earth in that there coffin"²⁹. In fact such figures in a literary work and such actions deepen the effect and sense of mystery and suspense in professional way. K. J. Fielding argues about that:

The novel is mad in an intricate pattern of opposites. Some elements in the plot, are too intricate, particularly the spy story and Jeremy Cruncher's body snatching. Yet They are carried out with spirit; and, beneath the grotesque and even comic action, they join in giving the sense that characters and events are driven by hidden forces. Dickens writes of powerful human impulses released by the long-suppressed revolution.³⁰

Chapter Twenty One "Echoing footsteps" in Book Two "the Golden Thread, Dickens refers to several interesting observations about Lucia's:

listening to the echoing footsteps of years... there was something coming in the echoes, something light, afar off, and scarcely audible yet, that stirred her heart too much.³¹

Lucia here seems to hear more than the echoes of feet passing in the street near by. Perhaps she hears the footsteps of those, far across the English Channel, who will enter her life and the lives of these she loves. With the reference of the echoing steps, there is the reference to the sea whose "black and threatening waters... whose depths were yet unfathomed and whose forces were yet unknown"³². Then the chapter ends with the implied prediction that Lucie Draney and her loved ones will eventually be engulfed by the "ocean of faces"³³ which now floods the streets of Paris.

Madame Defrag is one of Dickens's most important characters who lives within a dark shadow, suspense and mystery. Her insistence on Darnay's imprisonment raises many questions which are all answered in Chapter Ten, "The Substance of the Shadow" book named *The Third Track of Storm*. She insists that Charles Darnay inherited the guilt of his family especially his father "the worst of a bad race"³⁴ who rapes her sister and causes her death "the younger brother raped (her sister)... and she finally dies after suffering another week of severe pain"³⁵.

Dickens's use of mystery is successful one because he uses it in a logical intellectual way. He presents it and solves it later on. He has:

no misgivings... he plans his book beforehand; or any how he stands above it, his interest in cause and effect gives him an air of predetermination³⁶

In constructing his novels, Dickens uses suspense and mystery, like the source of Pip's great expectations. His plots effectively hold the reader's interest, for something is always happening, even if the something is not connected with the plot. He gives little space to exposition³⁷. His stories tell themselves, and what background

the reader needs to know is revealed as the novel unfolds. Similarly, his characters typically reveal their natures through action and conversation, rather than long passages of exposition and interpretation.

In *Great Expectation*, we are introduced to an atmosphere of mystery, suspense, uncertainty and fear. The detailed description of the opening scene heightens the reader's expectation as to the outcome of the forthcoming events. Pip, is in the churchyard, "a small bundle of shivers," growing afraid of his surroundings when suddenly he encounters a man from nowhere:

Hold your noise! 'Cried a terrible voice as a man started up from among the graves, at the side of the church or I'll cut your throat!

A fearful man, all in coarse grey with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin'

'Oh! Don't cut my throat sir', I pleaded in terror. 'Pray don't do it!'

"There is a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am a Angel. That young man hears the words I speak. That young man has a secret way peculiar to himself of getting at a boy, and at his heart and liver. It is in vain for a boy to attempt to hide himself from that young man. A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open."³⁸

This striking opening passage presents to us a novel of mysterious and disturbing events and indicates a vision of a world in which people appear out of mists and darkness, in which a boy is pursued by men desperate enough to tear his heart and liver out. Roger B. Henkle comprehensively encompasses Dickens's vision of a grim age as reflected by the passage which opens *Great Expectations*, a passage in which, "Dickens projects a murky, probably evil world, tainted with criminality and fear ... As events unfold, our initial impression will be reinforced, Dickens envisioned nineteenth century England as a dark and corrupt society".³⁹

In *Great Expectations*, the plot is resolved through the discovery of a series of surprising relationships, and each of these is a relationship between something loathsome and something desirable. The first of these is the discovery that Pip does not owe his great expectations to the fairy godmother, Miss Havisham whom he wrongly thinks that she would put his dreams out and make his "wild fancy" surpass "by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale"⁴⁰, but to the ogre, Magwitch, Magwitch has been transported to Australia; there he has prospered as a sheep rancher, and he has decided to use his wealth to make a gentleman of the little boy "I've made a gentleman on you!"⁴¹, Who stole the food and file for him on the marshes long ago:

I stole some bread, some rind of cheese, about half a jar of mincemeat (which I tied up in my pocket – hand – Kerchief with my last night's slice, some brandy from a stone bottle ..., a meat bone with very little on it, and a beautiful round compact porkpie ... and I go a file from among Joe's tools"⁴².

Pip's rise in the world has not been an act of magic; it has actually been a reward for theft, for what he has regarded as the most shameful deed of his life.

The second great discovery is that of Estella, for whom pip has wasted his life in longing and about whom he says:

The beautiful young lady at Miss. Havisham's, and she's more beautiful than anybody ever was, and I admire her dreadfully, and I want to be a gentleman on her account,⁴³

is far from being a princess; she is in fact the illegitimate daughter of Magwitch, by the criminal who is "Loaded with all the crimes in the Calendar"⁴⁴, and who now serves as Mr. Jaggers's servant. Miss Havisham is no fairy godmother: she is a foolish old maid.

In *Great Expectations*, Dickens make his readers puzzled through raising so many questions. K.J. Fielding states that:

'Dickens and Crime' raises fascinating questions ... these questions must for the moment, be left for self questioning and answering, as if the reader were not just putting himself in Pip's place but actually able to *be* him and observe him at every age.⁴⁵

Dickens way of plotting his novels and the new themes he experiments adds a great deal to Victorian fiction. Dickens's treatment of crime, passion and punishment differs in the sense that he adds sensationality and psychological analysis to a criminal mind. Michael wheeler declares that:

Perhaps the most baffling feature of Dickens's vision is the holding in tension of a strong sense of evil, and a faith in the possibility of individual redemption. It is a vision that verges upon Manichaeism. His fascination with violence and crime remained a major driving force behind his writings.⁴⁶

Dickens's unique use of mystery and suspense rests on his use of symbols to shadow forth his own obsessions or the dilemmas of the human condition, the vitality of his Language, his distinguished penetration in the psychology of a human being and his analysis and criticism of society.

To conclude with, Dickens' way of tackling the concept of suspense and mystery has added new trend to literature. He asserts himself to be original in using this concept as technique in some of his novels namely *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*. Dickens' suspense and mystery never last for along time for it dose not indicate ambiguity. He would always unfold his mysteries and clear out suspense. That indicate that this technique is used only to add more attraction to his actions.

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مفهوم الشك والحيرة مع الإشارة لبعض أعمال الكاتب جارلس دكنز : حكاية مدينتين والآمال العظيمة

المدرس المساعد إيناس صبحي عامر
 كلية التربية للبنات - جامعة بغداد

المخلص:

من خلال استخدامه المتميز لعنصري الشك والغموض كتقنية أدبية في كتابة رواياته فإن جارلس دكنز يؤكد كونه كاتب مبدع. قد يبدو هذان العنصران ملائمان لشخص من القرن التاسع عشر إذ لم يكن هناك ما هو أفضل من القراءة أما لشخص من القرن العشرين فذلك غير مناسب. يكمن إبداع دكنز بكونه قادراً على جذب انتباه شخص من القرن العشرين بهذه التقنية حيث انه قسم قصصه إلى أجزاء مما يخدم فكرة العروض التلفزيونية إذ يبقى المشاهد يترقب الأحداث الممكنة بين حلقة وأخرى وكذلك فقد جعل شخصه تتميز بكونها عامة واستخدم مفهوم الأغراض المزدوجة أو الأغراض الثنائية وبهذه الطريقة فقد فسح مجال لظهور أدب التحري. فقد اعتاد دكنز على أن يسبر في غور الظواهر . وبناء عليه يظهر أن دكنز يفصح عن حقائق مخفية عن الكون من خلال شخصه وكذلك فهو يفصح عن حالات أخلاقية وروحية. يهدف البحث إلى دراسة استخدام دكنز لعنصري الشك والغموض كتقنية أدبية في روايته حكاية مدينتين و الآمال العظيمة إذ تظهر الروايتان استخدام متميز لكتنا التقنيين .