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HISTORICAL RETROSPECTION AND AMBIVALENCE IN *A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

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RANIA SERENA SOETIRTO

ADVISOR: JONATHAN H. GROSSMAN

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ABSTRACT

Although the origins of the historical novel could be traced back to seventeenth century France, the genre did not begin its rise to prominence until the nineteenth century as authors began to utilize the historical novel as a way to mitigate the confusions of a world ridden by revolutions and political changes. This thesis argues that, rather than mitigating historical perplexity, Charles Dickens' historical novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) further exposes the contradictions of the French Revolution, creating an ambivalent depiction of the period at large and ultimately revealing that historical retrospection itself must be ambivalent. This thesis will be discussing how Dickens amplifies a sense of ambivalence about the most important historical event of his age through acts of historical retrospection. Through his repeated use of parallels of time and space, of events, and of the characterization of his characters, Dickens doubles the reader's vision of history. In particular, I look at how through the use of metaphors, such as Dr. Manette's letter, Dickens strengthens the ambivalence of his historical novel by using the letter as a way to mimic his own novel, creating a scenario that proves how historical recollection lies within human memory. Furthermore, I show how the ambivalence of *A Tale* lies in Dickens' usage of the unnamed narrator and this narrator's ability to exert himself into the detached, omnipresent persona who functions as the historian of the novel.

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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.

- Charles Dickens

Introduction

Alternating between England and France, *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) discusses the implications of the French Revolution on both nations and how it affects the lives of both its French and English characters as the French Revolution becomes a foreboding presence and a source of conflict in the novel. As a historical novel, *A Tale* obsesses over the connections between the past and present, creating a set of parallels and images through a series of historical retrospections done by both the narrator and the characters. This thesis is concerned with how this historical retrospection results in both contradiction and ambivalence.

The title of *A Tale,* and its choice to parallel the capitals of both England and France respectively, gestures toward the novel's ambivalent nature, and how it resorts to contradictions to reveal the realities of a tumultuous time in history – a period that oversaw the rise of liberty, while also the descent of a nation into a time of political repression. Dickens' decision to represent these two nations in his novel also parallels the very origins of the historical novel, a literary history which is especially connected to both France and England. Before 1820, most historical fiction had only been written in either the French or English language (Maxwell 1), with French historical fiction making its first crossing to England in the late eighteenth century (3). The early version of the historical novel originated in France, where it was heavily constructed by anxieties springing from the Enlightenment, which questions the "integrity of historical studies as a discipline" (3) and the general fear of combining history and fiction. However, this fear was preceded by a literary culture of combining both fiction and history in France. For most of the seventeenth century, French fiction and history were quite indistinguishable, essentially "[confuting] the roles of novelist and historian" (Maxwell 11). The focus on separating fact and fiction during the Enlightenment could be seen through "the context

of the period's determination to remove fable, inherited notions, and invention from historical scholarship" (Hamnett 17), which amplifies the Enlightenment's sentiments towards historical fiction as an inferior subject compared to history.

However, in the mid to late eighteenth century, both France and England began to witness a reassessment of the function and value of fictional narratives as fiction began to emerge as the primary medium to represent contemporary social reality, and even as a tool to shape and understand that reality (Ray 1). In the view of several modern scholars, this was the indirect result of the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte's rise to power. Many authors had found the time period to be overwhelming as it saw various smallfolk revolts and the reconfiguration of many national institutions. On both a social and political scale, these brought changes that many deemed as unorthodox, unprecedented, and even contradictory. John McWilliams in *Revolution and the Historical Novel* describes how historical novels became a medium for writers to process the confusion of the era, to make sense of the revolutions, progress, and carnage that seems to be happening almost simultaneously (1). Through the historical novel authors can simplify historical confusion by creating and weaving together direct explanations, fictionalizing history, and historical facts (1). According to this academic theory, the historical novel allows authors and readers to have a sense of control and order in a tumultuous and unpredictable time. However, in contrast to this understanding of the historical novel, I argue that *A Tale* functions in a different manner and for a different purpose. Instead of creating order, Dickens' *A Tale* embraces historical contradictions as the novel transpires by exposing these juxtapositions to the reader, creating an ambivalent narrative.

In some ways, this argument is not surprising. The novel almost immediately sets an ambivalent tone for its readers, conditioning the reader to read the text through this perspective.

Opened by its first chapter, “The Period,” Dickens introduces the readers to the unnamed narrator, an omniscient and mysterious figure that functions as the sole authority of the novel’s narration, who begins the story with a paradoxical and rather contradictory opening: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” (5). The narrator continues to list out similar paradoxes throughout the entire chapter, while refraining from giving their own personal opinion as to the contradictions, creating an ambivalent atmosphere. This detachment gives the reader the choice to freely interpret the narrative as they are left to their own devices to navigate these various contradictions. The only influence that the narrator chooses to exert over the reader is ambivalence, a lens in which the narrator soughts to create for the reader to process the text in.

This thesis discusses the complexities of ambivalence in this historical novel and how *A Tale* examines the perplexities of historical narratives, the formulation of history, and lastly the role of human memory, which is the human factor that becomes a source for historical retrospection. There are three angles in particular examined. First, I will examine how from a historical lens, the unnamed narrator, can be seen as the novel’s impromptu historian as he sets to narrate the historical events of the past and how those events interweave with the lives of his fictional characters. Secondly, I will show how Dickens dissects the role of ambivalence as a dimension of human memory within historical retrospection. Here my focus is on the characterization of Dr. Manette, the French doctor and former prisoner of the Bastille, whose traumatic experiences and warped memories lead to various contradictory results. Finally, this thesis investigates how Dickens produces a historical novel structured by ambivalence through the way he employs the use of time, as he switches from past to present tense in several scenes to address the role of time and how it affects the human ability to coherently reflect on the past. Here, I argue that Dickens essentially reveals how ambivalence on past events is often a luxury

bestowed to those in the future. Those in the past moments being recollected must attend decisively to their present, constrained by their inability to see future outcomes or consequences of current historical action. In these three ways, as well as others I will raise along the way, *A Tale of Two Cities* reveals the chaotic nature of human history and how ambivalence ought to be considered as inseparable or even a byproduct of historical retrospection.

Part One

Historicizing an Ambivalent Historical Novel

In this section, I theorize that *A Tale* is a historical novel structured by ambivalence through an analysis of the role of narrative within history and in relation to historiography. Beginning in particular in the 1960s, scholars began debating on the philosophy of history and to what extent can a history be considered as narrative. This debate instigated a discussion between scholars who deemed history as a series of factual and scientific explanations of the past and those who focused on the role of narrative to facilitate a coherent and intelligible understanding of history (Roberts 1). For historians, narratives are a crucial part of their work. Historical recollections are in fact stories, which are told, analyzed, and delivered by scholars who work to understand and explain why certain historical events came into being. One can take a similar approach when it comes to analyzing Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* and the historical novel as a genre. Represented by the omniscient, unnamed narrator, the narrative of *A Tale* resembles a historian's recollection of the past. The sense of detachment that the novel's narrator exudes – from their all-seeing nature, and to their ability to consider contradictory events in the narration – are qualities that a historian embodies. First and foremost the ability to detach oneself from a particular historical event to produce a neutral historical retrospection is an ability only bestowed upon figures from the future, who have the capacity to view a historical event in its entirety from a third-person point of view. As the narrator functions from a seemingly different timeline from the characters, his view of the events that took place in the novel is unclouded, unlike the characters who are only able to see the events of the novel through their limited perspective. Additionally, it is also interesting to note how the characterization of the various characters in the novel lies solely on the narration of the narrator. *A Tale* does not provide a

first-person perspective for any of the characters (aside from the letter in which Dr. Manette details the cause of his imprisonment, which will be addressed in a later section in this thesis) – meaning the reader only has the narrator's narration of the characters to create an interpretation of the novel's cast. This can be likened to our understanding of historical figures, and how some have achieved mythical recognition through historical narrative such as those of national heroes and a nation's founding fathers. The understanding of their roles, achievements, and deeds lies solely with the historian who reiterates and writes these historical records for the public's consumption.

Aside from the narrator's role as the historian, *A Tale* also embodies the intersectionality between narrative and fiction through the act of recollection. The ability to formulate narratives is an ingrained part of the human persona as it often serves as a connection between those in the present with those in the past. Therefore, it is quite appropriate to theorize how recollection could never be separated from the formation of narrative. Peter Brooks, an American literary theorist, begins his book *Reading for the Plot* with a discussion of the human tendency to seek for narratives, arguing that human life ceasely intertwines with stories that people tell and hear, by stories that were either created by the human imagination or concocted through the act of dreaming (3). The human infatuation with narrative also extends itself to the past. As Brooks theorizes, people have a habitual tendency to recount and reassess the meaning of past actions by "situating [themselves] at the intersection of several stories not yet completed" (3). In theory, *A Tale* exemplifies this characteristic. By creating various fictional characters to move the plot of his tale forward, Dickens indirectly situates himself in an intersection of different narratives and potential outcomes as he muses and reflects on the French Revolution through the stories of his characters. With its use of the French Revolution as the historical background that encompasses

the family saga that takes place back and forth between the English channel, *A Tale* is a compilation of connections between the past and the present. It embodies the human tendency of narrating and reflecting on the past, and how narrative is essentially the medium that allows people to express their ambivalence to past events.

The ambivalent narrative approach that the novel adopts can also be attributed to the ambivalent nature of the French Revolution and its outcomes. In *England and the French Revolution,* Stephen Prickett discusses how literature, both in the forms of images and text, have shaped the polarizing reception of the French Revolution during the eighteenth to nineteenth century. From the philosophies of Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which garnered both a mass following that violently opposed each other in France, to the writings of statesmen in Great Britain such as those of Edmund Burke (1729-1797), these forms of literature have considerably influenced the view of the Revolution, although it also contributed to a fierce debate on the 'rightfulness' of the Revolution and whether the movement had been justifiable. Prickett muses on this idea as he writes, "Knowledge is not separable from the perspective of the knower… The descriptions and images of the French Revolution debate conditioned the ways in which observers actually perceived those events. What to the Republican Thomas Paine, was the justifiable fall of a tyranny was to Burke a violation of order and a threat to civilization itself" (3). Aside from textual prints, counter-revolutionary images were also known to have garnered a wide-circulation in Britain, prompting views that vilified the Revolution through the use of grotesque and emotionally charged images. Some of these graphics included prints depicting the French devouring heads and organs, revolutionaries roasting babies, and the use of corpses as furniture (Mangum 146).

In addition to the extensive release of pamphlets, propagandic material, and graphics that affected the public's ambivalent reception of the movement, perhaps the most interesting outcome of the French Revolution for our purposes here is also the alteration of the meaning of the word 'revolution.' The French Revolution has been attributed to having created the initial awareness and general acceptance of the term 'revolution' as a political phenomenon (Prickett 2). Particularly in England, this challenged the conventional definition of the word *revolution*, which associated the word *revolution* with the act of restoration instead of an instigator for change. Throughout the sixteenth century and into the eighteenth century, the word "revolution" was still understood in terms of its Latin origin which means "to turn back" (McWilliams xxxiii). In England particularly, the British had heavily identified the word revolution with the events of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, which restored the Stuarts' reign and expelled James I from the throne, an act that oversaw the upholding of the ostensibly rightful institutional entity (2).Whereas the British had seen revolutionary works as those of restoration, the French Revolution was predominantly occupied by political attempts to dismantle the old regime and replace it with a new constitutional government. The way the French Revolution challenged the conventional ideas of a revolution gave birth to the historical understanding of the word *revolution* that is used today.

In both a literary and historical perspective, the most famous textual debate that has influenced the polarizing and even ambivalent view of the French Revolution can be attributed to the writings of Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke and English-born American political activist Thomas Paine (1737-1809). While their debate is prominently known to have been the precursor of the 'left and right divide within politics,' their differing views on the legitimacy of the state also sets into motion the understanding of institutionalized power and the validity of

civil uprising as a tool to topple corrupt regimes, a historical dilemma that is often brought up in *A Tale*. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke condemns the Enlightenment (which inspired the French Revolution) to be anti-traditional, finding it to be a force that threatens and destroys living institutions. Although Burke had supported American colonists during the American War of Independence (Church 4), he condemns French revolutionists as criminals and fanatics whom he deems to have created a sense of unlawfulness and anarchy in France (Burke 9). Burke writes that although he agrees that all men have equal rights, not all men have an equal right to power, authority and stateship: "…in this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things… he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock; and as to the share of power, authority, and direction which each individual ought to have in management of the state" (11). In his writing, Burke also alludes to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, using the revolution as an example of an occurrence where the British had risen up to preserve ancient and indisputable laws and liberties, as he considers the traditional constitution of government as men's only security for law and liberty (5). In the following year, Paine published the *Rights of Man* (1791) as a response to Burke's *Reflection*. Paine argues that the government serves to accommodate the living, not the dead, and thus can be subject to change depending on the current generation's needs and aspirations. He writes, "What is government more than the management of the affairs of a nation?" (24). Paine believes that every age and generation must be free to legitimately act for itself as the generation that precedes it. He calls the fascination to uphold institutional governments based on tradition alone as "the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies" (16). Representing opposite sides of the spectrum, the writings of both Burke and Paine have continually shaped the views surrounding the French

Revolution in Britain. Their writings were still familiar approximately seventy years later when Dickens published *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859.

As a historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities,* shapes the desire for retrospection by explicitly becoming a medium that explains the general reception of the French Revolution for a specifically later English time period. For instance, although *A Tale* is a book that sets itself to discuss the political climate of nineteenth century France, the book is undeniably English. Half of the story is set in England, with its major cast being predominantly British instead of French. Scholars have also long noted the oddity in the French's characters' dialogue, which resembles a rough translation of the French language. Although their dialogues are written in English, the French characters in *A Tale* still maintain a French syntax when they are speaking (Vanfasse 4). Dickens uses this strategy to convey a feel of the French language to his readers and immerse them in the atmosphere of the French Revolution by translating French sentences and setting the phrases into English; however this literary device creates stilted dialogues that feel stiff and unnatural for Native English-speaking readers (4). Rather, then, Frenchifying the novel, the stilted English of the French characters acting as a rough translation of the language, proves for readers how *A Tale* is an English novel.

In this same vein in which structural ambivalence arises from the combination of the dual national settings and the asynchronous temporality of the retrospective narrator, perhaps the most ironic and starkly British Victorian aspect of the book is its choice for its main antagonist. Dickens employs Madame Defarge, a French *tricoteuse,* or a female revolutionary mythically known to have knitted by the side of the guillotine during executions, as the main antagonist of his novel. Although Dickens often pairs Madame Defarge with her husband and fellow revolutionary, Monsieur Defarge, to perform various ploys and intricate schemes, Madame

Defarge casts a longer shadow compared to her husband as her role in the history and past crimes of the Evrémonde house ultimately sets the plot of *A Tale* in motion. The characterization of Madame Defarge as a *tricoteuse* and a leader of Saint Antoine's female revolutionaries, could even be considered to be a deliberate allusion to the general anxieties of the time period towards women and their role in the French Revolution. Teresa Mangum in her article "Dickens and the Female Terrorist: The Long Shadow of Madame Defarge" discusses the complex portrayal of Madame Defarge and her band of merry women by alluding to early representations of *sansculotte* figures. Illustrations of these women were deemed to be quite harsh, with well-known English artists such as William Hogarth, Thomas Rowlandson and James Gillray, being some among the many artists producing images of these women in an unfavorable light (Mangum 146). A theory exists in existing academia that Dickens might have based Madame Defarge's character on Anne-Josèphe Théroigne de Méricourt, a Belgian orator and organizer in the French Revolution, known to have been a founder of one of the most radical women's clubs of the time (152). In essence, Madame Defarge's presence in *A Tale* could thus be considered as a manifestation of English influences and opinions of the French Revolution, which becomes one of the distinct characteristics of the novel that further emphasize how the novel is more English than French.

In our own retrospect, *A Tale of Two Cities* could be considered as the English retrospection towards the French Revolution, a foreign political event that occurred across the sea, which sparked fears of a similar kind of revolution emerging in English soil. Although the initial reception towards the French Revolution had been celebratory in England (Willis 87), the events of the Reign of Terror (1793-1794) led to a realization that "French modernization was going down a further, bloodier path… Initial enthusiasm in Britain was followed by fearful

reaction to [the] guillotine" (87). As a Victorian author, Dickens mulls over this fear through his own reflection of the past through historical memories and the general receptions of the English public towards the French Revolution. Dickens wrote *A Tale* approximately over 50 years after the end of the Revolution and the Reign of Terror, meaning Dickens would have been aware of the aftermath of the French Revolution and the political influences that sparked the movement into place. Additionally, Dickens would also have a certain formal understanding of the historical narratives of the Revolution, including its role in ushering Napoleon Bonaparte's rule as a dictator and emperor who instigated a series of wars known colloquially as the Napoleonic wars.

The historical novelist, Sir Walter Scott, discusses the errors and ironies of historical memory through his *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* (1827), where he invokes the historical novel's exploration of the fears and hopes of the time period that it depicts. He writes, "'When we look back on past events, however important,' it is crucial to recall 'the fears, hopes, doubts and difficulties' they aroused, even though they have ended in 'an outcome quite different from whatever was anticipated'" (McWilliams 3). Through the Victorian era's historical memory of the French Revolution, Dickens was able to project the national understanding of the Revolution into his novel, including its fears, repulsion, and general dilemma towards the morality of the Revolution. For instance, Dickens expresses the general hostility that the Victorian era has towards female revolutionaries in France through the characterization of Madame Defarge. However, unlike other historical novels, who would have attempted to create a more two-dimensional portrayal of the character as an attempt to explain this moral dilemma, Dickens' portrayal of Madame Defarge was in some degree positive. Although the narrative often vilifies Madame Defarge and subjects her to various negative characteristics, she is arguably the most powerful and even three-dimensional character in the novel, functioning as a multifaceted

character capable of being a leader, revolutionary, orator, and politician. She is well-respected and feared among both the men and women of Saint Antoine, and is well-regarded by her husband who, in admiration, describes her as a "'A great woman,' said he, 'a strong woman, a grand woman, a frightfully grand woman!'" (Dickens 193). This is quite a positive representation for a character that represents a hated group of people.

In addition to his portrayal of the female revolutionary Madame Defarge, Dickens also extends this ambivalent characterization towards the common people, who encompass the social class to which Madame Defarge belongs. Dickens' ambivalence towards the cause of the common people and their plight, which instigated the French Revolution, can be seen through both his use of a variety of scenes that capture both a sense of sympathy and condemnation, although Dickens seems to lean more towards the first alternative. The first appearance of the French common folk is in the chapter, "The Wine-Shop," which begins *in medias res* as it details the events of a broken cask of wine. The broken cask immediately suspends all business in the street as the people almost instantaneously run "to the spot and drink the wine" (31). This scene reveals the reality of the streets in France, detailing the poverty and desperation that the common people face. Dickens dramatizes the scene by creating further imagery which involves men and women dipping their "mutilated earthenware" (31) and handkerchiefs to savor the last of the wasted wine. The most appalling image would be of the way Dickens describes the way the women had squeezed the wine dry into infants' mouths (31). Several other scenes that followed also reveal the perversion that the common people face, from the death of the young boy, trampled by St. Marquis Evrémonde's coach, to the callousness of the aristocrats when reckoning the death of the peasant boy, which was only compensated by a single gold coin (115). Although this sympathetic portrayal of the peasantry would've stoked the reader's empathy towards their

plight, the unnamed narrator also creates a nuanced imagery describing the common folk's treatment of the aristocrats during the French Revolution, in which the narrator also sympathesizes as he describes how the aristocrats had become ghosts during their imprisonment: "Ghosts all! The ghost of beauty, the ghost of stateliness, the ghost of elegance, the ghost of pride, the ghost of frivolity, the ghost of wit, the ghost of youth, the ghost of age, all waiting their dismissal from the desolate shore" (265).

Furthermore, the narrator's disapproval of the revolutionaries tactics is also seen in the way it describes the revolutionaries and their revolutionary celebrations as demonic. In a particular scene in *A Tale,* Lucie Manette and her young daughter witness in fear as French citizens sing and dance to *La Carmagnole,* a revolutionary song that was popular during the first French Revolution in front of the La Force prison where Darnay was imprisoned. Dickens' description of the peasantry's dance is chilling, referring to the festivities as diabolical. Symbolically witnessed by the French-born and British-raised Lucie Manette, the scene represents a generally English perspective on the *La Carmagnole* and political expression in France. Dickens alludes to the French's celebration and revolutionary zeal as kin to a demonic ritual, indicating the 'English fear' towards the French Revolution and the potential of a similar revolution emerging in England:

> A moment afterwards, and a throng of people came pouring round the corner by the prison wall…There could not be fewer than five hundred people, and they were dancing like five thousand demons…No fight could have been half so terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport – a something once innocent delivered over to all devilry – a healthy pastime changed into a means of angering the blood, bewildering the senses, and steeling the heart. (288)

This negative portrayal would have been a trope familiar to many of Dickens' Victorian audience. After the 1790s, the hardening class distinction in England began to oversee a rise in unfavorable portrayals of plebeians and the working class within literature. This phenomenon in print interestingly began in the same decade that witnessed the birth of the French Revolution. In his book *Literature and Society in Eighteenth-Century England,* W.A. Speck discusses the ideology, politics and culture in England from 1680-1820. His research indicates that where plebeian characters had appeared previously in print as sympathetic, their depiction changed drastically after the 1790s when they came to be represented as "sinister, almost subhuman, creatures, threatening the very fabric of society" (142). The fear and distrust towards the lower class and the working class might have been attributed to the success of the French Revolution which upturned the traditional social hierarchy in France and the fear of its influence spreading to nearby European countries. This same "sinister, almost subhuman" (142) depiction of the working class or the plebeian can also be seen in Dickens' *A Tale,* with Dickens calling the revolutionary peasantry and their celebration as "…dancing like five thousand demons" (288). However, his previous sympathies towards the common folk, reveals that although Dickens uses a Victorian perspective to describe the French peasantry, his portrayal of them are outrightly ambivalent and contradictory.

Finally, contextualizing the ambivalence of the novel in terms of being an act of historical retrospection, one can see that Dickens' ambivalence could be traced to his position as an individual from the future looking into the past. As I mentioned, ambivalence is arguably, only a luxury usually bestowed upon people who live after the emergence of a historical event, when they are capable of seeing the entirety of the outcomes of a historical event from a detached perspective. From the perspective of a literary theorization of historical retrospection (if one

ought to consider history as a form of literary narrative) people from the future looking back into the past thus could be likened to a reader analyzing the characters of a book. Similar to the reader who functions outside of the confines of the linear plot that is encapsulated by the book or novel, people from the future are neither bound physically nor emotionally to the events that they are analyzing. Furthermore, their ability to access different alternatives and insert themselves within various interpretations of the past allows those in the future to be more ambivalent than the historical agents who live alongside the historical event, and thus have no access to the outcomes of the event. Historical agents also have a direct emotional attachment with the historical events that they experience, meaning they understand these events from their personal and subjective perspective. This immediacy may inhibit historical agents from being ambivalent as their own perspective would define the realities of the historical events that they live in, creating a limitation in their very perspective. As if to capture this reality, *A Tale,* mimics the very nature of history, and the outcomes of historical retrospection through the lens of fiction. Philosopher Franklin Rudolf Ankersmit captures part of this idea in his definition of a historical novel, which he explains in his book *Narrative Logic. A Semantic Analysis of the Historian's Language* (1981). Ankersmit explains:

> Although at times a general account of historical reality may be given in a historical novel, the historical novel essentially shows us historical reality as seen through the eyes of (fictitious) people living in the past. Their interpretation of the past, their "points of view" on the socio-historical reality contemporary to them, guides the historical novelist's exposition of the past. (28)

Similarly, Dickens uses formal aspects of his novel to mimic the formation of a historical narrative. First, Dickens has the unnamed narrator who functions as the deliberate historian of *A*

Tale to his readers. Diegetically, the character Madame Defarge also has qualities of a historian, "who preserves a text of the Revolution's victims" (Lewis 31) through her knitting, which further emphasizes the novel's fascination with the historian role and how various characters exemplify this characteristic. Additionally, the novel produces several literary texts within its own physical text, such as Manette's letter, to mirror the role of historical documents and its role in historical retrospection. Scholars such as Cates Baldridge have addressed the ambivalence of *A Tale of Two Cities,* albeit by only analyzing the diegetic components of the novel or its historical connotations (633); however this thesis aims to prove that the very nature of *A Tale's* ambivalence lies from its extradiegetic perspective, which is through its attempt to mimic historical restropection and address how ambivalence is a product of historical recollection.

Part Two

Historical Recollection as a Byproduct of Memory

In *Revolution and the Historical Novel*, McWilliams explains how historical novelists often turned to the use of metaphor as the most desperate, albeit effective way to control the contradictions and ambiguities that exist within fiction and history (2). He further argues that metaphors were necessary to "give shape to the complexity and contradictions of the author's historical sense" (2). Like other major historical novelists, such as Scott and Leo Tolstoy, Dickens' novel heavily relies on metaphors to narrate his historical understanding of the French Revolution. Furthermore, it is even arguable that Dickens relies more on metaphors to convey meaning in his novel compared to historical references (4). From his allusions to Greek mythology to the personification of the guillotine, the metaphors in *A Tale* are numerous, as they make an appearance in almost every chapter. However, for the sake of argument, this thesis will only examine Dickens' metaphors to time and space, and how he uses these metaphors to make a commentary about the connection between the past and present.

Dickens' historical novel is historical not only because it is set in the past, but because it also focuses on his characters' relationships with the past, especially through the use of memory. Tina Young Choi explores the multiple metaphors that Dickens uses to explain the connection between history, time and memory. She elaborates how the act of recollecting the past takes multiple forms in *A Tale,* ranging from "the language of the official record to the tenuousness of personal recognition and the indelibility of material proof" (783). Dickens' obsession to find connection between the past and present could be seen by the way he concocts different tethers to connect his characters, and to an extent, his readers with the past. For instance, the prologue is a form of remembrance as it functions to connect the readers to the events that happened in the

"year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five" (Dickens 5). The foreboding narration of the prologue mimics that of someone remembering a distant past, which creates a scene similar to an individual recollecting and narrating what they remember of a time long past.

Diegetically, *A Tale* also has another medium that connects the characters with the past: Dr. Manette's letter, which documents the historical events that led to the culmination of the conflicts seen in the characters' present. Manette's letter functions as a tether to the past for Manette and also as a form of historical revelation. Similar to a history or "primary" document, Manette's letter serves to reveal to those in the present what happened in the past. In this instance, there is a similarity between the unnamed narrator and Manette as both function as an unpremeditated historian for an extra-diegetic (the reader) and diegetic audience (the courtroom attendees witnessing the reading of the letter) respectively. However, while the narrator is able to maintain a constant sense of ambivalence towards the events that transpired in the novel, Dr. Manette, who functions within the novel's diegetic sphere, is incapable of the same kind of ambivalence due to his limited perspective. While the narrator functions outside of the diegetic realm and is capable of jumping from different locations and time periods in order to narrate the story to the reader, Dr. Manette lives in a linear timeline as dictated by the plot concocted by the author (Dickens) and unfolded by the unnamed narrator, meaning he is confined within *A Tale's* specific timeline. This limitation on Dr. Manette causes him to lack the ambivalent nature and perspective that the unnamed narrator has. However, as a character, Dr. Manette raises interesting ideas about the connection between human memory and historical recollection, which further amplifies my argument surrounding the novel's take on ambivalence. His psychology, his impaired memories, and even his letter, reveal how historical recollection can take different outcomes and result in ambivalent and even contradictory outcomes, exposing the fickleness of

human memory, and indirectly, history, as a collective recollection of the past through both institutional and personal means.

I. The Unnamed Narrator as a Metaphorical Historian

Before turning to Dr. Manette and the letter he wrote and hid while imprisoned, I want to discuss the relevant aspect of the role of the unnamed narrator. Although it can be deduced that the unnamed narrator is embodied by a single authoritative individual, it is undeniable that his role in the novel is more institutional than personal. The unnamed narrator's voice dominates the entirety of the novel's narration, dictating the atmosphere and direction of *A Tale.* The novel's ambivalent tone can be credited as the doing of the unnamed narrator, who opens the story through a monologue, which consists of the narrator mulling over contradictions tied to the year "one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five" (Dickens 5). Told primarily through the perspective of the narrator, *A Tale* is dominated by the professional authority of the narrator who possesses an uncanny and seemingly trustworthy knowledge of the events that transpired in the novel. This all-knowing narrator of *A Tale* embodies the characteristics of the professional narrator, an archetype which began appearing in nineteenth century novels (Ray 15). The nineteenth century oversaw the elevation of omnipresent omniscient narrators as a way for the author to detach themselves from the narrative and provide a professional authority that represents a dispassionate representation of the world instead of a personal narrative on behalf of the writer (15). This unnamed narrator shields the author to an extent from moral collusion, and thus the narrator becomes a metacharacter in their own right, as seen in the case of *A Tale's* narrator. As the unnamed narrator becomes a character of its own, separate from Dickens' own identity as the author, the narrator thus becomes an independent voice capable of transitioning from multiple perspectives that might even challenge Dickens' own preconceived notions as an

English author reflecting on the French Revolution. In a way, the narrator's detachment serves to propel the reflective and ambivalent nature of *A Tale* by being a voice that transcends the moral obligations demanded by society towards its individuals. This independence affords the unnamed narrator the opportunity to represent and even dabble with multiple sides of the historical events that it hopes to tell without repercussion.

That is, as I have been arguing in this thesis, the author's position as a third person narrator to the conflict and the events of the French Revolution allows him to see the various outcomes and consequences or the Revolution that neither the characters or players of the movement could from their limited perspective as individuals living in the present. This allows the narrator the author creates to adopt a more ambivalent stance compared to the historical agents who lived during the era. From the perspective of historians, this sense of detachment is a direct result of working with the so-called unintended consequences of past events, which are accessible to the historian but not the subjects (Roberts 11). In *The History and Narrative Reader,* Geoffrey Roberts argues how "a linguistic distance is created between historians and their subjects" (11), that a sense of separation between the historian (those in the future) and the subject (those in the past) is inevitable. Since historical narrative is produced through the language that historians use to interpret the outcomes of past events, the narratives they produce are their own instead of the historical agents, who have no knowledge of either the concept and theories that are being used to explain the outcomes of their experiences (Amkersmit 14). The narrator of *A Tale* serves as the novel's unintended historian who narrates the historical events or the experiences of the historical agents (Dickens' characters) to the reader. This creates a clear linguistic barrier between the unnamed narrator, and the characters who are oblivious to the

presence of the narrator, who exists and functions outside of the characters' linear time and narrative.

Furthermore, the historian is also the master of the narrative, not the subject or the historical agent. With the narrative under their control, the narrator has the power to decide how the events of the French Revolution would be presented to the reader. Similar to Dickens' characters, real-life subjects of a historical event are also characters within the historical narrative, who only operate and exist based on the narrative created by the historian. Not all historical narratives can be considered as ambivalent; however, various aspects of historical retrospection and documentation have allowed historians to be ambivalent when analyzing the consequences of historical events. *A Tale*'s narrator embodies these qualities through his skeptical and cynical narration of the period, as he questions the very nature of the historical event that he aims to dissect for the reader. The narrator's choice of using various comparisons reflect the narrator's pervasive knowledge of the world that transcends both space and time, an insight that is clearly absent or inaccessible to the characters in the novel, who is also oblivious to the existence of the narrator. Uncoincidentally, the first chapter, "The Period," ends with a commentary on the "smallness" of people or the characters within history, showing how in the face of history, historical agents, who are bound to a certain historical event, would eventually be dissected and analyzed by those like the unnamed narrator, people who are both immune and detached from the realities of the very agents that live during the time period. Thus, the chapter explains the miniscule influence of people in the face of historical narrative, that within history, real people play no bigger of a role than characters that exist within works of fiction. Furthermore, this also testifies to the historian's power and authority. As previously discussed in the introduction, the historical agent, who is confined by both time and space, is incapable of

directly addressing those in the future. Their very characterization lies solely in the hands of the historian, who has both the authority and power to decide how the recipient of a historical narrative would receive the information, and thus the historical agent would always lie in the mercy of the author who writes and retells the past.

II. Dr. Manette's Psychology

Tina Young Choi in *History, Memory, and Rewriting the Past in A Tale of Two Cities* observes that "a historical novel [is] concerned as much with memory as with political history" (784). The warped memories of Dr. Manette, including his way of referencing himself based on the number of his prison cell at the Bastille, is inherently political. His memories define the political turmoil of the years preceding the French Revolution and gives an explanation to the political climate that instigated the French Revolution. Additionally, Dr. Manette's memories could be referred to as a metaphor for the chaotic upheavals of the time period, resulting in warped and contradictory recollections of the past. Dr. Manette's imprisonment can be considered as a political memory. His imprisonment is evidence of the practice of a letter *de cachet*, a tactic involving false imprisonment charges. Used by aristocrats during the eighteenth century, the letter *de cachet* allows aristocrats to "bury alive" their enemies under false or no charges (Siefken 60). The reason why Dr. Manette's imprisonment is strictly described under the metaphor of a burial is that his imprisonment has no end (Siefken 62). Unlike prisoners who have a fixed jailed period, Dr. Manette was left in the Bastille to disappear after witnessing the murder of a peasant girl and her brother by the Evrémonde brothers. Dr. Manette's imprisonment also has a psychological influence on the readers as it serves to portray the cruelty of the French upper-class. His warped memories, as a result of trauma, are made explicit by Dickens,

influencing the readers to understand how long-term imprisonment had deteriorated both Dr. Manette's mind and physique.

In the third chapter of the novel's first part, Jarvis Lorry dreams of his mission to recover Dr. Manette who has been buried for "almost eighteen years" (Dickens 17). The chapter specifically uses the metaphor "buried alive" to refer to Dr. Manette's imprisonment while also paralleling the scene with the phrase "recalled to life," to signify Dr. Manette's impending freedom and reunion with his daughter, Lucie Manette. Lorry's dream functions in a sequence where he questions the unnamed figure (Dr. Manette) in a loop, creating a constant repetition of the phrases "buried alive" and "recalled to life." This sequence produces a metaphor to the cycle of history – to beginnings as symbolized by the act of recalling a person to live, and endings, with the act of burial. Additionally, the act of recalling something to life can also allude to recalling or recollecting memories of the past as Dr. Manette's appearance sets into motion the cause and effects of the novel's climax, which is Darnay's trial during the French Revolution. Interestingly, Dr. Manette memories unfold in a reverse sequence, from effects to cause (Siefken 60). This choice of reversing how the memories are uncovered to the reader exemplifies how historical recollection is an act that moves backwards, as people turn to past narratives to uncover events that have passed.

A Tale of Two Cities brings in many modes and instruments to recall history, which is communicated through both personal and institutional means, which includes Dr. Manette's letter. Through a discussion surrounding Dr. Manette's psychology and the various court scenes in the novel, I want to suggest that there is an inherent argument being made by the novel that history is both an individual and collective form of political recollection, which can result in varying interpretations between the individual and the collective. This variance results in

ambivalent and contradicting outcomes, a fact that the novel establishes. For instance, the second court scene in France where Darnay is put on trial after the rediscovery of Dr. Manette's letter reveals how there is a significant difference between one's personal recollection compared to that of the community. While Dr. Manette insists on Darnay's innocence at court, "Who and where is the false conspirator who says that I denounce the husband of my child?" (Dickens 329), the court immediately condemns Darnay as guilty after the reading of Dr. Manette's letter, "At every juryman's vote, there was a roar. Another and another. Roar and roar" (345). The ambivalent result of Darnay's sentencing reveals how personal and collective recollection can be starkly contradictory. Interestingly, the scene also proves how personal recollection can fluctuate and embody ambivalent characteristics, although they are produced by the same individual. Through Dr. Manette's letter, we can see retrospectively two rather contradictory sides of Dr. Manette. There is one who condemns every member of the Evrémonde line to death, and another who vigilantly defends an Evrémonde, who happens to be his son-in-law. Although in each present moment, Dr. Manette is not ambivalent (he feels strongly to condemn first, then to defend later), his letter's representation within *A Tale* allows readers to see the ambivalent structure of the novel, and how ambivalence can be produced through a historical recollection of the past.

Dickens uses several literary tools to express this historical retrospection including the rendering of Dr. Manette's psychological condition, the relation of Manette to mementos (especially his shoe-mending tools), and the use of institutional locations to evoke a sense of recollection of the past. By bringing different ways to represent historical recollection, *A Tale* invites critical examination of the processes used to preserve, recall, and communicate history in a personal and institutional context (Choi 784). The subject of Dr. Manette's psychology is connected to his impaired memory. In his first appearance in the novel, this trauma causes

Manette to virtually exist in a reality between the past and present. Although Manette's physical body is in the present, his mind still resides in One Hundred and Five North Tower, which causes him to rely on his shoemaking to cope during highly stressful situations. The scene where Mr. Lorry takes Lucie to see her father, whom she thought had died, brings forth a sense of confusion as it serves as the first physical encounter between the past and present in the novel. When Manette sees Lucie for the first time after eighteen years of separation, he reacts in confusion, thinking that the young Lucie could be his wife, "'No, no, no; you are too young, too blooming. It can't be. See what the prisoner is. These are not the hands she knew, this is not the face she knew, this is not a voice she ever heard'" (Dickens 47). This juxtaposition between the young and vibrant Lucie with the decaying Manette creates a discrepancy between the two characters, with Lucie representing the present and Manette representing a fragment of the past as a prisoner at the Bastille. This scene brought a sense of ambivalence in the text. While Lucie Manette thrives in England, growing up to be a well-bred middle class woman as a result of a more politically stable nation, Dr. Manette represents death as a result of political upheaval.

Additionally, Dr. Manette also occasionally refers to himself in the third person, especially when conditions of his trauma resurface. In chapter nineteen of the second book, "An Opinion," Jarvis Lorry implores Dr. Manette to help him understand the psychological conditions of a "friend" of his who relies on shoemaking to address the trauma he had experienced. To the reader, it is quite obvious that Lorry is referring to Dr. Manette himself; however, Dr. Manette's answers and the way he refers to himself in third person creates a confusing portrayal of himself. The sense of detachment that Dr. Manette uses to describe himself is similar to the quality that the narrator has when addressing the characters of *A Tale.* As Dr. Manette continues to address his condition from a third-person point of view, he is capable of harnessing bits of objectivity

coupled with glimpses of ambivalence when he advises Lorry to burn the shoemaking bench. Although Manette seems to understand after a moment that the shoe bench Lorry refers to is his –"it is such an old companion" (Dickens 212) – he continues to describe the circumstances surrounding his shoemaking in a third-person perspective, before eventually conceding to having the bench destroyed. Here is the internal struggle that he experiences because of his desire to keep the bench in place: "'I sanction it. But, I would not take it away while he was present. Let it be removed when he is not there; let him miss his old companion after an absence'" (212). From this scene, it can be inferred that emotions limit the ability to be ambivalent. In contrast to the emotionally detached narrator, Manette is stuck in the past both mentally and physically due to the powerful associations that he has with the Bastille. However, once he is able to detach himself from the memories, he is capable of making objective decisions while showing hints of ambivalence.

III. Dr. Manette's Letter and the Historical Document

A Tale of Two Cities contains various *mise en abymes,* images within images. In our context of historical retrospection as producing ambivalence, one of the most prominent *mise en abymes* would be Dr. Manette's letter, which was utilized by the Defarges to convict Darnay at court. The letter narrates the rape of a peasant girl by the Evrémonde brothers, which results in her death and her brother's who died trying whilst trying to avenge her sister. As the doctor who tried to save the girl, Dr. Manette becomes the unwilling witness and writes the letter after he was forcefully thrown into jail.

Considering the novel's fascination with historical recollection, it is only fitting that the novel also encapsulates various acts of recollection by connecting the past and the present through various copies and mirrors. Through the technique of inserting a story within a story, Dr.

Manette's letter mirrors *A Tale of Two Cities,* where it serves to narrate specific historical events to the characters, similarly to how *A Tale* narrates the events that took place in the novel. Jacob Emery in his essay "Figures Taken for Signs: Symbol, Allegory, *Mise en abyme*" assesses how the value of the mise-en-abyme "is usually understood as deriving from its ability to signify, or perhaps more accurately to figure, the framing text" (341). Our concern is with how Dr. Manette's letter serves as a historical document or literary narrative that encapsulates the role of a text in historical connection.

To the spectators in the second court scene, the letter serves the same function as *A Tale* does to its extradiegetic readers. It allows the characters to discover the past and recollect on the events that had transpired. The court scene itself could be seen as a form of recollection. As the judge and witnesses decide the fate of Darnay, they must rely on the information and narratives provided by the letter in order to be able to commit to a historical retrospection. This mimicry does not only end through the creation of the letter, but also by the way Manette transforms himself as the narrator of the text and an historian exposing the events of the past, similar to the novel's unnamed narrator. Like the unnamed narrator, Manette begins his letter by addressing the year in which the events that led to his imprisonment took place, "I, Alexandre Manette…write this melancholy paper in my doleful cell in the Bastille, during the last month of the year, 1767" (Dickens 331), creating a mirroring representation of the novel's prologue. Like the novel, the letter is also responsible for creating an ambivalent and rather contradictory characterization of Dr. Manette's relationship with his son-in-law Darnay. Although Dr. Manette advocates twice for Darnay's innocence, one, when he serves as a witness when Darnay was tried as a spy in England, and second, when Dr. Manette utilized his influence among the revolutionaries to garner Darnay's release, the letter ultimately twists his role from a protective father-in-law to

Darnay's third accuser, whose account spurs the court to declare Darnay as guilty. This brings an ironic twist to Dr. Manette's statement, when he first took the stand during Darnay's first trial within the book, where he said, "'I hope,' bursting into tears, 'I may not repay him by doing him harm to-day.'" (74). In this way, Dr. Manette functions as both Darnay's savior and condemner, an ambivalent role for a father-in-law to play. This contradiction reveals how the narrative of a historical document exists based on the interpretation of the following generations that perceives it. As historical events could result in different interpretations, the letter proves how history is essentially ambivalent as it unfolds through the subjective lens of its interpreters.

As if to speak further on the theme of ambivalence, it is quite fitting that Darnay's verdict remains inconclusive. *A Tale* oversees three courtroom proceedings, one in London and two in France, with Darnay being put into trial for all three. The court scenes exude a sense of ambivalence because Darnay's innocence or guilt was never solidified as he alternated between being both the guilty and innocent party. It is also interesting that Darnay's characterization is also ambivalent and contradicting. While he stands trial for his status as an aristocrat, condemned for the sins of his father and ancestors, Darnay lives a remotely middle-class lifestyle as an immigrant in England, which contrasts his upper-class roots. The unnamed narrator explicitly mentions in the narration that Darnay works as a French tutor, "In this age, he would have been a Professor; in that age, he was a Tutor" (134), and although he garners great respect from the role, the position of language tutors at the time were considered to be mostly a half-professional and half-freelance role with most tutors employed to teach traveling gentlemen (Maxwell 464). Although language tutors are capable of becoming distinguished figures, such as the case of Agostinos Isola, who infamously taught Italian to the English poet William Wordsworth (Sturrock 797), they were not a long-established occupation by the eighteenth century. Darnay's

identity as a French tutor conflicts with his aristocratic upbringing, creating another series of contradictions that is already prevalent in the novel, as Darnay explicitly lives a double life in his attempt to conceal his noble roots.

As Sydney Carton replaces Darnay and dies at the guillotine in the novel's famous closing scene, Darnay essentially has never gone through the sentence intended for him, meaning his fate will always be ambivalent as he is neither innocent nor guilty in the sight of the French court. While the French public had deemed the execution as successfully completed, Darnay's flight to England means he has officiated his status as an exiled figure from France. This see-sawing outcome fits the theme of ambivalence that the novel is trying to portray. There is no definitive answer for Darnay who would always be deemed as neither alive nor dead. Similar to the established contradictions within Darnay's identity, the conclusion of the court scene supports or even amplifies the contradicting nature of Darnay's existence. This ambivalent ending reveals how the court scene, or historical retrospection, would almost result in ambivalent results as the court debates on Darnay's innocence or guilt.

Part Three

Ambivalent Historical Forms in Time and Space – The Historian's Omnipresent Character

How can we convey the fact that historians are untethered to the "the timeline" of the historical event? Despite the connection that the historian has as the author of a historical narrative, is it possible to to describe how historians are untethered to the timeline of the historical event that they sought to recreate or deliver? How do you explain the "meta-existence" that a historian has within a historical narrative? Dickens finds a way to do so by modulating the tenses in his narration to convey a jump between the timeline of *A Tale,* which affects not only the structure of the narrative, but also the way in which the narration is being told to the reader. It is arguable that through this ability to jump between different timelines in a text, a historian is able to navigate different outcomes and hypothesize as to why certain events came into being. Additionally, Dickens also manipulates descriptions of space in the novel to create a sense of self-insertion into the texts through the use of parallelism within spatial relations.

I. Schisms of Tense and Time

While *A Tale* is mostly written in past-tense there are three scenes in the book where the narration shifts to present-tense, indicating how the scene is narrated from the novel's "present." The use of past-tense in the novel creates a sense that the unnamed narrator is narrating the events of *A Tale* from the future, as he muses over the characters' actions that had happened in the past from the narrator's present perspective. Therefore, the jump from past-tense to present-tense in the three chapters listed, creates a schism in the timeline of *A Tale*, creating a perplexing non-linear sequence of events that resembles schisms in the novel's fabric of time. This perplexing shift is seen first during the reading of Dr. Manette's letter, in which the letter was written and read in present-tense by the court. This hypothetically results in an atmosphere

that feels as if the courtroom had been transported to the past to witness the events that led to Dr. Manette's arrest as it unfolded in real-time. The second scene involves the family's flight from France after Carton disguises himself as Darnay, which ultimately sends him to the path towards the guillotine. The third and last scene that involves this obvious shift in tenses is during Carton's executions. However, this scene does not merely make a switch from past-tense to present-tense. As the narrator narrates the execution of Darnay as if it is revolving in real time, the narration eerily ends with Carton narrating a vision of the future, breaking the novel's repetitive cycle of replaying the past as it ushers a new form of retrospection, which is that of the future. The physical break in the text that precedes the prophetic narrative creates a final break in the text, creating a barrier from past narratives to that of a retrospection of the future. Carton's prophecy of the future is also accurate as he describes the ambivalent end of the French Revolution which results in both progress and regress: "I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out" (Dickens 389). In this scene, Darnay takes on the characteristics of the historian through his ability to see the multitudes of outcomes from his death. In this scene, death symbolizes a sense of detachment, which became the key for Darnay's ambivalent monologue at the end of the novel. I am not arguing that death results in ambivalence, however, the sense of detachment that Darnay experiences from the other characters through his death allows him to gain an ambivalent perspective as he is transported outside of the linear timeline of the other characters.

Whereas time and space does not seem to limit the unnamed narrator, this sudden grammatical shift jogs certain dispositions into the readers who are forced to alternate into

different time periods with the narrator, forcing them into a kind of self-insertion into a period that they do not belong in. This ability to meta-physically self-insert oneself into a narrative can also be another form of *mise en abyme* in the text as the narrator mimics Dickens' very own ability to self-insert his story and characters into the events of the French Revolution.

Several scholarly notes establish that there are approximately more than ten real-life recorded events that occurred during the French Revolution that were mentioned in *A Tale.* While many scholars have long read Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* as insufficiently historical as the plot of the novel mainly focuses on the melodramatic circumstances surrounding the Manette family, the establishment of about eighteen real-live events of the Revolution from the storming of the Bastille to brief mentions of Robert Damiens' assassination attempts of King Louis XV, indicate how Dickens' narrative is very much guided by historical records, which makes the creation of his novel and characters possible.

As part of his preparation and writing of *A Tale*, Dickens has long been known to have ardently studied Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837), an influential historical account of the Revolution. Moved by Carlyle's work, Dickens used Carlyle's history as a basis of his novel, borrowing details from Carlyle (Marcus 56). A historian and longtime friend of Dickens, Carlyle's influence on Dickens is quite tangible with various scholars noting the presence of Carlyle's beliefs and values in Dickens' historical novel, including Carlyle's fascination with the conflux between the present and the past (Christian 12) – in essence the conflux of time and how time is presented within literary narrative. There was also a mutual understanding among Dickens and Carlyle over the use of fiction as a medium to understand and navigate one's perception of historical events. David Sorensen in his essay "'The Unseen Heart of the Whole': Carlyle, Dickens, and the Sources of 'The French Revolution' in 'A Tale of Two

Cities,'" recounts that "both men realized that just as fiction might enhance the study of history, so too could history enrich the art of the novel" (5). Finally, Dickens' novels also contain several distinctly Carlylean ideas on social questions, including Carlyle's theories of the present-time which Carlyle described as "the 'conflux of two eternities,' the past and the future" (Christian 12) as seen through *A Tale's* infamous opening line, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," (Dickens 5) which questions the paradox and chaotic nature of time and era in which the French Revolution presides, and its influence on then-future events.

These ideas of historical self-insertion and the representation of time in the novel reveal the subjectivity of history, and the ability of the human psyche to deliberately place themselves in the narrative through acts of recollection. In the scene where Dr. Manette and Lucie flee Paris with an unconscious Darnay, the narrator momentarily begins to narrate the story within a first-person perspective, creating a scene that feels as if the narrator is physically joining the characters in their escape, instead of merely being an omnipresent and invisible observant of their flight from France: "Houses in twos and threes pass by us, solitary farms, ruinous buildings, dye-works tanneries and the like, open country, avenues of leafless trees" (370). This same effect also occurred during Sydney Carton's execution. These schisms within the timeline of *A Tale*, reveals the rather complex and animated power of historical retrospection. As the narrator reflects on the past, his existence outside of the linear timeline of the character allows him to break the timeline and jump from different scenes and concepts of time without any repercussions, which may seem confusing as it results in scenes that might feel contradicting and unruly. Historical self-insertion as seen through the narrator shows a practice of how historical retrospection allows for ambivalence through the use of a non-confining timeline. As the narrator has the authority to control the way the historical account in *A Tale* is presented to the reader, this

gives the narrator the power to shift through settings, falsify, or cling to history (McWilliams 1), creating contradictions and showing scenes that might not be logically comprehensible if analyzed from a constricted timeline. This shows the reason why the narrator, or the historian, is capable of becoming ambivalent about the subject matter they are narrating.

II. Parallelism – The Use of Patterns and Cycles to Mimic Historical Narratives

Similar to the use of metaphors, Dickens also utilizes parallels to amplify the ambivalence and contradictions within the text and history. From the three court scenes, to the physical parallels between Darnay and Carton, *A Tale* functions through dualities and cycles. While this repetition might initially produce a sense of proliferating similarities, Dickens' use of parallels in *A Tale* is special because he uses parallels to invoke contradictions, which amplifies the ambivalence within *A Tale.* His use of parallels is already evident from the title of the novel, which functions to create the contradictory nature of the time period and how it instigates different effects in Paris and London respectively. In the first court scene, as Carton takes on the defense of Darnay, Jerry Cruncher notes the uncanny resemblance that the two men share physically: "...but left them – so like each other in feature, so unlike each other in manner – standing side by side, both reflected in the glass above them" (81). Dickens' use of parallels in this scene, and the deliberate act of placing both characters side by side, creates a sense of ambivalence, which reveals how a person with the same physical features could have entirely different mannerisms, temperaments, and fate. Although Carton and Darnay's physical resemblance was able to fool the French revolutionaries into executing Carton in place of Darnay, they were the polar opposites of another in character, rivals even for their love for Lucie Manette. While Darnay represents life and matrimony (through his marriage with Lucie Manette), Carton dies in isolation in a foreign country, with only the seamstress as his

companion, who in his finals moments was the only person who recognized that the Charles Darnay set up for execution was a fake. The intentional placement of the overhang mirror in this scene further amplifies the mirroring effect of these two characters, intensifying the parallelism between the two characters. This particular usage of space to the way Darnay and Carton are placed physically next to each other, shows how Dickens capitalizes the use of space in the text.

In addition to the parallels that Darnay has with Carton, Dickens continues using parallelism as a tool to juxtapose his views on the violent means of the French Revolution, which he seems to condemn throughout the narrative. Dickens creates parallels between both the protagonists and antagonists of *A Tale* which he also links several times with the violent events of the Revolution. David Rosen notices the parallel between the Christ-like Sydney Carton with *A Tale*'s main aggressor, Madame Defarge. In "A Tale of Two Cities: Theology of Revolution," Rosen explores the similarities between the two characters through the context of pagan and religious beliefs that require the act of spilling blood as a key to reach resurrection or rebirth. Rosen argues that the barbarism, violence, and spilling of blood during the French Revolution does not necessarily result in resurrection, rebirth, reform, or change, instead it pushes French commoners to commit the same violence that the upper class had inflicted on them for generations. Rosen writes, "Dickens… seems to understand both the significance and the enduring power of such rituals; in his hands, the French Revolution follows the pattern of pagan fertility rites. The centuries of aristocratic rule have left France a wasteland. In the most palpable, physical sense, the rapacity of the nobility has emptied the national coffers and left the countryside barren" (172). Rosen also compares the nature of both Carton and Defarge's death, elaborating that while Carton's execution results in birth and multiplication (as his death leads to the continued existence of Lucie and Darnay's family), Madame Defarge's death does not

produce any form of offspring. In death, Defarge remains childless as she has been in life. This can also be attributed to earlier references of the Gorgon's head during the Marquis' death. Interestingly, Madame Defarge is also a personification of another Greek myth: the three sisters of fate. Similar to the fates, Defarge knits the names of the Revolution's enemies, essentially condemning the people on her list to death. Linda Lewis, in her article "Madame Defarge as Political Icon in Dickens's 'A Tale of Two Cities,'" parallels Madame Defarge with the three sisters of fate and describes her as a personification and icon of both awe and brutality (31).

Dickens is also prone to creating more than one parallel for a certain subject. For instance, Madame Defarge has multiple parallelisms. Aside from her parallel to Carton, Dickens also creates a parallel between Madame Defarge and Lucie Manette, the heroine of *A Tale* – creating a series of mirroring effects that convey different meanings. Madame Defarge's dominant presence in the novel is a direct antithesis to the mainstream view of women during the Victorian era which demanded that women be chaste, quiet, and submissive. John Lamb in his article "Domesticating History: Revolution and Moral Management in 'A Tale of Two Cities,'" explores the symbolism of Madame Defarge as a representation of Victorian anxieties towards sexuality, gender, and class that threaten to uproot Victorian domestic ideology and bourgeois middle class values. Although Dickens portrays both the male and female agents of the French Revolution in a relatively equal manner, Lamb notices that it is within the features of female characters that signs of social violence and insanity are clearest (227). Madame Defarge represents the Victorian era's anxiety towards working-class political revolt and deviant female sexuality, which were both seen as a threat to middle-class society and property. Fearing the possibility of this immorality spreading among women, Madame Defarge's influence over the women of St. Antoine is a clear representation of the Victorian paranoia over the idea of a

revolutionary woman, whose revolt toward Victorian values might spread to other women. In his article, Lamb describes Darnay's return to France after his six years of marriage with Lucie Manette as leaving "the bliss of his English home and the respectability of his wife to court the fierce, passionate, and raging female, La Revolution, who is embodied in Therese Defarge and her bloodthirsty sisterhood, the women of St. Antoine" (227). The differing point of view on the role of women in both Victorian England and France is one of the most noticeable questions in *A Tale*. While women in England, as embodied by the character of Lucie Manette, were seen to be the model middle-class women, the women in France had a more egalitarian role as leaders and active participants of the Revolution which reflects the established motto of "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,"or Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity – principles popularized by the French Revolution. Additionally, the French Revolution had also inspired the likes of Mary Wollstonecraft, an English writer and advocate of women's rights, to write both *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and her lesser known history *The French Revolution*: "... in the Vindications, Wollstonecraft saw the French Revolution not as destroying society, but rather as being driven by a democratic logic which held out the hope that it could finally be established on a defensible" (O'Neill 458). In *A Tale*, Madame Defarge, the charismatic revolutionary, politician, freedom fighter, and terrorist embodies this clash between the ideal Victorian woman and the representation of women as active agents within socio-political movements.

Aside from the discussion of the parallels among Dickens' characters, Dickens also uses parallels to convey cyclic patterns in the text. In *A Tale,* the three court proceedings serve as major points of transition*,* creating a series of mirroring scenes that provide a polarizing take on the organization of Dickens' novel while simultaneously raising attention to the text's use of

doubling. The first court scene takes place in London, with Darnay standing trial under suspicion of being a spy for the French. His acquittal does not last long. When Darnay returns to his country of birth, he finds himself standing in court again in not one, but two trials as France grapples with a brewing Revolution that threatens to uproot traditional social institutions. Mirroring the one in London, Darnay also stands accused of being an enemy of the state in France, although this time his charges were based on his aristocratic lineage. While the second trial ends with another acquittal for Darnay through the interventions of Dr. Manette, the third trial sends Darnay to La Force prison to await his execution. The various doublings and parallels taking place in these three court scenes functions to create a contradictory sentiment on *A Tale*'s retrospection of the French Revolution and further pushes the ambivalence that both the text's narrator, and to an extent Dickens, took in analyzing the Revolution.

In retrospect, the numerous scenes between characters, settings, and events, reveal how history often functions in a repetitive cycle, which Dickens acknowledges. However, through these acts of repetitions and parallelism, there is an inherent argument that shows how history, albeit its exterior of similarities, will always be an ambivalent subject matter. The complexities of history are tied onto the complexities of its historical agents or people. Despite the rather two-dimensional characterization of the characters in *A Tale*, this characteristic supports the argument that people are miniscule in the face of history, that although historical agents might seem distant and lacked nuance, the complex consequences of their actions is a direct statement to the complexity of history.

For the historian, or in this case, the unnamed narrator of *A Tale*, there is no familiarity between the characters (who serve as the historical agents of the novel) and the narrator, which might result in a detached description of the characters. The only connection that the narrator

shares with the characters is through the fact that the narrator is narrating or recollecting the events that circulate around the lives of these people. There is no sense of familiarity between the narrator and the characters to create a nuanced description, which results in the unnamed narrator's ambivalent behavior towards the events that transpired in the novel. The lack of physical connection and space, results in a lack of a relationship between the narrator and characters that would allow the narrator to become a more subjective or emotionally invested witness. As people drive historical events forward, they begin to serve as characters in a plot, as their actions shape history similar to the way characters shape a plot of a story. In the grand scheme of things, people are miniscule in the face of history as human actions have the potential to be analyzed in an ambivalent perspective from those in the future. Through the context of the novel's use of parallelism, the miniscuility of the characters parallels the general understanding of history and its historical agents. It is by creating these parallels that Dickens was able to evoke or emphasize a set of contradictions, creating an ambivalent portrayal in the novel.

Conclusion

As historical retrospection stems from the concoction of human memory and thought, therefore it is plausible to assume that history would always be ambivalent as the understanding of it is produced through the act of recollection. *A Tale of Two Cities*, like its namesake, is undeniably filled with contradictions – in fact it is a story of contradictions, a medium where the narrator reveals these various contradictions and lays them bare to the reader. *A Tale of Two Cities* mimics its subject matter – the French Revolution – as it follows the complex trajectory of history, indirectly revealing how history is far too complex to be labeled into tiny, well-thought-of explanations, albeit the numerous attempts of Dickens' contemporaries to use the genre as a way to mitigate their confusions, dilemmas, and fears of past historical events. History would always be ambivalent, which is made possible through the act of retrospection and recollection. Fiction, within a context of *A Tale*, serves as a way for Dickens to narrativize his understanding, doubts, and perspectives of the French Revolution, delivering a novel that aligns with Victorian England's interpretation of the movement that occurred across the narrow English channel. Through *A Tale,* Dickens lays out a groundwork of stories, and interconnecting characters, creating plausible scenarios that would allow him and his readership – the English people, to immerse and even insert themselves within the timeline of a historical event and divulge with these various ambivalences in a way that seems contemplative. *A Tale* allows its readers to dissect the novel similar to the way they would dissect a historical piece, allowing readers to formulate their own opinions of the French Revolution, while making peace with unanswered historical questions by allowing ambivalence to take hold.

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