Lucie as the Light in *A Tale of Two Cities*

Gregory Hutchinson

Introduction: *A Tale of Two Cities* has always been regarded as an unusual work in Dickens's pageant of novels. It is one of only two historical novels along with *Barnaby Rudge.*[1] Since so much of his strength as a novelist stems from his intimate knowledge of the contemporary scene, *A Tale* might seem an unwise digression for Dickens. And indeed, some critics dislike it. Q. D. Leavis actually dismisses it in a sentence, without further explanation (287). Other critics think it is unusually well-done, but still out of the mainstream of Dickens's novels.

While agreeing that *A Tale* is unique in obvious ways, I feel that it is central in at least one respect: it portrays a special and instructive reverence for the novel's residing "angel" Lucie Manette, even though the period and Lucie's Franco-English origins make her something other than a "Victorian angel."

For anyone who is unfamiliar with this type, a typical Dickens novel has at least one character who can be described in general terms as a beautiful young woman with an extremely gentle manner. George Orwell coined the phrase "legless Victorian angel" (138) to describe the type, and in fairness to Orwell (an honest critic and a sincere admirer of Dickens), it is Dickens himself who applies the word "angel" to such characters as Ruth Pinch in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and

Esther Summerson in *Bleak House*. In the twentieth century there was a natural rebellion against Victorian values, especially against the prudery that taints so much minor fiction right into the early years of the twentieth century.[3] It isn't surprising that these Dickens angels would trigger the natural suspicion of prudery and pedestal-placing.

In other papers on his novels, I have argued that Dickens knew what he was doing when he created these rather ideal young women, and his novels would suffer without them. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, we can see one reason why. Though Lucie's role is a fairly passive one,[4] she is the motive-force behind much of the action. In fact, her name, which is a variation of the Latin word for *light*,[5] suggests her role in the novel. She illuminates the other important characters, whether good and evil. Without taking very much action herself, Lucy inspires the actions by which these characters reveal themselves and their place in the ethical jungle of the late eighteenth century and the French Revolution.

This paper will be divided into three parts, the first dealing with the Lucie's immediate family and friends, the second with two of the villains, and the third with Lucie's ultimate saviors.

I Immediate Family and Friends: The most obvious recipient of Lucie's influence is her father, Dr. Manette. Twenty years before the main action of this novel, during the reign of Louis XV, Dr. Manette had the misfortune to witness the deaths of two peasants, a sister and brother, at the hands of the Evrémonde brothers, a pair of powerful aristocrats. The details of these misdeeds can be left to a footnote.[6] Lucie, who has lived in England most of her life (but has

remained bilingual), had always been told that her father was dead. This was because her mother didn't want Lucie to live in the state of false hope that was ruining her own life. But an old bank officer from Tellson's House named Mr. Lorry, who used to work at the bank's Paris branch office, breaks the news to Lucie that her father is still alive and about to be freed from the Bastille, a notorious old fortress of a prison in Paris.

Therefore, with the kind Mr. Lorry at her side, Lucie goes to Paris to meet her father. Dr. Manette turns out to have temporarily lost his mind. He is quartered in a notoriously poor section of Paris known as Saint Antoine above the wine shop of his former servant Monsieur Defarge. The doctor remembers no one, seems unconscious of his own identity, and spends his time sitting on a bench making shoes. In an emotional scene, Lucie reveals herself to him (despite the violent reaction that Defarge fears from this approach of an unknown young woman), and the old prisoner is somehow soothed and calmed.

The next time we encounter Dr. Manette, he is living with Lucie in a quiet corner of still-suburban Soho, in the London area, and he has regained his old sense of identity and even a respectable medical practice. Clearly, Manette's recovery has come about through the agency of his daughter. No one who saw the prisoner Manette in Paris (including the less than disinterested Defarge[7]) expected him to regain either his health or his sanity. But the symbolism involved in this restoration is still more to the credit of Lucie. She doesn't just help to bring about her father's recovery (whether full or partial remains to be seen) — she is the light by which Manette remembers and assumes his old identity. The focus of his despair was completely losing contact with his wife twenty years ago. Now he can see the

wife again in Lucie.[8]

In a more mundane sense, Lucy helps to establish her eventual husband Charles Darnay in his new identity. Charles is the last of the Evrêmondes, an arrogant and greedy family of French aristocrats that bled the peasants in their province dry — the peasants are literally hungry — and caused more than one peasant's death. As a reformer, Charles is a bitter opponent of his uncle, Monsieur the Marquis, the same conspirator who killed the peasant boy in a duel and (along with his older brother) had Dr. Manette imprisoned twenty years ago.

Charles has his final meeting with the Marquis at his uncle's chateau soon after the uncle has created a new wave of rage among the common people by allowing his coach to speed through Saint Antoine and run down a small child, and then, to add insult to manslaughter, by making it plain that he doesn't care. Coincidentally, on the very night of Charles's stay at the chateau, the Marquis is stabbed in his bed by the enraged father, and the ensuing, excessive punishment of the Crown for this murder becomes another significant step towards the Revolution. Charles has already changed his name to Darnay and moved to England before this assassination. He now relinquishes the position and property accruing to him by way of his uncle's death.

It was on an earlier trip from France to England that Charles intentionally booked passage on the ship carrying Lucie and her father to England because he felt obliged to watch over the old man whose life his family had ruined. This was how Charles met Lucy, and this and subsequent meetings (she is actually called, very much against her will, to testify against him at a trial for treason) give Charles his

ultimate goal in life. He determines to marry Lucy and support her and their eventual family by teaching and translating French. His sense of fulfillment as a modern language teacher and his success at a time when only the classical languages were officially taught at Oxford and Cambridge (though he has unofficial university classes as well as high-paying private students), and his contentment in his new identity are due largely to Lucie. The couple's harmony is unremarkable as fiction, since there is no dark side to it other than Charles's concealment of his Evrêmonde connection.[9]

Lucie's influence on Mr. Lorrie, the venerable banker and friend of the family, can be established quite briefly because it is more a matter of clarifying his character than inspiring his actions. Mr. Lorrie would act on Dr. Manette's behalf whether or not he met Lucie, but she is the means by which we see his real character. So Lucie's effect in Lorry's case is mainly symbolic. Like so many Dickens characters, Mr. Lorrie has his little tic, which is to describe himself as a businessman, with no human feelings. Here is a sample of his first meeting with Lucie, in which he is trying to tell her that her father is still alive without upsetting her — indirectly, in almost fairy-tale fashion, using no names, though Lucie knows he is talking about her father and herself:

> "His affairs, like the affairs of many other French gentlemen and French families, were entirely in Tellson's hands. In a similar way, I am, or I have been, trustee of one kind or other for scores of our customers. These are mere business relations, miss; there is no friendship in them, no particular interest, nothing like sentiment. I have passed from one to another, in the course of my

business life, just as I pass from one of our customers to another in the course of my business day; in short, I have no feelings; I am a mere machine." (25)

In this short passage alone, Mr. Lorry uses the word "business," to stress the impersonal nature of his labors for the family, three times. He attributes all action on Dr. Manette's behalf to Tellson's House. And finally, as a peroration, he compares himself, before the concept of robots had found its way into science fiction, to "a mere machine." This is the Mr. Lorry that the very impersonal Tellson's House knows and trusts, but Lucie's penetration into the real meaning of his story, and her reaction to it, force Mr. Lorry to reveal his human side. She remembers a younger man who must, she concludes, have been Mr. Lorry, in France twenty years ago, and Lorry's answer is belied by his spontaneous words and actions. First there is more of the same:

"Miss Manette, it was I. And you will see how truly I spoke of myself just now, in saying I had no feelings, and that all the relations I hold with my fellow-creatures are mere business relations, when you reflect that I have never seen you since. No; you have been the ward of Tellson's House since, and I have been busy with other business of Tellson's House since. Feelings! I have no time for them, no chance for them. I pass my whole life, miss, in turning an immense pecuniary Mangle." (26)

The awkward repetition of the phrase about Tellson's House is a clue that Mr. Lorrie is losing his composure. And even before this, when Lucie rose in agitation, he took her hand and "put it with some ceremony to his lips." (26). After the above speech, Mr. Lorry punctuates

his story several times with the protestation "a matter of business," with each repetition making it clearer that for him this affair is anything but business as usual. He finally gives his own theory of how Lucie's mother died, " — I believe broken-hearted —," which is a very unbankerly speculation. In a word, Mr. Lorrie's first contact with Lucie is enough to reveal his true character, which is gentle — perhaps somewhat sentimental — and the opposite of his protestations. Even if Lucy doesn't alter Mr. Lorry's actions, she illuminates his character.

Another family friend, Lucie's companion, protector, and adorer Miss Pross, will be treated in Part III, since her final sacrifice for Lucy comes fast upon Sydney Carton's sacrifice, and she is best treated with Carton.

II Villains: As with Mr. Lorry, Lucie does not really influence the actions of the main villains, the Defarges, so much as allow us to see them clearly for what they are. What we see, more than once, is that Monsieur and Madame Defarge are very different people. Defarge is more than an honest revolutionary. He too has blood on his hands and deserves the beheading he will receive in the coming white revolution.[10] Yet we understand from the beginning, with no help from Lucie, that he is gentler than his wife. She has a primitive Greek sense of vengeance. It was her own sister, father, and brother that were killed by the Evremondes. As Maxwell in his brilliant notes explains (467), Madame Defarge desires the head of Charles, a complete innocent, because he continues the Evrêmonde line, just as Procne, in the Greek myth (retold in the *Metamorphoses*), kills her own innocent son Itys because he belongs to the line of her husband, King Tereus, who raped her sister Philomela.

For those who are unfamiliar with this gory myth, Tereus rapes Philomela, then cuts out her tongue and imprisons her to keep her from reporting the rape. However, Philomela weaves a tapestry that reveals Tereus' crime and has it sent to her sister Procne (Tereus's wife). Procne takes savage revenge. She kills their son, Itys, cuts him up in small pieces, and feeds the pieces to Tereus. When Tereus learns that he has been tricked by Procne into eating his own son, he sets out to kill her, but she and Philomela escape and are metomorphosed into birds. (Philomela is a nightingale and can say one word very clearly: "Tereus, Tereus, Tereus!")

Madame Defarge is forever knitting, which recalls Philomela and Procne's communication through weaving. The point is that in her lust for revenge, madam, as Dickens calls her, ignores the question of guilt or innocence. Like Procne, she wants to kill off the rapist's (and murderer's) progeny. For her it is a great stroke of luck that "Evrémonde" has returned to France.

By contrast, Monsieur Defarge seems to wish Charles had never answered the call from a former servant to return to France and testify on his behalf. "'In the name of that sharp female newly born and called La Guillotine,'" he says "with sudden impatience" at his first meeting with Charles, "'why did you come to France?'" (262). Defarge is a leading revolutionary figure, but he isn't especially bloodthirsty. Nevertheless, he does nothing at all to hinder what he is sure will be Charles's death either at the hands of the mob (who kill many of the detainees in La Force prison before they can be executed) or by "La Guillotine."

The real divergence between the husband and wife comes, however, after Charles has been found innocent in his trial and is even

cheered by the mob. Just as the family is about to celebrate the acquittal, armed representatives of the Tribunal come to the house and arrest Charles again. The Revolution has not yet evolved a government of laws, and a new denunciation by "Saint Antoine" — which, it transpires, means by "Citizen and Citizeness Defarge" (303) — is enough to condemn Charles for good. Without some *deus ex machina* (which will in fact materialize), Charles will soon face the guillotine.

Lucie makes a naive appeal to madame, which has no effect whatever and establishes that the woman has lost all capacity for normal human sympathy, if she ever had any. This is underscored by madame's indifference to the revelation at the second trial that the wife of Evrêmonde, Charles's mother, spent the last two years of her life searching for her, the future Madame Defarge, in the hope of making some restitution for what her husband and brother-in-law, the reigning Evrêmondes, had done to her family, a fact that is revealed at the second trial, in which Dr. Manette's secret journal is read: "She had reasons for believing that there was a young sister living, and her greatest desire was, to help that sister" (343).

But madam isn't just unsympathetic; she is ferocious and demands the death of everyone descended from or related to the Evrêmondes, as Sidney Carton overhears in the guise of an English visitor with no talent for French. Defarge and an inner core of bloodthirsty Jacobins are discussing the extent to which it is necessary to pursue the Evrêmondes, and Monsieur Defarge clearly wants to stop with Charles. But he expresses this desire irresolutely, as a question, and madame vetoes it:

"It is true, what madame says," observed Jacques Three.

"There is great force in that. Why stop?"

"Well, well," reasoned Defarge, "but one must stop somewhere. After all, the question is where?"

"At extermination," said madame. (352-53)

This is madame's philosophy with a vengeance (as it were). But here Monsieur Defarge still tries, with no success, to restrain her:

"Extermination is a good doctrine, my wife," said Defarge, rather troubled; "in general, I say nothing against it. But this Doctor has suffered much; you have seen him to-day [sic]; you have observed his face when the paper was read."

"I have observed his face!" repeated madame, contemptuously and angrily. "Yes, I have observed his face to be not the face of a true friend of the Republic. Let him take care of his face!"

"And you have observed, my wife," said Defarge, in a deprecatory manner, "the anguish of his daughter, which must be dreadful anguish to him!"

"I have observed his daughter!" repeated madame; "yes, I have observed his daughter, more times than one. I have observed her in the court, and I have observed her in the street by the prison. Let me but lift my finger —!" She seemed to raise it (the listener's eyes were always on his paper), and to let it fall with a rattle on the ledge before her, as if the axe had dropped. (353)

At this point, the gargoyles accompanying the happy couple start singing the praises of "the citizeness." The Vengeance (a brutal apparition from the lower depths who possesses none of madame's physical charms to confuse anyone about her character) uses the very word that Dickens intends for Lucie: "She is an Angel!" (353) — meaning madame, of course.

This inversion makes the point. Madame defines what she has

become — and how far beyond her conscience-bound husband she has evolved — when her attention turns to Lucie. If Lucie is an angel for Dickens and her many lovers, madame is a devil: a fallen angel, in the Christian myth. She is the focus of the evil in this story just as Lucie is the focus of the good. Thus madame's subsequent expressions of savagery produce "a horrible enjoyment" in her disciples (354). It is inevitable that she should no longer trust her husband and only confide her next course of action — going alone to the house of Lucie and her father, armed with a knife and a pistol, to either bring them back for execution or kill them on the spot — to the equally vicious Vengeance and Jacques Three, while keeping Defarge in the dark. They gloat over the fact that besides Lucie and Dr. Manette, her siblings' last comforter, madame includes the child, little Lucie, in her plans:

> "The child also!" observed Jacques Three, with a murderous enjoyment of his words, "has golden hair and blue eyes. And we seldom have a child there. It is a pretty sight!"

By "there," Jacques Three means *at the guillotine.* Madame has no quarrel with this comment. Her only concern is that these plans must be kept from Defarge:

> "In a word," said Madame Defarge, coming out of her short abstraction, "I cannot trust my husband. Not only do I dare not confide to him the details of my projects; but also I feel that if I delay, there is danger of his giving warning, and then they might escape." (353)

It is clear, then, that Lucie is the agent by which we distinguish the often-excessive fervor of the Revolution, represented by Monsieur Defarge, from the rabid demand for extermination, represented by his

wife. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Lucie is the most important instrument for distinguishing between a normal human being who has fallen into evil but still retains a noticeable reserve of decency, and someone given over completely to hatred and revenge.

Ⅲ The ultimate hero: Sydney Carton deserves to be treated separately (with a few words on behalf of the heroic Miss Pross) because he is a separate entity throughout the novel and the one character without whom it would either be an unconvincing melodrama or a tragedy. Along with Miss Pross, Carton is the only character who acts from motives of complete altruism.

Sydney is portrayed from the outset as someone who does more than he gets credit for. The overbearing and presumptuous advocate[11] Mr. Stryver relies on Carton to an extent that no one else realizes. Stryver, we are told, was only a modest success at the beginning of his career because he had powers of oratory but no ability to focus them. It is hinted that he is less than brilliant and doesn't understand his cases without help. Now he is a great success, and his performances are all perfectly focused. We then discover (first-hand: Dickens does not spell this out for us) that the focusing agent is Sydney. He and Stryver stay up half the night before a courtroom appearance, and all Stryver does is wait for Sydney (whilst both down an alarming quantity of wine) to analyze the material and tell him what is important, and even what to say and do during the trial.

The best example we get of this is at the trial of Charles Darnay for treason.[12] Darnay, being French (though no one knows he is the natural, albeit disinclined, heir to the Evrémonde title and fortune), is accused of spying on the Crown, and one of the prosecution's witnesses claims to have seen someone looking just like him on "the

Dover mail" (a stagecoach) five years ago (76). (Why this is relevant is unclear.) Stryver is having no success in shaking the witness's story until a note from his bewigged partner, Carton, is passed to him. Then he asks the witness if he could have been mistaken, since other people might look like Darnay. When the prisoner answers that he could not have been mistaken, he is shown Sidney Carton without his wig, looking enough like Darnay to be his twin. The witness is demolished and with him the case against Darnay, who is acquitted. Yet after the trial Stryver not only accepts all the credit for the favorable verdict, but, when they are alone again, has the nerve to lecture Carton on the difference between the two of them — Stryver being the great star and Sidney his abject foil. What must strike every reader is how little Sidney seems to care about this ingratitude.

Although Carton spends the majority of the trial and its aftermath staring at the ceiling and seeming indifferent to the outcome, there is one exception. Lucie has been forced during the trial to testify that Charles Darnay came to England on the same ship as she and her father, thus making her an unwilling witness for the prosecution. It is Carton who notices that Lucie (in well-known eighteenth-century fashion) has fainted and needs assistance:

> Yet [despite his seemingly oblivious attitude], this Mr. Carton took in more of the details of the scene than he appeared to take in, for now, when Miss Manette's head dropped upon her father's breast, he was the first to see it, and to say audibly, "Officer! look to that young lady. Help the gentleman to take her out. Don't you see she will fall!" (80)

In Sydney's case it becomes ever more obvious to the reader (though not to the other characters) that Lucie is his inspiration for

acting responsibly. Yet he doesn't even dream of courting her or trying to win her affections away from Darnay, whom (unlike the obtuse Stryver) Sydney recognizes as her future husband.

Thus Stryver conceives and drops his plan for favoring Lucie with his hand the same day — dropping it only because Mr. Lorry convinces him that his suit would be unsuccessful[13] — while Sydney knows for certain that Lucie will marry Charles Darnay, and yet remains faithful to her in a very uncomfortable role: he wants to visit her house occasionally, but not to exchange any intimacies with her or give any sign that he loves her. And that is all. This is why he emerges only once before Charles's Paris ordeal to speak his mind to her. He does so in a very moving scene (exactly the kind of scene that Dickens detractors call sentimental). He tells her that he loves her but with no thought of winning her, and that even if she were free and willing, he wouldn't have her because he is too lost in his vices (the only discernable one being a reckless intake of wine) to make her happy. He asks for permission to visit a few times a year and to remain as he is, just a peripheral figure with no special friends in the house (least of all, to outward appearance, Lucie). Then Sydney makes one last eloquent declaration, which sets the stage for his sacrifice:

> "My last supplication of all, is this; and with it, I will relieve you of a visitor with whom I well know you have nothing in unison, and between whom and you there is an impassable space. It is useless to say it, I know, but it rises out of my soul. For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything. If my career were of that better kind that there was any opportunity or capacity of sacrifice in it, I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you. Try to hold me in your mind, at some quiet

times, as ardent and sincere in this one thing. The time will come, the time will not be long in coming, when new ties will be formed about you — ties that will bind you yet more tenderly and strongly to the home you so adorn — the dearest ties that will ever grace and gladden you. O Miss Manette, when you see your own bright beauty springing up anew at your feet, think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you!" (159)

Such a speech would be impossible in a modern novel, but it is impressive here,[14] partly because so much care has been taken in the portrayal of Carton as someone either without "delicacy," as Stryver puts it,[15] or with a hermit's aversion to sharing his private feelings. It comes more than a hundred pages before Sydney has the opportunity to sacrifice himself for Lucie and those dear to her, and save her husband Charles from the guillotine.

Once the opportunity to serve Lucie arises, Sydney becomes a man of action. Charles Darnay is in prison, awaiting the guillotine, and Sydney's plan is to use his resemblance to Charles (after an exchange of clothes and hairstyles) to put himself under the guillotine and restore Charles to his family. This requires considerable manipulation, and Carton turns out to be a far better spy than Miss Pross's ungrateful brother Solomon (spy name, John Barsad). Sydney speaks French like a native, which helps him arrange various details, but he pretends to be a complete novice in the wineshop with Madame Defarge and her bloodthirsty followers (including the cringing little woodcutter, who is prepared to testify against Lucie), so that no one minds speaking in front of him. He also manipulates and controls Barsad, blackmailing the spy and intimidating him into using his

position in the prison, first, to usher him (Sydney Carton) in, and then to carry Charles Darnay out and deliver him to his family in time for them to escape by coach. Carton has covered every detail, including the need for the family to leave at once to avoid the executions that madame has planned for the entire family.

After some very good action (the pejorative for which is "melodrama"), Charles is returned to the family, unconscious, since as a true gentleman he could never have agreed to Carton's sacrifice on his behalf. Sydney had to anesthetize him — in a most modern way, with ether — and the family sets out for the coast, to catch the boat to Dover, though at a tensely slow pace, in a coach driven by hostile revolutionaries.

In the meantime, there is the wonderful action scene in which Miss Pross, before rendezvousing with Mr. Lorry's faithful assistant Jerry Cruncher, blocks Madame Defarge's entrance to the rooms of the house, on the theory that if this evil "foreign" woman doesn't see inside the rooms, she can't be sure Lucie and her father aren't hiding inside, and that buys time for her "little bird," to escape.[17] This ends in a struggle. Miss Pross's bear-hug keeps madame's knife from being drawn, and a quick move causes madame's pistol to discharge in herself. Madame Defarge falls dead.

Just as Sydney's love for Lucie involves the loss of his life, Miss Pross's equally determined sacrifice (she is resolved to die before she allows the evil foreign woman to pass) involves the loss of her hearing. While she and Jerry Cruncher are finally departing for the coast, Jerry becomes aware that Miss Pross can't hear him. She only remembers "a great crash and then a great stillness" and divines that "that stillness seems to be fixed and unchangeable, never to be

broken any more as long as life lasts!" (384 with subsequent quote).

> "If she don't hear the roll of them dreadful carts [the carts carrying victims to the guillotine], now very nigh their journey's end," said Mr. Cruncher, glancing over his shoulder, "it's my opinion that indeed she never will hear anything else in the world."
>
> And indeed she never did.

The last comment is the omniscient narrator's. Miss Pross's sacrifice saves the whole family by giving them all the time they need (she has even thrown the key to the house in the river, for the time when it occurs to someone to look for madame), and, like Sydney's sacrifice, it was inspired by Lucie. If we weren't already aware of Miss Pross's value, we are at this point.

Sydney's last minutes, in the line of victims moving slowly toward the guillotine, are spent with a completely innocent little seamstress who doesn't even know what she was accused of because she can't read. Her decapitation, gleefully counted in unison by the women knitting near the site of execution[18] (with Madame Defarge sorely missed) is the ultimate indictment of the Reign of Terror, since no sane process (even forgetting about fairness) could have indicted the girl. Sydney's nobility at this point is as convincingly portrayed in his kindness to the little spinster, whom he reassures and kisses before her execution, as it is by his famous "last words" (beginning "It is a far, far better thing that I do").

It should be insisted, as many critics actually do note, that these words are not Sydney's at all, but the omniscient narrator's. It would be much more accurate to identify them with Dickens than with the character Sydney Carton. What Dickens actually writes is, "If he

[Carton] had given any utterance to his [last thoughts], and if they had been prophetic, they would have been these" — whereupon a much longer passage than was spoken, obtrusively and pompously, by Ronald Colman, in the silly old movie, tells us what the immediate future will be.

After *David Copperfield*, Dickens was supposed to have gotten over the habit of telling us what happens to the characters after the action of his novels, but here he does it again, and very satisfactorily. For one thing, Sydney Carton becomes a kind of saint in the Darnay family. Lucie sheds yearly tears in his memory, and little Lucie (who has always had a sort of telepathic understanding with him and demanded that he save her father after his final arrest by the Tribunal) becomes a lovely old lady and passes Sydney's memory on to her grandchildren. Even the name Sydney is retained in the family. Both in terms of honor and usefulness, Sydney Carton has been saved. He is seen for the hero he is because of his devotion to Lucie.

Notes

(1) Sir John Shuckburgh notes that *Barnaby Rudge* is only incidentally an historical novel — it is about the Gordon Riots, but otherwise has very little to do with history — while *A Tale of Two Cities* is an historical novel in the full sense, with its intense interest in the period portrayed (v).

(2) High marks are certainly given by Chesterton, who considered *A Tale of Two Cities* a relief after negativism of *Little Dorrit* (211). And Shuckburgh claims that *A Tale* is the best plotted of any Dickens novel (v). Jerome Meckier, on the other hand, claims that Dickens "resurrected the specter of revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Meckier sees *A Tale* as indirectly attacking the "industrial dystopia" and "clogged...administrative arteries" of Dickens's own England (10).

(3) Victorian prudery — often just called "Victorianism" — went well beyond the fiction of the period. More accurately, the fiction reflected the attitudes of the times, satirized by Dickens in the character of Mr. Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend*, a complacent bully who proclaims that nothing should be said or written that could not be heard by his adolescent daughter. This attitude was common in the United States right into the mid-twentieth century. I can remember an uncle — a man who had seen action in World War II and must have known something about life — objecting to the language in a respected modern novel because it contained words "that shouldn't be used in mixed company." I also remember my mother chiding me for using the word "sex," even though what I was saying was humdrum, and suitable for "mixed company."

It might be added that Dickens was the great satirist of Victorianism, and we should think twice before accusing him of prudery. Even in *A Tale of Two Cities*, about an earlier era, there is the satirical thrust at the proto-Victorian Tellson's House in the chapter describing how the Paris branch of Tellson's had "whitewashed the Cupid" on one of the counters of the building, which had been inherited from the decadent French (268).

The key word in Orwell's phrase "legless Victorian angel" is "legless." Dickens was not a prude, but he knew his reading public well enough. He knew, for instance, that anatomical references were dangerous, and this was surely why he steered clear of full-bodied descriptions of his angels. But he also saw how ridiculous this Puritan mutation was, and he was probably the origin of the hilarious idea of American women being scandalized by references to the "legs" of a table.

The danger of treating Dickens as an example of Victorianism rather than its critic, can be seen in Harry Stone's unfortunate attempt to psychoanalyze Dickens through the two love affairs in *A Tale of Two Cities*, with Charles representing the tepid twin in his marriage with Lucy, and Sydney being the sexual lover and sublimated twin "(Dickens as illicit lover-cum-brother)" because his love is "repressed." (174). In the first place, Carton's love is not "repressed." He is fully aware of it. It is suppressed, which means that he keeps it in check *consciously*. What else, on Planet Earth, would a decent man do in any century? In the second place, just because Charles is not as interesting a character, there is no reason to think he isn't interesting in every manifestation to Lucy. This is a confusion of reader with character.

(4) Lucie is certainly no Esther Summerson, but her relative passivity actually clarifies my point. Esther is important to most of the characters in *Bleak House* because of her actions, while Lucie is important in *A Tale of Two Cities* simply because of what she is. In fact, Lucie is an exception to the reason behind what Goldberg calls "the relative flatness of the characters" (116, with subsequent reference). Dickens wanted (as Goldberg reports, referring to a letter to his biographer John Forster) to let the characters reveal themselves through "action and dialogue." But Lucie's action, at least, is fairly circumscribed. Her status is more a matter of the other characters' veneration.

(5) Though, strangely, I have yet to find any other mention of this fact, it must have occurred to many readers that Lucie's name is related to the Latin genitive *lucis (of light)* or more simply still, to the dative *luci (to light)*; so it is safe to say that this identification is only original with me in a limited sense. It occurred to me in the way that Dickens must have intended, by reading the novel.

(6) Dr. Manette was effectually kidnapped off the street by the Evrêmondes and taken to their chateau, where he was commanded to minister to a dying peasant girl and to her younger brother, who had been mortally wounded and would die before his sister. From this boy, Dr. Manette heard how one of the Evrêmonde brothers had insisted on his right, as the reigning aristocrat in that region, to bed the young fiancee of one of his subjects. Their father's refusal to accede to this demand resulted in his murder, whereupon the sister was kidnapped and raped. Thence, the boy challenged the younger Evrêmonde brother to a duel, which he quickly lost through inexperience in the gentle art of swordsmanship. From the point of view of the Evrêmondes, this nuance of dueling with a peasant boy was the most mortifying part of the whole affair, and the one that they were most anxious to conceal. After the brother and sister's deaths, Dr. Manette was sent on his way, with an admonition to absolute secrecy. Instead of keeping the secret, however, he wrote a letter to the authorities, reporting what he had seen and heard. This letter was intercepted by the Evrêmondes (or perhaps passed on to them, as a noble favor). They then had Manette kidnapped and thrown in the Bastille, presumably for the rest of his life, without trial. Manette never saw his wife (or his daughter, Lucie, while she was a child) again, and the wife died two years later.

(7) Defarge, along with his ferociously knitting wife, Madame Defarge, had become the leader of a movement of people in Saint Antoine preparing for the coming Revolution. One step in this preparation was to show Dr. Manette — recent prisoner of the Bastille, celebrated victim of injustice, and a broken man —- to budding revolutionaries. Defarge's concern for his old master was genuine, but he didn't mind using Manette as a propaganda tool while he was staying in Saint Antoine. As the story develops, it becomes clear that this breach of normal decency was a very mild omen of what the revolutionaries were capable of.

(8) This recalls the double recognition of Shakespeare's Percales, who wakes from his dreams to see his grown daughter Marina for the first time. The experience both confuses and renews him. T.S. Eliot's beautiful poem "Marina" is a meditation on this scene. In Eliot's poem, Peracles' ambivalence is poignant. His first impression is that his youth has been restored, and this is his young wife. Then he realizes Marina is his daughter, someone with whom he can celebrate new life and the future, but only at one remove. Marina's happiness will be the full experience, but his own involves renunciation. He resigns himself to playing an old man's role in this new life, while enjoying, ambivalently, the sensual rewards that nature still offers him. This explains Dr. Manette's reaction to Charles Darnay, when the father realizes that Charles has fallen in love with Lucie and she reciprocates. Though Manette has been, in Dickens's own words, "recalled to life" (this is both a chapter heading and a coded message), he cannot help feeling an initial hostility to Charles, which he does his best to suppress. I don't see any reason to agree with Richard Maxwell (xxi) that this hostility continues after the marriage. All the signs point to Charles's welfare being one of the conditions of Manette's continued sanity, which is why he falls back (temporarily) into his senile shoemaker's role when Charles seems certain to be guillotined.

(9) These scenes of domestic bliss are enlivened by the fiercely devoted Miss Pross (who has somehow become Lucie's lifetime nanny) and by Lucie's father, both of whom are jealous of anyone who threatens their own relationship with Lucie, as well as by the sporadic visits of Sidney Carton, who is enough of a black sheep to offset Charles's perfections, and who has a selfless love for Lucie that reveals its true depth at the end of the novel. It might also be observed that Charles had no need to conceal his past

from Lucie and her father. When he is imprisoned in France, they come to help him immediately and blame him for nothing.

(10) Defarge's fate is indicated in the famous speculation on what Sidney Carton might have said in his final hour, if he were able to see the future (389). The white revolution was a bloody reaction to the Jacobin Reign of Terror. It involved thousands of deaths (but this time of Jacobins, who were blamed for the Reign of Terror) and lasted from 1794 to the end of 1795 (cf. Maxwell, 489).

(11) There is a difference between the British and American systems of designating lawyers. In the United States, all lawyers may appear in court as well as conduct legal business outside the courtroom. Therefore, they can all be referred to as either *lawyers* or *attorneys*. In the United Kingdom, on the other hand, some lawyers are simply *solicitors*, entitled to work on legal documents but not to appear in court, and others are *advocates*, who may argue cases in court. Sidney Carton and his employer Stryver are both advocates.

(12) Dickens was a liberal, not a Francophobe, and the third-person narrator takes time to note here that as a suspect accused of espionage in eighteenth-century England, Charles Darnay faces a far more cruel death than the guillotine. If found guilty, he will be drawn and quartered before being hanged. That is to say, he will be cut down the middle in two directions, and the hanging will disembowel him. This is why Norris Pope, referring to *A Tale*, observes that "Dickens never simply blames foreigners for problems. He also points out the contemporaneous problems of England at the time of the French Revolution (such as the tendency to hang poor people for relatively petty crimes)" (105).

(13) By the end of the day, having digested and accepted as trustworthy what Mr. Lorry told him about the impossibility of his suit, Stryver has decided on the face-saving strategy of pretending he is the one rejecting Lucie. At this point we realize that Stryver's arrogance is an awful thing. And this is confirmed in the later scene, on the eve of Charles Darnay's return to France, when Stryver sides with the French aristocrats congregating at Tellson's House in their condemnation of the Evrémonde apostate (nobody realizes this is Charles, who happens to be there at the bank), who

treacherously relinquished his title and left France. The difference between these aristocrats and Charles, and what they hate about him, is that his departure from France was an admission that his family had abused their position, while the aristocrats fled for their own safety and hope to have their old prerogatives restored. They are in denial, and Charles has acted nobly. We therefore find Stryver's championship of their position and gratuitous attack on the (still-unknown) Evrémonde to be final proof that he is more than just annoying. Dickens underscores Stryver's place in the moral scheme of things by having him actually believe, after a certain passage of time, that Lucie courted him and he rejected her. In this minor case as well, Lucie is used to illuminate character.

(14) Edwin Eigner puts Sydney Carton with other hopeless Dickens lovers, from Toots in *Dombey and Son*, to Tom Pinch in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. (Eigner's example of Mr. Guppy in *Bleak House* doesn't really work, since Guppy is conceited and presumptuous, and, in fact, more in love with himself.) As Eigner says, however, Carton comes "with the smile wiped entirely off our faces" (145).

(15) This chapter, in which Sydney bares his soul to Lucie, is ironically entitled "The Fellow of No Delicacy," while the chapter portraying Stryver's presumptuous plans for marrying Lucie and his subsequent maneuvers to save face is entitled "The Fellow of Delicacy." The irony of the titles is almost too simple, and we are reminded that Dickens was a popular writer who scorned no part of the reading public.

(16) One minor flaw in the novel is Jerry Cruncher's unresolved characterization. In the early chapters, Jerry is portrayed as a grave-robber and wife-abuser, though the abuse seems to be verbal. He suspects his wife, rather ridiculously, of *praying* against him. (He refers to this as "flopping," meaning *kneeling to pray*.) Dickens turns even this absurdity to his advantage later, when Jerry makes utterly incoherent reference to "flopping," but what we mainly notice is that Jerry is a fairly faithful and heroic figure in the latter half of the novel. Mr. Lorry trusts him reservedly even after he learns about the grave-robbing. It seems as though Dickens had more sinister plans for Jerry and then abandoned them to his obvious use in the action, ushering the deafened Miss Pross back to England.

(17) Miss Pross is totally dedicated to Lucie. She has been calling Lucie her "little bird" for twenty years. Her only other passion, besides caring for Lucie, is indulging the memory of her brother, Solomon, who many years ago absconded with her money. Miss Pross remains under the illusion that Solomon is a wonderful man. In truth, he is a spy, aka John Barsad, whose only saving grace is that he can be controled and used by Sydney Carton.

(18) This particular day of execution has a theme: "Fifty-two" for the fifty-two weeks of the year. So there are exactly fifty-two victims. This is one reason Sidney must replace Charles in the execution line. The seamstress is Number 22, and Sydney is Number 23.

Works Cited

Chesterton, G. K. *Charles Dickens.* London: Methuen & Co., 1906.

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities.* (First published 1859.) London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2003.

Eigner, Edwin M. *The Dickens Pantomime.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Goldberg, Michael, *Carlyle and Dickens.* Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1972.

Leavis, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis. *Dickens the Novelist.* Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1980.

Maxwell, Richard. Introduction to *A Tale of Two Cities.* Charles Dickens. Richard Maxwell, ed., London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 2003.

Meckier, Jerome. *Dickens's Great Expectation: Misnar's Pavilion versus Cinderella.* Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002.

Orwell, George. *Dickens, Dali & Others.* 1946. San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Brace, Janovich, 1973.

Pope, Norris. *Dickens and Charity.* London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1978.

Shuckburgh, Sir John. Introduction to *A Tale of Two Cities.* 1953. Charles Dickens. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Stone, Harry. *Dickens and the Invisible World.* London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1979.