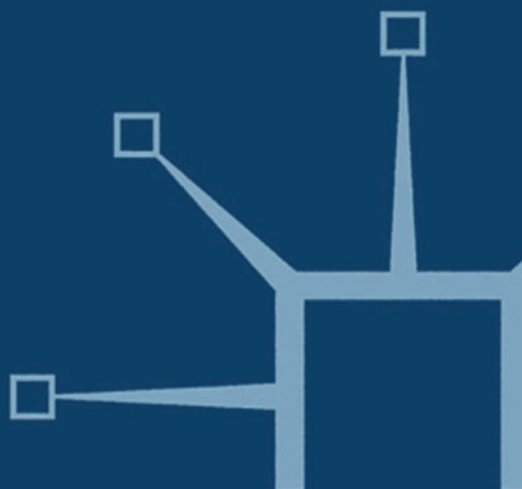


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Charles Dickens,
A Tale of Two Cities and
the French Revolution

Colin Jones
Josephine McDonagh
Jon Mee



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Edited by

Colin Jones, Josephine McDonagh and Jon Mee

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In memory of Sally Ledger

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List of Abbreviations

- DSA* *Dickens Studies Annual*
- Letters* *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey and others, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–2002).
References in text to volume and page.
- Slater* *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism*, ed. by Michael Slater and John Drew, 4 vols. (London: Dent, 1994–2000). References in text to volume and page.
- TTC* Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, ed. Richard Maxwell (London: Penguin Books, 2003). References in text to book, chapter and page.

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Besides thanking the above, we also acknowledge our debt to all the contributors to the conference, especially David Paroissien and Carolyn Steedman for their masterly summing up; Beth Palmer, Adelene Buckland, Rosey Dunleavy and Greg Tate, for helping; as well as the audience at the conference for their helpful comments and general support.

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An earlier version of Gareth Stedman Jones’s chapter appeared in *History Workshop Journal* 65(1) (2008), pp. 1–22.

Any faults remaining are our own.

As this volume went to press, we learnt of the tragic death of one of our contributors, Sally Ledger. Sally, who was our friend and colleague over many years, died ludicrously young, and just as she had established herself as one of Britain’s foremost Dickens scholars.

This volume is respectfully and lovingly dedicated to her memory.

Colin Jones
Josephine McDonagh
Jon Mee

1

Introduction: *A Tale of Two Cities* in Context

Colin Jones, Josephine McDonagh and Jon Mee

A British icon

On 15 October 1859 Charles Dickens wrote to his friend, the French actor François Régnier, giving advance warning of a parcel that he was sending him. It would contain ‘the Proof sheets of a story of mine that has been for some time in progress in my weekly journal, and that will be published in a complete Volume about the middle of November’. The ‘story’ was *A Tale of Two Cities*. ‘I want you to read it for two reasons’, wrote Dickens:

First because I hope it is the best story I have written. Secondly, because it treats of a very memorable time in France; and I should very much like to know what you think of its being dramatized for a French theatre. If you should think it likely to be done, I should be glad to take some steps towards having it well done. The Story is an extraordinary success here, and I think the end of it is certain to make a still greater sensation.

(*Letters*, IX, 132)

By this time, Dickens was already the best known and most successful writer in Britain, the author of a dozen novels and an established literary celebrity, whose work had begun to achieve international renown. He had recently launched a series of public readings of his works – for the first time, for his own profit. These were beginning to consolidate his celebrity across Britain and Ireland and in America.¹

If Dickens’s letter to Régnier sounds a note of triumphalism at his ‘extraordinary success’, it was doubtless mingled with personal relief. The success of the novel in Britain was closely tied to Dickens’s new magazine venture, *All The Year Round*, on which, as editor and as majority shareowner, Dickens had staked his professional identity and personal finances.² The highly popular *Household Words*, which he had edited for nine years, had just been dissolved following an acrimonious dispute with its publishers. Dickens sought to overcome this setback with a new enterprise, which he accompanied with

a nationwide advertising campaign. *All The Year Round* was launched in April 1859 with *A Tale of Two Cities* as its lead item, serialized from the first issue.

The gamble paid off. The novel achieved overwhelming success from the outset, thereby establishing the new magazine commercially. Issued on a weekly basis between April and November 1859, it both met and stimulated further demand by being produced in parallel in monthly parts from June to December. It was published by Chapman & Hall as a single volume in December 1859. By then its serialized form had already secured it a vast readership, numerically outstripping sales figures of all Dickens's previous novels. Dickens also sold the rights in America, where it was published in *Harper's Weekly* between May and December 1859. The German publisher Tauchnitz produced a two-volume English-language edition in the same year. On the back of its growing fame, *A Tale* was adapted for the London stage in 1860, and played to appreciative audiences.³ Commercial triumph was, moreover, matched by positive critical reception: reviews were mostly favourable. One, for example, claimed that it showed 'every promise of taking high rank among [Dickens's] happiest master pieces'.⁴ Dickens's correspondence contains laudatory letters from luminaries, including the historian and social thinker Thomas Carlyle, whose *The French Revolution* (1837) Dickens credited as his main inspiration and source.

Dickens's relief at the success of *A Tale of Two Cities* must have been all the more intense in that it suggested that he had surmounted a particularly severe period of turbulence in his private life. He had recently separated from his wife, Catherine, with whom he had nine surviving children (eight of whom stayed with Dickens and his wife's sister, Georgina Hogarth). The separation had been very public, and, as Dickens's biographers have noted, its consequences seeped into Dickens's professional endeavours.⁵ Indeed, it was this that provoked his split from the publishers of *Household Words*. In June 1858, aware of damaging gossip that was circulating about his domestic situation, Dickens had taken the unprecedented step of publishing a 'statement' in *The Times* and other newspapers, as well as in *Household Words*, explaining the separation and denying unspecified rumours about his private affairs. When his publishers, Bradbury and Evans, refused to place the announcement in *Punch*, another magazine they owned, Dickens was so incensed that he decided to split from them too.⁶ Many of the rumours in circulation linked Dickens romantically to his sister-in-law, who remained platonically loyal to the charismatic writer. Some – more accurately – alleged a liaison with an unidentified young actress. Ellen Ternan, the woman in question, had met Dickens two years earlier when she and her family had acted with him in Wilkie Collins's play *The Frozen Deep*, about an ill-fated Arctic expedition that had taken place in 1845.⁷ Dickens had played the part of Richard Wardour, a man who dies rescuing his rival in love. Dickens confidentially admitted to Angela Burdett Coutts that his initial idea for *A Tale* originated while acting in the play, and parallels between Wardour and the character Sydney Carton are

clear.⁸ It is only one step – and it is a step that certain Dickens biographers have taken – to seeing the exploration of masculine sacrifice in both *The Frozen Deep* and *A Tale* as an imaginative working through of the knotted relations linked to the breakdown of Dickens's marriage and his love affair with Ternan.⁹ In this biographical reading, all the principal male characters in *A Tale* are seen as projections of the author: Manette, 'recalled to life', as Dickens had been by a young woman; Charles Darnay, the accepted lover of Lucie Manette, and who even shared his initials with Charles Dickens; and Sydney Carton (originally named Richard or Dick¹⁰), who makes the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good of society. Accordingly, the theme of resurrection that reverberates throughout the novel comes to stand for Dickens's own sense of personal resurrection.¹¹ Ellen Ternan is seen as Lucie Manette and, more controversially, one critic has even suggested that traces of Catherine Dickens can be detected in the character of Mme Defarge.¹²

The 'extraordinary success' of the novel, Dickens's satisfaction with it as 'the best story I have written' and the depiction of it as a multifaceted projection of his own character at a difficult moment in his life are perhaps surprising, given that *A Tale of Two Cities* is in some ways the most 'unDickensian' of Dickens's novels. The most compact and plot-driven of his works (alongside *Hard Times*, 1854), it lacks the expansive cast of Dickensian characters whose personalities are expressed in imaginatively invented idiolects, such as, for instance, Mrs Gamp's famously 'owldacious' eccentricities in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844). In *A Tale*, the French in particular are depicted as melodramatic types who speak in a predictable stage French and lack the linguistic inventiveness usually associated with Dickens's characters. Some features may be explained by the original form of publication. Although Dickens was an established master of serial fiction, *A Tale of Two Cities* was produced for a weekly, rather than his preferred monthly, format. These 'teaspoon' parts (a term he echoed back to Carlyle)¹³ contributed to the novel's emphasis on plot over character. In a letter to his close friend John Forster, he claimed that in writing the novel he had 'set [himself] the task of making a picturesque story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express, more than they should express themselves, by dialogue' (*Letters*, IX, 112–13).

In addition, *A Tale* is exceptional in being one of only two historical novels that Dickens wrote, despite the prestige and popularity of the genre. The other is *Barnaby Rudge*, conceived at least as early as 1836 but not published until 1840, Dickens's novel about the Gordon 'No-Popery' Riots, which erupted in London in 1780. The two novels have much in common. Both cover the final decades of the eighteenth century, and, as Mark Philp points out in his essay, the pivotal events of the Gordon Riots foreshadow those of *A Tale*. The 'incessant footsteps' that echo ominously in the Manettes' Soho house, for instance, during the hot and thundery afternoon in June 1780 (*TTC*, II, vi) could well have been the footsteps of Gordon rioters.¹⁴

Both novels are preoccupied with collective violence and the mentality of the mob, and in their explicit treatment of political themes may be thought to depart from the more familiar domain of the Dickensian novel. This aspect of both novels obviously shows the influence of Carlyle, but, as the essays in this volume by Philp and Stedman Jones suggest, is far from being totally determined by it. *Barnaby Rudge* engages with the Victorian fears of popular revolutionary violence, which had been given forcible expression in Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837) and *Chartism* (1839). In both books, Carlyle represented popular revolutionary action as the expression of a latent inner fury in the people at large, part of an unconscious struggle between order and anarchy, rather than an expression of political aspirations or discrete historical processes. Dickens often uses a similar language of huge natural forces at work, and in *A Tale of Two Cities* takes many of his incidents from Carlyle's history, but he is also willing to explore socio-historical causes of the phenomena he describes. Although by the time Dickens returned to Carlyle's history of the Revolution as one of the key sources for *A Tale of Two Cities* the two celebrity authors had become friends, Carlyle was much more obviously a conservative opponent of the democratic principles he attacked in his apocalyptic *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850). Dickens and Carlyle shared a suspicion of political economy and utilitarianism – expressed brilliantly in *Hard Times*, the novel Dickens dedicated to Carlyle (1854) – and a sense of impending social upheaval, but they did not share a philosophy of history or even a political vision. Dickens's brand of populist radicalism shows very little of the later Carlyle's longing for the strong leader or his nostalgia for the past, but instead often maintains a more modernizing view of the future, expressed as the glittering vision of the metropolis of Paris at the end of *A Tale of Two Cities*.¹⁵

What differentiates *A Tale* from most of Dickens's other work is its balanced Anglo-French location: sixteen chapters are set in London and three in other English locations, as opposed to eighteen in Paris and six in the French provinces. These dual international locations, plus the novel's world-historical theme, give it a different ambiance and cultural reach from the principally London-bound domestic dramas for which Dickens was famous.

Despite its exceptional status within Dickens's *oeuvre*, *A Tale* has never failed to charm Dickens enthusiasts. By the time of his death, it was well on the way to being established as one of his most extensively published as well as most popular works. At the turn of the twentieth century, Sydney Carton, the tragic hero of the tale, had become a stock figure in the national imaginary, a place which Martin-Harvey's barn-storming theatrical adaptation, *The Only Way* (1899), helped to consolidate. As Joss Marsh notes, Carton's elegiac guillotine speech ('It is a far, far better thing . . .') was used to maintain morale among besieged British troops at Mafeking in the Boer War, while in the First World War it was similarly popular among Tommies in the trenches. *A Tale of Two Cities* had become an icon of British national identity.

Frequent new editions, theatrical performances and, from 1911, film versions have helped to relay throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the flying start the novel immediately won in the nation's affections. Its wide use as a classroom text in English schools has endorsed this position. For many English schoolchildren, *A Tale of Two Cities* is the only Dickens novel they have read in its entirety (its relative and unDickensian brevity helps). This has established Carton's guillotine speech as well as the pithy opening lines of the novel as some of the most frequently quoted, misquoted and mimicked of Dickensian aphorisms.

The iconic status of the novel has allowed it to accommodate a great variety of often wildly divergent readings. It has been read as a reference point for Franco-British relations, a representation of mob violence, a fable about Christian sacrifice or a psychological emanation of the author's troubled sexuality. These interpretations have tended to be taken in isolation, and there have been relatively few attempts to bring together the novel's diverse contexts and spheres of influence. Moreover, it has invariably been viewed within an exclusively British context, with little attention paid to the French aspects of the work. In this volume, in order to achieve a more broadly informed assessment of the novel's place in political and cultural life, we bring to bear on it a spectrum of approaches and points of view by historians of British and French political ideas, literary critics, and historians and critics of film and theatre. Their essays explore and highlight the richness of the novel and its adaptations into other media, and underline the limitations of viewing it solely as a national icon. In these introductory remarks, we seek to contextualize the essays by sketching out the French and British milieux in which Dickens composed his novel and in which it subsequently circulated.

A Tale of Two Cities in France

Dickens does not appear to have thought that it was unreasonable to have high hopes for strong cross-Channel interest in his account of 'a very memorable time in France', an interest that would match *A Tale of Two Cities*'s reception in England. By 1859, his work was already popular in France. The *Revue britannique*, edited from 1839 by Dickens's acquaintance and sometime translator, Amédée Pichot, ran morsels from British journals, including, in 1842, much of *Barnaby Rudge*. *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) had been staged as a melodrama at the Paris Ambigu-Comique theatre in 1842, while in the 1850s *Martin Chuzzlewit* was serialized in the official government newspaper, *Le Moniteur*.¹⁶ Under an agreement brokered in 1856, moreover, the French publishing house Hachette secured the rights for French translations of all Dickens's major fiction.¹⁷ In May 1860 – in advance of the novel appearing as a single volume in England – Dickens wrote (in unaccented French) to thank Hachette for the decision to translate *A Tale of Two Cities*: 'Voilà un de mes espoirs les plus ardents, en l'écrivant' (*Letters*, IX, 249).¹⁸

On first encountering Paris in 1844, Dickens had fallen in love with the city ('the most extraordinary place in the world') and his Parisophilia never faltered.¹⁹ He resided there in 1846–7, and was a frequent visitor thereafter, sometimes for lengthy spells. He knew figures from the French literary establishment, and indeed by the mid-1850s had even achieved the status of minor celebrity in Paris. He was stopped in the street by admirers; by 1862 he would proudly observe how his novels were 'to be seen at every railway station, great or small' (*Letters*, X, 151). Yet his hopes for a parallel triumph with *A Tale of Two Cities* in the second of the novel's eponymous cities were to be sadly disappointed. On 16 November 1859, Dickens replied to a non-extant misive from François Régnier, thanking him for his 'kind and explicit' reply to his earlier letter and accepting the impossibility of the French theatrical adaptation to which he had aspired. 'I very much doubted', Dickens added, 'whether the general subject would not be objectionable to the Government, and what you write with so much sagacity and with such care convinces me at once that its representation would be prohibited' (*Letters*, IX, 163).

The French translation of *A Tale of Two Cities* duly appeared in 1861 under the title *Paris et Londres en 1793*, translated by Henriette Loreau, but signally failed to spark enthusiasm among the French reading public.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, when Dickens took his public readings to Paris in the early 1860s, he chose not to break with his programme of selections. No extracts from *A Tale* were included: *David Copperfield* (1850), *Dombey and Son* (1848), *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) were adjudged more to the taste of his French audiences.²¹

The French in the nineteenth century tended to like their Dickens full of character, individualism and 'English' eccentricity. The 'unDickensian' *Paris et Londres en 1793* did not catch on in France. The politics of the novel in particular were invariably seen as unfathomable, reactionary or even Francophobic. Liberals and radicals were appalled at his depiction of revolutionary characters, while conservative nostalgics for the *ancien régime* took cold comfort from *A Tale's* pre-revolutionary scenes. In terms of its reception and the meanings ascribed to it over time, *A Tale of Two Cities* thus presents something of a conundrum. Though Dickens avowed it to have been written for French as well as English audiences, the novel has had a highly contrasted inheritance. Francophilic to a tee, Dickens would have been much distressed that his novel should thus become a source of discord, disharmony and misunderstanding between the populations of the two cities and the two nations at which he appears to have targeted it. A runaway success in England, where its status as a national icon stimulated its reproduction beyond the novel form on stage and in film, in France it has been generally poorly known, neglected and often dismissed as pure English jingoism.²² French writers, literary critics and historians have thus viewed the novel merely as a way-station on the reactionary and xenophobic English political trajectory as regards the French Revolution, leading from Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution*

in France (1790), through Dickens and the Baroness d'Orczy's *Scarlet Pimpernel* (1903) to the *Citizens* (1989) of Simon Schama.²³

Certainly, the novel has been poorly served by the French publishing industry, and its print history across the Channel is a sombre record of neglect and misunderstanding, which has justified indifference and encouraged hostile readings.²⁴ Symptomatically, down to the 1930s there were only two re-editions of Hachette's *Paris et Londres en 1793*, in 1873 and 1881. This compares poorly even with the re-editions of other translations by Henriette Loreau (*A Tale's* first translator), whose *Bleak House* (1857) has had four re-editions, and Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* (1858) a surprising six, the most recent in 2001. The dozen or so other translations and adaptations of *A Tale* from 1861 until the present compare very unfavourably with *David Copperfield*, for example, which has managed in excess of 100.²⁵ Moreover, critics have agreed that the quality of the French adaptations and translations of *A Tale* has tended to be mediocre. This is true of the more popular, boiled-down versions, which are full of misunderstandings and errors.²⁶ But even Loreau's 1861 translation – which remained the standard version for over a century – is criticized for flattening Dickens's style.²⁷

Strikingly, if comically, even the title of *A Tale of Two Cities* has proved a stumbling block.²⁸ The obvious and literal translation – *Un Conte de deux villes* – was not employed for over a century, until 1970 in fact.²⁹ The dysphonic effect caused by literal translation (notably over 'de deux') may be a factor in explaining this reticence; so too the apparently general tendency of nineteenth-century publishers to prefer eponymous titles. The most utilized alternative title has been *Le Marquis de Saint-Évremont*. First employed as a subtitle to re-editions of the 1861 translation, *Paris et Londres en 1793*, it was later boosted by the success in France of the 1935 Hollywood film version of *A Tale of Two Cities*, starring Ronald Colman as Sydney Carton, and discussed in this volume by Charles Barr. This was shown under the title *Le Marquis de Saint-Évremont* and triggered a minor flurry of interest in the novel, leading to print adaptations in 1937 and 1938.³⁰ Other adaptations have been even more imaginative with their titles: *Un Drame sous la Révolution* (1914); *Le Jour de Gloire* (a 1937 stage version, whose authors, André Bisson and Meg Villars, prided themselves on bringing to the attention of the French public 'an English novel which today is rather forgotten' ['un roman anglais qui est aujourd'hui assez oublié']); and *Espoirs et passions* (1989).³¹

To English ears, the French predilection for *Le Marquis de Saint-Évremont* as a title is bizarre. The Marquis is a minor and hardly heroic character – on the contrary, he is the archetypal melodramatic villain, the wicked uncle of the major protagonist, Charles Darnay. Presumably the reference is to the latter, though as Kamilla Elliott discusses, he renounces it completely and never uses it as a means of self-identification. Moreover, *Le Marquis de Saint-Évremont* promotes Darnay at the expense of Carton, whom most English readers regard as the principal male character around whom the themes of

redemptive sacrifice cluster most thickly, as opposed to Darnay, his bland and less interesting French lookalike.

Problems with the novel's title in French are symptomatic of more profound misapprehensions. The novel's events occur over more than two decades, whereas the title of the original translation (*Paris en 1793*) highlights one, albeit climactic, moment. Adaptations of the novel for a young or popular audience have tended to follow this lead and to telescope the events of the 1770s and 1780s into brief chapters or else treat them in flashbacks. Adaptations have also tended to omit Dickens's first chapter and start with 'La Malle-poste' – 'The Mail'.³² We can be absolutely certain that Dickens attached great importance to his opening chapter and in particular to the famous opening paragraph: 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . .'. In 'The Bastille Prisoner', the highly abbreviated version of *A Tale* which he prepared for public reading – which condensed a 400-page novel into three-quarters of an hour of spoken English – Dickens retained the opening paragraph in its entirety.³³ This omission in French adaptations and translations is thus a major step, as is the decision in some versions to omit altogether Carton's final scaffold speech as well (as in the 1959 translation). To English readers, this appears a perverse, not to say incomprehensible, excision of the work's most memorable lines.

National and international contexts

Because *A Tale* has been so little and so poorly known in France and so cursorily studied in French, it has been easy for French readers to dismiss it out of hand. The tendency has been facilitated by the fact that for many the novel appears to equate French popular political radicalism with terroristic and bloody violence, which is condemned from the allegedly superior vantage point offered by British political gradualism. The novel appeared at what now seems the high-water mark of Victorian political stability and seems to express the political complacency of the era. Dickensian critics have sometimes, perhaps unwittingly, endorsed such a view. Puzzled by the choice of the French Revolution as the theme for this historical novel, Philip Collins observes that 'nothing comparable was happening in England in the middle or late fifties to give topicality to (or to inspire) the crowd scenes in the tale'.³⁴ Radical opposition to the state had receded from public view since the suppression of the Chartist mass rally on Kennington Common in April 1848, inaugurating what appears to be a phase of stability, an 'age of equipoise', in British politics, in contrast to the French revolutionary tradition which had flared up yet again in Paris in the same year. Moreover, from some angles of vision, *A Tale of Two Cities* appears to be invested in a kind of anti-politics, in which only family and close human interrelationships count in a cosy world on which ideology has no purchase. In such readings, the French Revolution

provides a backdrop and an analogue to the personal and domestic revolution in Dickens's biography.

Yet in fact *ex post facto* political readings made across the vista of apparent Victorian stability from the 1850s onwards underestimate the significance of the international context of Dickens's political vision at this time. The 'Indian Mutiny' in 1857 provided a particular point of reference in this respect. As Patrick Brantlinger and others have observed, the lurid representations in the British press of atrocities and bodily violence of the Indian mutineers kept popular violence in the mind of the Victorian reading public.³⁵ They resonate strongly with the events in *A Tale*. Dickens's savage condemnation of the Indian rebels in his letters – were he Indian Commander-in-Chief, he told Angela Burdett Coutts, 'I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested'³⁶ – have been seen partly as fuelled by concern for his son Walter, who at the time of the first reports of the violence was en route to India as a cadet in the East Indian Army, where he fought the revolutionaries at Cawnpore and Lucknow as a member of the 42nd Highlanders.³⁷ Yet Dickens's fiction tells a more nuanced tale. His Christmas story of December 1857, 'The Perils of Certain English Prisoners', written at the time of his concern for his son and set in a South American mining colony, was a deliberate attempt to express solidarity with Britons in India during this period.³⁸ Interestingly, as in *The Frozen Deep* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, the story includes a love triangle between a woman and two men, including one Captain Carton (*sic*), the hero of the story, whose rescue of a child thought dead is greeted as the act of a Christian saviour, and prefigures his namesake, Sidney Carton's ultimate act of salvation. As Dickens told Henry Morley, the story concerns a 'set of circumstances . . . in which a few English people – gentlemen, ladies and children – . . . find themselves alone in a strange wild place and liable to hostile attack'.³⁹ Such a description might pass as a description of the final chapters of *A Tale of Two Cities*, while his added comment that 'I want to shadow out . . . the bravery of our ladies in India' strikes a faintly chivalrous but distinctly Prussian note, especially in the encounter of the English 'wild woman' with the 'tiger' Mme Defarge.⁴⁰

The interpersonal intrigues of *A Tale of Two Cities* are thus foreshadowed in this story, as is Dickens's concern with popular violence. 'The Perils of Certain English Prisoners', however, champions a broader political vision. In particular, Dickens highlights issues of bad government in the person of Commissioner Pordage, whose benevolent but misplaced trust of the Indian population reflects the attitude of Lord Canning, Governor-General of India. The latter had controversially called for clemency to be shown to those Sepoys who had not been actively involved in the Mutiny, yet had shown no concern for British expatriates.⁴¹ Articles in Dickens's *Household Words* around this time buzz with similar concerns, including the belief that a corrupt and neglectful government in India had triggered the uprising in the first place and consequently left British citizens exposed to popular fury.⁴²

The political parable that Dickens extracted from the 'Indian Mutiny' – as evident in his journalism, correspondence and, imaginatively, in 'The Perils of Certain English Prisoners' – resonates not only with the nakedly emotive concern over popular violence in *A Tale of Two Cities*, but also with the novel's ideological undertow. A neglectful and uncaring government could spark insurrection. Dickens's anxieties in this respect were, moreover, magnified by the current scene in Europe. Napoleon III's aggressive foreign policy – which prompted invasion scares in the late 1850s – was a particular concern. The French emperor seemed itching to start a policy of European expansion as his uncle had – bad in itself for British interests, but worrying for those who thought in terms of neo-Jacobin ideological contagion reaching these shores. For Dickens, however, French aggression also risked giving the British ruling classes a pretext to put reform on the shelf for a generation or more, as had been the case in the 1790s and 1800s.

As a number of the essays in this volume show, Dickens's anxieties about the possibility of popular violence focused far more than has generally been thought on England than on France, and on the future rather than the past. In Mark Philp's terms, Dickens was as much concerned about the future of the 'bloody English' as the past of the 'bloody French'; the 'violent, brutal disorder and arbitrary justice of the novel's narrative of the past', according to Sally Ledger, act as a warning for the future of British society. For Stedman Jones, Dickens's debts to Carlyle were less connected to the latter's notorious anti-democratic attacks on the Paris mob in his *The French Revolution* than with his quasi-apocalyptic anxiety that the potential for violent rebellion was a universal characteristic of the lower orders. *Sans-culotterie* was not an exclusively French phenomenon; it could be for export, especially in the context of heartless insouciance on the part of the ruling classes. As Stedman Jones notes, by dedicating *A Tale of Two Cities* to Lord John Russell, Dickens highlighted the importance of the reform agenda to which the Liberal statesman subscribed, but which seemed to be missing by the late 1850s.⁴³ If the ruling classes in England were to fail to respond to social distress, major political turbulence loomed. 'There is nothing in the present time at once so galling and so alarming to me', Dickens wrote in a letter (cited in Bowen's essay) to Austen Layard in 1855, 'as the alienation of the people from their own public affairs... I believe the discontent to be so much worse for smouldering instead of blazing openly, that it is extremely like the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first Revolution...'

Despite an apparently more comic approach to crowd violence in London in *A Tale of Two Cities* – the funeral procession, for example – such representations nevertheless retain, as Sally Ledger shows, many elements of the fearful, visceral quality of Parisian violence as evidenced in the storming of the Bastille and the dancing of the Carmagnole. The depiction of the latter episodes also acts as a reminder of the excesses of London's Gordon Riots of 1780, recounted in lurid detail in Dickens's earlier *Barnaby Rudge*.