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Dickens and the Fiery Past: A Tale of Two Cities Reconsidered

G. Robert Stange

During this school year, as for decades past, thousands of high school students will study A Tale of Two Cities. Is the novel a good choice for the high school program? This appraisal will help in answering the question. The author is an associate professor of English at the University of Minnesota.

BUT WHY waste time on Dickens when one can read Henry James?" The sophisticated graduate student who asked the question did not really want an answer; he wanted to provoke critical discussion. The obvious reply is that life, thank God, is long enough to include both these novelists, but the question's chief use is to define two permanent poles of literary art. James, in his search for a flawless technique, sustained control, and delicate effect, is worlds apart from the sprawling, uneven, essentially imperfect Dickens. In this respect, at least, Dickens is like the "imperfect" Shakespeare; by dint of his extraordinary creative energy, the very scope of his art, he enters the rare category of writers who have ceased to be detached objects of contemplation, and become instead parts of everyone's past.

Seen under the aspect of eternity Dickens may not be a greater novelist than James, but he can speak more easily than James could to many more people. James could not have afforded to be vulgar as Dickens was; he could not have allowed himself the artistic

errors that Dickens continually falls into; he could never have cried over his characters so unabashedly, nor laughed so uproariously. When we read the great fictional craftsmen we are impressed by the justness with which they have *rendered* a character or an aspect of life; we approve them by considering that they have been faithful to our experience of the world. But the characters of Dickens' novels have an independent existence; his world operates by its own laws, and after being immersed in it we return to our world with heightened perceptions and a finer sense of reality. In reading Dickens one tends to compare the characters of real life with those in his novels: no one ever praised Grandfather Smallweed or Mr. Micawber or Mrs. Gamp for being faithfully rendered; we find instead human beings who resemble *them*.

There are many reasons why Dickens' novels are the best kind of thing for young people to read. On the most general level, his great creative energy, the easy extensiveness of his work, help suggest to the young the joyful possibilities of all art. His sensitivity to the

beauty and interest of the humblest aspects of life, his vibrant sympathy, are fine examples of responses that must inform any permanently significant literature. A novel by Dickens should be in every high school curriculum. But I have sometimes wondered why that novel has almost invariably been *A Tale of Two Cities*. Reflection suggests an initial advantage in its being the shortest—next to *Hard Times*—of Dickens' fourteen novels. However, I think there are other more worthy reasons, and some of them are good.

This particular novel was most widely accepted as a high school assignment about half a century ago. At that time, we must assume, it reflected contemporary literary enthusiasms. In the 1890's Freeman Wills' play, *The Only Way*, an adaptation of Dickens' novel, was an enormous success. I suspect that, for this reason, our pedagogical forbears found *A Tale* the most immediately relevant, the most "modern" of all Dickens' novels.

The fact that this novel is unlike most of Dickens' work may also have recommended it to teachers. There are more big scenes in it than in any of his other novels; there is less of the grotesque, fewer episodes and characters that the inexperienced reader might consider quaint or antiquated; and there is, almost uniquely in Dickens, a single plot that is unravelled with speed and concision, and which always dominates both the characters and their *milieux*. The novel's relatively simple construction makes it easy for the reader to get into and through the story; it invites an immediate and simple response. In addition to these not inconsiderable advantages con-

scientious teachers must have regarded the historical background of the novel as a kind of unearned dividend that could be drawn on at need. If one could get a little history in by the back door, so much the better.

Some of these reasons have lost their force over the last thirty or forty years. There may be some point in reconsidering the exclusive assignment of this novel (if I were choosing for a high school course I should pick *Great Expectations* or *David Copperfield*), but I do not think we need regard *A Tale of Two Cities* as a really bad choice. It may be—along with *Hard Times*—the least Dickensian of the novels, but no novel of Dickens is uninteresting; none can fail to enchant or to instruct us. The very weaknesses of Dickens are illuminating, and if in this novel he has, as I believe, failed to achieve his ambitious plans, the novel nevertheless has qualities which make it uniquely valuable.

In considering the general scheme of *A Tale of Two Cities* we can discern three main points of departure from which the conception obviously develops. Dickens tells us in his preface that the main idea of the story came to him while he was performing in an amateur production of Wilkie Collins' play, *The Frozen Deep*. This melodrama, which was much admired by Dickens and his friends, is about two men, Antarctic explorers, who are in love with the same girl. One of the heroes (played by Dickens) sacrifices his life to save his rival's, and by this sacrifice is morally regenerated. Dickens' comment on the play helps emphasize the fact that in the novel Sydney Carton's sacrificial death, and more important, the whole theme of

violent death and regeneration, must be regarded as the "main idea."

Though *A Tale* ends with Carton's execution, its beginning and middle are dominated by the sufferings of Doctor Manette, the Bastille prisoner. Dickens had considered calling the novel "Buried Alive," or "The Doctor of Beauvais," and the theme of imprisonment runs darkly through it, second in importance only to the theme of rebirth. During the years to which *A Tale of Two Cities* belongs Dickens seems to have been obsessed by the notion of a prisoner buried alive, suddenly released to the light of everyday life, and having to re-form his connections with free men, to learn again the meaning of love and responsibility. Both *Little Dorrit*, which preceded *A Tale*, and *Great Expectations*, which followed it, develop the prison theme; one works out the comic and tragic conditions of prison life itself, the other treats with pathos and searing irony the ideas of innocence and guilt in terms of the bond between the convict and the "free" and "guiltless" men who judge and sentence him. "Recalled to Life" is the title of the first book of *A Tale*. Doctor Manette's story is not developed with irony or complication, but the narrative of his experiences is as much an inciting motif of the novel as is the story of Sydney Carton. Both lives are broadly conceived in the pattern of suffering, death (either real or symbolic), and regeneration. Both private lives reflect and mesh with the great public events which, we are to see, follow the same pattern.

From Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution*, originally published in 1837, Dickens derived the account of historical events within which he could

dispose his private dramas. He was devoted to Carlyle's history, "the book of all others," according to his American friend, J. T. Fields, "which he read perpetually and of which he never tired—a book for inexhaustibility to be placed before every other book." In 1850 Dickens wrote to his friend and biographer, John Forster, that he was reading *The French Revolution* "again, for the 500th time," and he concluded the preface to his novel with the statement that "no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book."

Many of the details of Dickens' novel are drawn directly from Carlyle. Certain great scenes, such as the storming of the Bastille or the operation of the guillotine, are as firmly based on Carlyle's history as are such smaller details as the firing of the chateaux or, even, the four valets who help Monseigneur to dress. But in emphasizing these specific obligations one may overlook the more fundamental debt. Dickens' choice of the historical event which would be the subject of his novel, the ideas about history and man's relation to it which shape his treatment of that subject, all derive from Carlyle.

As Carlyle saw it, history evolved through successive stages of destruction and reconstruction. The study of the past had not so much an intellectual as a moral purpose: every fact of life is a matter of divine revelation; by scanning history, the inspired writer finds the prophetic truth that would guide the future. Fundamental to Carlyle's views was the belief that each new age was born like the phoenix out of the ashes of the past. The men of his time were entering, he felt, an

age of reconstruction and rebirth; the preceding age of Revolution he interpreted as the period of apocalyptic fire out of which the new world would rise. In his book he only implied his moral judgments of the French Revolution; in conversation he was more direct, and described it as "the suicidal explosion of an old wicked world, too wicked, false and impious for living longer." His book was planned to emphasize the dramatic—and symbolic— aspects of the historical event: its three sections are concerned with the *ancien régime*, the Terror, and the building of the new society.

Two attitudes that emerge from Carlyle's view of history are particularly important to Dickens' fiction. First, though Carlyle was disgusted by the theories and practice of the revolutionists, he was able to welcome their fury as a cleansing flame. He observed the noble and vicious events of the catastrophe with a grim, religious certainty, never moved by revolutionary ardour, but never doubting the necessity of revolutionary violence. And second, he did not entertain the conception of the past as a subject of study in its own right. We of the twentieth century are so imbued with the notion of a "scientific," "objective" study of history that we forget how recent an idea it is. For Carlyle the past lay like a scripture which, being interpreted, revealed the eternal and inexorable laws of sin, expiation, and redemption. That a past time might be dispassionately reconstructed, or that it might be interpreted, not by the standards and beliefs of the present, but by its own systems of order and value, never occurred to the historian Carlyle, nor to his disciple Charles Dickens.

Both the general approach and the structure of *A Tale of Two Cities* are shaped by Carlylean doctrines. Dickens chose the French Revolution as his subject because he, too, saw it as the event which ushered in the modern world. And then, his idea of the past led him to write historical fiction with a difference. By nature Dickens was contemptuous of the past: he had neither the patient enthusiasm of the antiquarian nor the curious eye of the scholar; he wished to regard history only from a moral (and preferably superior) standpoint. Consequently, we do not have in this novel the careful reconstruction of manners and morals which occasionally gives such richness to the novels of Scott or Thackeray. Dickens' reader is not made to feel that he has been projected into a bygone time. Instead, the novelist uses the condescending "in those days" formula; he continually reminds us that we have escaped from the trammels and superstitions of the past into a freer, better age: "But indeed, at that time, putting to death was a recipe much in vogue with all trades and professions, and not least of all with Tellson's." (Book II, Ch. 1.) Or we find him sneering at "dear old institutions," which turn out to be such things as the pillory, the whipping post, and blood money, all fragments of "ancestral wisdom, systematically leading to the most frightful mercenary crimes that could be committed under Heaven." (Book II, Ch. 2.)

Dickens, then, is encouraged by Carlyle's theory to regard the past primarily as a storehouse of lessons, a terrible moral drama. In constructing his novel—it seems clear—he conceived his problem as one of integrating the personal lives of his characters with

the wider pattern of history. It is the principal scheme of the novel to show the individual fate mirroring and being mirrored by the fate of the social order. The lives of both Doctor Manette and Sydney Carton are, in a sense, parables of the Revolution, of social regeneration through suffering and sacrifice. The Doctor's return to life illustrates the stumbling course of the new order, released from its dark dungeon of oppression and misery, finding its place in a new and juster world. And Carton embodies both the novel's central narrative theme and its profoundest moral view: his past of sinful negligence parallels the past of eighteenth-century Europe; his noble death demonstrates the possibility of rebirth through love and expiation.

The web of moral interdependence is very closely spun. John Forster, who often echoed Dickens' own views, emphasized this aspect as the finest feature of the novel: "There is no piece of fiction known to me, in which the domestic life of a few simple private people is in such a manner knitted and interwoven with the outbreak of a terrible public event, that the one seems but part of the other." Indeed, in a work of serious historical interest it is necessary that the reader have a sense of his own connection with—even his own responsibility for—a social crisis. A modern example would be Ernest Hemingway's persuasive epigraph reminding the American or English reader that the knell that sounded the death of the Spanish Republic tolled also for him. Dickens, in a similar manner, set himself the task of persuading his readers that they were not islands entire of themselves, but involved in the injustice that led to the Revolution and in the violence

that it set loose. "The world," Dickens is reported to have said, "is so much smaller than we think it; we are all so connected by fate without knowing it; people supposed to be far apart are so constantly elbowing each other; and tomorrow bears so close a resemblance to nothing half so much as to yesterday."

This notion of reciprocity between private and public, England and France, past and present, imposes a pattern of parallelism on Dickens' novel. It had to be a tale of *two* cities, not just a story of revolutionary Paris. Every device that ingenuity suggested was used to connect the seemingly placid world of England with the upheaval in France. Symbolically the point is emphasized by the footsteps which echo on the quiet corner of Soho where Lucie lives with her husband and father. These echoes, becoming increasingly ominous, finally mingle with the "headlong and dangerous footsteps . . . raging in Saint Antoine afar off." (Book II, Ch. 21.) Mechanically considered, the novel is divided almost equally between the two countries: of the forty-five chapters, two recount the parallelism of events in England and France, nineteen are set in England, and twenty-four in France. The subject, however, did not permit a true balance of emphasis; all of Book III takes place in France, so that the movement of the novel is directed away from England toward the heart of the revolutionary strife.

In terms of action Dickens seems to have tried to establish a correspondence between the two nations, but not to have quite succeeded. Tellson's Bank is to some extent conceived as agent of the Old Order, and therefore

as evidencing its guilt, but it turns out to be quite an attractive (perhaps because thoroughly English) place. The description of the London mob attacking the funeral procession of the Old Bailey spy (Book II, Ch. 14) must have been designed to balance the descriptions of French mob violence with a home-grown Fleet Street variety. But the episode seems irrelevant to the story, and is handled in an oddly perfunctory way, ending in a moralistic rather than a dramatic strain: "... the crowd gradually melted away, and perhaps the Guards came, and perhaps they never came, and this was the usual progress of a mob." Jerry Cruncher, the grave-robber, who for professional reasons joins the attack on the funeral, was probably conceived as an English counterpart to the implacable Defarge, but no significant parallel is established.

The process of doubling is observable in the treatment of the main characters. The shiftless Carton and the virtuous Charles Darnay are doubles. Darnay is tried as an enemy of the state both in England and in France; in both cases he is unjustly accused, and in both is saved by Carton. Darnay has an original French name, D'Evrémonde, a coupling of the English word *every* and the French word *monde*. The association is with *tout le monde*, suggesting that Darnay is an Anglo-French Everyman. Lucie Manette, finally, is the child of an English mother and a French father.

The difficulty in this attempt to yoke the worlds of London and Paris by violence together is that Dickens had to forego his usual confident placing of English characters in English scenes. He was able to make use of a number of Englishmen, but he had to

violate both fictional probability and historical possibility by transporting them all to Paris in the Year of Terror, 1792. Then, the absence of English backgrounds prevents, I think, the unhampered flowering of his comic spirit. The comedy that appears in *A Tale* is only a faint echo of the old Dickens. Mrs. Cruncher's "flopping" is purely verbal humor, and attached to a pathetic situation. There are some deft satirical strokes in the description of Darnay's first trial, and a droll description of the fresco of Cupid in Tellson's Paris office, "still to be seen on the ceiling in the coolest linen, aiming (as he very often does) at money from morning to night." But these touches are few and comparatively weak.

Dickens' comic spirit was, I am sure, inhibited by the nature of his material. Comedy is based on the familiar and the particular; the wide gestures of intense passion or suffering are far removed from the minute turns of comic vexation. For this reason comedy would obviously be inappropriate to a study of revolution. However, there is another reason for the gravity of *A Tale of Two Cities*: Dickens' best comedy is verbal; Mrs. Gamp (in *Martin Chuzzlewit*) is supremely comic because of the wild irrelevance of her speech, a speech which rises from the carefully perceived cadences of the vulgar language. Since Dickens rarely made good comedy out of the well-bred, it seems likely that in this novel, where he was pretty much confined to upper middle-class people, aristocrats, and foreigners, he was bereft of the native, colloquial speech upon which his genius fed. He was not up to creating comic French characters and, indeed, for reasons of his-

torical consistency, the Frenchmen had to be a grim crew.

In the absence of the comic spirit other means had to be used to vivify the novel, so it is no surprise to find that Dickens spoke of setting himself "the little task of making a *picturesque story*, rising in every chapter, with characters true to nature, but whom the story should express more than they should express themselves by dialogue." It is one of the great weaknesses of the novel that Dickens attempted to rely on plot rather than on character, but it is one of its strengths—as well as its most distinctive feature—that it became a novel of *pictures*. So marked is the painterly quality of *A Tale* that one's memory of it is dominated by a series of *tableaux vivants*, scenes without dialogue, but with a composition so clear that one tends to see them within the limits of a frame.

The most memorable scenes are charged with symbolism and become a primary means of shaping the reader's judgment of the Revolution. The first glimpse of France that the novel provides is the scene of the broken wine cask in Chapter Five. The two paragraphs in which this is contained are so purely visual that they might almost stand for the description of a painting called—let us say—"The Broken Cask." To this the novelist has added a notation of sound effects, "a shrill sound of laughter and amused voices," and a final sentence that sends the participants back to their usual tasks, and rounds out the scene. The great paragraph which describes the Carmagnole is another *tour de force* of word painting (Book III, Ch. 5), as is the picture of the men sharpening their bloody "hatchets, knives, bayonets, swords" at the grindstone (Book III, Ch. 2).

These episodes are peculiarly interesting in that they are imagined to exist in the spatial dimensions of picture rather than in the temporal flow of narrative or verbal description. Dickens concludes his picture of the grindstone, for example, by saying: "All this was seen in a moment, as the vision of a drowning man, or of any human creature at any very great pass, could see a world if it were there." These three most elaborate pictures serve to create an intense emotional impression of the historical action of the novel. Each is a scene of passion and violence, each is presented with the clarity and overcharged feeling of a vision in delirium. This frenzy, Dickens would have us conclude, is the Revolution. It is through picture that he chose to control our responses: "It has been one of my hopes," so runs the preface, "to add something to the *popular and picturesque* means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr. Carlyle's wonderful book." (The italics are mine.)

Though there are no other pictures as highly wrought as these I have mentioned, the tableau technique is the ruling method of the book. Dickens tends throughout to make important episodes into set-pieces which are more visual than strictly dramatic. Since such passages are obviously separable from the surrounding matrix of narrative, the unity of tone in the novel suffers, but in his use of the stylized image Dickens developed a method that owes nothing either to the theatre (the source of much of his technique) or to the fiction of his predecessors and contemporaries. There is a groping toward a new form of the literary picturesque, the creation of an image

which derives more from the conventions of painting than of literature, but which makes use in an impressionistic way of sound and movement. Dickens spoke justifiably of adding something to the "picturesque" means of understanding.

The general conception of *A Tale of Two Cities* is so grand that one is tempted to overlook the novel's technical faults. But faults there are, some of them unforgivable, many of them quite instructive. The elements of sentimentality and melodrama are no more persistent here than in some of the earlier novels, but as always, they are unpalatable to the modern reader. Lucie Manette's heart-rending reunion with the father she has never known is simply not prepared for:

"And if, when I shall tell you of my name, and of my father who is living, and of my mother who is dead, you learn that I have to kneel to my honored father, and implore his pardon for having never for his sake striven all day and lain awake and wept all night, because the love of my poor mother hid his torture from me, weep for it, weep for it!" (Book I, Ch. 6.)

The illustrious analogue here is the reunion of Cordelia and Lear, but to define the differences between the two scenes is merely to become impatient with Dickens.

Similarly, Sydney Carton's declaration of love to Lucie is entirely possible, even noble, but it is undermined by sentimentality:

"In my degradation, I have not been so degraded but that the sight of you with your father, and of this home made such a home by you, has stirred old shadows that I thought had died out of me.

"Will you let me believe, when I recall this day, that the last confidence of my life was reposed in your pure and inno-

cent breast, and that it lies there alone, and will be shared by no one?" (Book II, Ch. 13.)

What is wrong in this passage is not so much the emotional situation, which we could be persuaded to believe in, as the language: there are too many dreams, and souls, and homes, and innocent breasts.

Some of Dickens' characteristic mannerisms grew all out of bounds in *A Tale*. Repetition was an endemic Victorian rhetorical device of which Dickens was always fond, but in no other novel is it so obtrusive. Observe the opening paragraph: "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 . . ." etc. Perhaps some of the repetitions and parallels were intended to emphasize the interconnections of twin realms of the novel, but too often the device becomes merely a trick. It does not add to the reader's experience to find the titles of chapters in balanced pairs, "The Fellow of Delicacy" followed by "The Fellow of No Delicacy," and "Knitting" followed by "Still Knitting." These verbal devices evidence a curious lack of control, a tendency to depend for effect on mere smartness.

One stylistic problem that Dickens did not quite overcome was the challenge of rendering the quality of foreign speech. Many novelists (and more dramatists) have been defeated in their efforts to make foreigners sound really foreign; on the whole Dickens has done pretty well. He was for the most part content to give the French dialogue a slightly stilted quality, the result usually of a literal translation of French idiom. M. Defarge's first

statements are illustrative: "Say, then, my Gaspard, what do you do there? . . . 'What now? Are you a subject for the mad-hospital?'" This, at least, sounds exotic without suggesting that the speaker has an imperfect grasp of his own language, but the method of rendering idioms literally can easily become absurd. One bit of dialogue runs, "'One can depart, citizen?' 'One can depart,'" and French readers have been particularly annoyed by such solecisms as "the Bridge of the Pont-Neuf." However, clumsy as these locutions are, it is profitable—and to Dickens' advantage—to compare his efforts with Hemingway's valiant attempt to render the spirit of Spanish speech in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway's earthy Spaniards sound as queer as Dickens' Parisians.

But if there are weaknesses in Dickens' technique, there is also strength in many of the smaller touches which give richness to the novel. Much of the effect of *A Tale* is a result of artful patterns of imagery. The pervading image of the road, for example, runs through the whole book. The first chapter, which opens with a general description of the period, ends with a reference to the figurative road along which all men will be carried in the years ahead of them. The second chapter, which begins the narrative, makes the figure of speech literal: "It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November. . . ." When, in the course of the novel, we encounter many roads upon which the characters drive or ride, none, thanks to the explicitness of the opening chapter, is without metaphorical significance.

Sometimes the imagery is allegorical. In the scene of the broken wine cask, which I have already mentioned, Dick-

ens makes it obvious that the wine symbolizes blood, and the multiple meanings of wine and blood are then developed. Defarge's wineshop is the center of revolutionary action; we are led to reflect that the fellowship of blood and wine has many guises. Affecting the reader, however, on a more instinctual level are the images—which tend to run together—of fountains, flood, and fire. The fountain which is the center of the life of Saint Antoine becomes a symbol of the irrepressible force of humanity welling up against repression. After the wicked Monseigneur's carriage has run down a child, the novelist tells us, "The water of the fountain ran, the swift river ran, the day ran into evening, so much life in the city ran into death according to rule . . . all things ran their course." (Book II, Ch. 7.) The Saint Antoine fountain has its rural counterparts: "The fountain in the village flowed unseen and unheard, and the fountain at the chateau dropped unseen and unheard—both melting away, like the minutes that were falling from the spring of Time." In the passages that follow, the water of the chateau fountain seems to turn to blood, and the village fountain becomes the rallying place for the populace, the symbol of their common humanity, of the force of life that cannot be put down. In the chain of imagery the fountain images give way to a flood, a sea, and the sea is succeeded by fire. The flowing water may be curbed or checked, but it cannot be stopped, and it can soon turn from a beneficent to a destructive force.

One of the powerful features of Dickens' art which should not go unmentioned is his strong sense of the lusts and guilts and passions which lie

under the surface of human consciousness. It is notable that his treatment of the Revolution is free of sentimental notions as to the essential goodness of man. The Terror is conceived as both a cleansing and polluting force, but men are shown to be attracted to violence for its own sake. There is also a deal of deep psychological understanding in the treatment of Charles Darnay's attraction by the "Loadstone Rock" of the Revolution. And for us who live in a world of concentration camps, of political betrayals, and inexplicable confessions there is something almost prophetic in Dickens' analysis of the prisoner's state of mind:

Similarly, though with a subtle difference, a species of fervor or intoxication, known, without a doubt, to have led some persons to brave the guillotine unnecessarily, and to die by it, was not mere boastfulness, but a wild infection of the wildly shaken public mind. In seasons of pestilence, some of us will have a secret attraction to the disease—a terrible passing inclination to die of it. (Book III, Ch. 6.)

This is not only brilliant psychology; it has turned out to be good history. It is in its grasp of its subject that the power and brilliance of this novel are finally seen to lie. The novel's chief weaknesses are the results of its excessive artificiality: its construction constantly calls attention to itself. But in reacting against these smaller details we must not forget that Dickens' main intention was to present a view of, to "add something" to our

understanding of the French Revolution. And the more I consider this novel as an interpretation of that event, the more successful it seems to me. One may quarrel with this or that detail of documentation, but the historical view, in its broad outlines, is a sound one. Dickens suggested that "this terrible Revolution" was an inevitable response to injustice, but he showed also how revolutionary ardor produced its own forms of injustice. Carton, describing the Revolution as a dark phase in the development of modern history, saw "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." This view of history was temporarily out of fashion, but there is some evidence that historians are now returning to it. Experience of the revolutionary era of our own century has led more influential writers to see the French Revolution as the critical event of modern history, as a cataclysm whose effects are still with us.

A Tale of Two Cities is a profoundly thoughtful, if not a theoretical book. It is the sort of novel that should be enormously *usable* for young people and for their teachers. Its technical weaknesses are of a kind that can illustrate the nature and problems of fiction, but what is much more important, its conception can vivify for us the meanings of the past, can offer us a reading of history, humane and deep, by a great artistic intelligence.

Charles Dickens's works and his works are products of what's referred to as the Victorian Era. Quite literally the time period lasting through the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), it is often characterized by the height of the British Industrial Revolution. Authors of the period, Dickens in particular, discussed through their works social inequality and a sense of disgust with the shortcomings of class division. Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* was no exception. Cited: 1) G. Robert Stange, *Dickens and the Fiery Past: A Tale of Two Cities Reconsidered*, in *English Journal*, October, 1957, pp. 381-90. 2) George Woodcock, "A Tale of Two Cities: Overview" in *Reference Guide to English Literature*, 2nd ed., edited by D. L. Kirkpatrick, St. James Press, 1991. Home » Charles Dickens » A Tale of Two Cities. Home. A tale of two cities, p.3. A Tale of Two Cities, p.3. Charles Dickens. "A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that everyone of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this." The real Banking-house by Temple Bar, the real business of the past day, the real strong rooms, the real express sent after him, and the real message returned, would all be there. Out of the midst of them, the ghostly face would rise, and he would accost it again. "Buried how long?"