

A WONDERFUL CORNER FOR ECHOES: THE USE OF SOUND IN CHARLES DICKENS'

*A TALE OF TWO CITIES*

by

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(Under the Direction of RICHARD MENKE)

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* is a novel particularly interested in sound as a way of understanding human behavior and history. Working from the assumption that Dickens is primarily a visually oriented novelist, this thesis suggests *A Tale of Two Cities* is an anomaly in the Dickens canon. Building on the insights of cultural critics such as Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong, this thesis concludes that sonic metaphors provided Dickens with an effective medium to convey the disorder unleashed by the French Revolution.

INDEX WORDS: Charles Dickens, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, Michel Foucault, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sound, Echoes, Orality, Literacy

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## 1. Introduction

For roughly a hundred and fifty years, critics and readers alike have struggled to reconcile *A Tale of Two Cities* with the rest of the Charles Dickens' novels. For some reason, the novel stands out in the Dickens canon. George Saintsbury, George Gissing, and Arnold Benning all "found it unimpressive, an anomaly among Dickens' work" (Beckwith 16). Select an article at random from a critical reader on the novel and some sentiment to this effect will probably appear. "[*A Tale of Two Cities*] is different from Dickens' usual narrative style, and this difference does not utilize every resource which we are accustomed to associate with his artistry," writes Earle Davis; "farce and caricature are either absent or underplayed" (40). "[It] has been hailed as the best of Dickens' books and damned as the worst," opines Edgar Johnson, "it is neither, but it certainly in some ways the least characteristic" (Hutter 56). "The fact that this novel is unlike most of Dickens' work," says G. Robert Strange in 1957, attempting to explain its status in the high-school curriculum, "may also have recommended it to teachers. . . it may be – along with *Hard Times* – the least Dickensian of [his] novels" (382).

*The least Dickensian of [his] novels.* The statement prompts a question: *what does it mean to be Dickensian?* As Harold Bloom calls to our attention, Henry James dismissed Dickens as a great novelist on the grounds that he could not "see beneath the surface of things. . . [that] he has created nothing but figure. . . added nothing to our understanding of human character" (1-2). Taylor Stoehr identifies the Dickensian as a "use of detail as an active ingredient in setting and plot," a cinematic way of generating interest in concrete objects (76-77). To be Dickensian, then,

is to be visually oriented. His was a style of writing that lends itself to comparison with cinema. Thus we have Sergei Eisenstein declaring in “Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today,” that “one need only alter two or three of the character names and change Dickens’ name to the name of the hero of my essay, in order to impute literally almost everything told here to the account of Griffith” (101-2).

The interest in linking Dickens to film endures to the present day. In his 2003 book *Dickens and the Dream of Cinema*, Grahame Smith indirectly rebuts James’ attack on *The Inimitable*, asserting that Dickens’ “hypnotic visual power [makes possible] seemingly effortless access to a life below the surface by the imaginative precision of the objects and actions that make up that surface” (156). Smith highlights the opening paragraphs (paraphrased here) of *Bleak House* as an example of this imaginative precision.

London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets. . . a Megalosaurus. . . waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes. . . Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another’s umbrellas. . . Fog everywhere.

(Dickens 5)

As the reader quickly comes to realize, this fog is not merely everywhere, but *everything*. It is Chancery, corruption, Victorian England, the novel itself turned inside out. Here we have a series of images suspended in indefinite time, caught up in the process of losing their individuality as they are simultaneously being singled out, a literary equivalent of a cinematic montage before Dickens has any business knowing what a montage is.

And yet something different seems to be at work in the introduction to *A Tale of Two Cities*. All apologies to Austen, its opening clause is probably the most quotable, easily recognized line in the history of the novel. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times;” citation would be insultingly redundant. Of course, few readers (myself included) could likely recite the entire sentence, and therein, just as the sentence passes beyond the realm of quotability, lies its brilliant irony. By invoking the ponderous, pompous register of the historian, Dickens suggests that history has less in common with literate trajectory than it does with chaotic speech. Ask a colleague to characterize the Obama era and you will probably receive an amalgamation of contradictory statements that amount to “well, not terribly different from the Bush era.” And what conclusion does *A Tale of Two Cities*’ narrator come to after speaking of the best and worst of times? “In short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only” (Dickens 7). In a manner mimetic of human speech, Dickens suggests here that history cannot be plotted out onto an easily identifiable course. Form equals content.

We find ourselves in familiar territory as we venture beyond the opening paragraph; the Dickensian mode is at work, reducing England and France to thrones upon which sit “a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face” and “a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face” respectively (7). And yet no sooner does Dickens assume his *modus operandi* than he begins to undercut it. Graphic images of torture and murder, of “tongue[s] torn out with pincers” and “prisoners in London gaols [fighting] battles with their turnkeys” fail to alert anyone to the imminent danger (8, 9). “In both countries,” we are told, “it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general were settled for ever” (7). And here we arrive at the point – or at least a point – that for me seems to distinguish *A Tale of Two*

*Cities* from the rest of the Dickensian canon; sight utterly fails to alert the powers that be in England and France that revolution is at hand. No one can peel away the bark of a tree in France or Norway and uncover a guillotine. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, surfaces do not seem to relate to depths in quite the same way as they do elsewhere in Dickens. It is a novel that demands that its characters and readers to use their ears.

In this essay I will explore the acoustic qualities of *A Tale of Two Cities* that, I believe, explain the novel's status as an oddity among Dickens' novels. While other critics (such as John Picker) have analyzed some of Dickens' work in terms of sound, I do not believe anyone has yet attempted a comprehensive analysis of the novel with this approach. Whether through the deafening uproar of the Storming of the Bastille, the silent suppression of Dr. Manette's voice, or the pre-audited knowledge of Lucie Manette, Dickens associates sound with violence throughout the novel. After a brief consideration of why Dickens might have been so interested in sound while writing *A Tale of Two Cities*, I will proceed to demonstrate the connections between sound and violence in the novel, drawing upon the work of Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Michel Foucault to develop my analysis.

## 2. Why?

In his 2003 book *Victorian Soundscapes*, John Picker argues that innovations in nineteenth-century audio technology significantly transformed Victorian conceptions of sound, which were in turn manifested in the literature of the period. Citing W. H. Preece, an electrician in service of the British Post Office, he begins his analysis with an enthusiastic quotation from one of the electrician's 1878 lectures:

the microphone is an instrument which acts toward the ear as the microscope does to the eye. It will render evident to us sounds that are otherwise absolutely inaudible. I have heard myself the tramp of a little fly across a box with a tread almost as loud as that of a horse across a wooden bridge. (3)

Some journalists were more gushing still; Picker recounts a journalist writing in *The Spectator* that the world would soon

hear the sap rise in the tree; to hear it rushing against small obstacles to its rise, as a brook rushes against the stones in its path; to hear the bee suck honey from the flower; to hear the rush of the blood through the smallest of blood-vessels, and the increase of that rush of the blood due to the slightest inflammatory action. (4)

Such sanguine prospects seem mildly amusing to the twenty-first century mind. We also use the microphone to pick up sounds that would otherwise be inaudible, but the mention of the device to us is likely to prompt thoughts of an inverted amplification of sound; we are less interested in using the microphone to hear the buzzing of a fly than we are to project the buzzing white noise of guitars cranked to eleven. As Picker argues, however, the microphone was part of a Victorian paradigm in which temporal and spatial boundaries were being vastly expanded; technology was revealing to them a microscopic and microphonic universe previously inaccessible to the unaided human senses. At the same time, Victorian understandings of sound were collapsing a world that once seemed too vast to fully comprehend; R. M. Ballantyne, as Picker notes, wrote of Krakatoa's eruption that "it is no figure of speech to say that the *world* heard that crash" (4). If the shot heard around the world was a poetic device in 1837, by 1878 the line between metaphor and reality was no longer quite clear. The Victorian era had indeed become one, in Preece's words, "alive with sound" (4).

Elsewhere in *Victorian Soundscapes*, Picker turns his attention to the phonograph, asserting that

One of the advantages of the phonograph was that it allowed householders not only to make socially acceptable noise of their own but also to bring that noise inside, in ways that would drown out the distractions of the itinerants and poor beyond their doors.

Victorians utilized the phonograph in ways that spoke to their own concerns over issues ranging from the domestic to the imperial. (111-112)

Picker also quotes Edison's claim that the device would enable "the captivity of all manner of sound-waves heretofore designated as 'fugitive,' and their permanent retention" (113). While Dickens died in 1870, seven years before Edison sounded off on the phonograph, I think these passages remain marvelously suggestive for an analysis of *A Tale of Two Cities*. For the Victorians, sound was caught up in an intellectual nexus with matters of social justice. Through the telegraph, information could be disseminated at a rate infinitely more rapid than previously possible; a blunder in the Crimea could be translated via poetry into domestic outrage overnight. On the other hand, the phonograph made it possible to drown out the undesirable protests of the world beyond. Sound became a medium that, because of its near-instantaneous and far-reaching power, had to be carefully controlled, and just whose hands would do the controlling was a question bound up in all the era's reforms. Thus Edison's metaphors suggest incarceration, and we are prompted to ask ourselves which sound waves *are* fugitive, which merit permanent retention, and precisely what will be done with these detained vibrations. Are they to be detained for observation, or merely for the sake of retention? Suggestions of Bentham and Foucault's panopticon creep into the mind.

Dickens himself stands as a testament to the need to regulate sound; he notoriously wore himself out through the vigorous public readings of his novels. Although he lived in an era when increasing mechanization allowed him to reach a greater audience through his literary works, the era had yet, as of the time of his death, to provide him with a manner to easily reach a mass audience through his voice. In the absence of the phonograph, he had to personally deliver his readings. It is intriguing to note (as Picker points out) that Dickens conceived of the idea of public readings toward the end of 1846 as he was working on *Dombey and Son*, the first novel Dickens planned in detail (Picker 38). In a letter to John Forster, Dickens characterized the Victorian era as one of “lecturings and readings” (38). It would seem as if the drive to plan out his novels in a more detailed manner was connected with, or perhaps gave rise to, a desire to address his audience with his own voice. In his letter to Forster, Dickens writes of “a great deal of money [to be] made” by the venture, but the preface to *A Tale of Two Cities* suggests something deeper in play here than mere pecuniary matters (Picker 38):

When I was acting, with my children and friends, in Mr. Wilkie Collins’ drama of *The Frozen Deep*, I first conceived the main idea of this story. A strong desire was upon me then, to embody it in my own person. . . throughout [the idea’s] execution, it has had the complete possession of me; I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself. (Dickens 3)

While a public reading is not the same thing as a theatrical performance, they both share dramatic qualities. Dickens here explicitly identifies the origins of *A Tale of Two Cities* in Collins’ *The Frozen Deep*; the novel is the result of his desire to *embody* the drama. Put in other words, the novel is an attempt to communicate a degree of emotional intensity experienced in an oral performance. Dickens claims his characters’ sufferings as his own, as a fact he has

personally verified. He is willing to accept Carlyle's interpretation of the French Revolution as a given, but he must experience for himself the agonies of those who endured it. This satisfactorily explains Dickens' domestic approach to history in the novel, but it also elucidates his approach to sound and voice in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

This deeply personal approach to the novel is characteristic of the orality explored by Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong. McLuhan's great insight – *the medium is the message* – while greatly obscured by his quasi-spiritual rhetoric, stands in spite of it: “we shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us” (xi). McLuhan spends much of *Understanding Media* analyzing the effects of Edison's electric light on the present era, but in his offhanded way of integrating literature into his analysis of electricity, he buries a connection between the two – and Dickens – in his chapters on the telegraph and cinema. “But with telegraph,” he writes, “came the integral insistence and wholeness of Dickens. . . the electric gives powerful voices to the weak and suffering, and sweeps aside the bureaucratic specialisms and job descriptions of the mind tied to a manual of instructions” (253, 254). McLuhan later writes that “it was the detailed realism of writers like Dickens that inspired movie pioneers. . . the realistic novel, that arose with the newspaper form of communal cross-section and human-interest coverage in the eighteenth century, was a complete anticipation of the film form” (288, 289). In McLuhan's analysis, the telegraph becomes a liminal technology, translating writing into sound; a message, once wired, will undergo a series of linguistic tumbling through touch and tongue as it passes from one person to others. It is this tumbling, McLuhan argues, that fosters the sense of wholeness he attributes to Dickensian realism. It reflects most accurately the connection between mind and body; “the simultaneity of electric communication, also characteristic of our nervous systems, makes each of us present and accessible to every other person in the world. . . electricity offers a

means of getting in touch with every facet of being at once, like the brain itself” (248, 249). In other words, electric technology blurs distinctions between individuals and reveals the interconnectedness of everyone caught up in the network. The device primarily responsible for this blurring and revealing in Dickens’ day was the telegraph; thus, it was only a matter of time before Dickens used sound as a way of understanding interconnectedness.

So how does this play out in *A Tale of Two Cities*? Here, paradoxically, it may prove useful turn to McLuhan’s Mill, Walter Ong. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong addresses more explicitly and completely the ways in which the written word transformed human thought, particularly literature. While McLuhan focuses on the ways in which electrical technology has altered human thought, Ong’s insights into literacy as a technology may prove more valuable to our investigation, as Dickens lived and wrote in a world being thrown into upheaval by electricity. In Ongian terms, while the Victorians, courtesy of the Romantics, had fully internalized literacy, they had yet to fully internalize electricity.

For both McLuhan and Ong, the written word permanently restructures the way the human mind processes information. “Sound exists only as it is going out of existence,” writes Ong, echoing one of McLuhan’s examples of a jet breaking the sound barrier; “there is no equivalent of a still shot for sound” (32). A thought can be printed onto a page and frozen for later analysis; waves of sound, however, cannot be frozen. The phonograph made possible the near-precise reproduction of sound, but the moment one lifts the needle, those sounds cease to exist. Aural experiences are by nature ephemeral, timeless or time-bound in a manner visual experiences are not. For a culture to relocate the primary organ for the transmission of knowledge from the ear to the eye through literacy transforms the way that culture acquires and retains knowledge. Oral cultures, Ong argues, perceive the world in terms of simultaneity,

whereas chirographic cultures perceive the world in terms of sequence. This is the result of learning through reading. While pattern recognition renders it possible for the literate mind to skip letters and words yet still comprehend sentences, the literate mind still attempts to process written information by reading it in a linear fashion, be it left to right or top to bottom. Literacy renders syllogistic logic possible.

Whether his target was the parish, the Court of Chancery, or the Circumlocution Office, Dickens, perhaps more effectively than any author in English literature, demonstrated and satirized the warped logic by which the British government operated. His critiques of any given body might accurately be reduced to a single statement: *this body does not perform the function it ostensibly claims to perform*. Dickens had a keen eye for recognizing disorder, and spent his entire literary career chronicling the social dysfunctions of early Victorian England, dysfunctions that he attributes in no small part to bureaucratic ineptitude. His novels suggest a point Ong would render explicit nearly 150 years later, that “writing [is] a mechanical, inhuman way of processing knowledge” (24). While syllogistic logic makes possible the aristocratic and bureaucratic legal systems of the nation-state, paradoxically, once set in motion these systems begin to operate in manner that defies the very logic that makes them possible. Dickens captures this unraveling in one of *A Tale of Two Cities*’ most celebrated passages.

All the devouring and insatiate Monsters imagined since imagination could record itself, are fused in the one realization, Guillotine. And yet there is not in France, with its rich variety of soil and climate, a blade, a leaf, a root, a sprig, a peppercorn, which will grow to maturity under conditions more certain than those that have produced this horror. Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms. (357)

Here literacy, the technology by which imagination records itself, is explicitly connected to the favored instrument of revolutionary justice. The monsters, fictitious terrors of the human mind, are sublimated into a mechanical beast of human creation; dysfunctional monarchical rule has rendered real what oral man dreamt up. Humanity in turn is likened to plant life, which as a result of injustice and oppression will not flower with organic unpredictability; rich variety has been mutated into certain horror. With industrial precision, such a system will hammer humanity into identical inhuman forms. McLuhan's phrase suggests itself again: *we shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us*. Literacy gives rise to monarchical bureaucracy, the abuses of which prompt cries of revolution. The passage echoes the warning *Bleak House's* camera-eye narrator delivers regarding Jo on the doorstep of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. "Turn that dog's descendants wild, like Jo, and in a very few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark – but not their bite" (199). Yet *A Tale of Two Cities* suggests a revision of this animal metaphor. The bark of the French Revolutionaries may well be indistinguishable from their bite.

For Dickens, in the absence of responsible human oversight, the inhuman methods of processing knowledge that render the nation-state possible will ultimately lead to social decay. As J. Hillis Miller has famously noted, the Dickensian universe is an entropic one. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, we find entropy at work in a manner first hinted at in Krook's bottle shop. Dickens seems to be suggesting the possibility of what McLuhan and Ong deny, namely, that the written word may entropically collapse into its component parts until letters are but magical symbols beyond the power of the human mind to make any sense of. Highly literature cultures may degenerate into oral cultures. This is precisely what we find in progress in Dickens' Revolutionary France. Sound, not sight, is *A Tale of Two Cities'* dominant metaphorical groove

because the behavior of an oral culture is asserting itself in the face of a corroded visual culture. A reversion to orality is underway.

### 3. Orality and Revolutionary Justice

Oral communication is the primary method used to transmit Revolutionary knowledge throughout France. On the one hand, this is unsurprising; the French sans-culotte is largely illiterate. On the other hand, this is quite noteworthy; Dr. Manette aside, largely absent from the Dickensian account of the French Revolution are the educated elites who protested monarchical abuse of power. Dickens' revolutionaries, until they have seized control of the country, operate entirely outside the bureaucratic system, but they are not entirely a disorganized, unstructured mass. They operate by means of an orally determined code, a code that reflects many of the traits Ong attributes to orality. For a complete list of orality's defining characteristics, the reader should turn to Ong's chapter, "Some Psychodynamics of Orality" in *Orality and Literacy*; for the purposes of this essay, it is sufficient to characterize orality as redundant, additive rather than subordinate, and empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced (31-77).

In "The Wine-Shop," we find the first stirrings of Revolutionary activity among the four Jacques. En route to Manette's cell, Monsieur Defarge (one of the Jacques, of course) tells Lorry that he has privileged these men, "the three of one name," because of their namesake; "I choose them as real men, of my name" (39). Whether or not the three men received the name at birth is questionable, yet Defarge here assigns a certain value – realness – to all of this repetition. And yet these men are bearers of secret knowledge and, in a sense, spies. They are conducting a task – espionage – that demands the falsification of realness. The unity of their names seems particularly noteworthy in comparison to their British counterparts; Jacques is distinctly French,

whereas Barsad and Cly, both highly unusual names, seem to lack a distinct national association. Here we find several of Ong's oral characteristics in play. Each of the Jacques drops the name redundantly. "Hard lives they live, Jacques. Am I right, Jacques? / You are right, Jacques" (36). Their identities are additive rather than subordinate to each other. While Defarge does wield a degree of power over the three, what we have here is less Jacques directing Jacques than it is Jacques and Jacques working together toward revolutionary ends. The Jacques have been selected for, or have opted to be called by, a personal name rather than an abstracted codename; John Barsad is in reality a certain Solomon Pross, and were Cly more sleek, he might be *Sly*.

We find more of Ong's oral characteristics in play in the Parisian trampling scene. The outrage of the common people at Monseigneur's reckless difference is expressed in terms of sound. "The complaint had sometimes made itself audible, even in that deaf city and dumb age / wild a wild rattle and clatter. . . with women screaming before [the carriage]. . . howling over [the child] like a wild animal"; we hear of the child being run over as opposed to seeing it (105). Monsieur the Marquis' first reaction is to ask "why does he make that abominable noise?" (105). As Ong notes, oral communication is empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced. The common people join other in wild cries of agony while the nobleman attempts to distance himself from his own actions through silence. "The people joined round," we are told, collectively engaging with the tragedy before collectively silencing themselves: "there was no visible menacing or anger. Neither did the people say anything; after the first cry, they had been silent" (106). Beyond the father who cries for his child, no one in the crowd vocally asserts themselves over another, nor have they any need to; Madame Defarge stands at hand, knitting, personalizing the offense for the benefit of all gathered.

An Ongian reading of Defarge's knitting reveals new insights into a familiar topic. As Ong notes, "the Greek term 'rhapsodize,' *rhapsodein*, [means] 'to stitch song together'" (22). The Frenchwoman's knitting, at first glance, seems to be a sort of alternative feminine literacy. We know Madame Defarge to possess "a watchful eye," an eye she has no fear of using (35). She alone meets the gaze of the cruel Marquis in the Parisian trampling scene; "among the men, not one. But the woman who stood knitting looked up steadily, and looked the Marquis in the face" (107). Her knitting is explicitly identified by her husband as a system of visually oriented coding.

"Jacques," returned Defarge, drawing himself up, "if madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it – not a syllable of it.

Knitted, in her own stitches and her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun. Confide in Madame Defarge. It would be easier for the weakest poltroon that lives, to erase himself from existence, than to erase one letter of his name or crimes from the knitted register of Madame Defarge." (165)

But if we read this in tandem with Ong's analysis however, we might pick up on something at the aural level at work here as well. Symbols are distinctly a visual phenomenon, as is erasure, but "register" has sonic connotations beyond documentation. What are we to make of Defarge's claim? If his wife could remember every syllable she records in her knitting by memory alone, why need she knit in the first place? One answer might be that her coding exists in a liminal state between the oral and the visual. "In an oral culture," writes Ong, "knowledge, once acquired, had to constantly be repeated or it would be lost; fixed, formulaic thought patterns were essential" (24). If we think of the knitting in terms of song, then what we have here is Madame Defarge, in the words of Ong, "[singing] the remembrance of songs sung" (146). She is repeating to herself

the offenses decried by the French people. It is no coincidence that the passage quoted above follows the illiterate mender of roads' tale; "the oral song," writes Ong, "is the result of interaction between the singer, the present audience, and the singer's memories of songs sung" (146). And what if we ask what sort of song Madame Defarge is singing? "Oral narrative," according to Ong, "is not greatly concerned with exact sequential parallelism between the sequence in the narrative and the sequence in extra-narrative referents" (147). Is this not what we find in the Frenchwoman's knitting? She seems less interested in weaving a narrative that can be read from one end of the fabric to the other than she does recording offenses episodically.

Ongian orality also satisfyingly characterizes the revolutionary legal system. Enemies of the revolution are, of course, denounced. One man's word can and does condemn another.

Before that unjust tribunal there was little or no order of procedure, ensuring to any accused person any reasonable hearing. There could have been no such Revolution, if all laws, forms, and ceremonies, had not first been so monstrously abused, that the suicidal vengeance of the Revolution was to scatter them all to the winds. (303)

Once again we find literacy connected with bureaucracy, and revolution connected with not merely the breakdown of order, but the collapse of procedural, sequential logic. Personal testimony is exalted above all other evidence: personal testimony, even in spite of itself. More credence is lent to the human voice itself than to the intentions of its speaker.

The President asked, was the Accused openly denounced or secretly?

"Openly, President."

"By whom?"

"*Three voices*. Ernest Defarge, wine-vendor of St. Antoine." (303, italics mine)

Darnay comes under attack by voices before he does by individuals. It is precisely because Revolutionary logic so heavily weights voice – voice, once issued, is irretrievable – that Manette’s initial written utterances override any attempt on his part to reinterpret or contextualize them. In what bureaucratic court governed by literate, sequential logic, would the entire contents of his letter be vocalized and, once vocalized, stand on their own without further argumentation? “A terrible sound arose when the reading of this document was done. A sound of craving and eagerness that had nothing articulate in it but blood” (318). The crowd gathered at the hearing collectively involves itself in the suffering communicated by Manette’s letter rather than distancing itself from it to analyze it objectively. The chapter ends paragraphs later, case closed.

#### 4. Sound and Suppression

In a handful of ways throughout *A Tale of Two Cities*, sound is associated with violence unleashed by the French Revolution. Consider for a moment the narrator’s depiction of Dr. Manette’s voice.

The faintness of the voice was pitiable and dreadful. It was not the faintness of physical weakness, though confinement and hard fare no doubt had their part in it. Its deplorable peculiarity was, that it was the faintness of solitude and disuse. It was like the last feeble echo of a sound made long and long ago. So entirely had it lost the life and resonance of the human voice, that it affected the senses like a once beautiful color faded away into a poor weak strain. So sunken and suppressed it was, that it was like a voice underground.

(41)

While Manette's incarceration is already a deplorable thing, what makes the doctor's case particularly heinous are the effects of his isolation; his voice has been suppressed. The human voice, for Dickens, is not an instrument to be used for self-satisfying purposes; it is a tool for communication. Deprived of anyone to communicate with, Dr. Manette has been deprived of part of his humanity, courtesy of the inhuman machinery of the ancien régime. The final sentence here resounds with greater strength in tandem with the first book's title. Manette must be "recalled to life," for he is as good as a dead man; his unearthing comes as a result of being spoken to. Yet this passage is not without its complications. Manette's voice is "like the last feeble echo of a sound made long and long ago." Echoes here traverse time just as they do elsewhere in the novel (as we will see in a moment), but the doctor's voice, unlike Carton's, is on the verge of being silenced forever. Is this the eventual fate of all vibrations in space, or do some sounds echo eternally?

A page later we are told that Dr. Manette "had lost the habit of associating place with sound" (42). Pages before this passage we find Monsieur Defarge dismissing the three Jacques who stand outside Dr. Manette's cell, observing him. "Do you make a show of Monsieur Manette," Lorry asks of Defarge; "I show him, in the way you have seen, to a chosen few," Defarge replies (39). The appropriate term leaps off the page at the post-modern reader: *spectacle*. There seems to me something undeniably Foucauldian about the whole scene. What we have here is sound – or more precisely the capacity to divide the senses against each other, largely to the disadvantage of the ear – being used as a distinct instrument of violence. As Foucault writes in his chapter "Panopticism" in *Discipline and Punish*:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all

events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure [. . .] all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (197)

Here Foucault makes the same connection as Ong and Dickens between literacy and bureaucratic power. The state's power hinges upon its regulation of information flowing between points under its control, and this power is capable of being leveraged against any point, any individual, within its grasp. "Discipline brings into play its power," writes Foucault, "which is one of analysis" (197). Literacy, the textual containment of sound, makes possible the bodily containment of the individual.

Manette's cell shares interesting similarities with Foucault's panopticon:

In short, [the panopticon] reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap. (200)

Manette's cell, we are told, is "dim and dark," but has a window (Dickens 40). It does not meet Foucault's qualifications for the dungeon. The apparent freedoms offered by the panopticon exist but to

induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power [. . .] the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary [. . .] in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault 201)

This is exactly what we find in Manette's case. He is unconscious of the three Jacques observing him, and carries out his work of shoemaking without any outside intervention beyond the provision of tools and supplies. He maintains his incarceration largely *gratis*. Yet the model of imprisonment Dickens presents here differs from Foucault's in one important aspect; it is Manette's aural sense that is primarily affected. Part of the terror of Foucault's panopticon is its power to obfuscate sight. The prisoner in the cell cannot see the prisoners in their adjoining cells, nor can he determine with any certainty whether or not they are being seen. In a similar fashion, Dr. Manette, as a result of his imprisonment, is deprived of the ability to associate place with sound. He must use his sense of sight to determine whether or not he is even being heard. Here, obfuscation of sight becomes secondary to the suppression of sound. In essence, Dickens anticipates Foucault's spin on Bentham by imagining a "panauricon," an incarcerating mechanism Manette will carry with him back across the Channel.

In "Hundreds of People," we are introduced to the peculiar paradox that characterizes the Manette household. Their home is described as both "a quiet lodging. . . in a quiet street corner" and "a wonderful place for echoes" (88). It is a place simultaneously full and devoid of sound. The narrator explicitly connects the house to the ear through metaphor:

it was a such a curious corner in its acoustical properties, such a peculiar Ear of a place, that as Mr. Lorry stood at the open window, looking for the father and daughter whose steps he heard, he fancied they would never approach. Not only would the echoes die away, as though the steps had gone; but echoes of other steps that never came would be heard in their stead, and would die away for good when they seemed close at hand. (94)

Recalling the earlier passage in the novel in which imprisonment severs Dr. Manette's sense of sound from place, this passage further builds upon the carceral aspects of the Manette household.

Dickens goes to great lengths to associate hearing and imprisonment here; not only does he capitalize the word Ear, but he locates the Manette residence in the corner of a street off Soho-square, spatially locating the home in a cell of sorts. Manette of course experiences multiple reversions to his addled state throughout the novel, but particularly unnerving here is the way his self-incarcerating behavior seems to spread to his home. From Lorry's vantage point at a window, he cannot reconcile his sense of hearing with his sense of sight. He is able to distinctively identify the Manettes' footsteps in the crowd, yet his friends' approach is circular, by turns close at hand and far away, so that their arrival half-catches him by surprise. By way of exaggeration, Miss Pross provides the chapter with its title, yet the hundreds of people she claims come looking for Lucie never materialize.

“Here they are!” said Miss Pross, rising to break up the conference; “and now we shall have hundreds of people pretty soon!”

But, no Hundreds of people came to see the sights, and Mr. Lorry looked in vain for the fulfillment of Miss Pross' prediction.

Dinner-time, and still no Hundreds of people.

Tea-time, and Miss Pross making tea, with another fit of the jerks upon her, and yet no Hundreds of people. Mr. Carton had lounged in, but he made only Two. (94, 95)

The Manettes' home seems to divide the senses against each other.

The Manette household also has a curious effect on its surrounding neighborhood. While several businesses occupy the ground floor of the building, the work that ought to be conducted there is repressed. The narrator reports that “little was audible any day” of “several callings purported to be pursued” (89). In spite of the fact that this is a place where “church-organs claimed to be made,” all we hear of industry here is “a distant clink. . . across the court-yard, or a

thump from the golden giant” (89). Dickens manipulates sound on multiple levels in this passage. In place of a workshop that manufactures *organs*, we hear merely the assertion that instruments are made; the sounds of industry are muffled into onomatopoeia. It would be wrong to deem this muting entirely sinister, for the neighborhood does boast an idyllic quality, but the Manettes’ presence does introduce a degree of unease into the London cityscape. The Manettes’ home is less a place where outside sounds are safely drowned out than it is a corner of London that suppresses surrounding sounds.

### 5. Seismic Knowledge

Only one chapter in *A Tale of Two Cities* spans the English Channel: “Echoing Footsteps,” the chapter in which the Bastille is stormed, one of the lengthiest passages of sustained violence Dickens penned. But before we examine what happens on the French side of the Channel, let us return for a moment to Picker’s analysis of the Victorians and sound and consider the domestic front.

Picker dedicates a chapter of his “close listenings” to Dickens, focusing intensely on *Dombey and Son*. While his reading of *Dombey and Son* is a particularly acute one, I disagree with assessment that the novel is the most “ear-orientated” of Dickens’ works. His insights into the character of Little Paul Dombey, however, can be extended to the characters of *A Tale of Two Cities*, particularly Lucie Manette. Picker begins his study of *Dombey and Son* with a brief discussion of Charles Babbage’s *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment*. He describes Babbage’s *Treatise* as one of “the most important early Victorian contributions to the debate over natural theology and an eccentric pre-Darwinian attempt to reconcile spiritual phenomena with scientific reasoning” (15) For Babbage, air is a record of “all that man has ever said or

woman whispered,” and the ocean “bear[s] equally enduring testimony of the acts we have committed” (21). It is in tune with these thoughts, Picker argues, that Little Dombey’s curiosity at the waves’ sayings becomes more discernible; *something*, although the doomed child cannot tell precisely what, has been writ upon them.

For Picker, Little Paul Dombey is an “engaged listener,” one who “indulges. . . his aural imagination” (21). The argument, I think, might better be applied to Lucie Manette and the characters passing through the Manette household. Curiously, *A Tale of Two Cities* receives a single passing reference in Picker’s study. While it may have been *Dombey and Son* in which Dickens began to express an interest in the connections between sound, character, and knowledge, it is in *A Tale of Two Cities* where we find these curiosities indulged to their fullest extent.

Perhaps it ought to be unsurprising that Lucie Manette seems to parallel Little Dombey, given conceptions of Victorian femininity, domesticity, and childhood. Set apart from the masculine working world, both characters are free to contemplate the sounds they hear rather than produce them.

Ever busily winding the golden thread which bound her husband, and her father, and herself, and her old directress and companion, in a life of quiet bliss, Lucie sat in the still house in the tranquilly resounding corner, listening to the echoing footsteps of years.  
(202)

Lucie is of course far from idle; she is bound up in the work of a Victorian housewife (pointedly, *weaving*). Yet her work enables her to experience the paradox of sound to a far greater extent than any other character in *A Tale of Two Cities*, save perhaps Sydney Carton. Isolated, she

acquires knowledge of John Cage's later discovery (via Picker, here) that "there is no such thing as silence" (Picker 6). Yet Lucie hears more than her beating heart:

For, there was something coming in the echoes, something light, afar off, and scarcely audible yet, that stirred her heart too much. Fluttering hopes and doubts – hopes, of a love as yet unknown to her. . . (Dickens 202)

Tranquility, it seems, is a prerequisite for pre-audition, but tranquility means more than merely silence. Before Lucie's precognitions, we find her caught up in moments where "her work would slowly fall from her hands, and her eyes would be dimmed" (202). Lucie's tactile and visual senses fail her just as she becomes attuned to the aural. First she hears the echoes of motherhood joyously ringing in her ears, but like diastole following systole, she then hears

doubts, of her remaining upon earth, to enjoy that new delight. . . . Among the echoes then, there would arise the sound of footsteps at her own early grave; and thoughts of the husband who would be left so desolate, and who would mourn for her so much, swelled to her eyes, and *broke like waves*. (202, italics mine)

The passage echoes Picker's insights into *Dombey and Son*, for what is Lucie hearing but what the waves were always saying? Lucie hears the pre-auditions of her own untimely death, death being what Little Dombey never lives long enough to truly understand. The passage is one of the most understatedly macabre and bizarre Dickens ever penned. Lucie, weaving away at her woman's work, perceives that she is spinning away at her own fate; she is triangulated here between the Victorian female, the oracle, and the Moirae. And having already heard the echoes of her fate resounding back through time, she is further assaulted by sound.

That time passed, and her little Lucie lay on her bosom. Then, among the advancing echoes, there was the tread of her tiny feet and the sound of her prattling words. Let

greater echoes resound as they would, the young mother at the cradle side could always hear those coming. They came, and the shady house was sunny with a child's laugh, and the Divine friend of children, to whom in her trouble she had confided hers, seemed to take her child in his arms, as He took the child of old, and made it a sacred joy to her.

(202)

At this point the chapter becomes so overloaded with echoes that it becomes difficult to make sense of what one is reading. Having given birth to one child, Lucie hears the echoes of a child's death; but whose death is Lucie pre-auditioning? Does the "child of old" refer to a child from the Biblical account, or is Lucie hearing the death of one of her own, a child unborn as she stares into little Lucie's cradle?

Even when golden hair, like her own, lay in a halo on a pillow round the worn face of a little boy, and he said, with a radiant smile, "Dear papa and mamma, I am very sorry to leave you both, and to leave my pretty sister; but I am called, and I must go!" (203)

Are we really hearing the echoes of a child's death before it is even born? Do both of the Manette children perish in childhood? It is difficult to tell, with all of "the rustling of an Angel's wings [blending] with other echoes" (203). Regardless, what we hear of through Lucie's ears are not the great earthshaking moments of life, but rather the foreshocks of those events. The actual birth of little Lucie and the death of the young golden-haired boy take place just out of earshot. This narrative approach, mimetic of the conception of sound in play here, allows Dickens to organically convey information that might otherwise require an epilogue. The careful reader discerns here that Lucie and Darnay will survive the novel and prosper after the pages cease recording their narrative. "Lucie heard in the echoes of years," we are told, "none but friendly

and soothing sounds. Her husband's step was strong and prosperous among them; her father's firm and sound" (202).

For all Lucie hears of her future domestic life, however, domesticity does not protect her from more public echoes. Through her ears, the narrative springs forward six years.

These were among the echoes to which Lucie, sometimes pensive, sometimes amused and laughing, listened in the echoing corner, until her daughter was six years old. But, there were other echoes, from a distance, that rumbled menacingly in the corner all through this space of time. And it was now, about little Lucie's sixth birthday, that they began to have an awful sound, as of a great storm in France with a dreadful sea rising. (204, 205)

The relationship of sound to time here is consistent with what we have already witnessed throughout "Echoing Footsteps." Unbound by time, the sonic vibrations of various happenings are able to travel in any temporal direction, and as long as the narrative remains in an aural state, this audio-temporal logic permits Dickens to collapse narrative space and time as he pleases.

Yet the content of this passage is equally as intriguing as the narrative device that conveys it. To build upon Picker's assessment of *Dombey*, Lucie hears what the waves, now whipped into storm, are saying: revolution is at hand. Revolution has of course been at hand the entire novel, but here we find the menacing rumbles swelling into an "awful sound." Reconsider in its entirety a familiar passage from the novel's opening chapter:

It is likely enough that in the rough outhouses of some tillers of the heavy lands adjacent to Paris, there were sheltered from the weather that very day, rude carts bespattered with rustic mire, snuffed about by pigs, and roosted in by poultry, which the Farmer, Death, had already set apart to be his tumbrils of the Revolution. But that Woodman and that

Farmer, though they work unceasingly, work silently, and no one heard them as they went about with muffled tread. (8)

No one but Lucie Manette, it seems. As Lucie's pre-auditory echoes grow in intensity, what once was a matter of private precognition becomes a public fact. The Manette household is joined by Mr. Lorry, who proceeds to remark about "such an uneasiness in Paris" (205). An exchange follows between Lorry and Lucie.

"Now, come and take your place in the circle, and let us sit quiet, and hear the echoes about which you have your theory."

"Not a theory; it was a fancy."

"A fancy, then, my wise pet," said Mr. Lorry, patting her hand. "They are very numerous and very loud, though, are they not? Only hear them!" (206)

Gathering about Lucie, the Manette household asks of her to explain the transmission once reserved for the domestic oracle. Lucie has no theory to explain the echoes; her reception of them depends upon her passive acceptance of what she has heard. This is also consistent with the approach to sound found elsewhere in the novel; pre-auditory reception of sound is connected with Victorian domestic femininity, whereas interpretation and the preemptive issuing of sound is associated with masculinity. Just as Lucie comes up short with a theory, the narrator, gendered male, steps in to sound off on the "tremendous roar [arising] from the throat of Saint Antoine" (206).

For the purposes of Dickens' novel, the storming of the Bastille is the beginning of the French Revolution. It is the source of the echoing footsteps of the chapter's title, the very event that makes the novel possible. Revolutionary terror follows in its wake. The account of Dr. Manette's suffering is unearthed during it. It is appropriately situated near the center of *A Tale of*

*Two Cities*; the chapter is the epicenter of all the shocks running through the novel. It is the point at which Madame Defarge sets aside her silent, inscrutable knitting and vocalizes what she has rhapsodized upon for so long. And, importantly, it is an event communicated to us through aural metaphors; we do not see the storming of the Bastille as much as we do hear it. Who distributes the muskets Saint Antoine equips itself with? “No eye in the throng could have told” (206). The passage’s primary visual metaphor – the crowd, the revolution as a wave – is itself a liminal metaphor caught between the visual and the sonic. We find Jacques Defarge, his wine-shop likened to “a whirlpool of boiling waters,” “labor[ing] and striv[ing] in the thickest of the uproar” (206-207). Here, sound practically acquires mass, becomes a wave one must struggle through. “With a roar that sounded as if all the breath in France had been shaped into the detested word [The Bastille!], the living sea rose, wave on wave, depth on depth, and overflowed the city to that point. Alarm-bells ringing, drums beating, the sea raging and thundering on its new beach, the attack begun” (207). “Boom smash and rattle, and the furious sounding of the living sea”; “a parley – this dimly perceptible through the raging storm, nothing audible in it”; “tumult, exultation, deafening and maniacal bewilderment, astounding noise, yet furious dumb-show”: to quote all of these sound-related words would be effectively to surround the final pages of the chapter in quotation marks (208). So massive is the sound that it obliterates spatial and temporal boundaries: “of all these cries, and ten thousand incoherencies, ‘The Prisoners!’ were the cry most taken up by the sea that rushed in, as there were an eternity of people, as well as of time and space” (208). No surprise then that, there not being enough room for all of this revolutionary uproar within the Bastille, it spills throughout the entire novel.

## 6. Designated Fugitive

In “Echoing Footsteps” we find sound used as a way of knowing. Elsewhere in the novel, Dickens builds upon the connection between sound and understanding by associating the ignorance of Mr. Stryver with being, in a sense, tone deaf. In “The Jackal,” the narrator presents us with an animal metaphor to establish the relationship between Stryver and Carton; the latter is the jackal to the former, a lion. While Dickens’ use of the metaphor primarily serves to highlight Carton’s dissolution, if we pause to consider what it ought to mean for Stryver to be a lion, we find more evidence of Dickens’ manipulation of sound at work. Stryver certainly makes for a curious lion; he seems to lack a terror-inspiring roar, perhaps the king of the jungle’s quintessential trait. We would expect a legal lion to deliver devastating rhetorical blows, but quite the opposite proves true.

“You say again you are quite sure that it was the prisoner?”

“Did you ever see anybody very like the prisoner?”

“Look well upon that gentleman, my learned friend there. . . and then look well upon the prisoner. How say you? Are they very like each other?” (71)

Stryver’s offensive does not even amount to rhetorical sound and fury; rather, in what proves to be the most effective use of his voice in the entire novel, he calls attention away from it to Darnay’s uncanny resemblance to his legal associate. Stryver’s whole argument amounts to one of his favorite phrases: “look here!” Furthermore, the narrator proceeds to mute the rest of Stryver’s cross-examination. The remainder of Stryver’s case is co-opted by the narrator. His own voice subsumed into the narrative voice, Stryver proceeds “[to show] them how the patriot, Barsad, was a hired spy and traitor” (71).

Although Stryver does a great deal of speaking in the scenes in which he appears, he is largely presented as a blustering, foolish character. He is a comic antagonist; this does not, however, render him harmless. The narrator deems him a “glib man,” one who lacks “that faculty of extracting the essence from a heap of statements” (82). The narrator quickly modifies this claim, asserting that “the more business he got, the greater his power seemed to grow of getting at its pith and marrow” (82). Stryver, it seems, is only able to exercise his leonine powers to the degree that he receives the lion’s share of lucre. Implicit here is one of Dickens’ critiques of the English legal system. Only in such a dysfunctional state of affairs could a man who lacks legal prowess rise to the top of the profession. Stryver is a lion insofar as he feeds like one. The metaphor breaks down when it comes to actually establishing order in the bureaucratic jungle.

It is Stryver’s tone-deafness that forces him into an over-reliance on sight (he does possess “sharp eyes” [86]), which ultimately results in his failure to win Lucie Manette’s hand. His interest in the young woman hinges upon her status as a visual object. In his first session with the Jackal, Stryver proposes a toast to “the pretty witness. . . the picturesque doctor’s daughter, Miss Manette,” whom Stryver has no difficulty identifying as “the admiration of the whole Court!” (86). Nor does he have any difficulty identifying Carton’s admiration for Lucie; “I rather thought, at the time, that you sympathized with the golden-haired doll, and were quick to see what happened to the golden-haired doll” (86). Attempting to undercut Stryver’s keen gaze, Carton attacks his sense of sight: “if a girl, doll or no doll, swoons within a yard or two of a man’s nose, he can see it without a perspective glass,” an attack that does not prove very effective or convincing; the chapter concludes less than a page later with the image of the Jackal’s tear-soaked pillow (86).

As “A Companion Picture” demonstrates, the weakness of Stryver’s tongue relative to his eyes hampers him in the establishment and maintenance of personal connections. “I have something to say to you,” he begins the chapter, quickly assuming a dictatorial manner with Carton, defaulting upon his primary sense; “look here,” he exclaims (132). He repeats the injunction several times in the span of the chapter’s four pages, heavily weighting his final admonition for Carton to marry with an insistence upon the importance of sight. “Let me recommend you. . . to look it in the face. I have looked in the face, in my different way; look it in the face, you, in your different way” (135). For Stryver, the power to command one’s vision is a trait associated with vigorous masculinity (“I am a man” [133]). “Marry. . . never mind your having no enjoyment of women’s society, nor understanding of it, nor tact for it,” he instructs the Jackal; “[f]ind out somebody. Find out some respectable woman with a little property – someone in the landlady way, or lodging-letting way – and marry her, against a rainy day” (135). Unconcerned with comprehension, Stryver is content to associate meaningful, personal language with the female domain; “I feel that Miss Manette will *tell well* in any station,” he informs Carton (135, emphasis mine). In recognition that his defeat is assured as long as the match remains one of verbal sparring, Stryver attempts to undermine the very basis of Carton’s advantage, attempting to frame his employee’s manners as that of the “silent and sullen and hang-dog kind,” his voice impotent “because I know you don’t mean half you say; and if you meant it all, it would be of no importance” (133-34).

We find similar themes rendered more explicitly in the following chapter, “The Fellow of Delicacy.” Stryver’s legal language fails him in his personal case with Lucie Manette. “As to the strength of the case, he had not a doubt about it, but clearly *saw* his way to the verdict. Argued with the jury on substantial worldly grounds – the only grounds ever worth taking into account –

it was a plain case, and had not a weak spot in it” (136, emphasis mine). Even before Stryver can venture to Soho to “declare his noble mind,” we know his cause to be hopeless, his proposals to escort Lucie to Vauxhall and Ranelagh already having failed (136). Here, we find Stryver’s visually oriented perspective juxtaposed with Mr. Lorry’s sensitive ear, although this chapter presents us with an important development from the previous one. In contrast to Carton, who has yet to learn how to harness his trenchant tongue, Lorry’s experience at Tellson’s Bank has taught the businessman how to modulate his voice. The narrator begins depicting the decidedly one-sided exchange by highlighting the banker’s manner: “The discreet Mr. Lorry said, in a sample tone of the voice he would recommend under the circumstances” (137). Lorry possesses what Carton will acquire by the novel’s conclusion, the power to modulate his voice in a tone appropriate to a particular situation. Stryver presents himself at Tellson’s for a “private word,” yet presents his case in terms of worldly success; “am I not eligible. . . prosperous. . . and advancing?” he asks Lorry (137-38). Having first appealed to the banker for a private word, he confusedly appeals to Lorry’s office:

“here’s a man of business – a man of years – a man of experience – *in* a Bank. . . and having summed up three leading reasons for complete success, he says there’s no reason at all! Says it with his head on!”

Mr. Stryver remarked upon the peculiarity as if it would have been infinitely less remarkable if he said it with his head off. (138)

Stryver appeals to Lorry’s office in multiple respects in this exchange. As mentioned already, this passage completes the shift in Stryver’s appeal from the personal to the public man. With no shortage of rhetorical bombast, he calls upon Lorry’s recommendations as a man of business, highlighting the banker’s age and years of service in the financial house, emphasizing the fact

that he is presently carrying out the role of a financier. Thus, Stryver attempts to invoke Lorry's office in the sense of its being an establishment that both provides an occupation and a space for carrying out that occupation, qualities that it possesses as a public place for business. Yet the lawyer takes his appeal to office a step further; "here's a man of business," he begins, addressing the space itself, engaging in a curious, completely inappropriate monologue. Unable to modulate his voice in the tones appropriate to personal communication, he presses beyond the private and public to the impersonal and inanimate, into a space beyond the page. In a novel dealing with the French Revolution, references to decapitation become significant in ways that the characters inhabiting it could not possibly understand. The terrors of the guillotine, at this point in *A Tale of Two Cities*, have yet to have been unleashed upon the world. Stryver has no business "remark[ing] upon the peculiarity" of Lorry's statements "as if [they] would have been infinitely less remarkable if he had said [them] with his head off." Here, in his theatrics, Stryver has unwittingly pressed his voice beyond the fourth wall, pressed it into the service of Dickens' narrative – or perhaps we might say that because Stryver lacks adequate control of his voice, Dickens has temporarily taken possession of it.

Stryver stands unified with the French and the dangers of an unmodulated voice at the end of book II in "Drawn to the Lodestone Rock." Dickens' choice to make a reference to the *Arabian Nights* rather than the more obvious reference to Greek mythology is worth noting. Darnay is not drawn to France by a siren call. While Gabelle's letter does stir him into action, the unruly voice of Stryver, joined with that of the expatriate Monseigneur, repels him from his adopted country. The swarming Monseigneur's false demands for justice seem to Darnay "such vapouring all about his ears, like a troublesome confusion of blood in his own head. . . which had already made Charles Darnay restless" (228). Immediately following, we are told that "among

the talkers, was Stryver, of the King's Bench Bar, far on his way to state promotion, and, therefore, loud on the theme" (229). Darnay's ambivalence toward Stryver is vital to understanding the scene. "Him, Darnay heard with a particular feeling of objection; and Darnay stood divided between going away that he might hear no more, and remaining to interpose his word" (229). To say that Monseigneur's vehemence for vengeance is a purely personal affair, of course, would be to overstate the case; however, it is precisely because Stryver, for his own personal gain, confuses what is for Darnay a personal, private matter, into a vociferously public affair that repels the expatriate across the channel.

## 7. Conclusion

We have seen how Dickens connects sound with suppressive violence, the knowledge of violence, and the outbreak of violence throughout *A Tale of Two Cities*. To conclude my essay, I wish to examine the novel's final two chapters. To neatly wrap up a novel in which sound is the primary instrument of communicating knowledge, in which sound can obliterate time and space, is no small task; if the walls of the Bastille and the English Channel cannot do it, how are we to expect the cover of a book to fare? Perhaps this is the reason so many critics find *A Tale of Two Cities*' ending unsatisfying. It is perhaps also the reason Dickens offers us two endings to the novel: the comic death of Madame Defarge and the heroic death of Sydney Carton.

Just as the human wave whips itself up into a state of inaudibility and ultimately deafens itself to its own abuses of justice, the struggle between Madame Defarge and Miss Pross leads to the latter's loss of hearing.

[Madame Defarge] knew full well that Miss Pross was the family's devoted friend; Miss Pross knew full well that Madame Defarge was the family's malevolent enemy. . . Each

spoke in her own language; neither understood the other's words, both were very watchful, and intent to deduce from look and manner, what the unintelligible words meant. (351)

Here we return to Ong. If literacy is a visually based system that reshapes the mind, the conflict between Defarge and Pross suggests that orality is also a restructuring construct, arising out of a need for individuals to effectively communicate with each other. The orality that characterizes Revolutionary communication, embodied in Madame Defarge, breaks down when it must communicate with someone who does not speak its language. In Dickens' account, in the absence of a common tongue one must be both visually *and* orally attuned to survive. "But [Pross'] courage was of that emotional nature that it brought the irrepressible tears into her eyes. This was a courage that Madame Defarge so little comprehended as to mistake for weakness" (352). Defarge's fatal error is to incorrectly read the human body. Her orally rooted drive to personalize injustices committed against her paradoxically leads her to abstract these personal offenses upon others indiscriminately. Forced to rely upon sight, she sees in others what she wishes to see. Thus Defarge attempts to overpower Pross and winds up hoisted upon her own petard. The scene also functions as a sort meta-commentary on the difficulty of concluding a novel structured upon a sensory mode prone to frustrating attempts to order it. Dickens cannot conclude his novel without determining that there is some point beyond which sound cannot travel. In a not-so-happy ending, Pross' deafness eliminates her as a narratable character; never again might she hear the hundreds of people congregating at the Manette household.

The tensions involved in Dickens' attempts to conclude the novel are evident in the final chapter's title; precisely whose footsteps die out forever? Elsewhere in *A Tale of Two Cities*, we have heard the echoing footsteps associated with the Defarges and the revolutionaries. Are the

footsteps here the echoes of Madame Defarge, still resounding, or does Carton appropriate them metaphorically for himself? The latter suggestion is problematic, as we do not hear Carton's feet anywhere in the final scene. Rather, what we seem to have is the imagination on Dickens' part of an idealized voice capable of silencing those who would raise theirs to harm. By sacrificing himself to the guillotine, Carton disembodies his voice so that it might resound immortally, unimpeded.

Carton's parting vision inhabits the nebulous realm of sight and sound before resolving into what is decidedly the emission of a human tongue. Before his vision resolves, however, Carton himself undergoes a transfiguration into Christ; "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (360). In a curious narrative interjection, John 11:25 booms through the text, the issuing tongue unidentified; is this the voice of god, the narrator, or Carton? The following passage connects the scene to both the storming of the Bastille and Lucie's pre-auditions.

The murmuring of many voices, the upturning of many faces, the pressing on of many footsteps in the outskirts of the crowd, so that it swells forward in a mass, like one great heave of water, all flashes away. Twenty-three. (360)

The paragraph boggles the mind. Like a great whirlpool, all of *A Tale of Two Cities'* echoes are drawn into a vortex from which they will be heaved back throughout the entire novel. At precisely this point, vision fails. Whatever Carton sees – and he foresees a great deal – he must communicate orally. Thus, "sublime and prophetic," which the gathered crowd "said of him," Carton preempts the narrator and concludes the novel. Although through Carton's final words Dickens provides us with one of his most eminently quotable endings, Carton's prophecy is not

without its complications. Among the things he sees are “a child upon [Lucie’s] bosom, who bears my name” (360). This child proceeds to become

“a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him, foremost of judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place – then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day’s disfigurement – and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice.” (361)

One of Lucie’s children will one day pass on Carton’s story; yet which child, precisely, grows up to restore Carton’s legacy? Lucie heard the echoes of her boy’s early death. Are we to infer from Carton’s words that Lucie will give birth to another boy and name that child Sydney? And what of the passage that precedes this paragraph?

“I see [Lucie], an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day.” (361)

Has Lucie not heard pre-auditions of her untimely death? Do these passages, in tandem with “Echoing Footsteps,” comprise an oversight on Dickens’ part, or do they suggest that at least one of the aurally attuned characters might have misheard or misspoken? If so, then who? The question cannot be adequately resolved.

The veracity of all the novel’s pre-auditions and preemptive utterances aside, Carton’s final words are devoid of visuality; “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known” (361). In concluding the novel with Carton’s voice, Dickens supplants the disembodied, pompous historical tone of the introduction with the transcendent, yet still recognizably human register of the martyr. Carton’s words endure

because they are not, in the Ongian sense, literary. They are the conclusion to a life story that can and will be recited and passed along through generations.

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A Tale of Two Cities is an 1859 historical novel by Charles Dickens, set in London and Paris before and during the French Revolution. The novel tells the story of the French Doctor Manette, his 18-year-long imprisonment in the Bastille in Paris and his release to live in London with his daughter Lucie, whom he had never met. The story is set against the conditions that led up to the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror.