Dickens's Attitudes in
*A Tale of Two Cities*

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STUDIES OF THE AUTHOR-READER RELATIONSHIP are easy enough to conduct in the case of writers who, like Thackeray, George Eliot, or Charlotte Brontë, address their readers. It was an examination of *Jane Eyre* that first attracted my attention to this problem a few years ago; the reader of that book is apostrophized on some thirty occasions, and the author's attitude to him or her can be inferred with tolerable clarity from the relevant passages, as can the mental image Charlotte Brontë—or is it Jane Eyre?—has formed of this elusive person. Dickens—and especially the later Dickens—presents more difficult problems. As I note elsewhere, in *Bleak House*, for instance, very little visible attempt is made to establish any kind of specific relationship with the reader.1 And in *A Tale of Two Cities* there seems to be even less than in *Bleak House*. Yet, as has often been remarked, no novel is written in a complete vacuum; every work of literature meant for publication, and preeminently every work of fiction by Charles Dickens, was originally written for the reader and is thus in some sense addressed to the reader. The relationship may, and indeed most of the time does, remain implicit, but it is present, inevitably, in the writer's consciousness. It ought to be possible to infer its varying nature from the study of other types of relationship occurring at more visible levels; the reader is addressed by the writer through several channels, such as narrator or narrators and characters.

This discussion is an attempt to analyze and sort out a complex of relationships involving the author, the narrators, the characters, and the readers of *A Tale of Two Cities*. I must from the outset make it clear that it is not my purpose to sit in judg-

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In a lecture delivered at Lausanne in 1959 Angus Wilson made some useful comments on the division of labor while a novel is being written between the novelist, the narrator, and the remainder of the writer’s personality. He said: “I have found in the course of ten years’ writing that three personalities or separate wills exist during the making of a book—the narrator, the craftsman, and the residue”; he went on to add: “The three exist in perpetual warfare—to the detriment I may say of the physical and nervous health of the whole—and their warfare is an eighteenth-century one of evershifting alliances to maintain the balance of power.”

This theory seemed to me illuminating when I heard the lecture in which it was put forward, and I have continued to regard it as valid and to use it in my teaching and in the critical analysis of various novelists. I am tempted, however, to introduce a slight modification of emphasis in the use of Wilson’s distinctions. Not being an experienced novelist myself, I would hesitate to describe any part of Dickens’s personality, however nonauthorial or nonnarrating, as a mere residue. On the other hand the more traditional opposition between author and narrator which Wilson was not interested in discussing remains in my eyes important and useful, whereas his own pair of narrator and craftsman are possibly more perceptible to the practicing artist—he says that his natural aptitude as a novelist is “for narration rather than for craft”—than to the external observer and the

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critic. Yet on the whole Angus Wilson’s suggestion of an at least threefold division of the novelist’s personality is immensely helpful. The private man (what he calls the residue) goes on with his private life, holds the pen physically, lights an occasional cigarette, answers the telephone or decides to ignore its call but is nevertheless disturbed by it, goes out for a meal, falls asleep; inevitably this private man conditions or interferes with the progress of the narrative, if only through temporary reluctance or unfitness, but sometimes through more positive impulses. Of the other two, those properly concerned with the narrative work itself, one—the “author” or “novelist”—is like the architect, the other—the narrator—like the foreman. The former conceives the general plan, invents the story and the characters, and issues orders in consequence; the latter has to carry out those orders, to transmute them into the descriptions, the narrative, and the dialogues of the book.

This delegation of part of the author’s creative function to a subordinate persona is crystal clear in the case of all first-person narratives. David Copperfield is Dickens’s narrative persona, so is Pip, and Jane Eyre is Charlotte Brontë’s. But the delegation also exists, though less visibly, in third-person narratives. It does not merely assume the form of “point of view”; it also involves the adoption of a specific style and tone, of a certain set of habits and beliefs, of a certain store of general knowledge and specific information. Obviously we are not to take all the statements made in a third-person narrative as representing the author’s permanent views; we can often form some idea of the narrator’s personality as distinct from the author’s. I believe that it is, at a lower level, a fairly common experience with most of us. We may adopt a lecturing tone and a writing tone and vary them in accordance with the particular audience we are addressing, the specific periodical we are writing for; we may even when writing letters assume a distinct persona for each correspondent or at least class of correspondents. A writer like Dickens, whose letters show how much he liked disguise and parody, would alter his manner not only from David to Esther to Pip but also from the narrator of Pickwick to that of Oliver Twist or Nicholas Nickleby. And like the writers of epistolary novels or like himself in Bleak House, he would also vary his stance from chapter to chapter or from episode to episode in some of his books.
In the case of *A Tale of Two Cities* it is obvious that there was an exceptionally close link between the book and the author, between the narrative and the man Charles Dickens, who asserted in his brief but striking preface that "throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me" and significantly added: "I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself." Even while making allowance for the writer's habitual overemphasis of his own emotional attitudes, his statements must be borne in mind; they imply that the usual distance or detachment from characters and tale could not be preserved entirely and even that the normal delegation from author to narrator could hardly be maintained throughout.

The bulk of the narrative, with the exceptions that must be called "intrusive," is delegated not to one but to several narrators, that is, to the teller of the tale or narrator proper, to a historian, and to a polemicist. The narrator occupies the position and exerts the privileges of omniscience, with some minor reservations as we shall see, but on the whole comfortably and unashamedly; he knows all that there is to be known about the characters and their thoughts and the course of events. The historian takes over whenever the knowledge required is not of private circumstances and fictional persons but of the real fate of two countries through a quarter of a century or more. A clear case of this substitution of the historian for the narrator occurs in book 1, chapter 5, after the description of the wine-cask episode in the Paris suburb of Saint-Antoine. The street lamps in that area are said—presumably by such a contemporary observer as the narrator—to be swinging "in a sickly manner overhead, as if they were at sea." The very next sentence states, "Indeed they were at sea, and the ship and crew were in peril of tempest," a broader view of things and one that implies knowledge of the future as well as the present.

As for our third man, the polemicist, he is not so easily to be distinguished from the historian, for there is a satirical way of giving historical information that serves the purposes of both. The "Monseigneur" chapter (2.7) is neither straightforward narrative nor straightforward history; it is a kind of personalized

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*The numbers given after each quotation hereafter in my text likewise refer to book and chapter numbers of the *Tale.*
satire that seems to rest on fragmentary or warped historical documentation. The aside about the Old Bailey and Bedlam (2.2) is satire in the guise of information; the allusion to "the last Louis but one, of the line that was never to break—the fourteenth Louis" (2.9) is again polemical history. What the three narrators have in common is their undisguised omniscience, even though it varies in degree, as does the distance between them and the tale or the characters.

**Omniscience**

The omniscient convention is not popular with modern critics, especially in France since Jean-Paul Sartre’s onslaught on François Mauriac; Sartre argued that Mauriac—in *La Fin de la nuit*—had made himself guilty of claiming to know more about his fictional characters than they could know about themselves and thereby limiting their freedom. Yet it is obvious that Sartre’s own practice as a novelist derives from a different convention—except when he forgets about it—but that it is just as conventional and artificial as any other. So does that of our ‘nouveaux romanciers’—no one can reproduce life in its entirety; it is probable that books by authors who attempted to do that and no more would be extremely confused and dull, as life often is, and that most people read novels in the hope of finding in them a sifting and interpretation of the raw materials of life. It is probable also that life can no more be translated into words than painting, or music, or even poetry can be translated into prose. A novel therefore inevitably implies a process of selection and rejection on the part of the author. The most deliberately patternless novels ever written are far more patterned than reality, and the pattern has had to be imposed from the outside by the author’s act; the most impressive transcript-of-life novel—Joyce’s *Ulysses*—is also the most ingeniously patterned. The omniscient convention thus appears not only to be traditional, to have often been applied successfully and delightfully, but also to be entirely legitimate in itself. In any case Dickens happily belonged to a pre-Sartrian era when omniscience created no problems, when it was used by everyone with a clear conscience, when it was the available and accepted novelistic convention. *A Tale of Two Cities* is thus quite blithely told by omniscient narrators.

Blithely, but not quite uniformly or simply.

The narrator occasionally affects not to be quite sure of what he asserts and qualifies some of his statements with an inserted “perhaps” or “probably.” In a few cases he goes so far as to deny that he possesses complete knowledge of the facts he is expounding. Yet on the whole, omniscience is practiced by the narrator for the Tale to the full. The use of dramatic irony inevitably implies omniscience since its purpose is to share with the reader knowledge not possessed by at least one of the characters on the stage. There are many cases here. Several references to Miss Pross’s illusions about her brother Solomon (e.g., as the fittest bridegroom for Lucie [2.18] and several warnings as to the course of some revolutionary actions, of which the characters are in temporary ignorance, provide examples: “Troubled as the future was, it was the unknown future, and in its obscurity there was ignorant hope” (3.1) is the clearest, made clearer still in the next sentence (about Charles Darnay in Paris): “The horrible massacre, days and nights long, which, within a few rounds of the clock, was to set a great mark of blood... was as far out of his knowledge as if it had been a hundred thousand years away.” Here great play is made with words like “unknown,” “ignorance,” and “out of his knowledge.” But the examples of ordinary, straightforward, omniscient statements are far more numerous still; things like “Monsieur Defarge... feigned not to notice the two strangers” (1.5) show that the narrator sees inside the characters and reads their thoughts and hidden purposes. When the Doctor describes his past experiences and asks his daughter, “Can you follow me, Lucie? Hardly, I think? I doubt you must have been a solitary prisoner to understand these perplexed distinctions” (2.17) the narrator seems to claim that he himself is miraculously or intuitively possessed of that understanding which neither Lucie nor the reader can acquire. Otherwise the proper narrative use of omniscience consists in knowing more than can be observed from the point of view temporarily adopted. When Mr. Lorry calls on Stryver, he finds him—and we move into Stryver’s house with Mr. Lorry—“among a quantity of books and papers, littered out for the purpose” (2.12); Mr. Lorry could not know that it was “for the purpose,” but the narrator can, because he can stand—omnisciently—within the consciousness of two or more persons at the same time. Similarly what Miss Pross does not recognize about her brother’s
history has come to the knowledge of Mr. Lorry, as we are told
twice (in 2.6, where it is most acceptable, as his possession of
such information conditions the manner in which he receives
Miss Pross's speech, and again in 3.8). Every summary of a career
(e.g., Stryver's at the beginning of 2.5) or of a scene (“The sweet
scents of the summer night rose all around him, and rose, as the
rain falls, impartially, on the rusty, ragged, and toil-worn group
at the fountain not far away” [2.8]) also omnisciently expands
the scope of the narrative in time or in space.

Of course the historical narrator has to practice omniscience
almost permanently on the broadest scale: “They hanged at Ty-
burn in those days . . .” (2.2); “The new era began; the King was
tried, doomed and beheaded . . .” (3.4). In one case the nature of
narrative, historical, and polemical omniscience is asserted with
particular clarity: “He looked at them and saw in them, without
knowing it, the slow sure filing down of misery-worn face and
figure, that was to make the meagreness of Frenchmen an English
superstition which should survive the truth through the best part
of a hundred years” (2.8). Similar devices can be used to impart
to the text not ironical pungency alone but also prophetic so-
lemnity or even cosmic magnitude. A sentence like “There were
few buildings then, north of the Oxford-road, and forest-trees
flourished . . . in the now vanished fields” (1.6) is there to show
us, naturally enough, that the narrator has a wide stretch of time
at his fingers’ ends, “then” as well as “now,” that he moves in
his characters’ as well as his readers’ time and thus acts as a link
between the two. Of this privileged position he takes advantage
to project the readers’ present (or any intermediate period) into
the past in the guise of prophecy: “The time was to come, when
that wine too [BLOOD] would be spilled on the streetstones” (1.5);
the acme of that procedure is reached at the very end of
the book when Carton is about to die and, because “he looked
sublime and prophetic,” is credited—hypothetically it is true
(“If he had given utterance to his [thoughts]; and they were pro-
phetic. . .”)—with a hyperprophetic vision extending presum-
bly even beyond the readers’ present, beyond 1859 (or 1970): “I
see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this
abyss. . .” As for space, his command extends to the whole earth
(“all the wide dominions of sleep” [2.17]) and even beyond to a
point whence “the feeble shining of this earth of ours” is seen
only as “a twinkling star” (2.16) and beyond that again to the remotest bodies of the cosmos, “so remote from this little earth that the learned tell us it is doubtful whether their rays have even yet discovered it, as a point in space where anything is suffered or done” (1.6). Here we have omniscience with a vengeance when the narrator takes us away with him into “the arch of unmoved and eternal lights.”

On the whole, then, the narrators, though they occasionally choose not to show it, know between them everything. What they give the reader is the truth, the facts, not just conjectures or suggestions. They treat the reader as a person who has to be informed about private events and general history, therefore as a person inferior to them.

NARRATORS AND NARRATIVE

The narrators' attitude to the story ought to be relatively simple; the narrative is their job, is what they have to relate—it is their raison d'être. Yet within this general program there are interesting variations in the way the things described or reported are seen or heard; the variations are mainly concerned with distance and point of view and with the narrators' degree of personal involvement.

The first element that varies is the distance between the narrator and his narrative, between the storyteller and the events described. And it varies quite spectacularly from the very beginning of the book. At the end of the first chapter there is a sudden focusing of the attention, a kind of “zooming” effect. The body of the chapter is a general picture of England and France in the year 1775, comprising several references to the royal couples in both countries. “All these things, and a thousand like them,” the reader is told in the final paragraph, “came to pass in and close upon the dear old year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five.” The last sentence, however, introduces the effect I have alluded to: “Thus did the year one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five conduct their Greatnesses, and myriads of small creatures—the creatures of this chronicle among the rest—along the roads that lay before them.” Thus is the way paved for the beginning of the second chapter which runs: “It was the Dover road that lay, on a Friday night late in November, before the first of the persons with whom this history has business.” This effective
narrowing of the narrator's field of vision, from "myriads of creatures," a whole year, and two large countries to a small group on one English road on a specific night, is all the more interesting as the reverse process can be observed at a later stage of the novel: the narrator concerns himself with Monsieur Gabelle's experiences on the night when the Marquis's castle is burnt down (2.23), then suddenly recedes or zooms back and launches into the broader view—"Within a hundred miles, and in the light of other fires, there were other functionaries less fortunate, that night and other nights."

In these instances the narrator shifts his position but does not give up his function. In other passages, however, he delegates it to different persons. In book 2, chapter 3, the reader is informed of the course of the trial not through the narrator's direct report but through Jerry Cruncher's imperfect perceptions: "He had now to attend while Mr. Stryver fitted the prisoner's case on the jury... Mr. Cruncher had next to attend while Mr. Attorney-General..." The satirical value of this method is obvious: legal language at best, in Dickens's opinion, was confused and confusing; by going through Jerry's dull and ignorant brain, it is made ten times more so. And in a later chapter (2.14) a similar function is delegated to young Jerry, who, as a hidden and terrified observer of his father's "honest trade" (conducted at night and in a churchyard), makes the tale more impressive and mysterious.

The narrator of A Tale of Two Cities also practices more ordinary shiftings of his point of view. In book 2, chapter 6, for instance, he sees Barsad's visit to the wine shop mostly from Madame Defarge's point of view; yet on at least two occasions he takes us inside the visitor's consciousness, thereby implicitly claiming his freedom to move about from one point of view to another within the same scene so as to leave no psychological corner in the dark.

The other element that varies is the degree of the narrator's personal involvement in the tale. Close to the beginning of the first book, in chapters 1 and 2, there are a few sentences in which he depersonalizes himself and uses such conventional and antiquated forms as "this chronicle" or "this history." But this particular attitude is given up almost as soon as it has been attempted. The use of the first person is also more severely restricted than in almost any other Dickens novel or than in any novel by Thackeray.
A Tale of Two Cities

or George Eliot. There are so few cases that they can all be reviewed briefly at this point. The first person singular—\textit{I}—occurs ten times in the first paragraph of book 1, chapter 3: "A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret. . . . No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book that I loved. . . ." But this is the philosopher's \textit{I} and it is used for general statements, not in order to convey any impression of the narrator as an individual person. "Our booked passenger" (1.2) produces an effect similar to that of "this chronicle," even if it also faintly associates the author or narrator and the reader, like the \textit{us} of "the learned tell us" (1.6). The \textit{you} and \textit{your} at the beginning of book 2, chapter 1, in the description of Tellson's Bank ("If your business necessitated your seeing 'the House,' you were put into a species of Condemned Hold at the back. . . .") and the \textit{you} of "not in shadow so remote but that you could see beyond it into a glare of brightness" are quite impersonal and mean no more than any indefinite pronoun (like \textit{one}) would. The \textit{all of us} and \textit{some of us} of book 3, chapter 6, are more interesting: "In seasons of pestilence, some of us will have a secret inclination to die of it. And all of us have like wonders in our breasts, only needing circumstances to evoke them." Here the author (rather than the narrator) seems to be indulging in introspective analysis under the guise of omniscient generalization. Finally, in chapter 13 of book 3, first-person pronouns are used lavishly for a different purpose; it is during the flight of the English characters from Paris that they occur: "Sometimes, we strike into the stinking mud, to avoid the stones that clatter us and shake us. . . ." This is a clear case of sudden emotional identification with the characters at a critical moment, an impression reinforced by the use of the present tense.\footnote{This shift to the first person is noticed and adequately commented on by John Gross in his discussion of the \textit{Tale in} Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London, 1962), pp. 190–91.} On the whole, however, the narrators of the \textit{Tale} do not indulge in personal confidences and the reader cannot form a clear idea of the kinds of persons they are.

Author and Characters

In the division of labor between author and narrator or narrators, the characters of any novel must be taken as conceived by the author and handed over to a narrator to be dealt with accord-
ing to fairly specific and strict directions. One can hardly imagine the narrator part of a writer modifying a character in opposition to the author part of him. The author, in this matter as in that of the story, remains the masterbuilder or the taskmaster. I am aware of course that most novelists have claimed at one time or another that their characters often became uncontrollable and flatly refused to act in the way predetermined for them by their creator. But even if one does not—as I must confess I do—take the liberty of doubting the truthfulness of such statements, of discounting them as the mere cant of the trade, as the kind of thing a writer is expected to say if he wishes to be regarded as a powerful artist, it may at most mean that the novelist occasionally discovers the inadequacy or inconsistency of his original purpose concerning his characters, of his arbitrary predeterminations. In any case such fits of irresistible inspiration, such outbreaks of the divine afflatus, can only visit the author, not the narrator. But at this point it is apparent that our distinction between author and narrator, however convenient in a study of the processes of imaginative creation, cannot be regarded as hard and fast. After all, the author and the narrator are parts of the same individual—they work together; the delegation of power by the author to the narrator is incomplete and revocable; the author is always close at hand; the narrator is merely a personality or a persona temporarily assumed for the purposes of story-telling. Attitudes toward the characters, however, bring us more directly in touch with the author than the aspects examined so far in this article. There are several revealing examples in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Charles Darnay's case is indeed somewhat peculiar. It would be difficult to find a passage in which admiration for him is explicitly expressed or solicited. The story gives him a prominent place, but he occupies it on the whole with modesty. It might be contended that Sidney Carton's sacrifice magnifies the person who is implicitly supposed to be worthy of it or at least to be worth saving at the cost of Carton's life, but Carton's life is obviously sacrificed for Lucie's sake, not for Charles's; it is as Lucie's husband solely, as the sine qua non of her happiness, that he has to be kept alive. Lucie's love for him is not much of an argument in his favor either, partly because it is a dull affair in itself and dully presented, partly because Lucie is not brilliantly attractive. She is loved by two or three men, as other pretty women, however
humdrum, have been and will be, but she is on the whole uninteresting. Her husband on the other hand has created an unusually unanimous critical feeling against him.

John Gross writes: "Darnay is, so to speak, the accredited representative of Dickens in the novel, the 'normal' hero for whom a happy ending is still possible. It has been noted, interestingly enough, that he shares his creator's initials—and that is pretty well the only interesting thing about him. Otherwise he is a pasteboard character, completely undeveloped." For K. J. Fielding Darnay is "no more than a shadow." Edgar Johnson finds him "plodding, unimaginative, rather pedestrian,... all sobriety and quite incapable of making a joke." Even Mrs. F. S. Boas, who has so much more than other readers to admire in the Tale, is unenthusiastic and says that Darnay's "gallant but weakly impulsive nature comes out in all he does." Yet there is a high degree of emotional identification with Darnay on the author's part, as also with Carton of course. And yet both are strikingly different from the author himself. Carton represents tendencies which he might have liked to let loose in himself; he is far more dissolute and eventually far more heroic, far less egotistic than the novelist. The creation of Carton thus appears as an exercise in imaginative, tentative reconstruction and reorganization of the self. Whereas when the novelist identifies himself with Darnay, as he so passionately does, he above all identifies Darnay with himself (rather than the other way round as with Carton), lending him for instance his own leaning toward "the Loadstone Rock" (2.24). The intensity with which Darnay's last hours in his condemned cell are presented makes them quite moving; obviously they were lived by Dickens. Yet Darnay was not given more than .01 percent of Dickens's vitality.

The treatment of Carton is considerably more subtle. Dickens at first studiously refrains from creating any liking for him and then suddenly makes him profoundly pathetic ("he threw himself down in his clothes on a neglected bed, and its pillow was wet with wasted tears" [2.5]), as if to show that a life can be both

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*P. 189.

"As everyone recognizes, he divides himself into two between Carton and Darnay" (Fielding, p. 208).
worthless and thoroughly, movingly unhappy. The chapter ironically called "The Fellow of No Delicacy" (2.13) is far less successful; it is the dreary and impossible chapter in which Sydney calls on Lucie, not exactly to propose to her but to explain to her why he cannot do so, why he is "even thankful that it cannot be." One understands of course why the chapter is there, why it has to be there: it enables Carton to utter such statements as "In the hour of my death, I shall hold sacred the one good remembrance," and especially "I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you." Yet it makes one shudder to think that this chapter must have been dear to Dickens's own heart, that he must have believed he had made it believable. As for Carton's death, Edgar Johnson's guarded statement seems to me acceptable: "There are many readers who are not entirely unjustified in feeling that the death of Sydney Carton is drenched in overindulged sentiment, with Dickens pulling all the organ-stops to make it heart-rending." The other readers who feel that this episode is beautifully and poetically written "are not entirely unjustified" either. The emotion with which it is fraught may or may not be shared by individual readers and critics, but there can be no doubt that Dickens's own emotion at this point was sincere and intense.

The clearest case of a character who made Dickens's blood boil and caused him to lose whatsoever self-control and detachment he possessed is of course Stryver, who is worth looking at in some detail from that point of view. Toward Stryver the novelist has only one attitude, but it results in a variety of devices, from irony to downright insult. Chapter 11 of book 1 is called "A Companion Picture"; it is devoted to ponderously stressing the contrast which had already been made abundantly clear before between Carton and Stryver, between appearance and reality, between worldly success and personal value. Perhaps the insistent method used here takes its tone from what Dickens wished to convey about Stryver's coarseness; perhaps coarseness cannot be conveyed light-handedly, yet it is efficiently conveyed through Stryver's speeches, and I think the reader may well resent Dickens's comment at the end: "The prosperous patronage with which he said it, made him look twice as big as he was, and four times as offensive." We have heard Stryver talk big and assumed or inferred

that he looked as big as he talked, and we must preserve our right to decide just how "offensive" we find him. The same attitude is adhered to throughout the next chapter (2.12), whose top-heavy irony is expressed in the title "The Fellow of Delicacy," delicacy being precisely and all too obviously what Stryver is incapable of. After he has fitly enough married not Lucie but "a florid widow," the novelist's indignation extends itself unfairly to his three stepsons—unfairly, it seems to me, because the boys "who had nothing particularly shining about them but the straight hair of their dumpling heads" (2.21) are not his offspring. The novelist's growing indignation against Stryver then produces a vigorous outburst of moralization and even an appeal to the shortest way with such dissenters from the truth; after telling us that Stryver had so often repeated his lie about Lucie that he believed it himself, the author adds: "which is surely such an incorrigible aggravation of an originally bad offence, as to justify any such offender's being carried off to some suitably retired spot, and there hanged out of the way." There are further insults to Stryver in book 2, chapter 24, where he is called "Bully Stryver" and his sneers are said to be "coarse," needlessly once more, because the man's own speeches had again exposed him quite eloquently; in fact "Bully Dickens" was bullying the reader into detesting "Bully Stryver." The Stryver case therefore shows that the novelist lost his control not over his character—who is superbly alive and almost painlessly convincing—but over himself in front of his readers.

**Author and Reader**

A relationship with the reader can be established either by the narrator or by the author of a novel. In *Wuthering Heights* different types of relationship are created by Lockwood and by Nelly Dean; in some of Dickens's own first-person narratives the relationship is fairly intimate and the first-person narrator efficiently interposed between author and reader; *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* and *Bleak House* provide interesting cases; so do several shorter stories, like the two "Lirriper" fragments; the only disastrous experiment was the creation of Master Humphrey, because the liveliest of young writers, at twenty-eight, was trying to address the reader from the point of view of a sentimental, sententious, and weary old man. But in most novels the relationship with the reader has to be established by the author himself.
The type of relationship created in *A Tale of Two Cities* can only be inferred from a study of the generalities and other intrusions. I call "intrusions" all the passages that interrupt the progress of the narrative, but I studiously refrain from asserting that they "needlessly" interrupt it, because I have every reason to believe that Dickens knew better than I do what was needful or what he intended to do. Most intrusions are obviously authorial, in other words, represent the author part of the novelist intruding on and temporarily taking over from the narrator part of him.

The preface of the *Tale* states that it was Dickens's purpose "to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding" the French Revolution and thus to act as a teacher. That he "remained a moralist and a preacher" is, according to John Gross, "his saving strength." His teaching bears mainly, but not exclusively, on the history of France. As regards the Revolution itself, the lesson taught by Dickens is far from clear because he alternates between sympathy and horror. Briefly—no detailed discussion of that interesting issue can be indulged in at this point—he seems to see the outbreak of violence as inevitable and even justified, for "Monseigneur as a class had, somehow or other, brought things to this" (2.23). When the Marquis's chateau is destroyed by fire, the description of the episode is impressive but tendentious and provides an imaginative interpretation of it as the just punishment of evil, "as if it were the face of the cruel Marquis, burning at the stake and contending with the fire" (2.23). In the early stages of the Revolution the novelist even appears to have felt that it held out a promise of moral improvement: the people who have murdered old Foulon go back to their suppers "innocent of meat, as of most other sauce to wretched bread. Yet, human fellowship infused some nourishment into the flinty viands" (2.22). But the later excesses and the blind, mad cruelties of the revolutionaries are seen as no less inevitable, and the lesson at the end is a warning to England: social injustice must be remedied before it is too late, before the infernal cycle of violence and destruction is let loose, for it will eventually drench in blood the aspiration to human fellowship that causes the rebellion. A revealing analysis of this mechanism is contained in the following reconstruction of a revolutionist's thought processes: "The raggedest nightcap, awry on the wretchedest head, had

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*12* P. 197.
this crooked significance in it: 'I know how hard it has grown for me, the wearer of this, to support life in myself; but do you know how easy it has grown for me, the wearer of this, to destroy life in you?" (2.22).

The rest of Dickens's teaching is conducted in the form of intrusive comments. Among the minor intrusions may be counted a number of indiscreet epithets by means of which the writer takes the reader, so to speak, by the hand and tells him what he must think: "odd description" (1.4); "deplorable peculiarity" (1.6); "unconscious insistency" (2.1); "wicked face" (2.16); "cruel knife" and "detested word" (2.21). Irony and satire, and prophecy, are similarly intrusive in many such passages as: "The Marquis... as elegantly despondent as he could becomingly be of a country still containing himself, that great means of regeneration" (2.9); Young Jerry's "cunning was fresh with the day, and his qualms were gone with the night—in which particulars it is not improbable that he had compeers in Fleet-Street and the City of London, that fine morning" (2.14); "If a picture of the château as it was to be a few years hence... could have been shown to him that night, he might have been at a loss to claim his own from the ghastly, fire-charred, plunder-wrecked ruins" (2.9). On several occasions the reader may feel that his intelligence is being seriously underrated by the author's overinsistence on perfectly clear points. Thus after two pages about the prison of La Force, when a turnkey mentions "the love of Liberty" (3.1), no one needs Dickens's comment that his words "sounded in that place like an inadequate conclusion." Nor do we require to be told in so many words that Solomon is Miss Pross's "by no means affectionate brother" or again that he is "the brother who so little deserved her affection" (3.8). The case of Stryver has already been discussed above, but the same tendency to overexplicitness is evinced on many other occasions. Jerry's embarrassment when he has been found out by Mr. Lorry takes the form of "that peculiar kind of short cough requiring the hollow of a hand before it, which is seldom, if ever, known to be the infirmity attendant on perfect openness of character" (3.9). Generalizations introduced through expansion from a specific incident in the story occur fairly frequently: a waiter watches Mr. Lorry at his meal in the Dover inn "according to the immemorial usage of waiters in all ages" (1.4); Miss Pross's proneness to exaggeration is said to be characteristic of her "as
of some people before her time and since” (2.6), a particularly otiose and unilluminating comment. There is more vividness but also more intrusiveness in the author's murderous longing expressed at the sight of the grindstone scene and the mob with their “frenzied eyes;—eyes which any unbrutalized beholder would have given twenty years of life, to petrify with a well directed gun” (3.2). Unlike Dickens, I am not prepared to answer for all other beholders, but it seems to me that the particular beholder he had in mind is sufficiently “brutalized” at that point to be reminiscent of the Defarges' reaction to the spy's visit, “the person . . . whom either of them would have shot with the greatest satisfaction” (2.16).

All the above statements are more or less called for by the narrative or at least derive from it. But the book is also interspersed with numerous generalities of varying interest and originality which are still more definitely intrusive. Among the feeblest may be mentioned the remark about “the calm that must follow all storms—emblem to humanity, of the rest and silence into which the storm called Life must hush at last” (1.6); the assertion that “an emotion of the mind will express itself through any covering of the body” (2.2); the unsensational announcement that “from the days when it was always summer in Eden, to these days when it is mostly winter in fallen latitudes, the world of man has invariably gone one way . . . the way of the love of a woman” (2.10); the disquisition on “the moonlight which is always sad, as the light of the sun itself is—as the light called human life is—at its coming and its going” (2.17); the sentimental view that children will inevitably attach themselves to their mothers' unrequited lovers (2.21); the revelation that “all secret men are soon terrified” (3.8); or the hopeful assurance that “the vigorous tenacity of love” must be “always so much stronger than hate” (3.14). We do not go to the work of a writer of Dickens's caliber in order to receive information of that kind. Other generalities are of greater value: when the author tells us that “any strongly marked expression of face on the part of a chief actor in a scene of great interest will be unconsciously

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\text{This particular example is not merely uncalled for and vapid but also clearly wrong; neither sunrise nor the birth of a child is intrinsically or usually sad.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}}\text{This, however, even if it does no more, justifies Edward Wagenknecht's view that in the Tale "the moral quality of the book is Dickensian in its glorification of love and hatred of cruelty" (Dickens and the Scandalmongers [Norman, 1965], p. 126).}\]
imitated by the spectators” (2.3), we can take it on trust from such a shrewd and experienced observer as our novelist; a remark about the owl is even characteristically and delightfully Dickensian: it “made a noise with very little resemblance in it to the noise conventionally assigned to the owl by men-poets. But it is the obstinate custom of such creatures hardly ever to say what is set down for them” (2.9); and the opening paragraph of chapter 3 of book 2 about the mystery of “every human creature... to every other” is of remarkable interest and modernity.

It is a little difficult and perhaps arbitrary to sort out what is a mere pointing out of the lessons of the tale from what is by the way. But in both cases generalizations are intrusive; they are contributions made by the author in his own real person and in his capacity as teacher and preacher. Their number makes it apparent that while the narrator knows everything concerning the events and characters of the story, the author knows everything about the world, life, and mankind; he knows in short everything about everything. From this privileged position, Dickens was enabled not to content himself with simply informing his readers’ minds (e.g., about French history). Like the hero of David Copperfield (in chapter 48) who resolves to “form” his little wife’s mind, Dickens was out to form his little readers’ minds. His treatment of the reader seems high-handed, sometimes contemptuous, always magisterial.

On the whole the relationships among author, narrators, characters, and reader of A Tale of Two Cities are complex because of the uncertain division of labor between author and narrators and the frequent shiftings of their respective positions; however, they are complex rather than subtle.

Until all Dickens’s novels have been subjected to an analysis similar to that attempted here, and from the same point of view, only provisional and conjectural conclusions can be reached. If such analyses were to confirm that efforts at establishing intimacy with the reader became less frequent with each succeeding novel, it might mean that Dickens gradually evacuated the personal address out of his novels into his periodicals and later into his readings, leaving to the novels themselves the voice of the masterly, the superb, the imperious artist.