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“THE PASSENGER BOOKED BY THIS HISTORY”
THE STRANGE CASE OF DR JARVIS AND MR LORRY IN
A TALE OF TWO CITIES

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On the face of it, or rather judging by that genial face of his, “beamingly adjusting his little wig” [*A Tale of Two Cities*: 186] before Lucie’s and Charles’s wedding, it certainly seems that considerate Mr Lorry does not qualify for duplicity. The novel is centrally preoccupied with the exploration of duality, it is famously built on the alternation between the Paris and the London poles, it stages a crucial pair of opposites, Charles Darnay and Sidney Carton being mirror-images of each other and having diametrically opposed dispositions¹ – but with Mr Lorry at least, there seems to be no room for ambivalence or second thoughts, no case at all for duplicity.

He is all-in for his friends, all dependable and remarkably whole-hearted, to the point that he may pass for a one-dimensional character, for the type of the kindly friend, endowed with one function only in the novel: to relentlessly help the heroes in their quest from beginning to end. In a text that opens on the liminal diversion of the historical novel along the

¹ I have developed in another paper the idea that the obtrusive pattern of duality was to some extent a decoy, and that beyond that pattern, Dickens had endeavoured “to build a story and to create a narrative form that favour and intensify circulations and exchanges between these two geographical poles. The novel does not reinforce the respective insulation of London and Paris, it does not comfort opposed positions: it is remarkable precisely for the assiduous effort to reduce the distance between Paris and London, to build a continuous flow between the two capitals, and to explore mainly that space of indecision and indiscernibility, in between the two.” Nathalie Jaëck, “Liminality in *A Tale of Two Cities*: Dickens’s revolutionary literary proposal”. In Maxime Leroy (ed.), *Dickens and Europe*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2013 (to be published).

structures and references of the fairy-tale², Mr Lorry could easily pass for a fairy-tale function indeed, for the 'by-the-book' magical helper that Propp defined in his 1928 *Morphology of the Folk-Tale* – always ready with a carriage, wonderfully crossing borders, digging people from the dead.

Yet, I would like to propose in this paper that there might be more than meets the eye as far as Mr Lorry is concerned: “the innocent Mr Lorry” [77], visibly unassuming, unceremoniously “squeezed clean out the group” [77] by Stryver the bully after Darnay’s trial in Old Bailey’s, is also crucially referred to as “the first of the persons with whom this story has business” [10] – the first to enter the scene certainly, but perhaps also the most central one behind the decoy of his secondary role and stable benevolence. There is in fact just one instance in the novel when Mr Lorry does lose his cool, when he gets “nettled” [78] as Carton puts it, and it is when Carton hints at the banker’s inner dilemma in a sly impersonal side-remark to Darnay: “If you knew what a conflict goes on in the business mind, when the business mind is divided between good-natured impulse and business appearances, you would be amused Mr Darnay” [78]. My point is that the reader should take heed of Carton’s offhand warning – he is a specialist in duality after all –, and follow the track of Lorry’s “conflict” or “division”. There is indeed a need to see through the many layers that hide him on his very first appearance, “wrapped to the cheek-bones and over the ears, [...] hidden under [...] many wrappers” [11], and to illuminate the ambiguity and the tension that characterize his role in the novel.

I will thus try to show that the harmless friend does mean trouble, and crucially that a dissident modern double lurks behind the slightly outmoded conventional gentleman. Mr Lorry embodies modernity in two ways: he is both an economic novelty and a literary modern event.

He is a trustworthy friend, an immemorial embodiment of traditional British character, but he is also a sample of a newly developed, highly powerful and fast-adapting species that was one of Dickens’s most consistent targets – he is a liberal banker as much as a liberal friend, and the disinterested caring individual is made to cohabit with the anonymous and unemotional banking agent. As such, we will see that he does represent a very material menace to the tranquil Soho corner he strives so much to protect, a ready mutation of oppression, as he grows and multiplies on his friends’ ground.

² “There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France.” [7]

From a literary point of view, Mr Lorry's case is even more interesting and even less expected. It seems that Dickens is using Mr Lorry as he used Mr Dick in *David Copperfield*, as internal tension, as an improbable means to dislocate from the inside his usual typical structures and major literary positions. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, omniscience, retrospection, the transparency of language, closure, the need to identify that typically characterize Realism are questioned, and Mr Lorry seems to be Dickens's solution to bring about a very efficient textual mutation, taking the text along adventurous lines of escape. With Mr Lorry as internal rival to the omniscient narrator whom he manages to expel in the final chapter but two, the Revolution is clearly happening on the English side of the Channel as far as literature is concerned, and in this field, Mr Lorry undoubtedly means business.

"Gentle Mr Lorry"

My intention is of course not to deny the obvious here: there is a very affectionate and very dependable Dr. Jarvis in Mr Lorry, a persevering mender and delicate soother. He is entirely devoted to his friends (in fact whenever he appears in the novel, it is as an accessory to the central characters' needs, he is always summoned for others, and never occupies the text for his own private matters); he seems to be all defined by two organizing lines, disinterestedness and goodness on the one hand, and habit and tradition on the other.

The wedding-day exemplifies these two dominant characteristics: the omniscient narrator establishes the fundamental benevolence of Mr Lorry:

For a moment, he held the fair face from him to look at the well-remembered expression on the forehead, and then laid the bright golden hair against his little brown wig, with a genuine tenderness and delicacy which, if such things be old-fashioned, were as old as Adam.
[186]

Indeed, what is profoundly reassuring about Mr Lorry is that he is a creature of habit: he embodies permanence, reliability and tradition. "Old-fashioned", "as old as Adam", his destiny seems to have been decided from before the cradle: "'you were cut out for a bachelor,' pursued Miss Pross 'before you were put in your cradle'" [186]; he has also become an immovable part of the bank, his faithfulness being of an organic nature as the ivy metaphor literally grafts him to the bank "of which he had grown to be a part, like strong root-ivy" [249]. He strolls to Soho for a visit every Sunday, "early in the afternoon, for three reasons of habit" [88], and the narrator insists on the regularity of Mr Lorry's ways, "he often walked out,

before dinner, with the doctor and Lucie" [88], "On unfavourable Sundays, he was accustomed to be with them as the family friend, talking, reading, looking out of the window, and generally getting through the day" [88]. The frequentatives, the temporal adverbs, the -ING forms, the ternary rhythms, the simple preterit as well as the defining tag "the family friend": all contribute to build a reassuring pattern, to turn Mr Lorry into an immovable reference.

This is reinforced by his idiosyncratic use of his favourite phrase, 'a man of business', that regularly returns as a kind of linguistic shield against the overwhelming invasion of feelings: "I am a man of business. I have a business charge to acquit myself of." [...] Don't heed me anymore that if I was a speaking machine" [25]; "These are mere business relations, miss; there is no friendship in them. [...] In short, I have no feelings; I am a mere machine" [26]. That phrase does partake of a fundamental comforting strategy that is characteristic of the popular novel as Eco defined it, namely the regular return of what is already known:

Le style usera de solutions préconstituées, offrant au lecteur les joies de la reconnaissance du déjà connu. Puis il jouera d'itérations continues afin de procurer au public le plaisir régressif du retour à l'attendu.
[ECO : 21]

Indeed, whenever Mr Lorry enters the scene, the reader is able to anticipate and to rely on the return of that gimmick that becomes a metonymy of the whole man, and such return provides him with intense gratification, as the text seems to validate his interpretation. Such a repetitive process is endowed here with a nearly farcical power, and it is indeed a literal illustration of Bergson's analysis of the mechanism of laughter: Mr Lorry explicitly comparing himself to a machine reads as an anachronistic echo to Bergson's most famous formula to define laughter, "du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant": "Ce qu'il y a de risible dans ce cas, c'est une certaine raideur de mécanique là où l'on voudrait trouver la souplesse attentive et la vivante flexibilité d'une personne." [BERGSON : 18] In such instances when he feels he runs the risk of being taken out of his depth by an unusual emotional situation he is not used to coping with, Mr Lorry mechanically returns to the talisman of the formula.³

³ Though the reader is comforted by such foreseeable return, he is obviously also glad to witness the gradual fading away of that sentence, as Mr Lorry feels more and more secure with Mr Manette's friendship and thus becomes able of more fluidity:

But it is not only as a static individual that Mr Lorry indulges the reader: he is also a sample of immemorial England. This idiosyncrasy is not only proof of his personal stability, it gets elevated to becoming the verbal transcription of long-established national character. English readers recognize themselves in that champion of “staid British responsibility and respectability” [*A Tale of Two Cities* : 248], and his growing quite panicky when he needs to express feelings becomes the anthem of the English’s sense of decency – though foreigners may remain quite impervious to such understated fineries: “You English are cold” is Mme Defarge’s verdict, while her husband matter-of-factly acknowledges the width of the ontological gap between the French and the English: “You are English; that is another thing” [39].

Dickens’s treatment of the character of Mr Lorry thus contributes to turn *A Tale of Two Cities* into what Barthes called “un texte de plaisir : celui qui contente, emplit, donne de l’euphorie ; celui qui vient de la culture, ne rompt pas avec elle, est lié à une pratique confortable de la lecture” [BARTHES : 1501]. Mr Lorry does seem to be an element of culture indeed: he activates and favours comfortable practices of reading as he totally fits in Dickens’s own intratextual network, joining the gallery of endearing mildly eccentric older men, seeming to fall into well-identified categories and to fulfil a typical function. Yet, Dickens also brings in disquieting elements, and methodically deconstructs the paradigm: seemingly solid Mr Lorry also proves to be a very efficient virus in the system he professes to comfort.

“A man of business”: the return of the repressed

If Mr Lorry is so engaging to the reader when this “man of business” interruption dislocates his speech, it is of course because the reader is led to read it as an antiphrasis, as a irresistible symptom of his deep sensitivity, as a derisory mask the reader can see through. But there is the possibility of another reading: the catchphrase could be a trap indeed for the reader, a clever attempt to disguise Mr Lorry’s real nature, or even some sort of a irrepressible return of the repressed, a massive slip of the tongue. There is in fact ample evidence in the text to document Mr Lorry’s double nature, and the material consequences of his *truly* being “a man of business” appear in two central Soho scenes: both during the first account of his visits and on the day of Lucie’s wedding, Mr Lorry literally proliferates and makes himself at home.

“After several relapses into business-absorption, Mr Lorry had become the Doctor’s friend” [88].

In chapter VI, “Hundreds of People”, Dickens describes “the quiet lodgings of doctor Manette in a quiet street corner not far from Soho” [88]: what is remarkable there is the fact that Doctor Manette’s house is cornered indeed, it is a vestige of a bygone or at least fast disappearing rural age, besieged by the bustling activity of the city that is still muffled, but that is roaring at the very doors of the little cottage – and quite remarkably, Mr Lorry is the cat among the pigeons, the one who enacts the intrusion of the real world into that tight fictive bubble of private domestic bliss, the one who penetrates and thus forces open “the very harbour from the raging streets” [89]. Though Mr Lorry is only paying a social visit to his dear friends, the passage is tainted with a portentous sense of danger, with the ominous feeling that the banker’s finding a way into that preserved spot tolls the knell of a whole era and physically enacts the current mutation from rural pastoralism to urban capitalism.

Dr Manette’s house is an exception in the city, a doll’s house nestling in a fairy-tale bosky bower, both out of space and out of time, a historical mirage, an ideal timeless representation of domestic happiness and natural harmony:

A quainter corner than the corner where the Doctor lived, was not to be found in London. There was no way through it. [...] Forest trees flourished, and wild flowers grew, and the hawthorn blossomed, in the now vanished field. [...] It was a cool spot, staid but cheerful, a wonderful place for echoes, and a very harbour from the raging trees. [88]

The text is clear: this quaint corner is “a tale”, the tale of a “Queen Ladybird’s garden”, a Garden of Eden where fruit are plentiful, where leaves are green: it is “brilliant”, “bright”, “cool”, “staid but cheerful” [88], and crucially it is leisurely, there is no business activity. Money is dismissed, replaced by its elemental mythical material: silver is “chased”, and “gold [...] beaten by some mysterious giant who had a golden arm starting out of the wall of the front hall – as if he had beaten himself precious, and menaced a similar conversion of all visitors”⁴ [89]. Mr Lorry’s leisurely excursion to

⁴ Quite remarkably in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the national territories of Paris and London are not described as the real settings of historical events: they are obviously marked as fictions, London and Paris being quite artificially reduced to a few symbolic places (Soho vs. St Antoine in particular, plus another level of fictive embedding, the private family home vs. the all-open Public House). The proclaimed opposition between the two cities, London as a walled Garden of Eden vs. Paris as a wild jungle is thus marked as a fiction, and Dickens encourages his readers to unmask this tale of

his friends' house thus turns into a highly threatening incursion into that protected space. As he pops the bubble and forces a way through the green shield though "there was no way through it", the whole mood changes: the city penetrates the country as Mr Lorry literally appropriates the ground and assesses it. Though no one is at home, Mr Lorry still pushes his way in:

"Doctor Manette at home?"

Expected home.

"Miss Lucy at home?"

Expected home.

"Miss Pross at home?"

Possibly at home, but of a certainty impossible for hand-maid to anticipate intentions of Miss Pross, as to admission or denial of the fact.

"As I am at home myself," said Mr. Lorry, "I'll go up-stairs". [89]

The hand-maid's words are merely reported and reduced to their telegraphic minimum, while Mr Lorry is presented as in charge of language, talking over her, deciding of his own admission in assertive forms, and quite astoundingly pronouncing himself at home. Once in the parlour, he spends his time looking about, literally calculating the value the property:

As Mr Lorry stood looking about him, the very chairs and tables seemed to ask him, with something of that particular expression which he knew so well by this time, whether he approved. [90]

As the narrator delegates focalisation to all-observant Mr Lorry, the lexical field is that of economy and evaluation: Mr Lorry praises Lucie's "ability to make much of little means" [89], he notices that she has been able to make the "simple" furniture fructify, enhancing its "value" by "set[ting] it off by so many little adornments" [90], he paces the rooms, and counts their number, three on a floor, the first one being "the best" [90]⁵. Here in this scene, Mr Lorry's collective identity as a banker collides with his individual

opposition, to read opposition *as a tale*: as is well-known, Dickens's account of the French Revolution was also meant as warning to contemporary England, at a moment when parliamentary reform was yet again under debate. I develop this point in "Liminality in *A Tale of Two Cities*: Dickens's revolutionary literary proposal".

⁵ It also turns out that he has made enquiries about the inhabitants of the house: "Mr Lorry's inquiries into Miss Pross's personal history had established the fact that her brother Solomon was a heartless scoundrel" [92].

identity as best friend, and the reader is reminded of Carton's warning: Lorry gets incorporated in his function, he becomes "Mr Lorry as a class", just like Monseigneur, an interchangeable member of the multinational bank – and in this respect a totally heterogeneous element in Soho, literally dislodging the lawful inhabitants, occupying the ground.

Mr Lorry's intrusive propagation in his friends' house gets amplified on the morning of the wedding. Here again the generous friend – paying back the welcoming generosity of the Manettes towards him and paying it back with interest as he is "gratified" [185] to be the one giving the most expensive present, a whole set of plate that sends tears to Miss Pross's eyes – proves to have grown and multiplied at the contact of his friends, to have profited: there is no shouldering away Mr Lorry now, he has developed over the family just as over the bank. The actual important scene as far as the progression of the story is concerned, namely the revelation that Darnay is Evremonde, is happening behind a closed door, in the wings – as of course befits preservation of suspense. But the result is that both the father and the groom seem to have deserted centre-stage, making it very easy for Mr Lorry to absolutely steal the show.

Indeed the floor is his, as the other male characters are occupied elsewhere, and as the bride, as befits a dutiful angel in the house, is utterly muted: Lucie is reduced to the position of a direct object in Mr Lorry's sentences, listening to his instructions as to her honey-moon, addressed to, held, complimented, maintained in a perfectly passive position. It could seem that along with Miss Pross, patriarchal Mr Lorry thus complies here with the traditional function of the servants in romantic comedies, and provides a scene of comic relief at a time of dramatic tension, the diversion of a harmless duet of buffoons – even the farcical fantasy that there might be a wedding between these two. Yet once more "gentle Mr Lorry" [185] gets caught in the overhanging economic structure: the speech of the friend gets colonised by banking metaphors, disinterestedness becomes tainted with profit, and Mr Lorry cannot resist praising himself.

In the absence of Dr Manette, he plays surrogate father: quite understandably moved, he appropriates *his* "child" Lucie, and explicitly attributes to himself the merit of Lucie's presence in England: "And so it was for this, my sweet Lucie, that I brought you across the Channel, such a baby! Lord bless me! [...] How little I valued the obligation I was conferring on my friend Mr Charles!" [185]. The centrality he grants himself could be endearing, through the funny displacement of "Lord bless *me!*", but it is expressed once more in monetary terms, as he conceives of himself as Charles's valued creditor for his happiness. Not satisfied with his role as

surrogate father, he also tends to gather all the parts, that of the witness of course, which he actually is, but also that of the vicar himself, as he gives Lucie “his blessing” [186], and even that of a speculative bridegroom: “Dear me! This is an occasion that makes a man speculate on all he has lost. Dear, dear, dear! To think that there might have been a Mrs Lorry! [...] I was very unhandsomely dealt with” [185]. Mr Lorry is sort of becoming his own “Precious”, he is everywhere in his own sentences, occupying all the grammatical functions, subject, object, in the principal clauses and the secondary ones: even Miss Pross has come to belong to him – “I, my Pross” [185] –, and times are long gone when she could throw him against the wall.

What is very interesting in *A Tale of Two Cities* is that Mr Lorry’s duality does not bring about any kind of conflict of interest – the closest we get is when Mr Lorry refuses to house his friends in the French buildings of Tellson’s in Paris, and finds a safe place for them, ensuring their presence will not harm the interests of his employers. But apart from this minimal dissociation, Mr Lorry navigates very smoothly between his two poles. The reason is that it is paradoxically his very function as a banker that enables him to be a decisive help to his friends, whose major need, three times in the novel, is to circulate between London and Paris. Dickens makes it very clear that despite his being as English as can be, Mr Lorry is also specialised in circulations, the very function of the bank in that time of crisis being to maintain the fluidity of the link between the two countries – the easy flow of capital indeed. We meet Mr Lorry on the move, in the coach between London and Paris, and we leave him on the road again, in another coach between Paris and London⁶. Indeed, as a banker, and as opposed to regular citizens who find it arduous to travel in these troubled times of national redefinition, Mr Lorry invariably obtains his leave-to-pass. Dickens thus makes it clear that money flows much more easily than people: the circulation between capitals is reinterpreted as the circulation *of* capital, and common banking interests easily lead to multinational brotherhood, as the French Aristocrats feeling totally at home in the London branch of Tellson’s demonstrate. Mr Lorry’s duality thus finds a happy, though highly ironic, coherence.

“Our booked passenger”

Mr Lorry’s economic modernity, his extreme relevance in a transforming

⁶ The innkeeper notices this permanent pattern of anonymous circulation: “We have oftentimes the honour to entertain your gentlemen in their travelling backwards and forwards between London and Paris, sir. A vast deal of travelling, sir, in Tellson and Company’s House” [21].

world where the new powers of money were taking over the older powers of rank, makes him an obedient servant of the spreading capitalist system of power Dickens lost no occasion to denounce; but he is also an agent of change, the embodiment of a huge structural mutation. As far as the literary positions are concerned, it is remarkable that Mr Lorry embodies exactly the same kind of transition: he destabilises Dickens's textual system just as he destabilises the Manettes' static world, and brings in some dashing modern proposals for a reassessment of the Realist model the boundaries of which Dickens was undoubtedly exploring.

The major point I would like to make is that it is possible to claim that in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens proposes two beginnings and two endings – which is quite fitting in a tale of duality – and that Mr Lorry plays in each case a unorthodox part, questioning Dickens's usual method. Mr Lorry intervenes in the second beginning, *i.e.* in chapter 2, and in the first ending, chapter 13 of book 3rd: his interventions are thus embedded in the “official” beginning and ending, ambushed in the text.

The first chapter of the novel, and one of the most famous incipits in English literature, has been amply commented upon: there is general agreement that it is a departure from Dickens's typical narrative mode, a way to jam the beginning of the story and to defeat easy interpretation. Instead of storming into the story as he typically does, Dickens seems to halt just there: he writes sentences in couples, the second term “unwriting” the first one, and confronts the reader to a liminal stammering through the bewildering juxtaposition of antonyms, as if all of a sudden, in this time of crisis, the complexity of the world made it inaccessible to denomination⁷. The thing is that in chapter two, everything seems to be back to normal, and the “real” Dickens novel seems to be allowed to start, after that disquieting delay. The reader finds himself back again on comforting familiar ground: a beginning *in medias res*, an atmosphere of mystery, a coach at night, unidentified passengers, all the typical pleasurable ingredients are gathered.

And yet, Mr Lorry immediately disturbs the smooth running of the story: he is introduced as liminal warning and further delay, as a virus in the system. Against the best interests of the Realist novel, he prevents “Suspension of

⁷ In his article, Philippe Hamon demonstrates that the possibility for language to name, order and interpret reality is the essential theoretical belief that founds the Realist system: “Dans le programme réaliste, le monde est descriptible, accessible à la dénomination”. Hamon, Philippe. « Un discours contraint ». In *Littérature et réalité*: 162.

Disbelief”, and redefines the function of language with his very first words: literarity takes over literality, as Mr Lorry’s main functions are first, to insist that the reader is in a book, not in reality, and second, to establish that language is certainly not a neutral transparent medium, but on the contrary an active way to transform reality, a code with an intention. The narrator initially calls Mr Lorry “the passenger booked by this history” [13], and repeats the formula a few lines down: “our booked passenger” [13], thus making it clear that Mr Lorry is a character in a book, a literary function, and the reader is thus mobilised primarily *as* reader, whose object is *a text*, as well as a story. Mr Lorry reinforces the sense of literarity as he refuses to use language in its typical function of communication, as a literal tool. In the first scene of the novel, he is confronted to Jerry, “a messenger”. As such, Jerry’s function is to embody the literality of language, to convey a clear message, the meaning of which is unilateral and transparent; he uses language to describe, to clarify and to order reality: “Wait at Dover for mam’selle” [14]. As opposed to that, Mr Lorry’s answer does not comply with the logic of communication, and provides the messenger with a totally opaque answer: “Recalled to Life” [14], in capital letters, as if to insist that letters are capital and meaning problematic. Jerry is bewildered by the answer: “That’s a Blazing strange answer, too” [14], and indeed, nobody can make heads or tails of it, as the dialogue between Tom and Joe illustrates:

“Did you hear the message?”

“I did, Joe.”

“What did you make of it, Tom?”

“Nothing at all, Joe.”

“That’s a coincidence, too,” the guard mused, “for I made the same of it myself.” [14]

Of course, Mr Lorry’s attitude can be interpreted an obvious way: these are dangerous times, he is engaged in the tricky business of smuggling back to England a former political prisoner, and his disguising language is thus totally appropriate, as a practical measure of precaution in case the messenger gets intercepted. But he also establishes one essential element: that language is always a code, a way to complexify meaning and disguise reality, that it is always a transformation superimposed upon facts, that speech always serves its own agenda.

Mr Lorry does not stop there in this respect, and twice at least, he proves that his use of language is highly convoluted and wandering – first when he has to break the news to Lucy that her father is alive, and second when he tries to tell Dr Manette that he relapsed for nine days into his former habits

of silence and shoe-carving. In both instances, his technique is the same: he feigns to be speaking of someone else, to be telling them “the story” of someone, “the story of one of our customers” [25] to Lucie, or “the case of a particularly dear friend of mine” [192] to Manette. Crucially, he inverts the Realist method, which is to make fiction pass for reality; here, he creates what we could call *effets d’irréel*, he displaces reality in the realm of fiction, he deals with it on the subjunctive mode, with suppositions, fictive presents, heavy modalisation, he does all he can to deprive language of any sort of indicative value, of any authority on reality. Instead of finding one specific form to cover reality as closely as possible, he beats around the bush, he diverts reality behind layers of figures of speech, metaphors and comparisons mainly (“Like Monsieur Manette, your father, the gentleman was of Beauvais” [25]), he distanciates Manette from reality by refusing to use the direct “you” pronoun, taking refuge behind an anonymous fictive “he” in order to avoid any kind of direct message.

Here again, and as for the message trusted to Jerry, Mr Lorry’s aim is to protect his friends: he tries to avoid the psychological shock of revelation, he works his way through language as a method to “prepare” them to the truth – the title of chapter 4, when he breaks the news to Lucy, is indeed “Preparation”. But beyond the psychological relevance of his trick, Dickens also makes a literary point here: as Mr Lorry is allowed such delay, the textual machine of revelation of events is on stand-by, the text stalls the progression of facts in order to stroll in the meanders of language. This illustrates a modern redefinition of the relationship between reality and representation. Lorry implicitly recognizes the symbolic violence of language, the fact that it is an instrument of power, a strategic choice and partial representation, as there is no single and trustworthy message, no exact superposition between reality and language. Language is necessarily an act, both a displacement and a strategy – such a position is dramatized in the novel when Manette’s letter is excavated from the tomb of the cell to provide an alternative version to its current double: the archive becomes spectacular damning evidence against the live word, two diametrically opposed versions by the same man officially testifying to the same reality. In court-rooms of course, the loose link between reality and representation is a boon, it is vital as it creates the space of indecision everyone hopes to conquer, to win the case, and language reveals its fundamentally plastic relation to reality: “Mr. Attorney-General turned the whole suit of clothes Mr Stryver had fitted on the jury inside out” [72].

After making this fundamental move of dissociating the natural link between the signified and the signifier in the first chapters, Mr Lorry is even

more radical at the end of the novel. There again, there are two endings, none of which follows Dickens's typical code⁸. I will concentrate here on the first ending, that is to say the one where Mr Lorry is involved, the highly adventurous flight of all the central characters, chapter 13, book 3rd. Though there will be side-developments after this chapter, mainly the death of Madame Desfarges and the execution of Carton, it deals with what is centrally at stake, the flight to England of the Darnays/Manettes. What is outstanding and unprecedented in Dickens's novels is that the outcome remains open, the reader will never know if they reached England safely. The heroes are left wandering on the road, suspended in a state of imminence and emergency: "The wind is rushing after us, and the clouds are flying after us, and the moon is plunging after us, and the whole wild night is in pursuit of us; but, so far, we are pursued by nothing else" [343]. Rushed by the pushing -ING forms, accelerated by the ternary rhythm, pulsed by the prospective simple present, the novel ends right in the middle, in pure grammatical adrenaline, in the extreme temporal dilation of the "so far". We take leave of the characters in a state of *advent*, on the edge of yet possible events, the ideal space of adventure according to Jankélévitch: "L'aventure infinitésimale est liée à l'avènement de l'événement. [...] L'aventure est l'instant en instance : l'actualité sur le point de se faire" [JANKÉLÉVITCH : 828], and Jacques Rivière could have been referring to the end of *A tale of Two Cities* when he described what quintessential adventure should be: "L'espace est libre de tous côtés ! Ah ! Je ne vois rien ! Pourtant il est peuplé de mes aventures prochaines ; elles sont là à deux pas de moi ; elles me menacent de leur sourire invisible" [RIVIERE : 28].

⁸ The official ending is Carton's sacrifice, and it is meant to bring resolution and closure: indeed, these final pages do resemble a typical Dickens ending, they consist of the typical parade of all the central characters, a textual ceremony Dickens had got his readers used to. One paragraph is devoted to each central character and to the major details of his destiny, as in the final chapter of *David Copperfield* for example, "A Retrospection". But the real trouble this time is that the parade is not taken charge of by the omniscient narrator, it is precisely *not* a retrospection: it consists in the imaginary words Carton *might* have pronounced *if* he had said anything. So the status of the parade is that of the prospective fantasy of a dying man, doubly fictitious as it is not only totally imagined, but it was never even pronounced: "If he had given any utterance to his [thoughts], and they were prophetic, they would have been these" [360]. It reads as if, after all that had happened in the novel from a formal point of view, the typical parade, backed by the authority of the omniscient narrator, could simply no longer take place but on the ironic mode, as a distanced celebration of the powers of fiction.

But how has it all got anything to do with Mr Lorry? In fact, if this ending is so much at odds with the Realist agenda, which should endeavour to propose a full account of reality according to what Paul Ricœur calls “le critère de complétude” [RICŒUR : 38] , it is precisely because there is no omniscient narrator anymore to ensure closure and completion: Mr Lorry has efficiently expelled him from the text.

That chapter starts in a totally conventional way, the omniscient narrator organizing the events and presiding over narration: “In the black prison of the Conciergerie, the doomed of the day awaited their fate. They were in number as the weeks of the year” [332] – retrospection, third person-narration, overhanging focalisation, reliable information: all the Realist ingredients are there to stabilize the narrator’s position. But after Carton’s fate has been sealed, after he has successfully managed to pass for Evremonde, the book comes to a threshold. A barrier indeed materializes the demarcation, as the chapter now concentrates on the central characters’ flight, and dramatically changes courses: “The same shadows are falling on the prison, are falling, in that same hour of the early afternoon, on the Barrier with the crowd about it, when a coach going out to Paris drives up to be examined” [340]. From then on, it reads as if the omniscient narrator were gradually losing ground, until he is completely ejected by Mr Lorry himself, who takes over focalisation and comes up with very original forms. The omniscient narrator gets squeezed in between proliferating lines of dialogue, he gets only granted a few minimal cues, nothing more than static comments, until the reader realises that he is in fact merely parroting Lorry’s answers to the Citizen: “This is she”, or “She and no other” [341]. Indirect speech is highly dysfunctional here: it is in fact an exact repetition of direct speech, the narrator has no autonomy at all and merely repeats what Lorry answers. The confusion between the two voices starts here, leading to a narrative raid. There is a gradual substitution, the narrator being deprived of focalisation, first through the use of passive forms, where Lorry is the unmentioned but ambushed indirect object: “It is hoped he will recover in the fresher air. It is represented that he is not in strong health” [341]. The narrator’s control is purely grammatical, reported speech is diverted of its usual function, and Lorry is not long in fully occupying the narrative ground, pushing his way in through an invading pattern of anaphoras: “It is Jarvis Lorry who has replied to all the previous questions. It is Jarvis Lorry who has alighted and stands with his hand on the coach door. [...] These are again the words of Jarvis Lorry” [341].

All of a sudden and just as the citizen opens the barrier, the narrative threshold yields: “One can depart, citizen?” [341] asks Lorry, and indeed, he

creates a major formal departure. A totally heterogeneous unanchored form in the first person plural bursts in and supplants the typical omniscient third person singular.

Houses in twos and threes pass by *us*, solitary farms, ruinous buildings, dye-works, tanneries, and the like, open country. The agony of *our* impatience is then so great, that in *our* wild alarm and hurry *we* are for getting out and running – hiding – doing anything but stopping. [342]

The anomaly goes on for a page, until the end of the chapter, “So far *we* are pursued by nothing else” [343], and before the text returns to normal, without any comment, next page.

It seems to me that such narrative break is unprecedented in Dickens’s novels: the aim is transparent, and Dickens is obviously looking for a disorganised form to increase the sense of emergency and confusion, and the effect is still reinforced by the use of the simple present that abolishes any possibility of interpretative distance. But the “*we*” Dickens comes up with is a totally hybrid and unreferenced form, in which omniscience seems to be absorbed in a process of identification with the characters and the reader. It results in what we could call a kind of ‘collective stream of consciousness’ where the respective positions of narrator, focaliser, reader and character are allowed to merge; this “*we*” is a decidedly modern shortcut where omniscience gives way to collective random impressions, truth becomes relative, verticality gets levelled, and discourse loses its stable warrant. Mr Lorry’s attempt to bring everyone safely to London is thus massively incomplete: he rather shockingly leaves the omniscient narrator behind, and imposes on the text his own wandering ways.

The authority of the narrator will not be restored after Lorry has crossed that border, and Carton’s imaginary words will thus read as a posthumous tribute to a posthumous narrator, as a parodic eulogy to omniscience.

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N.B. All the references to *A Tale of Two Cities* are to the following edition: DICKENS, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities* [1859]. Oxford: University Press, 2008.

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