

# Revolutionary Narratives, Imperial Rivalries: Britain and the French Empire in the Nineteenth Century

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Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2013

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Boston College

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

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REVOLUTIONARY NARRATIVES, IMPERIAL RIVALRIES: BRITAIN AND THE FRENCH  
EMPIRE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A Dissertation

by

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

December 2013



*Revolutionary Narratives, Imperial Rivalries: Britain and the French Empire in the Nineteenth Century*

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Abstract:

This dissertation considers England's imperial rivalry with France and its influence on literary production in the long nineteenth century. It offers a new context for the study of British imperialism by examining the ways in which mid-Victorian novels responded to and were shaped by the threat of French imperialism. It studies three canonical Victorian novels: William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1846-1848), Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and argues that even though these texts deal very lightly with the British colonies and feature very few colonial figures, they are still very much "about empire" because they are informed by British anxieties regarding French imperialism. *Revolutionary Narratives* links each novel to a contemporary political crisis between England and France, and it argues that each novelist turns back to the Revolutionary period in response to and as a means to process a modern threat from France.

This project also explains why Thackeray, Brontë and Dickens would return specifically to Revolutionary history in response to a French imperial threat. Its first chapter traces the ways in which "Revolutionary narratives," stories about how the 1789 French Revolution had changed the world, came to inform and to lend urgency to England and France's global, imperial rivalry through their deployment in abolitionist writings in both countries. Abolitionist tracts helped to fuse an



association between “empire” and “Revolution” in the Romantic period, and recognizing this helps us to understand why Victorian writers would use Revolutionary narratives in response to imperial crisis.

However, this dissertation ultimately asserts that *Vanity Fair*, *Villette* and *A Tale of Two Cities* revive Revolutionary history in order to write against it and to lament its primacy in popular discourse. In the mid nineteenth century, public discussion in England and France tended to return quickly to the history of the Revolutionary period in order to contextualize new political drama between the two countries. This meant that history often seemed to be repeating itself when it came to England and France’s rivalry. Thackeray, Brontë and Dickens use Revolutionary history in their novels as a way to react against this popular use of history and in an effort to imagine a new path forward for England and France, one not burdened by the weight of the past.

“There is no present or future, only the past, happening over and over again, now”

-Eugene O'Neill *A Moon for the Misbegotten*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It's easy to know who to thank, but impossible to know how to thank.

Writing a dissertation can be a lonely endeavor, particularly when writing about isolated souls such as Charlotte Brontë or when tracing a dark period in Charles Dickens's life. I've been able to follow, but not inhabit, their loneliness because of my remarkable family and friends, and because of the tremendous support I've been blessed to find in Boston and beyond.

Thank you first to my committee. Thanks to Alan Richardson for shepherding me through my exams and for finding the kernel that would become this dissertation. Thank you to Beth Kowaleski Wallace for being a constant champion of my work and teaching, and for being the voice in my head as I wrote, always letting me know when I wasn't actually making a point and being so pleased when I was. Thank you foremost to Rosemarie Bodenheimer. Ti, I'm staggered by the energy and attention you give to your teaching, your research, and your advising. Thank you for having such patience and faith in this project, and for giving me so much guidance and support since it started.

Thank you to Paula Mathieu and Lad Tobin. Lad, I'm so grateful that you thought to hire me as a teaching mentor years ago. Paula, thank you for trusting me to do so much in your writing program. Thank you as well for your unflinching support throughout my time at B.C.

To my Burns Library family: David Horn, Shelley Barber and Amy Braitsch. I haven't worked under the Ford Tower for years, but the Burns is still my home on campus. Thank you to David in particular for sparking my passion for archival work, for so many heated and exasperated discussions about the Red Sox, and for being a role model of the kind of person and teacher I want to be.

I've been so fortunate in my friendships in our graduate community. Thank you to Alison Van Vort and Wendy Cannella Matthews for saving my sanity with our wonderful weekends in York. Thanks to Alison Cotti-Lowell and Katie Daily-Bruckner for stressing over setbacks and celebrating breakthroughs with me. Thanks to the amazing members of my Ph.D. cohort: Nick Gupta, Alex Puente, and Ali. You are all such amazing teachers, and I love knowing how many lives you've changed since we started together at B.C. Thanks finally to Kristin Imre for being my teaching mentor. Kristin, I will teach my entire career and never have your instinct for it.

Thank you to Stephanie Loomis Pappas and Staci Shultz for two remarkable friendships that grow deeper and more important to me every year -even at a distance. Thank you to Steph for making me an honorary Loomis with all its attendant nerdiness and love.

Thank you to Sara Stenson, my first and closest friend in Boston, for so many meals, so much laughter, and so much love since we started here.

Thank you to Elizabeth Heisner for sharing my wanderlust and for such a remarkable and ever-changing friendship.

Thanks to Jeff Bornino for taking what I do seriously but not letting me take it too seriously.

Alyssa Connell. Eight years ago, I awkwardly smiled at you and you skeptically glared at me –not the most auspicious beginning. I never would have guessed how important you'd become in my life. Thank you for everything. Thank you for getting me through this.

To my grandparents: Elizabeth and Charles Kehoe; Joanne and Ralph Bell; Louis Heitzman, and Roger Binkley. You have all shaped who I am, even those of you I never knew. Thank you in particular to Papa for fostering my love for literature, history and travel.

To my siblings, Mary and Michael Heitzman, and their beautiful children –thank you for all of your love and support as I finished this project. I'm amazed at the remarkable lives you lead and the wonderful families you've started.

Finally, and most importantly, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Robert and Dottie Heitzman. There are no words to thank you for how completely you've loved and supported me on the long path to becoming Dr. Heitzman. Your three children have followed three different lives, and you've celebrated all of them equally. You always knew this day would come, even when I did not.

## INTRODUCTION

### “There is No Present or Future, Only The Past”: Writing the Revolution in the Age of Empire

Less than two months after the Battle of Waterloo, Sir Walter Scott traveled to Belgium, joining the flood of British pilgrims flocking to the site of Wellington’s victory over Napoleon’s forces. He chronicled his journey in his memoir, *Paul’s Letters to His Kinsfolk* (1816), an epistolary account of his time in Europe just after the war. His narration offers a fascinating glimpse into life in the immediate wake of Napoleon’s defeat. Scott reached Waterloo in early August 1815, and found that the battlefield had already been transformed into a popular shrine for British tourists, complete with an ad hoc market for relics from the war. What stands out in Scott’s description is the speed with which English civilians began to treat Waterloo as sacred historical ground, as well as the degree to which they evinced a personal connection to the history that had taken place there. The civilians who reach Waterloo comb the battlefield with the avidity of impatient archeologists, frantically searching or bartering for any artifact from the war. Scott confesses:

The eagerness with which we entered into these negotiations, and still more the zeal with which we picked up every trifle we could find upon the field, rather scandalized one of the heroes of the day, who did me the favour to guide me over the field of battle, and who considered the interest I took in things which he was accustomed to see scattered as mere trumpery upon many a field of victory, with a feeling that I believe made him for the moment heartily ashamed of his company. I was obliged to remind him that as he had himself gathered laurels on the same spot, he should have sympathy, or

patience at least, with our more humble harvest of peach-stones, filberts, and trinkets. (Scott 186)

The veteran recoils against the intensity with which the English tourists scavenge the ground for even second-tier souvenirs, furiously claiming any artifact from the recent conflict. For his part, Scott negotiates for several items including a songbook previously carried by one of the French soldiers, a collection of popular ballads. He laments that similar artifacts don't remain from the battles of Cressy (1346) and Agincourt (1415), both historic English victories over the French (Scott 190). Scott immediately slots Waterloo alongside these ancient triumphs. The speed with which he and his compatriots turn the fields of Waterloo into an archeological dig shows how quickly the battle registered as an historic event for ordinary English men and women, and how swiftly they came to be committed to commemorating it through the preservation of historical treasures. However, the alacrity with which they keep tokens from the war also suggests a compulsive behavior, a willful determination to celebrate Waterloo as historical, the mania of which catches even the soldier off-guard.

How are we to interpret the intensity with which the English civilians began to treat Waterloo as historical? Their monomania is certainly a product of patriotic pride and an eagerness to celebrate the end of a long conflict with France; but to what degree is their collective will to historicize also a product of that conflict with France? In his seminal work on the rise of the historical novel, Georg Lukács argues that the Revolutionary Period in Europe marked a shift in how history was experienced and perceived. The French Revolution unfolded on a tremendous scale,

so much so that individual European citizens felt complicit in or touched by its development –they felt a part of history as it was happening. Lukács writes:

It was the French Revolution, the revolutionary wars and the rise and fall of Napoleon, which for the first time made history a *mass experience*, and moreover on a European scale. During the decades between 1789 and 1814 each nation of Europe underwent more upheavals than they had previously experienced in centuries. And the quick succession of those upheavals gives them a qualitatively distinct character, it makes their historical character far more visible than would be the case in isolated, individual instances...now if experiences such as these are linked with the knowledge that similar upheavals are taking place all over the world, this must enormously strengthen the feeling first that there is such a thing as history, that it is an uninterrupted process of changes and finally that it has a direct effect upon the life of every individual." (*The Historical Novel* (1962) 23)

Lukács's project has fallen from the forefront of eighteenth century studies in part because he sketches such a narrow genealogy for the rise of the historical novel. He links the genre almost exclusively to Sir Walter Scott, and doing so has left him vulnerable to critical studies that have established broader historical trajectories for the use of history in fiction.<sup>1</sup> However, scholars have also recently begun to recognize how elegantly his conception of mass historical-consciousness complements Benedict Anderson's work on the development of nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Lukács's assertion that the French Revolution fostered a sense of simultaneous experience throughout Europe, that was then understood to be the experience of



history, dovetails neatly with Anderson's conception of synchronous national time, which he sees as essential to the formation of national identity. In Lukács's formulation, individual citizens experience modern events as historical and are aware that those around them are also experiencing or living through these historical events. This fosters a sense of belonging and community that easily becomes a form of nationalist identification. For the English men and women who travel to Belgium in Scott's account, Waterloo is already a part of what binds them together in an imagined national community. They have lived together through an intense period of historical upheaval, they've survived it, triumphed during it, and their compulsion to collect artifacts can be seen as not just a desire to celebrate their victory over France but also as product of a collective nationalist will to see the events of the Revolutionary period as historical in order to find meaning in them.

This study is not suggesting that the impulse to read contemporary events as historical is unique to the Revolutionary period –history and nationalism almost always go hand in hand. But it is focused on understanding the manner in which historicization, or the act of treating an event as historical, became one of the principal means for the British to understand the Revolution and to find meaning in it, and emerged as a necessary nationalist defense mechanism in an age when the Revolution itself was so rapidly rewriting the political playbook, particularly when it came to Anglo-French relations.

It is also concerned with the legacy of that Romantic era use of history for the Victorian period. This project reads the will to historicize and to immediately slot present events within a longer historical narrative as symptomatic of Anglo-French

relations throughout the nineteenth-century and an intellectual inheritance from the Revolutionary period. It argues that recognizing the reflexivity with which British writers turned to history as a way to process sudden political upheaval in France can help to explain why three major Victorian authors: William Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens returned to the Revolutionary period and revived Revolutionary history when they did. The three body chapters in this work trace the composition of three canonical Victorian novels: Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1846-1848), Brontë's *Villette* (1853) and Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) in relation to moments of rapid political change in Anglo-French relations, specifically moments of imperial crisis between the two countries. It suggests that the three novels arose in conjunction with and as a response to these contemporary periods of political crisis, as well as in tandem with popular returns to the history of the Revolutionary period. However, this project will show that Thackeray, Brontë, and Dickens return to the history of the Revolutionary period in order to react against and to delineate the limits of the instant use of history as a means to contextualize Anglo-French relations."<sup>3</sup>

This project will also explore why Victorian popular discourse would return to the Revolutionary period at moments of Anglo-French imperial crisis. Thackeray and Dickens wrote *Vanity Fair* and *A Tale of Two Cities* when England was under the threat of invasion from France, and Brontë composed *Villette* just as Napoleon III was coming to power and formally reinstituting France as an Empire. What is the relationship between the Revolution and imperialism? The answer to that question will be the primary focus of this introductory chapter. I will suggest that the

Revolution quickly came to be associated with England and France's imperial rivalry because "Revolutionary narratives" were rapidly incorporated into abolitionist writings in both countries. This globalized the stakes of the Revolution and made Revolutionary narratives a part of the politics of empire.

### Imperial *Pas de Deux*: Nationalism and the Politics of Empire

*Revolutionary Narratives* will also seek to expand critical discussion on "empire" and "nationalism" in the long nineteenth century. It offers a new context for the study of British imperialism in the period, by examining the ways in which mid-Victorian novels responded to and were shaped by periods of crisis in England's global rivalry with France. All three of the novels in this study deal very lightly with the colonies, and in the case of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Villette*, feature no colonial figures, yet I will argue that these canonical texts are still very much "about empire" in that they respond to British perceptions of and fears about French imperial expansion. Literary scholarship on British imperialism in the nineteenth century still largely studies England's global development in isolation from its imperial rivalry with France, particularly when thinking about the ways in which literary production functions in relation to empire. England and France competed culturally, economically and militarily all over the map in the nineteenth century, and rarely made decisions about imperial expansion that were not direct responses to the other's global growth, yet we largely continue to read English literature through the limited spectrum of British colonial locales and colonized peoples.

This study will expand the analytical map, and it will do so also in order to move scholarship on England and France's nationalist rivalry away from critical

schemas that are also too conservative in geographic focus, too firmly aligning “nationalism” with “the nation.” The turn of the nineteenth century marked a complicated period of nationalist identity formation for England and France. The Revolution altered the tenor of their national rivalry: they had opposed one another geopolitically for centuries, but were effectively political twins on either side of the Channel, each centering state power in the monarchy. After the fall of the Bastille, however, the two nations embraced competing national political narratives: England was tradition and the monarchy, while France was change and the people.<sup>4</sup> But the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries also saw the emergence of two different forms of global identity for England and France, identities that also shaped each side’s national sense of self. England’s global ambitions were linked to the strength of its navy, while France’s imperialism was tied directly to the success of its army. Their imperial rivalry pitted what historian David Armitage has characterized as “the elephant” against “the whale” (Armitage (2007) 1). This clash is best embodied in James Gillray’s political cartoon, “Plumb Pudding in Danger,” published in 1805 (please see following page).



Gillray's cartoon depicts William Pitt and Napoleon Bonaparte each carving out his nation's share of the globe. Pitt claims the ocean, piercing it with a miniature trident, a symbol of England's naval power, while Napoleon takes all of Europe, with the exception of Great Britain, Sweden and Russia, using his military saber to cut through the Continent. Gillray's cartoon was published at a time when each side had recently achieved a significant strategic and psychological victory over the other. Britain's Royal Navy triumphed over the Franco-Spanish fleet at Trafalgar (1805), securing maritime supremacy for the rest of the Napoleonic Wars. In the same year, Napoleon's army routed Austro-Russian forces at Austerlitz to secure hegemony over the Continent.

The Napoleonic Wars were effectively a global chess-match between the two powers, with each side seeking to overcome the strategic stalemate created by the

other's military advantage. Napoleon constantly sought to achieve naval parity with Britain, and obsessively chased the dream of invading England. Britain, by contrast, recognized that it would eventually need a decisive victory over Napoleon's forces on the battlefield, which is in part why Wellington's victory at Waterloo carried such quick emotional and psychological resonance for the English men and women who travelled there: it was a victory on land over the Emperor, a defeat of the Imperial Guard itself.<sup>5</sup>

Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo brought a close to what Edward Said has described as "*the period of triumphant nationality*" between England and France (*Culture and Imperialism* 1), yet this nationalist rivalry rarely played out within the confines of each state's national borders and in the form of traditional military confrontation on the battlefield. Instead, it was a conflict fought geo-strategically, with each side seeking not only military advantage, but global supremacy as well. The Revolutionary period was the high age of empire between the two powers. France would remain a *de facto* imperial power until the mid twentieth century, and would formally re-emerge as an empire in the mid nineteenth century (1852-1870), but it would never again have the global sway that it did under Napoleon, and would never again truly rival England imperially.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, England and France developed their empires in constant relation to one another. Indeed, in this period, imperial expansion in the form of direct occupation occurred only in locations where England and France were direct rivals, seeking to out-maneuver or to restrain the other, most notably in North America, the Caribbean, India and Africa.

As Britain and France's global influence increased, military and political decisions regarding each empire were always made in reference to the other. For example, in the eighteenth century, France was prepared to lose Canada in order to retain Guadeloupe and Martinique, while the British were willing to abandon Philadelphia in order to defend Jamaica. This imperial counter-positioning continued into the nineteenth century as England formalized its Act of Union with Ireland in order to solidify British power against the French, and the English repeatedly invaded Egypt in order to protect India from France.

England and France both thought globally about their rivalry, and their colonial conquests played as an imperial *pas de deux* between two powers who were obsessively aware of each other's role and influence in the world. Yet scholarship on their rivalry in the Revolutionary Period continues to privilege a national model. Criticism on geo-politics, imperialism and the growth of nationalism in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has increasingly become more geographically sophisticated, moving away from reading "empire" in literary texts simply in terms of the relationship between the colonial center and the colonial periphery, or analyzing the ways in which representations of colonial "others" in these texts helped to shape and define national identity. The rise of transnational literary studies and cosmopolitanism in eighteenth and nineteenth-century scholarship is due to the recognition that the political and imaginative "map" is best read as a "web" in the age of empire. This acknowledges the complicated connections that develop across and between colonial spaces as a result of the forced and voluntary movement of peoples through multiple national spaces, the complex affinities that

emerge between the subjects of different colonies or opposing empires, and the fraught nature of citizenship in a global era.

The transnational turn in criticism has moved scholarship away from viewing identity formation and literary representation in the imperial period through the limited prism of the nation-state. However, this global attentiveness is still largely absent in scholarship on the Anglo-French rivalry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many ways, the feud between England and France is the last bastion of traditional readings of “the nation” in critical studies on the period. This is in part because the direct rivalry facilitates critical models that privilege binary conceptions of national identity and “border” thinking. For example, Linda Colley’s groundbreaking work, *Britons: Forging the Nation: 1707-1837* (1992), persuasively demonstrates the extent to which Francophobia helped to “forge” English national identity in the period, arguing that the extended rivalry helped to meld disparate ethnic and national groupings of English, Scots and Welsh into “Great Britain,” a new national identity then codified and extended through literary and artistic representation. But Colley’s critical framework also reifies the relationship between the “nation,” a geographical-political entity conterminous with the national border, and “national identity.”<sup>6</sup>

Scholarship by Gerald Newman and Jeremy Black has also helped to establish the role that France played in the development of England’s national identity. They argue that England situated France as its historic “natural enemy,” a role that allowed it to serve as a nationalist antipode against which England could negatively define itself.<sup>7</sup> These projects are largely “Channel-centric,” in no small part because



geographic proximity helped to generate fear, which gave rise to nationalism.

However, local readings only partially account for the ways in which nationalist narratives were deployed in the age of empire, when both sides were equally aware that the other was a global power.

Additionally, work on the Anglo-French rivalry in the Revolutionary Period tends to be “Channel-centric” because the Channel itself was a critical component in how England conceptualized and processed fears about the French Revolution. The Channel served as a bulwark, a psycho-geographic threshold that allowed English writers, historians and politicians to read the Revolution as a French phenomenon, one divorced and distinct from any political unrest or popular upheaval on the island, and, as Seamus Deane argues, “alien to English circumstances and inclinations” (Deane 1).

But as much as the Channel allowed England to imagine it was removed from the Revolution, the Revolution itself was only briefly a localized event. Revolutionary discourse quickly spread beyond Europe, and was rapidly interlaced with imperial politics. One of the principle ways that happened was through the publication of pro- and anti-slavery writings in England and France. The movements to abolish slavery in both countries pre-dated the Revolution, but were also fundamentally changed because of it, and they helped to globalize the stakes of the French Revolution by shifting public attention to the colonies. In what follows, I will analyze the rise of abolition as a national and nationalist cause in England and France in the Revolutionary period, and will pay special attention to the ways in which the abolition movements in both countries unfolded in relation to their global

rivalry, as a result of it, and ultimately helped to fuse Revolutionary narratives and imperial politics.

### Writing the History of the Revolution: Burke and Nationalist Historiography

Before examining the ways in which Revolutionary narratives were globalized through abolitionist writings, it is important to consider that the writing of history itself was one of the earliest ways that British writers sought to limit the geography of the French Revolution and to see it as anathema to English national identity. Edmund Burke offered one of the first widely circulated responses to the French Revolution with the publication of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), and the success and influence of the work helped to situate historiography, or the writing of history, as a dominant mode of response to the Revolution. Burke's other intellectual legacy, at least for the purposes of this study, was to popularize the use of historical analogy, the act of reading one time period in relation to another, as a way to contextualize and to process radical political change in France. Burke helped to position history and historiography as the battleground for public responses to the Revolution, and his early influence on public discussion of the Revolution can help to explain why popular discourse in the Victorian period turned so quickly and instinctively to history to contextualize new moments of political strife in France and why their reflex would be to historicize and to frame contemporary conflict within a longer historical narrative.

Burke's treatise looms so large over the Revolutionary period that it is easy to forget that it was actually a reply to an earlier work and the product of a debate over how best to sketch an historical trajectory for the French Revolution. Burke

composed his tome in response to Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (1789), a sermon on English patriotism in which Price paralleled England's Glorious Revolution with the French Revolution and read the events in France as the coda to England's overthrow of James II in 1688. Burke viciously and verbosely denied Price's thesis with *Reflections*, ultimately arguing that the French Revolution was better paralleled with the chaos of England's Civil War (Burke (Vol. 8): 61-62). Morgan Rooney has recently characterized the debate between Burke and Price as a battle for "the authority of history," one that brought the use of historical analogy to the forefront of public discourse on the French Revolution (Rooney 35). Burke and Price fought over how to relate the past to the present, but not over the utility of doing so as a means of understanding the present.

Burke's turn to history as a way to respond to the Revolution can also be seen as the product of a broader Anglo-French political context, and as a form of nationalist pushback. In France, Jacobins celebrated the Revolution as the end of history, a fundamental departure from what had come before –an ambition formalized with the adoption of the French Republican Calendar, which symbolically reset history to begin with the Revolutionary period. Burke's impulse to establish an historical teleology to explain the Revolution was a nationalist gesture, a will to see the past as still relevant to the present. It was also a part of a larger turn in the political narratives of both countries. Before 1789, by virtue of England's Glorious Revolution, France possessed the older uninterrupted political dynasty, as Louis XVI's was part of a Bourbon monarchy that dated back to the thirteenth century, while England was only once century removed from overthrowing its monarch. The

Revolution flipped that dynamic, and acts of nationalist historiography such as Burke's *Reflections* fit within and helped to facilitate the emergence of new national narratives in which England was the enclave of tradition, inheritance and history.<sup>8</sup>

The use of history as a way to respond to the French Revolution can also be seen as an intellectual defense mechanism, a means to cope with the chaotic uncertainty of the post-Revolutionary period by covering it up with history. In *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault diagnoses intellectual production in the nineteenth century as suffering from "temporal agoraphobia," a fear of the messiness of the temporal present that produces a desire to use history to hide uncertainty and disorder (233-234). Foucault argues that this manifests in the urge to read history analogously, and to find comfort by seeing similarity between historical periods in order to stave off the fear that history itself is only a series of contingent occurrences (217-218). Foucault's analysis can certainly help us to understand the urgency and ferocity with which Burke reacted to the Revolution by historicizing it. While he was only one voice in the din of British discourse after the Revolution, he helped to shape the public debate on it and to move the use of historical analogy to the forefront of popular reactions to political turmoil in France, an intellectual legacy that this study will show endured long into the Victorian period as an instinctive reaction to sudden political drama across the Channel.

My project is not the first to assert that Victorian writers relied on historical analogy to process political upheaval in France or that mid nineteenth-century writers returned to the Revolutionary Period at times of political turmoil in France. *In Eyes Across the Channel: French Revolutions, Party History and British Writing*,

*1830-1882* (2000), Clare Simmons argues that the impulse to historicize and to return to Revolutionary history became a defining feature of intellectual discourse on Anglo-French relations in the Victorian age. She suggests:

In the middle years of the nineteenth century, British writers and readers interpreted events in France almost immediately as history, and hence in giving them form, they were compelled to construct an interpretive model from earlier historical analyses available to them. In trying to read occurrences in France between 1830 and 1882 as history, they therefore consistently applied the touchstone event of *the* French Revolution.

(Simmons 8)

Simmons's reads this historical reflexivity exclusively in terms of Revolutionary history, arguing that English writers returned to the Revolutionary period any time there was a new revolution in France. But that doesn't tell the whole story, nor does it account for many Revolutionary returns in the Victorian period. The returns to the Revolutionary period that my project explores don't align neatly with new Revolutions in France, but they do arise in conjunction with particularly fraught or tense periods of Anglo-French global and imperial relations. William Thackeray returned to the Battle of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair* during a French invasion scare in England. Charlotte Brontë composed *Villette*, with its explicitly Napoleonic male protagonist, Monsieur Paul, just as Napoleon III rose to power in France and promised to renew French imperialism. Charles Dickens returned to the Revolutionary Period in *A Tale of Two Cities* just as Emperor Napoleon III triggered yet another invasion scare in England in response to a failed assassination attempt

of him by political refugees who had trained for the attack in England.<sup>9</sup> Why would these writers choose to write “Revolutionary Narratives” at moments of imperial crisis? It is due in part to the fact that another of the earliest responses to the French Revolution came in the form of abolitionist tracts in both England and France, and that the abolition movements in both countries helped to globalize the stakes of Revolution and to situate it in relation to England and France’s imperial rivalry. A detailed examination of the development of both abolition movements can help to illuminate why Victorian writers would instinctively associate Revolutionary narratives with Anglo-French global politics.

#### In Service of the Empire: English and French Abolitionism

Before the Revolutionary Period, England and France’s principal abolitionist societies were intimately connected. France’s first abolitionist group, the *Société des amis des Noirs*, was founded at the urging of Britain’s leading abolitionists, Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson, and, as the society’s name suggests, was directly inspired by British and American Quaker efforts to abolish slavery. Jacques-Pierre Brissot, who along with Étienne Clavière, founded *Amis des Noirs* in February 1788, did so shortly after the two men became members of Britain’s Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade.

The two societies shared deep sympathy with one another, and their mutual aims inaugurated a brief, but rich, period of common correspondence across the Channel and a shared periodical culture as each group translated and reprinted significant speeches and pamphlets by the other in its own publications. In the brief calm before the Revolution, abolition became not only a transnational campaign but

a global cause as anti-slavery activists initially framed the efforts to abolish the slave trade as an opportunity for England and France to enhance their global standing and emerge as twin beacons for the cause of global liberty. In a letter written by Granville Sharp, read at one of the *Amis des Noirs*' first meetings in Paris, Sharp saw abolition as a chance for the two countries to trade their "rivalry for conquests" for "an emulation to spread the blessings of peace and civilization on their immense possessions, and most particularly on the oppressed race of Africans."<sup>10</sup> Sharp sees the campaign to abolish slavery through what Mary Louise Pratt has characterized as "imperial eyes," imagining it as a chance to refashion the world and extend Western cultural forms and practices into Africa. That is not to say that the European campaigns to abolish slavery were imperialistic, but they very quickly were viewed as global endeavors, and seen as a means to extend European cultural hegemony and international prominence. Recognizing this global-imperialist perspective in abolitionist discourse helps to suggest how the dual campaigns against slavery in England and France came to serve each power's imperial aims as the Revolutionary Period unfolded.

Before the Revolution, Jacques-Pierre Brissot shared Granville Sharp's aspiration that abolition might allow England and France to reframe the nature of their global rivalry, particularly their competition for commercial advantage. Brissot imagined that ending the slave trade would foster increased mercantile exchange between England and France once both countries ceased sending so many merchant ships to Africa to secure slaves (Brissot 16), and he felt that it was inevitable that any progress made in the campaign to abolish slavery by one country

would initiate a corresponding change in the other. In a speech delivered at the organizational meeting of the *Amis des Noirs* in Paris in February 1788, Brissot mused:

Tel est le rapport intime qui enlace l'Angleterre et la France l'une à l'autre, que rien de ce qui se passé chez l'une, ne peut plus être étranger à l'autre; qu'un grand événement chez l'une, produit un contre-coup chez l'autre.

[Such is the intimate connection between England and France that nothing takes place now in one and remains foreign in the other; a great event in one, produces an after-shock in the other.](Brissot 16)<sup>11</sup>

On the eve of the French Revolution, abolition was not yet a nationalist cudgel; rather it was seen as a way to positively transform the rivalry between England and France, and as a global issue in which the two countries' interests overlapped and were interlaced.

Nevertheless, the pre-Revolutionary period also saw the first movement towards abolition becoming a nationalist cause in each country. In the early 1770s, two significant legal decisions changed the ways in which abolitionist writers in England and France imagined their cause. The first occurred in France in 1770, well before the establishment of the *Amis des Noirs*, but in a period in which abolition as a public cause was already gaining popular traction. In 1770, a French slave named Roc successfully sued for status as a freeman under French law. He had arrived in France from Louisiana with his master and claimed that he was emancipated as soon as he set foot on French soil because French law failed to recognize slavery. A French magistrate agreed, also noting that Roc's master did not claim him as



property when arriving in France, thus indicating that he didn't consider him to be so. The decision galvanized the French anti-slavery movement. Abolitionist Pierre-Paul Nicolas mused, ““la France entiere est le temple de l’humanité...elle se glorifie sur-tout d’être la libératrice des esclaves: si-tôt qu’ils touchent cette terre heursuse, leurs fers tombent, ils marchent les égaux de leurs maîtres” [France is a temple for all humanity...she glorifies herself most as the liberator of slaves; as soon as they touch this happy land, their chains fall from them, they walk as equals with their masters.] (Nicolas 15). Nicolas imagines an autochthonous connection between liberty and the French nation, promoting France as not only a beacon for abolitionist ideals, but as sacred ground, a geographic space in which emancipation is endemic to the land itself.

Only two years later, England's abolition movement would seize on a similar *cause célèbre*. In 1772, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield ruled that a runaway slave, James Somerset, who had traveled to London with his owner, Charles Stewart, from Boston, could not be returned to captivity because English law did not support the keeping of slaves on English soil. As with the ruling in the Roc case in France, the Mansfield decision transformed how English abolitionists conceived of their cause. Suddenly, England itself could be imagined as an enclave in which liberty was not only a natural right, but a condition that was contagious within and contiguous with England's national borders. William Cowper's *The Task* (1785) captures the ways in which the Mansfield case redefined the geographic imaginary of the abolitionist cause. Cowper meditates:

Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs  
Receive our air, that moment they are free,

They touch our country and their shackles fall.  
That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud  
And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,  
And let it circulate through every vein  
Of all your empire; that where Britain's power  
Is felt, mankind may feel her mercy too.

-*The Task*, Book II, 40-47

Cowper's poem imitates the imagery of Pierre-Paul Nicolas's response to the Roc case with its depiction of an autochthonous connection between land and liberty, and, indeed, may have been inspired by it given the close relationship between English and French abolitionists before the Revolution. However, *The Task* also explicitly imagines abolition as an English national cause, one that will play out on a global stage. Cowper envisions empire as the mechanism by which England will extend its national ethos of natural liberty. While England and France shared similar ethical responses to the existence of the global slave trade before the Revolution, the seeds were already sewn for abolition to become a cause that that would divide them along nationalist lines following the Revolution, and was already conceived of as a both "national" and "imperial," and as a means of underscoring and demonstrating each nation's global prominence and as evidence of each country's global exceptionality. When both sides retreated to their respective national corners following the advent of Revolution in France, the abolitionist cause would help to define the nationalist divide between them, and would continue to serve each side's imperial aims and ambitions.

#### Globalizing Revolution – Abolition and French Imperialism

The 1789 French Revolution fundamentally changed the global politics of the abolition movement. In France, Revolution quickened the anti-slavery cause. As

Catherine Duprat and Marcel Dorigny have argued, the *Amis des Noirs* helped to lay the groundwork for a new political climate following the Revolution. Dorigny argues that participation in the *Amis des Noirs* was, “a political apprenticeship without precedent in France at the time” (Dorigny 40).<sup>12</sup> French antislavery arguments in effect “previewed” Revolutionary discourse, because French abolitionist writers tended to draw more heavily on Enlightenment thought than their British counterparts, who typically grounded their arguments in Christian philosophy, emphasizing compassion and cross-cultural sympathy. French anti-slavery advocates focused on Enlightenment ideals of universal humanism. This allowed their post-1789 publications to easily adopt the Revolution’s focus on universal forms of political belonging and equality. In the immediate wake of the Revolution, “*les Noirs*” became either “*les Noirs français*” (French blacks) or “*les gens de couleur*” (colored citizens). In an address to the National Assembly one year after the French Revolution, the *Amis des Noirs* stressed that their goals were identical to the Assembly’s, and encouraged the newly-formed political body to consider the plight of French blacks. The abolitionists argued, “vous avez gravé sur un monument immortel, que tous les hommes naissent et demeurent libres et égaux en droits. Vous les avez rendus, ces droits, au peuple françois” [You have engraved on an immortal memorial that all men are born and live free and equal in rights. You have returned these rights to the French people.] (*Adresse* 3).

In their address, the *Amis des Noirs* do not call for the immediate abolition of slavery, stressing, “nous ne demandons point que vous restituez aux Noirs français ces droits politiques” [We do not ask that you restore these political rights to French

blacks as well] (*Adresse 3*); but their concession is telling as they identify blacks in the French colonies as “*Noirs français*,” suggesting that they are already a part of the political body, and by stressing that they are not yet asking for their political rights to be restored to them. Even as they soften their stance in response to the tempestuous and unsettled climate of post-Revolutionary Paris, the *Amis des Noirs* underscore that political rights are universally guaranteed and extend equally to all members of the citizenry, a philosophy that would become a hallmark of post-Revolutionary thought.

In their appeal to the National Assembly, the *Amis des Noirs* do call for the immediate abolition of the slave trade, and also graft Revolutionary discourse onto this aspect of their argument, suggesting that African princes sell their people into slavery in order to gratify their avarice (*Adresse 4*). They draw on a nascent French Revolutionary narrative, aligning African princes with the aristocracy, and paralleling the plight of Africans with those of the French peasantry. The *Amis des Noirs* conclude the address by insisting that abolishing the slave trade will allow France to assume a new global identity, one that will force England to follow France’s lead or risk its own international reputation (*Adresse 5*). The *Amis des Noirs*’ address to the National Assembly illustrates how quickly nationalism, global identity and politics, and Revolutionary discourse began to intermingle after the storming of the Bastille, and how easily these varied concerns came to overlap in popular discussion.

However, global-imperial concerns also constrained the abolition debate in the early years after the Revolution. The *Amis des Noirs* did not call for an

immediate end to slavery in the French colonies in part because of the successes of the principal pro-slavery lobby in France, the *Club Massiac*, a group that had managed to define abolition as primarily a colonial issue. The *Club Massiac* managed to persuade the Revolutionary government that an immediate end to slavery in the colonies would be catastrophic to France's global standing and financial well-being (Popkin 203). They argued that France would face an instant and insurmountable debt if slavery were discontinued, but the group also aligned their arguments with the tenets of France's new political culture, asserting that the National Assembly could only protect the interests of the French people by preserving slavery in the colonies (Popkin 203).

The *Club Massiac*'s successful lobby forced the *Amis des Noirs* to be more circumspect in their advocacy against slavery, and to temper their Revolutionary rhetoric with practical proposals that considered France's colonial health. As Christopher Miller has suggested, the post-Revolution abolition narrative unfolded awkwardly as it veered between, and attempted to accommodate, Enlightenment ideals and the economic realities of France's colonial system.<sup>13</sup> Even in the first flush of the Revolution, abolitionist writers had to carefully thread the intellectual needle, blending the aspirations of universal liberty promised by the Revolution and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789) with the politics of empire. For example, in an anonymous tract published only a few months after the storming of the Bastille, entitled *L'esclavage des nègres aboli ou Moyens d'améliorer leur sort* [*Black Slavery Abolished, or, Methods for Improving the Condition of Slaves*], the pamphleteer looks for an intellectual loophole in Revolutionary thought, writing,

“Dieu a créé tous les hommes libres; que cette liberté ne doit être altérée que par les chaînes qu’ils se donnent eux-mêmes volontairement” [God made all men free; this freedom cannot be abridged except by chains that they themselves voluntarily assume.] (*L’Esclavage* 1). The pamphleteer suggests that free society already recognizes forms of consensual servitude such as soldiery, and recommends that military service could be a model for African labor in the colonies. The writer proposes that current slaves be offered ten-year labor agreements, at which point they would be freed and free to return to Africa. The writer notes that this would avoid the disastrous consequences of immediate emancipation.

In the first years after the Revolution, imperial economics trumped universal humanism in the abolition debate. This only began to change once France’s colonial position in the Caribbean became less stable. In August 1791, a slave uprising began in the French colony of Saint Domingue. Early in the uprising, Spain began to quietly support the rebel slaves as a means of extending its influence on Hispanola. By February 1793, France was formally at war with Great Britain. The onset of the Anglo-French war transformed the slave rebellion in Saint Domingue into a fully-fledged colonial conflict. In May 1793, Spain began offering military commissions to ex-slave rebel leaders and freedom to any slaves serving under their command. In September 1793, British troops from Jamaica invaded Saint Domingue, taking control of the western and southern provinces of the colony. France’s position soon became untenable.

Once it became clear that France was losing the war on the ground, it moved to seize control of the global political-narrative in an effort to regain military

advantage. Shortly before the British invasion, on August 29, 1793, French colonial commissioners, L  ger-F  licit   Sonthonax and   tienne Polverel, declared that any slave that fought for France would receive his or her freedom. Following the British invasion, the French National Convention moved to formalize Sonthonax and Polverel's declarations, and to extend them to the rest of the colony, recognizing that doing so would allow France not only to globalize Revolutionary discourse, but also to gain the upper-hand in the battle for control over the political narrative that was informing the colonial conflict in the Caribbean. In the final public debate before the French National Convention, Jean-Fran  ois Delacroix, advocating in favor of abolition, fused the Revolutionary and colonial imperatives, urging his fellow delegates:

It is time that we rise to the height of the principles of liberty and equality.

For though we say that there are no slaves in France, isn't it true that men of color are slaves in our colonies? Let us proclaim the liberty of men of color.

With this act of justice you will give a great example to the men of color enslaved in the English and Spanish colonies. (Dubois and Garrigus 131)

Delacroix frames universal abolition as not only the culmination of Revolutionary ideology, but also as a means to foster instability in England and Spain's colonial holdings. His hope is that France's declaration of colonial emancipation will encourage slave uprisings throughout the Caribbean. His remarks demonstrate how quickly abolition allowed France to align its Revolutionary and imperial goals.

Delacroix's colleague, Georges Danton, offered an even more dramatic portrait of how abolition would transform the stakes of England and France's global rivalry, musing:

Until now our decrees of liberty have been selfish, and only for ourselves. But today we proclaim it to the universe, and generations to come will glory in this decree; we are proclaiming universal liberty...let us launch liberty into the colonies; the English are dead, today. We are hurling liberty into the New World; she will bring abundant fruits and establish deep roots there. In vain [British Prime Minister William] Pitt and his accomplices will apply political pressure to try to repeal the effects of this good deed; they will be dragged into the void. France will regain the rank and influence that its energy, its soul, and its population merit. (131-132)<sup>14</sup>

Danton's rhetoric is imperial: he imagines a process of global transformation, with France ascending to the pinnacle of global esteem as the world receives the benefits of Revolutionary ideology. Danton's use of metaphor places his ambition firmly on the colonial register: he envisions a process that is both aggressive and agrarian, as liberty is both "launched" into the colonies and also takes root there, bearing fruit for a rich harvest. Danton's dream for the next stage of the Revolution rests in the imperial imaginary. He collapses the distinctions between France's goals as an empire and as the epicenter of Revolution. The spread of Revolutionary liberty to the colonies now becomes a means to forestall England's influence in the West Indies and to foster the Revolution's commitment to universal human rights.



On February 4, 1794, the same day as the final public debate on the issue, the Revolutionary government formally abolished slavery in the French empire, averring:

The National Convention declares that slavery of the *nègres* is abolished in all the colonies; consequently, it decrees that all men living in the colonies, without distinction of color, are French citizens and enjoy all the rights guaranteed by the constitution. (132)

The National Assembly's Declaration made slaves free *and* French at the same moment. In an ideological instant, the world was suddenly more French, the contours of the French nation had completely changed, and former slaves were now a formal part of the French political tapestry. In the post-Revolutionary world, this model of immediate citizenship would become the defining characteristic of French imperialism, and the key distinction between France's global project and England's. As Terry Eagleton has argued, the fundamental difference between French and English forms of imperialism is that French imperialism is assimilationist, meaning its ultimate aim is to incorporate conquered peoples into the political body.<sup>15</sup> After the Revolution, when one was conquered by the French, one became "French."<sup>16</sup> Abolition legitimated Revolution as a global cause, and offered Jacobins in France an ethical justification for extending France's influence in the world.

#### Jacobins in England – Francophobia and British Abolition

It was precisely the potential for Revolution to become a global phenomenon and spread beyond France's borders that gave British politicians pause at the close of the eighteenth century, and the paranoia that it could do so stalled the English

abolition movement in the years just after the storming of the Bastille. Anti-Jacobin sentiment shaped public debate in England in the post-Revolutionary period, and proved to be a boon to the pro-slavery cause. The overthrow of the monarchy in France made the status quo politically attractive in England, and made any widespread change in British policy seem dangerous. Pro-slavery advocates capitalized on the new political climate, casting abolitionists as pro-Jacobin and as advocates for dramatic political change. An anonymous pamphleteer in 1792 characterized Wilberforce and his fellow abolitionists as the “Jacobins of England,” and offered an exposé of their cause, claiming:

By what motives the promoters of the Abolition have been actuated? the answer is plain, Fanaticism and False Philosophy had exalted their imagination, and obscured their reason; and in what they affected to call a Reform in the Constitution, they saw the means of establishing such a Government as best suited their wild ephemeral theory.<sup>17</sup>

The author depicts abolition as akin to Revolutionary political upheaval, characterizing the efforts to reform British governmental policy as attempts to reform the British government itself. In his hands, abolitionists become fanatics, heirs and kindred spirits to the leaders of the Revolution in France, a parallel the writer quickly makes explicit, insisting, “in France, their fellow reformers put arms into the hands of the Mob, and dictated the measures of the National Assembly” (5). Before the Revolution, British abolitionists sought to elicit widespread popular emotion among the English people, cultivating cross-cultural sympathy and fellow feeling in anti-slavery tracts. Post-Revolution, this became a liability, a success that pro-

slavery writers could target and characterize as attempts to foster a mass uprising. The devotion to universal human rights that drove abolitionist writers now exposed them to critique. Pro-slavery writer Gilbert Francklyn asked, “what would the people of England think of men, who, under the familiar pretext of zeal for the rights of humanity...endeavour to stir up the soldier, the sailor, the artisan, and the peasant, to assert their rights to an equal portion of liberty with those who now lord it over them?”<sup>18</sup> Francklyn deftly reframes the anti-slavery narrative, drawing on fear of the Revolution to strip the quest for universal human rights of its benign benevolence, making abolition seem like the first salvo in a series of civilian uprisings.

The French Revolution allowed British anti-slavery writers to turn abolitionists’ own arguments against the abolitionist cause, and to paint anti-slavery writers as dangerous idealists whose zeal for change in the Caribbean could only lead to chaos akin to the Revolution in Paris. As Hugh Thomas has observed, before the French Revolution, arguments against abolition centered on the benefits of the trade, but post-Revolution focused on abolitionists themselves, and stressed the lack of foresight in and impracticality of their proposals (Thomas 524-525). In the post-1789 world, abolitionists became irrational Revolutionaries, ready to overthrow the system in order to remedy it.

British abolitionists were only on the wrong side of popular political opinion for a brief period in the late eighteenth century, but the skill with which the pro-slavery lobby manipulated anti-Jacobean sentiment and brought it to bear on the abolition debate, fundamentally changed the nature of the debate. Their successes

erased the last vestiges of abolition as a cross-Channel cause, a mantle of global leadership that England and France could assume together. Anti-French sentiment was *de rigueur* in pro-slavery tracts from this period, even in pieces that largely ignored the anti-Revolutionary canard. For example, in an anti-abolitionist pamphlet entitled, “A Letter to William Wilberforce, Esq. by Philo-Africanus” (1790), the pseudonymous author only briefly acknowledges the new European political context, quickly congratulating Wilberforce for, “abstract[ing] your attention from the paltry revolutions of Europe, and to employ your precious time and abilities in favour of the unfortunate Africans” (1), but cannot move forward without casually indulging in anti-French nationalism, quipping, “I am, Sir, a plain Englishman, and, like most of my countrymen, have some knowledge and some prejudices. I believe that the French ate frogs and wore wooden shoes, until their glorious revolution had left them nothing to eat, and no shoes to burn” (2). Although Philo-Africanus sardonically borrows from English history, characterizing events in France as a “glorious revolution,” his intent isn’t to parallel the two Revolutions. Rather, his insult is part of the process of establishing his authority to speak as an “Englishman”; it’s an obligatory nod to the ethos of the age. He doesn’t attempt to paint Wilberforce as pro-Jacobin, but cannot refrain from ridiculing the French. This tract demonstrates not only how pervasive Francophobia was in post-Revolutionary England, but that it was, to a degree, an expected part of public debate on slavery. Even after English abolitionists regained their footing and found themselves once again on the right side of popular political sentiment, Francophobia would continue to rule writings about slavery. The legacy of this period in the English anti-slavery

movement is that abolition as a popular topic was now firmly nationalized, embedded in the larger politics of the Anglo-French rivalry, and shaped by English perceptions of the French Revolution. As the debate moved forward into the nineteenth century, the popular association between “Revolution” and “Abolition” would only deepen as France returned to the slave trade, and English abolitionists could now make English interpretations of the French Revolution work in their favor.

### A Tyrant Rises – Abolition and British Imperialism

On May 20, 1802 (30 floréal, an X), Napoleon Bonaparte reinstituted slavery in the French colonies. His decision was motivated by colonial ambition; Napoleon had risen to power in 1799 and quickly turned his attention towards reestablishing France’s colonial foothold in the Caribbean (Dubois & Garrigus 18). He argued before the French tribunal that the slave trade itself had never been formally abolished by the Revolutionary government, and so could be resumed (Thomas 547). Napoleon didn’t fear reinstituting slavery itself in the French colonies because he no longer had to contend with the possibility of English intervention in the French West Indies –at least temporarily. On March 25, 1802 (4 germinal, an X) England and France concluded the Treaty of Amiens, momentarily ceasing their war. The Treaty gave Napoleon *carte blanche* in the Caribbean, and returned France to a pre-Revolutionary colonial system, one dependent on slave labor.

Napoleon’s dramatic reversal of France’s policy towards slavery illustrates again how deeply the abolition movement was embedded in and dependent on the greater politics of empire and on the delicate ebb and flow of Anglo-French

diplomacy. Slavery itself was the *sine qua non* of colonialism until the nineteenth century, and because it was so essential to empire, its abolition in England and France did not unfold uniquely as a neat narrative of Enlightenment progress and greater understanding of global human rights. Those ideals were part of the campaigns to abolish slavery in England and France, and they certainly drove and inspired the principal abolitionists in each country; but abolition in both countries also unfolded in relation to each side's use and perception of Revolutionary narratives.

When Napoleon reinstated slavery in the French colonies, he changed the political calculus of abolition, and effectively flipped how national perceptions of the French Revolution could be used to further the anti-slavery cause. Napoleon went against the global goals of Revolution, betraying its ambition for universal equality and political fraternity. This put him at odds with not only Jacobins in France, but also those in England sympathetic to the early ideals of the Revolution. Shortly after Napoleon's declaration, William Wordsworth composed "September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1802" as a response to it. In the sonnet, Wordsworth's poet travels from France to England with a Franco-African woman fleeing Calais because she has been stripped of her political rights in France. Wordsworth writes:

We had a fellow-Passenger who came  
From Calais with us, spotless in array,  
A Negro Woman like a Lady gay,  
Yet silent as a woman fearing blame;  
Dejected, meek, yea pitiably tame,  
She sate, from notice turning not away,  
But on all proffer'd kindness still did lay  
A weight of languid speech, or to the same  
Was silent, motionless in eyes and face.  
She was a Negro Woman driv'n from France,

Rejected like all others of that race,  
Not one of whom may now find footing there;  
This the poor Out-cast did to us declare,  
Nor murmur'd at the unfeeling Ordinance."

Wordsworth's poem was composed in 1802 in the immediate wake of Napoleon's declaration, but it was not published until 1807, and at that point was indicative of how the British abolition movement had changed in light of Napoleon's rise to power in France. Wordsworth sketches a Channel Crossing that aligns the politics of abolition with the national border. Liberty stops at the water's edge in France. Wordsworth imagines French soil itself as dangerous, intractable ground for former slaves. The Crossing here functions as a reverse Middle Passage with those of African descent fleeing potential enslavement in favor of England's shores. Wordsworth's geographic imaginary evokes the literary motifs that dominated after the Mansfield decision in 1772. England is now a beacon and safe haven, a counterpoint to France's now inhospitable shores. The distinction between "liberty" and "enslavement" is now nationalized along Anglo-French lines, and abolition as a national cause is no longer just a way for England to distinguish itself on the world's stage, as it was imagined in 1772, but also functions as a way for England to specifically differentiate itself from France. Wordsworth's poem marks a turn in the English abolition movement: anti-slavery is now not only a national cause, but a nationalized one.

Wordsworth adored France, but his poem captures his grief over Napoleon's callous reinstitution of slavery, and his seeming betrayal of those the Revolutionary government had taken in as French citizens. Wordsworth's "fellow Passenger" is a liminal figure --she has already adopted European dress --and yet her reactions to

those on the packet ship suggests she has only partially overcome the psychological trauma of enslavement. She does not avoid human contact altogether, but sits “silent as a woman fearing blame; / Dejected, meek, yea pitiably tame.” Wordsworth depicts her as on guard against added indictment. His sketch suggests a woman expectant of additional torment, now that Napoleon has reopened the old psychological wound of slavery.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, the image of Napoleon as tyrant would become a hallmark of British wartime propaganda; but Wordsworth’s poem shows how this conceit ultimately served British abolitionist needs as well. Both campaigns needed a tyrant, and abolitionist tracts quickly came to serve nationalist ends by reinforcing the dominant perception of the autocrat across the Channel. Even a quarter-century later, Wordsworth would continue to give special weight to Napoleon’s actions against French Africans when considering the post-Revolutionary period, writing in his 1827 introduction to “September 1, 1802,” “among the capricious acts of Tyranny that disgraced these times, was the chasing of all Negroes from France by decree of the Government.”<sup>19</sup>

Napoleon’s action put British abolitionists on the right side of popular nationalism, allowing them to depict anti-slavery as a patriotic act and as a way to illustrate the triumph of British nationalism. British anti-slavery advocates were not unmoored political opportunists, but they did tap into and help to codify the nationalist spirit of the age in the Napoleonic period and its attendant Francophobia. Abolitionist writings also deepened and drew upon popular fears about the French Revolution itself, and the widespread perception that the chaos it unleashed could



only lead to the rise of tyrannical figures like Napoleon. It was a political narrative primarily popularized by Edmund Burke in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In it, Burke augured the arrival of an absolutist military ruler in France, one who would fill the political vacuum left by the loss of the monarchy. Burke predicted:

In the weakness of one kind of authority, and in the fluctuation of all, the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, and who possesses the true spirit of command shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account. There is no other way of securing military obedience in this state of things. But the moment in which that event shall happen, the person who really commands the army is your master; the master (that is little) of your king, the master of your assembly, the master of your whole republic.<sup>20</sup>

While Burke did not anticipate Louis XVI's execution, his outline of how the Revolution would lead to a de facto military dictatorship proved prescient. Conservative readings of the Revolution, such as those by Burke, provided a template for interpreting Napoleon's rise when it did happen, and allowed his ascent to register almost immediately as an historical event, a milestone in a political and historical narrative that began with the Bastille.

Napoleon's rise also opened the next chapter in England and France's imperial rivalry. Napoleon reinstituted slavery to gain a greater foothold in the French West Indies. For the remainder of his rule, the politics of abolition would

continue to unfold in tandem with the politics of empire in both England and France. Napoleon's ambition for expanded French influence in the Caribbean proved untenable. The French lost Saint-Domingue at the end of the Haitian Revolution in 1804, and ultimately abandoned most of their American holdings with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 –a transaction also motivated by France's renewed war with England. To compensate for the loss of these colonial possessions, Napoleon sought to consolidate his power on the European continent. In November 1806, after his watershed victory against Prussia in the Battle of Jena (French: Iéna ), Napoleon issued the Berlin Decree, an edict that banned the import of British goods by any European continental power aligned with France. The move was designed to capitalize on and codify France's hegemony over the continent, and to strangle England economically.

It left England with only one corresponding imperial maneuver –it had to solidify its control over the seas, and just as abolition as a national cause aided France's imperial aims immediately after the French Revolution, abolition as a national movement offered England a benevolent justification for monitoring maritime commerce and establishing a blockade of the French West Indies. As Srividhya Swaminathan and Linda Colley have argued, abolition gave England political cover as it extended its imperial influence. Colley asserts:

Anti-slavery supplied the British with an epic stage upon which they could strut in an overwhelmingly attractive guise. Acknowledging that this was so does not detract from what was achieved. Not all great powers are so anxious to redeem past oppressions, or so eager for the world's good

opinion. Thousands of lives were saved...many more benefited because of the Royal Navy's campaign against other nations' slave-traders.<sup>21</sup> Colley doesn't explicitly link England's advocacy of anti-slavery to its imperial rivalry with France, but the naval campaign she identifies specifically enabled England to embargo French commercial traffic under the auspices of limiting the slave trade. Additionally, England was eager to rise in global popular opinion in no small part in order to rally global sympathy in its war with France.

On March 25, 1807, England formally abolished the slave trade. The measure passed exactly five years to the day after England and France negotiated the Treaty of Amiens, which ended their first post-Revolutionary conflict. It passed in no small part due to the groundswell of popular support in England against slavery after France reinstituted it, and as a result of the heady mix of Francophobia and ardent nationalism that followed in the wake of England's re-declaration of war with France in 1803.

The passage of the bill was a joyous moment for English abolitionists, who had weathered the sharp turns of politics and several previous defeats of the bill; but the end of England's participation in the slave trade also prompted reflection on the part of anti-slavery advocates, who could now reminisce on those trials and now valorize the struggle itself. Shortly after passage, Wordsworth composed "To Thomas Clarkson" (1807), a sonnet honoring England's leading abolitionist. In it, Wordsworth casts Clarkson as a suffering saint, a Sisyphean figure who has endured the long climb towards abolition largely as a personal trial. Wordsworth reminisces, "Clarkson! it was an obstinate hill to climb: / How toilsome –nay, how dire –it was,

by thee / Is known: by none, perhaps, so feelingly" (1-3). As the sonnet continues, Wordsworth suggests that the present moment marks a turning-point, when Clarkson's solitary triumph will become an endeavor other nation's will emulate. He assures Clarkson, "O true yoke-fellow of Time, / Duty's intrepid liegeman, see, the palm / Is won, and by all Nations shall be worn!" (8-10). Wordsworth quickly imagines a next stage for abolition, one that will play out globally, with England's triumph serving as a model for other nations.

Robert Southey drew on the same imagery of wise, wizened leadership following the hard-won victory of the abolition bill in his poem, "Verses Upon the Installation of Lord Grenville" (1810), but extended it to the national level, imagining that England's triumph marked its coming of age as a global leader. Southey's piece celebrates William, Lord Grenville (1759-1834), the British Prime Minister responsible for ushering the abolition bill through Parliament. Southey first presented the verses in Oxford, and muses on the passing of recent years:

What change hath intervened! The bloom of spring  
Is fled from many a cheek, where roseate joy  
And beauty bloom'd; the inexorable Grave  
Hath claimed its portion; and the band of youths,  
Who then, collected here as in a port  
From whence to launch on life's adventurous seas,  
Stood on the beach, ere this have found their lots  
Of good or evil (5-12)

Southey's melancholy for the passing of youth takes on a global perspective. He imagines England's young men as ships setting off from port, evoking not only England's maritime identity, but also its recent legacy with the slave trade. The metaphor allows Southey to sketch a parallel coming of age for England in the world and to reflect how much the world itself has changed in recent years. Southey

surveys the last two decades of European history, ultimately collapsing abolitionist and Revolutionary imagery in his narrative sketch on continental upheaval and oppression:

Lo! Kingdoms wreck'd,  
Thrones overturn'd, built up, then swept away  
Like fabrics in the summer clouds, dispersed  
By the same breath that heap'd them; rightful kings  
Who, from a line of long-drawn ancestry  
Held the transmitted sceptre, to the axe  
Bowing the anointed head; or dragg'd away  
To eat the bread of bondage; or escaped  
Beneath the shadow of Britannia's shield,  
There only safe. Such fate have vicious courts,  
Statesmen corrupt, and fear-struck policy,  
Upon themselves drawn down; till Europe, bound  
In iron chains, lies bleeding in the dust,  
Beneath the feet of upstart tyranny. (20-33)

Southey traces a familiar Revolutionary trajectory with the chaos and corruption of the Revolutionary government leading to the inevitable rise of Napoleonic tyranny; but midway through his reminiscence, he begins to evoke the imagery of abolition, imagining European rulers subject to the trials of sudden bondage or forced to flee France's shores for exile in England, an exodus that recalls the flight of Wordsworth's "Fellow Passenger." His sketch ends with Europe in chains, enslaved under the boot of Napoleonic tyranny. Southey's poem illustrates how easily the dominant cultural and historical contexts from the period collapse into one another, as Revolutionary, abolitionist, and European historical narratives blend into and reinforce one another in a *mélange* of English nationalist meaning.

While Southey's poem is dense with nationalist pride, he doesn't believe that England is so exceptional that it is isolated from the politics and possibility of revolutionary upheaval. Southey doesn't see revolution as anathema; he views it as

divinely inspired retribution for prolonged oppression, and he cautions that England's advancement of abolition has only partially balanced its moral ledger-book:

Look to thyself, O England! for be sure  
Even to the measure of thine own desert,  
The cup of retribution to thy lips  
Shall soon or late be dealt!...a thought that well  
Might fill the stoutest heart of all thy sons  
With awful apprehension. Therefore, they  
Who fear the Eternal's justice, bless thy name  
Grenville, because the wrongs of Africa  
Cry out no more to draw a curse from Heaven  
On England! (47-56)

Southey sketches a long arc of retribution, casting abolition as only one line on a list of historical misdeeds. He views the project of atonement for injustice against the oppressed as a multigenerational affair, one that England's "sons" can now adopt with a slightly lighter burden because of Grenville. Southey predicts that future generations will continue to revere and remember the Prime Minister's name for this reason (lines 69-78) and that future generations of Africans will celebrate him as well (lines 95-101).

Southey's poem reads history as an inherited obligation, a burden and national birthright. Two decades after the passage of the abolition bill, Amelia Opie would adopt an identical conceit in her poem, "The Black Man's Lament; or, How to Make Sugar" (1826). This piece, written nineteen years after abolition and seven years before full emancipation (1833), was composed for children, to introduce them to the brutal realities of the slave system and induct them into the national cause to eradicate it. It is narrated by a West Indian slave, and opens with a

frontispiece depicting a young English child signing the petition to abolish the slave trade:



When the child signs the petition, he becomes a part of history. Opie's poem was designed to keep the horrors of slavery in the national consciousness in order to generate public support for full emancipation in the colonies; but it also figures the history of English abolition as a national inheritance. The next generation doesn't start anew; instead it assumes the mantle and burden of the old, joining and continuing history.

### Revolutionary Returns: Writing with and against History

The Revolutionary period was seminal in English national history. It was more than just a moment of great nationalist triumph with the victory at Waterloo; it was an epoch that produced an overabundance of nationalist and historical narratives that would shape how England would see itself in relation to France throughout the nineteenth century. The abolition movement in particular offered writers an opportunity to draw upon and intermingle nationalist motifs, including nationalist readings of the Revolution. It also allowed England and France's

nationalisms and nationalist rivalry to be writ large, playing out on a global stage, and was wrapped up and complicit in each country's efforts for global ascendancy.

The age would take on its own intellectual gravity, pulling writers back to it throughout the Victorian period. The Revolution itself was a rich canvas for literary and historical production because it was filled with both human and historical drama; but the canonical texts that this study explores return to the Revolutionary Period not only to capture its drama, but also in specific response and in relation to moments of crisis in Anglo-French global relations. As this introductory chapter has suggested, the instinct to do so is part of the legacy of the Revolutionary period. English writers at the turn of the nineteenth century found two early modes to process and to find meaning in significant political change in France: they turned to history to temper the chaos of and to contextualize abrupt political upheaval, and they also came to associate Revolutionary narratives with the differences in England and France's global identities and global ambitions, and to rely on Revolutionary narratives to represent the stakes of and lend urgency to their global rivalry.

However, the Victorian authors that this study examines use Revolutionary history and write Revolutionary narratives in part to challenge nationalist forms of historiography as well as the endurance of Revolutionary motifs in popular culture. They replicate the process of returning to the past in order to explain the present, but they are not beholden to it. William Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens return to Revolutionary history not to revive or recall the past in service of the present, but to lament the degree to which the past was perpetually erasing the present in Anglo-French relations. Dickens and Thackeray do so in the form of



historical fiction, returning explicitly to the French Revolution and the Battle of Waterloo, while Brontë offers a more oblique return to history through the rise of the Napoleonic Monsieur Paul Emanuel in *Villette*. Brontë's novel is not historical fiction, but it replicates the historical novel's preoccupation with the relationship between the past and the present through its retrospective narration.

All three novelists return to Revolutionary history in tandem with popular returns to the Revolutionary period in public discourse. Thackeray, Brontë and Dickens mirror these public returns, but they do so to write against them. Thackeray revives the chaos and hysteria of the end of the Napoleonic Wars in order to lampoon its easy return in popular emotion and the degree to which old fears could keep England and France locked in old forms of nationalist aggression. Brontë and Dickens return to history in order to imagine an alternative to it, and a way forward from the endless cycle of national opposition Thackeray identifies. *Villette* and *A Tale of Two Cities* reflect on the nature and limits of national belonging, identification, and international relations. Both writers respond to the real world, but offer an alternative to it that can only exist in the world of fiction. They rely on the literary to overcome the burden of history.

## CHAPTER ONE

### “The Devil’s Code of Honor”: French Invasion and the Return of History in *Vanity Fair*

The end of the Napoleonic wars initially brought an uneasy peace between England and France. The early decades of the nineteenth century were marked by a cold diplomacy between the ancient rivals. But by the 1830s, their strained political relationship had begun to thaw. England greeted Louis-Philippe’s accession to the French throne with cautious optimism. His “July Monarchy” drew support from progressive and conservative elements alike in France, and his commitment to preserving France’s constitutional monarchy seemed to herald a new age of political sympathy between the two powers. In 1833, Edward Bulwer-Lytton wrote in *England and the English*, a work addressed to the French diplomat Talleyrand, “I think your Excellency must have perceived, since your first visit to England, there has been a great change from what formerly was a strong national characteristic – *We no longer hate the French*” (34: italics in original).

The *détente* between the two countries culminated in 1840, as England and France brokered a new *Entente Cordiale*. This “friendly agreement” was designed to facilitate economic and diplomatic exchange between the two nations, and to highlight their common global-political interests. In October 1840, in conjunction with the new accord, the English government agreed to return Napoleon’s body to the French for a state burial in Paris. Napoleon had died in exile on Saint Helena on May 5, 1821, and the return of his body to the French was meant to symbolize renewed faith between the two nations, and to mark an end to the tensions that had

separated them since the Napoleonic period. The Emperor's reburial would finally let the ghosts of Waterloo rest.

Unfortunately, this period of political amiability was short lived. Even before Napoleon's body reached Paris, England and France found themselves at odds over the Egyptian occupation of Syria, and by the middle of the decade had resurrected all of their old national animosities. The mid 1840s saw France re-emerge as an overt imperial power for the first time since the Napoleonic Wars. France's renewed imperial ambitions revived all of the old ghosts of the Napoleonic period, including the quintessential Napoleonic nightmare in England –invasion. Beginning in 1844, an invasion scare took hold in England. The belief was that the development of steam technology would allow the French Navy to easily cross the Channel, and to finally realize the Emperor's failed dream. The positive change in England's perception of France that Edward Bulwer-Lytton promoted in his letter to Talleyrand disappeared in an instant. In its wake, the long history of antagonism between the two countries came rushing back. Popular discourse in England returned to the Napoleonic period as a means to process and to underscore the current threat from France.

The ease with which England looked back to earlier history suggests the old emotions towards France were buried just below the surface of the national psyche. However, the ferocity with which old fears took hold, the facility with which history became a context for the current affair, and finally the fluidity with which Napoleonic-era narratives resurfaced is, as the introductory chapter of this work suggested, a product of how England had learned to process sudden political

upheaval in France and to deal with the menace of French global ambition. When it came to France, England reflexively looked back to the old to understand the new.

William Thackeray followed the breakdown in Anglo-French relations in the 1840s very closely, and he returned to the Napoleonic period in his own writing at the same moment that popular discourse began to look back to the age of Waterloo in response to modern events. In the middle of the French invasion scare in England, Thackeray began to serialize *Vanity Fair*, and in the middle of his novel, he returns to the Battle of Waterloo itself. Thackeray doesn't depict the battle as a moment of great triumph for England; indeed, he doesn't depict the battle at all. His story stays with the English men and women who have accompanied the British army to Brussels. As the Battle of Waterloo unfolds off-stage, Thackeray captures the collapse in English civilian confidence in the army and the chaos that ensues as rumors reach the capital that a French army is about to invade the city. Thackeray replicates the dynamics of the modern invasion scare in his Waterloo chapters, and this chapter will use the invasion scare as a context for *Vanity Fair*. It will first examine how Thackeray wrote about Anglo-French relations at the beginning of the 1840s, when the *Entente Cordiale* was signed. It will then trace the development of the invasion scare in England, and the reporting of it in both the mainstream and satirical press. Finally, it will examine *Vanity Fair* in relation to the invasion panic, arguing that Thackeray doesn't return to the Napoleonic period because he was caught up in the hysteria surrounding the invasion threat, but rather because he was dismayed by it. His depiction of Waterloo functions as meta-history. He historicizes in order to critique the impulse to do so, and he caricatures the invasion scare in

order to lampoon the ease with which English public discourse had revived old fears regarding the French and readopted old nationalist poses.<sup>1</sup>

“They hate us, my dear, profoundly and desperately”: Thackeray and the *Entente Cordiale*

Thackeray followed the events surrounding the reburial of Napoleon Bonaparte with great interest. He personally attended Napoleon’s state funeral in Paris on December 15, 1840, and one year later, published his own account of the Emperor’s disinterment at Saint Helena and reburial in Paris, entitled *The Second Funeral of Napoleon*. The work was published under Thackeray’s pseudonym, Michael Angelo Titmarsh, and is an odd mélange of first-hand observation and journalistic composite, as Thackeray collects and translates published accounts of events at Saint Helena and the transport of Napoleon’s body back to France. Thackeray opens his work, which is structured as a series of letters to an imagined English reader, Miss Smith, by noting the avidity with which accounts of Napoleon’s disinterment have been consumed. He writes (as Titmarsh):

Newspapers have been filled for some days past with details regarding the Saint Helena expedition; many pamphlets have been published; men go about crying little books and broad-sheets filled with real and sham particulars, and from these scarce and valuable documents the following pages are chiefly compiled. (*Second Funeral of Napoleon* 6)

Thackeray’s *Second Funeral* is a product but also a parody of this periodical culture. As Titmarsh, he can’t hide his contempt for the ways in which Napoleon’s disinterment has been sensationalized in England and France, and he collects French language accounts of the ceremony on Saint Helena in part to ridicule them.

In the early pages of the work, Thackeray often flaunts his own bilingualism by critiquing the melodramatic diction used in French accounts of Napoleon's return from exile. He has little patience for the sentimental and saccharine prose with which the French writers celebrate the Emperor's return from the South Atlantic.

However, his critical commentary disappears when his account reaches the point in the official ceremony when Napoleon's body is uncovered for the first time in nineteen years. At that moment, Thackeray shifts from a his own summary of events on Saint Helena to a translation from an unidentified French account describing the moment Napoleon's coffin is opened. Thackeray translates:

It is difficult to describe with what anxiety and emotion those who were present waited for the moment which was to expose to them all that death had left of Napoleon. Notwithstanding the singular state of preservation of the tomb and coffins, we could scarcely hope to find anything but some misshapen remains of the least perishable part of the costume to evidence the identity of the body. But when Dr. Guillard raised the sheet of satin, an indescribable feeling of surprise and affection was expressed by the spectators, many of whom burst into tears. The Emperor was himself before their eyes! -the features of the face, though changed, were perfectly recognized -the hands extremely beautiful -his well-known costume had suffered but little, and the colours were easily distinguished. The attitude itself was full of ease; and but for the fragments of the satin lining which covered as with a fine gauze several parts of the uniform, we might have

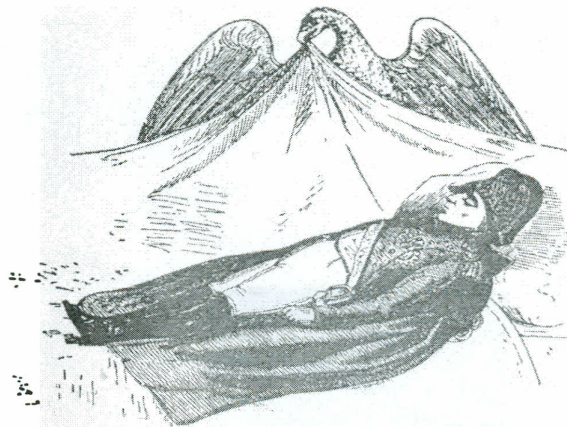
believed we still saw Napoleon before us, lying on his bed of state.

(*Second Funeral of Napoleon* 15-16)

When translating in *Second Funeral*, Thackeray typically preserves a trace of the original French, often quoting French expressions before rendering them into English. Here, he offers the French perspective without an editorial frame to distance the reader from the narration. The French nationalist sentimentality that disturbs Thackeray elsewhere in *Second Funeral* is still present, but in this case, he does not critique it. He instead lets the full weight of the moment hit the reader, and allows his English audience to share in the realization that time has not touched the Emperor. Thackeray was so taken by this moment that he replicated it on the title page of *Second Funeral*:

## THE SECOND FUNERAL

OF



AND

## THE CHRONICLE OF THE DRUM.

By MR. M. A. TITMARSH.

LONDON:—HUGH CUNNINGHAM, ST MARTIN'S PLACE,

Illustration: Title Page of Thackeray's *The Second Funeral of Napoleon* (1841)

The title page portrays the French imperial eagle gently lifting the funeral shroud from Napoleon's body, revealing the perfectly preserved emperor. The image is ambiguous as to whether the eagle is removing the shroud, which would suggest a moment of reawakening, or simply lifting the veil briefly before once again allowing the Emperor to rest. Thackeray controlled and frequently produced the illustrations in his works, and making this image the opening to *Second Funeral* suggests that Thackeray's primary concern in writing it was to understand what Napoleon's return meant. The addition of the imperial eagle indicates that Thackeray quickly recognized that Napoleon's disinterment could inaugurate a new age of empire in France, and could mark not an end to Napoleonic history, but its rebirth.

In *Second Funeral*, Thackeray sees the potential for the French sentimentality surrounding Napoleon's reburial to morph into a more sinister form of nationalism, one dormant since Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. While waiting for Napoleon's funeral in Paris to begin, Thackeray, who is now narrating from personal experience in the account, walks down the *Grands Boulevards* in Paris and closely inspects the statues erected in Napoleon's honor. He realizes they are a façade, observing:

At a little distance, to be sure, you could not see the cracks, and pedestals and statues *looked* like marble. At some distance you could not tell but that the wreaths and eagles were gold embroidery, and not gilt-paper; the great tricolored flags damask, and not striped calico. One would think that these sham splendours betokened sham respect, if one had not known that the name of Napoleon is held in real reverence." (*Second Funeral of Napoleon* 46-47)



Thackeray realizes that the counterfeit displays reveal that Louis-Philippe's government is only interested in temporarily celebrating Napoleonic history. The statues are not designed to preserve the Emperor's memory for future generations, but are meant to motivate the present one. Throughout his reign, Louis-Philippe found himself on unstable political ground, and constantly sought to shore up his popular support in France. By honoring Napoleon and trumpeting France's imperial past, Louis-Philippe could tap into the groundswell of popular emotion that the Emperor still elicited among the French people and could appease republican leaders in his own government. The cheap, hastily erected statues along streets of Paris were proof for Thackeray that the French government was only interested in the political use of history.

He also understood that the next natural political step would be to direct this renewed nationalist euphoria towards France's old enemy. While observing the imperial fervor infecting the metropolitan citizenry, Thackeray asks, "did the French nation, or did they not, intend to offer up some of us English over the imperial grave; and were the games to be concluded by a massacre?" (*Second Funeral of Napoleon* 49). Thackeray imagines the second funeral of Napoleon ending with a nationalist blood sacrifice, completing the ritual of return in popular memory to the nationalist climate of the Napoleonic period.

England and France's *Entente Cordiale* was designed to mark a new beginning for the two countries, and the re-burial of Napoleon was intended to show how far the two rivals had come since the Napoleonic period; but Thackeray, from the moment the accord was signed, sensed a different reality. He recognized that

looking back might show how little had change, and that returning to history might reawaken it. He also understood that history could be a powerful political weapon, and in the hands of Louis-Philippe's government could be used to marshal popular emotion against England. In *Second Funeral*, Thackeray is deeply distrustful of the *détente*, and he rages to his imagined English reader, Miss Smith:

They hate us, my dear, profoundly and desperately; and there never was such a hollow humbug in the world as the French alliance. Men get a character for patriotism in France merely by hating England. Directly they go into strong opposition, they appeal to the people, and have their hold on the people by hating England in common with them. Why? It is a long story; and the hatred may be accounted for by many reasons, both political and social. Any time these eight hundred years this ill-will has been going on, and has been transmitted, on the French side, not on ours; we have had no (or few) defeats to complain of, -no Invasions to make us angry." (*Second Funeral of Napoleon* 35-36)

Thackeray's sense that the long legacy of hatred and nationalist opposition between England and France was a one-sided French affair would change by the time he wrote *Vanity Fair* in 1847-1848, and, in the interval, England *would* face the prospect of invasion. But in the immediate wake of the *Entente Cordiale*, he felt there was no moving forward from the past for France because hatred of the English had become a national inheritance, part of France's patrimony.

His acrimony at this moment in *Second Funeral* stems from an incident that occurred as Napoleon's body was being transported back to Paris from Saint Helena,

one that would preview what was in store for Anglo-French relations for the rest of the 1840s. In response to England's offer to return Napoleon's body, Louis-Philippe sent his son, the Prince de Joinville, as his ambassador and tasked him to bring the Emperor's body back to France. Shortly after the official transfer of Napoleon's remains to the French at Saint Helena, a ceremony during which Napoleon was given full military honors by the British government, and while the Prince de Joinville's ship, the *Belle Poule*, was en route back to France, word reached the French crew that England and France were near hostilities over the Egyptian occupation of Syria. Joinville reacted by ordering his crew to demolish their cabins and convert them into additional gun batteries, he also ordered them to be ready to scuttle the ship should the English try to seize Napoleon's coffin. Joinville's act of military bravado infuriated Thackeray, who saw the French Prince's rapid shift from peacetime to war-footing as nothing more than stagecraft, an attempt to play the nationalist hero in order to augment his political stature in France. He writes:

The French captain takes his charge on board, and the first thing we afterwards hear of him is the determination "*qu'il a su faire passer*" into all his crew to sink rather than yield up the body of the Emperor *aux mains de l'étranger* -into the hands of the foreigner. My dear Monseigneur, is not this *par trop fort*? Suppose "the foreigner" had wanted the coffin, could he not have kept it? Why shew this uncalled-for valour, this extraordinary alacrity at sinking? Sink or blow yourself up as much as you please, but your royal highness must see that the genteel thing would have been to wait until you were asked to do so, before you offended good-natured, honest people, who,

heaven help them, have never shewn themselves at all murderously inclined towards you." (*Second Funeral of Napoleon* 34)

Thackeray cannot contain his rage that the Prince de Joinville would so quickly adopt a nationalist pose, and reflexively return to a posture of aggressive, paranoid, nationalist opposition. While there were real political stakes in the Near Eastern Crisis, Thackeray senses nothing more than political humbug in Joinville's response to the diplomatic flare-up between England and France. Joinville opposes an enemy who hasn't provoked him. By doing so, he can reposition himself as a quasi-Republican hero protecting the body of the Emperor against the English enemy, a political sleight-of-hand akin to his father's use of Napoleonic memory in Paris.

The Prince de Joinville's nationalist pretension was unnecessary; Napoleon's body was ultimately returned to France without incident, and the Near Eastern Crisis was resolved by 1841. However, Joinville's impetuous return to un-nuanced, unadulterated Anglo-French antagonism would prove to be a harbinger for cross-Channel relations in the coming years, as popular discourse steadily recalled and returned to the high period of Anglo-French aggression during the Napoleonic Wars. Thackeray's visceral reaction to Joinville's willingness to revive the war helps to frame how he would have read the turn in public memory to the Waterloo era.

"The Channel is No Longer a Barrier": Invasion and the Collapse of the *Entente Cordiale*

The Prince de Joinville himself triggered the popular return to history; on May 17, 1844, he anonymously published an article in *La Presse*, advocating that French maritime forces should be increased to include a significant number of steam ships. He argued that steamers would allow the French navy to overcome its only

historical obstacle to a successful invasion of England -the wind. Steam technology would eliminate the need for perfect wind conditions in support of any French invasion. His push to improve the French navy was due to lingering embarrassment over the Near Eastern Crisis. France had been ultimately unable to extend its global influence in the region because of England's naval acumen. Although the two forces were closely matched, England's ships successfully bombarded the Egyptian coast until the French-backed Egyptian leader, Mehmet Ali, finally relented and agreed to give up control of Syria.<sup>2</sup>

Joinville's proposal in *La Presse* to construct a French steam navy was part of his commitment to end England's naval superiority. The article itself was an abridged version of a pamphlet he wrote entitled *L'Etat Des Forces Navales De La France* [Status of French Naval Forces]. After its abridged appearance in *La Press*, the pamphlet was rapidly republished in the French periodical, *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and within days of its appearance in France, had begun to circulate in England. It was quickly known that Louis-Philippe's son had written the tract, and his authorship seemed to imply French governmental sanction for the project to revitalize the French navy through steam technology. It also shifted the tenor of the pamphlet from speculation to threat.

The English press reacted with a mixture of rage and fear over the prospect of a French steam fleet, and denounced Joinville's pamphlet for its revival of Anglo-French antagonism. On May 27, 1844, *The Examiner* assessed the realpolitik behind Joinville's manifesto, "it seems certain that the Prince laid his book before his father, who hesitated much between the fear of offending Queen Victoria and the desire of

presenting his son to France as one of its inveterate heroes. The latter prevailed." ("The Prince de Joinville" 27 May 1844) *The Examiner* sketches the same political dynamic Thackeray observed in *Second Funeral*, with Louis Philippe electing to advance his family's popular standing at England's expense.

*The Times* saw even greater danger in disrupting the delicate *détente* between England and France, and the careful balance in their military strengths that kept the two powers largely in political checkmate. It warned:

The worst consequences that would result to France from the superiority of the steam navy of England, so long as its army is so greatly superior to that of England, would be the temporary loss of its commerce and the bombardment of some of its seaports; whilst the consequence of French superiority to England would be the invasion of the whole kingdom." ("English and French Navies" 24 May 1844)

The fact that French steam technology could facilitate a French invasion of England was immediately seized upon and sensationalized in the British press. Joinville himself only viewed the possibility of invasion as a strategic benefit of steam technology, not its *raison d'être*. He was much more interested in the boost that steam technology would give to national security and morale, writing:

By sea, as well as on land, we wish to be respected. Here, as elsewhere, we want to be able to protect our interests, preserve our independence, and defend our honor, from wherever threats may emerge to challenge them. (Joinville 2)<sup>3</sup>

Joinville's focus was on securing French interests through an enhanced navy, one that would match the English Royal Navy in prestige and power, and he viewed the possibility that France could invade England as a result of steam technology as a necessary weapon in France's diplomatic and military strategic arsenal. The British popular press, however, focused primarily on this possibility, and saw the threat of invasion from France as a frightening return to the terror of the Napoleonic period.

The invasion of England had long been a dream of Napoleon's. From 1803 to 1805, Napoleon maintained an invasion army of 200,000 men known as the *Armée des côtes de l'Océan* (Army of the Ocean Coasts) or the *Armée de l'Angleterre* (Army of England), as well as French flotilla of invasion barges in ports in France and in Holland ready to launch for England. Napoleon's belief, right up until the moment he was defeated at Waterloo, was that his forces could cross the Channel if they could only secure a few hours of favorable wind.<sup>4</sup> Even if French invasion was realistically never more than a Napoleonic fantasy in the early nineteenth century, it continued to haunt the edges of the British popular imagination, and fear of it provided a cognitive and emotional framework for a quick return to the Napoleonic period in public discourse.<sup>5</sup>

*Punch* magazine offered one of the earliest responses to Joinville's pamphlet. Since Thackeray was closely associated with the magazine in this period, he was most likely following the invasion scare from its earliest stages, especially since the Prince de Joinville was once again center stage. *Punch's* editors recalled that Joinville had made a formal state visit to London in 1843:

You were kindly received in our perfidious island last year. You visited our

cities, towns, and country, our towns inland and seaboard. And your benevolent patriotism instantly pointed out to you, while considering the 'Etat des Forces Navales de la France,' that it would be very easy to burn all these fair quiet towns, lying so peaceful and confiding along the water side. They were entirely defenceless, and their unprotected condition touched your great soul, and suggested to your Christian spirit the easy opportunity of plunder...The riches accumulated upon our coasts and in our ports would no longer be in safety. Our arsenals are crowded with ships –how they would burn! Our warehouses are full of wealth –what is it for, but for Frenchmen to plunder! Our women are the most beautiful in the world. *Sacrébleu!* How they would scream as five hundred jolly lads from the *Belle Poule* came pouncing down upon them! ("The Prince of Joinville's Amateur-Invasion of England")

*Punch* closes the invective by naming the ship, the *Belle Poule*, that Joinville had captained during the Syrian crisis, thus recalling the militant stance he and his men took against England while transporting Napoleon's body. As Thackeray does in *Second Funeral*, *Punch* portrays Joinville as dangerously opportunistic, and willing to exchange a peacetime stance for war-footing. Whereas Thackeray's frustration with Joinville stemmed from the Prince's ability to pivot so quickly between these two postures, *Punch's* editors take the next logical narrative step and depict Joinville as simultaneously offering peace while planning for war. *Punch* also imagines what Joinville's invasion of England would look like, rendering a remarkably detailed



invasion fantasy in which all of England's island treasures, even its women, are vulnerable to the French incursion.

*Punch* also casts Joinville as explicitly Napoleonic in his ambition, concluding, “we may be perfidious, but at least we have the decency of hypocrisy. We may be sordid, but at least we profess to worship Christian peace –not murder and Napoleon” (“The Prince of Joinville’s Amateur-Invasion of England”). *Punch*'s standard satirical spin on current events makes Joinville's pamphlet an easy target for such an extreme depiction of the French national character; but *Punch*'s caricature of France as a nation disposed to violence was matched in the mainstream press. *The Times* offered the same image of a French national proclivity for violence. On September 3, 1844, *The Times* remarked, “we think them [the French] as fond of blood, and as eager to shed it, as any people on the face of the earth, whether civilized or uncivilized. Whatever glory may belong to a disposition of this kind, we are willing to accord to the French people –at least to that portion of them who constitute the war party, and who are thirsting for a conflict with England” (“The Prince de Joinville And His Critics”). *The Times* hedges its assessment of the French national character by eventually reducing its indictment to “the war party” in France, but only after giving outlet to the alarmist view of France's disposition for violence.

The intensity of these reactions suggests how quickly the old nationalist postures and caricatures could be readopted and revived. In July 1845, Lord Palmerston, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, addressed the House of Commons, assessing the threat of the French navy. He warned, “the Channel is no longer a

barrier. Steam Navigation has rendered that which was before impassable by a military force nothing more than a river passable by a steam bridge" ("National Defences"). Palmerston cultivates the old fear of invasion, and he would continue to raise the alarm regarding France, particularly once the *Entente Cordiale* between England and France finally collapsed in October 1846.

The at-least diplomatic *détente* between the two rivals evaporated as a result of the complicated intrigue of the so-called "Spanish Marriages" affair. On October 10, 1846, Queen Isabella II of Spain married her cousin, Francisco de Asís de Bourbon. On the same day, her sister and presumptive heir, Luisa Fernanda, married King Louis-Philippe's youngest son, Antoine, the Duc de Montpensier. The dual marriage secured French influence over the Spanish court. The *Entente* broke down because the French government had promised Lord Palmerston that Luisa Fernanda's marriage would not go forward until Isabella had given birth to one or more children, thus blocking Luisa's path to the throne, and diminishing Louis-Philippe's influence in Spain. For Palmerston, the "Spanish Marriages" signaled a dangerous increase in French power, and he sought to awaken a sense of public urgency over France's renewed imperial ambitions.

#### Waking John Bull: England and the Politics of Invasion

The post *Entente Cordiale* period marked an interesting shift in popular discourse on France in England. The mainstream press continued to give weight to the possibility of invasion and to echo Palmerston's anxiety regarding France, but the satirical worm had turned, and *Punch* turned its attention towards those who were raising the alarm –and believing in it –in England. This shift corresponds to

the period in which Thackeray began to serialize *Vanity Fair*.<sup>6</sup> In 1847, only a few months after the breakdown of the *Entente Cordiale*, *Punch* ran a cartoon entitled, “Lord Palmerston’s Unpopular Exhibition,” showing the foreign secretary warning an ambivalent John Bull of the “horrible treachery” of the “Spanish Marriages” and the equally unsettling “Confiscation of Cracow,” the Austrian Empire’s annexation of the independent city of Kraków (Cracow), which was seen as a violation of the Congress of Vienna (1815) that had ended the Napoleonic Wars and settled Europe’s political borders.

*Punch* depicts Palmerston as a carnival barker, attempting to sell both acts as a return to Napoleonic-era politics. In the cartoon, it is unclear if Palmerston is attempting to warn the British public that a new age of Anglo-French nationalist strife is at hand, or if he is promoting a return of English and French national antagonism. On the tableau, Louis-Philippe is depicted in Napoleonic dress, and the British Lion has been hastily added to the display in a last-minute effort to market the revival of British nationalism as part of the attraction. *Punch* paints Palmerston with the same brush as Joinville at the beginning of the invasion crisis: they cast him as eager to return to old nationalist postures and to resurrect old anxieties (please see following page).



Illustration: *Punch Magazine*: Volume XII (January-June 1847)

Palmerston sought to raise the alarm in England because he and Britain's military leadership were convinced that England's armed forces were not sufficient to repel a French invasion. England secured its global supremacy through its navy, but by the 1840s, the British fleet was scattered across the globe maintaining outposts and lines of communication throughout the empire. Palmerston recognized that increased defense spending was the only means to secure the coast, and so sought to increase public awareness of the French threat. This meant cultivating English anxieties about the French and continuing to warn of the possibility of invasion in order to marshal public support for action against France. Palmerston's hope was that public panic would place pressure on the Parliament to allocate additional funds for soldiers and to pay to fortify naval strongholds in Chatham, Plymouth, Portsmouth and Sheerness (Partridge, 232). Just as Louis-Philippe in France fostered public memory of the Napoleonic period in order to solidify his political standing, Palmerston drew on it to aid his political ambitions for England's military hegemony.

He was not alone. As Anglo-French tensions mounted in 1847-1848, the hero of Waterloo himself joined the public discussion, and endorsed the perception that Anglo-French history was beginning to repeat itself. On January 5, 1848, *The Times* published a letter written by the Duke of Wellington to Major General John J. Burgoyne, assessing England's vulnerability to French assault. Wellington explicitly framed the contemporary debate in terms of Napoleonic history, writing, "I have taken the year 1804 as the standard, as that was the year in which the invasion was threatened. It was previous to the employment of the armies in the Peninsula or

North America; in short, as nearly as possible similar to the political circumstances in which we stand at this moment" ("The Duke of Wellington's Letter").

More damaging is Wellington's assessment of what he believes will be the English civilian response to French invasion. He writes:

We hear a great deal of the spirit of the people of England; for which no man entertains higher respect than I do. But, unorganized, undisciplined, without systematic subordination established and well understood, this spirit, opposed to the fire of musketry and cannon, and to sabers and bayonets of disciplined troops, would only expose those animated by such spirit to confusion and destruction. ("The Duke of Wellington's Letter")

Wellington predicts full-scale public panic in the face of a French invasion. But other British military leaders felt that just such public panic was dangerously absent in England and sought to foment it. Wellington's "Burgoyne letter" was published in January 1848, but was composed one year earlier on January 9, 1847. In the interval, it circulated privately, and on December 1, 1847, one month before Wellington's missive was made public, *The Times* published an anonymous letter to the editor, written by someone who had read Wellington's assessment of England's national defenses. The unnamed writer, who identifies himself only as "P" --an alias *Punch* would later suggest stands for "Panic" --hints:

There is now in circulation among very few, and almost by stealth, a letter of indescribable importance by a warrior, who, almost 40 years ago, then wrote as well as he fought --*ita scripsisse ut bellasse* --and now, in his 77<sup>th</sup> year, writes even better than he did then. His theme is the condition of the

country as regards invasion, and his statements may make the stoutest heart tremble. ("The National Defences")

The writer's clues leave little doubt that the unnamed warrior-bard is Wellington, and his hints regarding the Burgoyne letter are designed to enhance public curiosity and anxiety over the possibility of invasion. The anonymous correspondent warns that Wellington, "enters into every detail –he names, from personal observation, the most likely places for debarkation –he proves the ease with which it might be effected –he displays the nullity of our means of defense" ("The National Defences"). Wellington may name the most likely sites for the French to land in England, but the unnamed editorialist does not, thereby maximizing public panic and paranoia. *The Times* editorial page offered the perfect space for those invested in the invasion scare for political means to inflame it. Through the whispered prose of an anonymous letter, "P" is able to transform Wellington's sober, professional assessment of England's military readiness into a catalyst for rumor and panic. He avoids quoting from Wellington's letter directly –specifics, after all, would diminish the perception that all of England is vulnerable --but does close with Wellington's own words in order to capitalize on the old soldier's authority and to fully sound the clarion call of invasion. P warns that Wellington writes, "we are no longer 'gainst invasion and the hand of war safe. The country, moreover, requires to be told, that it is no longer insular, that it is connected with the continent by a causeway of steam" ("The National Defences").

Six days later, another unnamed correspondent in *The Times*, who had also read Wellington's letter, continued the effort to draw public attention to the

possibility of French invasion, and to rouse the British people out of what he felt a state of complacency born by peace:

Thirty-Two years of peace have brought in their train numberless blessings, for which it behoves us to be most thankful. But there are concomitant evils. Ease, affluence, commercial and national prosperity, beget an unreasoning sense of security, and enervating habits of self-indulgence. No personal knowledge, realizing the horrors of warfare, counterbalances the dreamy memories of past victories." ("To The Editor of the Times")

For this correspondent, the oft-repeated nationalist accounts of the Napoleonic Wars have rendered the British people ignorant of their contemporary vulnerability. They view the current French threat through the hazy eyes of historical recollection and the popular hagiography of Waterloo –assuming future victories because of past successes. He seeks to shock them into a rapid shift from complacency and over-confidence to fear.

*Punch* ridiculed the renewed warnings of French invasion, and as in its caricature of Lord Palmerston one year earlier, saw the Duke of Wellington as more interested in reviving old forms of nationalism and reawakening old fears about France than in assessing the modern threat. In January 1848, just after the full contents of Wellington's letter were finally made public, *Punch* published a cartoon entitled "Wellington Stirring Up The British Lion" in which Wellington is depicted as trying to prod awake the British Lion with the tip of his plume pen. In the cartoon, Wellington has sheathed his sword for his pen, suggesting the pen has become his weapon of war. Wellington appears in full battle dress, ready to defend the English



coast against the French fleet, while the lion dozes comfortably along the Cliffs of Dover, presumably still enjoying the easy slumber of England's peacetime relations with France. The lion sleepily reassures Wellington, "All right Ole' boy, I shall be ready when I'm wanted." In *Punch's* hands, Wellington is a sad old man -still noble, but stuck in the past, ready, and perhaps hoping for, one last battle with France and one more moment of nationalist glory (please see following page).



Illustration: *Punch Magazine*: Volume XIV (January-June 1848)

*Punch* continued to target those who would raise civilian fears about France in another satirical send-up of the invasion scare entitled “The Kettle Has Done it All,” published in early 1848. In the piece, two English women sit at home watching a new teakettle as it begins to steam; as it does so, one of the women, Mrs. Gerkins, is encouraged to watch it closely and see French shapes in the steam:

Look close to the spout, Madam, and you will behold the French fleet towed by steamers, coming out of the mouth of Boulogne, and crossing the Channel. They have arrived at Dover: and now keep your eye to the spout again, Ma’am, and do you not perceive –of course you do –thousands of boats putting off, full of soldiers, and horses, and field-pieces, to the beach? The whobbling of the kettle, Ma’am, is the lively representation of the guns of Dover Castle, a-firing down upon the shingles. You will now perceive in that cloud the railway train –winding as a sea-serpent –whirling the French army to London. And now, Ma’am –keep your eye close –and you will perceive the French cuirassiers and French infantry, with their swords and bayonets, a-charging of the mob through no end of streets and thoroughfares.” (“The Kettle Has Done It All!”)

*Punch*’s satirical rendering of the invasion scare casts the French threat as something akin to seeing shapes in the clouds as a result of strong suggestion. *Punch* is satirizing the willingness to believe and the gullibility that allows a French army to be seen in a puff of steam, or in the rumor of a steam-navy, simply because someone says it’s there. The vignette also targets the ease with which gossip can translate into fear and the revival of old terrors regarding the French.

“He Will Overpower the English and Be Here Tonight”: *Vanity Fair* and the Invasion Scare

It was amid this backdrop that Thackeray composed *Vanity Fair* and returned to the Napoleonic age himself. The novel's Waterloo chapters (Chapters 28-32) were published by *Punch* in August and September 1847, which places them between the magazine's caricatures of Palmerston and Wellington. In them, Thackeray shares *Punch*'s scorn towards those who would elicit public panic about France as well as the ease with which old fears about the French could resurface.<sup>7</sup> While *Vanity Fair*'s Waterloo chapters were published before Wellington's "Burgoyne letter" was made public, the speed with which *Punch* responded to it and the fact that *Vanity Fair* and *Punch* offer an identical critique of war-mongering and renascent nationalism suggests Thackeray's editorial influence on the Wellington cartoon.

From the beginning of the decade, Thackeray had harbored resentment towards those who would take England and France back to the nationalism and nationalist aggression of the Napoleonic age, an anger that first emerged in *The Second Funeral of Napoleon* (1841) in response to the Prince de Joinville's promise to sink the *Belle Poule* rather than let England have Napoleon's body. Reading *Vanity Fair* as a response to the French invasion scare and the contemporary crisis in Anglo-French relations shows that by the end of the decade, Thackeray was weary that England and France would always return to the past and were doomed to perpetually reenact their part in a never-ending nationalist *pas de deux*.

Thackeray structures his Waterloo chapters to mimic the dynamics of the invasion scare, replicating its geographical and psychological elements. First, he

positions Brussels as a continental stand-in for London. The Belgian capital is effectively transformed into an English city through the flood of English civilians who accompany the British army to Belgium and settle into the city, making it seem, “almost like Old England” (*Vanity Fair* 321). Indeed, Thackeray eventually calls the Belgian capital, “the little colony at Brussels” (*Vanity Fair* 345) and is careful to emphasize how comfortable, safe, and familiar life becomes in Brussels for the English civilians there. He writes, “the place was full of English soldiery...English bugles woke them in the morning; at nightfall they went to bed to the note of the British fife and drum” (*Vanity Fair* 315). This sense of security and comfortable, national familiarity makes the eventual French menace to the city that much more dramatic and personal for Thackeray’s English readers, and makes the French threat to Brussels a threat to an English city.

Furthermore, Thackeray’s representational framework, which places the Battle of Waterloo itself off-stage, and limits the reader’s perspective to events in Brussels alone, replicates the geographical schema of the invasion scare, as the tension in the Waterloo chapters stems from the progress a rumored, but unperceived, French army marching on the city. In fact, Thackeray’s Waterloo narrative so effectively mimics the invasion dynamic that his narrator actually pauses to reassure the reader, “we of peaceful London City have never beheld –and please God never shall witness –such a scene of hurry and alarm, as that which Brussels presented” (*Vanity Fair* 358). He then launches into an extended description of the English civilian panic in the streets of Brussels as the French army approaches.

Crowds rushed to the Namur gate, from which direction the noise proceeded, and many rode along the level chaussée, to be in advance of any intelligence from the army. Each man asked his neighbors for news; and even great English lords and ladies condescended to speak to persons whom they did not know. The friends of the French went abroad, wild with excitement, and prophesying the triumph of their Emperor. The merchants closed their shops, and came out to swell the general chorus of alarm and clamour. Women rushed to the churches and crowded the chapels, and knelt and prayed on the flags and steps. The dull sound of the cannon went on rolling, rolling. Presently carriages with travelers began to leave the town, galloping away by the Ghent barrier. The prophecies of the French partisans began to pass for facts. 'He has cut the armies in two,' it was said. 'He is marching straight on Brussels. He will overpower the English and be here to-night.'

(*Vanity Fair* 358)

Thackeray evokes a sense of distance between the two cities in order to collapse or subvert it, and his reassurance that London has never known such scenes of panic and chaos only serves to remind the reader of present fears that this is what would happen in the capital city if the French invaded, and allows Thackeray to link *Vanity Fair* to the invasion hysteria.

Thackeray doesn't do so to join the voices warning how unprepared the English were for a French invasion, but to lampoon and to lament the ways in which old fears about the French were being cultivated in the civilian population. Rumor reigns in Thackeray's Brussels, and a cacophony of competing narratives fills the

city as English men and women share what they've heard about the French army from those who claim to have information on the subject. As Thackeray's narrator notes in the previous passage, panic spreads so quickly that "the prophecies of the French partisans began to pass for facts." The English men and women in Thackeray's *Waterloo* are so ready to believe the worst stories they hear about the French that they accept wholesale any prediction about French aggression, even from those who stand to benefit from invasion.

In *Vanity Fair*, the civilian panic begins in the same manner as the contemporary invasion scare, through the circulation of a piece of French military propaganda. In the text, shortly after the Allied Army leaves Brussels, Napoleon's "Proclamation from Avesnes," begins to circulate in the capital. The Emperor's eve-of-battle declaration is designed to solidify his support among Belgian civilians, and to rile up his French troops, but in *Vanity Fair*, it primarily serves to unnerve the English population in the city. Thackeray paraphrases the document at length, which lets him trace how its particular pronouncements begin to work on the civilian imagination. He writes:

The Emperor's proclamation from Avesnes had been distributed everywhere plentifully in Brussels. 'Soldiers!' it said, 'this is the anniversary of Marengo and Friedland, by which the destinies of Europe were twice decided. Then, as after Austerlitz, as after Wagram, we were too generous. We believed in the oaths and promises of princes whom we suffered to remain upon their thrones. Let us march once more to meet them. We and they, are we not still the same men? Soldiers! These same Prussians who are so arrogant to-day,

were three to one against you at Jena, and six to one at Montmirail. Those among you who were prisoners in England can tell their comrades what frightful torments they suffered on board the English hulks.' (*Vanity Fair* 348)

Napoleon seeks to inspire his supporters by recalling their history of struggle against the English. He revives the old animosities and emotions in order to direct them anew against the enemy. His proclamation prompts the first frisson of fear among the English, and Thackeray links this genesis of doubt to the resurrection of nationalist history and the nationalist use of history.

One of the many partisans who read Napoleon's proclamation is Jos Sedley's valet, Isidor, a Belgian servant and secret supporter of Napoleon. Isidor soon returns to his master and shares Napoleon's predictions of success. In *Vanity Fair's* Waterloo section, Thackeray centers his narration on Jos Sedley, who in the course of only three short chapters pivots from pompous certainty that the English will triumph on the battlefield to unrestrained panic that the French are about to invade Brussels. Jos is Thackeray's proxy for those English civilians willing to believe the invasion hype and who trust any prediction that's based on historical precedent.

Isidor's summary of Napoleon's "Proclamation from Avesnes" rattles Jos's nationalist certainty very quickly. He presents it as fresh "news" from the front, and tells Jos that the Duke of Wellington's army has been "crushed" by Napoleon. Jos and Isidor's subsequent conversation allows Thackeray to lampoon not only the civilian proclivity to panic, but also the impulse to look back to history in order to process present events. He sets the two men up as dueling nationalist gossips, both



relying on historical precedent to prove their cases and to out-terrify the other. Jos scoffs at Isidor's testimony that Wellington has been "crushed," confidently replying, "crushed, psha!" said Jos, whose heart was pretty stout at breakfast-time. "The Duke has gone to beat the Emperor, as he has beaten all his generals before" (*Vanity Fair* 349). As Isidor adds additional details of what he's heard from fellow servants about the English defeat, Jos gradually begins to panic, insisting, "'we are three to one, sir, against any force Boney can bring into the field,' Mr. Sedley objected; 'the Austrians and the Russians are on the march. He must, he shall be crushed,' Jos said, slapping his hand on the table" (*Vanity Fair* 349).

Isidor seizes on Jos's uncertainty, offering the details of Napoleon's Avesnes declaration as evidence that the French will win the war. He confidently tells Jos:

'The Prussians were three to one at Jena, and he took their army and kingdom in a week. They were six to one at Montmirail, and he scattered them like sheep...Look here, here it is in black and white. Here's the proclamation of His Majesty the emperor and King,' said the now declared partisan of Napoleon, and taking the document from his pocket, Isidor sternly thrust it into his master's face, and already looked upon the frogged coat and valuables as his own spoil. (*Vanity Fair* 349)

Almost immediately after Napoleon's declaration appears in *Vanity Fair*, it is transformed from propaganda to popular fact. Isidor seizes on it as "black and white" proof that the Emperor will triumph, and its most terrifying predictions begin to work on Jos's mind. Thackeray replicates the effect that Joinville's

pamphlet had in England, and the quick shift it went through from self-interested speculation to sinister and certain threat.

He also revives a Revolutionary narrative in this scene, coding it onto Jos and Isidor's dynamic. As soon as Isidor declares his partisanship, he begins to covet Jos's possessions, mentally taking possession of Jos's "frogged coat." He morphs into a quasi-Revolutionary figure, waiting for the moment his wealthy master will finally be overthrown. Thackeray links nationalist posturing to the rebirth of anachronous narratives about the French. The old nightmares of the Revolution re-emerge in Brussels as rumors gain traction that the French army is marching closer to the city. The old narrative of proletarian upheaval gives poignancy to and a way for the English civilians to process the French threat, and it certainly fuels the public panic. Becky Sharp encounters an English aristocrat, Lady Bareacres, who has sewn her diamonds into her clothing in order to hide them from the French (*Vanity Fair* 365), and even the typically unflappable Becky, who sleeps through her husband's departure for the battle, succumbs to the popular hysteria and takes the precaution of "a little needlework for her own advantage; she stitched away the major part of her trinkets, bills, and banknotes about her person" (*Vanity Fair* 372).

In their terror, the English civilians in Brussels mentally transform the French army into a Revolutionary mob. Thackeray satirizes the facility with which this old fear about the French could feel new and relevant and could be used to fuel even greater panic. Just as the real-world French threat to the English mainland was seen as believable because it dovetailed with historical fears about the French and with the worst English nightmares of the Napoleonic period, the possibility that a

quasi French mob was about to invade Brussels and seize all property there rings true to the English civilians in the city because it matches old horror stories about French violence.

Paranoia that English civilians are about to relive the worst terrors of the Revolution continues to mount in Brussels, prompting a mass exodus from the city among those who can find means to travel. As the invasion hysteria reaches its climax, Jos Sedley's confidence finally collapses when a Belgian hussar returns to Brussels to report the English army has been routed and the French forces are *en route* to the city. The Belgian soldier is named Regulus, and Thackeray notes, "he had been born in the revolutionary times" (*Vanity Fair* 360). Regulus is named for the Roman General Marcus Atilius Regulus (3<sup>rd</sup> Century BC), and his name recalls the popularity of Roman republicans during the French Revolution, once again allowing Thackeray to evoke the Revolution in tandem with prophecies of English destruction. He cultivates a cognitive association between English fear of the French and a tendency to recall earlier history. Regulus's report is also a sham; he lies about the English defeat, and exaggerates the horrors of the battle, in order to justify his flight from it. Thackeray targets those who cultivate popular panic for personal ends, the same dynamic *Punch* satirized in "Lord Palmerston's Unpopular Exhibition" and in "Wellington Stirring Up the British Lion," the cartoon that appeared shortly after Thackeray serialized the Waterloo section of *Vanity Fair*.

Regulus's self-interested fear-mongering works. Jos's remaining confidence in the English army evaporates, so much so, that he even fears he might be mistaken for a British officer because he's grown out his mustache -which is of course what

Jos had hoped would happen when he believed the English would win. He frantically urges Isidor to shave off the offending mustache. In his terror, he mistakenly tells Isidor, "*coupez-moi, vite! Coupez-moi*" (*Vanity Fair* 363). Jos accidentally tells Isidor to "cut him" not to shave him, and, Thackeray adds, "Isidor thought for a moment he had gone mad, and that he wished his valet to cut his throat" (*Vanity Fair* 363). Jos's linguistic infelicity briefly leaves him vulnerable to a replay of the Revolutionary violence of *la guillotine*. Even this comic misunderstanding is tinged with the threat of Revolutionary violence. Once Thackeray begins to narrate the panic in Brussels, his reflex is to code events historically through cognitive links to the Revolution.

Thackeray is ultimately satirizing the impulse to look back and the facility with which the worst fears about the French are accepted as fact because they carry the weight of precedent. In the novel, the English civilians believe Napoleon will win because he has won before. They condescend to history, assuming it is an accurate guide for present events. Thackeray critiques the public willingness to read the past in the present, and does so by returning to history himself, and revising it in a way that collapses historical distance. He draws on popular imagery from the contemporary invasion scare, grafting it onto his depiction of the Battle of Waterloo. In the novel, as Napoleon's forces reportedly march closer to the city, the rumors of their arrival begin to echo the worst-case scenarios reported in the British press at the height of the 1840s invasion scare. English civilians in Brussels learn the frightening news:

The Duke of Wellington was retreating upon the capital, and a great battle must be fought under its walls probably, of which the chances were more than doubtful. The Duke of Wellington had but twenty thousand British troops on whom he could rely...and with this handful his Grace had to resist a hundred and fifty thousand men that had broken into Belgium under Napoleon. Under Napoleon! What warrior was there, however famous and skilful, that could fight at odds with him?...The few English that could be brought to resist him would perish at their posts, and the conqueror would pass over their bodies into the city." (*Vanity Fair* 370-371)

Thackeray transposes the modern stakes onto the historic battle. *Vanity Fair's* historiography denies a contemporary reader the comfortable distance of history; the imagined panic in the streets and the prospect of an invading French force would have seemed painfully familiar, and the historical frighteningly prescient. It is a reflection of the degree to which, for a Victorian, when it came to England and France, the "new" always seemed old, and the present always a repetition of history. But Thackeray is not beholden to that belief; rather he uses *Vanity Fair* to bemoan the widespread willingness to believe that history was constantly repeating itself in Anglo-French relations.

The civilian panic in *Vanity Fair* eventually subsides, once the French cannons cease to sound in the distance; however, Thackeray closes his Waterloo chapters not by trumpeting the English victory over the French, but by ruminating on the role that historical recollection has played in the seemingly endless rivalry between the two countries:

The tale is in every Englishman's mouth: and you and I, who were children when the great battle was won and lost, are never tired of hearing and recounting the history of that famous action. Its remembrance rankles still in the bosoms of millions of the countrymen of those brave men who lost the day. They pant for an opportunity of revenging that humiliation; and if a contest, ending in a victory on their part, should ensue, elating them in their turn, and leaving its cursed legacy of hatred and rage behind to us, there is no end to the so-called glory and shame, and to the alternations of successful and unsuccessful murder, in which two high-spirited nations might engage. Centuries hence, we Frenchmen and Englishmen might be boasting and killing each other still, carrying out bravely the Devil's code of honor. (*Vanity Fair* 374)

Thackeray imagines England and France locked in a continuous cycle of violence and retribution, constantly reliving and remembering history in order to fuel and give meaning to present strife. His account of Waterloo is deeply metahistorical; he looks back in order to reflect on the cultural impulse to do so. He modernizes Waterloo, lacing it with contemporary anxieties regarding French invasion, and returning to the Napoleonic Wars just as popular memory was doing so as a means to understand and to underscore the most recent French threat. Thackeray satirizes the invasion panic, but he does so in order to ridicule and lament the ease with which old fears could become new, the facility with which old nationalist postures could be readopted, and the seemingly ceaseless return of history between England and France.

Thackeray also denies his English readers the typical patriotic inspiration they would draw from hearing stories about Waterloo. He observes that he and his contemporaries “are never tired of hearing and recounting the history of that famous action,” but he refuses to indulge in the same nationalist historiography. His Waterloo is not a nationalist bedtime story, which keeps it from kindling even more patriotic fervor. He doesn’t offer an account of an epic battle fought and won by monumental Englishmen towering over and out-maneuvering a malevolent French foe. Thackeray takes *the* triumphant moment of English nationalism in the nineteenth century and turns it on its head, making it a tale of English uncertainty and cowardice. He uses historical reflection to controvert what he saw from the beginning of the decade as the dark side of historical reflection, specifically when it came to England and France: that it always only revived the same old hatred, fear and nationalist bloodlust.

*Vanity Fair* emerged in a period when those nationalist emotions were bursting yet again to the surface and were fueling public discourse on Anglo-French relations. As this chapter has suggested, Thackeray’s novel is a direct result of the return of these nationalist animosities and reflects the turn in popular memory back to the events of the Napoleonic period as a response to the renewed antagonism between the two powers. By the 1840s, decades of peace between England and France had cooled their nationalist resentments, but that peace evaporated in an instant, and Revolutionary era narratives about France and Napoleon resurfaced from almost the moment the Emperor’s body was unearthed on Saint Helena. By the time Thackeray completed his serialization of *Vanity Fair* in July 1848,

revolution had come again to France and yet another French monarchy had fallen. Over the next few years in England, history in France would seem to repeat itself again as yet another Napoleon emerged from the ashes of revolution.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *“Vous ne voulez pas de moi pour voisin”: Charlotte Brontë, Villette, and the rise of Napoleon III*

In the first months of 1848, the unstable political ground that French King Louis-Philippe occupied throughout his reign finally gave way. Louis-Philippe had come to power as a populist monarch, but steadfastly refused to extend the electoral franchise beyond a small landowning minority in France. His resistance to greater suffrage proved to be his undoing. A series of widespread protests in Paris in February 1848 culminated in the collapse of the so-called “July Monarchy” and the formal declaration of France’s Second Republic. Louis-Philippe fled across the Channel, seeking asylum in England, and even before Thackeray finished serializing the final chapters of *Vanity Fair* in *Punch*, the monarch whose son had ruminated on the possibility of invading England found himself the island’s unexpected guest.

After his fall, another member of a French political dynasty slipped quietly across the Channel. Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, Napoleon I’s nephew, spent almost all of Louis-Philippe’s reign in exile. He tried unsuccessfully to stage *coup d’état* in 1836 and 1840, but couldn’t marshal the popular support his uncle did when he returned from exile on Elba Island in 1815. Louis-Napoléon saw his chance to regain political power after the February 1848 French Revolution that toppled Louis-Philippe’s government, and he quickly left exile in England to seek public office in France. He relied on and cultivated the memory of France’s greatness under his uncle, cloaking his campaign in Napoleonic nostalgia. It worked. In December 1848, he was elected the first president of the Second Republic by a popular landslide. However, he shared his namesake’s political ambition, and only

three years later seized additional power in a *coup d'état* on December 2, 1851, dissolving the French National Assembly on the forty-seventh anniversary of his uncle Napoleon Bonaparte's coronation as Emperor of the French. One year later, on December 2, 1852, he would bring the Napoleonic narrative full circle, assuming the title, Napoleon III, and formally inaugurating the Second French Empire.<sup>1</sup>

Louis-Napoléon's rise in France was firmly linked to the public memory of his uncle, and his political trajectory mirrored that of the first Bonaparte, who rose to power in the wake of the first French Revolution. His ascent seemed to suggest that history in France was beginning to repeat itself, particularly because his political rhetoric promised France's reemergence as a great imperial power. However, he had also lived in England for two years, and had even served as a Special Constable during the April 1848 Chartist demonstrations on Kennington Common. He spoke English fluently, and in his speeches espoused admiration for English cultural institutions and an ambition to reconcile the two ancient rivals. As he rose to power in France, it was not at all clear if his rule would mark a new period of *détente* and reconciliation for England and France, or a renewal of their historical antagonism.

His political advancement was greeted with deep ambivalence in England. His profession of peace and good-will towards England was certainly seen as a hopeful sign, but Louis-Napoléon also made it clear that his goal was to return France to its former imperial glory. The English press initially reacted with cautious optimism regarding the new Napoleon's emergence on the world stage. The public hysteria surrounding the invasion scare had died down, and the early hope was that Louis-Napoléon would bring England and France closer together after a particularly

fraught period in their shared history. But this optimism eventually gave way to the conviction that this second French emperor would follow in his uncle's footsteps and would take the two countries back to war.

It was against this political backdrop that Charlotte Brontë composed *Villette*. She wrote the novel's third volume in November-December 1852, just as Louis-Napoléon was completing his meteoric rise in the French government. This chapter will read Brontë's novel in relation to the popular reaction to the new French leader, and will argue that it was influenced by it and reflects the mixture of caution and curiosity with which the British press responded to Louis-Napoléon. Reading the novel in this way helps to illuminate one of Brontë more enigmatic narrative decisions in *Villette*: her decision to make Monsieur Paul Emanuel, the temperamental professor at Madame Beck's *Pensionnat*, the love interest for the novel's protagonist, Lucy Snowe. Monsieur Paul's ascent in the narrative comes quite suddenly. For the first two volumes of *Villette*, he is a minor character, appearing periodically to pester and challenge Lucy Snowe, an angry gadfly who flutters off as quickly as he appears, often disappearing for long sections of the novel. But when Brontë turns to the third volume of her text, Monsieur Paul swiftly becomes the narrative's center of gravity: his comings-and-goings are the principal gossip of the school, and he is quickly elevated to the role of Lucy's romantic interest.

Monsieur Paul's sudden rise in the text reflects Louis-Napoléon popular emergence on the political stage, and in the early pages of *Villette*'s third volume, Lucy repeatedly tells the reader that the imperious little professor reminds her of

Napoleon Bonaparte. Lucy finds herself drawn to him. She is uncertain how to react to his forcefulness and his will to dominate their encounters, but also finds in him a special equal, a partner whose temperament is the exact opposite and perfect complement to her own. In short, she evinces the same cautious interest in her Napoleon as the British press did to Louis-Napoléon.

Recognizing this allows us to view *Villette* as political allegory and helps to move criticism on the novel away from scholarship that has tended to read Monsieur Paul's character biographically, viewing him as a doppelgänger for Constantin Héger, the strong-willed schoolmaster for whom Charlotte Brontë taught English in Brussels in 1842-1843.<sup>2</sup> This critical impulse doesn't account for the rapidity of Monsieur Paul's movement to the narrative center of the novel. If he is a stand-in for Héger, why isn't he Lucy's love interest from the beginning of the text, and why does Brontë spend so much time hinting that Lucy's match will be the Englishman Doctor John? Even if Lucy was never meant to marry Doctor John, Brontë carefully cultivates the Doctor's character over the course of the novel's first two volumes, and then swiftly ushers him off stage in the third volume, wrapping up his story in only three short paragraphs in Chapter 37. Brontë moves Monsieur Paul into the spotlight with the same narrative ferocity. His name inaugurates the third volume, and four of its first five chapter titles refer to him in some way ("The Watchguard," "Monsieur's Fete," "M. Paul," "M. Paul Keeps His Promise"). This has the effect not only of underscoring Monsieur Paul's new importance for the narrative, but also of making Brontë's novel seem suddenly fixated on him.

Another key change in the narrative landscape occurs in tandem with Monsieur Paul's rise: beginning with the third volume, Brontë's novel quickly becomes more geopolitical. After Lucy flees across the Channel at the beginning of *Villette*, the narrative's global compass shrinks, rarely straying beyond the walls of Madame Beck's school. The *Pensionnat* becomes Lucy's world; but in the third volume the world suddenly seems to come to the school: relationships become nationalized and interpersonal rivalries take on the dynamics of larger geopolitical concerns that are played out in miniature at the school. In particular, the school becomes a narrative space in which the Anglo-French rivalry is re-enacted, and the entrenched cultural differences of that rivalry are the source of the romantic tension in the final third of the novel. Religious difference threatens to keep Lucy and Monsieur Paul apart, as her quiet Protestantism and his pushy Catholicism initially grate against one another, and even when reconciled are the reason characters such as Madame Beck and Père Silas conspire to keep the two apart. Even Lucy's romantic interests are nationalized along Anglo-French lines. Doctor John Graham Bretton's name is a thinly-veiled reference to Great Britain, and his temperament aligns him with cultural stereotypes of English equipoise (Lucy describes him as equally dispassionate as the Cliff of Dover (*Villette* 255)). By contrast, Monsieur Paul Emanuel's passion and presumption aligns him with post-Revolutionary stereotypes of the French.

Monsieur Paul's character is so deeply coded as French that Lucy occasionally forgets he isn't French, remarking early in the third volume, "like a true Frenchman (though I don't know why I should say so, for he was of strain neither

French nor Labassecourien), he had dressed for the ‘situation’ and the occasion” (*Villette* 338). Lucy’s cognitive lapse is telling and suggests how profoundly Brontë had French national types on her mind as she crafted Monsieur Paul’s character. Lucy forgets Monsieur Paul isn’t French at the beginning of the third volume, during the event that inaugurates his new prominence in the novel, the celebration of his feast day at the school. This event gives us the clearest indication that we need Napoleonic history to read *Villette*’s final volume. Monsieur Paul’s feast day is March 1st, the anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte’s return from exile on Elba Island and the beginning of his “100 Days” of rule before his defeat at Waterloo.<sup>3</sup> Brontë knew Napoleonic history well, and her choice of this feast day underscores how much Monsieur Paul’s popular rise in the novel is linked to Napoleonic memory for her.<sup>4</sup>

The “100 Days” marked the last time before Louis-Napoléon in which a French leader ascended to power so rapidly and so unsettlingly. Brontë recycles Napoleonic history in *Villette*’s third volume, opening it with a “new” one hundred days, and ending it with yet another exile to an island in the Atlantic Ocean. Her return to Napoleonic history allows her to reflect on the changing political landscape between England and France as a result of Louis-Napoléon’s ascendancy, and to represent her ambition for Anglo-French relations. The romance between Lucy and Monsieur Paul signals Brontë’s aspiration that England and France could transcend their historical antagonisms. She envisions the relationship as one of special equals. Both characters maintain their national differences, but begin to see them as complementary to one another.

However, Monsieur Paul's exile to the French island of Guadeloupe at the end of the novel reveals Brontë's skepticism that such political change could ever be sustained. The two protagonists are ultimately kept apart by other characters' nationalist biases towards Lucy as an English Protestant, and as a result of Monsieur Paul's deep sense of loyalty to the Franco-Catholic community to which he belongs in *Villette*. *Villette's* conclusion suggests that Brontë believed all Napoleonic narratives were doomed to end the same way, and that England and France were fated to cycle endlessly through the same forms of political antagonism. Brontë is more hopeful than Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*, but ultimately shares his despair that the long history of national antagonism between England and France is fated to keep them apart and locked in endless opposition.

#### Exceptional Equals: Brontë, Brussels, and the Return of Napoleon

Napoleonic history was a deeply personal subject for Charlotte Brontë. She began to study Napoleon's life while living in Brussels, and identified with the tragedy of his exile from family and friends. Anne Longmuir has persuasively argued that Brontë is best read as a Romantic writer when considering her views on France. Brontë was deeply influenced by the works of William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Walter Scott, and Longmuir suggests that she shares a Romantic ambivalence towards France and French radicalism (Longmuir 174). This analysis will extend Longmuir's formulation and suggest that Brontë also possessed a Romantic ambivalence about the figure of Napoleon; she was fascinated by Bonaparte, and read him through a Romantic lens that captured his dual potential for epic grandeur as either hero or tyrant.

Simon Bainbridge has characterized the “clash of testimonies” that surrounded the figure of Napoleon for English Romantics, noting, “on the one hand, Napoleon is described as ‘extraordinary’, ‘gigantic’, ‘great’, ‘wonderful’, ‘marvellous’, ‘prodigious’ and ‘tremendous’. On the other, as ‘cruel’, ‘mean’, ‘merciless’, ‘perfidious’, ‘imperious’, ‘cowardly’ and even ‘insane’” (Bainbridge 8). This is the dual valence that surrounds Monsieur Paul in *Villette*. He is alternately a figure of attraction and aversion, and he often cycles quickly through the two positions, frantically shifting between compassion and control, or aggression and reconciliation in his interaction with Lucy Snowe. The two characters ultimately find balance with one another as her poise serves as a balm for his passion, but Brontë’s Romantic ambivalence towards the “greatness” of Napoleon drives Monsieur Paul’s characterization throughout *Villette*, and is indicative of the complicated personal fascination Brontë felt for England’s principal national antagonist.

Brontë is typically read as rigidly nationalistic in her devotion to English cultural values. Anne Longmuir has suggested that Brontë stages a conflict between French and English values in her novels:

While Englishness and Britishness enjoy a relatively uncomplicated relationship in Brontë’s fiction, there is no such accord between British and European identity. Indeed, a conflict between British and Continental, especially French, values dominates Brontë’s fiction...further, the conflict between French and British values exists not just between characters in Brontë’s fiction, but within her characters as well. (Longmuir 165-66)



Longmuir's sense of Brontë's nationalism certainly works for the bulk of her fiction; indeed, French identity is often a cultural trait to be cured or erased in characters in her novels. Jane Eyre anglicizes Adèle Varens, while in *The Professor*, William Crimsworth trains Frances Evans Henri how to be a proper English wife, ridding her of her French and teaching her how to make a "proper British repast" (*The Professor* 246), but *Villette* does not display the same will to efface continental cultural identity. There are cultural clashes in the novel, but Lucy does not use her position of authority at Mme. Beck's school to teach her pupils how to be less Labasscourian, and she certainly makes no effort anglicize Monsieur Paul.

The manner in which Brontë reworks the plot of *The Professor* in *Villette* is indicative of how much this novel stands apart from her other fiction in its depiction of Anglo-French nationalism. Brontë composed *The Professor* in 1846, but it was rejected for publication and only published posthumously in 1857. She ultimately used the novel as a template for *Villette*, most notably recycling its love-triangle plot. However, whereas *The Professor* is a colonial fantasy: Frances becomes English in speech and behavior and is ultimately repatriated to England, *Villette* doesn't indulge in colonial refashioning, and Monsieur Paul's unwavering continentalism is part of what draws Lucy closer to him.

Brontë's Tory nationalism didn't disappear with the publication of *Villette*, but it doesn't manifest as a will to conquer continental values as it does in her other works. The difference can be attributed to the particular role that Napoleon played in Brontë's imagination, and to the effect that his nephew's rise would have had on her considerations of the Anglo-French relationship. From her childhood, Brontë

was fascinated with the figure of Napoleon, but her sense of him changed significantly as she matured. In “The History of the Year” (1829), an early diary entry written by Brontë, she recalls her father bringing her brother Branwell a set of toy soldiers:

Papa bought Branwell some soldiers at Leeds. When papa came home it was night and we were in Bed so next morning Branwell came to our Door with a Box of soldiers. Emily and I jumped out of Bed and I snat[c]hed up one and exclaimed this is the Duke of Wellington it shall be mine!!...Branwell chose Bonaparte. (“The History of the Year” 2-3)

The Brontë children each adopted one of the figurines as a personal totem. The small group of soldiers came to be known as “the Twelves” or “Young Men,” and the Brontës crafted a series of plays around their adventures, using their particular soldier as a stand-in for themselves, but also occasionally interacting with them in the stories (Barker ix). Wellington became Brontë’s avatar, and her memory of Branwell claiming “Bonaparte” in response to her declaration that her protégé would be Wellington suggests that their sibling rivalry took on a nationalist flair, and underscores how much a youthful Brontë viewed the two figures, Wellington and Napoleon, as antagonists or counters to one another. In their games, each man ruled over his own particular state: Wellington occupied “Wellingtonsland” while Bonaparte ruled “Frenchysland.”<sup>5</sup>

As Brontë grew up, her perspective on Wellington and Bonaparte’s relationship would change. She would begin to view them less as antagonists and more as complements: the only two men who truly understood each other. Her

personal devotion to Wellington would remain undiminished, but Napoleon began to rise in her imagination, shifting from a conquered foe to a tragic hero in her estimation, and becoming a figure with whom she could identify. In Brussels, Brontë lived less than ten miles from Waterloo, and under Constantin Héger's tutelage, she began to reflect on the end of the Emperor's life and the consequences of his defeat in Belgium. In 1843, she wrote a *devoir*, or essay, for Héger entitled, "La Mort de Napoleon" ("The Death of Napoleon"), in which she imagines Napoleon in exile:

Europe, drained by the rapacity of Napoleon, lashed him to an isolated rock in the Atlantic. There perhaps he suffered all that they endure who, distant from homeland and family, deprived of the affection of their kind, know the soul's hunger and thirst; and is there a hunger more biting, a thirst more burning? ("The Death of Napoleon" 272-274)

Brontë doesn't dismiss Napoleon's crimes, but he is no longer a distant, nationalist "other" in her mind. She clearly identifies with him. Brontë was profoundly lonely in Brussels, and she projects her own feelings of isolation from family and country onto her depiction of Napoleon at Saint Helena. In Napoleon, Brontë saw a figure of exceptional genius –a tyrant to be sure, but a member of a small fellowship of lonely souls, scattered throughout history, with whom she felt a deep sense of affinity, and who were each other's only equals. Her father and Constantin Héger both fostered and served as models for Brontë's fascination with "exceptional men": those who have the personality and passion to shape history, but who are also often undone by it and burdened to walk apart, shunned and misunderstood by the larger world.

Brontë characterized this species of historical prime mover in an essay written for Héger on the life of Peter the Hermit:

From time to time, there appear on earth certain men destined to be the instruments of great change, moral or political, in their epoch. Sometimes it is a conqueror, an Alexander or an Attila, who passes like a hurricane and purifies the moral atmosphere as the storm purifies the physical atmosphere. Sometimes, it is a revolutionary, a Cromwell or a Robespierre who makes reparation through a king for the vices of a whole dynasty. Sometimes it is a religious enthusiast like Mahomet or Peter the Hermit, who raises up entire nations by dint of exciting the profoundest sentiments of the human heart. ("Peter the Hermit" 118)

Napoleon easily fits into this genus, the small group of historical individuals who have been able to shape national or political destinies. Brontë's historical and religious survey is broad, but it is clearly influenced by recent European history and by the Revolutionary period in France, and her willingness to admit both "conquerors" and "revolutionaries" suggests she may have had Napoleon in mind when conceptualizing the group, as these were the twin roles through which his biography was read in the nineteenth century. Brontë does not weigh or assess moral or political worthiness, admitting conquerors and religious figures equally; it's the potential to effect widespread change that registers for her.

In her essay on Napoleon, she also suggests that it is these historical titans who are best able to deal with and judge one another. The essay represents Napoleon and Wellington as absolute equals:

Let us not permit ourselves, then, to approach the Corsican's grave with a feeling of pity or to stain the rock that covers his remains with tears. Let it not be said that the hand which separated him from his wife and his child was the hand of a tyrant; no! It was a hand like his own, a hand strong but not bloodstained. He who extended that hand knew well how to read Napoleon; he was his equal, not his superior (there has never been one on earth), but his noble peer. ("The Death of Napoleon" 274)

Brontë's devotion to Wellington is undimmed, but she now views Napoleon as equally exceptional and worthy of admiration. Juliet Barker has argued that Brontë reinvented her romantic type in Brussels, moving away from the physically and morally flawless heroes that characterized her juvenilia to the dark heroes that dominated her adult fiction: flawed, stubborn, and temperamental men such as Edward Rochester and Paul Emanuel (Barker xvi). Barker links the shift to Brontë's affection for Héger, but it can also be seen as a product of her study of historical figures while at the *Pensionnat*, and especially of her willingness to admit Napoleon on equal standing with Wellington in her imagination, and to see a dark glamour and appealing sadness in his ambition and failure. Napoleon became a romantic figure in Brontë's mind while in Brussels and her romantic narrative type shifted accordingly. She began to write Byronic heroes: flawed, tortured, moody, and driven. Her love for Héger was certainly an influence, but so was the sense of affinity she felt for Napoleon in his loneliness and isolation, and her belief that he was an exceptional genius, a force of and catalyst for history, of a type perhaps never to be seen again.

Brontë's fascination with Napoleon was so profound that in 1843, shortly after writing "The Death of Napoleon," Héger gave her a fragment of Napoleon's coffin as a gift. He had obtained it from a colleague, Joachim-Joseph Lebel, a former secretary for the Bonaparte family, who received it when the Emperor was reburied in Paris in December 1840 (Lonoff 306). As a child, Brontë had seized on a tiny tin soldier to be her totem for Wellington, finding an emblem for her patriotic pride and youthful enthusiasm for success and individual accomplishment. As an adult, she now had a relic from Napoleon, one linked to what she found so alluring about him: the tragedy of his epic fall and the sorrow of his death in exile, and indicative of a shift in her own perspective, one now tinged with a sense of personal disappointment and isolation, and more drawn to great failure than unbridled success. In, "The Death of Napoleon," she ruminates:

Truly his life is a rainbow; the two extreme ends touch the earth, the intervening arc spans the skies. Still, over Napoleon in his cradle a mother watched; in his childhood he had brothers and sisters; later, he had a wife who loved him very much; but Napoleon on his deathbed is alone, without mother, brother, sister, wife or child. Let us run quickly through his exploits and then contemplate the abandonment of his final hour. There he is –exiled and captive –bound to an arid rock. He has committed the crime of Prometheus, and he undergoes his punishment. Prometheus wanted to make himself God and Creator, and he stole the fire of heaven to give life to the body he had formed; Bonaparte too wanted to create, not a man but an

empire, and he tore the life from entire nations to give an existence, a soul, some reality, to his vast work. ("The Death of Napoleon" 272)

Brontë races past Napoleon's successes ("let us run quickly through his exploits"); she is far more captivated by his failure.

Her sense of Napoleon as a Promethean figure is most likely the product of her study of Lord Byron's poetry. Byron's "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" (1814), written after the Emperor's first exile on Elba, explicitly links the two fallen heroes, and tasks Napoleon, asking, "Or, like the thief of fire from heaven, / Wilt thou withstand the shock? / And share with him, the unforgiven, / His vulture and his rock!" (136-139). Byron's poem was written in a fury of anger and disappointment over Napoleon's abdication, and is laced with his bitterness that Napoleon choose exile over death. His rage would later be replaced by melancholy. After Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo and exiled for a second time to Saint Helena, Byron's reflections on the Emperor in works such as "Napoleon's Farewell" and "From the French" (1816) began to focus on the tragedy of Napoleon's domestic isolation from family, fellow soldiers, and France herself. Brontë shares this perspective in "The Death of Napoleon," lamenting Napoleon's separation from his family. She and Byron both felt a complicated sense of identification with Napoleon, and while Byron would maintain a degree of ambivalence towards the trajectory Napoleon's life followed, his post-Waterloo poetry often ruminated on the possibility that he might one day return. He closes "Napoloen's Farewell" with a final benediction from Bonaparte: "Farewell to thee, France! but when Liberty rallies / Once more in thy regions, remember me then - /... / There are links which must break in the chain

that has bound us, / Then turn thee and call on the Chief of thy choice!" (17-18, 23-24). The thought that Napoleon might still return, might still be needed by France, was alluring for Byron. After the Emperor's death, the wistful hope that he might once again escape exile faded into the belief that history may never see his like again. His exceptionality became part of his legend and memory, and framed how Brontë thought about him in "The Death of Napoleon." She was drawn to his exceptionality, as well as the terrifying way that he could shape history and marshal an entire nation, and she believed in and was drawn to the idea that figures like Napoleon Bonaparte were rare in the pages of history.<sup>6</sup>

#### Empire Means Peace: The Rise of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte

The myth and memory of Napoleon Bonaparte became a powerful part of the popular histories of England and France in the nineteenth century, and by the mid-century became the basis of and justification for Louis-Napoléon's ascendancy in France.<sup>7</sup> Louis-Napoléon solidified his standing among Bonapartists in France by fashioning himself as the heir to and reincarnation of his uncle. His exile from France in the 1830s and 1840s further established him as a bona fide Napoleonic figure. It allowed him to draw on the memory of his uncle's exile, and to cast himself as the fulfillment of the promise of a Napoleonic return. However, his Napoleonic narrative was complicated by the fact that he was not exiled *by* England, as was the case for his uncle, but *in* England. He drew on Napoleonic history, but did not represent a clean return to it because of his relationship with England.

The English press recognized the deep ambiguity of the "new" Napoleon. The historical parallels between his and his uncle's rise were uncanny and unavoidable,



and added weight to the gravity of his political ascent, but the English press acknowledged that he was a more inscrutable figure than his uncle. Their reporting initially carried none of the hysteria generated in 1844, when the invasion scare seemed to be marking the dawn of a new Napoleonic age. In December 1852, in conjunction with Louis-Napoléon's rise, *The Times* published an article entitled "The French Emperor: His Character, Intentions, and Necessities" that captured the ambiguity and uncertainty surrounding this *new* Napoleon:

Now that Louis Napoleon is fairly seated on the throne to which he has aspired through many weary years of disappointment, exile, imprisonment, and intrigue, it becomes a matter of the deepest interest and the most vital moment to English statesmen and English citizens thoroughly to understand the character, wishes, and intentions of the man who could thus wield without control the enormous military power of their nearest neighbor.

("The French Emperor")

The article opens by evoking the Romantic myth of Napoleonic exile, casting Louis-Napoléon as a suffering leader, one who has survived the painful melancholy of frustrated political ambition. His exile is figured as a personal trial, and while *The Times* writers quickly wonder what his ascendancy will mean for England, their concern is tempered by curiosity to know what effect his isolation has had on his potential to rule. As the article continues, they express their hope is that it has allowed him to become a more qualified leader, a broader thinker who has used exile to deepen his understanding of political philosophy and history, and who will

now channel that knowledge into the revitalization of France. Yet what fascinates *The Times* columnists is Louis-Napoléon's dark inscrutability:

He is naturally shrewd, secret, and impenetrable. He has the invaluable faculty of silence. He has, too, been a patient and wide observer. He has studied politics in Switzerland, in America and in England. He has devoted his mind to that one subject. He is, too, a deep-thinker. He ponders much, which few Frenchmen do. His six years' captivity in Ham matured and strengthened by silent meditation, whatever natural capacities he may have possessed...he has brooded over the history, politics, and the social condition of France till on these subjects he is probably one of the best informed men in the country." ("The French Emperor")

*The Times* writers cast Napoleon as a Romantic figure: a brooding, mysterious leader, tempered by imprisonment and isolation. His discretion is part of his appeal; it doesn't register for the writers as a disturbing quality, but it drives their curiosity to know who he will be on the throne of France. Louis-Napoléon is not figured as a "nationalist other" here; indeed, the prevailing hope is that captivity has rendered him *less* quintessentially French. The aspiration is that he has become a political hybrid –a leader able to use knowledge of other national political systems to aid France.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the desire to read Napoleon's rise optimistically, and to believe that he has been strengthened by exile, rendered more circumspect and qualified to lead, ultimately gives way to doubt. *The Times* columnists worry that the years of isolation and frustrated opportunity may have made him politically insatiable,

engendering an ambition for power that will outpace even his uncle's. They caution their readers:

But we shall greatly and dangerously misconceive Louis Napoleon if we regard him as a man of shrewdness, reflection, and calculation only. The most prominent feature of his character is a wild, irregular, *romanesque* imagination –which often overrides all his reasoning and reflective faculties, and spurs him on to actions and attempts which seem insane if they fail, and the *acme* of splendid audacity if they succeed. The abortions of Strasbourg and Boulogne, and *coup d'état* of last December, were equally the dictates – alike the legitimate progeny –of the same mental peculiarity. He believes, too, in his “star.” He is even a blinder and rasher fatalist than his uncle.”

(“The French Emperor” –all italics are original)

The columnists see two “Napoleons”: the Patriarch and the Madman, and wonder which will dominate. They eventually conclude that Louis-Napoléon, “must be interpreted by the rule of contraries...hence, when he proclaimed, “L’Empire, c’est la paix!” we are reluctantly compelled to put the announcement aside as conveying no meaning, and giving no clue to his real views and purposes” (“The French Emperor”).

*The Times* editorial was triggered by a speech Louis-Napoléon delivered in Bordeaux on October 9, 1852. Beginning in September 1852, he set out on a public tour of the French provinces, a campaign designed to sound public support for the re-declaration of France as an empire. In Bordeaux, a city that had suffered severely during the Napoleonic Wars due to the reduced use of its ports, Louis-Napoléon

framed his ascent to the Imperial throne as a matter of popular will and necessity, and signaled his dual desire to assume absolute power *and* guarantee absolute peace:

The purpose of this journey, as you know, was to see for myself our beautiful provinces of the south and familiarize myself with their needs. It has, however, given rise to a much more important result. Indeed, -and I say it with a candor as far removed from arrogance as from false modesty, -never has a people testified in a manner more direct, spontaneous, and unanimous, the longing to be freed from anxiety as to the future by concentrating in a single person an authority which shall accord with their desires...there is, nevertheless, one apprehension, and that I shall set at rest. A spirit of distrust leads certain persons to say that empire means war. I say, the empire means peace. France longs for peace, and if France is satisfied the world is tranquil.”<sup>9</sup>

Louis-Napoléon casts himself as an unexpected autocrat. He depicts himself as a compassionate patriarch who sets out to sound the needs of France, and suddenly finds himself called to serve as Emperor. That political sleight of hand would have been fairly transparent and eerily familiar for an English reader. Louis-Napoléon’s tour of the southern provinces was designed to cultivate and to recall his uncle’s popularity among the French people, and specifically to evoke the popular memory of Napoleon’s “100 Days,” when Napoleon returned to Southern France, and marched slowly to Paris, propelled by a groundswell of popular support, before finally reassuming the Imperial mantle after arriving in the Capital.

The impression that Napoleonic history was replaying itself in France would have been unsettling enough from an English perspective, but it was Louis-Napoléon's declaration that "Empire means peace" that became the centerpiece of English anxieties regarding the man who would become the next Napoleon. It would be referenced repeatedly in press coverage of Louis-Napoléon's political rise in France.<sup>10</sup> The expression would have been paradoxical for an English reader in the mid nineteenth century. As a host of critics have observed, England didn't consider itself to be an "imperial" power until the latter half of the nineteenth century; it certainly held colonies and wielded enormous global influence, but "empire" was a term associated with France's aggressive nationalist policies during the Napoleonic age and with the French political structure under Napoleon. It was only after Queen Victoria assumed the political title of "Empress of India" in 1876 that England technically became an empire, and it was largely in the late century as Britain's empire began to crumble that the idea of "empire" became such a central part of popular nationalism.<sup>11</sup> In the mid-century, this meant that Louis-Napoléon's assertion that France intended to be both "imperial" and "peaceful" would have struck English readers as contradictory, and only added to the ways in which it was impossible to discern what his rise meant geopolitically and diplomatically for England and France.

In autumn 1852, as Louis-Napoléon's accession as the next Emperor of the French came to be seen as a political *fait accompli*, the English press began to weigh what nascent French imperialism would mean for Anglo-French relations. On October 14, 1852, in an untitled editorial, *The Times* cautioned that significant

military deployment by both powers was unrealistic and untenable, again illustrating the drop-off in popular fear from the 1840s, when the invasion scare drove calls for military expansion. *The Times* observes:

The revolutionary storm of 1848 no longer affords a decent pretext or a reasonable motive for the permanent maintenance of the largest armies the world has ever beheld. The question of peace or war in Europe rests mainly –we might almost say exclusively –with France, for in the present state of things we entirely concur in the remark of Louis Napoleon , that “if France is satisfied the world is tranquil.” No Power can be so much as suspected of the slightest desire to attack her territory or to contest her rights, though no Power feels at this moment an equal degree of confidence in the intentions of the French Government towards the territory and the rights of its neighbours. (*The Times* 14 Oct. 1852)

*The Times* writers are forced to tread lightly in response to Louis-Napoléon’s *coup d’état*, cautiously reassuring his government that England has no global or military designs against France. Louis-Napoléon has so carefully cultivated an air of ambiguity and mystery in conjunction with his rise to power that the English press address him as if anxious not to awaken a dangerous animal. The diplomatic center of gravity between the two powers now firmly rests in Paris, and *The Times* columnists are forced to acknowledge that they have no choice but to accept Louis-Napoléon’s assertions that “empire” is a guarantee of peace, not a harbinger of war:

For ourselves, we are quite ready to apply and to abide by this test of the wisdom or folly of his policy –of the truth or the worthlessness of his

promises. But while we see the whole army of France in the highest state of preparation for any undertaking, and with a considerable addition to its effective force; while we know that unusual activity prevails in all the French dockyards, and that the navy has received within the last few months a vast augmentation to its strength, we are unable to reconcile these facts with the declared intentions of the French Government; and this palpable inconsistency naturally increases the distrust with which the new Imperial Administration may be viewed." (*The Times* 14 Oct. 1852)

Louis-Napoléon's rise has now reached a crisis point for the English press, as the ambiguity and inconsistency of his political rhetoric and military posturing have now become "palpable" and unavoidable. *The Times* writers attempt to sift through the imperial tea-leaves, cautiously balancing their hope and willingness to believe that a new French Empire will inaugurate a new age of *détente* between the ancient rivals with their anxiety that the undisguised military buildup across the Channel can only be indicative of war. They evince a complicated caution towards the would-be emperor, attempting to reconcile their desire to see Louis-Napoléon as a positive figure, one worthy of trust, with their suspicion that his professions of peace are only designed to buy time to prepare for war.

On November 6, 1852, *The Times* reprinted a speech delivered by Louis-Napoléon to the French Senate, in which he attempted to frame the political and historical stakes of the new imperial age for the French people, but which, for an English reader, would have only deepened the dense political ambiguity of Louis-Napoléon's ambition for France:

In the re-establishment of the Empire the people finds a guarantee for its rights and a satisfaction to its just pride; this re-establishment is a security for the future, closing, as it does, the era of revolutions, and consecrating again the conquests of 1789. It satisfies its just pride, because, raising again freely and deliberately what all Europe 37 years ago destroyed by force of arms amidst the disasters of the country, the people nobly revenges its reverses, without making any victim, without threatening any independence, and without disturbing the peace of the world. ("The Empire in France")

Louis-Napoléon cycles through a dizzying array of political symbology. He casts his accession as both the end and the sanctification of the Revolutionary period, positioning his rule as both a return to stability after the upheaval of the European revolutions of the 1840s, and a matter of popular fiat. His gesture towards political stability would have been a positive sign for the British government, as it would have promised a more favorable climate for not only Anglo-French diplomacy, but for economic exchange as well. It would have suggested the end to a particularly charged period in cross-Channel relations due to the invasion crisis, and also because England had become home to scores of French refugees seeking asylum in the wake of the Continental revolutions. However, this reassurance is quickly tempered by Louis-Napoléon's assertion that his reign also revenges the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and recuperates the glory and political standing France had lost at Waterloo. His declaration of a bloodless victory for the French people is simultaneously belligerent and placatory. He imagines that the world has been remade, but that the effects are localized to France.



Louis-Napoléon's November 1852 speech offered no inroads for the English people to definitively understand what a new French Empire would mean for England. Once he finally became Emperor on December 2, 1852, his inaugural address to the French people was equally enigmatic. His address was published in *The Times* one day after his coronation. In it, he appealed to French citizens:

Assist me, all, to establish in this land, harassed by so many revolutions, a stable Government, whose basis shall be religion, justice, probity, and the love of the less fortunate classes. And here receive the oath, that I will spare no exertions to assure the prosperity of our country; and that, while maintaining peace, I will yield in no point which concerns the honour and the dignity of France. ("Latest Intelligence")

Napoleon evokes both pre- and post-revolutionary political ideals, promising to fashion a government that both protects "the less fortunate classes," as was the popular aspiration during the Revolutionary Period, and to reinstitute the primacy of religion in civil life, a move that politically rehabilitates the First Estate after its fall from grace during the 1789 French Revolution. Both of those gestures, once again, would have been reassuring to an English reader, suggesting a return to traditional forms of political power and a more benevolent form of French patriotism; however, Napoleon's quick turn towards the geopolitical at the conclusion of his speech is clearly intended for his audiences on both sides of the Channel. His assertion that he will maintain peace, but not at the cost of France's political renown, concludes the address with considerable ambiguity in terms of

what his rule will mean for Anglo-French relations, as it positions him as both political balm and powder-keg.

His decision to assume the title “Napoleon III” was equally unnerving for the English, since it effectively reversed England’s triumph over the French at Waterloo, a victory that secured Napoleon Bonaparte’s abdication and his renunciation of “Emperor” as a hereditary title. The day after his installation as Napoleon III, *The Times* writers fumed:

We regret that the Ruler of the French should on this occasion have thought fit to revive –and to revive in the most expressive terms –a series of events in which his name stands, and must ever stand, directly opposed to the past policy of Europe. His position is sufficiently difficult without encumbering it with associations drawn from disputes and contests over which a peace of 37 years has happily passed. (“The Speech Addressed by Louis Napoleon”)

The columnists do not reject Napoleon III’s right to rule; indeed, they recognize and authorize his political position, acknowledging the challenges he will face as leader of the French. Their concern stems from his willingness to look back and to recycle Napoleonic history, and to frame his rule as a continuation of it. From a French political perspective, Napoleon III’s decision to declare himself the direct heir of Napoleon Bonaparte was the natural culmination of his political rise. He had carefully cultivated the associations between himself and his uncle, even crowning himself Emperor on the anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte’s assumption of the title. Yet from an English perspective, the direct link was a touch too much; it was an explicit acknowledgement of what had become increasingly evident –that

*another* Napoleon had emerged from the ashes of the First Empire, cloaked in the same guise of mystery and temperament as the first Napoleon. The English wanted to believe that the new Emperor represented a fresh start for France, and that he could bring calm to the Continent and facilitate better relations between England and France, but they also feared that he represented not an end to an era of political instability in France, one that dated from the 1789 French Revolution and the Napoleonic Period, but rather marked its continuation, or worse, its *resurrection*.

“He Resembled the Great Emperor”: *Villette* and the Return of Napoleon

Charlotte Brontë turned to the final volume of *Villette* just as events surrounding Napoleon III’s installation as Emperor reached their apex. Her correspondence shows that she followed *The Times*’ coverage of his rise to power.

On February 17, 1852, she wrote to Margaret Wooler:

As to the French President –it seems to me hard to say what a man with so little scruple and so much ambition will not attempt: I wish, however, the English Press would not prate so much about invasion; if silence were possible in a free Country –would it not be far better to prepare silently for what may come –to place the national defences in an effective state and refrain from breathing a word of apprehension? Doubtless such is the thought of practical Men like the Duke of Wellington –I can well conceive his secret impatience at the mischievous gabbling of the newspapers. Wonderful is the French Nation. (*Letters*, 22 –original underlined text is preserved)

The rest of Brontë’s letter has not been preserved. The existing fragment ends with her enigmatic declaration: “Wonderful is the French Nation;” but her tone in the

missive suggests a mixture of exasperation and curiosity. She is clearly intrigued by the new Napoleon as much as she endeavors to temper that curiosity by targeting *The Times* for its hysterical coverage. Earlier the same day, *The Times* had published a report on the possibility that Louis-Napoléon's popular rise in France might augur a potential invasion, and as in 1844, *The Times* columnists saw this as a frightening return to the political atmosphere of the Napoleonic period:

England in 1852 has the same grounds for apprehension as in the period from 1800 to 1814, so far common sense suggests that we should take the same care of ourselves as we did then...the French nation is throwing itself, we will not say deliberately, but knowingly and precipitately, into that Imperial and aggressive position from which force alone compelled it to withdraw in 1814. ("The Perusal of What Passed...")

In her letter to Margaret Wooler, Brontë refuses to indulge in the same speculation regarding invasion, but she has clearly been impressed, as *The Times* writers are, by the ways in which the current events seem to recycle Napoleonic history. She speculates how far Louis-Napoléon's ambition will take him, and even in early 1852, is clearly beginning to imagine a moment when he and Wellington will be forced into a confrontation. Her letter revisits narrative motifs that were appealing to her in Napoleon Bonaparte's biography. For Brontë, the first Bonaparte was an Icarian figure, undone by his own great ambition, and ultimately taken down by another titan, Wellington. Even as she seeks to tone down the coverage of Louis-Napoléon's ascent, she is clearly taken by him, and begins to mark out a narrative trajectory for

him that mirrors the one she first sketched out for his uncle, while writing on his life when she was in Brussels.

By late 1852, Brontë was imaginatively back in Brussels, as she began to use her experience at Héger's school to draft and to inspire Lucy Snowe's story. Her cognitive associations with that period in her life would have been particularly acute, and would have made it difficult to ignore the uncanny parallels between the historical Bonaparte she studied in Brussels and the new Bonaparte ascending in France. In autumn 1852, as the British press began to ruminate on the terrible ambiguity that surrounded this next Napoleon and to reflect on his dual potential to be read either as a figure of reconciliation, one who will calm France and who is deeply invested in peace between the two powers, or as an antagonistic figure, one who will spark a new age of rivalry between the two nations, Brontë made a radical shift in *Villette's* narrative trajectory, electing to focus the final third of the novel on the figure of Monsieur Paul Emanuel, a character whose temperament encapsulates exactly that duality.

On November 3, 1852, Brontë wrote to her publisher George Smith to inform him of the turn in the plot, confessing:

Most of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Vol. is given to the development of the "crabbed Professor's" character. Lucy must not marry Dr. John; he is far too youthful, handsome, bright-spirited and sweet-tempered; he is a "curled darling" of Nature and Fortune; he must draw a prize in Life's Lottery; his wife must be young, rich and pretty; he must be made very happy indeed. If Lucy marries anybody –it

must be the Professor –a man in whom there is much to forgive –much to  
“put up with.” (*Letters* 78)

Brontë frames her pivot from Dr. John to Monsieur Paul as a movement away from one romantic archetype to another, a move that reflects the ways in which her sense of the romantic ideal shifted when she was in Brussels, as she began to study Byronic figures such as Bonaparte. Her decision to align Lucy with Monsieur Paul and to pair Dr. John with Polly Home (Paulina Mary de Bassompierre), who is a light, easy companion for her “‘curled darling’ of Nature,” certainly fits with *Villette*’s narrative perspective that some lives are meant to be blessed and unforced, while others are meant to be a challenge and destined for disappointment. Brontë decides to join like with like, but she is also expressing a desire to move Lucy away from one romantic type towards another as part of a project of narrative rehabilitation for Monsieur Paul and as a means to more fully develop his character.

Brontë would continue to push herself to flesh out Monsieur Paul’s character over the course of the next month. On December 6, 1852, only three days after Napoleon III’s coronation, she replied to her publisher, George Smith, who had critiqued her decision to pair Lucy Snowe with Monsieur Paul.<sup>12</sup> Brontë describes a compulsion to write about Monsieur Paul, acknowledging:

I must pronounce you right again, in your complaint of the transfer of interest in the 3rd. Vol. – from one set of characters to another. It is not pleasant, and will probably be found as unwelcome to the reader, as it was, in a sense, compulsory upon the writer. The spirit of Romance would have indicated another course, far more flowery and inviting; it would have

fashioned a paramount hero, kept faithfully with him and made him supremely “worshipful” –he should have been an idol, and not a mute, unresponding idol –either-: but this would have been unlike real Life, inconsistent with Truth –at variance with Probability. I greatly apprehend, however, that the weakest character in the book is the one I aimed at making the most beautiful, and if this be the case –the fault lies in its wanting the germ of the real, in its being purely imaginary” (*Letters* 88 –original underlining)

Brontë finds herself suddenly inspired by the Romance of real life, and compelled to infuse “the germ of the real” into *Villette*’s central relationship. Her response to Smith gives the impression that she has suddenly remembered that “real life” Romantic types are flawed, not flowery, nor are they objects of easy, untroubled worship. In response to this narrative epiphany, in late 1852, Brontë moved Lucy away from John Graham Bretton and towards a character who would challenge her, one who would not be an object of easy worship, and one who, in *Villette*’s third volume, repeatedly strikes Lucy Snowe as “Napoleonic.”

Brontë elevated Monsieur Paul’s character in the immediate wake of Napoleon III’s rise to power in France. She also shifted the romantic stakes in her novel in the third volume, as Lucy and Monsieur Paul’s progress towards one another becomes a matter of not only finding a way to comfortably match their contrasting temperaments, but also to overcome their entrenched national differences and antagonisms. Monsieur Paul suddenly becomes Brontë’s proxy for

French nationalism in *Villette*'s final volume, as he and Lucy engage and often antagonize one another along Anglo-French nationalist lines.

They begin their awkward, complicated movement towards one another in the final chapter of Volume II, when Lucy attends a public address by Monsieur Paul at Villette's Hotel Cr cy. The voluble schoolteacher speaks to the city's collected aristocracy, and Lucy finds herself surprised to see a political-nationalist side to his character that had not surfaced before:

He spoke to the princes, the nobles, the magistrates and the burghers, with just the same ease, with almost the same pointed, choleric earnestness, with which he was wont to harangue the three divisions of the Rue Fossette. The collegians he addressed, not as school-boys, but as future citizens and embryo patriots. The times which have since come to Europe had not been foretold yet, and M. Emanuel's spirit seemed new to me...with all his fire he was severe and sensible; he trampled Utopian theories under his heel; he rejected wild dreams with scorn; -but, when he looked in the face of tyranny -oh, then there opened a light in his eye worth seeing; and when he spoke of injustice, his voice gave no uncertain sound, but reminded me of a band-trumpet, ringing at twilight from the park. (*Villette* 311)

Monsieur Paul's address inspires one of the few contemporary references in *Villette*, as Lucy links him to the spirit of the continental revolutions of 1848 ("the times which have since come to Europe"). It was this revolutionary spirit that brought Louis-Napol on to power in France, and Monsieur Paul is cultivating the same popular political emotion that allowed the eventual Emperor to finally break



through after multiple failed *coup d'état* in France. In his speech, Monsieur Paul threads the Napoleonic needle, presenting himself as simultaneously autocratic and an advocate for political upheaval, and Lucy finds herself drawn to him for the first time. After the speech, she is temporarily tongue-tied around him, unable to respond when he asks, "*Qu'en dites-vous?*" ["What did you think?"], yet confessing to the reader, "I would have praised him: I had plenty of praise in my heart; but, alas! no words on my lips" (*Villette* 312). Lucy's loss for words is significant since so much of her interaction with Monsieur Paul takes the form of linguistic jousting. She quickly puts her verbal armor back on, but her silence testifies to how deeply his passionate political speech has impressed her.

Lucy does recover, and her interaction with Monsieur Paul for the remainder of the soirée sets up their principal dynamic in the first half of the third volume; her nascent attraction to Monsieur Paul quickly gives way to antagonism when he accuses her of acting the coquette with Dr. John, hissing that she is a "petite chatte, doucerette, coquette!" ["little hypocrite, coy little thing, coquette"] (*Villette* 318). His response suggests that Monsieur Paul is also beginning to see Lucy in a romantic light and is striking out against a potential rival, but his anger dissipates almost as quickly as it erupts, and his antagonism leads almost instantly to a desire for reconciliation, a reconciliation that takes the form of a delicate linguistic *pas de deux* between the two. Monsieur Paul begs forgiveness from Lucy, who responds, "M. Emanuel, I do forgive you," to which he replies, "let me here you say, in the voice natural to you, and not in that alien tone, 'Mon ami, je vous pardonne'" (*Villette* 320). His response suggests that Lucy has been speaking English to him, and that the

English phrase that appears in the text is not meant to be read as translation; it also indicates that Monsieur Paul has come to view French as Lucy's "natural" language. Lucy partially accommodates the request, shifting to French, and responding, "Monsieur Paul, je vous pardonne," which prompts yet another challenge, "I will have no monsieur: speak the other word, or I shall not believe you sincere: another effort –*mon ami*, or else in English –my friend!" (*Villette* 320). Monsieur Paul's default mode is to attempt to dominate the encounter, and he tries to dictate Lucy's response; however, she has the linguistic upper-hand because she speaks both languages with near fluency. Lucy ultimately weighs both terms, "mon ami" and "my friend," concluding:

Now, 'my friend' had rather another sound and significancy than '*mon ami*,' it did not breathe the same sense of domestic and intimate affection: '*mon ami*' I could *not* say to M. Paul; 'my friend,' I could, and did say without difficulty. This distinction existed not for him, however, and he was quite satisfied with the English phrase. He smiled. You should have seen him smile, reader; and you should have marked the difference between his countenance now, and that he wore half an hour ago. I cannot affirm that I had ever witnessed the smile of pleasure, or content, or kindness round M. Paul's lips, or in his eyes before. The ironic, the sarcastic, the disdainful, the passionately exultant, I had hundreds of times seen him express by what he called a smile, but any illuminated sign of milder or warmer feelings struck me as wholly new in his visage. (*Villette* 321)

Brontë inaugurates Monsieur Paul's narrative rehabilitation in this moment; Lucy's apology softens his harsh exterior, and she begins to see him for the first time as an object of attraction. Lucy's profession of friendship and forgiveness takes the form of a diplomatic negotiation, with each side searching for mutually acceptable language of reconciliation. Lucy's solution is to blend the two national languages, offering Monsieur Paul absolution through a bilingual statement, "my friend, je vous pardonne."

In *Villette's* final volume, Brontë uses Lucy and Monsieur Paul's relationship to promote a political narrative of reconciliation and mutual understanding. The political fantasy plays out on two levels in the text: it is represented through Lucy and Monsieur Paul's romance, but it is also enacted on the linguistic level through their bilingual conversations. Bilingualism in the novel functions metaphorically, allowing Brontë to symbolize her aspirations for Anglo-French diplomacy, specifically the conceit that England and France might understand one another in spite of their national differences. Lucy and Monsieur Paul reply to one another freely in both languages and move fluidly between them. The impression is that language difference doesn't handicap them but renders them more fluent by allowing them to draw on both language systems.

But their bilingualism is pure fantasy in the novel; indeed, their bilingualism is a fantasy of the novel. We learn early in *Villette* that Monsieur Paul doesn't actually speak English. He tells Lucy, "I only know three phrases of English, and a few words: par exemple, de sonn, de mone, de stares" (*Villette* 155). His bilingualism is a reflection of Lucy's memory of him, and a function of the novel's

retrospective narration. The Lucy who narrates looks back on her life in Labassecour and “writes over” Monsieur Paul’s stated linguistic deficiencies in order to reflect her impression that as different as they were, they ultimately understood one another.

Brontë draws on the complicated psychology of memory in crafting Lucy’s life-story. Scholarship on Lucy’s retrospective narration has tended to focus on what she withholds from the reader,<sup>13</sup> but Lucy’s narration is also a product of how she chooses to remember her time in Villette.<sup>14</sup> Lucy revises her encounters with Monseieur Paul to heighten the sense that they held a special communion with one another, a kindred relationship that was enhanced, rather than hindered by their national-linguistic differences. This linguistic fantasy aligns with the dominant political narrative in the final volume, and with Brontë’s overarching ambition that England and France, as embodied by Lucy and Monsieur Paul, might come to find a kindred bond akin to the one she felt Wellington and Bonaparte shared –a sense of special affinity and historical exceptionality that didn’t transcend national difference, but gave it poignancy.<sup>15</sup>

But Brontë’s emphasis on language difference also allows her narrative to accommodate the opposite political extreme: that England and France are so resolutely different that their entrenched national differences will never allow them to understand one another. Brontë’s narrative reflects the political ambiguity that surrounded Louis-Napoléon’s rise to power, and the uncertainty if his reign would revive old national antagonisms or alleviate them. Monsieur Paul, as the Napoleonic character, is the fulcrum for these political extremes in the narrative. The political

fantasy on one extreme uses the novel's retrospective narration to imagine total comprehension between the two nationalized main-characters, but "underneath" the "written over" version of events exists an equally improbably linguistic scenario: the idea that Monsieur Paul cannot speak English.

Monsieur Paul is the most linguistically proficient character in the novel. He speaks multiple languages fluently, and we learn from Lucy that he is so über-lingual that one of his hobbies is to read classical literary works to the students at Mme. Beck's school and prune them of inappropriate passages on the fly, improvising artistic equivalents to replace the stolen text (*Villette* 328). Lucy observes that Monsieur Paul's substitutions are often superior to the original version. Monsieur Paul is primarily a linguistic being; indeed, his skill with speech is part of Lucy's attraction to him, and she even imagines becoming his amanuensis in order to capture the amazing power of his *discours* (*Villette* 381). Yet, for all his linguistic mastery, Monsieur Paul has a cognitive block when it comes to English. When one reads "below" the written-over bilingualism, Monsieur Paul appears unable to advance beyond the handful of words he knows in English. His stubborn, exaggerated inability to speak English is Brontë's means of acknowledging the possibility that centuries of antagonism have ultimately made England and France incapable of understanding one another or of overcoming their nationalized prejudices towards one another.

The romantic narrative in the third volume wrestles with the same uncertainty and ultimately betrays the same pessimism that England and France, as embodied by Lucy and Monsieur Paul, could ever overcome institutionalized forms

of national prejudice. Brontë foregrounds the national-political dynamic in the third volume, and it becomes a measure of how well Lucy and Monsieur Paul are succeeding interpersonally. They rely on old prejudices when they make a misstep with one another, and gradually move past them as they fall in love.

From its inception in the third volume, the romantic narrative seems to be drawn straight out of the contemporary political dynamic, as Lucy, the emotionally “islanded” Englishwoman, finds herself dealing with a sudden and uncomfortable sense of proximity to an imperious and temperamentally unstable Napoleonic figure. One of their first exchanges in the third volume makes the theme of uncomfortable proximity the central tension between the two characters. Lucy informs the reader that Monsieur Paul has a habit of surprising students while at evening study. Lucy recounts, “it was his occasional custom –and a very laudable, acceptable custom, too –to arrive of an evening, always à l'improviste, un-announced, burst in on the silent hour of study, establish a sudden despotism over us and our occupations” (*Villette* 327). Lucy has mixed feelings regarding Monsieur Paul’s “sudden despotism,” she is quick to note that she accepts and even commends his impulse to join the students, but his dramatic arrival also catches her flat-footed; she is unsure of how to react to his sudden proximity. Monsieur Paul naturally forces the situation, entering the study space and sitting down right next to Lucy, who he instructs not to move. When she does, sliding over slightly to accommodate him, Monsieur Paul fumes, “‘vous ne voulez pas de moi pour voisin,’ he growled: ‘vous vous donnez des airs de caste; vous me traitez en paira;’ he scowled” [“You

don't want me for a neighbor...you give yourself superior airs; you treat me like a pariah.] (*Villette* 329).

Brontë's initial impulse in her third volume is to frame Monsieur Paul and Lucy's interactions in terms of an unexpected need to interrelate with one another. She foregrounds the diplomacy issue, and their dynamic mirrors the awkwardness of Anglo-French relations in the immediate wake of Napoleon III's rise to power. Monsieur Paul aggressively seeks to make Lucy at ease with him and attempts to force the proximity problem, insisting that they immediately act as comfortable neighbors. Lucy certainly isn't unreceptive to Monsieur Paul's presence, but she can't pivot from distant to relaxed footing as quickly as he insists. When she momentarily recoils, he instantly revives their old antagonism towards one another, and nationalizes it. He launches into an Anglophobic diatribe, offering the students a reading of a French translation of "un drame de Williams Shackspire; le faux dieu...de ces sots païens, les Anglais" ["a drama from Williams Shackspire; the false god of those ridiculous heathens, the English.] (*Villette* 329). This move frustrates Lucy, who is exasperated that Monsieur Paul makes a French translation of Shakespeare the basis of his critique of both the writer and English reverence for him. The translation naturally misses the richness of the original and loses Shakespeare's linguistic genius. Lucy understands this and can hear the difference in the French version, but Monsieur Paul of course cannot. Brontë underscores his nationalist prejudice here through the reminder that he doesn't speak English.

In the early stages of their relationship, the tendency between Lucy and Monsieur Paul is to tip towards aggression in spite of their budding mutual

affection. There is a rote quality to their use of anti-nationalist sentiment; Brontë illustrates that the prejudices are an automatic reflex for them and an impulse when they fail interpersonally or wound one another emotionally. For example, on Monsieur Paul's feast day, Lucy prepares a personalized gift for him, a watch-guard that she weaves from two different ribbons to symbolize the extremes in his personality. It also underscores that their bond is a union of opposites, and demonstrates how well they are getting to know one another. The other women in the school simply purchase or pick a bouquet of flowers for him, suggesting a lack of thought or affection for the tiny teacher. Lucy quickly resents that her decision not to purchase the expected gift, but to fashion one of her own, makes her seem thoughtless, and she refuses to participate in the public ceremony of gift-giving, stubbornly unwilling to perform her affection for Monsieur Paul.

When the ceremony begins, each woman in the school ceremonially places her flowers before him. Once it becomes obvious that Lucy has not purchased flowers for him, Monsieur Paul's anger steadily mounts. He stands on the classroom estrade, "gazing straight and fixedly before him at a vast 'mappe-monde' covering the wall opposite, he demanded a third time, and now in really tragic tones – 'Est-ce là tout?'" (*Villette* 339). Monsieur Paul seems to draw inspiration from the world map, and once he has resigned himself to not receiving a gift from Lucy, he launches into a nationalist invective against English women. Lucy notes:

I don't know how, in the progress of his "discours," he had contrived to cross the channel, and land on British ground; but there I found him when I began to listen. Casting a quick, cynical glance round the room – a glance which



scathed, or was intended to scathe, as it crossed me –he fell with fury upon “les Anglaises.” Never have I heard English women handled as M. Paul that morning handled them: he spared nothing –neither their minds, morals, manners, nor personal appearance. I specially remember his abuse of their tall stature, their long necks, their thin arms, their slovenly dress, their pedantic education, their impious skepticism. (*Villette* 341)

Monsieur Paul blurs the personal and the political, channeling his rage towards Lucy into a rant against all Englishwoman, but he also casts Lucy as the definitive English type, imagining her features and foibles as *the* markers of English national identity. Lucy replies with her own patriotic philippic, but doesn’t rail against the room full of Labasecourians, who listen to Monsieur Paul’s attack with smug approval; rather she launches into an indictment of the French. Lucy’s anger finally boils over, and she confesses, “at last, I struck a sharp stroke on my desk, opened my lips, and let loose this cry: ‘Vive l’Angleterre, l’Histoire et les Héros! A bas la France, la Fiction et les Faquins!’ [“Long Live England, History and Heros! Down with France, Fiction and Villains!”]” (*Villette* 341).

Lucy’s Francophobic rant illustrates how much the rivalry was on Brontë’s mind as she crafted this scene, and the degree to which we’re meant to read Monsieur Paul as a French character. This fiery exchange represents the nadir of their relationship in the third volume. Brontë signals this through the unambiguous nationalist opposition in Lucy’s diatribe against the French (history vs. fiction, heroes vs. villains).

She also continues to develop the association between Monsieur Paul and French nationalism as the volume progresses. Early in their relationship, Lucy muses that the tiny man's imperious nature reminds her of Napoleon Bonaparte's. She reflects:

I used to think, as I sat looking at Monsieur Paul, while he was knitting his brow or protruding his lip over some exercise of mine, which had not as many faults as he wished (for he liked me to commit faults: a knot of blunders was sweet to him as a cluster of nuts), that he had points of resemblance to Napoleon Bonaparte. I think so still. In a shameless disregard of magnimity, he resembled the great Emperor. (*Villette* 348)

In this passage, the reader is given another rare glimpse of "present day" Lucy, and we're told that Monsieur Paul continues to remind her of Napoleon Bonaparte ("I think so still."). Time and memory don't diminish his nationalist aura in Lucy's eyes. Brontë shows the reader at the beginning of the romance that Monsieur Paul is not going to become *less* Napoleonic in Lucy's mind as she falls in love with him; rather the association will be what remains and continues to define him for her. Brontë is not offering her reader a nationalist fantasy in which love conquers the national other; rather her fantasy is that Lucy's recognition that Monsieur Paul is a Napoleonic figure is part of the first stirrings of real romantic affection for him, and that their chemistry and energy with one another stems from the fact that they are so resolutely national opposites.

While Brontë does preserve a sense of national difference between the two characters, she quickly moves past the idea that their relationship will be based on

nationalist opposition. Only one page after first linking Monsieur Paul to Napoleon, Brontë makes the parallel again, as if to underscore its importance to the reader.

Lucy observes:

To pursue a somewhat audacious parallel, in a love of power, in an eager grasp after supremacy, M. Emanuel was like Bonaparte. He was a man not always to be submitted to. Sometimes it was needful to resist; it was right to stand still, to look up into his eyes and tell him that his requirements went beyond reason –that his absolutism verged on tyranny. (*Villette* 349)

Lucy's confession is the clearest indicator that Brontë conceives Miss Snowe and Monsieur Paul's relationship in geopolitical terms and is working through the contemporary challenge of how best to respond to a Napoleonic figure. She initially valorizes the right to resist, casting Lucy as a quasi Wellington, valiantly opposing Napoleonic ambition.

However, Brontë quickly abandons the idea of nascent nationalist opposition as the best means to respond to new Napoleonic ambition. She instead begins to favor interaction based on a sense of mutual identification and solidarity, a dynamic more in line with how she came to view the relationship between Napoleon Bonaparte and the Duke of Wellington as she began to study and to write on Napoleon's biography. In her writings on the Napoleonic period, Brontë individualized Anglo-French national identity in the figures of Wellington and Bonaparte. Her conception of Monsieur Paul and Lucy's relationship in *Villette* reflects her tendency to read the historical and the geopolitical in terms of individual relationships. As Brontë studied Napoleon's personal history, she came

to believe that there was a special solidarity between Bonaparte and Wellington. They were resolutely national opposites, but also each other's only real equals, and capable of understanding one another in ways that others could not. For Brontë, they were cut from the same historical cloth, but crafted by different national tailors, and part of the tragedy of Napoleon's death for her was her impression that such individual-historical solidarity was rare.

Brontë revives this sense of a special communion between national opposites in *Villette*. She channels her curiosity over a new Napoleon in France into Monsieur Paul's character, and crafts a relationship between her two protagonists that reflects what she found so remarkable and so rare about the bond between Wellington and Bonaparte. The nationalist antagonism between Lucy and Monsieur Paul dissipates, and gives way to a growing sense of communion between them.

Once again, Brontë signals this solidarity through the characters' bilingualism. Early in the third volume, as Lucy begins to recognize her affection for Monsieur Paul, she formally bids farewell to her interest in Dr. John. Her valediction echoes Brontë's confession in her November 3, 1852 letter to George Smith that Lucy and Dr. John are not well-suited for one another because he is too flawless, one of the "curled darling(s) of Nature and Fortune." Seemingly alone in the school's garden, Lucy quietly says farewell to the bond:

"Good night, Dr John; you are good, you are beautiful; but you are not mine.

Good-night, and God bless you!" Thus I closed my musings. "Good night" left my lips in sound; I heard the words spoken, and then I heard an echo –quite

close. "Good-night, Mademoiselle; or, rather, good-evening –the sun is scarce set; I hope you slept well." (*Villette* 362)

The narration suggests that Monsieur Paul is speaking English here, "echoing" and then improvising off of Lucy's words. Indeed, his alliterative rejoinder ("the sun is scarce set") makes him appear particularly fluent, and underscores the degree to which this conversation is a linguistic fantasy –an enhanced, idealized version of events. Brontë once again "writes over" Monsieur Paul's deficiency in English, using the novel's retrospective narration to produce a textual bilingualism, one that exists only in the surreal space of memory, but which also reflects how deeply these two characters do understand one another.

This particular scene is a watershed moment for Lucy and Monsieur Paul, as he finally acknowledges the rich symbiosis and sympathy in their bond. Lucy confesses to him that she believes the mysterious nun who haunts the school is real. He avows the same belief and adds:

I knew it, somehow; before you told me. I was conscious of rapport between you and myself. You are patient, and I am choleric; you are quiet and pale, and I am tanned and fiery; you are a strict Protestant, and I am a sort of lay Jesuit: but we are alike –there is affinity between us. Do you see it, Mademoiselle, when you look in the glass? Do you observe that your forehead is shaped like mine –that your eyes are cut like mine? Do you hear that you have some of my tones of voice? Do you know that you have many of my looks? I perceive all this, and believe that you were born under my star! Tremble! for where that is the case with mortals, the threads of their

destinies are difficult to disentangle; knottings and catching occur –sudden breaks leave damage in the web. But these “impressions,” as you say, with English caution. I, too, have had my “impressions.” (*Villette* 367)

Monsieur Paul concludes with an Anglo-French cognate, “impressions,” which makes it impossible to discern which language he’s speaking here. Brontë again uses the two language systems to symbolize the relationship she sees between the two characters. In this case, English and French perfectly mirror one another, replicating the physical similarity Monsieur Paul identifies. Brontë imagines Lucy and Monsieur Paul to be distinct, yet also to double one another. Each maintains the distinctive markers of their political identity: Monsieur Paul is the fiery, temperamental continental, and Lucy remains the stoic English Protestant, yet these differences don’t clash as they did at Monsieur Paul’s feast, rather they correspond and complement one another.

Brontë sketches a special affinity between these two characters, one that reflects the potent bond she believed existed between Bonaparte and Wellington – that they were twin titans, each resolutely national, yet linked through their exceptionality. *Villette*’s third volume functions as political allegory: Monsieur Paul’s sudden centrality in the narrative reflects Napoleon III’s sudden rise on the world stage, and Lucy’s need to confront and to assess her relationship with him is indicative of England’s need to gauge its political relationship with the new Napoleon. Brontë’s hope, as expressed through Lucy and Monsieur Paul’s interaction, is that the two powers will not renew their old antagonism, but rather find that their long history *of* antagonism has elevated them to the status of special

equals, and that they can find solace and strength in their rare solidarity. Brontë draws on the “exceptional characters” concept of her youth, extending it to the national level, and imagining a form of diplomacy and *détente* based on respect born out of old adversity and the sense that England and France have fought for so long that they’re the only two powers that really understand one another.

Yet the old animosities are ultimately what push Lucy and Monsieur Paul apart. *Villette*’s final volume strives to imagine a new Anglo-French diplomacy through Lucy and Monsieur Paul’s relationship, one based on a sense of mutual identification –a kindred bond. However, established national prejudices eventually creep back in. The pressure is external to the relationship, as minor figures in the novel endeavor to pull Lucy and Monsieur Paul apart. In *Villette*, Monsieur Paul is surrounded by a coterie of Catholics including his mentor, Père Silas; his cousin, Madame Beck; and the cantankerous Madame Walravens. They discourage him from pursuing his bond with Lucy. Their principal concern is her stern Protestant faith. Monsieur Paul confesses to Lucy that he is torn between the advice of his Catholic companions and his compassion for Lucy:

“I called myself your brother,” he said: “I hardly know what I am –brother – friend –I cannot tell. I know I think of you –I feel I wish you well –but I must check myself; you are to be feared. My best friends point out the danger, and whisper caution...it is your religion –your strange, self-reliant, invulnerable creed, whose influence seems to clothe you in, I know not what, unblessed panoply.” (*Villette* 417)

Lucy's Protestantism is her most distinctive marker of English national identity in *Villette*. Brontë's heroine eschews other established forms of national belonging: she does not have pronounced connection to England's national space, and she is eager to become bilingual once on the Continent; but she steadfastly maintains her devotion to England's national religion, and her fidelity is enough to generate bias against her from the Franco-Catholics in the novel.

Brontë signals her pessimism that Lucy and Monsieur Paul's change in perspective towards one another and their willingness to move past old antagonisms could be a harbinger of widespread cultural change. She does so by nationalizing the fight for Monsieur Paul's affection and loyalty. In the third volume, Brontë effectively draws a national line in the sand, with Lucy on one side and all of the French and Labassecourian characters on the other. Monsieur Paul is not only pressured by his Catholic confidants to foreswear his connection to Lucy, but he is also given a "national" alternative to Lucy, as Brontë brings forward the previously incidental character of Zélie St. Pierre, a Parisian who also teaches at Mme. Beck's school. He is never seriously drawn to St. Pierre, but her presence demonstrates that Brontë is interested in the competition for Monsieur Paul's affection. Once he and Lucy have recognized their attraction to one another and their special affinity, the novel's narrative tension is generated by the efforts of the Franco-Catholic community in Villette to keep the two apart. Lucy also begins to suspect that Madame Beck, Monsieur Paul's cousin, has hopes of marrying him herself, and Lucy initially fears that Monsieur Paul's god-daughter, Justine Marie, is also his intended. Her paranoia is unfounded, but these rivals for Monsieur Paul's affection do pull at



him with the force of personal history and responsibility. They task him to remember his own origins and beliefs, and because they judge Lucy exclusively based on her Protestant faith, their resentment reenacts one of the principal sources of strife between the English and French -the rivalry between their national faiths.

Brontë again imagines an alternative to old forms of national antagonism, one again based not on a loss or lessening of political identity, but on a sense of mutual recognition. Monsieur Paul initially attempts to convert Lucy to Catholicism, leaving religious tracts in her school-desk. He soon recognizes his efforts are useless, and eventually endeavors to understand Lucy's Protestant faith. Lucy confesses to him that she distrusts "chanting priests or mumming officials," but that her heart longs to cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Monsieur Paul understands her longing, and muses, "whatever say priests or controversialists," murmured M. Emanuel, "God is good, and loves all the sincere. Believe, then, what you can; believe it as you can; one prayer, at least, we have in common; I also cry -'O Dieu, sois apaisé envers moi qui suis un pécheur!'" (*Villette* 421-422). Brontë once again uses bilingualism to signal Lucy and Monsieur Paul's solidarity, in this case, their recognition that they speak a mutual language of faith. Lucy makes the solitary cry of the Protestant, calling out as an individual to God, yet her appeal registers for Monsieur Paul who, raised in the Catholic confessional, hears the pain and truth in her voice. Both ultimately accord religious difference to the other as part of their affection and respect. Lucy comes to accept that Monsieur Paul's faith is right for him, noting, "in him was not the stuff of which is made the facile apostate," and he urges her to "remain a Protestant. My little English Puritan, I love Protestantism in

you. I own its severe charm. There is something in its ritual I cannot receive myself, but it is the sole creed for Lucy" (*Villette* 494).

This is the culmination of Lucy and Monsieur Paul's relationship in *Villette*, but the balance they find is fleeting. Brontë gives the lovers one quiet afternoon together in the Faubourg Clotilde at Lucy's new school, but she notoriously does not end the novel with them together. They are pushed apart by the Franco-Catholic characters in the text who cannot make the same leap that Lucy and Monsieur Paul do, and are unable to separate institutional and individual identity. Père Silas, Madame Walravens and Madame Beck are blindly beholden to their faith, and are only able to think about it institutionally, as opposed to Lucy and Monsieur Paul who recognize and respect one another as individual adherents of particular faiths. Their religious institutional loyalty is as inflexible and reflexive as the forms of nationalist prejudice Lucy and Monsieur Paul enacted before they fell in love. Brontë can imagine a step forward for these two characters, but ultimately cannot envision widespread change—at least not immediately. Monsieur Paul is dispatched to the French island of Guadeloupe to manage Madame Walravens's estates. Brontë lays bare the Franco-Catholics motivations for sending him away:

"My pupil," said Père Silas, "if he remains in Europe, runs risk of apostasy, for he has become entangled with a heretic." Madame Beck made also her private comment, and preferred in her own breast her secret reason for desiring expatriation. The thing she could not obtain, she desired not another to win: rather would she destroy it. As to Madame Walravens, she wanted her money and her land, and knew Paul, if he liked, could make the best and

faithfullest steward: so the three self-seekers banded and beset the one unselfish. They reasoned, they appealed, they implored; on his mercy they cast themselves, into his hands they confidingly thrust their interests. They asked but two or three years of devotion - after that, he should live for himself: one of the number, perhaps, wished that in the meantime he might die. (*Villette* 462)

Brontë imagines Lucy and Monsieur Paul driven apart by Père Silas's religious bias towards Lucy and Madame Walravens's desire to gain wealth from the colonies. Faith and Empire, the twin sources of Anglo-French tension in the nineteenth century, pull Monsieur Paul away from Lucy. *Villette's* conclusion suggests that while Brontë's ambition may be for a new kind of Anglo-French diplomacy in the wake of Napoleon III's rise, one based on a sense of special affinity between the ancient rivals, she's ultimately pessimistic that the old antagonisms can actually be overcome. She imagines the same end for her literary Napoleon as for the historical figure: he is sent to die on a lonely Atlantic island. Brontë's selection of Guadeloupe is significant. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the island was a pawn in the Anglo-French global rivalry, flipping back-and-forth between the two powers six times between 1759 and 1814. It was returned to France as part of the Treaty of Paris (1814), which settled the terms of Napoleon Bonaparte's exile on Elba Island. Brontë evokes both the costs of the rivalry and Napoleonic memory by sending Monsieur Paul into exile on Guadeloupe. *Villette's* conclusion suggests that Brontë believed Napoleonic history was doomed to repeat itself, and that England and France's historical antagonisms were fated to spoil any step forward for the two

powers. The novel's famously ambiguous ending of course offers the promise that Monsieur Paul might return from exile, and that he and Lucy, who manage to overcome their nationalist biases towards one another, can be together; but the novel's final lines betray Brontë's pessimism. After indulging the reader's need to imagine an optimistic conclusion for the two characters, Brontë closes her novel by observing, "Madame Beck prospered all the days of her life; so did Père Silas; Madame Walravens fulfilled her ninetieth year before she died. Farewell" (*Villette* 496). The three characters most instrumental in keeping Lucy and Monsieur Paul apart and least willing to abandon their unflinching institutional prejudices live long and prosperous lives. Brontë ends *Villette* with the bleak recognition that old hate takes forever to die.

As the 1850s drew to a close, Brontë's pessimism would soon be born out in political fact. By the end of the decade, England and France had fully revived their old nationalist posturing, dusted off their Napoleonic era distrust, and France's new emperor came to be seen by the English as a autocrat on level with the first Napoleon.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### "A Long and Constant Fusion of the Two Great Nations": Charles Dickens, the Crossing, and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

After Napoleon III formally reconstituted France as an empire, Anglo-French relations cooled considerably in the closing years of the 1850s. The early optimism in England that Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's exile in Britain might have broadened his political perspective and might improve cross-Channel relations, soon gave way to the realization that England and France's international relationship was largely unchanged under the new Napoleon, as well as the recognition that his empire bore eerie and uncanny resemblances to his uncle's. As the Emperor solidified his power domestically and extended France's influence abroad, England soon found itself home to a flood of political refugees –exiles from earlier French political dynasties as well as the politically dispossessed from countries under French control.

On January 14, 1858, three of these refugees, Italian republican nationalists, attempted to assassinate Napoleon III. They tossed several bombs at his carriage as it arrived at the Paris Opera house. The Emperor was unharmed in the attack, but 156 people were injured, eight of whom later died. It was quickly learned that the would-be assassins had been political refugees in England, and had planned and trained for the attack in Birmingham, even going so far as to design and to construct their bombs in consultation with a Birmingham manufacturer, before shipping them to the continent. The architect of the attempt was an Italian revolutionary named Felice Orsini, who hoped that the Emperor's death would set off a series of popular uprisings in Europe that would eventually lead to Italy's independence.<sup>1</sup>

The assassination attempt set off yet another diplomatic crisis between England and France, and the political fallout from the attack soon centered public attention in both countries on the Channel. The shared body of water became a political briar patch, laced with the anxieties of both countries, and a space for each side to expiate its guilt. The French directed their embarrassment and sense of vulnerability towards it, raging that the political refugees who committed the crime had been able to cross both ways, and compensating for the insecurity the attack generated by threatening to invade England. The English responded with a mixture of nationalist bravado and contempt for the invasion threat, and mitigated a sense of responsibility by marking the Channel as the space in which the refugees *became* would-be assassins. The Channel soon became an over-determined threshold space between the two nations and a reservoir for the competing nationalisms of both countries.

The popular will to see the Channel as a nationalist line of demarcation would have been anathema to Charles Dickens, who by the 1850s was a part-time resident in both England and France. In the years leading up to the attack, Dickens shuttled routinely across the Channel and often wrote about the Crossing in his journalism. In his writing the Channel became a psycho-geographic safe haven for Dickens, a site where he could feel a fleeting moment of connection to both countries, and could briefly overcome the quintessential experience of those who travel and call two different places home –that you’re always not in one of them. The nationalist rhetoric foreclosing on the Channel in the wake of the attack on Napoleon III would have been particularly traumatic for Dickens because he saw the

Channel as the space best able to embody a new kind of political relationship between the two powers, one in which each country came to recognize its similarity to the other. He also saw frequent travel across the Channel as the best means for the citizens of each country to overcome their entrenched nationalist prejudices. Dickens shared Brontë's aspiration that England and France could come to acknowledge how much they had in common and how much they mirrored one another; but whereas Brontë imagined a complementary relationship, one in which each side maintained its national distinctiveness while recognizing a special similarity, Dickens sought to collapse any sense of national difference and to diminish any sense of separation between the two national spaces. But Dickens also shared Brontë's skepticism that England and France would or could actually move past their well-established national resentments, and he certainly shared William Thackeray's rage towards those who would foster nationalist antagonism between the two powers in order to drive them further apart.

One year after the assassination attempt and its political fallout, Dickens released *A Tale of Two Cities*, his version of the onset of the French Revolution and the rise of the Terror. This chapter will suggest that Dickens looked back to the Revolution in direct response to the breakdown in Anglo-French relations following the attack on Napoleon III and the renewed bellicosity between the two powers.<sup>2</sup> It will argue that *A Tale of Two Cities* is informed by the popular nationalist rhetoric that sought to solidify the Channel as a threshold space between England and France, and that was also preoccupied, even in England, about the ease with which refugees could move between the two countries.

*A Tale of Two Cities* responds to the nationalist rhetoric on both sides of the Channel in its depiction of the multiple trials of Charles Darnay, a French political refugee, who is persecuted on both sides of the Channel for the crime of crossing it. It is in many ways a “Channel centric” novel. The narrative begins and ends with a race towards the Channel, as Dickens opens the text with Jarvis Lorry’s mysterious midnight ride to France and closes it with Charles Darnay’s desperate flight back to England. These narrative bookends pull the novel’s center of gravity towards the Channel, and much of the tension in the text is generated *because* characters cross the Channel. Charles Darnay, a thinly veiled double for Dickens himself, in particular feels a connection to both England and France, and travels repeatedly to France out of a sense of fidelity and obligation to his life there. He’s condemned in both countries for it, and *A Tale of Two Cities* reveals Dickens’s resentment about the popular repudiation of those who would move freely between England and France, as well as his despair that the rich sense of simultaneous national connection he felt on the Channel could ever be sustained in political fact. Like Thackeray, he returns to the Revolutionary period, the age that would set in motion and establish the contours of England and France’s political rivalry in the nineteenth century, in order to lament the ease with which the old animosities could return and the seemingly never-ending cycle of cross-Channel antagonism between the two powers.

#### *A Tale of Two Cities* and Transnationalism

Reading *A Tale of Two Cities* as a “Channel centric” novel also helps to move criticism on the work away from the national model. Scholarship on the text has tended to privilege a sense of national opposition when considering the relationship



between England and France in the work, and has largely treated the two countries as discrete national entities. The rise of transnationalism in literary studies has helped to complicate our understanding of how nationalism and national identification worked in the global eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when people were both forced and moved voluntarily between multiple national spaces and came to identify with different national locales, either as a coping mechanism as a result of the trauma of displacement or out of a commitment to crafting a cosmopolitan identity. A consideration of the ways in which Dickens's novel may reflect a broader, more complex, geography and may also embody his dual identification with England and France can deepen our understanding of how Dickens wrote about "the nation," and can add help us to understand how the Channel could function as a transnational space.

The critical history of reading *A Tale of Two Cities* through a pronounced national lens is due in part to Dickens's own insistence when the novel was released that it was an historically accurate portrayal of Revolutionary France. Dickens was obsessed with historical detail when composing *A Tale of Two Cities*. He compulsively and exhaustively read historical accounts of the Revolution in preparation for the novel, most notably Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History* (1837), which was the primary source text for Dickens's portrayal of the Terror. Dickens took great pride in *A Tale of Two Cities'* historical accuracy, remarking in his preface to the first edition:

Whenever any reference (however slight) is made here to the condition of the French people before or during the Revolution, it is truly made, on the

faith of the most trustworthy witnesses. It has been one of my hopes to add something to the popular and picturesque means of understanding that terrible time, though no one can hope to add anything to the philosophy of Mr CARLYLE'S wonderful book. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 397)

Dickens's obsession with historical detail has led to a concomitant obsessiveness among some critics of the novel, as several studies of *A Tale of Two Cities* have focused on Dickens's historical accuracy, and in particular on interpreting his use of Carlyle.<sup>3</sup> These readings tend to center the novel more exclusively in France: interpreting its use and portrayal of Revolutionary history, examining the text for insight as to what Dickens admired or feared about French culture, and quite simply viewing the text as a story *about* France.

Other critics have observed how sharply out of step *A Tale of Two Cities* is with Dickens's other portrayals of France, and have concluded that the novel is much more about England. Dickens's other representations of France are largely optimistic, capturing his affection for French openness, hospitality, and *joie de vivre*. *A Tale of Two Cities*, by contrast, is a deeply pessimistic look at the ways in which vicious social inequality can lead to radical upheaval in the form of revolution. The sharp contrast in tenor between the novel and Dickens's other depictions of France has led many critics to suggest that the work functions as allegory with Revolutionary Paris standing as metropolitan projection for Victorian London.<sup>4</sup>

These two critical trajectories move scholarship on *A Tale of Two Cities* away from the novel's central conceit: that it is a tale of two cities, London and Paris, a tale of two nations, England and France, and a reflection on the rich ways in which they

are connected to one another and stand as twins along the shared space of the Channel. That certainly does not suggest that scholarship on the ways in which the novel is “about France” or “about England” is misguided –far from it; but as this chapter will show, by the 1850s, Dickens was searching for a way to move past an “either-or” proposition when it came to England and France, and to codify the complicated dual affinity he felt for both national spaces. In his writing from the period, the Channel quickly emerged as the space in which Dickens could resolve his dual connection to both by collapsing the distinctions between them.

#### Writing the Channel – Dickens and The Crossing

As Dickens began to spend more time in France, primarily along the coast in Boulogne, he came to appreciate the forms of cultural exchange he saw there. Remarking on the number of English tourists in Boulogne in “Our French Watering-Place,” published in 1854, Dickens observes:

But, to us, it is not the least pleasant feature of our French watering-place that a long and constant fusion of the two great nations there, has taught each to like the other, and to learn from the other, and to rise superior to the absurd prejudices that have lingered among the weak and ignorant of both countries equally. (“Our French Watering Place” 241)

Boulogne's proximity to the Channel allows English and French citizens to intermingle freely and frequently, overcoming their biases towards one another; but Dickens imagines a transformation in space as well as sentiment, a “fusion of the two great nations” along the coast. Boulogne becomes a multinational space in

Dickens's mind: it reaps the benefits of both nations, and blurs the distinctions between them.

Dickens registered a similar sense of civic and geographical blending on the Channel itself. In his journalist accounts of the Crossing, the violence of the journey between England and France tended to unmoor the traveler, dislodging him from a stable sense of self or direction. In "Our French Watering Place," Dickens opens the work by reminiscing about one of his first trips across the English Channel to France. He recalls meeting a Frenchman mid-passage:

Our mind's eye recalls a worthy Frenchman in a seal-skin cap with a braided hood over it...who, waking up with a pale and crumpled visage, and looking ruefully out at the grim row of breakers enjoying themselves frantically on an instrument of torture called "the Bar," inquired of us whether we were ever sick at sea? Both to prepare his mind for the abject creature we were presently to become, and also to afford him consolation, we replied, "Sir, your servant is always sick when it is possible to be so." He returned, altogether uncheered by the bright example, "Ah, Heaven, but I am always sick, even when it is *impossible* to be so. ("Our French Watering Place" 1)

Dickens remembers the exchange with great affection. He relishes the Frenchman's wry resignation to the inevitable onset of seasickness, and the camaraderie that comes from making the rough passage across the Channel together. There is a respectful, almost ceremonial, quality to the conversation, as both men wearily accept that the violent passage across the Channel will make it impossible for them *not* to be sick.

Dickens recalls the encounter while reflecting on the ways in which his trips to France have changed since the development of a continental rail system. He remarks:

The means of communication between the French capital and our French watering-place are wholly changed since those days; but, the Channel remains unbridged as yet, and the old floundering and knocking about go on there. It must be confessed that saving in reasonable (and therefore rare) sea-weather, the act of arrival at our French watering-place from England is difficult to be achieved with dignity. ("Our French Watering Place" 1)

Dickens's tone in the excerpt is difficult to divine, but he does not actually regret that modern innovation has not found a way to bridge the Channel and to ameliorate the traveler's experience crossing it. Dickens found perverse pleasure in the difficult experience of the Crossing, and delighted in its narrative potential: the abject horror of seasickness, the surreal disorientation of crossing at night, and the sheer trial of the enterprise. The Crossing was a time when one lost oneself and one's certainty in the certain violence and instability of the journey.<sup>5</sup>

Dominic Rainsford argues that Trans-Manche narratives reached their apex with Dickens, and reads the violence of the Crossing as part of a rigorous process for Dickens by which France is rendered familiar:

All in all, the process of getting to France is lavishly traumatic for Dickens, but being there is perfectly comfortable. It seems that Dickens plays up the Channel-crossing process, but this only goes to make France, once he gets there, surprisingly familiar and unthreatening. Dickens seems to be an

Englishman for whom France is not really very foreign –or, perhaps for whom France is no more foreign than England. (Rainsford 67)

As Rainsford suggests, Dickens's depiction of the Crossing is indicative of his dual familiarity with England and France, but he reads the Channel as threshold space for Dickens, a line of national demarcation that Dickens crosses through and *then* finds himself in either England or France, and the Crossing as an experience that separates the two nations in space and time.

My analysis will suggest instead that the Channel functions as topological space for Dickens: its geography doesn't separate England and France in his mind; rather it offers Dickens a rare opportunity to feel a fleeting sense of simultaneous connection to both countries. Dickens varies how he represents that simultaneous connection -he occasionally imagines England and France overlapping or collapsing into one another as a result of the disorientation of the Crossing, and at other times depicts them as mirroring or "doubling" one another along the Channel. But what registers for Dickens in each case is the impression that on the Channel he is connected to both at once.

Jonathan Grossman has recently argued that Dickens's international perspective shifted significantly in the mid 1850s, as he began to cultivate a sense of "international simultaneity" in his works, no longer viewing travel as a discrete process by which characters go abroad, have life-changing experiences, then return "home" forever shaped by them, a schema that separates territories in space and time. Instead, Grossman suggests that with the publication of *Little Dorrit* (1857), Dickens's spatiotemporal perception changed, a shift in line with changes in the

ways in which passenger transportation systems networked people, connecting them across international space and “in shared, synchronized time” (Grossman 179).

A consideration of Dickens’s treatments of the Channel Crossing gives us a model to further conceptualize the spatiotemporal change Grossman identifies. The Channel was a space in which time and geography tended to break down for Dickens, and was characterized by his sense of simultaneous connection to multiple national spaces. As Grossman suggests, recognizing the ways in which Dickens registered and cultivated a sense of synchronous national connection allows for a critical reassessment of Benedict Anderson’s seminal work on the development of nationalism, challenging the idea that the simultaneous “homogenous, empty time,” which Anderson argues is essential to the development of the nation-state ends at the national border (Anderson 26), and helps us to understand how actively Dickens was trying to imagine a more complicated form of national belonging in his depictions of the Channel Crossing.

The disorientation of the Crossing allowed for this dislocation in space and time. In “The Calais Night Mail,” published as part of *The Uncommercial Traveller* series (1861), Dickens narrates the surreal experience of crossing the Channel in the dark on the tiny, turbulent night-mail packet:

What is going on around me becomes something else than what it is. The stokers open the furnace doors below, to feed the fires, and I am again on the box of the old Exeter Telegraph fast coach, and that is the light of the forever extinguished coach-lamps, and the gleam on the hatches and paddle-boxes is

*their* gleam on cottages and haystacks, and the monotonous noise of the engines is the steady jingle of the splendid team. Anon, the intermittent funnel roar of protest at every violent roll, becomes the regular blast of a high pressure engine, and I recognize the exceedingly explosive steamer in which I ascended the Mississippi when the American civil war was not, and when only its causes were. A fragment of mast on which the light of a lantern falls, an end of rope, and a jerking block or so, become suggestive of Franconi's Circus at Paris where I shall be this very night mayhap (for it must be morning now), and they dance to the self-same time and tune as the trained steed, Black Raven. ("The Calais Night Mail" 214-215)

Dickens is interested here in the phenomenology of travel, rendering his Channel Crossing as a series of cognitive associations. The physical experience of moving across the Channel allows him to skip imaginatively between disparate geographies and memories. The impression is that time and geography become malleable in the turbulence of the midnight crossing, as Dickens flashes between the Mississippi of years ago and a circus from hours hence, all based on the stimuli of the moment. The resonances between the experiences are what fascinates Dickens here, the parallel impressions he is able to draw in the dark, strange no-space of the Channel at night, and the momentary thrill of mentally being in two places at once.

The Crossing facilitates this "doubling" of place. In "The Calais Night Mail," Dover and Calais blend into one another amid the violent disorientation of the Crossing. Fighting seasickness, Dickens stands on the deck of the packet-ship looking expectantly for Calais:



Malignant Calais! Low-lying alligator, evading the eyesight and discouraging hope! Dodging flat streak, now on this bow, now on that, now anywhere, now everywhere, now nowhere!...Even when it can no longer quite conceal itself in its muddy dock, it has an evil way of falling off, has Calais, which is more hopeless than its invisibility. The pier is all but on the bowsprit, and you think you are there –roll, roar, wash! –Calais has retired miles inland, and Dover has burst out to look for it! (“The Calais Night Mail” 212)

Just as Dickens expects to see Calais, he finds Dover. At the beginning of this Crossing, the two cities start as national beacons, markers for how far Dickens has traveled across the Channel, but they soon collapse into one another. They end up not opposed to one another, but in a more symbiotic relationship, balancing one another as Dickens cycles through a series of complementary emotional pairs: love and hate, hope and despair, revulsion and attraction. His emotions mimic the ebb-and-flow of the unsettled crossing, and help to emphasize that Dickens feels the same pull towards both cities. In “The Calais Night Mail,” he personifies both, often treating them as a pair of near-forgotten mistresses. He quips at the opening of the piece, “It is an unsettled question with me whether I shall leave Calais something handsome in my will, or whether I shall leave it my malediction. I hate it so much, and yet I am always so very glad to see it, that I am in a state of constant indecision on this subject” (211). The Channel Crossing only exacerbates Dickens’s love-hate relationship with Calais. He loves it when he can see it; hates it when it disappears. When he finally arrives at the French customs station, Dickens manically declares that his was a case of mistaken ambivalence, a simple matter of disorientation,

"Calais *en gros*, and Calais *en détail*, forgive one who has deeply wronged you. –I was not fully aware of it on the other side, but I meant Dover" ("The Calais Night Mail" 216). Dickens's affection is of course based on proximity. He is a capricious paramour who loves whichever city he is closest to at the time. He doubtlessly loves them both equally when in the middle of the Channel; but his connection to both, his sense of fidelity to both is the key dynamic here. His playful rendering of his affection for both cities as a love-hate relationship underscores how much Dickens *does* feel affection for both cities, and the Channel Crossing briefly lets him reconcile his dual fidelity, as he casts each as equal and constantly collapses them into one another.

His sense of dual fidelity to England and France is the opening conceit in "Our French Watering-Place" as well. Dickens begins the piece by suggesting, "having earned, by many years of fidelity, the right to be sometimes inconstant to our English watering-place already extolled in these pages, we have dallied for two or three seasons with a French watering-place" ("Our French Watering Place" 230). Dickens's faithfulness to his family's summer home in Broadstairs gives him the right to be faithful to his family's summer home in Boulogne. He feels an obligation to nurture both connections, and casts his dual fidelity as an affective scale that must be balanced. Dickens also references an earlier encomium to Broadstairs ("our English watering-place already extolled in these pages"), an article entitled "Our Watering Place," published in *Household Words* in August 1851. Dickens would eventually publish both articles side-by-side in *Reprinted Pieces* (1858) as "Our English Watering-Place" and "Our French Watering Place," an editorial decision that

suggests how aligned the two locales were in his mind, and how much he was striving to represent a sense of balance between them.

Dickens's compulsion to see England and France as equals along the shared space of the Channel can also be seen in his article, "A Flight," published in *Household Words* on August 30, 1851 as a response to the debut of the South Eastern Railway Company's new "tidal trains." It is a deeply impressionistic account of a Channel Crossing made in conjunction with the new service. The "tidal" express trains were designed to make the journey from London to Paris (via Dover and Calais, or Folkestone and Boulogne) in only eleven hours, by coordinating London departures with the tide. This meant that departures were irregularly scheduled, but that it was also possible to travel from London to Paris in the same day.

The tidal-train service shaved only an hour and a half off of the Night Mail's service, but the Night Mail typically left London at 8:30 p.m. and arrived in Paris around 9:00 a.m. the next morning. With the tidal train, one could stand in London and Paris *in the same day*, which is exactly what Dickens does in "A Flight." The piece begins with Dickens waiting for his train to depart London. In order to more deeply characterize the experience, he emphasizes precisely what time of day it is, in part because he's stuck waiting on a particularly sultry London morning. He quips, "Here I sit, at eight of the clock on a very hot morning, under the very hot roof of the Terminus at London Bridge, in danger of being "forced" like a cucumber or a melon, or a pine-apple" ("A Flight" 26). This jibe sets a ribald tone for the piece, but it also privileges the role of chronology in the text. When Dickens arrives in France

at the end of what was still a long journey, he reflects on, and to a degree, relishes the fact that it is still the same day:

When can it have been that I left home? When was it that I paid “through to Paris” at London Bridge, and discharged myself of all responsibility, except the preservation of a voucher ruled into three divisions, of which the first was snipped off at Folkstone, the second aboard the boat, and the third taken at my journey’s end? It seems to have been ages ago. Calculation is useless. I will go out for a walk. (“A Flight” 34)

Dickens walks Paris in a traveler’s haze, “pushing back this morning (if it really were this morning) into the remoteness of time, blessing the South Eastern Company for realizing the Arabian Nights in these prose days, murmuring, as I wing my idle flight into the land of dreams, ‘No hurry, ladies and gentleman, going to Paris in eleven hours. It is so well done, that there really is no hurry!’” (“A Flight” 35). Dickens savors the surreality of the experience, the sublime confusion of travelling from London to Paris without a sense of rupture, either from the manic “hurry” that he typically associates with the Crossing, or from the clean divide between night (London) and day (Paris) that came from crossing on the Night Mail. Dickens relishes the reverie, the feeling of poetic timelessness in a prose world, and is in no rush to let go of his spatiotemporal disorientation.

Dickens *was* in a rush to compose the work, so much so that he wrote “A Flight” before having even taken the tidal train service. Dickens composed the account from notes taken by his sub-editor, W.H. Wills, who took the trip during the summer of 1851.<sup>6</sup> His urgency to produce the piece suggests how enamored

Dickens was with the idea of the new service, and his cavalier blending of fact and fiction (not an unusual practice for Dickens in his journalism) underscores that it was what the journey itself represented that mattered most for Dickens, and its pronounced departure from the traditional experience of crossing the Channel.

Dickens centers the article with a Channel Crossing, imagining the moment in which the packet approaches the French coast:

And now I find that all the French people on board begin to grow, and all the English people begin to shrink. The French are nearing home, and shaking off a disadvantage, whereas we are shaking it on. Zamiel is the same man, and Abd-el-Kader is the same man, but each seems to come into possession of an indescribable confidence that departs from us –from Monied Interest, for instance, and from me. Just what they gain, we lose. (“A Flight” 31)

Dickens imagines an autochthonic connection between the individual and his or her native soil; the traveler is nurtured by and grows in proximity to his or her home country. But Dickens’s imagery also suggests symbiosis: the English are shrinking *as* the French grow. He registers it as a parallel experience, suggesting there is a fixed amount of national energy that must be shared in common, and which, presumably, would be equally balanced midway across the Channel. Once again, Dickens imagines the Channel Crossing as part of a geographic schema that strives for stasis, one that suggests a comfortable middle space in which competing national connections are resolved or balanced. His model here segregates the nationalisms: the French are connected to France, the English travelers to England, but the Channel is still the space that mediates opposing forms of national affinity.

Dickens's Channel is topological space, defined not by the distance between two points, but by the traveler's relationship to them –a space in which it makes sense to feel connected to and pulled towards two difference places at once.

In "A Flight," the ability to be in England and France in the same day also allows Dickens to better appreciate and register the similar ways in which the two countries express nationalist pride. As Dickens roams the streets of Paris at the end of the narrative, he is accosted by a narrow-minded, dimly nationalistic traveler who he nicknames "Monied Interest," a moniker that emphasizes Dickens's interest here, and later in *The Uncommercial Traveller* papers, with the distinction between those who travel for professional reasons and those like his eponymous "Uncommercial Traveller" who goes abroad not out of monetary interest, but rather for the personal experience of visiting a new country. Monied Interest arrests Dickens on his stroll:

As I glance into a print-shop window, Monied Interest, my late travelling companion, comes upon me, laughing with the highest relish of disdain.

"Here's a people!" he says, pointing to Napoleon in the window and Napoleon on the column. "Only one idea all over Paris! A monomania!" Humph! I THINK I have seen Napoleon's match? There WAS a statue, when I came away, at Hyde Park Corner and another in the City, and a print or two in the shops. ("A Flight" 16)

Dickens refers to the statues of the Duke of Wellington in Hyde Park Corner and at the Royal Exchange, and it is his sense of *just* having been in London that allows him to see a parallel in England and France's memorials to their heroes of Waterloo.

This recognition allows him to turn the nationalist sentiment embodied by the

monuments on its head. The statues are intended to commemorate the high age of Anglo-French nationalist opposition, but Dickens realizes they also show how similar the two countries are and that there is nothing particularly French in the nationalist monomania Monied Interest observes.<sup>7</sup> It also illustrates once again how committed Dickens was in the 1850s to seeing the commonalities between England and France even if it meant finding correspondence in how they celebrated their last war with one another. It was most notably on the Channel that Dickens could register this commonality and could figuratively collapse one country into the other in his mind. The Crossing, for a moment, allowed Dickens to negotiate a split sense of self and to reconcile his sense of dual national fidelity.

Crossing the Line - Orsini's Bombs and the Channel as *Cordon Sanitaire*

The Channel was a psycho-geographic sanctuary for Dickens, and crossing it gave him a brief sense of nationalist equilibrium. This would have made Felice Orsini's failed attempt on Napoleon III in January 1858 particularly traumatic for Dickens. Dickens was by no means fond of Napoleon III himself, but the political fallout from the assassination attempt marked the Channel as threshold space in public discussion, a highly invested line of nationalist demarcation.

Napoleon III's government was enraged that the political refugees who committed the crime had not been more aggressively monitored and constricted while in England, and that they had been allowed to circulate, to gather, and to conspire against France -in England -with relative impunity. The attack radically altered the geopolitics of the Channel, as the political debate centered on the freedom England accorded its refugees, and the ease with which the conspirators

could cross the Channel from England. On January 19, 1858, *The Times* reported that the French government was pressuring England to limit the autonomy given to political refugees. *The Times* responded:

Nothing that has happened in France, or that is likely to happen, can affect the internal state, the genius, or the institutions of any neighbouring people equally powerful, independent, and self-respecting. We shall not be curious to inquire what is the particular country to which Frenchmen point as the refuge and nurse of conspiracies against their own Constitution. It is enough to observe that if France has her natural and inevitable development, other nations have theirs also. If she tends with irresistible force to the unity of an Imperial system, to the simplicity of one will, to the mere reign of necessary order and beneficent force, we, too, for example, advance in a tradition of our own, which we should find it impossible to renounce. It is part of our identity to be the refuge of all nations. Nature itself has given us ports with every aspect, and traffic with every clime. From our ancient fusion of many races and hospitality to many refugees we derive both the precedent and the capacity for sympathizing with all the tribes of humanity, and even all the phases of human opinion. We cannot prevent this metropolis from being even what Rome was described by its satirists, the sink of the human race. We cannot save our public thoroughfares from the floods of vice poured in by neighbouring States. For better, for worse, we have long been wedded to liberty, and we take it with all its evils for the sake of its manifold blessings.

(*The Times* 19 January 1858)



The attack becomes an opportunity for *The Times* to assert England's independence from French cultural influence, and to position England as an island refuge, a reluctant, but proud, host to those who must flee political oppression on the Continent. *The Times* imagines separate national destinies for England and France, and in part returns to the imagery of the post-abolition period, during which England was cast as a safe haven for Africans fleeing France, after Napoleon I's imperial government elected to reinstitute slavery in the French colonies. The article also evokes the popular perception following the French Revolution that England and France embodied radically different political ideals. *The Times* writers position England as the natural enclave of liberty, while assigning France a political destiny that leads inevitably to Imperial tyranny ("If she tends with irresistible force to the unity of an Imperial system... we, too, for example, advance in a tradition of our own). This early response to the assassination attempt quickly revives political narratives popularized in the Revolutionary Period when a sense of clean political separation between England and France was a part of how each side developed its global identity after the storming of the Bastille.

However, even as *The Times* endorses England's identity as an island refuge for the politically dispossessed, it characterizes those refugees as an abject class in England, imagining them turning London into "the sink of the human race." While the post assassination crisis would dramatically push England and France apart, both sides tended to view the refugees in England with scorn and suspicion. This can help us to understand why Dickens would center *A Tale of Two Cities* around the suspicious comings and goings of a French political refugee, Charles Darnay.

Even as *The Times* writers metaphorically held their nose while praising England's culture of political asylum, they also voiced embarrassment that the attack against Napoleon was plotted in England. On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the paper reported:

It has been hinted to us that not only did the conspirators meet here, but that some of the projectiles were also made here...it cannot, however, be doubted that it was in Birmingham that the final arrangements of the plot were made. This is a distinction of which, if the town itself was in any way implicated we should be heartily ashamed, as with the cowardly transaction itself every Englishman is heartily disgusted." ("The Attempt to Assassinate The Emperor of the French")

*The Times* oscillates between pride in the relative freedom given to political refugees and revulsion for the attack itself. There is a dual desire to see the right to political asylum as indigenous to England and the idea of political assassination as anathema to it. The anxiety that emerges in the English reaction to the attack on Napoleon III is that the political freedom accorded to the refugees somehow allowed for, or even caused, the attempt. The fear is that England is not necessarily a safe haven for the oppressed, but a comfortable nest for conspirators, and that the freedom to associate could somehow foster the desire to assassinate. On February 2, 1858, *The Times* editorialists considered the limits to the liberty accorded to refugees, asking:

Is it really true that by the laws of England such designs may be conceived, matured, and carried on to execution without rendering the actors liable to punishment? This point seems to admit of debate, and to be regarded

differently by different authorities. We think, however, that if we dismiss for a moment the consideration of law, and confine our views to the suggestions of reason, we shall discern pretty clearly the general conclusions to which the opinion of this country would tend. There are two distinct issues in the case –one concerning the crime in question, and the other the procedure. We believe there is not a man upon these islands who does not abhor the idea that assassination can be justified by political pretexts, or who would look upon murder as anything less than murder because it was undertaken upon revolutionary grounds. So rooted is this feeling in the public mind, that even causes which might in some respects command our sympathies become detestable in popular esteem when they are connected with plots and poniards. (“England Gets Rather Hard Measure in the Matter”)

*The Times* goes out of its way to stress that the refugees would have found no recourse for the idea of political assassination in England, and to make the notion of murder for political gain as foreign, or abject, to English popular opinion as possible. Indeed, the description of assassination as murder “undertaken upon revolutionary grounds” seems to be an effort to cast the action as somehow continental in nature, positioning it within a larger history of revolutionary action on the continent, rather than within the greater history of England as an island refuge.

However, *The Times* editors are concerned with the issue of English culpability, questioning at what point England begins to bear responsibility for the actions of the assassins, and at what point conspiracy actually becomes a crime. *The Times* finesses the issue by distinguishing between the idea of assassination and the

act of assassination (“There are two distinct issues in the case –one concerning the crime in question, the other the procedure.”) By coupling this distinction with the assertion that the English detest political assassination, particularly in conjunction with revolutionary violence, *The Times* is transferring blame to the continent. The periodical continues:

Whatever we can do to prevent the abuse of the asylum which our shores afford we will do cheerfully...it is much easier to catch a man at a bridge than to catch him in the open country, far simpler to identify him as he steps out of a boat than when he is at large in a multitude. A refugee more or less is lost in the swarms which flock to us from every territory in Europe. We cannot, until he betrays himself by some significant act or word, distinguish the conspirator dealing in bombs and daggers from the harmless dancing-master eating the bread of labour in a foreign land. Orsini might be in England for any purpose; he could hardly be in France except for purposes of evil. When he and his colleagues set out on their infamous mission with grenades in their pockets their objects might indeed be said to acquire some notoriety, but not before. It was in the very act of quitting our shores that their criminality assumed a notable shape. (“England Gets Rather Hard Measure in the Matter”)

The Channel is the centerpiece in this geo-judicial schema, the threshold at which the refugees’ whispered plotting becomes intent, and the Crossing itself is the moment in which speculation becomes sinister, and politically-frustrated refugees become worthy of surveillance. This formulation absolves England of much of the

responsibility for policing political exiles, and mitigates any guilt that the refugees *became* criminals in England. The English writers use the Channel to mark a clean line of national culpability, and to cultivate a Manichean sense of guilt and innocence.

*The Times* editorialists also sought to cast the act of crossing the Channel for political retribution as quintessentially French by reminding their readers that Napoleon III had also been a political refugee in England and had followed a nearly identical trajectory as Orsini and his co-conspirators. They quipped:

The French Emperor is the person who directs against England accusations of being a den of conspirators; and who could speak with greater knowledge than he? Has he not, when so enjoying our protection, acted the part of a conspirator? Did he not leave these shores armed with the great name of his predecessor –I mean the Great Napoleon –did he not, armed with that name, and a tame eagle, go to Boulogne...and that is the man who chooses to publish in the pages of the *Moniteur* accusations against England for being a haunt and a den of homicides, wherein conspiracies are hatched and which ought therefore to be subjected to the invasion and rapine of soldiers?" (*The Times* 6 February 1858)

Three distinct political histories collapse together in this short indictment of Napoleon III. *The Times* writers overlap the Emperor's biography with that of Orsini, but also recall and add Napoleonic era history to the mix by mentioning Napoleon III's use of his uncle's memory and by ending the invective with a reference to the threat of invasion.

The old Napoleonic nightmare of invasion quickly resurfaced after the assassination attempt. When the attack failed, several of the conspirators fled back to England. Napoleon's government demanded their extradition, and when England refused, the Emperor, and his generals, raised the specter of invasion. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, *The Times* reprinted a speech given to the Emperor by one of his generals, General Bazaine. He attests:

This odious and cowardly attempt has filled our hearts with indignation and rage against those who, by giving an asylum to these sanguinary anarchists, have made themselves their accomplices. In expressing our wishes that your Majesty's life, so intimately connected with the repose and prosperity of France, may be ever preserved from all parricidal attempts, it does not suffice the army to form a rampart round its Sovereign; it is ready to shed its blood in all places to reach and annihilate the artisans of regicide...those wild beasts who at periodical epochs quit a foreign soil to inundate the streets of your capital with blood inspire us with no other feeling than that of disgust; and if your Majesty wants soldiers to reach those men, even in their haunts, we humbly pray you to designate the 82<sup>d</sup> Regiment as part of the advanced guard of this army. ("The Revival of Liberty")

Barazine uses the Channel to recast the issue of national culpability, making the central issue not the French Army's failure to protect the Emperor, but the English government's willingness to grant the refugees asylum. Asylum equals complicity, a formulation that shifts responsibility across the Channel, and seeds the origins of

the crime on English soil. The invasion threat also charges the Channel, making it a challenged space that the French army might cross at any moment.

The invasion threat was a reaction to a sense of vulnerability on the part of France following the attack. Napoleon III's government compensates for its insecurity over how porous the Channel seems to be and how easily refugees can cross it by threatening to cross it with a French army, thereby symbolically asserting new control over the space. What terrified the French government most was the free circulation of refugees between the two countries, and the Emperor soon moved to target this group. In March 1858, an anonymous pamphlet, entitled *L'Empereur Napoleon III et l'Angleterre* and thought to be authored by Napoleon III himself, was published in France and reprinted in *The Times*. Midway through the work, the author strives to illustrate how dangerously revolutionary French refugees have become as a result of political shelter in England by quoting Félix Pyat, a French revolutionary, who, in 1858, was in exile in England. In his own pamphlet, written in England and smuggled into France, Pyat promises, "in spite of all your precautions –notwithstanding your walls of China, your line of Customs, your *cordon sanitaire* –we pass, we penetrate, we arrive in the cottage, in the hands, eyes, hearts, of the operatives and peasants, and the people read us notwithstanding all" ("The Emperor Napoleon III and England."). Pyat blends the dual fears of the imperial government, evoking the imagery of geographical transgression in order to illustrate the pervasiveness and power of revolutionary thought. He morphs two forms of circulation, people and ideas, and makes threshold crossing in all forms a political seditious act.

The French government soon began to monitor both forms of circulation much more aggressively. In the wake of the attack, Napoleon III's government moved to suppress any periodical not supportive of the Emperor's leadership and to restrict movement across the Channel from England. The Imperial government targeted the politically dispossessed, passing the *Loi de sûreté générale* or, as it was popularly called, the *Loi des suspects*. The legislation, adopted on February 27, 1858, in effect established a suspect class, consisting of anyone who had been accused of political dissent since 1848. Among its provisions, the law stipulated that anyone who had been complicit in the Revolutions of 1848 and 1851, and had subsequently fled France, would be subject to arrest or deportation to Algeria if they returned to France (Wright 414-430).

This group's standing soon became untenable on both sides of the Channel. For its part, Prime Minister Palmerston's government finally relented to French pressure, and introduced the Conspiracy to Murder Bill, which made it a felony to plot in Britain the assassination of someone abroad. Palmerston's bill was eventually defeated, but its circulation facilitated the arrest of a French refugee living in England named Simon Bernard. Bernard, a French language teacher (also Charles Darnay's occupation in *A Tale of Two Cities*), was arrested on February 14, 1858, exactly one month after the attack on Napoleon III. This suggests that his arrest was partially a diplomatic gesture designed to encourage *détente* between England and France. Bernard was charged with shipping the weapons used in the attack from England to France, an accusation that continued to deepen the public perception of the border as a dangerously porous space. Indeed, in testimony at



Bernard's arraignment, security at the border was presented as almost comically lax, as Bernard practically confessed his intention to commit a crime, and yet was still allowed to ship weapons to France. The customs agent, who helped Bernard prepare the package, recalls asking the refugee what it contained, "he stated that it contained two valuable pistols, and by words and gestures indicated his expectation that some change would very soon be made" ("The Examination of a French Refugee"). Bernard stops just short of telling the customs official that the weapons will be used in an attack on the French government, but the official acknowledges in his testimony that he knew Bernard was a political refugee from France, and yet still sent the armaments abroad. His blasé reaction to Bernard's clumsy threat would prove to be indicative of a larger English indifference to the crime against Napoleon III during Bernard's trial.

When the Frenchman's trial finally did begin at the Old Bailey, it was a popular sensation in England. Bernard's attorney, Edwin James, positioned the case as an opportunity for the English jury to reject public and political pressure from France, and to demonstrate that they were not cowed by the threat of invasion across the Channel.<sup>8</sup> He urged:

I implore you to let the verdict be your own, uninfluenced by the ridiculous fears of French armaments or French invasions...You, gentlemen, will not be intimidated by foreign dictation to consign the accused to the scaffold; you will not pervert and wrest the law of England to please a foreign dictator? No. Tell the prosecutor in this case that the jury-box is the sanctuary of English liberty...tell him that, though 600,000 French bayonets glittered

before you, though the roar of French cannon thundered in your ears, you will return a verdict which your own breasts and consciences will sanctify and approve, careless whether that verdict pleases or displeases a foreign despot, or secures or shakes and destroys for ever the throne which a tyrant has built upon the ruins of the liberty of a once free and mighty people. ("The Attempted Assassination of the Emperor of the French")

James flips the dynamic of the case, making the principal issue not whether England has a legal responsibility to punish its refugees for complicity in crimes abroad, which asks the jury to consider the ways in which England and the continent have become connected, but rather makes the case an opportunity for England to assert its independence from the continent. Furthermore, by alluding to the border threat, James reinforces the border itself in the public imagination, marking it as a barrier, a line of demarcation and national difference.

James's rhetoric also evokes the Napoleonic period, when the threat of invasion from the continent by a "foreign despot" was an everyday anxiety in England. James makes the contemporary diplomatic tension between England and France seem classical, part of a longer continuity of nationalist rivalry. His invocation is a return to an earlier and in some ways easier period of cross-Channel antipathy, when the lines were more clearly drawn, and the political stakes much more obvious, and when it wasn't necessary to sort through the ways in which the two powers were legally entwined because of the refugees' attack against the Emperor.

James's nationalist rhetoric worked. After a brief deliberation, the English jury acquitted Simon Bernard of complicity in the assassination attempt, rejecting the legal premise that he could be held accountable for a crime committed across the Channel that he did not directly take part in. The diplomatic crisis between England and France eventually died down, in no small part due to the execution of Felice Orsini in France, but the nationalist posturing on both sides raised the Channel in the public consciousness of both nations, and marked it forcefully in the popular imagination as a contested threshold between England and France, a space that was far too easy to cross for refugees, would-be assassins, and imagined invaders. Additionally, public discussion after the assassination attempt focused on sounding the distance between England and France, and insisting on a clean separation between them.

#### A Compulsion to Cross - Charles Darnay and the Channel

Dickens for his part followed the events surrounding the assassination attempt. When Palmerston's Conspiracy to Murder Bill was finally defeated, Dickens wrote to French actor, François Régner, "there is great excitement here this morning, in consequence of the failure of the Ministry last night, to carry the Bill they brought in, to please your Emperor and his troops. I, for one, am extremely glad of their defeat" (*Letters* 8: 522). Dickens responds specifically to the political pressure from France, alluding to the invasion threat, and signaling his disgust at the nationalist bluster that prompted the bill. He also followed Felice Orsini's trial in France and was troubled by Orsini's remorselessness at trial, writing to John Delane, the Editor of *The Times*, on February 28, 1858, "I think the attitude of that miserable

man Orsini, on his trial, as sad a picture, almost, as this world has to shew at the present time. 'Sir,' said a noble gentleman to me when I was last in Italy: 'in this country of mine, the greatest social misery is to have a son'" (Letters 8: 525-526). The horror for Dickens was that political oppression in Italy gave rise to someone like Orsini, and that social inequality could make acts of violence and political martyrdom inevitable. This aligns with his perspective on revolutionary violence in *A Tale of Two Cities*. In the novel, Dickens recognizes that the first French Revolution was the result of extended class oppression and social equality, but his sense of the long narrative of revolutionary upheaval is that it only leads to more violence and new forms of oppression: the excess of the *Ancien Régime* becomes the brutality of the Terror.

*A Tale of Two Cities* is also shaped by the nationalist rhetoric that followed Orsini's attempt on Napoleon III, and can be read as a response to it. *A Tale of Two Cities* stands apart from Dickens's typically playful and imaginative renderings of the Crossing, and his will to see it as a rich, sublime space connected to both nations, not an inviolate line between them. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens is still committed to representing the ways in which those who cross the Channel can feel a positive sense of connection to the nations on both sides of it, but the novel also betrays Dickens's skepticism that those who do so could ever escape public scorn and suspicion. The narrative appears to be deeply influenced by the public resentment towards political refugees in England following the attack on Napoleon III. Dickens figures the Crossing as a transgressive act in *A Tale of Two Cities*, a journey that never fails to generate public suspicion and anxiety. Dickens replicates the public

paranoia that followed the assassination attempt on Napoleon III, mimicking the popular desire to foreclose on the Channel, and to insist upon it as a barrier between England and France. The fact that Dickens does so demonstrates how deeply he was affected by the popular debate, and also suggests a degree of despair on Dickens's part following the refugee crisis. As with his other writings on France, *A Tale of Two Cities* functions as a model for what the Anglo-French relationship could be, but unlike his other works, there is a pessimism in *A Tale of Two Cities* that that dream will ever be realized, at least by the current generation.

In his journalism, Dickens constantly sought to see the similarities between England and France; but in *A Tale of Two Cities*, he seems to portray them as radically dissimilar. Indeed, Dickens seems to replicate Thomas Carlyle's vision of the French Revolution, in which London is the site of political calm and stability, while Paris is the chaos of the mob. In Dickens's Revolutionary narrative, Paris is embodied by the violent mania of the *Faubourg Saint-Antoine*, and London is the sheltered calm of Soho Square, but that distinction is not meant to figure them as opposites. Rather, they function as doppelgangers for one another -Paris has simply fallen into disrepute. The two cities share the same relationship as Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton. Under the grime of years of personal neglect and debauchery, Carton is Darnay's double –a fact that ultimately saves both men in the novel. Even as Dickens returns to the height of nationalist strife between England and France during the Revolutionary Period, he cannot dismiss his desire to see the two countries as doubles. They are connected, and in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens fosters that connection on the interpersonal level. In the novel, characters cross the

Channel, often at great personal peril, out of a sense of fidelity and obligation to those on the other side, and do so in spite of intense public pressure against crossing between England and France.

The first such passage occurs at the opening of the novel, as Jarvis Lorry makes his first Channel Crossing in fifteen years in order to return Alexandre Manette to England. This journey revives Lorry's connection with France. He had previously crossed the Channel routinely as an agent for Tellson's Bank, travelling between Tellson's branches in London and Paris, for, as he observes, "we are quite a French house, as well as an English one." (*A Tale of Two Cities* 21) For fifteen years, Lorry does not visit the French half of his firm, staying exclusively in England. That stasis shuts down part of Lorry's identity, in particular his sympathy for others. He becomes coldly commercial in England, only able to relate to others professionally. He insists that his devotion to Monsieur Manette is strictly a business obligation, telling Lucie, "these are mere business relations, miss; there is no friendship in them, no particular interest, nothing like sentiment" (*A Tale of Two Cities* 25). But his connection to Monsieur Manette pulls him across the Channel, and that journey slowly revives his sentimentality, and his sense of personal devotion to others. Dickens links moving beyond the border to moving beyond one's self, but also to recalling a greater sense of self. Lorry reawakens a dormant part of his own identity by going to France.

For Charles Darney, the novel's principal character and Charles Dickens's avatar in the text, crossing the Channel is a means of negotiating a sense of self and responsibility in two countries. Darnay flees France out of shame for his family's

history and for the abuses they have perpetuated as part of the French aristocracy. He settles in England, finding work as a French language tutor, and eventually forming a family with Lucie Manette. But he still feels a significant pull back to France, an obligation to redress the wrongs of his family. He drops his French title, Charles, le Marquis d'Evrémonde, but cannot abandon a sense of responsibility for his family's past. His title itself is somewhat oxymoronic; Dickens seems to be playing on the idea of Darnay as an "everyman" Marquis, suggesting he embodies a new form of aristocratic patronage, a hope that Darnay carries as well and that carries him routinely across the Channel, in order, as he confesses to his uncle, to "execute the last request of my dear mother's lips, and obey the last look of my dead mother's eyes, which implored me to have mercy and to redress" (*A Tale of Two Cities* 129).

Darnay does not make a clean break with France when he flees across the Channel, but he also does not join the small groups of French refugees who congregate in Tellson's Bank in London, conspire perpetually against the Revolutionary government in France, and wait for the political wheel to turn again. Dickens distinguishes Darnay from this sinister group of refugees, who were the forbearers to the political exiles who plotted against Napoleon III and in the 1850s were also waiting for their chance for political vengeance. Darnay isn't pulled back to France to revenge but out of a compulsion to ameliorate the condition of the French people. Darnay feels a sympathetic bond to the citizens of France, even though he is a member of the country's most vilified class. His sense of fidelity to France is so profound that it prompts an involuntary confession to Jarvis Lorry:

My dear Mr. Lorry, it is because I am a Frenchman born, that the thought (which I did not mean to utter here, however) has passed through my mind often. One cannot help thinking, having had some sympathy for the miserable people, and having abandoned something to them...that one might be listened to, and might have the power to persuade to some restraint. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 245)

Darnay's sympathy pulls him across the Channel pre- and post-Revolution. The first time, he goes to make amends for his family's past abuses; later to rescue his former servant, Monsieur Gabelle, who is arrested by the Revolutionary government for handling the financial affairs of an aristocrat.

Darnay's compulsion to cross the Channel also leads directly to his arrest in the novel. Darnay spends a considerable amount of time on trial or under indictment in *A Tale of Two Cities*. He is placed on trial three times in the text -twice for the crime of crossing the Channel. His third trial, in which he's denounced for his family's involvement in Monsieur Manette's wrongful imprisonment and the death of Madame Defarge's brother and sister, is in many ways the "expected" trial in a novel about the Revolutionary Period –Darnay is tried for the crimes of his class. But his first two trials don't fit as neatly into a narrative about the Revolution. Their focus is on the Channel, and they echo the rhetoric of patriotism and public paranoia that was paramount during the months after the assassination attempt on Napoleon III. They reflect Dickens's frustration with the public attempts to cast England and France as irreconcilable enemies, and to see the desire to cross the Channel as sinister and seditious.



Darnay is first arrested in England. He is accused of spying for Louis XVI, and crossing the Channel to pass information on British military deployment.<sup>9</sup> Dickens lampoons the nationalist paranoia Darnay's multiple crossings elicits through the ridiculous language of his indictment. Darnay is accused of being:

A false traitor to our serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth, prince, our Lord the King, by reason of his having, on divers occasions, and by divers means and ways, assisted Lewis, the French King, in his wars against our said serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth; that was to say, by coming and going between the dominions of our said serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth and those of the said French Lewis, and wickedly, falsely, traitorously, and otherwise evil-adverbiously, revealing to the said French Lewis what forces our said serene, illustrious, excellent, and so forth, had in preparation to send to Canada and North America." (*A Tale of Two Cities* 65)

The formulaic, repetitive language of the indictment suggests a rote form of patriotism and patriotic opposition to France. It foregrounds how much Darnay's trials, for Dickens, represent a practiced, reflexive nationalist antipathy. They are ultimately nothing more than empty nationalist gestures, part of a worn-out, but well-established routine, and part of the long history of hating and fearing the nation across the Channel.

Francophobia fuels Darnay's trial at the Old Bailey, and the Attorney General foregrounds the issue of national security early on:

The jury, being a loyal jury (as he knew they were), and being a responsible jury (as he knew they were), must positively find the prisoner Guilty, and

make an end of him, whether they liked it or not. That, they never could lay their heads upon their pillows; that, they never could endure the notion of their children laying their heads upon their pillows; in short, that there never more could be, for them or theirs, any laying of heads upon pillows at all, unless the prisoner's head was taken off. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 69)

As with the Simon Bernard trial, the verdict is seen as a moment of national testament, a chance for the jury to prove its national loyalty and to protect England from an external threat from France. Surprisingly, the Attorney General's final rhetorical flourish seems to draw on the imagery of the Terror -he appears ready to call for the Guillotine. In his nationalist fervor, he slips into language better suited to the other side, suggesting how easily one form of patriotic discourse can parrot or morph into another, and underscoring how much Dickens sees the nationalist language itself as empty and unconsidered.

Darnay's first trial in the novel doesn't just mimic the nationalist mania following the assassination attempt; it also draws on the public anxiety about the Channel Crossing by centering Darnay's supposed treasonous acts there. One of the chief witnesses against Darnay, Roger Cly, testifies that he met Darnay on the Channel Crossing and witnessed him passing lists of information on the British army to Frenchmen in Calais and Boulogne. Cly's character is part of Dickens's larger critique of nationalism in the Old Bailey trial scene. Cly is later discovered to be an actual spy, but he testifies at Darnay's trial as a "patriot" and "true Briton" (*A Tale of Two Cities* 71). Cly uses the rhetoric of patriotism to mask actual sinister intent, just

as the defense attorney uses it to color how the jury views all the evidence presented at trial.

All of Darnay's actions are placed in the worst possible light due to the heady mixture of fear and nationalism cultivated at the Old Bailey. The virtuous Lucie Manette is forced to testify that she not only saw Darnay pass papers to two Frenchmen on the packet-ship, but that when she first met Darnay on the Crossing, he made a provocative and potentially treasonous statement to her. She recalls his assessment of the American Revolution:

He tried to explain to me how that quarrel had arisen, and he said that, so far as he could judge, it was a wrong and foolish one on England's part. He added, in a jesting way, that perhaps George Washington might gain almost as great a name in history as George the Third. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 75)

Darnay's sense of the social grievances in France makes him acutely aware of the injustices that have led to the American Revolution. His gibe about George Washington is an attempt to make Lucie understand the historical underpinnings of the American war, but nationalism trumps nuance at the trial, and Darnay's statement is seen as proof of treasonous intent.

Darnay is ultimately acquitted at the Old Bailey, and the manner of his acquittal points to an alternative for Dickens to the nationalist monomania that drives the trial. Darnay is saved because he has a "double," Sydney Carton, an Englishman whose physical resemblance is enough to sow reasonable doubt in testimony that it was Darnay who crossed the Channel. Darnay's trial is about fear of those who make the Crossing, and Dickens offers a resolution that aligns with

how he tended to view that passage and what he found therapeutic about it –that it was a moment when England and France came to "double" or collapse into one another in richly uncertain ways, and when the disorientation of the journey made it impossible to say, for certain, which nation was which.<sup>10</sup>

But *A Tale of Two Cities* still signals Dickens's pessimism with the political climate between the two countries at the time of the novel's composition. He is careful to paint both England and France as stubbornly nationalistic, and in France's case, to evoke the judicial discourse that followed the assassination attempt itself. Darnay is arrested when he returns to France, indicted, as in England, *because* he crosses the Channel. In France, he is denounced for emigrating, a crime that strips him of all rights and titles, reducing him in title to the act itself ("the Emigrant Evrémonde"). He is condemned because he is a political refugee, rendered abject because he has sought refuge in England, the identical crime made punishable under Napoleon III's *Loi des suspects*.

In his second trial, Darnay's defense is that he fled France and returned there before it was a crime to do so. He testifies:

He had voluntarily relinquished a title that was distasteful to him, and a station that was distasteful to him, and had left his country -he submitted before the word emigrant in its present acceptation by the Tribunal was in use -to live by his own industry in England, rather than on the industry of the overladen people of France. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 293)

After the French Revolution, emigration allowed members of the French aristocracy and clergy to evade arrest and condemnation. On October 23, 1792, the

Revolutionary Government formally dispossessed emigrants of their land and titles, and made any return to France a capital crime. Darnay's defense is that he fled France before the term *émigré* became synonymous with the country's most suspected class, and returned to France before it was a crime to re-cross the Channel.<sup>11</sup> Darnay also stresses that he severed his fiscal connection to France before leaving, ceasing to benefit financially from his family's estate holdings; in other words, that he made a clean break from France.

Darnay is also asked at his trial if it is true that he married in England, and he replies, "true, but not an English woman" (*A Tale of Two Cities* 293). Darnay's response further deepens the sense that for Dickens the real issue that is on trial is whether or not Darnay's emigration has resulted in an intermingling of cultures and cultural resources. The French Tribunal probes for evidence that England and France have not become more blended as a result of Darnay's Crossing; indeed, he is finally acquitted when Doctor Manette testifies that Darnay had previously been placed on trial in England for treason against the English government. Manette testifies regarding Darnay:

So far from being in favour with the Aristocrat government there, he had actually been tried for his life by it, as the foe of England and a friend of the United States -as he brought these circumstances into view, with the greatest discretion and with the straightforward force of truth and earnestness, the Jury and the populace became one...At every vote (the Jurymen voted aloud and individually), the populace set up a shout of applause. All the voices

were in the prisoner's favour, and the President declared him free. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 295)

Darnay's indictment in England perversely allows for his acquittal in France.

Dickens seems to draw on the adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." In this case, Revolutionary bloodlust –the blind eagerness to punish any member of the *Ancien Régime* -is trumped by the Tribunal's nascent sense of nationalism. The fact that Darnay stands trial in England positions him as an enemy of the Aristocracy in a way that no amount of personal testimony could ever do. The French jury is largely unreceptive to his claims that he has renounced his Aristocratic standing, and is poised to condemn him as an Aristocrat nonetheless, until they learn of his trial in England. At that point they are eager to use the jury box as a moment to denounce the English government instead. It is the natural conclusion for a trial in which the more salient issue seemed to be sounding the distance between England and France, rather than assessing the crimes of the Aristocracy.

The first two trials in *A Tale of Two Cities* replicate the Anglo-French political dynamic following the assassination attempt on Napoleon III in 1858. Dickens portrays the English and French people, as represented by their juries, as rigidly nationalistic and deeply invested in establishing a clear line of separation between England and France, and also deeply distrustful those who do desire to cross between the two countries. Darnay is twice acquitted for the crime of crossing the Channel, but is eventually condemned anyway. He is denounced ultimately as an aristocrat, but his conviction suggests pessimism on Dickens's part that someone like Darnay could ever completely escape popular repudiation.

Darnay does, of course, escape capital punishment. He is saved, once again, by his double. The novel's conclusion signals both Dickens's despair that someone like Darnay, who does feel a sense of connection and obligation to both sides of the Channel could be condemned for it, and his hope that salvation can be found in similarity, and that England and France will recognize their resemblance just as Carton grudgingly does over the course of the novel. Carton's vision on the scaffold, which concludes the novel, is of the day when Darnay is able to safely cross the Channel again. He imagines Darnay returning to *Place de la Révolution* with his two children, one who carries Carton's name, signaling rebirth, and another who carries Lucie's, and who, Dickens writes, fulfills the promise of the novel's title, and "chattered in the tongues of the Two Cities that were blended in her life" (*A Tale of Two Cities* 219). This is Dickens's only direct reference to the novel's title, and it underscores how much his aspiration for it was linked, once again, to the idea and hope of a greater culture blending between England and France.<sup>12</sup> Dickens is not telling the tale of two different cities with his novel, each resolutely and irreconcilably separated from the other; he's imagining a process by which they could become whole. Little Lucie blends England and France together far more completely than her parents' habitation in both ever could, and fuses "the two great nations" in a way that Dickens typically only glimpsed in the sublime, surreal disorientation of the Crossing.

## EPILOGUE

### Literature and History

Sydney Carton doesn't actually make the moving declaration that closes *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens renders Carton's testimony as a hypothetical. He recounts that while awaiting execution:

One of the most remarkable sufferers by the same axe – a woman –had asked at the foot of the same scaffold, not long before, to be allowed to write down the thoughts that were inspiring her. If he had given any utterance to his, and they were prophetic, they would have been these... (*A Tale of Two Cities* 389)

Dickens based the unnamed woman on the scaffold on Madame Roland, a Girondist whose composure before dying at the Guillotine greatly impressed Thomas Carlyle.<sup>1</sup> History records that Madame Roland's final words were, "O Liberty, what crimes are committed in thy name!" Carton's imagined declaration doesn't focus on the violence of the Terror, although he does begin by predicting that all of his oppressors --Barsad, Cly, Defarge and The Vengeance --will also die at the Guillotine, consumed by the fires of liberty they helped to fan. Carton's focus is on the time when the chaos of the Terror will finally exhaust itself. Dickens closes the novel by imagining a moment when the weight of the history that has lead to the French Revolution will finally dissipate. Carton predicts:

I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the



natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out. (*A Tale of Two Cities* 389)

All three of the Victorian novelists in this study respond to the burden of history Dickens identifies here. As the previous chapter has suggested, Dickens's novel reflects not only on the horrors of the Revolutionary period, but also on the ways in which England and France were pushed apart during the Revolution, and Carton's hope in his final declaration is that his French double will one day again move freely between the two countries. Dickens ruminates on the end of the long history of the Revolution; but he can only do so by shifting from the historical to the imaginary. As he begins Carton's testimony, Dickens pivots from historical detail –Madame Roland's execution –to the hypothetical. He simulates the departure from history upon which Carton reflects.

Furthermore, he refuses to assign the gift of prophecy to Carton. His narrator notes of Carton's dying thoughts, "if he had given any utterance to his, and they were prophetic, they would have been these." Dickens's narrator isn't saying that Carton does know what's going to happen; rather, he is observing what Carton would have needed to say to be prophetic. Dickens doesn't want an oracle on the scaffold; prophecy robs history of its ambiguity and uncertainty. Even if the prediction is false, when it is made it makes history seem predetermined. As much as Dickens may have found solace in knowing that the bloodlust of the Terror would finally end, he doesn't necessarily give Carton this insight, and he ends his novel by using his narration to move away from the historical into the richly abstract world of the literary, offering a declaration that was never actually made. The conclusion of his

novel illustrates what the literary can do: capture impossible perspectives, words that don't exist, and ways of experiencing the world that transcend the actual and the historical.

William Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens all wrestle with and rebel against the ways in which England and France seemed doomed in the nineteenth century to repeat history over and over again and the reflexive ways in which their culture seemed to instantly revive old antagonisms and recall old history in response to new political drama. *Revolutionary Narratives* has suggested that they all do so by returning to history themselves, either explicitly as Thackeray and Dickens do in their returns to the Revolutionary Period, or obliquely as Brontë does in her use of Napoleonic history to frame the final volume of *Villette*. This study has shown that their novels are deeply personal responses to contemporary Anglo-French political contexts, ones that reflect their views on England and France, on the history of the Revolutionary period, on the long history of nationalist strife between the two countries, and most critically on the relationship between history and that nationalist conflict.

However, in locating a contemporary Anglo-French political context for *Vanity Fair*, *Villette*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and in articulating how each novel responds to and is shaped by that political reality, my project does not mean to assert that these works are merely mimetic or purely political. It does not seek to strip them of their imaginative quality and or to see them simply as knee-jerk reactions to real-world politics –just the opposite. William Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens may have been inspired by the real, but they each relied

upon the literary to imagine an alternative path forward for England and France and an end to the seemingly ceaseless cycle of violence and repetitive history between the two countries.

Thackeray offered an alternative perspective on Waterloo, one laced with the terrifying imagery of the invasion scare that haunted England as he wrote. He imagines a Waterloo filled with cowardly civilians, mass panic, and bald uncertainty that the English will triumph over Napoleon –hardly the stuff of nationalist historiography. For Thackeray, Waterloo framed and set in motion England and France’s contemporary cycle of revenge and nationalist recollection. He dislodges it from its place in the nationalist pantheon and denies it its role as a source of modern inspiration and arrogance for the English –a patriot touchstone that can be recalled to quicken the contemporary fight with France.

Charlotte Brontë and Charles Dickens go one step further and use their literary works to imagine what the alternative Anglo-French political relationship could look like when not suffocated by the burden of history and when England and France don’t settle for reenacting the same old nationalist struggle. For Brontë, the alternative is a deep symbiosis between the two powers and a recognition of their special solidarity, as well as an acknowledgment that history has made them special equals, not necessarily endless rivals. But Brontë needs a literary tapestry to fully imagine what that alternative relationship could look like. She uses *Villette’s* retrospective narration to weave a fantasy in which England and France, as embodied in Lucy Snowe and Monsieur Paul, transcend their national differences and misunderstandings, and find that they understand one another perfectly and

fluently, and can move easily between each other's languages. It's a fantasy of total comprehension that *Villette's* structure keeps in the realm of the fantastical. By reminding the reader that Monsieur Paul doesn't actually speak English while also representing him speaking the language fluently, Brontë's narrative points to its own constructedness and artificiality, as if to illustrate how improbable the fantasy of total comprehension is and how much it is an ideal. Lurking beneath this idealized version of the Anglo-French relationship is its alternative –the “reality” in which Monsieur Paul can understand any other language but English, and in which he and Lucy clash with one another by reflexively and rotely reviving old Anglo-French prejudices. Ultimately, Brontë uses her narrative to point to an alternative to this cycle of animosity, even while maintaining her skepticism that England and France will ever transcend their national differences.

Charles Dickens also turns to the literary in order to imagine transcending a sense of Anglo-French binary national difference. But for Dickens, the dream of moving past this opposition is deeply personal and a product of his will to see England and France not as separate national spaces but as part of a more sublime geography, one in which national differences evaporate in the ecstasy and confusion of travel. As with Brontë, his alternative is purely imaginary and can exist only in the realm of the literary in which paradox is par for the course and perception is not bound and burdened by reality. However, Dickens, like Thackeray and Brontë ultimately gives way to doubt that England and France, at least in the present generation, can ever escape the endless cycles of hate and history that have kept them apart.

*Revolutionary Narratives* has illustrated the degree to which the history of the Revolutionary period continued to define and to lend urgency to the Anglo-French political rivalry well into the nineteenth century. The history of the Revolutionary period continued to haunt the public imagination in both countries, resurfacing to bind them in their old nationalist forms and to isolate them into two distinct “imagined communities,” each rigidly opposed to the other. As this project suggested in its opening pages, blending Georg Lukács work with Benedict Anderson’s helps us to understand the ways in which history in the Revolutionary Period facilitated Anglo-French nationalist identification, and this study has borne out how beholden to the history of the Revolutionary period each side became for the better part of the nineteenth century. *Revolutionary Narratives* has shown that the impulse to revive and to return to the history of the Revolutionary period tended to manifest itself particularly at moments in which France moved to reassert its old imperial swagger. That impulse is vestige from the Revolutionary period, when “Revolutionary narratives” helped each side to understand the differences between their global ambitions and identity as well as the stakes in their imperial rivalry. This association between “Revolution” and “empire” was buried just beneath the surface in the Victorian period, and reemerged as a nationalist touchstone when France’s imperial ambition resurfaced. Recognizing this expands our understanding of how empire informed public discourse and literary production in the long nineteenth century and helps us to understand why three of the Victorian period’s most prominent novelists would return to the Revolutionary period when they did. Thackeray, Brontë, and Dickens revive Revolutionary history

in order to write against it and in an effort to find a way for England and France to finally move forward from the past.

## NOTES

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### INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Most recently, Fiona Price has argued that the attention to widespread social change that Lukács sees as indicative of historical fiction after Scott was actually endemic to historical novels in the 1790s. See “The Uses of History: The Historical Novel in the Post-French Revolution Debate and Ellis Cornelia Knight’s *Marcus Flaminius* (1792).” *Reading Historical Fiction: The Revenant and Remembered Past*. Eds. Kate Mitchell and Nicola Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Maxwell argues for a direct genealogy between them, advocating for more attention to the influence Lukács had on Anderson’s project. See *The Historical Novel in Europe: 1650-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. 64.

<sup>3</sup> This project reads the Napoleonic Wars as part of the Revolutionary period, because in England and France in the early nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte’s rise and fall was seen as a product of the Revolution. For the English, Napoleon’s ascent was the inevitable result of the political power vacuum left by the overthrow of the French Monarchy. For the French, Napoleon’s popular rise was augured and animated by the Revolution itself. On both sides of the Channel, his ascension fit seamlessly within a nationalist narrative of the Revolution, and this project considers it as part of a broader definition of Revolutionary “history.”

<sup>4</sup> England was only one century removed from its own “Glorious Revolution” (1688-1689), but James II’s overthrow did not result in the abolition of the monarchy. That distinction was critical for nineteenth-century English historians, most notably Thomas Carlyle, who saw it as evidence that the two revolutions were not related,

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and that England's successful reconfiguration of the monarchy was further proof that it stood for "tradition" while France embodied the rash upheaval of the mob.

<sup>5</sup> Allied forces defeated Napoleon in April 1814, but did not secure victory on the battlefield. Napoleon abdicated the imperial throne only after his marshals refused to follow his command to continue fighting in Paris once the Allied army had seized the city. By contrast, Napoleon surrendered directly to British forces following his defeat at Waterloo, turning himself over to Captain Frederick Maitland on the *HMS Bellerophon* on November 20, 1815.

<sup>6</sup> A notable exception is Michael Wiley's *Romantic Migrations: Local, National, and Transnational Dispositions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). Wiley focuses on "schemes of migration" between England and France after the French Revolution, considering how migration "destabilized Britons' sense of individual, local and national selfhood" (3). He suggests that migration created a condition of "unsettled *betweenness*" in English national subjectivity (7-8). However, Wiley also advocates reading British national literature through the lens of the Channel, a move that continues what I'm describing as a "Channel-centric" approach to the rivalry and to the period.

<sup>7</sup> See Gerald Newman *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (New York: St. Martin's, 1997), and Jeremy Black *Natural and Necessary Enemies: Anglo-French Relations in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, Ga.: U of Georgia P, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> In her elegant analysis of Burke's work, Morgan Rooney sees "inheritance" as the central conceit in Burke's conception of history. She writes, "in *Reflections*, he opposes what he sees as the universalizing, ahistorical tendencies of Enlightenment



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thought with a historicism that emphasizes continuity, accretion, and local experience...ultimately, in his discourse, inheritance –the principle that reconciles the twin historical necessities of change and continuity –underwrites the operations of historical development in the British and wider European contexts.” Morgan Rooney *The French Revolution Debate and the British Novel, 1790-1814* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2013), p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Vanity Fair* was published at the same time as the 1848 French Revolution, and Clare Simmons links it to that Revolution in *Eyes Across the Channel* (2000) but Thackeray composed and published his novel serially between 1846-1848 before Revolution broke out in France. The political instability in France in the period, which this study links to Thackeray’s novel, was certainly part of the build-up to revolution in France, but “revolution” had not yet occurred in France when Thackeray decided to return to Waterloo with *Vanity Fair*.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot (Eds.), *La Société des amis des Noirs, 1788-1799. Contribution à l’histoire de l’abolition de l’esclavage* (Paris: Editions UNESCO, 1998), p. 296.

<sup>11</sup> All translations from the French are my own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>12</sup> Catherine Duprat *Le temps des philanthropes: La philanthropie parisienne des Lumières à la monarchie de juillet* (Paris: C.T.H.S., 1993), p. 125; Marcel Dorigny “La Société des Amis des Noirs: antiesclavagisme et lobby colonial à la fin du siècle des Lumières (1788-1792).” *La Société des Amis des Noirs 1788-1799*, ed. Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot (Paris: Editions UNESCO, 1998), p. 40.

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<sup>13</sup> Miller argues, “those who would depict abolition as the simple realization of an ideal born in the Enlightenment –which of course it was to a certain extent –have a twisted path to walk, roughly between 1748 (the publication of *L’Esprit des lois*) and 1848 (the second and final abolition of slavery). The narrative would be much simpler if the abolition of 1794 had not been reversed by Napoleon in 1802. Many hesitations and reversals complicate the narrative. Abolition veered and lurched its way toward an outcome” Christopher L. Miller *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade* (Durham, N.C.: Duke UP, 2008), pp. 83-84. Miller persuasively demonstrates the degree to which colonial concerns constricted the French abolition movement; however, he insists on a cleaner teleology for Anglo-American abolition (Miller 83). England’s efforts to abolish slavery were also a product of and influence by colonial realities, and, I will suggest, were entangled in the complicated politics of England and France’s global rivalry.

<sup>14</sup> These translations are drawn from Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus’s *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford / St. Martins, 2006). Dubois and Garrigus reprint and translate the original French governmental record of the debate. By 1794, France faced political instability domestically and abroad. The abolition debate unfolded in tandem with the Terror, and both Danton and Delacroix would lose their heads to the Guillotine only two months after voting in favor of abolition, accused of not fully supporting Revolutionary ideals.

<sup>15</sup> Terry Eagleton writes, “French colonialism is typically centralizing and assimilationist: it regards native cultures as largely worthless, but offers its peoples

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the chance to integrate with an enlightened metropolis by becoming French citizens themselves...for the French, the ideal goal is political citizenship which an Algerian or Vietnamese may in principle attain; for the British, identity is essentially a cultural affair, so that the thought of a British Asian or African is merely absurd"

*Terry Eagleton, Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (New York: Verso, 1995), p. 94.

<sup>16</sup> This ambition and the egalitarian rhetoric of the Revolution continues to mask and to exacerbate social tensions in France and to define post-colonial France, as aspirations for "liberty, fraternity and equality" make it difficult to admit and to represent the staggering social inequality between the culturally and historically mainstream French and the descendants of colonized peoples, most notably French citizens of North African descent. In *Contre la dépression nationale* (Paris: Textuel, 1998), Julia Kristeva suggests that France is suffering from a form of national depression, becoming isolated and self-centered in the same manner as the depressed analysand. Kristeva argues that increased public discussion of and openness to the "foreigner" (étranger) in French culture is the only means to reconcile France's post-revolutionary, Enlightenment identity with its post-colonial reality.

<sup>17</sup> *A very New Pamphlet indeed! Being the truth: addressed to the people at large containing some Strictures on the English Jacobins, and the Evidence of Lord McCartney, and others, Before the House of Lords, respecting the Slave Trade.* (London, 1792), pp. 3-4.

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<sup>18</sup> Gilbert Francklyn *Observations, occasioned by the attempts made in England to effect the abolition of the Slave Trade; shewing the manner in which Negroes are treated in the British colonies in the West-Indies: and also, some particular remarks addressed to the Treasurer of the Society for effecting such abolition from the Reverend Robert Boucher Nicholls* (London: J. Waster, C. Stalker, and W. Richardson, 1789), p. xvii.

<sup>19</sup> *Poetical Works*, Vol. 2 (MacMillan, 1896), p. 342.

<sup>20</sup> Burke *Reflections on the Revolution in France* [1790] (New York: Penguin Classics, 1986), p. 342.

<sup>21</sup> Colley *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 379.

Swaminathan adds, “the conception of Great Britain as a maritime and commercial power was not sufficient to carry over into the new, imperial or ‘moral’ empire of the early nineteenth century. Abolition provided one avenue of expanding the self-perception of (inter)national dominance without the burden of guilt” Srividhya Swaminathan *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759-1815* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), p. 214.

## CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup> Scholars have frequently linked Thackeray’s representation of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair* to mid-Victorian discourses on France and French imperialism. Critics have offered a series of 1840s contexts for the novel. For example, Suvendrini Perera argues that Thackeray looks back to the Napoleonic Wars as a response to France’s renewed efforts at imperial expansion. She suggests that Thackeray’s Waterloo is “imperial history” designed to highlight failed Napoleonic ambitions in light of

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present French imperial aspirations *Reaches of Empire: The English Novel from Edgeworth to Dickens* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), p. 101.

Clare Simmons also situates Thackeray's novel within an 1840s French political context, arguing that *Vanity Fair* is a product of English popular understanding of the 1848 French Revolution. Simmons links Becky Sharp's characterization to the popular belief that the 1848 Revolution was more socialist in nature than earlier French Revolutions. She suggests that Becky's threat to domestic ownership is informed by mid-Victorian fears about the threat to property in the wake of the French Revolution (Simmons 117).

My reading here does not link the novel to the 1848 French Revolution because *Vanity Fair*'s Waterloo chapters were composed in late 1847, before the fall of Louis-Philippe's monarchy in February 1848. However, Thackeray completed the novel's serialization in July 1848, after the collapse of Louis-Philippe's government, and, as Simmons persuasively argues, the Revolution certainly informs Becky's characterization late in the novel, after the Waterloo section has ended.

Other scholars focused on 1840s contexts for the novel have read Thackeray's Waterloo in relation to Victorian memorializations of the battle. John Schad links Thackeray's depiction of Waterloo to the popular memory of the 1819 Peterloo massacre, arguing that Waterloo itself serves as a structural absence in the narrative, suggesting an act of cultural repression of the more difficult memories associated with the eighteen teens "Reading the Long Way Round: Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*." *Yearbook of English Studies* 26 (1996), p. 27.

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More recently, Mary Hammond has argued that Waterloo returned to the English popular imagination in 1847-1848 because of a contemporary debate on how best to honor those who had served in the battle. Hammond reads *Vanity Fair* as a response to a proposal in June 1847 by the Duke of Wellington to present a medal to every soldier who survived the Peninsular Wars. Hammond suggests that Thackeray's novel takes up the discussion of how best to commemorate war heroes "Thackeray's Waterloo: History and War in *Vanity Fair*." *Literature and History* Vol. 11, No. 2 (2002), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> C.I. Hamilton writes, "the bitterest aspect for French observers of the argument over Syria had been the way that, despite the strength of their Mediterranean fleet at the time -and despite its being stronger even than its British equivalent (at least in sailing vessels) -France still had been forced to give way diplomatically. The failure was not taken as a reflexion on the navy; indeed, the main lesson was that France needed to increase her navy further" (678) "The Diplomatic and Naval Effects of The Prince de Joinville's *Note Sur L'Etat Des Forces Navales de la France* of 1844," *The Historical Journal* Vol. 32, No. 3 (1989): 675-687.

<sup>3</sup> In French, Joinville writes, "sur mer, comme sur terre, nous voulons être respectés. Là, comme ailleurs, nous voulons être en état de protéger nos intérêts, de maintenir nôtre indépendance, de défendre nôtre honneur, de quelque part que viennent les attaques qui pourraient les menacer."

<sup>4</sup> For a comprehensive history of Napoleon's plans for invasion, see H.F.B. Wheeler and A.M. Broadley's *Napoleon and the Invasion of England: The Story of the Great Terror* (1908).

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<sup>5</sup> In *Eyes Across the Channel*, Clare Simmons observes the degree to which the nineteenth-century nightmare continues to register in English popular discourse, noting that as the Channel Tunnel prepared to open in 1994, *The Independent* (6 May 1994) ran a reproduction of a French engraving from 1803 depicting Napoleon's plan for a tunnel under the sea as a means of invading England (Simmons 210n).

Additionally, Keith Wilson notes that engineering plans for a joint English-French tunnel project under the Channel included English provisions for designing a mechanism that would allow the tunnel to be quickly flooded should the French declare war on England, or alternately, injected with poisonous gas. See *Channel Tunnel Visions: 1850-1945: Dreams and Nightmares* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994), pp. 35-36.

Furthermore, as Benedict Anderson and Simon Gikandi have observed, the foundational myth of English national identity effectively suppresses a successful French invasion of England, by recasting William the Conqueror as the first King of England and not as a Norman invader. See Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 201. Simon Gikandi *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1991), 24.

I would add that by figuring William the Conqueror as the first King of England, the colonial subject position becomes the default or originary form of English political identity, thus allowing a threatened return to it through French occupation to operate as both nightmare and wish-fulfillment. It also suggests that

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invasion fantasy functions in the national unconscious as the uncanny, terrifying in the national psychic imaginary for its simultaneous familiarity and impossibility.

<sup>6</sup> John Carey establishes this timeline for *Vanity Fair*'s composition. Thackeray began "Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society," which would become *Vanity Fair*, in late 1844 or early 1845. By May 1845, Thackeray had submitted the first installment of the novel, an early version of Chapters 1-4, to the publisher, Colburn, who rejected it. By April 1846, the first installment had been revised and accepted for publication by *Punch*'s editors, Bradbury and Evans. (Carey, Introduction to *Vanity Fair* xii) *Punch* would serialize the novel in 20 installments from January 1847 to July 1848.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed breakdown of *Vanity Fair*'s serialization, see Edgar F. Harden's "The Discipline and Significance of Form in *Vanity Fair*," *PMLA* Vol. 82, No. 7 (Dec., 1967): 530-541.

## CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup> When Napoleon I abdicated on April 4, 1814, he named his son, Franz, the Duke of Reichstadt (popularly nicknamed "The Eaglet"), as his successor. However, Allied forces refused to recognize his accession, and he ruled in title only as "Napoléon II." Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's decision to assume the name Napoleon III was meant to further signal his fidelity to the Bonapartists and to more fully legitimize his political ascendancy in France by casting him as Napoleon's natural heir and part of an unbroken line of Napoleonic succession.

<sup>2</sup> See most recently *The Oxford History of the Novel in English: The Nineteenth-Century Novel: 1820-1880* Ed. John Kucich and Jenny Bourne Taylor (Oxford: Oxford



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UP, 2011), p. 208, and Lucasta Miller's *The Brontë Myth* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001). Critics have also stressed Héger's influence in Brontë's broader corpus. Sue Lonoff reads the relationship as setting the "master-pupil" dynamic present in so much of Brontë's fiction. Lonoff "Charlotte Brontë's Belgian Essays: The Discourse of Empowerment" *Victorian Studies* Vol. 32, No. 3 (Spring 1989): 387-409. Meg Harris Williams suggests Héger became "an agent in a personal myth," shaping Brontë's writing after Brussels. Harris Williams "Book Magic: Aesthetic Conflicts in Charlotte Brontë's Juvenilia" *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 42 (1987), p. 42. See also John Maynard's *Charlotte Brontë and Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 19-26.

<sup>3</sup> Napoleon arrived in France on March 1, 1815, beginning his slow march to Paris from Golfe-Juan, between Cannes and Antibes.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Boone has also examined the link between Monsieur Paul and Napoleon Bonaparte. He briefly links the two in his Foucaultian reading of disciplinary control and power in the novel. See Boone "Depolicing *Villette*: Surveillance, Invisibiliy, and the Female Erotics of 'Heretic Narrative.'" *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1992), p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Gaskell offers a detailed sketch of Brontë's youthful devotion to Wellington, writing that he was for her "a demi-god. All that related to him belonged to the heroic age." Elizabeth Gaskell *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Ed. Alan Shelston (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 480. For further discussion of Brontë's fascination with Wellington, see Juliet Barker *The Brontës* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994), p. 155; Lyndall Gordon *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), p. 218; Winifred Gérin *Charlotte Brontë: The Evolution of Genius*

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(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 616; and Tom Winnifrith *The Brontës* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 125.

<sup>6</sup> Scholarship on Brontë's knowledge of Napoleonic history tends to focus on *Shirley*, since the novel is set in the Napoleonic period. Most recently Philip Rogers has argued that *Shirley* responds to contemporary debates over the Chartist movement, and to Wellington's Tory hostility to Chartism. See Rogers "Tory Brontë: *Shirley* and the 'Man'." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* Vol. 58, No. 2 (2003): 141-175. Pam Morris has examined the ways in which "heroes" came to be linked to national identity for Brontë in her reading of *Shirley*. See Morris "Heroes and Hero-Worship in Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* Vol. 54, No. 3 (Dec. 1999): 285-307. For additional discussion on English nationalism in *Shirley*, see Charlotte Brontë *Shirley*. Ed. Herbert Rosengarten and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 46.

<sup>7</sup> Sudhir Hazreasingh argues that Napoleonic memory became state memory in France in the 1840s, writing, "the 1840s marked a critical shift from the cult of Napoleon as a specific, concrete individual to a more abstract, collective, almost depersonalized tribute. The Orléanists thus hailed the Emperor not so much as an individual ruler, or as a man endowed with particular moral or political qualities, but rather as an almost timeless symbol of French national glory" (764). See Hazreasingh "Napoleonic Memory in Nineteenth-Century France: The Making of a Liberal Legend." *MLN* 120 (2005): 747-73. Louis-Philippe's Orléanist monarchy used the memory of Napoleon to solidify its political standing in France. This political maneuver was replicated by Louis-Napoleon once the monarchy had been

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overthrown in order to legitimate his *coup d'état*. The fact that both sides could use Napoleonic memory to authorize radically different political structures underscores Hazreesigngh's assertion that by the mid nineteenth century "Napoleon" had become political shorthand for French national power, not for a particular political perspective.

<sup>8</sup> J. P. Parry has addressed the ambivalence in the English response to Louis-Napoleon's rise, noting that Britain's own political power was contingent on successful relations with France. He writes, "a crucial component of national self-confidence was Britain's apparent ability to influence European affairs. Ironically, this depended on maintaining an informal alliance with Napoleon III and France. This created great ambiguity in the response to the Second Empire, which was heightened by the desire of the City and most commercial opinion to cultivate good relations with Napoleon in order to ward off the threat of war and to exploit economic opportunities in France." See Parry "The Impact of Napoleon III on British Politics, 1851-1880." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> series Vol. 11 (2001): 147-75.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in James Harvey Robinson's *Readings in European History. Vol II* (Boston: The Athenaeum Press, 1906), p. 563. For additional discussion of Louis-Napoléon's tour of Southern France, see William Smith's *The Bonapartes: The History of a Dynasty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> On December 3, 1852, *The Times* nervously reported that ballad singers had composed a series of popular songs to commemorate Napoleon III's coronation, including a piece entitled, "L'Empire, c'est la paix," whose refrain insists, "On nous

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disait: L'Empire, c'est la guerre, / Nous repondons: L'Empire, c'est la paix."

[Someone has told us: Empire means war, / We reply: Empire means peace.] These songs were performed at Napoleon III's installation, which suggests they were most likely commissioned by the Emperor. The refrain signals the degree to which he sought to reassure a global audience that his accession was not bellicose.

<sup>11</sup> For additional discussion on the use of the term "imperialism" in Britain, see Eric Hobsbawm's *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UP, 1988), Edward Said *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993) and more recently Laura Franey *Victorian Travel Writing and Imperial Violence: British Writing on Africa, 1855-1902* (New York: Palgrave, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> His concern was at least partially egocentric, for, as Margaret Smith notes, George Smith recognized that he was the basis for Dr. John's character, and would have viewed Brontë's criticisms of Dr. John as an indictment of his own personality (*Letters* 88n).

<sup>13</sup>For discussion on Lucy's narrative elisions, see Gretchen Braun's "'A Great Break in the Common Course of Confession': Narrating Loss in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*." *ELH* Vol. 78 (2011): 189-212. Braun uses trauma theory to read *Villette*'s narrative structure, linking her withholdings to recurrent loss. She observes, "Lucy's pattern of reticence, in both story and discourse, is not only uniquely motivated, but also thematically and formally crucial to the novel. Her silences coalesce around feelings of loss: affective and social bonds severed by death or rejection" (195). While Braun's analysis certainly helps to explain Lucy's reticence to discuss the

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(presumed) death of her family, she also reads Lucy's relationship with Monsieur Paul in terms of the trauma of loss, ignoring the positive breakthroughs in her relationship with the school-teacher before his departure to Guadeloupe. See also, Jessica Brant's "Haunting Pictures, Missing Letters: Visual Displacement and Narrative Elision in *Villette*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* Vol. 37, Nos. 1-2 (Fall, 2003 – Spring, 2004): 86-111. Brant examines the ways in which Lucy's elisions operate on the level of the visual, reading Lucy and Monsieur Paul's relationship as "anti-visual" (93). Mary Jacobus in *Reading Women: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) reads Lucy's invisibility as "a calculated deception –a blank screen onto which others project their view of her" and "an aspect of her oppression" (48). As Jacobus's interpretation suggests, the issue of what Lucy says versus what she withholds in the novel is often read along feminist lines, making the key issue whether or not her reticence is a sign of gendered oppression (as Jacobus argues) or empowerment. Ivan Kreilkamp has persuasively argued that Lucy's refusal to speak is a means for Brontë to challenge the masculinist imperative embodied by Victorian stage artists such as Dickens to "perform" authorship, equating "speech" with "presence" (331). Kreilkamp argues that *Villette* privileges "print" over "speech, writing that Lucy resists, "improvisational, free speaking in favor of language produced through restraint, writing, and intellectual labor." He adds that "effective language" in the novel is a product not of "spontaneous speech" but "laboriously constructed writing" (331). See Kreilkamp "Unuttered: Withheld Speech and Female Authorship in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* Vol. 32, No. 3 (June 1999): 331-54. Kreilkamp's reading separates the spoken and

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the written word, but my analysis here suggests that Brontë's retrospective narration blurs the distinctions between the two, allowing her to "write over" or "reconstruct" the spoken word, rendering it as speech that could only exist in writing.

<sup>14</sup> Tony Tanner writes, "What Lucy Snowe makes of her life as narrative is as important as what she experienced prior to writing it. It is indeed an extension of the life as well as a reconstruction of it, the important difference being that as an experiencing subject she had little control over her environment, but as a narrating subject, she has complete linguistic control over its representation" (48). See Tony Tanner, Introduction. *Villette* (New York: Penguin, 1979), p. 48. My reading here suggests Lucy's retrospective narration not only allows her to assert linguistic control over her life story, as Tanner suggests, but also allows her to represent that life story linguistically. Her revised version of events puts language front and center, and uses it as a means to depict the psychic and emotional bond she shares with Monsieur Paul.

<sup>15</sup> Scholarship on *Villette* has largely ignored the issue of Lucy's bilingualism. The sole study on the topic is Patricia Yaeger's feminist analysis "Honey-Mad Women: Charlotte Brontë's Bilingual Heroines." *Browning Institute Studies* Vol. 14 (1986): 11-36. My reading here draws on Yaeger's sense that bilingualism allows Lucy to transcend the limits of traditional language systems. She argues, "when representations of a foreign language system appear in Brontë's novels, we find an image not of the word as limit –something feminist theory has taught us to expect – but of the word as vector, as harbinger of an abnormal way of thinking that is

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capable, in its strangeness, of bringing the heroine into dialogue with something new" (15).

### CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup> Gregory Vargo's dissertation project also links *A Tale of Two Cities* to the Orsini affair. He reads the refugee crisis and Simon Bernard's trial as part of an ongoing debate in England regarding the significance of the 1848 French Revolution and the Chartist Movement, and a desire to see England as separate from continental political uprisings. Vargo does not deal directly with the Channel, but he does note that Bernard's arrest revived rhetoric on English exceptionalism, writing, "the refugee question foregrounded the ways England was distinct from the continent as a haven from tyranny while paradoxically highlighting connections between European revolutionaries and British radicals" Gregory Vargo. *Social Protest and the Novel: Chartism, the Radical Press, and Early Victorian Fiction*. (Dissertation. Columbia University. Ann Arbor: ProQuest/UMI, 2010. [Publication No. 3420878]), p. 304.

For a broader historical account of Orsini's attempt, see Bernard Porter's *The Refugee Question in mid-Victorian Politics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), pp. 170-99, and Margot Finn's *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) pp. 181-183.

<sup>2</sup> Recent criticism has offered a series of contemporary geo-political contexts for *A Tale of Two Cities*. Deborah Wynne reads the novel's focus on famine and crowd scenes in relation to a religious revival Dickens's witnessed while on tour of Ireland

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in 1858. See Deborah Wynne "Scenes of 'Incredible Outrage': Dickens, Ireland and *A Tale of Two Cities*" *Dickens Studies Annual* Vol. 37 (2006): 51-64.

Grace Moore and Priti Joshi both link the novel to the 1857 Indian Mutiny (First War of Indian Independence) Moore sees a complex displacement at work in the novel, viewing Dickens's depiction of the Parisian mob as informed both by his frustration towards the British government's neglect of the working-class, as well as a more sober, sympathetic assessment of the Indian Mutiny following revelations of British atrocities in response to the uprising. Grace Moore. *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race, and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 131.

Priti Joshi sees the novel as less a specific response to the events of the Mutiny, then as animated by them, part of a broader moment of English national self-articulation. Joshi's reading is particularly evocative as it suggests, "that the Indian Mutiny focused and strengthened Dickens's yearning for a unified British identity and his conviction that such an identity is forged in a foreign landscape" (84). Priti Joshi "Mutiny Echoes: India, Britons, and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*."

*Nineteenth-Century Literature* Vol. 62, No. 1 (June 2007): 48-87. But Joshi's analysis also demonstrates the ways in which critical assessments of *A Tale of Two Cities*, even as they establish a wider geographic context for the novel, tend to insist upon a somewhat conservative definition of "the nation" for Dickens, one that aligns with the contours of the island. This essay suggests that while the Anglo-French relationship may have been a special case for Dickens, it certainly complicated his sense of national identity and belonging.



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<sup>3</sup> Carlyle's influence on the novel has been studied exhaustively. See notably: Michael Goldberg "Revolution: *A Tale of Two Cities*" in *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1972): 100-128. Goldberg argues Dickens "owes almost everything" to Carlyle, specifically his depictions of public violence. He suggests that Dickens shared Carlyle's "deterministic view of history," and that both writers use organic metaphors and biblical allusions to produce a sense of inevitability for events and to lend a prophetic quality to their works.

William Oddie's "*A Tale of Two Cities*" in *Dickens and Carlyle: The Question of Influence* [(London: Centenary Press, 1972) pp. 35-36, 61-85] sees Carlyle's principal influence in Sydney Carton's character, and argues that Dickens drew his idea of Carton's substitution from Carlyle. Oddie writes that Dickens, "responded to no part of Carlyle's doctrine that did not find an echo –sometimes slightly distorted in his own heart (83).

See additionally: Murray Baumgarten "Writing the Revolution." *Dickens Studies Annual* Vol. 12 (1983): 161-176. Baumgarten compares Dickens and Carlyle's depictions of the *carmagnole*, and parallels their use of organic imagery of horticulture. Richard Dunn "A Tale for Two Dramatists." *Dickens Studies Annual* Vol. 12 (1983): 117-124. Dunn finds Dickens influenced by Carlyle's sense of the "great Phenomenon," that is to say time as dramatic action.

Also Mildred Christian. "Carlyle's Influence upon the Social Theory of Dickens." *Trollopian* Vol. 2 (1947): 11-26, which sees Carlyle's influence on Dickens in his portrayal of the mob as more powerful than the individual's inclination.

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<sup>4</sup> Most recently, Colin Jones has linked the novel to Dickens's repeated cries for greater popular attention to the widespread misery in London. He reads Revolutionary Paris as projection for Victorian London, arguing that Dickens based his depiction of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine on London's East End. See Colin Jones. *Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities and The French Revolution* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> It was also a particularly European experience. Horace Greeley, upon crossing the Channel in 1851, lamented that the ships making the passage were not more like those in the United States. Greeley wrote, "they would not be tolerated as ferry-boats on any of our Western rivers...in this wretched concern, which was too insignificant to be slow, we went cobbling and wriggling across the Channel (27 miles) in something less than two hours, often one gunwale nearly under water and the other ten or twelve feet above it, with no room under deck for half our passengers, and the spray frequently dashing over those above it, three-fourths of the whole number deadly sick (this individual of course included), when with a decent boat the passage might be regularly made, in spite of such a smartish breeze as we encountered in comparative comfort" Greeley, *Glances at Europe* (1851), p. 14. By the end of the nineteenth century, the experience of having survived the Crossing was already a part of the national memory. In *Our Railways* (1894), John Pendleton writes, "the passengers whose good fortune or evil fortune it was to cross to Calais thirty years back in the little boat Ondine no doubt have a vivid recollection of the boisterous sea and the wave-splashed deck –and their intense longing to die" (p. 455).

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<sup>6</sup> Dickens wrote to Wills on August 13, 1851, "I am now going at once to do the "Flight to France." I think I shall call it merely "A Flight" –which will be a good name for a fanciful paper. Let me have your notes by return. Don't fail" (*Letters* 6: 459).

<sup>7</sup> Travel does nothing to diminish Monied Interest's bias for the French, which suggests that Dickens saw a relationship between commercial travel and nationalist prejudice. Monied Interest's intolerance towards the French stems from his limited understanding of the French Revolution. Earlier in "A Flight" he confides to Dickens's traveler, "that the French are 'no go' as a Nation. I ask why? He says, that Reign of Terror of theirs was quite enough. I venture to inquire whether he remembers anything that preceded said Reign of Terror? He says not particularly. 'Because,' I remark, 'the harvest that is reaped, has sometimes been sown.' Monied Interest repeats, as quite enough for him, that the French are revolutionary, 'and always at it'" ("A Flight" 9). This exchange suggests that Dickens was reflecting on the social origins of revolutionary violence, the major subject in *A Tale of Two Cities*, as early as 1851. Here, as in the novel, Dickens refuses to lose sight of the brutal class oppression that lead to the Revolution in spite of the violence of the Terror.

<sup>8</sup> James was Dickens's model for Stryver in *A Tale of Two Cities*, according to Edmund Yates. See *Recollections and Experiences*. Vol. 2. (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1885), pp. 30-31.

<sup>9</sup> Military deployment was a major concern during the post-assassination political crisis. The French invasion threat lead to fears in England that British soldiers would need to be recalled from India, where they had been dispatched to combat the Indian Mutiny, in order to better secure England's southern coast.

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of Carton's significance in the novel as barrister, see Simon Petch "The Business of the Barrister in *A Tale of Two Cities*." *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* Vol. 44, No. 1 (Winter 2002): 27-42. Petch moves beyond the doubling issue, examining Carton in the context of English professional culture.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Maxwell dates Darnay's departure from England as August 14, 1792, before it became a crime to return to France; but he is brought to trial in December 1793, after the passage of the law. See *A Tale of Two Cities*. Ed. Richard Maxwell. (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 481 n..

<sup>12</sup> Dickens considered a number of titles for the novel: *Buried Alive*; *The Thread of Gold*; *The Doctor of Beauvais*; he finally settled on *A Tale of Two Cities* in March 1859.

## **EPILOGUE**

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Dickens's use of Madame Roland, see Richard Maxwell's introduction to the Penguin edition of *A Tale of Two Cities* (2003).

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