Title of Paper: **The Face of the Crowd: Reading Terror Physiognomically in Charles Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities**

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Abstract:

The unknown secrets of the individual—and the limited extent to which these secrets can be read by others—is one of the abiding anxieties circulating throughout Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. In this way, secrecy and legibility are clearly articulated concerns of *A Tale of Two Cities*, to the extent that Dickens makes use of physiognomy to construct bare faces as legible and open. Given the revolutionary setting of the narrative, I read Dickens’ physiognomic logic as an attempt to frame the rioting French mob as metonymically reducible to the interior certitude provided by the novel’s most obviously (though for distinctly separate reasons) terrifying characters, Monseigneur Evrémonde and Madame Defarge. That is, far from attempting to occlude the crowd as a distinct and veiled subject, Dickens reconstructs masses of bodies as a knowable subject by focusing on physiognomically identifiable characters as signifiers for crowds as a whole.

**Keywords:** Dickens, Physiognomy, Terror, Crowds, A Tale of Two Cities

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In an article written for Household Words in 1865, Charles Dickens remarks, “Nature never writes a bad hand…Her writing, as it may be read in the human countenance, is invariably legible” (“The Demeanour” n.p.). If the face of another is to be misread, the fault lies in the untrained reader—the face is always open to scrutiny, ever ready to give up the secrets of its person. And yet the anxiety of the secret—and the face that is illegible—remains central to many of the narratives Dickens produced. Juliet McMaster observes that Dickens and other Victorian writers turned to physiognomy in order to offer their readers a sense of the “appearance as true” (“The Index” 22). Appearance thus affords the observer the sense of essential quality that may otherwise become effaced by words and actions. As crowds of bodies became a substantive quality to British city life, so too did physiognomy attain a firmer hold in Victorian cultural circulation. The reasons are, perhaps, obvious: to read the faces of individuals as they pass by, as anonymous though they may seem in large numbers, is to defer the threat of the crowd as a mass of wholly unknowable, wholly illegible bodies that may at a given moment erupt into spontaneous—and potentially destructive—action. McMaster suggests that while eighteenth century writers approached physiognomy from “the skeptical position,” (22) nineteenth century writers signaled an abiding obsession with “characters…all busy reading each other and being read” using the logic that “the best body is still the most legible body” (Reading 173). If that is the case for Dickens, how does his use of physiognomy relate to a larger attempt to reconcile the secret of the body with the larger—and perhaps more threatening—secret of the crowd?

“A wonderful fact to reflect upon,” comments the narrator of Dickens’s A Tale of Two Cities early on within the narrative, “that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other” (14). Moving across cityscape and countryside in spectral form, the narrator goes on to muse at length about the ultimate unknowability of humankind to itself, reflecting on the secrets that prevent individuals from displaying totally legible subjectivity to one another. The narrator’s musings ultimately mark a central conceit of A Tale of Two Cities: how to reconcile the “perpetuation of the secret” of individual bodies with an abiding desire to read and resolve the crowd, to make sense of the motivations and interiorities of collected human bodies (14). In this way, secrecy and legibility are clearly articulated concerns of A Tale of Two Cities, to the extent that Dickens makes use of a physiognomic logic to construct bare faces as legible and open. Given the revolutionary setting of the narrative, I read Dickens’s physiognomic logic as an attempt to frame the rioting French mob as metonymically reducible to the interior certitude provided by the novel’s most obviously (though for distinctly separate reasons) terrifying characters, Monseigneur Evrémonde and Madame Defarge. That is, far from attempting to occlude the crowd as a distinct and veiled subject, Dickens reconstructs masses of bodies as a knowable subject by focusing on physiognomically identifiable characters as signifiers for crowds as a whole.

Thus I do not take the ‘wonderful fact’ of the narrator’s musings on secrets to be an admittance of irreconcilability between the interiorities of bodies and their projected exteriorities, but rather as a statement of purpose—to parse out the secrets
that link certain individuals with the terror of the crowd. Indeed, the turn towards physiognomy in the narrative ostensibly contradicts the narrator’s meditation on the unfathomable secrecy of the individual and the collective. Yet, I argue that the narrator’s concerns are less indicative of an unresolvable tension within the novel, than they are a signal of a physiognomic intervention that attempts to account for the actions and behaviours of both single characters and ostensibly illegible collectives. My reading of *A Tale of Two Cities* therefore focuses on several key questions: what is the relationship between Dickens’s use of physiognomy and his construction of the novel’s primary antagonists? How is a physiognomic logic deployed to account for the threat of the crowd—indeed, very particular crowds whose threat is linked to the middle class? And finally, how is Dickens’s ‘crowd-control’ project within *A Tale of Two Cities* indicative of extant cultural anxieties towards the crowd in Victorian Britain?

Ultimately, I do not forward that *A Tale of Two Cities* necessarily succeeds in relying upon physiognomy to unveil the secrets that so haunt the narrator—rather, my interest is in the attempts made within the narrative to ascertain the interiorities of individuals based on their described exteriorities, and what this apprehension of physical characteristics signals for extant anxieties regarding revolution. In this way, my reading of the novel uniquely situates the practices and presumptions of physiognomy, which teach us to expect the face to be a legible object and to understand the motives of an individual based on whether his or her face is visible, in the context of revolutionary anxiety. In other words, my analysis of *A Tale of Two Cities* centres upon the relationship between terror and physiognomy, to the extent that the text makes use of the latter to construct the face of terror as one that is recognizably predisposed to commit acts of terror. Moreover, I suggest that the reflexive preoccupation with face-reading tellingly forecloses upon the threat of the crowd, insofar as physiognomic renderings of central characters function as metonymy to reduce uncertain multitudes to legible individuals.

Thus, my analysis considers how physiognomic representations of the ‘faces of terror’ exemplify a set of assumptions and tensions among Victorian cultural concepts about visible faces, bodily legibilities, and the threat of terror. Ultimately, the reassurance provided by physiognomy in *A Tale of Two Cities* demonstrates that concerns over terror and the potential comprehensibility of the face works to reinforce how an understanding of terror that locates it in specific bodies, and as a specific threat to the middle class. In other words, as a way of understanding how the practice of face-reading signals a more complicated compulsion to recognize and interpret the face of terror in response to extant anxieties surrounding revolution. As such, my argument asks after how key figures of terror, Madam Defarge and the Monsieur Evrémonde, are interpreted through the lens of a physiognomic logic that understands terror to be that which destabilizes the burgeoning social and political power of the middle class, represented textually through the Darnays. Finally, I consider the extent to which the ostensibly terrifying singularity of these characters and their legible faces is part of a larger project to render the crowd, the mob, or the riot comprehensible through a metonymic and physiognomic logic.

As McMaster’s assertions suggest, the practice of face-reading precedes Dickens’s attention by at well over a century. Indeed, physiognomy has a genealogy
that traces back to Aristotle’s *Physiognomonica*, but it is from the tracts of Johann Caspar Lavater that Dickens’s physiognomic logic finds its locus point. For Lavater, physiognomy constituted “the root of human actions, sensations, and beliefs because it described and explained the most natural responses of individuals to each other—acts of judgment” (Hartley 2). Lavater’s logic takes as its basic presumption that “the picture…of an individual is truthful because it is derived from what the external appearance of an individual tells us about their internal nature” (3). That is, the physicality of a person is sufficient to determine all aspects of that person’s interior life—characteristics, motives, capacities, and so on. The purpose of Lavater’s physiognomy has a much more varied articulation of presumptions, including a relationship to broader theological concerns. Lucy Hartley describes nineteenth century physiognomic practice as relating directly to “debates about the structure and function of the world” in that it “responds to and reacts against different conceptions of change in the organic world” (6). Hartley’s analysis of nineteenth century physiognomy places it in conversation with the Darwinian rupture to notions of human centrality, and briefly relocates Dickens’s considerations of physiognomy to the act of “preserving the authenticity and integrity of the self” (104). In contrast, I suggest that Dickens’s articulations of a physiognomic logic—particularly in *A Tale of Two Cities*—is motivated by the extenuating presence of the crowd in Victorian British socio-political imagination. Thus the detailed literary portraits he gives his characters—and specifically, his ‘terrifying’ characters—constitute an effort to figure the masses through recognizable singularities.

Graeme Tytler observes that “character description in the novel is, and always has been, by definition physiognomical” (5). Indeed, he suggests that “European culture in general appears to have been dominated by what may be aptly described as the Lavaterian physiognomical climate” (5-6). Despite the scepticism with which Lavater’s theories on face-reading were treated in eighteenth century British novels, they never quite vanished—and in the nineteenth century, Tytler remarks that physiognomy constituted a reinvention of the novelistic narrative form, to the extent that it is possible to trace “a typical nineteenth-century composite portrait [of characters], with the description being given by an omniscient narrator…[while] presented from the viewpoint of an observant character” (193). Dickens’s approach to constructing characters as recognizable according to physiognomy is thus not novel—indeed, even the metonymic function of rendering the crowd legible through representative individual characters is a tradition that precedes, moves with, and goes beyond Dickens’s attempts:

Another interesting aspect of literary portraiture during this period, if not altogether unprecedented, is the way in which novelists sometimes describe a crowd or group of people less as a collection of separate individuals than as a physiognomical homogeneity. (Tytler 202)

Nevertheless, *A Tale of Two Cities* significantly attempts to render the homogenous entity of the crowd as legible through a logic of terror. That is, the crowds of the narrative are not general crowds—they are crowds that constitute a large and potentially fatal threat to the middle class.

John Plotz, in *The Crowd: British Literature and Public Politics*, contends that in Victorian Britain “random crowds meant that chance encounters on London streets
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produced a new sort of social life, both a pleasant and a threatening urban anonymity” (1). For Plotz, the arrival of crowds into urban life had a distinct effect on the period’s literature, to the extent that the presence of crowds marked “an altered social fabric—along with concomitant psychological, formal, even epistemological alterations” within literature” (2). Plotz recognizes that there is an inherent slippage to what the crowd connotes:

That to one writer a crowd was a set of bodies collected on the street, while to another it was the dispersed English citizenry of certain social classes, and to yet another it was the English nation, wherever and however arrayed…This inherent unfixity reminds us how large a role any individual writer may have to play in marking or modifying the ways in which demonstrations, representations, and street mobs are linked to one another through the action or substance of “crowd.” (7)

My argument and analysis regarding A Tale of Two Cities recognizes the second meaning of the crowd, while acknowledging that attention to the other definitions Plotz tracks may have an altering effect on the conclusions I draw. Nonetheless, I contend that Dickens’s use of a physiognomic logic in rendering his characters exemplifies particular anxieties regarding class precarity and the threat of the aristocracy and working classes to the middle class. Indeed, Plotz recognizes A Tale of Two Cities to be a particularly crowd-based narrative treatment of Dickens’s, to the extent that the novel does not “give way to utter confusion about the known boundaries of the physical world,” and refuses instead to proclaim any “indebtedness to the social fabric of the heterogeneous city” (40). Instead, A Tale of Two Cities constitutes a marked attempt to use the ostensible illegibility of the crowd only insofar as “what is axiomatic for [the] story to proceed” rather than exemplifying an admittance that the crowd is always already beyond apprehension.

I contend that the middle class is the readership for whom Dickens works to craft legibility of the terrifying crowd. There are, therefore, two class crowds Dickens renders physiognomically identifiable as potentially terrifying: the aristocratic class, represented by the Monseigneur Evrémonde, and the rioting working class crowd, represented by Madame Defarge. In using physiognomy to unveil the secrets of his characters, Dickens relies upon certain key characteristics as translatable to the quiddity of terror. In first introducing the Monseigneur Evrémonde, Charles Darnay’s corrupt aristocratic French uncle, Dickens describes the man as being marked and surrounded by “the leprosy of unreality,” a quality distinguished by the Monseigneur’s extravagant dress and company (124). This leprosy constitutes a form of complicated denial, in which the Monseigneur and his retinue pretend—or are convinced—that the waning aspect of their power and influence is exactly the opposite. Indeed, the Monseigneur attempts to elide the possibility that he is on the precipice of losing power. Dickens writes the performance of grandeur as:

Such frizzing and powdering and sticking up of hair, such delicate complexions artificially preserved and mended, such gallant swords to look at, and such delicate honour to the sense of smell, would surely keep anything going, for ever and ever…Dressing was the one unfailing talisman and charm used for keeping all things in their places. (125)
The physiognomic logic at work in this passage suggests that the ‘artificial preservations’ that the Monseigneur and his retinue make use of are to be approached with suspicion by the reader. Indeed, while the aristocracy in this scene attempt through aesthetic façade to put on a “Fancy Ball that was never to leave off,” thereby securing the systems of power that maintain their specific privileges over French society, the real truth—and terror—rests in the face of the Monseigneur that no amount of powder can hide (125).

As the Monseigneur leaves his party—bidding due to the devil on his way out—Dickens’s narrator describes him for the reader in greater detail:

He was a man of about sixty, handsomely dressed, haughty in manner, and with a face like a fine mask, a face of a transparent paleness…The nose, beautifully formed otherwise, was very slightly pinched at the top of each nostril…[The pinches] gave a look of treachery, and cruelty, to the whole countenance…still, in the effect the face made, it was a handsome face, and a remarkable one. (126)

Far from creating the Monseigneur’s eventually realized monstrosity as a mystery for the reader, the narrator provides a succinct portraiture of the Monseigneur’s physiognomically inescapable capacity for terror. Not terror felt, but terror committed—the monstrosity of the next scene involves the Monseigneur killing a villager’s child, and offering the bereft parent a gold coin as restitution for the crime. In the span of two pages, Dickens presents a character whose mode of existence involves the careful performance of nobility that is literally ‘a fine mask’; but this is a mask that ultimately fails to hide the Monseigneur’s inherent capacity for sadism, violence, and terror. He can no more alter the pinches upon his nose which tell the truth of his person, than he can alter the course of the coming revolution.

Indeed, Dickens describes the Monseigneur’s ultimate inability to successfully hide the unpleasant truth of his nature, so that even “a blush on the countenance…was no impeachment of his high breeding; it was not from within…[but] by an external circumstance beyond his control” (132). The quality of the Monseigneur’s character is utterly fixed, to the extent that outside forces—whether his deliberate attempts in dress and actions, or the changes of the world around him—do not have significant impact. His physiognomy is unchangeable, and thus his propensity for terror is equally undisturbed. This quality is clearest in the chapter entitled “The Gorgon’s Head,” when the Monseigneur’s inherent monstrosity is rendered imperturbable through metaphorical connection to the “Gorgon’s head” which has overlooked the Monseigneur’s home in the country for “two centuries” (138). There is further suggestion in this metaphorical resemblance between stone monster and the Monseigneur’s terrifying character that cruelty is a quality as much in the blood as it is in the face. Indeed, the tradition of cruelty and terror seems central to the Monseigneur as a figure in the narrative; importantly, however, it is a quality that does not inherited by the subsequent generation, represented in the novel by Charles Darnay. When he finally arrives at the Monseigneur’s home, Darnay apprehends his uncle as one whose face, though like a mask, cannot occlude its terrifying quality:

The deepened marks in the nose, and the lengthening of the fine straight lines in the cruel face, looked ominous as to that; the uncle made a graceful gesture...
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of protest, which was so clearly a slight form of good breeding that it was not reassuring. (141)

The Monseigneur makes this gesture of protest in response to Darnay’s accusation that he is indifferent to what was his nephew’s formerly imperiled state; indeed, Darnay goes so far as to suggest that had the Monseigneur not been “in disgrace with the court” a “letter de cachet would have sent [Darnay] to some fortress indefinitely” (141). Thus for all the Monseigneur’s careful attention to rendering his appearance as one of civility and honour, both Darnay and the narrator recognize him to be an individual so motivated by his own interests that the accusation of killing or otherwise indisposing his own family is met “with great calmness”—a calmness that is, like the Gorgon’s head, utterly indifferent to any apprehension that recognizes it as terrifying (142).

Importantly, as I will discuss, the inherent cruelty of the Monseigneur that marks him as a face and figure of terror within *A Tale of Two Cities* is not located just to his body alone. The physiognomic logic that renders the Monseigneur terrifying has, as Tytler observes, the broader function of reducing the quality of an entire group to a series of characteristics that present them as legible for the reader. Thus the distinction between the Monseigneur and Charles Darnay, who are related by blood, is crucial for Dickens’s overall political and social commentary—the cruelty and terror of the aristocratic Monseigneur is not his middle class nephew’s cruelty, for all that they share a family name and legacy. Darnay escapes the physiognomy that constructs his uncle’s face as callous and sadistic by rejecting outright the privileges supported by oppression that the Monseigneur feels the aristocracy deserves. Darnay argues that his “honourable family, whose honour is of so much account…did a world of wrong, injuring every human creature who became between [them] and [their] pleasure” and that in atonement, he accounts his inheritance, “the property and France” no longer his through renunciation (145). In contrast, the Monseigneur states that he “will die, perpetuating the system under which [he has] lived” and that it is better “to be a rational creature…and accept your natural destiny” (144). Though linked by blood, Darnay and the Monseigneur differ in the worldviews, and the Monseigneur’s dedication to his cruel impositions upon others is writ largely upon his face in a way that it it not on the face of Charles Darnay.

The Monseigneur is representative of a terror attributed to the power of the aristocratic classes—his face with its inherent cruelty is the face of the noble upper class in Dickens’s fictional France, a class whose privileges are possible only through the deliberate oppression of those whose faces are apprehended as of lesser value. Yet the Monseigneur is not the only face of terror in *A Tale of Two Cities*—indeed, he is likely not the most recognizably terrifying figure in the narrative as a whole. That acclaim rests with Madame Defarge, whose role in terrorizing the Darnays—and France more broadly—goes beyond the Monseigneur’s legacy of cruelty. Madame Defarge is the face of terror metonymically attached to the rioting lower classes; hers is the face of the French mob prior to, during, and after the revolution Dickens describes in the novel. Like the Monseigneur, Madame Defarge’s face is not mired by an obvious ugliness—her propensity for committing acts of terror is rendered more subtly in her features, until the very moment of action is upon her. In first introducing Madame Defarge to the reader, the narrator describes her as
[A] stout woman of about [thirty], with a watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything, a large hand heavily ringed, a steady face, strong features, and great composure of manner. There was a character about Madame Defarge, from which one might have predicted that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided…the lifting of her darkly defined eyebrows…suggested to her husband that he would do well to look round the shop among the customers.

This description does not suggest something immediately threatening about Madame Defarge—unlike the Monseigneur, whose denial of the precarity of his position and inborn cruelty the narrator remarks upon immediately. In contrast, Madame Defarge is rendered merely watchful, a careful woman whose powers of observation—whose reading of the crowd of customers—her husband, a “bull-necked, martial-looking man” relies upon for his plotting (36). And yet it is this very quality of watching, of keeping records, and of apprehending those around her that marks Madame Defarge as the novel’s most centrally dangerous character. She represents a new form of terror in the narrative: the terror of the misapprehending mob, whose desire for victims overrides any signal of innocence—whether physiognomically or in practice—their victims may demonstrate.

Indeed, as the narrative builds to the moment of revolution, Madame Defarge begins to reveal more of the threat of terror she represents. A road mender reflects that Madame Defarge has the quality of “mysterious dread…by which he [is] constantly haunted,” to the extent that the road mender shakes “in his wooden shoes whenever his eye light[s] upon her” (203). His reasoning is that if Madame Defarge should “take it into her brightly ornamented head to pretend that she had seen him do a murder and afterwards flay the victim, she would infallibly go through with it until the play was played out” (203). Thus the steadiness indicated by her face in the initial scenes of the novel turn towards a more pernicious inclination to ‘hold true’ to fictions that may have fatal consequences for those involved. Indeed, the road mender apprehends in Madame Defarge’s face the promise of a terror whose purpose is its own fulfillment, a terror motivated not by expectations of privilege or a legacy of oppression, as the Monseigneur Evrémonde’s is, but by chaotic misapprehension. The road mender’s innocence in the fantasy of false accusation he dreams Madame Defarge capable of does not matter in her mode of terror: innocence is a quality to be considered and discarded, or else misrecognized entirely.

Certainly, though Madame Defarge eventually presents the full extent of her willingness to engage in bloody retaliation against the individuals she considers representative of the corrupt French judicial and political systems, it is her fulfillment of the road mender’s prophecy that fully articulates Dickens’s representation of the terror of the mob. Having successfully ensured the death of Charles Darnay, whom she holds accountable for the crimes of his relatives, Madame Defarge seeks the death—at her hands—of Darnay’s wife and daughter. Thus Dickens articulates the central terror of the crowd through Madame Defarge’s single-minded pursuit of Lucy and little Lucy, both of whom are innocent of the crimes laid at the feet of Charles Darnay—Madame Defarge apprehends the Darnays incorrectly as perpetrators of the system she revolts against, imperilling them for no more substantial a reason than
proximity and surname. That Darnay renounces previously his aristocratic inheritance and fully intends to earn a living through his own labour means little in Madam Defarge’s logic—her terror, once prompted, cannot be allayed: “…the Evrémonde people are to be exterminated, and the wife and child must follow the husband and father” (422). To justify her actions against Lucy and her daughter, Madame Defarge suggests that Charles’ impending death will fill Lucy with “sympathy for its [the Republic’s] enemies” and therefore she and her daughter must die to maintain the momentum of the revolution and its aim (425). Yet for all of Madame Defarge’s political posturing, her desire is motivated by a deliberate misreading of the Darnay’s ostensible guilt.

Tellingly, Madame Defarge’s capacity for terror is not one that renders her uglier as the novel moves towards its conclusion. Indeed, there is something almost sympathetic in the way that Dickens describes Madame Defarge, as one who, despite her terrifying role as a working class antagonist against the Darnays, nevertheless bears qualities that, for all their murderous purpose, are admirable:

There were many women at that time, upon whom time laid a dreadfully disfiguring hand; but there was not one among them more to be dreaded than this ruthless woman, now taking her way along the streets. Of a strong and fearless character, of shrewd sense and readiness, of great determination, of that kind of beauty which not only seems to impart to its possessor firmness and animosity, but to strike into others an instinctive recognition of those qualities. (425-6)

Indeed, perhaps the most ‘dreadful’ aspect of Madame Defarge’s handsomeness is its misapplication—the circumstances that have turned her determination and shrewdness into weapons against the Darnays may have otherwise been used had she not been subjected to a system of cruelty perpetuated by Monseigneur Evrémonde and the aristocracy he represents. While the Monseigneur’s cruelty is rendered unfixable upon his face, there is something more malleable about the propensity for terror that the qualities of Madame Defarge signal. I suggest that through Madame Defarge, Dickens makes the implication that the misapprehending working classes, for all their danger to the Darnay’s middle class way of life, may potentially be allayed of their desire to commit terror.

The keyword is, of course, potentially. By the time Madame Defarge elects to seek out and kill Charles Darnay’s wife and child, Dickens describes her as one for whom “opportunity had developed her into a tigress. She was absolutely without pity” (426). Her husband, Monsieur Defarge, is characterized as more willing to ‘read’ Lucy and little Lucy’s innocence, but his wife’s power overrides any influence he might have had on their fate. Thus for all the potentialities of Madame Defarge’s handsome countenance, she inevitably becomes a working class cautionary for a middle class readership—pushed too far, the working class crowd will not only misapprehend their targets, but do so far beyond the ameliorating effects of pity or reason.

As I have suggested thus far, the role of physiognomy in *A Tale of Two Cities* is to reduce the ostensibly terrifying collective of the crowd to recognizable singularities, thus homogenizing potentially threatening masses to legible—and therefore knowable—individuals. The careful descriptions of Monseigneur
Evrémonde and Madam Defarge account for Dickens’s careful intervention on behalf of the middle class—in rendering the bodies of the cruel aristocracy and the sometimes subtly malicious working class observable, Dickens affords a portion of his readership a safe-guarding measure against extant crowd-related uncertainties in Victorian Britain. Indeed, Sharonna Pearl in her monograph About Faces argues that even if physiognomy was “framed as class blind, the practice itself was not. The ability to penetrate the rules governing the display of class was of considerable use in the increasingly democratic urban metropolis” (42). Moreover, physiognomy was useful for “exposing individuals and identifying larger groups” (42). Pearl understands Victorian physiognomy to be a form both of classification and ‘classification,’ or the practice of reifying class boundaries according to the logic of face-reading (42). Moreover, Pearl records how physiognomy worked in real-time, as in Dickens’s novels, to the extent that the “anonymity of the masses did not preclude physiognomic readings entirely, but they were often rendered as impressions rather than detailed descriptions” (Pearl 43). My reading of the character descriptions Dickens provides in A Tale of Two Cities breaks somewhat with Pearl’s assertion that crowds were rendered through impressions, in that the level of detail he offers for Monseigneur Evrémonde and Madame Defarge indicate an abiding anxiety about moving beyond impressions.

In other words, the descriptions of the novel’s central terrifying antagonists resist the impossibility of reducing the crowd down to legible singularities. Far from merely leaving impressions, Dickens presents his readers with characters whose marked level of detail signals the novel’s faith in physiognomic legibility. Pearl argues that it is the “crowd that provided the context for the two sides of the scrutiny/anonymity coin and its accompanying terror” (33-4); thus Dickens’s figurings of Monseigneur Evrémonde and Madame Defarge exemplify a logic which intensifies physiognomic scrutiny to account for the potential effect of the crowd to anonymize its occupants.

My analysis of physiognomy in A Tale of Two Cities as a form of metonymic crowd control that renders the faces of terror legible for a middle class readership constitutes a multifaceted recognition of the interrelationship between terror, crowds, and legibility within Victorian Britain. The larger implications of such an analysis indicate that the novel constitutes an abiding example of anxieties regarding misapprehension, to the extent that Dickens continuously writes Madame Defarge as one whose misapprehension of the Darnays is motivated both by physiognomic qualities and contextual intensifications in the form of revolution. As I have asserted here, A Tale of Two Cities exemplifies how nineteenth century practices of face-reading work to reduce the threat of terror to readily identifiable qualities in the face of another, and in so doing, work to render the potentially threatening and terrifying crowd comprehensible and capable of being categorized by middle class city dwellers who must traverse the swell of incoming urban anonymity. Moreover, the novel indicates a recognition that the terror of the crowd is, for the middle class, not a unanimous one, but is in fact the terror of two crowds: the aristocratic crowd whose inherent cruelty places the middle class at risk to the reactions of the working class, and the working class itself, whose ability to misapprehend the middle class as perpetrators of the aristocratic system is potentially fatal.
The physiognomic practices I locate within *A Tale of Two Cities* centre upon the logic that the face of the other is an object of textual analysis that cannot be effaced unless by a poor ‘reader.’ For all the subtleties in Madame Defarge’s countenance that cause other characters to overlook her propensity for murderous retribution, her terror *is* recognized—by the narrator at least, and eventually by others. Ultimately Dickens’s physiognomic logic suggests that neither crowds nor subtlety of mien can preclude the ability of a canny reader to recognize intention and propensity. The Monseigneur Evrémonde does not overcome the cruel pinches on his nose to surprise Charles Darnay with a sudden change of character; nor too does Madame Defarge’s face suddenly soften in a way that would suggest her ability to pity or feel compassion for the Darnays. The physiognomy of *A Tale of Two Cities* is seemingly infallible—the qualities in face mirror qualities in character. As Dickens himself asserted, the fault is never in what the face of another reveals, but forever in the reader of that face to make an accurate practice of discernment.
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