

In the absence of  
hate



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Geoffrey Chaucer once wrote, “Trouthe is the hyeste thing that a man may kepe” (The Canterbury Tales “The Knight’s Tale”). Since before the ancient Greeks, mankind has striven to discern and define truth, a noble if somewhat arduous task. Even modern society, despite losing so many of the old, “prudish” morals of preceding generations, still holds truth as one of the greatest virtues and to find truth in life, one of the greatest accomplishments. Authors such as Charles Dickens reflect this great desire to seek and find truth, using many varying mediums to express their opinions or discoveries. From the opening lines of the book, Dickens uses the method of thematic opposition to illustrate pure truth and evil lies. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens consistently opposes characters, settings, and even his theme of revolution, presenting juxtaposed viewpoints and actions that demonstrate deeper truths about life. Two characters Dickens sets in opposition are Madame Defarge and Lucie Manette. Although Lucie Manette grew up an orphan after her mother died and her father lay languishing anonymously in a prison cell of the Bastille, although she suffered irreparable harm, Lucie Manette always finds within herself the ability to forgive wrongs and love other people. She looks for the best in every human heart and inspires those around her to love and achieve great, nearly impossible goals. Lucie Manette always appears in the form of light, often receiving the appellation of “angel.” She provides a soothing disposition to those in torment, patiently listening to sorrows and misdeeds while forgiving and encouraging the miscreant to better ways. Even though she cannot reform Sidney Carton, he realizes that she, more than anyone, would have that power; however, he feels he is already too far gone down a bad path to turn back and begin anew. He realizes, “You would have reclaimed me if

anything could. You will not be the cause of my becoming worse. The utmost good that I am capable of now, Miss Manette, I have come here to realize' " (Dickens 139). Unknowingly, Miss Manette's simple nature inspires love and aspirations filled with such generosity that eventually this great, inspired love saves her life and the lives of those dearest to her. Rising from a bitter and forlorn childhood, Miss Manette rises to great heights by following the path of love and forgiveness while she could turn bitter instead. Madame Defarge, on the other hand, is the root of all evil, leaving destruction in her wake wherever she goes. She derives her justification for the misdeeds she commits from the wrongs she and her family suffered while she was yet a child. Ever since the noble family of the Evrémondes raped her sister and killed her brother while he was defending his honor, Madame Defarge has sworn revenge upon the perpetrators of the crime as well as the descendents for as long as she lives. Instead of showing restraint and womanly pity, she lashes out violently against all who have ever done her a misdeed, real or imagined. Madame Defarge can neither forgive nor forget, and she only loves those who have done her no wrong. In the midst of the revolution, Madame Defarge remains a central figure because of her determination, lack of pity, and ruthlessness. " She stayed so close to him when he dropped dead under it, that, suddenly animated, she put her foot upon his neck, and with her cruel knife long ready hewed off his head" (Dickens 203). Even though Madame Defarge, like Lucie Manette, has every opportunity to avenge her unjust childhood through love and forgiveness, she chooses the path of vengeance. However, while forgiveness fulfills the desire for closure, vengeance only heightens the thirst for blood, starting a vicious cycle of death and destruction in the place of kindness and the

creation of new life. Madame Defarge's story is a common one in France, though the culture of England provides a different way of handling injustice. The settings of London and Paris provide two more examples of opposition. London, though containing plenty of squalid neighborhoods, remains much more prosperous and clean than Paris. Even the poor and the working classes in England have enough to eat and a place to sleep, enough to buy plates and silverware and tablecloths. Mr. Cruncher, though simply a messenger for Tellson's Bank by day and a grave robber by night, always has sufficient means to live and support a wife and child. Mr. Cruncher is by no means rich or even approaching prosperity, else he would not attempt grave robbery to supplement his income, but he does have the means to get by without his nocturnal occupation. " Mr. Cruncher's apartments were not in a savoury neighbourhood but they were very decently kept the room was already scrubbed throughout the cups and saucers arranged for breakfast, and a very clean white cloth was spread" (Dickens 48). Mr. Cruncher rests at the mucky bottom of English social hierarchy, but still his lowly position provides for a life far above the means of any honorable tradesman or farmer in France. France by far exceeds the worst neighborhoods in London for squalor, despair, and poverty. While Mr. Cruncher has breakfast on the table every morning, the working classes of Paris scrape to find one or two meals a day to divide meagerly between offspring and parent. The beggars on the streets of London probably earn a better income than the hard-working wood-sawyers of pre-revolutionary Paris. The people of Paris walk about the city with scarcity and depravity written on the premature wrinkles on their faces. Many do not have roofs over their heads or wood to heat their drafty homes. The nobility take everything the people ever receive, leaving

the citizens with nothing, not even enough to survive. “ The woman left on a door-step the little pot of hot-ashes, at which she had been trying to soften the pain in her own starved fingers and toes men with bare arms, matted locks, and cadaverous faces, who had emerged into the winter light from cellars” (Dickens 25). However, peasants are dispensable to the nobility because when one man dies, another is always available to take his place. The basic differences between London and Paris, a society based on self-betterment rather than a society based on survival, also create an environment conducive to opposing approaches to societal change. While Londoners approach all changes one man at a time, the people of Paris move toward revolution with a mindset of preparation to tear apart the world entirely before putting it back together again. The English people constantly seek ways to better themselves instead of overthrowing the society they dwell in, be it corrupt or perfect. Sidney Carton is a perfect example of a man who sets out to change himself and alters the world in the process. Carton’s greatest change is that from despair to an assurance that there is hope in the next world, even if he has ruined his chances in this one. Thus, though Carton dies because of his transformation, he changes his society because he acts selflessly and without fear, qualities that British society admires, inspiring others to better themselves, to change, to remember the good in others, the importance of love, and the possibility that there is always a diamond within the roughest exterior. “ It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known” (Dickens 352). Carton creates a one-man revolution by his simple faith in God and his loving, selfless revocation of his life to save a family. Carton does not try to avenge all the wrongs against him, the misjudgments

of his character, the subtle slights he has suffered, but instead forgives with a higher purpose in mind. He does not condemn the French revolution that leads him to this sacrifice because he realizes that, due to of the nature of the French people, it would not be possible for him to stop the tide of hatred and bloodshed within the country. Instead, he focuses on the small circle of love that he can find, that of Lucie Manette's family, and concentrates all his efforts towards preserving this example of love and kindness. Conversely, the French people do not attempt to change themselves but would rather change every other being because that seems to be the easier and more correct path to take. Thus, the Parisians take all the nobility under custody, charging them with crimes against the lower classes, including women and children who have not seen enough years to even understand the events around them. The peasants do not wish to teach the nobility a fairer way to live, do not wish to show them how unjust and torturous their haute-culture mannerisms were for the lower classes to bear. Instead, they choose to hate, to scream, to create a revolution that, once sparked, no one can control, attempting to exterminate a whole class of people in a horrible case of genocide that they call justice because they see that they are doing away with all the wrong the nobility created. In the process, however, the peasants do not learn to be just, wise, and honorable, but soon become just as despotic as the nobility when they find the power at their fingertips. Madame Defarge is a perfect example of this inflammable hatred that drives her to murder ruthlessly because she cannot change herself; she cannot see the equality, fraternity, liberty, or justice for which the revolution began. "For other crimes as tyrants and oppressors, I have this race a long time on my register, doomed to destruction and extermination" Then tell Wind and Fire

where to stop“but don’t tell me!” (Dickens 318). The people of France, like Madame Defarge, do not understand that as long as they cannot evolve, cannot forgive wrongs, they cannot build a society of better morals and virtues because the country will function in corruption, hatred, and distrust of neighbors, a distrust that would lead to the immediate death of the revolution in fear. Dickens uses the thematic opposition of love and hate, justice and injustice, and hope and despair to reveal universal truths about human nature, the ability to change, and the importance of love. When he sets Lucie Manette against Madame Defarge, he highlights the best qualities in Lucie: the love and forgiveness upon which society grows and flourishes. By setting Madame Defarge opposite these qualities, hewing off the heads of former noblemen, Dickens also shows the destructive nature of hatred and long-festering grudges. Because of her hatred of the class of nobility as a whole, Madame Defarge destroys society: she refuses to learn from the knowledge of the upper class, refuses to accept apologies from the innocent. Meanwhile, Lucie Manette creates veneration, love, and new life. She births children, forgives the faults of a man long gone down a path of wrongs and regret, and provides a stable apex around which her whole family turns, leaning on her for guidance and strength. Thus, the opposition of love and hate also represents the opposition of creation and destruction. The opposing settings of the civilizations also show a great deal about the nature of humanity. While the Londoners make the best of a rather corrupt government, the French languish in horrid squalor. Even though the British government is corrupt, the French government is more corrupt, stealing the last penny from its citizens rather than sharing the wealth and executing the laws justly. Albeit the British legal system draws and quarters its citizens at

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the slightest provocation, but the people do not live in filth and fear; they live their lives decently. Jerry Cruncher, though at the base of British society, lives decently, always has food on the table and a roof over his head. On the other hand, the French people of higher professions than Jerry live needy lives, surviving day by day, not even thinking of the future in any terms other than avenging the wrongs of their class. The women do not have enough to feed their children; the men do not have enough to feed their families. London and Paris show a great deal about the governments ruling the people in the living conditions of the commoners. However, the two cities show even more about the people by studying the citizens' reactions to the corruption. The French react by simply turning the tables against the aristocracy in revenge and condemning them as freely as the nobility once condemned the peasants. The French do not understand that this method of "displacing" corruption only aids its stronghold upon the basic lifestyle of the people. Thus, while the Londoners make the best of a bad situation, the French do nothing to better themselves but simply plot revenge against every nobleman that ever walked the earth. Dickens uses the opposition in characters, setting, and revolutionary theme to show basic truths about human nature. Dickens thematically opposes love and hate, justice and injustice, and hope and despair, revealing universal truths about human nature, the ability to change, and the importance of love. Dickens shows that love always triumphs over hate because love perpetuates society while hate destroys it slowly and surely. Society must always rule justly to survive because injustice creates insurrection and hate. Injustice also brings a deep brooding over past wrongs that creates a bloodthirsty desire for revenge and eliminates a human inclination to forgive, even if one cannot forget. Without

love, forgiveness disappears, and without forgiveness and love, justice disappears. When history repeats injustice, hate, and oppression generation after generation, the people slowly gain a sense of despair that lines every face, a sense that makes the people stop trying to live and start trying to die. Without hope, there is no belief in the justice of God and eternal life for those who suffer on Earth. Instead, those who despair, like the people of France, those who concede that death comes eventually, but the sooner it comes, the more painless, these people try to create their own justice, forgetting moderation, love, forgiveness: the higher qualities of life. These despairing people search for justice in death. If they must die because of the wrongs of another man, they will take the other man with them to a bloody death that satisfies no longing for fulfillment but instead creates only a greater desire for more revenge, more blood, more heads to vault high above the crowd to show the power of an oppressed people. Thus, Dickens reveals deep truths that lie at the bottom of every human heart, truths that should make one stop to think about the wrongs of the world and try to correct them by correcting the misdeeds of one's own heart. After all, there can be no war in the absence of hate and brooding grudges.