**NOTES ON ISSUE 1: GLOSSARY**

**“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us…. [I]n short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. “**  
  
The period invoked by the opening chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities* is the late 18th century – specifically (as we learn a little later on) 1775; and Dickens’ “best of times” and “worst of times” initiates a theme that helps prepare us for one of the major causes of the French Revolution – the coexistence of opposed extremes (such as the coexistence of immense wealth and immense poverty in France) in the pre-revolutionary period.

The “season of Light,” coexisting with the “season of Darkness,” invokes another irony of the period.  Though the “Enlightenment” (usually associated with the move from the superstitious world view of the Middle Ages to the rationalism of 18th-century philosophy and science) may be applied to aspects of various historical periods, the word itself became part of European lexicons in the 18th century (in French, the word is “*Lumières*”) (Roberts 268). If, however, the “Enlightenment” was a period of reason, rationality, science, etc., it was likewise a period of pseudo-science and new kinds of superstition. As one history of the period puts it, “The eighteenth century was the century of mesmerism as well as of inoculation; the cautious rationalism and theism of the early freemasons ramified in a few decades into the luxuriant dottiness of mystical and occult masonry” (Roberts 270). Thus the period in which the novel opens is a period both of Light and Darkness – a period of contrasts.

The “present period” of the novel is of course 1859, when *A Tale of Two Cities* first began serial publication. This period is introduced as “so far like” 1775 perhaps because of the persistence of contrasting extremes: In the 19th century, England led the Industrial Revolution (for which the ground was laid by 18th-century developments like the steam engine); yet unprecedented scientific, technological, and industrial progress coexisted with the vogue of “spirit rappers,” mediums, phrenologists, and so forth. Dickens makes reference to such phenomena in the opening chapter when he notes that “Spiritual revelations were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this” (Ch.1).  
  
**“There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France.”**  
  
In 1775 (the year in which the story of *A Tale of Two Cities* begins), the King and Queen of France were Louis XVI (r. 1774-93) and his consort, Marie-Antoinette. In England, George III (r. 1760-1820) and his queen, Charlotte Sophia, were the ruling couple.





These illustrations of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette, taken from the Artist’s Edition of Carlyle’s *French Revolution* (1893), show us the “king with a large jaw” and the “queen with fair face” of France.

These illustrations of George III and his queen, Charlotte Sophia, are taken from Holt’s The Public and Domestic Life of His Late Most Gracious Majesty, George the Third(1820).  They offer more conventional portraits of the king “with a large jaw” and the “queen with a plain face.”

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**“Mere messages in the earthly order of events had lately come to the English Crown and People, from a congress of British subjects in America.”**  
  
Between September 5 and October 26, 1774, the first Continental Congress of England’s American colonies met in Philadelphia; it presented a list of grievances to the English government in January of the following year. This “message” from the “British subjects in America” preceded the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the ensuing Revolutionary War (Sanders 30; Maxwell 442; Roberts 345). The*Annual Register* of 1775 gives a long account of the Continental Congress’ meeting and the various “messages” sent to the crown, including a

…declaration of rights, to which, they say, the English colonies of North-America are entitled, by the immutable laws of nature, the principles of the English constitution, and their several charters or compacts. In the first of these are life, liberty, and property, a right to the disposal of any of which, without their consent, they had never ceded to any sovereign power whatever. That their ancestors, at the time of their migration, were entitled to all the rights, liberties, and immunities, of free and natural born subjects; and that by such emigration, they neither forfeited, surrendered, nor lost, any of those rights. They then state, that the foundation of English liberty, and of all free government, is a right in the people to participate in their legislative council; and proceed to shew, that as the colonists are not, and, from various causes, cannot be represented in the British parliament, they are entitled to a free and exclusive power of legislation in their several provincial legislatures, where their right of representation can alone be preserved, in all cases of taxation and internal policy, subject only to the negative of their sovereign, in such manner as had been heretofore used and accustomed [etc.]. (25-6)

In addition to this declaration, the Continental Congress “proceeded to frame a petition to his Majesty, a memorial to the people of Great Britain, an address to the colonies in general,” etc., the “petition to his majesty contain[ing] an enumeration of their grievances” (28). After giving a protracted account of the assembly and communications of the Continental Congress, stressing both its declarations of loyalty to the English and its objections to the conduct of English rule, the *Annual Register* concludes its entry with a general commendation: “[I]t must be acknowledged, that the petition and addresses from the congress have been executed with uncommon energy, address, and ability; and that considered abstractedly, with respect to vigour of mind, strength of sentiment, and the language, at least of patriotism, they would not have disgraced any assembly that ever existed” (36). 

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Carlyle, as Sanders points out in his Companion to A Tale of Two Cities, “sees France’s problem as one of both moral and financial bankruptcy” in this period. In the strictly financial sense, however, France’s efforts since the early 17th century to retain a position of European prominence and power had built up a national debt that a series of ministers under Louis XVI (who was crowned in 1774) tried unsuccessfully to ameliorate (Roberts 349). French assistance to America during the Revolutionary War only exacerbated this condition, and, by the early 1780s, France was threatened – as Carlyle puts it – with “the black horrors of NATIONAL BANKRUPTCY” (56).  
  
**“…such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, because he had not kneeled down in the rain to do honor to a dirty procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards.”**  
  
This passage refers to the sentencing and execution of the Chevalier de la Barre in 1766. Accused of acting disrespectfully to a religious procession – de la Barre had not removed his hat when he passed within 30 yards of a procession bearing a crucifix, and had allegedly spoken “irreverently of the Virgin Mary” and “sung bawdy songs” (Sanders 31) – de la Barre was condemned at Amiens to undergo the punishments described (to have his tongue cut out, his right hand cut off, and afterwards to be burned alive – a punishment subsequently “softened” to decapitation prior to burning).

Dickens, who owned a copy of Voltaire’s Oeuvres Complètes (complete works), was probably familiar with the story from the Relation de la mort du chevalier de la Barre, in which Voltaire describes the circumstances of the accusation, the “evidence” gathered against de la Barre, and his ultimate sentencing and execution: The Chevalier de la Barre, a young soldier, was staying with his aunt, an abbess, when she became the object of romantic attentions from a man named Belleval. Belleval, rejected, attempted to ruin the abbess financially, and, when her nephew came to her aid, attempted to ruin *him* by spreading the rumor of his disregard of a passing religious procession. The disturbance created by these allegations coincided with the destruction of a crucifix hanging on a bridge, and Belleval alleged that de la Barre was responsible. Ultimately, the maneuvers of Belleval and the public indignation they occasioned led to de la Barre’s denunciation on the following allegations…

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As Voltaire points out, the precedent for de la Barre’s punishment was a sentence of 1682 whereby two women and two priests, who had “committed imaginary acts of sorcery and real acts of poisoning their victims” (145), had been put to death as “profaners and poisoners.” De la Barre, on the scaffold, said that he “never thought that a gentleman could be put to death for so little” (147). Voltaire told his story in the hopes of reforming the social and legal circumstances that allowed it.  
  
**“…rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees … marked by the Woodman, Fate…”**Dickens’ figure of “the Woodman, Fate,” may have been partly suggested by a passage in his chief historical source, Carlyle’s *French Revolution*. Describing the imperceptibility of the growth and termination of great things, Carlyle writes,

The oak grows silently, in the forest, a thousand years; only in the thousandth year, when the woodman arrives with his axe, is there heard an echoing through the solitudes; and the oak announces itself when, with far-sounding crash, it *falls*. (24)

According to Sanders, the “best lengths of pine” used for building were imported from Norway (31).   
  
**“…to make a certain moveable framework with a sack and a knife in it, terrible in history.”**  
The “moveable framework with a sack and knife in it” is the guillotine, named for its inventor, Joseph Ignace Guillotin (1738-1814), who was active in French politics before and during the French Revolution. A member of the Constitutional Assembly prior to the Revolution, Guillotin proposed the use of his machine in 1785; it was frequently though erroneously thought, in Dickens’ time, that Guillotin had been executed by his own instrument. (Though Guillotin was imprisoned during the Reign of Terror, he was not guillotined [Sanders 32].)   
  
Ironically, the device Guillotin invented for executions was intended to be more humane than the standard means of execution, instantly and painlessly severing the head from the neck. The first models of the machine were created by Dr. Antoine Louis of the French College of Surgeons, and were thus named “louison” and “louisette” after him; the later and more famous models were named after their original inventor (Guillotin). The mechanized executions made possible by the guillotine have occasionally been viewed as “symbolic of the birth of the modern state” (Murphy 224); indeed, use of the guillotine was not discontinued in France until 1981, and the last person to be executed by means of the guillotine died in 1977 (Murphy 223-4). The appearance of the guillotine is famous – a tall wooden framework with a blade pulled to the top (which drops down and severs a head placed in the bottom of the frame), and a sack to catch the heads.

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Many passages from the *Annual Register* seem to suggest that England was overrun with burglars and highwaymen in 1775. The simplest and most expressive are perhaps the accounts of convictions and executions:

The sessions ended at the Old Bailey [Old Bailey is the London street in which the Sessions House – where prisoner were tried – was located], when three criminals for house-breaking, one for highway robbery, and two for returning from transportation [i.e. a sentence of deportation to the colonies], received sentence of death; and, on the 21st of April, one of those condemned for house-breaking, and one of those condemned for returning from transportation, were executed at Tyburn. At the same sessions 31 were sentenced to be transported for 7 years, 6 to be branded in the hand, 2 of whom are to be imprisoned 6 months, 13 to be whipt, and 30 delivered on proclamation. (Feb. 21, 1775; 92)  
  
Ended the sessions at the Old Bailey, when the court passed sentence of death on two criminals, for highway robbery; nine, for house-breaking; one, for stealing cattle; one, for horse-stealing; and one, for stealing from a person, to whom he was clerk, two warrants, one for £213, the other for £1561 4*s*. for which he had received the money; and, on the 7th of June, five of the house-breakers, and the clerk for stealing the warrants, were executed at Tyburn. (May 2, 1775; 115)  
  
The sessions ended at the Old Bailey, when fourteen convicts received sentence for death, viz. the two unfortunate brothers, Robert and Daniel Perreau, for forgery; four, for street, field, and highway robberies; three for house-breaking, and house robberies; one, for theft; one, for firing a pistol at Walter Butler, one of the patrol, near the Foundling Hospital, and wounding him in the neck; two, for coining; and one, for horse-stealing; one received sentence for transportation for fourteen years; sixteen, sentence of transportation for seven years; and nine convicted of coining halfpence, were branded in the hand, and sentenced to suffer an imprisonment in Newgate for twelve months…. And on the 19th of July following, seven of the above capital convicts were executed at Tyburn; among whom were the two coiners. (June 7, 1775, 130)

From these and further accounts of convictions and executions in the *Annual Register*, one gets the impression, just as Dickens apparently did, that England in 1775 was not only overrun with highwaymen and house-breakers, but specialized in a particularly barbarous system of punishment (hangings, brandings, etc.). Indeed, the *Annual Register* is full of stories of “daring burglaries” and other fantastic crimes. For example, an entry from 1775 describes how

A well-dressed man knocked at a milliner’s in Pallmall, under pretence of wanting some ruffles; and being let in by the mistress, immediately locked the door on the inside, pulled out a pistol, and with horrid imprecations threatened to destroy her if she spoke a word; he then tied a bandage over her eyes, bound her, and stripped the shop of nearly £80 worth of lace and linen. (83)

Another entry describes the perils of apprehending thieves:

Two serjeants in the Surry militia, and two other men, in coming from Kingston toward London, meeting a fish-man of about 70, with part of a field-gate on his back, asked him if he came honestly by it; and, on his seeming confused, one of them attempted to secure him; but, before he could effect it, the fellow pulled out a large knife, and stabbed him in the breast, who immediately cried out he had received his death’s wound; then, the others endeavoring to secure him, he stabbed a second in the belly, a third in the arm, and the fourth in the groin. At length, several people coming up, he was overpowered, and conducted to the New Gaol. One of them died the next morning, and two of the others soon after. Of such fatal efficacy is any weapon in desperate hands against naked, though far superior strength and numbers!

**“…the highwayman in the dark was a City tradesman in the light, and being recognized and challenged by his fellow-tradesman whom he stopped in his character of ‘the Captain,’ gallantly shot him through the head and rode away…. “**

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Though Dickens identifies the coach attacked by highwaymen as “the mail,” the incident (in 1775) precedes the advent of mail-coaches in England (the first of which began to transport mail in 1784 [Harper 40]). The vehicle attacked was actually the “Norwich stage” – a stagecoach on the Norwich road.  (Stage-coaches were conveyances traveling in “stages,” which the *OED* defines as “division[s] of a journey or process,” or “[a]s much of a journey as is performed without stopping for rest, a change of horses, etc.; each of the several portions into which a road is divided for coaching or posting purposes; the distance traveled between two places of rest on a road.”)

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…In this and other entries in the *Annual Register*, a “mob” appears to materialize out of nowhere, suggesting that chaos threatened, at any moment, to break out in the London streets. In fact, mobs were somewhat frequent in 18th-century London, but were usually motivated by some kind of social or political protest (Johnson 31-2).   
  
**“In the midst of them, the hangman … was in constant requisition; now, stringing up long rows of miscellaneous criminals; now, hanging a housebreaker on Saturday who had been taken on Tuesday; now, burning people in the hand at Newgate by the dozen, and now burning pamphlets at the door of Westminster Hall; today, taking the life of an atrocious murderer, and to-morrow of a wretched pilferer who had robbed a farmer’s boy of sixpence.”**  
  
According to entries in the *Annual Register* of 1775, the London executioner was indeed responsible for the various punishments enumerated here – hanging housebreakers, burning thieves in the hand, and burning pamphlets outside Westminster Hall. An account of January and February 1775 describes a series of punishments handed down at the sessions in which criminal trials were heard, including the sentence of a thief of a farmer’s boy’s sixpence:

The sessions were ended at the Old Bailey; when the court passed sentence of death on eight convicts; sentence of transportation for seven years, on forty-three; and for 14 years, on three more. Three were ordered to be branded in the hand, and four to be privately whipt. And on the 15th of February, four of the capital convicts were executed at Tyburn. The fifth was pardoned on condition of transport for his natural life. One of those who suffered was for robbing a farmer’s boy of six-pence. (83)

The duty of burning pamphlets outside Westminster Hall also devolved upon the hangman, apparently as a way of performing, publicly, the condemnation of seditious tracts. The *Annual Register* of 1775 describes this process in application to pamphlets defending the cause of the American colonies against England:

Lord Effingham complained in the House of Lords of the licentiousness of the press, and produced a pamphlet entitled, “The Present Crisis with Respect to America Considered,” published by T. Becket, which his Lordship declared to be a most daring insult on the king: and moved, that the house would come to resolutions to the following effect:  
That the said pamphlet is a false, malicious, and dangerous libel…. That one of the said pamphlets be burnt by the hands of the common hangman in Old Palace-yard; and another, at the Royal Exchange.

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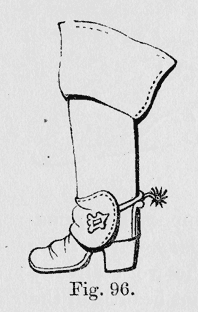
**“…carrying their divine rights with a high hand.”**  
  
According to the *OED*, the “divine right of kings” is the monarchical doctrine that “kings derive their power from God alone, unlimited by any rights on the part of their subjects.”   
  
**“The Dover road that lay … beyond the Dover mail, as it lumbered up Shooter’s Hill.”**  
  
The Dover road, 70.75 miles long, ran from London Bridge (on the Surrey side of the Thames River) to Dover (Harper, “The Road to Dover”). Shooter’s Hill, 8.25 miles along the Dover Road from London Bridge, is an eminence from which the city of London could be seen during the daytime; in the 18th century it was known for a mineral spring where Queen Anne herself (r. 1702-1714) was said to take the waters. At night, however, it was dangerous. According to Charles Harper, in his account of *The Dover Road* (1922),

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…Harper goes on to excerpt the accounts of Shooter’s Hill found in Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* and Byron’s *Don Juan* (1821). In the latter, Don Juan finds himself “greeted” by highwaymen, which he takes for an English custom of salutation. Of Dickens’ novel, Harper says he has but one criticism to make – “There was no Dover Mail coach in 1775, for the earliest of all mail coaches, that between Bristol and London, was not established before 1784. The mails until then were carried by post-boys on horse-back” (40). Thus, though guilty of a minor anachronism on this point, Dickens combines a common conveyance employed in his own time (passengers frequently booked places on mail-coaches, which traveled regularly between set points) with the dangers of the Dover Road in the late 18th century.

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**jack-boots**  
  
Jack-boots, according to Fairholt’s Costume in England: A History of Dress (1860), are “large boot[s], reaching above the knee, introduced in the seventeenth century” (514).



This illustration, from Fairholt’s Costume, gives us an idea of the kind of boots the coach-passengers are wearing as they trudge up Shooter’s Hill beside the mail.

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**“‘I belong to Tellson’s Bank. You must know Tellson’s Bank in London.”**  
  
Tellson’s Bank, in London, is based on the banking house of Child & Co., which was located in Fleet Street and “leased rooms over Temple Bar as a repository for their cash-books and ledgers” (Sanders 35). The association becomes clearer later in the novel, when we visit Tellson’s in Fleet Street next to Temple Bar.

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[T]he French Revolution of 1789 very much influenced the English fashions, and greatly affected both male and female costume; and to that period we may date the introduction of the modern [1860] round hat in place of the cocked one; and it may reasonably be doubted whether anything more ugly to look at, or disagreeable to wear, was ever invented as a head-covering for gentlemen. Possessing not one quality to recommend it, and endowed with disadvantages palpable to all, it has continued to be our head-dress till the present day, in spite of the march of the intellect it may be supposed to cover. It [is not] seen in Parisian prints before 1787. (326)

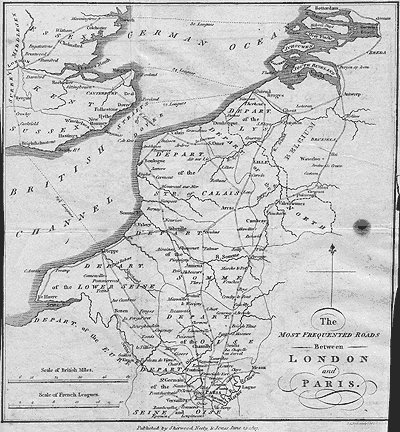
This illustration, from Fairholt’s *Costume*, shows the change in men’s hats from the 1780s to the turn of the century.



From left to right, the figures in the illustration above show a "large round hat" of 1786, the "last form" of the cocked-hat, and a round hat which came into vogue in 1792 (during the period of the French Revolution) and was still worn, "with little variation," when Dickens and Fairholt were writing (Fairholt 508).  
  
**“It [Jerry’s hair] was so like smith’s work, so much more like the top of a strongly spiked wall than a head of hair, that the best players at leap-frog might have declined him, as the most dangerous man in the world to go over.”**  
  
A blacksmith works in metal, and could thus be responsible for forging the spikes to which Jerry’s hair is compared. The game of leapfrog, which the *OED*locates in English usage from the 16th century onward, is “A boys’ game in which one player places his hands upon the bent back or shoulders of another and leaps or vaults over him” – a dangerous game to play over metal spikes or, by comparison, Jerry Cruncher.

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**“…packet to Calais…”**  
  
A “packet,” according to the *OED*, is short for “packet-boat,” or a “boat or vessel plying at regular intervals between two ports for the conveyance of mails, also of goods and passengers; a mail-boat.” The derivation of the word seems to relate to the progress of the mails, and especially state papers and dispatches, between England and the Continent: A “packet” was originally “the boat maintained for carrying ‘the packet’ of State letters and dispatches…. An early official name for this was POST-BARK (in State Papers as late as 1651), also POST-BOAT…. [T]his ‘Boate to Transport the Packetts’ was prob[ably] already familiarly known as the ‘packet-boat,’ since this term was so well-known as to be borrowed in French before 1634.” Mr. Lorry’s conveyance from England to France was thus the usual one in 1775, and the crossing – from Dover to Calais – was also the usual one. The distance between Dover and Calais (the towns closest to one another across the Channel) was about 22 nautical miles (Baedeker 15) or 8 leagues (Tronchet xxv).   
  
This map, from Tronchet’s *Picture of Paris* (c. 1818), shows the route of packets from Dover to Calais. It also, incidentally, maps the Dover Road (though not in great detail – only a few points between London and Dover are labeled).

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**“…a gentleman of sixty, formally dressed in a brown suit of clothes, pretty well worn, but very well kept, with large square cuffs and large flaps to the pockets, passed along on his way to breakfast…. Very orderly and methodical he looked, with a hand on each knee, and a loud watch ticking a sonorous sermon under his flapped waistcoat…. He had a good leg, and was a little vain of it, for his brown stockings fitted sleek and close, and were of a fine texture; his shoes and buckles, too, though plain, were trim. He wore an odd little flaxen wig, setting very close to his head: which wig, it is to be presumed, was made of hair, but which looked far more as though it were spun from filaments of silk or glass….”**  
  
Mr. Lorry’s brown suit of clothes identifies him as a well-groomed, modestly dressed gentleman of the 18th century. In 1775, however, his square coat-cuffs and the flaps on his coat and waistcoat were not in the latest fashion, belonging to the style of a somewhat earlier period: According to Planché's History of British Costume(1847), this style of clothing belonged to the “reign of Queen Anne [1702-14] and the first two Georges [1714-60]” (403-4), and began to change during the reign of George III. Beginning in 1772, “fashionable” gentlemen (primarily the wealthy) began to wear waistcoats “much shortened, reaching very little below the waist, and being without the flap-covered pockets” (Fairholt 318). Coats were also shortened, and “[a] watch was carried in each pocket, from which hung bunches of chains and seals” (Fairholt 318). Mr. Lorry, then, is well dressed in 1775, but not “fashionably” so, and adheres to a style of the earlier 18th century (indeed, the “pretty well worn” state of his suit suggests that, though neatly dressed, he has adhered to the same mode for some time). Even his watch, as obtrusive as it seems to be – “a loud watch ticking a sonorous sermon” – is apparently a symbol of sartorial restraint: Not only does it tick sonorously beneath the outmoded flaps of his waistcoat, but the fact that there is only one watch (instead of one for each pocket), and no “bunches of chains and seals,” suggests that he is very modestly accoutered.   
  
Moreover, with shorter waistcoats, multiple watches, and a lack of flaps, 1772 introduced wigs of considerable size – “enormous hair-do[s],” as one 19th-century writer puts it (Fairholt 318) – for fashionable gentleman. Mr. Lorry’s wig, however, remains “little”; and though Dickens’ description of it as an “odd little wig” refers to the fact that it would have been odd for his 19th-century readers to see one, it would – like the rest of Mr. Lorry’s outfit – have been proper in 1775 (though not especially fashionable).

Finally, having a “good leg” means that Mr. Lorry’s leg – in tight-fitting breeches to the knee – is shapely. From “the close of G[eorge] II’s reign [onward, breeches were] worn over the stocking … and fastened first by buckles and afterwards by strings” (Planché 403-4). Shoes likewise, for both men and women, were buckled – just as Mr. Lorry’s are – and had heels. Buckles did not become unfashionable until the period of the French Revolution, when shoe-laces began to replace them and shoes began to grow flatter in the heel. When this began to happen, “[t]he Prince of Wales was petitioned by the alarmed buckle-makers to discard his new-fashioned strings, and take again to buckles, by way of bolstering up their trade; but the fate of these articles was sealed, and the Prince’s compliance with their wishes did little to prevent their downfall” (Fairholt 326).

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A lamplighter, of course, was one who lit the lamps in a town. Before electric light (which did not appear in cities until the end of the 19th century), lamplighters were employed to light the street-lamps at night, and usually carried ladders (which they ascended to light the lamps). To say that someone was “like a lamplighter” was, according to the *OED*, a tribute to his or her swiftness.

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**“’I kiss your hand, miss,’ said Mr. Lorry, with the manners of an earlier date, as he made his formal bow again, and took his seat.”**  
  
In the mid-19th century, when Dickens was writing *A Tale of Two Cities*, bowing was the polite gesture of choice. The *Dictionary of Daily Wants* (1859) describes the bow as

A mode by which well-bred persons in England recognize and salute each other. A bow ought to be made by bending the upper part of the body and the head forward in a gentle curve; the action should be neither too laboured nor too curt, but the body should be inclined forward, and suffered to regain its erect position with an elastic sort of motion. The occasions upon which this gesture of respect is to be performed are innumerable, such as on entering or leaving a room, meeting with or addressing a lady, appealing to a public assembly, taking wine at dinner, tacitly admitting an error, or permitting an adverse opinion to override your own, acknowledging a compliment, signifying attention when individually addressed, bidding adieu to persons when the acquaintance is slight, &c. (177)

In Dickens’ own time, then, a bow would have been sufficient to acknowledge Miss Manette; but Mr. Lorry’s gesture of kissing her hand consists with the gallantry of the 18th century. 18th-century conduct books, however, acknowledge the extent to which this mark of respect for a lady could lapse into licentiousness. For instance, the author of *The Gentleman’s Library, Containing Rules for Conduct in All Parts of Life* (1734), sums up a section on the avoidance of social vices as follows:

We should labour to assume no *Gallantry*, but that of Spirit, which is stiled *Magnanimity* and *Greatness of Soul*; an Air of doing great and good Offices; a Pleasure in exercising our Virtues, and drawing them out to Light for the Service of Mankind. This is *Gallantry*, this is Elegance in Action; and the other, only called so by *Fashion* and *Folly*, is but a poor and mean Imitation of *Vice* in Disguise. (129)

**“She curtseyed to him (young ladies made curtseys in those days)…”**  
  
The word “curtsey” is a variant of the word “courtesy,” and refers to a courteous gesture made by women – “An obeisance; … a feminine movement of respect or salutation, made by bending the knees and lowering the body. Commonly to make [or] drop a curtsey” (*OED*).   
  
**“In your reception of it, don’t heed me any more than if I was a speaking machine – truly, I am not much else.”**  
  
The idea of “machinery” was common in the late 18th century (especially in application to vessels like boats, carriages, and objects or appliances operating mechanically). However, the kinds of speaking machines we might be tempted to associate with Mr. Lorry’s speaking machine – the telegraph, the phonograph, or perhaps the telephone – would all be anachronistic in application to 1775. The electric telegraph was not invented until 1836-7, and the telephone (invented in 1876) and phonograph (invented in 1877) did not appear until long after Dickens was writing (1859).   
  
**Beauvais**  
  
Beauvais, north of Paris, is described by the *Handbook to Paris and Its Environs* (c. 1924) as

A cathedral town, 50 miles north of Paris, and one of the oldest towns in France.

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**“…the privilege of filling up blank forms for the consignment of any one to the oblivion of a prison for any length of time…”**   
  
The “privilege of filling up blank forms” alluded to by Mr. Lorry is the famous use of *lettres de cachet* – literally “letters of seal” (they bore the private seal of the French king) authorizing imprisonment, without trial or redress, “at the pleasure of the monarch” (*OED*). Sanders, in *A Companion to A Tale of Two Cities*, notes that *lettres de cachet* were sometimes sold, “with blanks to be filled up with names at the pleasure of the purchaser” (42), and Dickens adopts this view. *Lettres de cachet* are represented, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, as a privilege available to French noblemen in favor with the court (a privilege exercised against Doctor Manette); and Dickens’ historical source, Carlyle’s *French Revolution*, makes much of the pre-revolutionary use of *lettres de cachet*as a political tool. Describing the tactics of Loménie-Brienne (Louis XVI’s Controller of Finance) against a Parliament that would not register Tax-edicts, Carlyle writes,

On the night of the 14th of August, Loménie launches his thunderbolt, or handful of them. Letters named of the Seal (de Cachet), as many as needful, some six score and odd, are delivered overnight. And so, next day betimes, the whole Parlement, once more set on wheels, is rolling incessantly towards Troyes in Champagne; “escorted,” says History, “with the blessings of all people”; the very innkeepers and postilions looking gratuitously reverent. This is the 15th of July, 1787. (72-3)

Though the Parliament was soon allowed to return from collective exile, the audacity of this political maneuver illustrates the kind of outrage made possible by *lettres de cachet*. *Lettres de cachet* were abolished at the beginning of the French Revolution (Sanders 42).

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**“…dressed in some extraordinarily tight-fitting fashion, and to have on her head a most wonderful bonnet like a Grenadier wooden measure, and good measure too, or a great Stilton cheese….** “  
  
As Sanders points out in his Companion to A Tale of Two Cities, the “extraordinary tight-fitting fashion” in which Miss Pross is dressed reflects, not an aberration in 18th-century style, but rather Dickens’ dislike of the clothing of the period (which was often both voluminous and tight-fitting). As F.W. Fairholt notes in his 1860 History of Dress, “the humbler classes seem to have gradually adopted from [the fashions of the well-to-do] only that portion of dress that was stiff and quaker-like” (314). As an example, he describes a woman’s outfit of 1772, consisting of an “uncomfortable bodice and stomacher … tight sleeves, long mittens, open gown carefully held up from the ground (and frequently worn drawn through the pocket-holes), … long white apron, [and] high-heeled shoes and buckles” (Fairholt 314). Miss Pross’ tight-fitting gown, which would resemble the one Fairholt describes, may help to identify her station; yet the exaggerated discomfort to which she seems to be subjected may also suggest that she is a woman of considerable endurance, not easily daunted.   
  
Miss Pross’ bonnet, compared to “a Grenadier wooden measure,” combines two images – that of a large wooden scoop for measuring out dry goods, and that of a Grenadier’s hat. An idea of the latter may be derived from Planché’s History of British Costume (1847), in which he notes that “[i]n the reign of George III the [previously-worn] sugar-loaf cap of the grenadiers was exchanged for the present mountain or muff of bear-skin” (419). This “mountain” of bear-skin, which remained part of the Grenadier’s uniform from the late 18th century through the period in which Dickens was composing *A Tale of Two Cities*, is surely the hat invoked with reference to Miss Pross’ unfortunate bonnet.

