



2021

Golden Angels, Sharp Females and Alternative Heroines in *A Tale of Two Cities*

Charissa Enns
Azusa Pacific University

Recommended Citation

Enns, Charissa (2021) "Golden Angels, Sharp Females and Alternative Heroines in *A Tale of Two Cities*," *The Macksey Journal*: Vol. 2, Article 128.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by The Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Macksey Journal by an authorized editor of The Johns Hopkins University Macksey Journal.

Golden Angels, Sharp Females, and Alternative Heroins in *A Tale of Two Cities*

Charissa Enns

Azusa Pacific University

Abstract

In the Victorian period, the pervasive idea that women must be like saints led to the popular term “angel in the house,” coined by Gilbert and Gubar acclaimed *Madwoman in the Attic*. This research paper will break down the term and will discuss the amoral female character in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The main female character, Lucie Manette, exemplifies the typical ideal of the homemaker, while her nemesis, Madame Defarge, is an evil, corrupt woman whose involvement in the French Revolution makes her a warning to other women who used to be powerful. Dickens is known for his stereotypical angelic and villainous female characters; however, *A Tale of Two Cities* offers alternative characters to Lucie Manette and Madame Defarge through Mrs. Cruncher and Miss Pross, who are both strong and moral characters. As the Victorian gender roles break down, it is revealed that these women are more than the societal pressures put on them. This revelation demonstrates that women should never be put into categories.

Keywords: Gender roles, amoral female, French Revolution, Angel in the House, Victorian Literature, Charles Dickens

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, women struggle with authority and find different ways to adapt to the patriarchal society they live in. These women's stories are interwoven with themes of revenge, blood, beheading, love, domesticity, and virtues. Each female character plays a key part in these themes. This chapter will reveal the ways that women play a part in authority and power, and how they are reduced by Victorian patriarchal society. However, *A Tale* will rise above society's deep prejudice against women in some ways and reveal that women can be strong and dignified. Madame Defarge performs the role of a revenge-seeking revolutionary who is left lying in a pool of her own blood at the climax of the novel. In direct comparison, Lucie Manette is a loving housewife and receives the joy of a restored family in her happy ending. These two women's personalities create opposing stereotypes for women. However, there are two other characters who show that women do not need to fit into these two stereotypes. Mrs. Cruncher receives the gift of understanding and forgiveness from her husband. And finally, through a truly harrowing finale, Miss Pross is the heroine of the novel as she saves Lucie from Madame Defarge. This paper will argue that these various endings for the female characters are a direct result of the complexities of Victorian society's ideas of what a woman should be.

To fully understand the intricacies of the role of women in Victorian society, the term "angel in the house" must be defined. The "angel in the house" ideal started with the expectation that a woman should be like Mother Mary, and in the Victorian era, it evolved into the idea that a woman must be like an angel.¹ (Gilbert and Gubar 20) This heavenly woman created a loving home that promoted humility, modesty, kindness, and diligence.² (Gilbert and Gubar 20) In *A Tale*, Lucie is the "angel in the house" while Madame Defarge is the villainess.

Both women have tragic beginnings with Lucie growing up as an orphan, and Madame Defarge's family dying at the hands of two corrupt aristocrats. Yet, these characters choose different values, as Lucie embraces love, and Madame Defarge embraces vengeance. These two women fit into the archetypes of the ideal and corrupt woman within Victorian society and portray a deep need for characters that step outside these stereotypes. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, there are initially two distinct types of female characters: angelic, moral female characters like Lucie Manette and villainous, terrifying female characters like Madame Defarge. However, the novel begins to diverge from these stereotypes through the characters of Miss Pross and Mrs. Cruncher, who create a bridge between strength and goodness.

The Importance of Lucie, Madame Defarge, and Miss Pross

The female characters' outward appearance reveals their inner self in *A Tale*. For instance, Lucie's restoration of her father alludes to the many important parts she will play in the novel including caretaker, homemaker, protector, daughter, mother, and wife. These roles were the ultimate goal for many women at the time. In addition to her roles, Lucie's beauty also contributes to her idealization in the novel. When Mr. Lorry lays eyes on Lucie, he describes her as having a "short, slight, pretty figure, a quantity of golden hair, a pair of blue eyes that met his own with an inquiring look . . ." (Dickens 22) Through her "golden hair and "inquiring look," Lucie appears to be angelic, innocent, and curious. Her slender figure is also significant. In Victorian literature, slender women were characterized by their preciousness, modesty, and, most importantly, self-abnegation in the service of others. (Byler 219) Lucie's character demonstrates these virtues immediately when she meets her father for the first time. (Dickens 23) Lucie helps pull him out of his trauma with "the light of her face" and "the touch of her

hand.” (Dickens 66) The kindness in her face and the gentleness of her touch restores and redeems him. Her goodness is enough to assist a man who is struggling to see the kindness in the world after being entrapped in prison for years. Lucie’s appearance implies that there is a kind heart underneath her beauty and establishes her as an angel in the house.

Madame Defarge’s appearance also reveals her moral character. Madame Defarge is “a stout woman of about his [Ernest Defarge’s] own age, with a watchful eye that seldom seemed to look at anything . . . a steady face, strong features and great composure of manner.” (Dickens 31) Her description is similar to that of a rock, cold and unmoving, and implies that she is calm but not compassionate. Her depiction establishes her as a hardened woman with no empathetic emotions towards others, which is confirmed by how frequently she proclaims that she has no qualms about killing any aristocrat or tyrant. (Dickens 138) The audience finds Madame Defarge’s statement shocking because she herself is a victim of violence, yet her lack of compassion prevents her from receiving redemption in the novel. Her disbelief in the sanctity of human life purposefully portrays her as the opposite of Lucie, who is full of love. This comparison is “two ‘primordial images’ of women—benevolent and malevolent—” which “vie for supremacy in a struggle that transcends history.” (Hamilton 204) This distinction indicates that the struggle between good and evil is what characterizes Lucie and Madame Defarge. These extremes create an image that leaves no room for the belief that people are not solely good or solely evil.

But an unexpected alternative to this binary presents itself in Miss Pross, Lucie’s companion. Miss Pross is a woman who has been defined by her looks, yet her role transcends her appearance. When the reader is first introduced to Miss Pross, Mr. Lorry says she is “one of

those unselfish creatures—found only among women—who will, for pure love and admiration, bind themselves willing slaves, to youth when they have lost it, to beauty that they never had . . . ” (Dickens 77) Mr. Lorry assumes she willingly serves Lucie because she no longer has youth, beauty, or hope of finding a husband. On the surface, Miss Pross’s role is to dedicate herself to a beautiful young woman to blend into Victorian society; however, Miss Pross is more than what meets the eye. While her role is described as a “willing slave,” Miss Pross is far from being powerless. (Dickens 77) Her strength is in the love she has for Lucie, unlike Madame Defarge, whose strength comes from anger. Miss Pross’s position is unique because her status as a servant makes her non-threatening, but she does have an inner power that appears in her final battle with Madame Defarge.

Victorian Women, Family, and Home

The key to understanding Victorian women's roles can be found in the home since women were at the heart of it. The home “evokes largely female associations. Indeed, the popular image of Victorian domesticity was so focused on women and children.” (Tosh 9) However, a woman’s job was more than simply attending to the house. Women were required to create a utopia because the home was “a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved.” (Houghton 343) Women oversaw the house and ensured that good virtues were upheld. The pressure to find and establish a home was high amongst Victorian society, and this idea of a perfect place apart became a woman’s identity. Many Victorians believed that women could only find true fulfillment if they devoted themselves to their domestic roles of raising families. (Coltrane 31) This section will

explore why Victorian society put such an emphasis on home and the consequences within the story of rejecting that idea.

Lucie's task of being a caretaker to her father represents the Victorian ideal. In her first scene, Mr. Lorry plans for her to form a family with her father. Before she meets her father, Lucie believes that she will not be able to help him, and he will remain "a ghost" of a man. (Dickens 26) In response, Mr. Lorry tells her their intended roles: "I, to identify him, if I can; you, to restore him to life, love, duty, rest, and comfort." (Dickens 26) Mr. Lorry has listed Lucie's duties: she is to nurture her father so he may have what is left of his life, love him, help him rest from his woes, and be comforted. Lucie fulfills her role by allowing her touch to restore him.¹⁷ (Dickens 39) However, it is not just her kindness that restores him but her angelic looks. Doctor Manette has kept a lock of her mother's hair, and Lucie's identical golden hair pulls him out of his stupor as he realizes that she is his daughter. (Dickens 39) They weep together, and she tells him she will bring him home and heal him. (Dickens 41) The narrator emphasizes Lucie's perfection by showing Lucie's ability to take care of her father. She continues to perform well by creating a home for him that is a walled garden far away from Doctor Manette's demons.

Lucie rehabilitates Doctor Manette, making a good home for him. The narrator describes their house through Mr. Lorry's eyes, "The disposition of everything in the rooms, from the largest object to the least . . . by delicate hands, clear eyes, and good sense; were at once so pleasant in themselves, and so expressive." (Dickens 76) Lucie's "clear eyes" and "good sense" have built a pleasant household. While Lucie's homemaking abilities might be valuable, her skills reflect the Victorian era's tendency to "reduce women to angel figures whose role is to fill the home with comfort and a sense of security." (Robson 312) Lucie is able to make a

comfortable home for her father where he can feel safe. Her capability to create a good home correlates to her ability to uphold a virtuous life for those around her. Lucie builds a sanctuary for people like Carton and Darnay who feel lost. In contrast, Madame Defarge does not have a home except for the wine shop. The wine shop itself is not safe as men come to plot a revolution in it. This difference highlights how Madame Defarge fails at homemaking from the Victorian perspective because she does not uphold virtue in her family's sanctuary.

Within the Victorian home, children were also an important part of a woman's daily life, and Lucie proves herself to be a good mother. The narrator describes how "her work would slowly fall from her hands, and her eyes would be dimmed. For, there was something coming in the echoes, something light, afar off, scarcely audible yet, that stirred her heart too much." (Dickens, 159) Lucie is a good mother and wife because she can sense a threat to her family. The narrator likens the echoes Lucie hears to a woman's intuition. These echoes show that a woman needs to anticipate any danger that might come to her children or the family she has worked hard to maintain. These "echoes" are her secret. Her husband says, "What is the magic secret, my darling of your being everything to all of us, yet never seeming to be hurried, or to have too much to do?" (Dickens 161) Lucie flawlessly predicts the coming storm without becoming flustered, making her role impressive.

While Lucie has the ideal family in the novel, Madame Defarge's family has been torn apart by the cruel aristocracy. The story reveals that the characters known as the Evrémonde brothers approach Thérèse Defarge's sister's husband to take the sister of Madame Defarge. They rape and kill Madame Defarge's sister and murder their brother who tried to stop the awful deed. This story demonstrates that the aristocracy takes what they want. The plea of the

lower class is clear in the brother's dying words as he says, "Doctor, they are very proud, the Nobles; but we common dogs are proud too sometimes. They plunder us, beat us, kill us; but we have little pride left, sometimes. She—have you seen her, Doctor?" (Dickens 242) This quote illustrates that the continually oppressed simply want to have their pride like the nobles. The aristocrat's tyranny in this scenario fractured Madame Defarge's family. With the destruction of Madame Defarge's family, she becomes obsessed with a vengeance through revolt. The irony is that in trying to avenge a lost family she ultimately loses the one she could have had with her husband. Her backstory creates a unique female character because she does not wish to build a home and dedicates herself to the revolution instead.

Victorian Women and Their Husbands

Since the family and home were such a central part of Victorian society for women, it was expected of them to marry. However, this societal expectation of marriage created an oppressive state because women could not own anything independently of their husbands. The laws stated that "under the commonlaw doctrine of *couverture*, when a woman married she lost her independent legal personality as a *femme sole* (single woman) and became a *femme covert* (covered woman)."³ (Nath and Kumar 79) In Victorian times, a married woman being covered meant that she had protection, but she also gave up her personal freedom. For example, women could not even own the jewelry they wore."⁴ (Nath and Kumar 79) The societal pressure to marry meant that women were expected to willingly give up their right to property. Victorian society "held rigid 'views on marriage' and the role of women in life. Most women regarded marriage as a fixed fact of nature. It was a fundamental part of their life plan."⁵ (Nath and Kumar 80) Without marriage, a woman had no one to protect and provide for

her. This section will analyze the intricacies of married life in *A Tale* and how it affects each female character.

Within the household of Lorry's servant Jerry Cruncher and his house, the reader is able to see a problem in a Victorian marriage where the husband rejects his wife's prayers to God and disrespects her. Mrs. Cruncher is a woman of "orderly and industrious appearance" and her house is "scrubbed throughout." (Dickens 46) She fulfills the Victorian expectation of keeping a clean home and is a good Christian woman who prays for her family. (Dickens 47) Her husband does not appreciate her. It is shown clearly through his actions when he responds to her prayer by saying, "You're at it agin, are you?" and throwing "a boot at the woman." (Dickens 46) In this scenario, the reader can clearly see that Jerry Cruncher is discourteous towards his wife and the work she does for him. Mrs. Cruncher is a perfect wife, so his actions are befuddling. However, Jerry Cruncher does not see her as a good wife because she prays that he might stop his illegal grave-digging, and he is afraid that Mrs. Cruncher's prayers will prevent his grave-digging profession and keep food off the table. (Dickens 47) Jerry Cruncher thinks that she is insulting his manhood by trying to take away his ability to provide for his family. Her inability to submit to her husband makes her appear not to be an "angel in the house."

At the end of the novel, Jerry Cruncher repents of his treatment towards his wife establishing her as a true "angel in the house." During the rising action of the final book, Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher are waiting to see if Lucie will be able to escape Madame Defarge. In this moment of tension, he confesses his wrongs, saying, "Never no more will I interfere with Mrs. Cruncher's flopping, never no more!" (Dickens 269) Cruncher finally understands that his wife is simply showing her love by praying for her family's well-being. (Dickens 48) In this scene,

the reader can see that moral character is more important than submitting to one's husband. Mrs. Cruncher maintains being a good Christian woman over submitting to her sinful husband, making her a true "angel in the house." As it will later be noted, in order for a woman to be a true "angel in the house," she must help men become virtuous, according to Victorian society.

Lucie promotes virtue in her home, but there are secrets hidden from her within the house. The men hide two key secrets from her. First, Lucie does not truly know who her husband is. When Darnay asks her father for permission to marry Lucie, Doctor Manette makes a request of Darnay saying, "Tell me when I ask you, not now. If your suit should prosper, if Lucie would love you, you shall tell [your identity] me on your marriage morning. Do you promise?" (Dickens 107) No one even considers telling Lucie that the name she takes is different from his original last name. The second detail hidden from Lucie is Darnay's choice to leave for France. He has good intentions, but he ends up leaving her with more pain than originally intended. Darnay values a happy and idyllic wife rather than a partner who can help him make decisions. Darnay did not think it was necessary for her to know his name or what he was doing. He simply decides that "neither Lucie nor her father must know of it until he was gone. Lucie should be spared the pain of separation." (Dickens 184) The misery is inevitable, but she would not have been as shocked if he had been honest with her. When Lucie did find out, she had a "look of earnestness so concentrated and intensified that it seemed as though it had been stamped upon her face expressly to give force and power." (Dickens 196) Darnay, in his naivete, believes that his decisions would not affect her. The family goes to France because Lucie wishes to support Darnay, and they are put in danger potentially. While Darnay has good intentions, his silence shows that he does not trust Lucie.

Madame Defarge and her husband appear to have a good relationship, but one disagreement drives them apart. The narrator portrays the couple as having a common goal and communicating well. Madame Defarge could simply cough, and her husband would know that he needed to look around the shop. (Dickens 35) Their relationship is full of respect. Her husband says, "If madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it." (Dickens 134) Ernest Defarge never yells at his wife. He discusses ideas with his wife and praises her for all she does. Ernest Defarge communicates all his plans to Madame Defarge, and she helps him. The Defarges appear to be in a healthy relationship because "Few literary couples are more devoted, more mutually respectful, more unified, or more compatible than Ernest and Thérèse Defarge. In fact, it is only when Madame Defarge violates their shared vision of revolution and her husband's trust that the novel resolutely rejects her vision of justice." (Magnum 143) Madame Defarge loses this unity when she rejects his advice and decides to kill the Evrémonde family. (Dickens 253) While the narrator appears to model a more equitable relationship with this couple, Madame Defarge's disobedience of her husband leads to a power struggle between them. Madame Defarge's decision causes her to become a villain of the story.

Madame Defarge's opposition of traditional Victorian standards is what puts her on the path to kill a six-year-old girl and causes no one to root for this powerful woman who defies the system anymore. (Dickens 253) Ernest Defarge attempts to convince Madame Defarge that vengeance is not the answer to everything. In fact, Ernest Defarge tries to have compassion for the doctor, saying, "But this Doctor has suffered much; you have seen him to-day, and I have observed her [his daughter] in the street by the prison." (Dickens 253) There is a role reversal

here because Ernest Defarge is telling a woman to have compassion rather than a woman telling a man to be kind. With this role reversal, Madame Defarge becomes powerful and receives the true loyalty of the revolutionaries following her. She says, "My husband, fellow-citizen, is a good Republican and a bold man; he has deserved well of the Republic, and possesses its confidence. But my husband has his weaknesses, and he is so weak as to relent towards this Doctor." (Dickens 266) In saying that her husband has a weakness for the doctor, Madame Defarge is prioritizing vengeance over her marriage. This decision solidifies the point that her turning away from her husband's guidance is what makes her a truly corrupt woman.

Madame Defarge's defiance creates a woman who loves violence enough to destroy her own home, making her the complete opposite of Lucie. Unlike the perfect woman, Madame Defarge resists "submission to her husband for whom she plays the catechist in aggression." (Black 91) Madame Defarge celebrates and promotes violent doctrine. This principle is something that no good wife should uphold. Through her belief in violence, she rejects typical gender roles and does not establish a virtuous house, which causes issues in her marriage. The lack of a morality-filled home is where Lucie and Madame Defarge differ. Lucie and Madame Defarge are two women on the extreme ends of the spectrum, one angel and one demon. Throughout the novel, Lucie is angelic because of the way she shows love towards others. For example, her husband is astounded by her compassion towards Carton. (Dickens 159) In contrast, Miss Pross describes Madame Defarge saying, "You might, from your appearance, be the wife of Lucifer." (Dickens 271) In this statement, it is shown that Madame Defarge's appearance is that of the devil and the very opposite of Lucie's looks. And like Lucie, Madame

Defarge's appearance reveals who she is, someone who is willing to kill a six-year-old girl.

(Dickens 271)

Fear of Female Authority

As Madame Defarge embraces vengeance, the reader sees her become the female authority figure that the Victorian patriarchy feared. Various psychologists have studied this anxiety over female power, and Dorothy Dinnerstein found that in Victorian society, "the predominance of patriarchies to the fear of female authority was caused by mother-dominated child-rearing." (Mcknight 27) During the Victorian era, it was a woman's main role to educate and take care of her children and the household while the husband worked. (Yildirim 45) Therefore, this mother-dominated child-rearing created dread within the Victorian people because women had extreme moral influence over their children and the men in their lives. In order to prevent women from having too much power, men would make the women's role smaller until women became a conscience for men.

Victorians were afraid of people like Madame Defarge because they assumed that all issues should be resolved within the home. It was a common Victorian belief that any human reform would have to come from within the family rather than by outside sources. (Kuykendall 157) In her storyline, neither the family nor society were able to reform Madame Defarge. Thus, she becomes a woman who does not wish to be passive, making her powerful and terrifying. (Kuykendall 157) To Victorians, the concept of female power was alarming. Without women in the home, who would protect virtue? Victorians believed that "the anchoring of masculine identity in the competitive world of work made self-alienation a problem for men, but woman's self-fulfilling labour of home-making was supposed to provide the antidote that would help

restore the divided male subject.” (John 15) The keyword here is *antidote* because women fixed every moral problem, yet they did not have power: a contradiction within itself.

Lucie the Exemplar

Lucie fulfills the role of the “angel in the house,” but she does more than appear to be an angel as she promotes virtue in others. For example, Carton believes that he is not good enough for Lucie despite loving her. He calls himself a “dissolute dog, who has never done any good and never will.” (Dickens 158) No one encourages Carton in the novel besides Lucie, leading him to believe in his wickedness. Carton’s belief in his wickedness comes from the fact that no one encourages him in the novel except for Lucie. Lucie declares faith in him by saying, “I am sure that he is capable of good things, gentle things, even magnanimous things.” (Dickens 159) Because Lucie concludes that Carton is good, he sees that he has the ability to be virtuous. Carton says, “The utmost good that I am capable of now, Miss Manette, I have come to realize. Let me carry through the rest of my misdirected life, the remembrance that I opened my heart to you . . . ” (Dickens 118) Lucie’s goodness allows Carton to see that he has potential. Throughout the novel, her love and example slowly transform him into a man who is willing to give his life for her. Ultimately, he goes to the guillotine in place of Darnay, her husband. (Dickens 253)

Lucie helps men heal and see their potential for good; however, if a man does not receive her direct love, she cannot help him realize his ability to be better. She helps Doctor Manette because she is his daughter and Carton because of her compassion for him. However, Stryver is an ambitious, proud, and foolish lawyer. He thinks very highly of himself, saying, “She will have a man in me already pretty well off.” (Dickens 109) Lucie does not love Stryver;

therefore, Mr. Lorry stops Stryver's proposal. In response, Stryver asks if she is a mincing fool.⁶ (Dickens 111-113) Stryver sees Lucie as unwise because of the societal expectation for women to marry well, and he assumes that her rejection was from a lack of intelligence rather than a lack of interest. (Fido 30) He continues to demean Lucie, pointing out Darnay's lowly tutoring job. Then, he proceeds to say that Lucie once tried to catch him. (Dickens 161) Stryver cannot understand that Lucie married for love instead of money or status. Stryver has lost in the attempt to win Lucie's hand and it makes him rude. Without Lucie's love and virtue, Stryver simply becomes an ambitious man without decency.

Darnay and Carton grow by remaining in Lucie's life because she teaches them both compassion and love. Darnay's and Carton's journey to friendship shows this improvement. When the men first meet each other, the likeness of the two is striking and makes both Darnay and Carton uncomfortable, as each stares at his mirror image. (Dickens 60) Carton looks at himself in the mirror and says, "Why should I particularly like a man who resembles you? There is nothing in you to like; you know that." (Dickens 59) This quote reveals that Carton does not like Darnay because he looks like him. Later on, Carton wishes to be friends with Darnay, for Lucie's sake, and Lucie implores Darnay to be kind to Carton because he has a big heart. (Dickens 159) The narrator says, "She looked so beautiful, in the purity of her faith in this lost man, that her husband could have looked at her as she was, for hours." (Dickens 159) Darnay cannot become friends with Carton without Lucie. In fact, he only considers it when she asks him to be generous towards Carton. (Dickens 159) Yet, Lucie pushes Darnay to see Carton for who he truly is, and Darnay is able to see the value in Carton.

Lucie might be Victorian society's exemplar, but her perfection reflects a society that advocates for self-erasure in women. Women's self-erasure in Victorian society can be shown through advice books that instructed, "Women, and particularly wives and mothers, should have no existence separate from their duties and affections toward families and communities." (Mcknight 6) When women had no activities outside of their families, it became their entire identity. Lucie experiences self-erasure because she is inseparable from her family and the home throughout the novel, and her main role is to be a good example to the men in her life. Women were also expected to be "the moral and intellectual improvement of the working class." (Mcknight 6) Women were supposed to fix men's failures. For instance, Carton says to Lucie, "In my degradation, I have not been so degraded but that the sight of you with your father, and of this homemade such a home by you, has stirred old shadows that I thought had died out of me." (Dickens 117) Through Lucie's example, Carton is able to see that goodness is possible. Lucie has become the conscience or "old shadows" that have not been stirred in him for so long. Her virtue makes her an exemplar throughout the novel as her angelic nature allows her to help others.

While Lucie is able to help Carton, her being an exemplar to him reveals how Victorian patriarchal society tries to make women's roles narrow and one-dimensional. The need to be a constant example of goodness proved difficult to a woman's psychological health as it brought "confinement to a domestic and maternal role." (Morne 15) With the responsibility of promoting virtue, women were confined to this one role in society. These bonds reduced women to a small, inner voice. Therefore, Lucie becomes a woman whose role does not extend beyond the home, and she only has a narrow role in the novel.

In addition to her role being small, Lucie is also physically small in the novel. The ideal of slenderness represented the role of an “angel of the house” in Dickens’s novels. For example, Dickens’s female main character in *Little Dorrit* has a “small body and limited visibility [which] stands for a whole system of counter-values: modesty, deference, charity, frugality, industry, and self-sacrifice.” (Wolf 223) Similarly, Lucie’s slight figure depicts how she reflects these standards. She portrays the virtues of charity, self-sacrifice, and industry through her care of her father, Carton, and her child. Lucie’s tasks are only domestic roles in the novel, reducing her to these characteristics and nothing more: a conscience who simply does what is right without any desires.

Miss Pross: The Alternate Heroine

Because Lucie is reduced to a precious angel, Miss Pross steps in with uncharacteristic strength to stop Madame Defarge from hurting the Evrémonde family. (Dickens 271) Madame Defarge underestimates Miss Pross and does not see that Miss Pross has the same hardened strength. Miss Pross’s description in the ending scene demonstrates her power, as the narrator says, “There was nothing beautiful about her; years had not tamed the wildness, or softened the grimness, but she too was a determined woman in her different way.” (Dickens 271) Madame Defarge and Miss Pross both have a wild and grim look upon their face when they attack each other. This mirror image is solidified when Miss Pross says, “No, you wicked foreign woman; I am your match.” (Dickens 271) These women are both determined, and this stubbornness is what pushes them to a violent conflict since neither is willing to budge. However, Miss Pross has an advantage that Madame Defarge does not expect. In the final scene, “Miss Pross with the tenacity of love always so much stronger than hate, clasped her

tight, and even lifted her from the floor in the struggle that they had.” (Dickens 271) This quote directly points out that Miss Pross has love in her heart while Madame Defarge does not. Miss Pross’s victory reveals that love is always stronger than vengeance.

Miss Pross chose to be a servant because of her love for Lucie. However, she is associated with the home. Although, her genuine affection for Lucie gives Miss Pross and Peggotty, a servant in *David Copperfield*, power as, “Peggotty and Miss Pross shows that real affection can also produce a degree of independence; the two are able to take care of themselves and others, despite their status as working, unmarried (at least initially in the case of Peggotty) women.” (Arnold 314) Miss Pross is an alternative heroine because her love of Lucie gives her independence. However, her power is initially non-threatening as it stays within the home. Miss Pross becomes a companion, housekeeper, mother, and cook while overseeing the domestic staff. (Dickens 79) The running of a household and her love for Lucie gives her power. While she has the power within the home, she does not have any sway over man. Without a husband or good looks, she is not an exemplar nor does she need to be.

Miss Pross’s position is unique because her authority and sudden violence do not cause corruption. However, this sudden burst of power could not come from Lucie. Lucie would never have been able to stand up to Madame Defarge, as she is not grim or impressive enough to kill someone. Therefore, Miss Pross with her “wild look” steps in to stop Madame Defarge with her love for Lucie. With Lucie in danger, Miss Pross lunges forward and reveals a power she did not know she had and strikes Madame Defarge. Miss Pross grabs Madame Defarge’s waist, pinning the gun under her arm. When Madame Defarge did manage to draw the gun, Miss Pross hit the gun, directing the shot at Madame Defarge. She is shot, Madame Defarge dies, and Miss Pross

loses her hearing. (Dickens 272) With her sacrifice, Miss Pross becomes a heroine and that female authority is good as long as it does not threaten morality or Victorian ideals. Miss Pross protects these ideals while Madame Defarge creates a mob. Miss Pross is only a heroine because she protects the angelic Lucie, allowing her household to be filled with virtue.

Conclusion

The home was a sacred place for those who were in Victorian society. Lucie, as the ideal mother and wife of the novel, has to create a moral oasis for her family. In comparison, Madame Defarge is unable to have a beautiful home. The role of the exemplar had immense pressure, and most women were expected to step into it flawlessly. Lucie experiences self-erasure because of her role in society. In contrast, Madame Defarge's defiance of her husband and the decision to murder affirms that upholding morality in a marriage is critical to Victorian society. Miss Pross is not a housewife and can therefore break the rules where the other women of the novel cannot.

Miss Pross offers an alternative to the angelic softness of Lucie and the evil strength of Madame Defarge. She displays how power and goodness can work together. However, the storyline and the portrayal of female characters in the book still show the patriarchal structure that Victorian society upheld. Lucie is the epitome of a good housewife, homemaker, and mother, yet she still has issues of trust within her marriage. Madame Defarge is able to find power, but ultimately it corrupts her. Mrs. Cruncher displays how morality is more important than wifely submission. The novel's alternative portraits of women—those who cannot be contained to categories—create the opportunity for a new understanding of women.

Endnotes

1. There are two authors in this scenario and their names are Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. Please see *The Madwoman in the Attic* for more information.
2. Gilbert and Gubar, 20.
3. There are two authors here and their names are Jitendra Nath and Ajay Kumar Please see “Victorian England and Women in Victorian Society; A Study for more.
4. Nath and Kumar, 79.
5. Nath and Kumar, 80.
6. In this scenario, multiple pages in Dickens *A Tale* create stronger support.

Works Cited

- Arnold, Abigail. "The Trouble with Tattycoram: Emotional Labor and the Dependent Woman in *Little Dorrit*." *Dickens Studies Annual*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2020, pp. 314-38.
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/765839>.
- Black, Barbara. "A Sisterhood of Rage and Beauty: Dickens' Rosa Dartle, Miss Wade, and Madame Defarge." *Dickens Studies Annual*, vol. 26, 1998, 91-106.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/44372502>.
- Bowen, John. "The Life of Dickens: After Ellen Ternan." In *Charles Dickens in Context*, edited by Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 11-17.
- Byler, Lauren. "Dickens' Little Women; Or, Cute as the Dickens." *Victorian Literature and Culture* vol. 41, no. 2, 2013, 219-50.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1060150312000368>.
- Coltrane, Scott. "Families and Gender Equity." *National Forum* vol. 77, no. 2, 1997, 31-45.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aph&AN=9706231171&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. Edited by Robert Douglas Fairhurst, New York, NY, W.W. Norton & Company, 2020.
- Fido, Martin. *The World of Charles Dickens*. London, Carlton Books Unlimited, 1997.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven, Connecticut, Yale University Press, 1979.

- Hamilton, J.F. "Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*." *The Explicator* vol. 53, no. 4, 1995, 1-5.
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/dickenss-tale-two-cities/docview/216777655/se-2?accountid=8459>.
- Houghton, Walter E. *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1957.
- Kuykendall, Sue A. "Hidden Hands: Working Class Women and Victorian Social Problem Fiction." *College Literature* vol. 29, no. 4, 2002, 157-61.
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/hidden-hands-working-class-women-victorian-social/docview/229574355/se-2?accountid=8459>.
- Magnum, Teresa. "Dickens and the Female Terrorist: The Long Shadow of Madame Defarge." *Nineteenth Century Contexts* vol. 31, no. 2, 2009, 143-60.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08905490902981945>.
- McKnight, Natalie. *Suffering Mothers in Mid-Victorian Novels*. New York, NY, St Martin's Press, 1997.
- Morne, Emmanuelle. "'Glorious Auxiliaries?': Gender, Participation, and Subordination in the Chartist Movement (1838-1851)." *Labour History Review* vol. 85, no. 1, 2020, 7-32.
- Nath, Jetendra and Ajay Kumar. "Victorian England and Women in Victorian Society; A Study." *International Multidisciplinary Journal* vol. 34, no. 34, 2017, 79-82.
- Robson, Lisa. "The 'Angels' in Dickens's House: Representation of Women in *A Tale of Two Cities*." *Dalhousie Review* vol. 72, no. 3, 1992, 311-33.
- Tosh, John. "New Men? The Bourgeois Cult of Home." *Victorian Values*, 1996, 9-15.

Wolf, Sherri. "The Enormous Power of No Body: *Little Dorrit* and the Logic of Expansion." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* vol. 42, no. 3, 2000, 232-55. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/enormous-power-no-body-little-dorrit-logic/docview/208057119/se-2?accountid=8459>.

Yildirim, Askn Haluk. "The Woman Question and The Victorian Literature on Gender." *Ekev Academic Review* vol. 16, no. 45, 2012, 45-53. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=aph&AN=83480555&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.