

## Core Course10: British Literature: 19th Century

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### Unit I

- I. Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*
- II. Charlotte Bronte: *Jane Eyre*
- III. Charles Dickens: *A Tale of Two Cities*

### Unit II

- I. Alfred Tennyson : *The Lady of Shalott* , *Ulysses*
- II. Robert Browning: *My Last Duchess*, *The Last Ride Together*
- III. Christina Rossetti: *The Goblin Market*

**Charles Dickens** (*Charles John Huffam Dickens*) was born in Landport, Portsmouth, on February 7, 1812. Charles was the second of eight children to John Dickens (1786–1851), a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, and his wife Elizabeth Dickens (1789–1863). The Dickens family moved to London in 1814 and two years later to Chatham, Kent, where Charles spent early years of his childhood. Due to the financial difficulties they moved back to London in 1822, where they settled in Camden Town, a poor neighborhood of London.

The defining moment of Dickens's life occurred when he was 12 years old. His father, who had difficult time managing money and was constantly in debt, was imprisoned in the Marshalsea debtor's prison in 1824. Because of this, Charles was withdrawn from school and forced to work in a warehouse that handled 'blacking' or shoe polish to help support the family. This experience left profound psychological and sociological effects on Charles. It gave him a firsthand acquaintance with poverty and made him the most vigorous and influential voice of the working classes in his age.

After a few months Dickens's father was released from prison and Charles was allowed to go back to school. At fifteen his formal education ended and he found employment as an office boy at an attorney's, while he studied shorthand at night. From 1830 he worked as a shorthand reporter in the courts and afterwards as a parliamentary and newspaper reporter.

In 1833 Dickens began to contribute short stories and essays to periodicals. *A Dinner at Poplar Walk* was Dickens's first published story. It appeared in the *Monthly Magazine* in December 1833. In 1834, still a newspaper reporter, he adopted the soon to be famous pseudonym **Boz**. Dickens's first book, a collection of stories titled *Sketches by Boz*, was published in 1836. In the same year he married Catherine Hogarth, daughter of the editor of the *Evening Chronicle*. Together they had 10 children before they separated in 1858.

Although Dickens's main profession was as a novelist, he continued his journalistic work until the end of his life, editing *The Daily News*, *Household Words*, and *All the Year Round*. His connections to various magazines and newspapers gave him the opportunity to begin publishing his own fiction at the beginning of his career.

*The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* was published in monthly parts from April 1836 to November 1837. Pickwick became one of the most popular works of the time, continuing to be so after it was published in book form in 1837. After the success of Pickwick Dickens embarked on a full-time career as a novelist, producing work of increasing complexity at an incredible rate: *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* as part of the *Master Humphrey's Clock* series (1840-41), all being published in monthly instalments before being made into books.

In 1842 he travelled with his wife to the United States and Canada, which led to his controversial *American Notes* (1842) and is also the basis of some of the episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Dickens's series of five Christmas Books were soon to follow; *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), and *The Haunted Man* (1848). After living briefly abroad in Italy (1844) and Switzerland (1846) Dickens continued his success with *Dombey and Son* (1848), the largely autobiographical *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861).

In 1856 his popularity had allowed him to buy Gad's Hill Place, an estate he had admired since childhood. In 1858 Dickens began a series of paid readings, which became instantly popular. In all, Dickens performed more than 400 times. In that year, after a long period of difficulties, he separated from his wife. It was also around that time that Dickens became involved in an affair with a young actress named Ellen Ternan. The exact nature of their relationship is unclear, but it was clearly central to Dickens's personal and professional life.

In the closing years of his life Dickens worsened his declining health by giving numerous readings. During his readings in 1869 he collapsed, showing symptoms of mild stroke. He retreated to Gad's Hill and began to work on *Edwin Drood*, which was never completed.

Charles Dickens died at home on June 9, 1870 after suffering a stroke. Contrary to his wish to be buried in Rochester Cathedral, he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

## About the Novel

*A Tale of Two Cities*, by Charles Dickens, deals with the major themes of duality, revolution, and resurrection. It was the best of times, it was the worst of times in London and Paris, as economic and political unrest lead to the American and French Revolutions. The main characters in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* — Doctor Alexandre Manette, Charles Darnay, and Sydney Carton — are all recalled to life, or resurrected, in different ways as turmoil erupts.

**Genres:** historical fiction; political commentary

**First Published:** In weekly installments in *All the Year Round*, from April 30 to November 29, 1859

**Setting:** London and Paris, 1775-1792

**Main Characters:** Doctor Alexandre Manette; Lucie Manette (later Darnay); Charles Darnay; Sydney Carton; Therese Defarge; Ernest Defarge; Jerry Cruncher; Mr. Lorry; Miss Pross

**Major Thematic Topics:** duality; revolution; resurrection; violence; centrality of women; aristocratic versus peasant

**Motifs:** darkness; restricted by society; duality

**Major Symbols:** Madame Defarge's Knitting; motherhood

The three most important aspects of *A Tale of Two Cities*:

- *A Tale of Two Cities* is told from the *omniscient*, or all-knowing, point of view. The narrator, or storyteller, who is never identified, has access to the thoughts and feelings of all the characters.
- *A Tale of Two Cities*, which is one of two historical novels written by Charles Dickens, is set in London and in Paris and the French countryside at the time of the French Revolution. The book is sympathetic to the overthrow of the French aristocracy but highly critical of the reign of terror that followed.
- Dickens characterizes the men and women who populate *A Tale of Two Cities* less by what the book's narrator or the characters themselves say, and more by what they do. As a result, the novel seems somewhat modern, despite being set in the 18th century and written in the 19th century.

## Summary

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," Charles Dickens writes in the opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities* as he paints a picture of life in England and France. The year is late 1775, and Jarvis Lorry travels from London to Paris on a secret mission for his employer, Tellson's Bank. Joining him on his journey is Lucie Manette, a 17-year-old woman who is stunned to learn that her father, Doctor Alexandre Manette, is alive and has recently been released after having been secretly imprisoned in Paris for 18 years.

When Mr. Lorry and Lucie arrive in Paris, they find the Doctor's former servant, Ernest Defarge, caring for him. Defarge now runs a wine-shop with his wife in the poverty-stricken quarter of Saint Antoine. Defarge takes Mr. Lorry and Lucie to the garret room where he is keeping Doctor Manette, warning them that the Doctor's years in prison have greatly changed him. Thin and pale, Doctor Manette sits at a shoemaker's bench intently making shoes. He barely responds to questions from Defarge and Mr. Lorry, but when Lucie approaches him, he remembers his wife and begins to weep. Lucie comforts him, and that night Mr. Lorry and Lucie take him to England.

Five years later, the porter for Tellson's Bank, Jerry Cruncher, takes a message to Mr. Lorry who is at a courthouse. Mr. Lorry has been called as a witness for the trial of Charles Darnay, a Frenchman accused of being a spy for France and the United States. Also at the trial are Doctor Manette and Lucie, who are witnesses for the prosecution. Doctor Manette has fully recovered and has formed a close bond with his daughter.

If found guilty of treason, Darnay will suffer a gruesome death, and the testimony of an acquaintance, John Barsad, and a former servant, Roger Cly, seems sure to result in a guilty verdict. Questions from Darnay's attorney, Mr. Stryver, indicate that Cly and Barsad are the real spies, but the turning point in the trial occurs when Sydney Carton, Stryver's assistant, points out that Carton and Darnay look alike enough to be doubles. This revelation throws into doubt a positive identification of Darnay as the person seen passing secrets, and the court acquits Darnay.

After the trial, Darnay, Carton, and Stryver begin spending time at the Manette home, obviously attracted to Lucie's beauty and kind nature. Stryver decides to propose to her, but is dissuaded by Mr. Lorry. Carton confesses his love to Lucie, but does not propose, knowing that his drunken and apathetic way of life is not worthy of her. However, he vows that he would gladly give his life to save a life she loved, and Lucie is moved by his sincerity and devotion. Eventually, it is Darnay whose love Lucie returns, and the two marry with Doctor Manette's uneasy blessing. While the couple is on their honeymoon, the Doctor suffers a nine-day relapse of his mental incapacity and believes he is making shoes in prison again.

Meanwhile, the situation in France grows worse. Signs of unrest become evident when Darnay's cruel and unfeeling uncle, the Marquis St. Evrémonde, is murdered in his bed after running down a child with his carriage in the Paris streets. Although Darnay inherits the title and the estate, he has renounced all ties to his brutal family and works instead in England as a tutor of French language and literature.

The revolution erupts with full force in July 1789 with the storming of the Bastille. The Defarges are at the center of the revolutionary movement and lead the people in a wave of violence and

destruction. By 1792, the revolutionaries have taken control of France and are imprisoning and killing anyone they view as an enemy of the state. Darnay receives a letter from the Evrémont steward, who has been captured and who begs Darnay to come to France to save him. Feeling a sense of duty to his servant and not fully realizing the danger awaiting him, Darnay departs for France. Once he reaches Paris, though, revolutionaries take him to La Force prison "in secret," with no way of contacting anyone and with little hope of a trial.

Doctor Manette, Lucie, and Lucie's daughter soon arrive in Paris and join Mr. Lorry who is at Tellson's Paris office. Doctor Manette's status as a former prisoner of the Bastille gives him a heroic status with the revolutionaries and enables him to find out what has happened to his son-in-law. He uses his influence to get a trial for Darnay, and Doctor Manette's powerful testimony at the trial frees his son-in-law. Hours after being reunited with his wife and daughter, however, the revolutionaries again arrest Darnay, based on the accusations of the Defarges.

The next day, Darnay is tried again. This time, the Defarges produce a letter written years earlier by Doctor Manette in prison condemning all Evrémondés for the murder of Madame Defarge's family and for imprisoning the Doctor. Based on this evidence, the court sentences Darnay to death and Doctor Manette, devastated by what has happened, reverts to his prior state of dementia.

Unknown to the Manette and Darnay family, Sydney Carton has arrived in Paris and learns of Darnay's fate. He also hears of a plot contrived to send Lucie and her daughter to the guillotine. Determined to save their lives, he enlists the help of a prison spy to enter the prison where the revolutionaries are holding Darnay. He enters Darnay's cell, changes clothes with him, drugs him, and has Darnay taken out of the prison in his place. No one questions either man's identity because of the similarities in their features. As Mr. Lorry shepherds Doctor Manette, Darnay, Lucie, and young Lucie out of France, Carton goes to the guillotine, strengthened and comforted by the knowledge that his sacrifice has saved the woman he loves and her family.

Scholars describe *A Tale of Two Cities* as the least Dickensian of Dickens' novels, yet it remains one of Dickens' most widely read books. It was originally published in weekly installments in *All the Year Round*, from April 30 to November 29, 1859. From the book's inception, it received mixed critical reviews, but succeeded in capturing the imagination of general readers through its swift, exciting story and memorable rendering of the French Revolution.

The idea for *A Tale of Two Cities* originated in two main sources. Always interested in the interaction between individuals and society, Dickens was particularly intrigued by Thomas Carlyle's history, *The French Revolution*. He saw similarities between the forces that led to the Revolution and the oppression and unrest occurring in England in his own time. Although he supported the idea of people rising up against tyranny, the violence that characterized the French Revolution troubled him.

Dickens was also drawn to the themes inherent in *The Frozen Deep*, a play that Wilkie Collins wrote and in which Dickens acted. In the play, two men compete for the same woman, Clara Burnham. When she chooses Frank Aldersley over Richard Wardour, Wardour (played by Dickens) vows revenge upon his rival, even though he doesn't know who his rival is. While on

an arctic expedition together, the two men get stranded. Wardour discovers that Aldersley is his rival, but instead of leaving him to die, Wardour overcomes his anger and saves Aldersley's life by carrying him to safety. Collapsing at Clara's feet, Wardour dies from his efforts while Clara weeps over him. The idea of Wardour's heroism and sacrifice strongly affected Dickens, and during the course of the play, as Dickens notes in the preface to *A Tale of Two Cities*, he "conceived the main idea of this story."

An examination of Dickens' personal life at the time he decided to write *A Tale of Two Cities* also reveals what may have motivated him to write this particular story. His marriage to Catherine Hogarth had been deteriorating for years, and in May 1858, they decided to separate. Meanwhile, he had met a young woman named Ellen Ternan while performing in *The Frozen Deep*, and began a clandestine relationship with her that would continue until his death. Additionally, a disagreement with his publishers at *Household Words* led to his resignation as editor and the creation of a new magazine, *All the Year Round*. Dickens used *A Tale of Two Cities* to launch the new magazine, and the themes of secrecy and upheaval that run throughout the book may be reflections of the experiences Dickens was encountering in his own life.

Dickens took a different approach to writing *A Tale of Two Cities* than to his previous novels and described the book as an experiment. Rather than relying upon dialogue to develop characters, Dickens instead relied upon the plot. Consequently, the characters are defined by their actions and by their place within the movement of the overall story. Critics have complained that this technique results in a loss of Dickens' strengths in his writing, including his sense of humor and his memorable characters. They agree, however, that Dickens' experiment created his most tightly plotted novel, in which the narrative moves along quickly and smoothly. The book's well-conceived structure neatly blends all of the storylines and characters, so that by the end of the book, no question remains as to how each element of the book impacts all the others.

Dickens' social ideas in this novel are straightforward: the French Revolution was inevitable because the aristocracy exploited and plundered the poor, driving them to revolt. Therefore, oppression on a large scale results in anarchy, and anarchy produces a police state. One of Dickens' strongest convictions was that the English people might erupt at any moment into a mass of bloody revolutionists. It is clear today that he was mistaken, but the idea was firmly planted in his mind, as well as in the minds of his contemporaries. *A Tale of Two Cities* was partly an attempt to show his readers the dangers of a possible revolution. This idea was not the first time a simple — and incorrect — conviction became the occasion for a serious and powerful work of art.

Violent revolutionary activity caught up almost all of Europe during the first half of the nineteenth century, and middle-class Englishmen naturally feared that widespread rebellion might take place at home. Dickens knew what poverty was like and how common it was. He realized the inadequacy of philanthropic institutions when confronted by the enormous misery of the slums. That Dickens turned to the French Revolution to dramatize the possibility of class uprisings is not surprising; few events in history offer such a concentration of terrors.

If the terrors of the French Revolution take a political form, the hope that Dickens holds out in this novel has distinct religious qualities. On a basic level, *A Tale of Two Cities* is a fable about

resurrection, depicting the main characters, Doctor Manette, Charles Darnay, and Sydney Carton, as all being "recalled to life" in different ways.

The Doctor regains his freedom and sanity, Darnay escapes a death sentence three times, and Carton redeems his soul through sacrifice. By using the theme of resurrection, Dickens demonstrates that the spiritual lives of all people depend upon the hope of renewal. Without such hope, as in the case of Madame Defarge, people lose what makes them human and resort to violence and cruelty.

In order to convey the significance of revolution and resurrection in the novel, Dickens relied upon his descriptive skills, which are perhaps at their best in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Dickens adeptly portrays the horrors of mob violence throughout the novel, leaving the reader with images of waves of people crashing through the battered gates of the Bastille; of Foulon with his mouth stuffed full of grass as he is beaten to death and beheaded; of the hundreds of unruly citizens singing and dancing wildly around Lucie Manette as she stands alone outside her husband's prison. However, Dickens balances these visions of revolutionary terror with images of rebirth and hope, such as Lucie's golden hair mingling with her father's prematurely white hair in the moments after he first remembers her mother and Carton's prophetic vision of the future as he goes to the guillotine. Although *A Tale of Two Cities* lacks the wealth of memorable characters found in other Dickens novels, the unforgettable images Dickens creates compensate for this deficiency.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, critics began to reexamine previous assessments of *A Tale of Two Cities* based on new trends in criticism. Biographical critics read the book in terms of the revolution occurring in Dickens' life, while psychological critics analyzed the relationships between fathers and sons and the prison imagery in terms of Dickens' childhood. Meanwhile, historical and Marxist critics examined *A Tale of Two Cities* as a work of historical fiction and in terms of political overtones. Although few people champion the book as the best of Dickens' novels, critics have given it more respect and increased attention in recent decades.

Regardless of critical interest in the novel, theatrical and film interpretations of *A Tale of Two Cities* have fascinated audiences since Dickens first published the book. Various productions have retold the story of Carton's sacrifice, including one in which John Barsad saves Carton from the guillotine. The tale was especially popular with early moviegoers; five silent films of the book were made between 1908 and 1925. Since then, two more films of *A Tale of Two Cities* were made in 1935 and 1957, and the story has been repeatedly adapted for radio and television. Such frequent interpretation by the media, combined with the large number of students who read the novel each year, demonstrates that Dickens' story of revolution, sacrifice, and redemption continues to captivate modern imaginations.

**Doctor Alexandre Manette** A doctor from Beauvais, France, who was secretly imprisoned in the Bastille for 18 years and suffers some mental trauma from the experience. After being released, he is nursed back to health by his daughter, Lucie, in England. During the Revolution, he tries to save his son-in-law, Charles Darnay, from the guillotine.

**Lucie Manette, later Darnay** A beautiful young woman recognized for her kindness and compassion. After being reunited with her father, she cares for him and remains devoted to him, even after her marriage to Charles Darnay.

**Charles Darnay** A French aristocrat. Darnay renounces his family name of St. Evrémonde and moves to England, where he works as a tutor and eventually marries Lucie Manette. He is put on trial during the Revolution for the crimes of his family.

**Sydney Carton** A lawyer who looks like Charles Darnay and who lives in a fog of apathy and alcohol. His love for Lucie Manette motivates him to sacrifice his life to save the life of her husband.

**Mr. Jarvis Lorry** An English banker. A loyal friend to the Manette family, Mr. Lorry shepherds the family out of Paris after the Doctor's release from prison and during the Revolution.

**Ernest Defarge** The owner of a wine-shop in a Paris suburb. Defarge is a leader of the Jacquerie (a roving band of peasants) during the French Revolution.

**Madame Thérèse Defarge** A hard, vengeful woman who is married to Ernest Defarge. Madame Defarge knits a registry with the names of aristocrats she condemns and later leads the female revolutionaries in killing and exacting revenge on her enemies.

**Miss Pross** A forceful Englishwoman who was Lucie Manette's nursemaid. She remains Lucie's devoted servant and protector.

**Jerry Cruncher** A messenger for Tellson's Bank and Jarvis Lorry's bodyguard. He is also secretly a graverobber.

**Mrs. Cruncher** Jerry's wife. A pious woman, she is frequently beaten by her husband for praying.

**Young Jerry Cruncher** Jerry's son, who resembles his father in appearance and temperament. He assists Jerry at Tellson's.

**C. J. Stryver** A boorish lawyer who employs Sydney Carton. Stryver is Darnay's defense attorney in England and aspires briefly to marry Lucie.

**Roger Cly** A police spy in England who faked his own funeral. He appears later as a prison spy in revolutionary France.

**John Barsad, or Solomon Pross** A police spy in England who becomes a spy in revolutionary France. Recognized as Miss Pross' brother, he is forced to help Carton save Darnay.

**Monseigneur the Marquis** A greedy, self-absorbed French aristocrat. He personifies all that is wrong with the upper classes in pre-Revolutionary France.



**Marquis St. Evrémonde** Darnay's uncle. An immoral, cruel man, he runs down a child with his carriage and is later murdered by the child's father.

**Jacques One, Two, Three, and Four** Members of the Jacquerie, the revolutionaries who organize and implement the French Revolution. The name comes from the nickname for peasants.

**Théophile Gabelle** An agent for the St. Evrémonde family. The revolutionaries imprison this man during the Revolution for handling some business affairs for Darnay. His letter begging for help sends Darnay back to France.

**Gaspard** A peasant. This man murders the Marquis St. Evrémonde for running down and killing his child.

**Road-mender and Wood-sawyer** A peasant. This man becomes a bloodthirsty revolutionist.

**Young Lucie Darnay** The daughter of Lucie and Charles Darnay. Madame Defarge threatens her life during the Reign of Terror.

**Foulon** A callous prison official who faked his own death. He is hanged and decapitated by a mob after they storm the Bastille.

**The Vengeance** The grocer's wife. Turned vicious by the Revolution, she becomes Madame Defarge's main companion.

**A Seamstress** A frightened young woman who is executed with Carton. She and Carton comfort each other on the way to the guillotine.

## The French Revolution

When Louis XVI became King of France in 1775, he inherited a country with economic distress, social unrest, a debauched court, and problems with the nobility and *parlement* (the courts of justice). The inheritance was fatal. At the time, the aristocracy was living on borrowed money and the labors of the lower classes. The middle class was becoming wealthy from its trade, manufacturing, banking, and contracting. The lower middle class consisted of tradesmen and laborers, with a few government officials.

The king, only twenty, was inexperienced and easily influenced, and he soon tired of his country's problems. He was a shy man who was often indecisive and narrow-minded; he usually depended on his ministers for advice but frequently would reverse their decisions and decide matters for himself, simply because he wanted to show his authority. He sincerely believed that he ruled by the will of God, by the Divine Right of Kings.

The court was in debt and in dire need of money because of years of royal extravagance, financial deficits, and two wars. In order to cope with these problems, Louis reinstated the *parlements*, which were made up of aristocrats; he hoped that they could solve his problems.

Although the lower classes were suffering, the magistrates in the *parlements* believed that reforms to help the lower classes were unnecessary. They thought that the lower classes needed no social reforms and that such people were born to bear the burdens of taxation. In contrast, members of the nobility, because of their birth into the upper class, or Second Estate, were exempt from *any* taxation. Not surprisingly, therefore, the *parlements* passed numerous laws favoring the aristocracy.

The *parlements* next asked Louis to return French rule to the Estates-General (a body that had not met since 1614), and eventually Louis gave in. Three legal status groups, or Estates, comprised the Estates-General — called simply, the First, Second, and Third Estates. In the First Estate were the clergy, usually the younger sons of the nobility. The Second Estate comprised the nobility, while the Third Estate included members of the working classes, plus some well-to-do merchants and professional men such as lawyers, doctors, and members of the minor clergy. Under the rule of the Estates-General, only the nobility could hold public office, high ranks in the military, important posts in the government, or sit in *parliaments*.

The commoners of France, overjoyed when Louis established the Estates-General, soon became disappointed. Initially, they thought that they would have their "own" Estate and, thus, a voice in government policy-making they quickly realized, however, that they possessed no real power. Organizing the new Estates-General on the same principle of the 1614 concept meant one vote for each member of the Estates. Thus, the clergy and the aristocracy could easily out-vote the Third Estate, two to one, which they did repeatedly.

Political problems increased, and food riots broke out due to food shortages. Rainstorms and hail ruined the crops of 1788, leaving people hungry. Paris, in particular, was a crowded, densely populated city of poor people. The masses had no jobs and no money. They began burning and looting the countryside and even common soldiers began talking against their aristocratic officers. Political pamphlets aggravated the situation by demanding that the Third Estate have a stronger voice in the government.

By the middle of June 1788, poor parish priests who belonged to the First Estate began to desert their political base and join the Third Estate. As a result, the Third Estate recognized that it was the only Estate elected by "the people." They declared themselves "the National Assembly," and immediately banned taxes.

This declaration placed Louis in an uncomfortable and difficult position. Recognizing the legitimacy of the National Assembly would mean surrendering his power, but not recognizing it might drive the Third Estate to even greater rebellion. Unfortunately, he chose to listen to Jacques Necker, his Minister of Finance, and to his queen, Marie Antoinette, and decided to oppose the National Assembly. He closed the chambers where the Assembly was to convene, but the Assembly immediately moved to an indoor tennis court. Despite the confusion, the Assembly took an oath not to disband until they had a constitution, and they openly defied the king. They would have a constitution.

Three days later, Louis vetoed the legitimacy of the National Assembly and ordered the Estates-General to return to their traditional system or he would dismiss them. When he left, the Second

and most of the First Estate followed him out. The Third Estate remained, and one of them, Mirabeau, shouted that the Third Estate would leave the assembly hall "only at the point of a bayonet!" Louis could not bring himself to use force against the Estate because so many clergymen and liberal noblemen had joined them. In a dramatic move, they defied the King and won. The Revolution had begun.

Paris, always a hotbed of dissension, had a large populace ready to fight against almost anything. In every corner, people seemed to meet and conspire; everywhere, people talked of revolution. Hunger haunted the city, and bread shortages constantly loomed over the population. Thieves often stole grain shipped into the city before it even arrived, and in the early summer of 1789, bread riots broke out.

Because the thousands of workers' salaries could not possibly keep pace with soaring prices, workers began wrecking factories and burning property. At this point, the Swiss Guard marched into Paris in early July. Rumors immediately spread that the aristocrats were going to try to stop the Revolution by armed force. In fact, however, Louis simply stationed the Swiss Guard where he did because the French Guard refused to fight against their own countrymen.

Four days before the Bastille fell, Louis dismissed Necker and the rest of his cabinet and appointed a new council of anti-revolutionary royalists. Almost immediately, rumors arose that the Swiss Guard and the German Guard were preparing to murder the Parisian populace. Even the French Guard believed the rumors. They joined the rioting masses and broke into the Tuileries Palace, taking gunpowder, ornamental guns, and cannon. Rioting and looting continued, destroying small shops and government buildings.

On July 14, a mob of citizens seized 30,000 muskets from the Invalides and attacked the Bastille, where the French government kept the royal store of gunpowder. They hung and butchered the governor and his guards and released the few prisoners. Strangely enough, the mob still had sympathetic feelings for Louis; they had lost all respect for him as a king, but still felt affection for him.

In fact, the common people didn't fear Louis as much as they feared the cluster of noblemen surrounding him. Paranoia about royalist schemes to quash the Revolution overtook them, and so they looted and burned chateaus throughout the countryside. The people slaughtered landlords simply because they were landlords. Consequently, aristocrats began leaving France in droves; the country was no longer safe for anyone but a ragged revolutionary. These uprisings and the general climate were part and parcel of the "Great Fear."

On August 4, the National Assembly passed a measure invalidating all feudal rights of the aristocracy. The Assembly decided to divide France into 83 departments, giving considerable freedom to all the departments. Then they passed a law that, ironically, caused an even greater schism between the classes. The new law stated that anyone could vote — if they had paid their taxes. The peasants felt betrayed; they had no money to pay taxes. The aristocracy had already taxed them to death, and the Revolution was doing nothing for them.

The Assembly also suspended Louis from power until he signed the new constitution and accepted his role as only a "constitutional monarch." Robespierre denounced him, and the *sans-culottes* — a revolutionary group of small businessmen, laborers, and artisans, as well as the very poor — demanded his removal. In addition, they called for a Republic.

The new government began issuing paper money as legal tender because it associated gold with aristocrats and the wealthy. Exiled nobles, therefore, flooded France with forged paper money, adding to the already deflated money value. Food prices continued to rise, and even two years of good harvests failed to alleviate the peasants' hunger. Mobs began raiding and robbing supply convoys. Soap was in short supply, and sugar was disappearing. Food riots began again.

Eventually, the National Assembly deposed Louis, put him and his family under arrest, and sent him to prison in the Knights Templars temple on August 13, 1792. The Assembly guillotined Louis on January 21, 1793. In August, the Assembly sent the queen to prison. It tried her in October and guillotined her on October 16, 1793.

Robespierre then took control of the Revolution, and the "Reign of Terror" began. He championed "the people's rights," but could not understand why the masses ranked food and better wages as more important than dedication to the principles of a free France. He saw conspirators and plotters everywhere, and anyone disagreeing with him became a traitor. He convinced his colleagues that the preservation of a safe society required force and terror. As a result, the new government executed hundreds at Marseilles and Toulon and drowned nearly two thousand in the Loire River at Nantes. The Revolutionary Tribunal was subdivided into four courts, which sat day and night. By September, the Law of Suspects had created so many accused people that the court tried cases in groups of fifty. Courts tried everyone: priests, hoarders, swindlers, aristocrats, and, of course, innocent men and women. Neighbor turned in neighbor. In all, the Tribunal killed more than twenty-five thousand people during the Reign of Terror.

The *sans-culottes* closed all the churches in Paris and even took over Notre-Dame cathedral and made it an atheistic "Temple of Reason." This decision upset Robespierre, but his followers equally disapproved of Robespierre's police bureau. They plotted Robespierre's downfall and eventually accused him — just as he had accused others — and sent him to the guillotine. After Robespierre's death, France moved into a period called the Thermidorian reaction, a relatively quiet period. The new government, called the Directory, was inefficient and corrupt, but provided a relatively stable regime nevertheless. Unfortunately, the new government put Napoleon Bonaparte in charge of its army. Unwittingly, it replaced the country's terrorists with someone who would soon become its virtual dictator.

