Charles Dickens’s "A Tale of Two Cities" and Christopher Nolan’s "The Dark Knight Rises": A Comparison

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Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises:* A Comparison

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1. Introduction

This master's thesis aims to present a thorough comparison of Charles Dickens's 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities* and Christopher Nolan's 2012 film *The Dark Knight Rises.* Despite these works of art belonging to different media and different historical styles, the latter has heavily been influenced by the former, and one may even go as far as to suggest that the Nolan film is a modern-day adaptation of Dickens's novel, adjusted for 21st century audiences. These works are linked mostly in their portrayal of revolutions driven by class differences, and in the underlying theme of rebirth, both of characters and cities.

Sources for this paper will include biographies on Dickens and Nolan by writers such as Peter Ackroyd, Michael Slater, and Tom Shone, and various articles dealing with the novel or the film either separately, or in a comparative manner. The bedrock of the paper is, needless to say, formed by scenes and quotations from *A Tale of Two Cities* and *The Dark Knight Rises*.

A comprehensive comparison of these two stories has not yet been published. There have been online articles and discussions on the topic, but most are not academic and only "scratch the surface" rather than tackle the topic's full potential. The author of this paper hopes that this paper will appropriately function as a thorough comparison.

The objective is to compare the two works and highlight where they converge and diverge in terms of stories, portrayals of revolutions, and ideas. The paper will be split into six main chapters. Both works will initially be presented in their historical contexts. The question why Nolan's film ought to be seen with Dickens's novel in mind will be answered here. Then, surface-level references and allusions to Dickens in *The Dark Knight Rises* will be brought into focus. A different chapter dealing with poverty and class distinctions will encapsulate the contrast between the cities of Paris and Gotham. The biggest portion of the paper will stress how the French Revolution in Dickens and Bane's revolution in Nolan differ. The final chapter will explore allegorical themes shared by the two works. Finally, the main arguments presented in the paper will briefly be summarized in the conclusion.

2. A Tale of Two Artists

"You've got to think of *A Tale of Two Cities,*" said Jonathan Nolan to his brother Christopher as he gave him his first draft of *The Dark Knight Rises,* "which, of course, you've read" (Shone 251). The Hollywood director, who by that time had already achieved enormous success and filmed two critically acclaimed Batman films, soon realized that his brother was

wrong: he had *not*, in fact, read Charles Dickens's historical novel. He had no choice but to quickly get himself a copy of the novel and read it (251). *A Tale of Two Cities* remained the narrative foundation for Nolan's final Batman film, with Nolan referring to the project as something "as close as I'll get to adapting *A Tale of Two Cities"* (252). But the question of why a 21st century superhero blockbuster was based on a 150-year-old Victorian classic persists, and before answering it, respective contexts in which the film and the novel arose ought to be illustrated. So, why *did* Nolan have to think of *A Tale of Two Cities* while making *The Dark Knight Rises?*

A full century and a half before Nolan filmed his film, during the Victorian period, *A Tale of Two Cities* was published. It was serialized in Dickens's own literary periodical *All the Year Round* from April to November 1859. It was one of Dickens's final novels, and his only work of historical fiction aside from *Barnaby Rudge.*

A Tale is different from other Dickensian stories in many respects: it is not as long as the likes of his other works such as *David Copperfield, Nicholas Nickleby* or *Bleak House*; destitution and hardship of the London's poor are substituted with rage and misery of the people of Parisian slums; there are no *bildungsroman* elements, no Olivers, Davids or Nicholases placed at the heart of the novel; there is a noticeable lack of comical elements, with George Orwell calling it "not funny" ("Charles Dickens"); most importantly, perhaps, is that a large portion of the story is set not in Victorian England, but instead in the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary France. That is not to say, however, that *A Tale* completely subverts Dickens's style. The departure is merely a testament to the fact that Dickens was this time writing something different from his usual texts. Instead of walking the streets of London's East End and getting inspired to raise awareness of the distressing conditions of his contemporary Londoners, he spent his time immersed in books dealing with France and the French Revolution. He would read *Zanoni* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Castle Spector* by Matthew Lewis, *Travels in France* by Arthur Young, *Tableau de Paris* by Louis-Sébastien Mercier, so that he could get a vision of the 18th century France as truthful as possible (Ackroyd 858-9). Most of all, he was inspired by his contemporary Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History*. Carlyle's biographer, Simon Heffer, explains that "the dramatic style of [Carlyle's] narrative affected and underpinned Dickens's own in the great novels he would write […]. So impressed was [Dickens] by the work that he carried one volume or other around with him…" (173). Literary critic and journalist Christopher Hitchens argued that Dickens "essentially recast [Carlyle's] pessimistic version of the French Revolution in fictional form" ("The Dark

Side of Dickens"). Alev Baysal gives several examples of Carlyle's influence on Dickens, including the fact that both "foreshadow the coming of the Revolution at the beginning of their works," that they reveal that only seven prisoners were liberated from the Bastille, and that they utilize the "dominant sea and fire metaphors" ("Carlyle's Influence"). The latter can be found in several places: there is a chapter titled "Fire Rises," and Dickens often uses sea metaphors such as this one: "…so tremendous was the noise of the *living ocean*, in its irruption into the Fortress…" (Dickens 245, emphasis added).

With *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens obviously aimed to capture the hectic atmosphere of social upheaval, of instability and revolution, as vividly and truthfully as he could. Despite the novel's title, it is more so a story of *a* city—Paris—rather than *two* cities (London only serves as a more stable place to which the unstable Paris can be compared) and its state prior to and during the revolution.

Dickens's novel turned out to be one of his "most successful books" (Orwell, "Charles Dickens") and is frequently cited as one of the bestselling books of all time (Flood). With Dickens being one of the most popular authors of the Victorian era, whose works are now considered classics, it should not come as a surprise that *A Tale* remained significant as a literary achievement 150 years after its original publication, around the time when Jonathan Nolan was writing a draft for *Rises.*

When Christopher Nolan decided to "loosely adapt" *A Tale*, he had already made several successful films, including *Memento* (2000)*, Batman Begins* (2005)*, The Prestige* (2006)*, The Dark Knight* (2008)*,* and *Inception* (2010). Some of these films, which he had written or co-written, were influenced by the Victorian era. For example, Wayne Manor in *Batman Begins* is a work of Victorian-Gothic architecture (Shone 159), *The Prestige* is literally set in the late-Victorian period of the 1890s (163), and *Inception's* "creative gene pool stretches back to the Victorians […] It was more or less conceived in the nineteenth century" (243). Nolan's Victorian creative influence can be traced back to his early life, a long period of which he spent in England. He was educated at Haileybury and Imperial Service College, an independent school built during the 19th century, where life revolving around "neoclassical quads, Latin grace, and cold baths" (243) seemed to encapsulate the spirit of the Victorian era. Eventually, at University College London, Nolan earned a bachelor's degree in English literature.

"Scratch a Christopher Nolan film and you frequently find a Victorian source," claims Nolan's biographer Tom Shone, before adding that Nolan "can with some legitimacy lay claim to being the greatest living filmmaker of the Victorian era" (27). Therefore, it seems only natural that a Victorian source would be the foundation for *Rises.* How should, then, *Rises* be compared to *A Tale?* As specified beforehand, Dickens's novel is mainly a story about the rebirth of a city (Paris) and its revolution (the French Revolution). *The Dark Knight Rises*, equivalently as epic in scope, also focuses on the rebirth of a city (Gotham) and its revolution (the villain Bane's revolution). Nolan draws heavily from Dickens here by making Gotham a decadent city teeming with class inequality and poverty. Gotham is to him what Paris is to Dickens: a "powder keg" that is just waiting to burst into a violent revolution. Cities and revolutions are key components of these stories. By comparing *Rises* to *A Tale* and consequently drawing parallels between them, the understanding of the film will be more complete.

If anyone had the tools and imagination to successfully capture the spirit of Dickens's 19th century novel and translate it into a modern Hollywood superhero film, it was Nolan. A person who "spent his formative years commuting between a nineteen-century English landscape and a twentieth century American one," (Shone 60) (even his youth was "a tale of two cities," or rather, "a tale of two *countries*") he was the perfect choice to blend a Victorian work with the modern American aesthetic. His favourite motifs are those of Dickens as well: "doubles and doppelgängers" (Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay), "prisons and puzzles" (the Bastille and the "puzzle" of Doctor Manette's imprisonment), "the secret self" (Darnay with his connection to the Evrémonde family) and the "guilty heart" (a description worthy of Carton) (60). Finally, both *A Tale* and *Rises* are epics of confinement (254), with the theme of prison(s) at their core. Considering all this, to echo what Jonathan Nolan said to his brother at the beginning of their collaboration, one must, indeed, think of *A Tale of Two Cities* when looking at *The Dark Knight Rises.*

3. The Fire Rises

Before delving into the crux of this paper, obvious references and allusions to *A Tale* that Nolan consciously placed in *Rises* must be identified. Although superficial, these elements add to the argument that his film was "Dickensized." To begin with, the most apparent reference to Dickens comes in the form of speech held by the character of Commissioner James "Jim" Gordon (Gary Oldman) at the end of the film. In a scene depicting the protagonist Bruce

Wayne's (Christian Bale) quiet, private funeral, Gordon is seen carrying a Penguin Classics edition of Dickens's novel. His voice-over starts to hover over shots of Gotham City; the quote that he reads is taken directly from the conclusion of *A Tale*. There, it is a part of the internal monologue by the character of Sydney Carton before his execution at the guillotine. The quote in the film is shortened from the original one. It is mostly a patchwork of the beginnings of several consecutive paragraphs internally monologued by Carton. Gordon finishes the quote with the novel's last line, perhaps the most famous of all lines in *A Tale* (with the possible exception of the very opening sentence). His monologue, a condensed version of Carton's, goes as follows (slashes indicate spots where cuts were made from the original):

> I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, / and I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy. / I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. / It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known. (*The Dark Knight Rises*, 02:31:43-02:32:25).

The quote's inclusion in the film is a strong homage to Dickens and a testament to the novelist's undeniable influence on the film. It is telling that his quote is reserved for one of Nolan's most important and heart-breaking scenes. Nolan refrains from writing an original monologue, but rather turns to Dickens to reinforce the pathos of Wayne's funeral.

Another homage to Dickens comes in the form of names. While the names of main characters from *A Tale* are nowhere to be found—such as Darnay, Manette, Defarge, or Carton—Nolan still adopts those from less-prominent characters. These are the characters of Barsad and Stryver. However, these characters share almost nothing but the surname with their Dickensian counterparts. Barsad in the novel is an English con-man who plants evidence against Charles Darnay, and Dickens describes him as "one of the greatest scoundrels upon earth since accursed Judas—which he certainly did look rather like" (84). On the other hand, Barsad in the film (Josh Stewart) is not portrayed as a scoundrel. Instead, he barely has any lines and only serves the generic function of the villain Bane's (Tom Hardy) loyal henchman. He is seen throughout the film in the background. The obvious link between the two Barsads is that both oppose the protagonists, but the film Barsad, unlike the novel version, is a less-layered, basic mercenary.

Stryver in the novel is called C.J. Stryver, while in the film he is named Phillip. The former is a barrister who works as Carton's partner. Albeit written as opportunistic and not a

wholly moral character (he takes all the credit from Carton when it comes to law matters), he is not presented as "evil" either. This contrasts with Nolan's Stryver (Burn Gorman), who is a highly-positioned assistant of John Daggett (Wayne's corporate rival who aids Bane) and clearly a minor villain. The difference between the two Stryvers is even apparent in the striking dichotomy of their visual appearance. Dickens's is "a man of little more than thirty, but looking twenty […], stout, loud, red, fluff" (89-90). Burn Gorman, the actor who portrayed Nolan's, despite being roughly the same age at the time of the filming, is far from being stout, loud, red, or fluff. Thus, the only commonality between the different versions of Barsads and Stryvers is that they stand in opposition to protagonists.

Another reference to Dickens is made when a kangaroo court is summoned, presided by the villainous Doctor Jonathan Crane, the "Scarecrow" (Cillian Murphy). During the trial of Phillip Stryver, Bane can be seen knitting in the audience. His knitting is an allusion to Madame Defarge from Dickens's novel, the character who can be described as "the dominatrix of the revolutionary collective in Paris" (Jukić 58). In just about every scene featuring her character, Dickens does not forget to mention that she is knitting: "…who leaned against the post-door, knitting…" (54), "…the woman who stood knitting…" (126), "…who had taken up her knitting…" (188). More examples can be found throughout the novel. Whole chapters are titled "Knitting," "Still Knitting," and "The Knitting Done." With this detail, Nolan draws attention to the parallel between Bane and Madame Defarge, both of whom are prominent figures in their respective revolutions. However, it will be elaborated later in this paper that Bane better functions as a counterpart to Monsieur Defarge, and that his partner, Talia al Ghul (Marion Cotillard), is the one modelled after Madame. This means that in this context, Nolan favours Dickensian elements in terms of inversion.

The line that keeps getting repeated throughout the film is "rise." The symbolic interpretation of "rising" will also be analysed later, but here it ought to be emphasized that the line makes for another Dickens reference. For example, in the first scene of the film, in which Bane hijacks a plane, he speaks the line "The fire rises" to one of his mercenaries. Not incidentally, "Fire Rises" is the title of the 23rd chapter of book two of *A Tale*, the chapter in which the Evrémonde chateau is set on fire by villagers. Alongside Carton's monologue spoken at Wayne's funeral, here Nolan also straight up borrows a line from Dickens. A variation on the line, the tagline "A fire will rise" is placed on several promotional posters for the film.

The aforementioned references to Dickens may be looked at as a way of Nolan thanking Dickens for his influence on the film. They are clear reminders that *A Tale* was a narrative template for *Rises*.

4. Down and Out in Paris and Gotham

At the centre of *A Tale* and *Rises* stands a city: Paris in the case of the former, and Gotham in the case of the latter. Paris is bookends to the novel, which begins with a journey to France's capital, and ends with Carton's execution there. The novel's main events are set in France—Dr Manette's unfair imprisonment at the Bastille, social upheavals and the Revolution, the death of the Marquis St. Evrémonde, the storming of the Bastille, Darnay's trial, Carton's heroic sacrifice, and so on. Statistically, more chapters depict Paris and France (24 in total) as opposed to London and England (19). In terms of action, London scenes are not nearly as memorable as those revealing the violent anarchy of the French Revolution: "That is why everyone remembers the revolutionary scenes in *A Tale of Two Cities*" (Orwell, "Charles Dickens"). Finally, as the Revolution spreads from Paris, it is *La Ville Lumière*, and not Dickens's commonly preferred setting, that ought to be compared to the revolutionary Gotham of *Rises*.

Before bringing into focus similarities between the two cities, it is necessary to examine how Dickens presents Paris with regards to the city's spatiality and aesthetic. To begin with, the scenes in Paris are mostly confined to the slums of St. Antoine, which Dickens at one point describes as following:

> [Hunger] was prevalent everywhere. […] Hunger stared down from the smokeless chimneys. […] A narrow winding street, full of offence and stench, with other narrow winding streets diverging, all peopled by rags and nightcaps, and all smelling of rags and nightcaps, and all visible things with a brooding look upon them that looked ill. […] The crippling stones of the pavement, with their many little reservoirs of mud and water, had no footways, but broke off abruptly at the doors. (Dickens 33-4)

These sentences illustrate the poverty of St. Antoine. Such a vivid picture, interestingly, comes from Dickens's knowledge of the 19th century London's East End conditions (Thornton 312), and not from the actual Parisian slums: "Dickens did more research for the scenes of urban poverty set in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine in London's East End than in the Faubourg itself" (Jones et al. 13). Still, the image that he presents should leave the reader distressed: Parisian slums are ghastly places, and the *misérables* cursed to live there certainly wish for any

sort of social and economic change**.** Throughout the novel, the Parisians such as the ones in St. Antoine are defined as "depressed and slinking" (33), "gaunt scarecrows" (34), "rats" (126), "poor," "unfortunate," "miserable" (205), and "wretched" (269). With St. Antoine representing the living conditions of the common people at the time, Dickens's Paris comes to life as a destitute city swarming with the poor. There are almost no scenes of extravagant, lavish places within Paris. What Dickens chooses to write about are mostly slums with narrow and winding streets, claustrophobic rooms, prisons engulfed in flames, and chaotic courtrooms. When the aristocracy find themselves in Paris, they only rush through the streets in their carriages, as if the city were only a passing point from which they need to get away as soon as possible:

> [The Marquis] was driven on, and other carriages came *whirling by* in *quick* succession; the Minister, the State-Projector, the Farmer-General, the Doctor, the Lawyer, the Ecclesiastic, the Grand Opera, the Comedy, the whole Fancy Ball in a bright continuous flow, came *whirling by*. (Dickens 126, emphasis added)

All these socially significant, high-class individuals such as ministers, doctors, and lawyers are driven on hurriedly. Even when the character of Gaspard's child is crushed under a carriage in the same scene, the Marquis takes little time to investigate the matter. It is his valet, rather than him, who decides to stop and ascertain what has happened. Dickens further emphasizes that "carriages were often known to drive on, and leave their wounded behind, and why not?" (123). All this proves the point that the rich do not belong to Paris, despite their control over the city. In other words, Paris is beneath them.

In the chapter that follows the aforementioned scene, "Monseigneur in the Country," Dickens begins the first sentence with the clear aim of creating a striking contrast with the dejected and deplorable Paris: "A beautiful landscape…" (127). This is when the character that embodies the oppressive aristocracy, the Marquis, goes away from the capital to his countryside château. What needs to be said here with *Rises* in mind is that a parallel can be drawn between the Marquis's château and Bruce Wayne's manor. Both buildings are residences of rich individuals, and both are situated away from the cities over which their owners have power (the Marquis in the context of his influence, and Wayne in the context of his own influence *and* his Batman persona influence). It is as if Paris and Gotham are dominated by external rather than internal forces. This is especially true of Gotham, where Nolan's villains mostly originate outside the city: Ra's al Ghul (Liam Neeson) and the League of Shadows come from the East, the Joker's (Heath Ledger) origins are unknown so he is possibly not a Gothamite, and Bane is like Ra's al Ghul a mercenary from elsewhere. Despite the Palace of Versailles being absent

from *A Tale*, it is also situated outside of Paris, even though it was the principal royal residence and a symbol of the French aristocracy. Thus, Paris and Gotham are similar in that some of those who weave the destinies of the two cities are not even *true* residents of these cities.

Dickens oftentimes shifts between two perspectives of Paris: "We often cut from a larger point of view – it is tempting to call it an 'historical' perspective – to a closer more individual or domestic perspective" (Jones et al. 17). The first perspective, a bird's eye, gives the reader a grander view of the city. The second one is the micro-one, displaying Paris from below. This perspective is saved for regular scenes in which the reader encounters characters and overhears their conversations. In her essay on Paris in *A Tale*, Sara Thornton suggests that Paris is "shown to us in particular ways involving 'super' visions or 'supervisions,' that is, panoptic visions, which imply a desire to supervise and even control" (303). Thornton goes on to discuss that Dickens oftentimes settles for a panoramic view as it is most suitable for a historical novel. Such a view "is thus not only the result of a desire to produce an urban mapping of the movement of people at a time of strife but it is an expression of a desire to see history and time in a vaster temporal scape" (307). If Dickens had been making a film instead of writing a novel, his shots would mimic those of Nolan's. It is imaginable that Nolan was inspired by a bird's eye view of Paris in *A Tale* and tried to capture a similar feeling with Gotham's aesthetic in *Rises*. Beautiful aerial shots of Gotham are an integral part of *Rises*, adding to the sense of "grandeur" and "epicness," which is what Dickens achieved by text. What separates Paris and Gotham in these portrayals, though, is people. Dickens's Paris is cramming with the masses, particularly in the revolutionary scenes where the mob is so large that it is frequently compared to the sea: "…the living sea rose […] and overflowed the city to that point" (Dickens 244). On the other hand, Nolan's Gotham is a place defined by "the absence of people, lonely streets, lonely architecture at nighttime" (Shone 60). Aerial shots of deserted streets and dominant static buildings are only replaced by the city teeming with people during the climax, where hordes of policemen face off against hordes of prisoners and where chaotic instability overcomes the preceding calmness. Aesthetically, the Gotham of *Rises* during the film's climax is when it most closely resembles Dickens's Paris.

But, since Gotham of Nolan's Batman series evolves throughout the trilogy, one may look back at *Batman Begins* and compare that Gotham to Dickens's Paris. There, the "dark and dangerous city" (Ip 226) is ridden with crime and poverty: mafia bosses such as Carmine Falcone have practically taken over it. Corruption is omnipresent, and the police are unable to successfully deal with criminals. Wayne's childhood friend and assistant district attorney

Rachel Dawes describes Gotham as follows: "This city is rotting. […] Things are worse than ever down here. [Falcone] floods our city with crime and drugs…" (*Batman Begins*, 00:26:42-00:26:52). The corrupt state of affairs is perhaps best illustrated in a scene in which Wayne confronts Falcone in a shady restaurant, where Falcone pulls out a handgun at Wayne and says: "Look around you. You'll see two councilmen, a union official, a couple of off-duty cops, and a judge. Now I wouldn't have a second's hesitation of blowing your head off right here and right now in front of 'em" (00:28:51-00:29:05). This quote demonstrates that Gotham's mobsters are linked to the justice system, effectively making the system dysfunctional. While Dickens does not place such an emphasis on the corruption in Paris in its pre-revolutionary days, Gotham of *Begins* recalls Paris by the fact that both metropolises are stricken with poverty and destitution (Paris due to class disparity as created by the aristocracy, Gotham due to its high levels of corruption and crime). There are Dickensian scenes in *Begins* that depict Gotham as a gritty place with dimly-lit narrow streets, filled with low-lives and the homeless, reminiscent of St. Antoine.

Gotham continues to evolve after *Begins*, and for *The Dark Knight,* Nolan has even altered the city's aesthetic to reflect the evolution: the city looks cleaner and wider, and there are no dimly-lit narrow streets with the homeless. The same aesthetic is kept for *Rises.* The visual evolution in the trilogy is perceptible: Gotham of the third instalment is completely altered from that of the first one. But, while the city's crime rate has been at all-time low, Nolan perfectly sets up the city as a breeding ground for the revolution to come. The city has been more than just a backdrop; it functions as an organism, a character, and its evolution is its own character development. According to Nolan, Gotham in the trilogy is a threat (Shone 60). Aside from poverty, this is where it converges with Dickens's Paris, where "the Faubourg Saint-Antoine […] is the villain of *A Tale of Two Cities"* (Jones et al. 13). Both cities are like organisms infected by a disease. Dickens even describes St. Antoine as "haggard" (251), implying tiredness, weariness, and suffering—symptoms of a disease. The disease takes its time of incubation—in *A Tale* it infects Paris at least from 1775, when the novel starts, to 1789 and the Reign of Terror, while in the film trilogy it lasts from Wayne's childhood (the poverty of *Begins)* to Bane's revolution many years later. The disease quietly but steadily spreads inside until it "explodes" on the surface in its full force in the form of social upheavals. This is why cities are threats; infected by a disease, they display mild symptoms over the years until they completely succumb to it.

Moreover, Paris and Gotham are twin cities with regard to the fact that their grim social circumstances, despite turning them into places of poverty, eventually made them places of *hope.* In Paris, the people have so little and are witnesses to injustice and brutality by the upper class everywhere (one only has to recall the scene in which a child is crushed under the Marquis's carriage to prove this point), something which fuels their incentive to take over their city. It is precisely the sense of *hope* that drives Madame Defarge and other revolutionaries into the storming of the Bastille and the subsequent attempt at changing the dynamic between the rich and the poor—the hope that Paris *can* change. In the trilogy, hope that incorruptible and heroic city officials can exist (such as Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart)) is what Batman and Gordon bestow to Gothamites at the end of *The Dark Knight*. And hope that the dynamic between the rich and the poor can be altered is what Bane seemingly bases his revolution on. Simply stated, without hope, there is no revolution. Paris and Gotham are places of hope, so they end up being the perfect breeding grounds for revolutions.

5. You Say You Want a Revolution

The French Revolution as presented by Dickens and Bane's revolution share a number of similarities, yet they diverge in several prominent aspects. The latter is of course based on the former, as Nolan was fascinated by Dickens's portrayal of the Revolution: "[The novel] is one of the most harrowing portraits of a relatable, recognizable civilization that completely folded to pieces with the terrors in Paris in France in that period. It's hard to imagine that things can go that badly wrong" (Lesnick). So, what is the most striking parallel between the two? Obviously, both revolutions are seemingly ignited by class disparity. ("Seemingly" being a keyword here: Bane's demagoguery is simply a façade. His revolution, or rather Talia al Ghul's, is caused for other reasons which will be examined later.)

The miserable Parisians are triggered by the unjust system of the Ancien Régime; their "revolution […] is mobilized around survival" (Jukić 57). While Dickens does not depict historical circumstances that brought about the state of Paris at the beginning of *A Tale*, he does present the consequences of the Ancien Régime. The rich live luxurious and lavish lives, while common people are starving in slums. *Rises* tackles the same issue of class disparity in the context of the 21st century, depicting a "vision of a modern American city torn apart by internecine class warfare stoked by a Robespierre-on-steroids" (Shone 262). The class warfare is perhaps not as much in focus as is in Dickens's novel, but it does play a part in the story. Nolan gives voice to the oppressed class with the character of Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway),

also known as Catwoman. What the Defarges, Gaspard and other characters from the Parisian slums are to Dickens, Kyle is to Nolan: a representative member of a certain group of people.

Kyle is a cat burglar with a criminal record. Her goal is to start a new life without her past looming over her. She accepts to steal Wayne's fingerprints to gain a "clean slate"—a computer program designed to erase one's criminal history. In an early scene, she opens Wayne's safe and steals his deceased mother's necklace. Later, she is seen putting the necklace on her neck. This is a symbolic change in ownership that foreshadows the class revolution to come: a member of the low-class has forcibly taken a piece of jewellery that used to belong to a high-class "aristocrat." This further adds to the argument that Kyle represents the 99% or, if one turns to the language of the French Revolution, the "Third Estate." Her views are lucidly expressed during her "populist talk" (Zakarin) whispered to Wayne in a danceroom scene:

> I don't stand on the shoulders of people with less. […] *You think all this can last? There's a storm coming*, Mr. Wayne. You and your friends better batten down the hatches, because when it hits you're all gonna wonder how you ever thought you could live so large and leave so little for the rest of us. (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 00:35:10-00:35:44, emphasis added)

Replace "Mr. Wayne" with "Monseigneur St. Evrémonde" and the quote fits perfectly within the pre-revolutionary Paris of *A Tale.* There is a Dickensian quality to the speech in that it echoes the sentiment of the poor in the novel. When it comes to the temporal certainty of the imminent revolution (emphasized in the quote), Kyle's point recalls that of Monsieur Defarge which Defarge said to the mender of roads before a meeting with the aristocracy: "…you make these fools believe *that it will last for ever*. Then, they are the more insolent, and *it is the nearer ended"* (Dickens 197, emphasis added). Both Kyle and Defarge deeply believe in the inevitability of the revolution, almost as if it were destined to happen. Since these two act as speakers for the poor, one can extend their belief over the whole group.

The dichotomy between the poor and the rich functions as a pretext for both revolutions, but is the number of adherents the same in each case? One needs to bring back into focus the "sea" of people that Dickens likes to write about in Paris scenes. He designates the masses as "the force of the ocean" (245), even hinting at their large number by stating that the cries at the storming of the Bastille were made up of "ten thousand incoherences" (246). On the other hand, Bane's revolutionaries are far from being as numerous. When Bane is first revealed to be hiding in the Gotham sewers, there is only a handful of his armed mercenaries patrolling the corridors. Moreover, unlike in Dickens where the whole city seems to be turned against the oppressors,

common Gothamites never join Bane's revolution. Bane's revolutionaries are comprised only of his mercenaries and, after the liberation of Blackgate (which parallels the liberation of the Bastille in Dickens), other criminals. At one point, Bane offers a vague number of the criminals in question: "…a thousand men have languished [in Blackgate under the name of Harvey Dent]" (*The Dark Knight Rises*, 01:36:59-01:37:02). In an ideal scenario, if all of them had joined his cause, along with some other prisoners not caught under the Dent Act, we may presume that his revolution could have been supported by around a thousand insurgents. "Thousands of police" (01:27:23-01:27:26) are said to have entered the sewers in the film. Once released, they confront the released Blackgate prisoners during the climax. Visually, there seems to be an equal number of participants on both sides. Whatever the precise number of Bane's followers is, he certainly had at least a thousand men obeying him at the pinnacle of the revolution.

Dickens's revolution is much bigger. His "ten thousand incoherences" only belong to those Parisians who attacked the Bastille, not all who backed the revolution. In the novel, the reader is given a sense that the whole of Paris is standing up to the tyranny of the rich (as opposed to the revolution supported by a fragment of Gotham's population). Interestingly enough, Dickens has an "impulse […] to exaggerate [facts about the French Revolution] – and from a historical point of view he has certainly exaggerated" (Orwell, "Charles Dickens"). Dickens's exaggeration is evident in the scene describing the fall of the Bastille. The historical event comprised of at best around 900 insurgents (Hibbert 82), rather than ten thousand. Setting historical accuracy aside, the revolution in Dickens is much more numerous than Nolan's. The reason behind this seems to be that Dickens intended to highlight that the horrible destitution in Paris was so prevalent that it engulfed the whole city. Consequently, the entire Paris—or at least an extremely large number of Parisians—had an impulse to rise and overthrow the tyranny of the rich.

Throughout *A Tale* and *Rises*, a certain tension, a feeling of impending terror, is constantly on the rise, as if the revolution will burst into something terrifying. In Michael Slater's biography of Dickens, the biographer presents one of the novelist's letters, in which Dickens highlights the rising emotion he aimed to express in *A Tale:* "I set myself the little task of making *a picturesque story,* rising [that is, increasing in interest and excitement] in every chapter" (470, emphasis and square brackets in the original). Dickens seems to have succeeded in his task. The first book is titled "Recalled to Life," and it revolves around Dr Manette's return after a long imprisonment. Here, some of the main characters are introduced, but more

importantly, the destitution of the St. Antoine slum is on full display—the stage is set for later events. In the second book, an even bigger tension between the rich and the poor is created. The brutal death of a child crushed under the Marquis's carriage is described, prompting a resolution in which the Marquis is stabbed in his château. Even the titles of chapters add to the rising tension. "Knitting" is followed by "Still Knitting," alluding to the passage of time *before* a significant event happens (what exactly comes *after* the knitting is done, one may inquire?). "The Sea Still *Rises*" and "Fire *Rises*" (emphasis added) imply that the plot is indeed getting thicker. Finally, Book the Third is named "The Track of a Storm," as if the storm is the event that everything prior has led to. It is in this book that the consequences of the French Revolution are depicted, with Darnay's trial and Carton's execution at the centre of it. Finally, the titles of the last chapters suggest a fall in tension. "The Knitting Done" is where Madame Defarge is killed, and "The Footsteps Die Out For Ever" with its macabre theme proves suitable as an ending. Despite the names of chapters, Dickens holds the tension until the end. Carton's final monologue, an extended version of the previously-mentioned speech by Jim Gordon in *Rises*, is, nonetheless, filled with peacefulness and optimism. The tension is omnipresent and constantly rises throughout the novel, only settling for tranquillity in the closing paragraphs.

The rising tension is integral to Nolan's film as well. Its main catalyst is the ticking nuclear bomb which threatens to obliterate Gotham during the climax. The ticking of the nuclear bomb can be compared to Madame Defarge's knitting: a simple, straightforward action that almost keeps reminding of the impending doom. Both actions belong to the leading figures of revolutions. The bomb is in the hands of Bane (and al Ghul), while Madame Defarge is the one who keeps knitting. Once the ticking and knitting stop, one may expect "all hell to break loose." Interestingly, the tension decreases in *Rises* after the bomb goes off, but only briefly. Soon, composer Hans Zimmer's dramatic music playing over the final scenes builds up towards the ending title card, once again increasing the tension. *Rises* is similar to *A Tale* in terms of the tension being kept until the end. As is the case in Dickens, Nolan gives a peaceful resolution to his protagonist and offers hope for a better future (Wayne's butler Alfred (Michael Caine) notices Wayne alive in Florence, and John "Robin" Blake (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) discovers the Batcave, suggesting that he would replace Batman as Gotham's superhero).[1]

The tension quickly escalates when both revolutions are instigated. This occurs with the fall of prisons. For Dickens, it is the historical Bastille (London's Newgate only appears in

[1] Robin is commonly portrayed as Batman's sidekick both in the comics and some film adaptations.

in Book the Second and remains absent during the revolutionary scenes); for Nolan, it is the fictional Blackgate. Structurally, Dickens and Nolan place these events at the same position in their respective works, that is, sometimes after the midpoint. In Dickens, the liberation is described in the chapter *Echoing Footsteps* (pages 238-50 out of 429 in the Canterbury Classics edition), while in Nolan it is presented 1 hour 35 minutes into the story, with the film lasting about 2 hours and 45 minutes. Their first halves are dedicated to the rising tension, the foreshadowing of the revolution. Once the prisons are liberated, the other part of their works deals with the further progress of revolutions.

The Bastille and Blackgate are "symbols of oppression," to borrow Bane's words (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 01:36:52-01:36:56). Tom Shone describes Dickens as "a frequent visitor of prisons since his father was hauled into debtors' prison in his youth" and as someone who "was fascinated by the irony that a revolution in the name of freedom resulted in so much false imprisonment" (252). So, Dickens presents the Bastille as a place where the innocent are locked up—truly an ultimate symbol of oppression. This is exemplified by the character of Dr Manette, who was falsely imprisoned for 18 years and consequently "went mad" and became "reduced […] to a child-like figure" (Jukić 58). Interestingly, the Bastille held only seven prisoners at the time of its storming (Dickens 250), and Dickens in this respect stays true to history. Regardless of the number, the prison in Dickens is an oppressive institution. On the other hand, while not innocent *per se*, prisoners of Blackgate in *Rises* have enough reasons to feel betrayed by the system. The character John Blake, a young policeman, tells Gordon: "Those men [had been] locked up for eight years in Blackgate and denied parole under the Dent Act, it was based on a lie" (01:38:34-01:38:40). The lie refers to Batman and Gordon's cover-up of Dent's crimes from the ending of *The Dark Knight.* Denied parole on a premise turned out to be a lie, Blackgate is another symbol of oppression, at least in the eyes of prisoners.

The liberation of prisons is accompanied by chaos in Paris and Gotham. For example, almost the whole neighbourhood of St. Antoine in Paris gathers upon hearing that the wealthy Foulon is alive: "The men were terrible, in the bloody-minded anger […], caught up what arms they had, and came pouring down into streets; but, the women were a sight to chill the boldest" (Dickens 253). This quote illustrates the lingering bloodthirst of the Parisians after the fall of the Bastille—Parisians are not quite done yet. The liberation was only a start: in the following chapter, Dickens describes how other crimes against the wealthy are happening all over France. After depicting the burning of the Marquis's château as staged by the revolutionaries, Dickens

writes that "the fierce figures were steadily wending East, West, North, and South, be that as it would; and whosoever hung, fire burned" (264). Revolution in Dickens is instigated in Paris, but it swiftly sweeps across France.

Likewise, in *Rises,* the riches are under attack as soon as the revolution starts. "The powerful will be ripped from their decadent nests," says Bane over shots of insurgents wreaking havoc in private apartments, personal items being scattered in front of buildings entrances, and people being hostilely pulled to the streets, "and cast out into the cold world that we know and endure" (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 01:40:18-01:40:33). While nothing in the United States but Gotham is ever shown, Gotham's uprising *does* have some sort of impact on the outside world. For example, a military general decides to inform the president about the new situation in the city: "Get me the president on the line" (01:34:41-01:34:43). Eventually, external military forces arrive at demolished bridges, and news regarding Gotham is broadcast to the other side of the world where Wayne is kept prisoner. The rest of the country, despite not succumbing to chaos, is unable to intervene in Gotham as Bane threatens to blow the city up with a nuclear bomb. Taking this into consideration, one of the biggest differences between the two revolutions is that unlike the French Revolution, Bane's is limited to a single city.

There is also a striking difference in the duration of the revolutions. After the attack on the Bastille, Dickens makes a time jump and unveils the dreadful state of France during the Reign of Terror, several years after the July 1789 attack. While Bane's "Reign of Terror" lasts only a few months, the French Revolution is much longer. What is more, the ending to Bane's revolution is depicted in *Rises*, when Batman saves Gotham from destruction. Dickens never depicts the ending of the French Revolution, nor does he hint at the eventual rise of Napoleon Bonaparte as one of the most significant consequences of the revolution. Instead, he wraps up his story in the middle of the revolution, with the guillotine actively beheading people. This is where *Rises* and *A Tale* differ: not only in the duration of their revolutions, but in the fact that only Bane's revolution is shown in its totality.

Another similarity, though, between Dickens and Nolan is that both choose to include scenes of courtrooms in revolutionary times. Nolan mimics Dickens in that after the fall of Blackgate, "the mock-trial that follows in Gotham is similar to the travesty of justice that took place during the Terror" (Laskar 109). A kangaroo court presided by Dr Jonathan Crane, the Scarecrow, is held to try the rich. The fact that Crane is the judge implies the absurdity of the court and the ludicrousness of the revolution: in the previous films, he is established as a

murderous lunatic, one of Batman's villains. His sentences jump only between "death" and "exile," where death means *death by exile.* So, there is *de facto* only one sentence: a walk over a frozen river which inevitably cracks under one's steps.

This mock-trial bears similarity to Darnay's trial in France. In Dickens, the preposterousness of the state of court is evidenced, for example, when gaolers who summon defendants joke before the tribunal: "Come out and listen to the evening paper, you inside there!" (Dickens 321). In a scene in which Darnay's name ought to be read amongst 23 names, Dickens stresses that "only twenty [names] were responded to; for one of the prisoners […] had died in gaol and had been forgotten, and two had already been guillotined and forgotten" (321). Gaolers's jokes and a lack of proper bureaucratic organization display a similar level of sloppiness to that of the court in *Rises*. And much like in Crane's court, in Dickens "every human creature [defendant] […] had *died* on the scaffold" (321, emphasis added). It seems that each defendant is doomed to be found guilty in both courts, regardless of their possible innocence, as is the case with Darnay whose "verdict has been decided in advance" (Bossche 214). These courts show that neither revolution is depicted as honestly caring about justice. In their bloodthirstiness and cruelty, they demand only death.

Finally, Bane and Talia al Ghul are counterparts to Monsieur Defarge and Madame Defarge. While Bane takes the role of the public leader of the revolution, he is secretly a pawn of al Ghul's. Al Ghul is fuelled by revenge against Wayne due to his killing her father in *Begins,* and she wants to "honour [her] father by finishing his work [that is, by destroying Gotham]" (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 02:19:42-02:19:45). She mirrors Madame Defarge in the sense that her primary goal concerns the city (the destruction of Gotham), while the urge to achieve her goal is invigorated by revenge. In her own words, "Vengeance against the man who killed him is simply a reward for my patience" (02:19:40-02:20:02). Her drive to exact revenge by bringing about a revolution is embedded in her tragic past. The same is true of Madame Defarge, as "both of them want to avenge their personal losses" (Laskar 109). Madame is determined to support the French Revolution, but is motivated by vile antagonism against the Evrémondes, who raped her sister and killed her brother when she was a child. Her hatred is what ultimately leads to Darnay's imprisonment and Carton's death. Interestingly, a point can be made that al Ghul and Madame's lives end with them believing that they have successfully exacted their revenge. Al Ghul dies muttering the words "There is no way this bomb will be stopped. My father's work is done" (02:28:14-02:28:39), convinced that the bomb will irrevocably go off, and while Madame is killed by Miss Pross in a struggle, unable to apprehend

Lucie and her daughter, she is aware that Darnay, a member of the Evrémonde family, is sentenced to the guillotine: "It was nothing to her, that an innocent man was to die for the sins of his forefathers; she saw, not him, but *them"* (Dickens 413, emphasis added). In a way, the primary antagonists of *Rises* and *A Tale* do, in their mind, get away with their revenge-driven goals.

Bane can simply be compared to Monsieur Defarge, the husband and right-hand man of Madame Defarge. While not al Ghul's husband, he is said to have loved her and to have been her protector (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 02:18:33-02:19:01). He is presented as a much more malignant, menacing character than Monsieur Defarge. He easily threatens, assaults and murders people, and is not depicted as possessing positive traits, other than caring for al Ghul and saving her from other inmates in a flashback. Monsieur Defarge's character belongs more to the grey area. He is not fuelled by revenge like his wife, but rather strictly commits to the revolution in its objective, social aspect. This character trait is described by his wife: "But it is your weakness that you sometimes need to see your victim and your opportunity, to sustain you. Sustain yourself without that" (Dickens 203). The quote illustrates the difference between the Defarge couple. Monsieur does not blindly hate the rich, whether they are guilty or not; he only cares about improving the social circumstances in Paris. He displays another positive quality in his empathy towards Dr Manette, something not discernible in his wife. "But my husband has his weaknesses, and he is so weak as to relent towards this Doctor" (409) is how Madame describes him, once again presenting his benevolence as a "weakness."

Moreover, Bane can be seen as a "tool" of al Ghul's, rather than the counterpart to a character in Dickens. He may be the embodiment of the revolution itself. For example, this manifests in the way he speaks. His speeches hold a striking similarity to those commonly associated with revolutions, perhaps most notably with the French one. Words such as *oppressed, decadent*, *blood*, *liberation* are all articulated by him when he directly addresses Gothamites. Nolan has said that "when people listen to Bane […], well, it's about a demagogue. He's the bad guy" (Shone 268). He deceives the insurgents by promising that what he wants is "to return control of this city to the people" (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 01:33:46-01:33:51). He constantly uses revolutionary language to dramatize his speeches, and in turn acquires a following. He is like a revolution itself: in his promises of a better future, he brings people together, but turns out to be the "bad guy," bringing destruction and terror with him. In "Nolanizing Dickens," Samrat Laskar suggests that Bane is "a machinery of destruction, a Guillotine controlled by [al Ghul]" (109). The guillotine being a symbol of the French

Revolution, and Bane metaphorically representing a guillotine, it would not be a far stretch to once again assert that Bane is, indeed, the embodiment of a ruthless revolution.

6. All Art Is Propaganda

"All art is propaganda," claimed George Orwell in his essay "Charles Dickens" after asserting that "every writer, especially every novelist, has a 'message', whether he admits it or not, and the minutest details of his work are influenced by it." Orwell's point of view places *A Tale* and *Rises* in the domain of propaganda. So, if all art *is* propaganda, what is the message that these two particular works are trying to convey? Or, more specifically, do Dickens and Nolan present revolutions as something positive, negative, or something in-between? How similar are these works in their presentation of social upheavals?

In the same essay by Orwell, the author specifies his reading of Dickens's revolution. He states that while Dickens was by no means a "proletarian" writer, he was still "quite genuinely on the side of the poor against the rich." This is evident from the novelist's fondness for writing about the poor—as is the case, for example, with Oliver Twist (an orphan), Nicholas Nickleby (whose father dies and leaves the family in dire straits) and especially *A Christmas Carol*, where the rich protagonist Scrooge is portrayed as an unlikeable miser, while the poor Cratchit family is loveable and kind. Christopher Hitchens points out that Dickens made it possible for "the downtrodden English people […] to see a celebrity, a man of wealth and fame, who was *on their side*" ("Charles Dickens's Inner Child," emphasis added). When it comes to the revolution, Orwell goes on to explain that in Dickens, "revolution is a monster," and that all the revolutionary scenes have "the quality of nightmare" ("Charles Dickens"). His argument can be supported by the fact that in the chapter describing the striking fall of the Bastille, Dickens defines the insurgents as "a vast dusky mass of *scarecrows*" with "steel blades and bayonets" (243, emphasis added). To stress this: the insurgents are not *people* but *scarecrows*, uncanny creatures that evoke the unease of nightmares. What is more, and what adds to the horror, they are armed with all sorts of killing tools, including "cartridges, powder, and ball, bars of iron and wood, knives, axes, pikes" (243), and are so determined that they are willing to die for their cause (243). Their generic naming of Jacques One, Jacques Two, Jacques Two Thousand, and so on, further strips away their humanity, turning them into a nameless multitude. The nightmare becomes more vivid with Dickens's images of "cannon, muskets, fire and smoke," "raging sea [of people]," "flashing weapons, blazing torches […], shrieks,

volleys, execrations […], boom smash and rattle," and "tumult, exultation, deafening and *maniacal bewilderment*" (245, emphasis added).

And if the Dickensian revolution is a nightmare, then the revolutionaries are, according to Orwell, depicted "simply as degraded savages – in fact, as lunatics" ("Charles Dickens"). John Kucich claims that "we lose sympathy for the rebels when they lose sight of their limitless freedom […] and become trapped in their own revenge, thus imitating their oppressors" (129). One of the best assessments of the revolution is perhaps most clearly encapsulated in the closing paragraphs of the novel, in Carton's famous monologue:

> "I see Barsad, and Cly, Defarge, The Vengeance, the Juryman, the Judge, *long ranks of the new oppressors* who have risen on the destruction of the old, *perishing by this retributive instrument*, before it shall cease out of its present use. I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long years to come, I see *the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth*, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out. (Dickens 428, emphasis added)

Through Carton, Dickens puts revolutionaries such as Monsieur Defarge, The Vengeance and others into the category of "new oppressors," which strengthens Kucich's argument. This element of tyranny casts another shade at the revolution. Moreover, the emphasized line in the quote concerning the retributive instrument—the guillotine—suggests that these new oppressors would eventually perish as a result of their own revolution. In other words, the revolution will spare no one and destroy itself. Yet in the final sentences of the quote, Dickens is hopeful, despite "Carton's vision of a peaceful Paris [being] problematic in the light of the reader's knowledge of its […] further revolutions in 1830 and 1848" (Bossche 211). Dickens still has faith in social progress and a better world: the guillotine will "cease out of its present use" and a brilliant people will "rise from this abyss." Even though "the revolution has failed" (Rosen 178) and it seems to be a nightmare, there will come a moment of waking up.

The evil of this time, the revolution, is for Dickens a consequence of the previous time. What the philosopher Walter Benjamin touched on in his essay "Paris, Capital of the 19th Century" while discussing collective consciousness can be applied to Dickens's portrayal of the revolution: "In these ideals there also emerges a vigorous aspiration to break with what is outdated – […] with the most recent past. These tendencies turn the fantasy […] back upon the primal past" (166). In other words, Dickens's revolutionaries want to break from the Ancien

Régime and in their collective fantasy of a new, more just world, they reverse to the primal past of chaos and violence. Returning to the final argument of the previous paragraph, this chaos and violence of the revolution will eventually make "expiation for itself" and "wear out." Simply put, Dickens believes the revolution will devour itself and the society will heal.

Orwell ultimately contends that the "strongest single impression one carries away from [Dickens's] books is that of a hatred of tyranny" ("Charles Dickens"). There is validity to this claim in the context of *A Tale:* "The novel is unequivocal in casting ultimate blame on the French aristocracy" (Jones et al. 11). The original tyranny of the aristocracy in the first portion of the novel is indirectly criticized through various depictions of the ghastly living conditions of Parisians. It is directly criticized, for example, when a child is crushed under the Marquis's carriage, with the aristocrat barely even caring. After the fall of the Bastille, the tables are turned and it is no longer the tyranny of the aristocracy that is criticised, but the tyranny of the revolutionaries. This is evident when the clearly innocent Darnay is sentenced to death by the kangaroo court. The biggest criticism of tyranny in the novel, though, comes at the end, when Carton is about to be executed. Carton, who coincidentally bears incredible likeness to Darnay, decides to change places with Darnay for the sake of Lucie's happiness. Despite being an Evrémonde lookalike, in reality, he has *no* connection to the aristocratic family at all. This lack of connection in a way makes him a "purer" victim than Darnay. The only reason he relates to the revolution is the fact that he resembles an Evrémonde and that he willingly sacrifices himself at the guillotine. With his "purity," Dickens aims to ignite an even greater feeling of indignation intended for revolutionaries.

Nolan has said that "*The Dark Knight* films are not political acts" (Shone 261), but that they are "anti-establishment" (43). *Rises* was released at about the time of the real-life Occupy Wall Street protests, organised against the wealth inequality within the United States. Nolan claims that the "sympathies of the film were very in tune with the sympathies of that movement" (261) which paradoxically *does* make it a political act. Interestingly, the film's complex portrayal of a revolution created a possibility for both the political Right and Left to interpret it to suit their own views: "[*The Dark Knight* trilogy] has been claimed equally by the Right and by the Left in terms of conversation" (216). Taking all into consideration, two premises are established: the work is somewhat ambivalent (like in Dickens, who sticks up for the poor yet depicts the revolution as a nightmare), and in its theme of class inequality and its sympathizing with the OWS movement, it champions the oppressed class (also like in Dickens).

In his essay "The Death of the Author," literary theorist Roland Barthes advocates for the idea of separating the art from the artist. By following Barthes's idea, one could dismiss Nolan's words, as they impose an interpretation on the film. Instead, what does the film *itself* communicate to us about revolution?

Bane's revolution as a process of fixing a broken social system is doomed from the start. His actual plan is to blow Gotham up, not balance class disparity. The hostility towards the rich is only used to gain followers as part of his demagoguery. Thus, the revolution in *Rises* is only a charade, an excuse to fool the poor. In the eyes of its leaders, it is not put into play to *heal* Gotham, but to *destroy* Gotham. The revolution also, in the end, turns out to be a complete failure: Gotham is saved by Batman and Bane's followers are defeated and imprisoned. Nolan's depiction of chaos (manifested in a kangaroo court and a prison break) reflects Dickens's portrayal of chaos that revolutions bring along. Revolution in Nolan is a failed project, something to avoid.

There is a further parallel between Dickens and Nolan's revolutions. Neither *A Tale* or *Rises* convey pro-Marxist messages. While they deal with class disparity, they never propose that the utopian vision of a classless social order is the final solution to society's problems. Orwell in his essay states that Dickens never makes "any attack on private enterprise or private property" ("Charles Dickens"), and *Rises* treats Wayne's loss of control over his company and his money as a moment of humiliation and disaster for him. While discussing Dickens's *Hard Times,* Orwell says that "if anything [it] is pro-capitalist, because the whole moral is that capitalists ought to be kind, not that workers ought to be rebellious" ("Charles Dickens"). A similar moral can be applied to *A Tale*: once the workers, Parisians, become rebellious, the story turns nightmarish and the workers turn into lunatics. Another example is found in the character of Darnay, an Evrémonde, who is not a capitalist *per se*, but whose French family stands in opposition to the poor. Darnay is still portrayed as a kind person who understands the hardships of the poor. As Dickens often introduces the "good rich man" (Orwell, "Charles Dickens"), Nolan does the same with Wayne and thus "[resuscitates] the archetypal Dickensian topic of a good capitalist" (Žižek). Grant Morrison claims that Batman "was the ultimate capitalist hero. He was the defender of privilege and hierarchy" (Shone 143). Wayne is a good capitalist, a billionaire willing to dedicate his life to helping the poor. Aside from trying to help Gotham with his superhero work and by funding orphanages, after his apparent death, his house and grounds are left to the city (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 02:33:50-02:34:25). The capitalist

status quo in *Rises* is challenged, but retained by the end of the film. It is the rich capitalist who is presented as the city's saviour.

To sum up, *A Tale* and *Rises* are ambivalent in their political messages. They stand on the side of the poor, but are definitely critical of revolutions. Still, they imply that there is hope for a better future in a post-revolutionary world.

7. Recalled to Life

The fundamental theme of the two works is that of rebirth. This theme is explored both through characters and cities. One only has to glance at the beginning of Dickens's novel to recognize rebirth: Book the First is titled "Recalled to Life." This is a perfectly suitable label for the depiction of the release of Dr Manette after an appallingly unjust 18-year-old imprisonment at the Bastille. Once Dickens introduces his character for the first time in a garret, he describes him as a "buried person," with a ghastly, worn and wasted state of face, and a colour of a cadaver (Dickens 15). Dr Manette, who in his imprisonment "abandoned all hope of being dug out" and who "can't say" whether he cares to live (16), is almost a walking corpse by the time he has the opportunity to experience the world again. It is no wonder that he is *recalled to life*—his previous state can be equated to that of death. This is the most obvious rebirth of a character in *A Tale.*

In *Rises*, the most important character recalled to life is Wayne, alongside his alter ego Batman. But before tackling the complexity of his rebirth, one must not overlook the central theme observed through a different character. The main antagonist of *Batman Begins*, Ra's al Ghul, is briefly brought back to life as a hallucination while Wayne is hopeless in a faraway prison in the middle of the film. Even though he is nothing but a product of Wayne's imagination, al Ghul takes the role of a brief, yet living character in this scene. One may even go as far as to suggest that he is brought back to life via his daughter Talia who wants to finish his mission by destroying Gotham. Wayne might have defeated Ra's in *Begins*, but Ra's is recalled to life in *Rises*.

Wayne/Batman experiences rebirth numerous times. Initially, he returns to public life with his billionaire playboy persona. After the devastating events of *The Dark Knight,* Wayne has become isolated in his manor, losing contact with the outside world. A dialogue between two side characters exposes his seclusion, with one character stating that no one has seen him "in years" (*The Dark Knight Rises,* 00:07:33-00:07:38). Reminiscent of Dr Manette who did

eighteen years in prison, Wayne spent eight years isolated (though willingly, unlike Manette). Rumours that he never leaves the East wing of his house, or that he has had an accident, or that he is disfigured, have spread (00:09:07-00:09:13). These rumours have shrouded his character in myth. This mimics Manette, whose imprisonment turned him into an almost legendary figure in revolutionary France, where he is a walking manifestation of injustice. He is said to possess "high personal popularity" (Dickens 325) which is evident on various occasions. For example, when Darnay is denounced by the Defarges, Manette asks four men representing the Republic whether they know him, to which they claim "We *all* know you, Citizen Doctor" (333). Wayne's isolation is comparable to that of Manette's in the sense that they both prompted people to speculate about and discuss these two individuals.

While Manette is given only a single rebirth, Wayne experiences several. Following a string of unusual events—including a meeting with Selina Kyle who steals his mother's necklace—Wayne decides to get out into the world. He visits a doctor, fixes his legs, and attends a high-class party with style. This is officially the return of the persona of Bruce Wayne. At the same time, Wayne is also planning the return of his Batman persona. In a hospital scene, he puts on a simple ski mask and pays a visit to Jim Gordon, who is recovering after confronting Bane and his men in the sewers. Batman has not fully returned at this point (Wayne does not wear the iconic costume in this scene), but his conversation with Gordon is a step towards the superhero's revival. Wayne later visits Lucius Fox (Morgan Freeman), his supplier of gadgets and weapons, and Batman is "recalled to life" afterwards. However, Batman is soon defeated by Bane. Once again, the superhero is "dead," while Wayne is confined to a faraway prison. For the second time, Wayne compares to Manette "in their commonality of being 'buried alive' in prison" (Laskar 110). At this point, Wayne is a failure: he is not only physically broken, but also psychologically. This type of flawed hero is linked to Dickens. In her essay titled *The Necessity of the Nurturing Male*, Natalie McKnight contends that many of Dickens's protagonists are failures. She lists characters such as Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit*, George Rouncewell in *Bleak House,* and Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities* as characters who can be "excellent exemplar[s] of masculinity while still failing, at least for a while" (9). Wayne is thus Dickensian, given that he has failed to live up to his own expectations. Yet, as Dickens "suggests the link between failure, physical brokenness and enlightenment" (16), so does Nolan, with Wayne achieving "enlightenment" and consequently heroically deciding that he would escape from the prison and confront Bane back in Gotham. He is recalled to life yet again, initially only as Wayne; in Gotham, he is recalled to life as Batman as well. Then, he

seemingly sacrifices himself for the city while taking the nuclear bomb away with his aerial craft.

Following the nuclear explosion, Wayne and Batman are dead in the eyes of Gothamites. In a twist at the end of the film, both personas are for the last time recalled to life. Wayne is seen living happily with Kyle in Florence (he has survived the explosion), and Batman's return in the form of John "Robin" Blake is alluded to when Blake discovers the Batcave. The central theme of the film and the novel is not only recurring in *Rises*. The film essentially *ends* with rebirth.

There is a link between Wayne/Batman and Carton in their sacrifice for the greater good. "Like Dickens who offsets the blood-dimmed tide of fanatic revolution with the calm sacrifice of Sydney Carton," says Samrat Laskar, "Nolan, too, imagines his Dark Knight in terms of Christian sacrifice" (109). Laskar argues that Wayne and Carton, despite their failures and personal demons, still retain their faith in humanity and in turn give their lives for the sake of others. Carton, whose "life and death follow true Christian typology" (Rosen 176) surrenders himself to the guillotine as a stand-in for Darnay, and Wayne as Batman flies away from the city with a nuclear bomb about to go off. The archetype of Jesus Christ is evoked through these heroic deeds. Thus, there is an underlying Christian theme embedded in both works: that of the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good. The difference in the execution of this theme lies in the fact that for Dickens, there is no Christian rebirth for Carton on Earth after his contact with the guillotine. Even if he experiences a "far, far better rest than [he has ever known]" (Dickens 429), it is not the rest destined to be experienced on Earth. His precise moment of death is never described, but there is no ambiguity that he is executed after his inner monologue at the end of the novel. On the other hand, Nolan's Christian sacrifice is more classically fulfilled in that it is followed by Wayne's "rebirth" in this world (in Florence), and Batman's via Blake.

Lastly, the theme of rebirth relates to Paris and Gotham. The cities are at various points depicted as places of decadence, poverty, corruption, and crime. *A Tale* and *Rises* are stories of a city's rebirth. Dickens ends his novel in the middle of the Reign of Terror, with Paris still being engulfed in the anarchy of revolutionary upheavals. The city's justice system is clearly flawed (Darnay is sentenced to death despite his innocence), the guillotine is chopping heads off one by one, and times are chaotic: "The Terror […] leaves France even more barren than before" (Rosen 178). Despite this, Carton's monologue assures the reader that Carton is optimistic about the city's future: "I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this

abyss" (Dickens 428). As illustrated previously, Gordon reads the same lines at Wayne's funeral. Nolan does not wrap up his story with Gotham in chaos as Dickens chooses to do with Paris, but he still echoes Dickens by finishing off with the identical optimism regarding Gotham's future: the city *will* rise out of the abyss, beautiful and filled with brilliant people. Paris and Gotham have evolved by the end of their respective stories. They "died" in their injustice, destitution and corruption, but Dickens and Nolan assure the audience using the "beautiful city" passages that there is hope for the future, and that both cities *can* and *will* rise. *A Tale* and *Rises* are narratives concerned with the metaphorical "deaths" of Paris and Gotham, and ultimately, their "rebirth."

8. Conclusion

Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* act as counterparts to each other, as the latter was heavily influenced by the former. Nolan has always been inspired by the Victorian culture and Victorian literature, so it does not come as a surprise that the foundation for the final instalment in his Batman trilogy lies in one of the most famous of Dickens's novels. This paper has compared the two works and analysed their similarities and differences. Nolan's motifs, such as prisons, doubles, flawed heroes, and others, are also those regularly found in Dickens. His film is an homage to *A Tale* and is rife with obvious references and allusions to the novel. This includes not only naming some of his side characters after Dickens's side characters, but also directly quoting from the novel. A variation of a Dickens quote even served as a tagline on promotional posters for the film.

On a deeper level, Nolan draws heavily from Dickens in the representation of a city on the brink of revolution. His Gotham is similar to Dickens's Paris in that both metropolises are centres of poverty, decadence, enormous class disparity, and corruption. While Nolan depicts mostly a deserted, lonely city, Dickens does the opposite, evoking the image of a claustrophobic, enclosed place swarming with the masses. Despite this aesthetic deviation, the cities are "twins" in that their tense states bring about revolutions. These revolutions are seemingly stirred by decadence and class disparity. The character of Selina Kyle represents in Nolan what the Defarges and other poor French characters represent in Dickens: people who long for social and economic changes in their respective cities. The key event in these revolutions is the storming of prisons—the Bastille and Blackgate. This attack functions as the true beginning of Paris and Gotham's social upheavals. While the French Revolution in Dickens is depicted as extremely large in numbers (though this is an exaggeration of history

on Dickens's part) and not only limited to Paris, Bane's is rather comprised of several thousand mercenaries and prisoners at best, and it never encompasses the world outside of Gotham. To their leaders, both revolutions are tools to exact personal revenge. Madame Defarge seems to be motivated by her personal vendetta against the Evrémondes, and Talia al Ghul desires to avenge her father. These two characters complement one another, while Bane can be linked to Monsieur Defarge, or, symbolically, to the guillotine and thus revolution in general.

One does not extract a clear message from Dickens or Nolan. Rather, the authors seem to suggest ambivalent ideas. They appear to stand on the side of the poor, yet they are also critical of revolutions. Dickens never paints the complete picture of a revolution, ending his novel in the middle of the Reign of Terror; Nolan, on the other hand, shows the full course. Both wrap up their stories with a glimpse of hope for Paris and Gotham, and a belief in the future. *A Tale* and *Rises* do not suggest that a Marxist utopia achieved via monstrous revolution is key to a brighter future, but that class disparity ought to be changed by other means.

Metaphorically, at the heart of *A Tale* and *Rises* lies the theme of rebirth. Not only do they portray the "rebirth" of characters such as Doctor Manette or Bruce Wayne, but also imply the rebirth of Paris and Gotham. Moreover, the journey of Wayne/Batman is based on that of Sydney Carton, and in their sacrificial roles, they end up becoming the archetypical Christ-like figures.

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Abstract

This paper offers a thorough comparison of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). Due to the fact that the latter is based on the former, there are a number of similarities between the two works. Aside from clear Dickensian references and allusions in *Rises*, the film draws heavily from the novel in terms of its portrayal of a city on the brink of a revolution. Paris and Gotham are "twin cities" in many regards, including class disparity and the infuriation of the poor. The French Revolution and Bane's revolution are analogous to one another: both seemingly stem from class disparity, their leaders have personal vendettas against the rich, they have led to the liberation of prisons (the Bastille and Blackgate), and have brought about a period of terror filled with executions, unjust laws, kangaroo courts, etc. Still, they differ in their respective sizes, duration, and the number of followers (the French Revolution being much larger and longer than Bane's).

Nolan draws heavily from Dickens in terms of characters. Talia al Ghul and Bane are modelled after Madame Defarge and Monsieur Defarge, respectively (while Bane can also be seen as the embodiment of revolution itself). Nolan and Dickens are also ambivalent when it comes to the political messages of their works. They seemingly stand on the side of the poor, but seem to be critical of revolutions. The central theme of *A Tale* and *Rises* is that of rebirth, which is explored through characters (most importantly Dr Manette and Wayne) and cities (Paris and Gotham).

Keywords: Charles Dickens, Christopher Nolan, class disparity, poverty, revolution, film