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The Representation of the French Revolution in Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities* and Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*: A New Historicist Reading¹

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Abstract

Texts are conceived not as mere reflectors of, but rather as active contributors to the historical process they illuminate. For most traditional historians, history is a series of events that have a *linear, causal* relationship and is *progressive*. New Historicists, in contrast, do not believe that we have clear access to any but the most basic facts of history. Any given event is a product of its own culture, but, in return, it also affects culture. In other words, all events *are shaped by* and *shape* the culture in which they emerge. Our view of those events is always subjective. New Historicism rejects the possibility of objective interpretation.

This essay aims to illustrate how in *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Les Misérables* the French Revolution has been represented, and also how they have contributed to the concept of the French Revolution from the New Historicist point of view. The findings confirm that Dickens’s perception of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* is a negative one since he gives voice to the harsh brutality of the Revolution and wants the predominant leading group to know that what happened in France in 1789 may one day happen in England. Hugo, instead, considers the emergence, not only of modern France, but also of the whole Europe as a result of the Revolution of 1789.

Keywords: *New Historicism, French Revolution, Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo*

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