

SACRIFICE AND RESURRECTION IN A TALE OF TWO CITIES

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“To give without any reward or any notice, has a special quality of its own.” Anne Morrow Lindbergh

A Tale of Two Cities begins with famous statement: “it was the best of times; it was the worst of times...” It can be argued that the best of times foretell us about inherent goodness in some of the characters of the novel. As is the reality, that some men are engraved eternally in the hearts and minds of people. What truly sets a man apart from his lesser counterparts is his willingness to give without taking. By exemplifying various acts of sacrifice, Charles Dickens demonstrates the human gift of love that brings great hope even in the face of turbulent tempests. In the novel, two ideas of sacrifice and resurrection go hand-in-hand and are closely related throughout the story. The characters in the novel get themselves sacrificed and ‘buried alive’ but see themselves ‘recalled of life’ only during the journey of the novel.

The New-Testament of the Bible draws upon the word ‘resurrection’. The Angel spoke to the mourning women upon crucifixion of Christ: “ I know you are looking for Jesus , who was crucified, but he is here for he has come back to life again, just as he said he would. Come and see where his body was lying. And now go quickly and tell them that he had risen from the dead and that he is going to Galilee to meet them there. This is my message”.

Sydney Carton himself believes that he will never rise to a new life, yet through his willingness to face death, he raises himself to something greater. By giving Darnay back to the loving arms of Manette and Lucie, he opens a door to a long, beautiful life to them all, and the generation to come. Despite the life of waste he once lived, he gains something eternal by his sacrifice. He realizes this while speaking his last beautiful thoughts: “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have even done, it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known”.

As the immortal words run through Carton’s head while he nears the guillotine: “I am the Resurrection and the life”;(398) we are assured that Carton, by his death, was also raised to a new life, where perhaps one day he will again see those he died for. Though many in this story have shown acts of compassion through their sacrifices, no person has sacrificed more than Sydney Carton. But in order to measure truly the impact of his offering, we must examine his eventful life. Mr. Carton was, at a young age, very promising and brilliant child. However, the death of his parents quickly shattered his life. Dickens describe him as a, “man of good abilities and good emotions” but was “incapable of his own help and happiness”

(92). Though much of his brilliance had continued with him onto adulthood, he had become a drunkard who describes himself as person who “cares for no man on earth and no man care for” (85). However, after revealing his love for Lucie, he is determined to protect her and the ones she love. He declared to Lucie that he was a man who would, “give his life to keep a life you loved besides you.” (155). In the last few moments of his life, he again said the same words to Lucie. As he was about to leave Lucie’s residence he bent down and murmured something in her ear. At this point, Carton had decided that his sacrifice would not only revive the life of Darnay, but also his own. Dickens notes that though Carton “was a tired man who had wandered and struggled and got lost, [he] was determined to stick to the road and see it to its end” (318). Carton eventually disguises himself as Darnay and takes the burden of Darnay’s death sentence. As he awaits his execution, he begins to contemplate the impact in which his actions might bring about. He sees “a beautiful city, and a brilliant people rising from this abyss.” (381). Throughout the novel, Dickens repeatedly compares Carton’s sacrifice to Christ, largely due to the fact that in Carton’s death he created life. Carton sees, “that child who bore my name, winning his way up in that path of life that was once mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious by the light of his.” His sacrifice brought resurrection in both metaphorical and literal forms. He revived himself, through the future accomplishments of “the boy who bore his name”, and revived Darnay by taking his place. In short, Carton’s action accomplished nothing short of what he had perceived he would do. Sydney becomes a Christ-figure in the novel. His heart is full of unbounded love and charity for all. For the love of lucie he begs before her husband Darnay saying: “if you could endure to have such a worthless fellow, and a fellow of such indifferent reputation, coming and going at odd times, I should ask that I may be promoted to come and go as a privileged person here”(p.168)

In a humdrum existence, Sydney carton feels lucie to be Gods good angel, who has come on earth to redeem him. He confesses to lucie as a sinner confesses to a priest: “I am dissolute, I am a wastrel , I am good for nothing, I am a profligate, I am a drunkard, I am a dead man. My life is what might have been, I am one who died young” (148). The poor seamstress awaiting her execution before Sydney feels frightened and nervous. She looks at the kind face of carton radiating the light of love. She seeks support and strength from him. The girl gets inspired when she listens to the tale of selfless love and Christ gets reborn. Out of love and gratitude, she tells her brother carton: “you comfort me so much, I am so ignorant” (p.393).

John Carney believes that the resurrection theme is best illustrated in Sydney, not in Jerry Cruncher and Cly. He says:

When we look back from this to Jerry Cruncher exemplifying the resurrection theme by digging up a coffin full of paving stoves, we sense the same gap between a solid event and the attachment of symbolic import to that we felt between captain Cuttle’s sea and Paul Dombey’s.

Before facing the guillotine, carton is in a state of reverie. He deeply reflects upon the state of things to come in the distant future. He does not, in fact cannot, repose his faith in the French Revolution, an orgy of violence, hatred and mob fury. Out of the ashes of this revolution and succeeding revolution nothing good and noble may emerge. Like the phoenix’s a better world with noble people will come, but love for all.

Dr Alexander Manette sacrifices his freedom. However, this honest action results in eighteen years of imprisonment. As a result this imprisonment he loses his sense of reality and becomes schizophrenic. He symbolizes the resurrection theme shifting from divine plane to human plane. Manette's acquittal described as "recalled to life", signifies his resurrection. Sacrifices are often made to strengthen bonds, and no other bond in the novel is stronger than the one that Lucie Manette shares with her father. Indeed Lucy has gone to great lengths to ensure that their bond stays strong. In the opening chapters of the novel, Lucie in hopes that her pleas can cure her father's insanity, devotes herself to Dr. Manette whole-heartedly, disregarding any personal desires of her own. She promises her father that if "I hint to you of a home there is before us. I will be true to you with all my duty." (p.46)

The novel is full of examples of sacrifices and resurrections on both personal and psychological levels. On one hand, The French people are willing to give their lives for the cause of freedom and The British are willing to sacrifice their lives for each other to see the Christ's doctrine of self sacrifice come true.

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