Unwilling Sacrifices in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*

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Abstract This essay examines the concept of unwilling sacrifices in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. While scholars typically attend to the forms of self-sacrifice in the novel, I explore the forms of sacrifice that are compelled by the aristocratic class of pre-revolutionary France and the fraternity of republican citizens of post-revolutionary France. Dickens demonstrates how both ruling classes resort to unwilling sacrifices to preserve political power, structure society, and justify their means of existence. The proclivity for such sacrifices, according to Dickens, leads to the degeneration of society. As the figures of Monsieur the Marquis, Madame La Guillotine, and Doctor Manette exemplify, the implications of unwilling sacrifices effect each level of society, ranging from the national to the individual. Dickens shows how unwilling sacrifices turn society against itself: they upset social harmony, destroy communities, sever familial bonds, and dehumanize individuals. Dickens censures equally the aristocracy and the republican fraternity for the demands they place on the members of society to give up their livelihoods and their lives. The adverse effects of unwilling sacrifice are ultimately a warning to Dickens's contemporary English audience. Thus, Dickens emphasizes throughout *A Tale* that the forced spilling of blood is no way by which any society can be maintained or rehabilitated.
Keywords Dickens; *A Tale of Two Cities*; society; revolution; sacrifice; violence

The first explicit reference to sacrifice in *A Tale of Two Cities* occurs during the intimate conversation between Sydney Carton and Lucie Manette in her London apartment. Towards the end of this touching scene, Sydney, in a rare display of emotional affection, declares himself to be her heroic champion and confesses his desire to sacrifice himself on behalf of Lucie and her family: "It is useless to say it, I know, but it rises out of my soul. For you, and for any dear to you, I would do anything. If my career were of that better kind that there was any opportunity or capacity of sacrifice in it, I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to

you" (158-59). Thus begins the theme of heroic sacrifice that reaches its culmination when Sydney clandestinely takes the place of Charles Darnay under the deadly blade of Madame la Guillotine.

Sydney's sacrifice is heroic because the hero willfully lays down his or her life for the preservation of another's. In Western culture, such a gesture is essentially Christological.[1] The biblical conception of sacrifice is further intertwined with the theme of resurrection in the novel. In a certain sense, Sydney manifests (and reiterates) the sacrificial love of Christ, which, in turn, enables Charles Darnay to be, as Dickens puts it, "recalled to life" (12).

More so than in any other of his novels, Dickens constructs the historic narrative of *A Tale of Two Cities* in terms of dialogic pairings.[2] That is, he contrasts each of his images and themes with their inverses and opposites. Thus the concept of heroic or willing sacrifice is in a dialogic relationship — an active dialogue, in other words — with the concept of unwilling sacrifice. As the dialogic counterpart to willing sacrifice, which rehabilitates broken familial relationships and fractured societies in Dickens' work, the concept of unwilling sacrifice marks the degeneration of society on both the microcosmic and macrocosmic level.[3] This unraveling of society, engendered most precipitously by unwilling sacrifices occurs on all levels, from the national through the communal and the familial to the individual.

Dickens expresses a great deal of anxiety concerning this type of sacrifice, for he demonstrates throughout his novel how unwilling sacrifice can quickly erode the structures of society. Throughout the novel, Dickens remains focused on the social deterioration that comes from unwilling sacrifice, so much so that Bert G. Hornback asserts that "Strictly speaking, the French Revolution is the crisis of class society; but Dickens chooses to deal with it here as the crisis of all human society" (*Noah's Arkitecture* 120). In this essay, I will examine the major instances of unwilling sacrifice to show how Dickens connects each sacrifice to the degeneration of French — and, by extension, human — society.

While Countless scholars have studied the acts of violence committed on behalf of society and the self-sacrifices made by the heroes and heroines of *A Tale of Two Cities*, there has been no serious study on the ways in which Dickens renders the victims of the different ruling classes of the French state as unwilling human sacrifices. In *Dickens, Violence and the Modern State: Dreams of the Scaffold* (1995), Jeremy Tambling argues that the violence of the novel revolves around a "primal scene" of murder (131). Specifically, Tambling sees the subtext of violence in the novel as Freudian, stemming from the abuse, sins, and the eventual parricide of the symbolic father: "In the case of *A Tale*, it [the primal scene] was a rape and a murder. The rape has been committed by the Evrémonde brothers as a virtual act of incest

practiced towards the feudal daughter: this is again a sin of the father, and . . . it brings the son, Charles Darnay, very close to execution" (131). Michal Goldberg's comparative study *Carlyle and Dickens* (1972) analyzes how Dickens utilizes violence as the etiology of many of his characters, and Goldberg also notes that the material of his violence derives substantially from Carlyle's works: "Dickens's lifelong and morbid fascination with criminality and the streaks of violence which appear like vivid scars across many of the passages of the late novels point to a similar abruption with the uncontrollable element of human nature" (102). Likewise, in his oft-cited study, *Dickens and Crime* (1978; 1994), Philip Collins convincingly demonstrates how Dickens's publishing career centered on the criminal aspects of society and the inefficacy of capital punishment, which partly explains why he protested against public executions until 1868(28).[4] John R. Reed's *Dickens and Thackeray: Punishment and Forgiveness* (1993) posits that the only effective form of justice that can stabilize society in Dickens' novels comes from the realm of providence; this form of justice is ordained and dispensed by God (245). He writes, "Dickens wants a regime that combines a sense of justice with a sense of mercy, but under these requirements it is difficult to assign [human] authority to punish" (257). Reed therefore reasons that "true justice is administered finally by providence," in Dickens's world, which "does not mean that most offenses are not punished through agency, but that the guiding power for such justice is divine." (257). Harry Stone investigates in his book *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity* (1994) the ways in which pre- and post-revolution French society sacrifices and swallows whole its victims in an act of symbolic anthropophagy.[5] He contends that the meaning underlying these acts of cannibalism in the novel is "part of the way Dickens expressed the deep flow of history, the inevitable working of cause and effect, the dire calculus of ghostly sin and ghastly retribution" (162). Finally, David Rosen's article "*A Tale of Two Cities:* Theology of Revolution" (1998) examines how the sacrifices of Sydney Carton and Miss Pross are related to Christian and mythic rituals pertaining to fecundity. Rosen argues that both types of rituals propagate new life in contrast to the death of the French Revolution. Rosen asserts,

> The difference between Carton's and Miss Pross's Christ-like sacrifices, and the bloodletting exacted by the revolution is a simple one: the former work, and the latter fails. Carton's death is an effective fertility-rite in the simplest way: he not only saves the lives of Darnay and Lucie, but allows them to have more children. (178)

My conception of unwilling sacrifices — those demanded by both the French

aristocratic class and the revolutionary proletariat that enact the complete deterioration of society — derives from Michel Foucault's seminal work, *Discipline and Punish*, in which he theorizes that the body is usurped from the individual by power of the state in nineteenth-century penalizing systems. According to Foucault, the "punishment-body," which "is not the same as it was in the [sic] torture during public executions effectively," "serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property" (11). In assigning certain kinds of punishments, the state takes away ownership of one's body and uses it against him- or herself:

> The body, according to this penality, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions. Physical pain, the pain of the body itself, is no longer the constituent element of the penalty. From being an art of unbearable sensations, punishment has become an economy of suspended rights. (11)

If we credit Foucault's assertion that the body is no longer the locus of pain but a thing which is controlled by the state, then bodies in *A Tale of Two Cities*, when they are put to death, manifest society's control over them. Penalized individuals lose control over their bodies and are utilized, punished, and killed by the dictates of that state. Their bodies become sacrifices made unwillingly on behalf of the state. Indeed, Foucault's concept of the usurpation of punished bodies by the state is something he drew from culturally- and socially-oriented works like Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The first unwilling sacrifice in *A Tale* is that of a helpless child who is trampled by the careening coach of Monsieur the Marquis. The Marquis's coach itself represents the wanton destruction and death caused by the excesses of the French aristocracy as well as the ability of the aristocracy to control the bodies of the peasant class. The child's death is sudden, one for which both the child and the parent, Gaspard, are unprepared and certainly unwilling. The child is sacrificed as a lesson for the peasant classes that any impediment or any obstacle that might possible interfere with the Marquis's life of comfort and sumptuousness can be stamped out of existence. Dickens describes the carriage as an inexorable vehicle that attacks anything in its wake: "With a wild rattle and clatter, and an inhuman abandonment of consideration not easy to be understood in these days, the carriage dashed through streets and swept round corners, with women screaming before it, and men clutching each other and clutching children out of its way" (114). The key phrase in this description is "inhuman abandonment," for it reveals how Monsieur the Marquis regards those beneath his

higher social status. They are, in his mind, inhuman cattle, not worth any consideration insofar as they provide him the means to his extravagancies. Therefore, these lower strata of society are to the Marquis expendable. When the carriage stops as a result of "a sickening little jolt," Monsieur the Marquis is much more concerned about the delay than the reason for the jolt (114). He observes Gaspard running to the carriage to inspect and mourn over his mangled child. Monsieur the Marquis heartlessly inquires, "Why does he make that abominable noise? Is it his child?" (114). The Marquis lacks compassion or even pity for the child's death, nor can he tolerate the sounds of grief coming from the dead child's father; in fact it is one of the commoners, "a ragged and submissive man," who tries to remind him that, indeed, "it is a pity — yes." (114). Yet, Monsieur the Marquis is incapable of such sympathetic emotions to beings whom he views as less important than his horses: "'It is extraordinary to me,' said he, 'that you people cannot take care of yourselves and your children. One or the other of you is for ever [sic] in the way. How do I know what injury you have done my horses?" (115). Monsieur the Marquis is evidently inconvenienced by the child's death not because of its tragedy, but rather because it has broken the routine of his day. As a result of this inconvenience, he transforms this tragic accident into an execution so as to make this death a justification for the aristocracy's social status.

The Monsieur the Marquis's reluctant attempt to offer monetary recompense for the loss of Gaspard's child exposes the aristocratic perception that the working class exists (and dies) only to serve their aristocratic rulers, who are very willing, perhaps eager, to eradicate those they rule. If they are not serving, then they are obstacles that need to be removed. As Foucault notes, the nineteenth-century human body was "entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it" as the machinery of the state sees fit (138). The Marquis's perspective leads John Reed to claim fittingly that "[t]he greatest historical guilt rests with the French aristocracy. The most obvious thing about them in this novel is that they are self-indulgent, arrogant, exploitive, and unjust" (262). They behave in this manner because they are the operators of the "machinery of power." The Monsieur grudgingly pays Gaspard a single gold coin for the loss of his child — a one-to-one exchange in the Marquis's opinion (114). However, the coin is quickly thrown back into the carriage (114). This refusal of a supposedly generous offer by Marquis not only infuriates him but provokes him to articulate his real estimation of the working class:

> "You dogs!" said the Marquis, smoothly, and with an unchanged front, except as to the spots on his nose: "I would ride over any of you very willingly, and exterminate you from the earth. If I knew which rascal threw at the carriage, and if that brigand were sufficiently near it, he should be crushed under the wheels"

(117).

The Marquis would "very willingly" make unwilling sacrifices of any commoner, and, indeed, the whole working class, if necessity did not demand that he keep them alive to maintain his lavish lifestyle. Still, he can effectively decimate society one individual at a time as an example for the rest, and so the Marquis perpetuates the unbearable system of aristocratic control that allows the summary execution of the other members — or, as the Marquis calls them, the dogs — of French society. "So cowed was their condition," Dickens explains, "and so long and so hard their experience of what such a man could do to them, within the law and beyond it, that not a voice, or a hand, or even an eye, was raised" against the Marquis (117). The threat of extermination, the complete execution of the working class, is very real because such punishments were a part of their "natural mechanics" (Foucault 104). The Marquis is, in other words, inclined to make these people unwilling sacrifices, even if such a massacre of the lower class would cause the nation's infrastructure to atrophy — and to some extent, the instances of Gaspard's child have already withered the health of the state. As Rosen stresses, "The centuries of aristocratic rule have left France a wasteland. In the most palpable, physical sense, the rapacity of the nobility has emptied the Nation's coffers, and left the countryside barren" (172). Even with a weakened infrastructure, the aristocrats known no better than to depend on the blood of the peasants to continue their wasteful subsistence. On a deeper level of signification, the exchange of a coin for the death of Gaspard's son is a mock ritual of primeval human sacrifice. Precious metal is no reparation for the severed relationship of a parent and his child. By extension, then, the Marquis not only sacrifices a child but the core unit of society, the family. This unwilling sacrifice furthers the idea that the Marquis "could swallow a great many things with ease, and was by some few sullen minds supposed to be rather rapidly swallowing France" (108). The first sign of resistance incites the Marquis to enlarge the sacrifice of the day from one child to the entire working class, if only he had enough nooses.

The innocent child caught under the wheels of the Monsieur the Marquis's inexorable carriage of human abandonment becomes a synecdoche of the human sacrifices required by the aristocracy. This first unwilling sacrifice of the novel unveils the one-directional structure of society: the labor of the working class fuels the life of extravagance and indulgence of the aristocratic class. The cost for the upkeep of this kind of civilization — the civilization of the aristocratic class — requires the sweat, tears, and the very lifeblood of the working class. Hence, Stone rightly labels Gaspard's later execution as another unwilling sacrifice. When the maximum amount of unwilling sacrifices have been given by the working class, when enough blood has

been spilt, and when enough familial relationships have been unmade, the working class, overthrows its opulent executioner in a repayment made in the currency of violence. Dickens asserts that the aristocratic class had long overdrawn their accounts in this currency: "There could have been no such Revolution, if all the laws, forms, and ceremonies, had not first been so monstrously abused, that the suicidal vengeance of the Revolution was to scatter them all to the winds" (328). The abuses of the aristocratic class propagated so many unwilling sacrifices that its members incurred a disastrous debt of violence. This exchange of a life for a life is only the first of many, and as the French Revolution progresses, all the aristocratic executioners will themselves become unwilling sacrifices.

When the French Revolution begins, Dickens narrates how the working class revolutionaries require a similar kind of unwilling sacrifice from both the former ruling class and from among their own ranks in order to maintain its new, bloodthirsty civilization. Indeed, "The brutish swallowing of Gaspard, a swallowing ritualized and glorified by the state, provokes on the part of the people more brutish swallowing yet. When that orgy of retributive feasting begins, Dickens continues to suggest its cannibalistic ferocity" (Stone 171). Indeed, the revolutionary class transtormed from the working class swallows whole communities of French aristocratic families:

> The novel's willingness to represent both the aristocracy and the Revolutionaries as equal opportunity offenders does not simply repeat in short form a characteristically Romantic ambivalence about the relevance of means to ends. The bloodshed is neither the stain on otherwise admirable ideals nor their consecrating mark and is instead shown to be the predictable outcome of a situation in which membership in a social group became a mortal issue. (Stout 31)

The revolutionaries slaughter these aristocrats as unwilling sacrifices *en masse* in order to protect the integrity of their newly formed Republic.

Although the revolutionaries are a new breed of executioners, the purpose of their wholesale slaughter shares a strikingly similar justification of that of their aristocratic predecessors: the preservation of their society and its divinely ordained civilization. As Stout rightly claims, "Thus, to describe the Revolution as a conflict between political forms is to miss exactly what Dickens finds to lament in the event: that the popular national membership that the Republic instated simply repeated the categorical force of the aristocracy it overthrew" (32). Nowhere is this categorical force more concentrated than on the character of Madame la Guillotine.[6] Moreover, the revolutionary class also causes society to erode into a more primitive form through

the spectacle of public execution. Foucault maintains that "The public execution is to be understood not only as a judicial, but also a political ritual. It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested" (47). In *A Tale of Two Cities* such ceremonies hearken back to France's bloody past of massacres and genocide. Madam la Guillotine yearns for a constant stream of blood at her feet. Dickens describes this stream as connected by time:

> In the black prison of the Conciergerie the doomed of the day awaited their fate. They were in number as the weeks of the year. Fifty-two were to roll that afternoon on the life-tide of the city to the boundless everlasting sea. Before the cells were quit of them, new occupants were appointed; before their blood ran into the blood spilled yesterday, the blood that was to mingle with theirs to-morrow was already set. (360)

These executions occur both synchronically and diachronically, linking themselves to the ritualized slaughters of primitive societies. All this blood, much like Monsieur the Marquis's chocolate, is emblematic of the excess needed to maintain the prosperity of France's revolutionary society, in this instance the prosperity of the Reign of Terror, which is measured in the number of beheadings per day. As Dickens sarcastically writes,

> It was the popular theme for jests; it was the best cure for headache, it infallibly prevented hair from turning grey, it imparted a peculiar delicacy to the complexion, it was the National Razor which shaved close: who kissed La Guillotine, look through the little window and sneezed into the sack. It was the sign of the regeneration of the human race. It superseded the Cross. Models were worn on breasts from which the Cross was discarded, and it was bowed down to and believed in where the Cross was denied. (283-84)

In a kind of dark farce, Madam la Guillotine ironically represents the "regeneration of society" (Dickens 284). Such a statement is ironic because this form of regeneration depends upon death. It quickly regenerates society by lopping off one head per minute (Dickens 284). Dickens go so far as to depict Madam la Guillotine as an ancient sacrificial altar, one which replaces the Cross. At this altar, human sacrifices are offered to the highest ideal in revolutionary France — the Republic — in order to appease its wrathful fury and bloodlust. Rather than progressing civilization, Madam la Guillotine represents a digression into a primitive time when humans were needlessly sacrificed to idols for the sake of ensuring civilization's successful continuation. That

continuation, in the consciousness of the Republic, comes primarily through unwilling sacrifices. Indeed, motto of the Republic contains the idea of such a sacrifice, "liberty, equality, fraternity or death" — resounding most on that final imperative, or as Dickens puts it, "the last, much the easiest to bestow, O Guillotine" (285). The word "death" in this motto is conspicuously ambiguous, especially in terms of sacrifice: it can just as easily refer to patriotic self-sacrifice as anarchical unwilling sacrifice.

For the sake of the Republic, Madame La Guillotine's victims are encouraged to be willing sacrifices. Such an effacing ideology leads Robert Alter to remark, in his essay "The Demons of History in Dickens's *Tale*" (1987), that the citizens of the French Revolution, like the previous aristocratic rulers, have "become the slaves of impersonal forces" and "at last are made inhuman by them" (97). Thus, when Charles Darnay is arrested a second time, a patriotic soldier exclaims to Doctor Manette that all citizens should be happy to lay down their life for Madam La Guillotine and the French Republic: "'Citizen Doctor,' said the first, with his former reluctance, 'ask no more. If the Republic demands sacrifices from you, without a doubt you as a good patriot will be happy to make them. The Republic goes before all. The People is supreme'" (303).

The soldier's response implicitly recognizes that the sacrifices the Republic require will almost certainly be unwilling; therefore, the position that the Republic comes before all compels submission from those who would resist. This apotheosis of the Republic and republican ideology prescribes unquestioning submission, but, in reality, this ideology does not make such sacrifices any less unwilling because as the new operators of the machinery of power, they control the bodies of the penalized.

Turning citizens' bodies into unwilling sacrifices for the Republic dissolves any sense of communal identity.[7] A rigid national consciousness replaces any familial, or even communal, subjectivity. This national consciousness can, at a whim, ask for the life of one of its citizens. Much like Madam la Guillotine, the "Law of the Suspected" continues the degeneration of society into a superstitious and untrustworthy society, inculcated with mob-like principles. Made in "Year One of Liberty," the "Law of the Suspected" assures that no one can trust his or her neighbor and that everyone will perceive everyone else as a potential opponent to the Republic (283), for the law

> struck all security for liberty or life, and delivered over any good and innocent person to any bad and guilty one; prisons gorged with people who had committed no offence, and could obtain no hearing; these things became the established order and nature of appointed things, and seemed to be ancient usage before they were many weeks old" (283).

The society of the French Revolution resorts first to sacrifice and slaughter before seeking real solutions and answers to society's problems.

The fervor of the citizens, enhanced by a singular, aggressive, and prevailing national consciousness, brooks no argument in defense of one's self. To place anything above the Republic is treason. What the French Revolution creates, then, is not so much a judgment on the aristocratic class as much as a firestorm of death, the main purpose of which is the extermination of all opponents — or obstacles — to the Republic. To the extent that an entire social sphere of French society can be wiped out, the revolutionary class actively pursues the demolition of every aspect of France's old societal structure. Consequently, the idea of neighborhood and community, which first organized and maintained the French Revolution (for example, the neighborhood of Saint Antoine in Paris), gives way to the all-powerful and ever-deadly fraternity of republic citizens.

In fact, the final sense of community and class distinction is manifested in the remnant of the aristocracy that Charles Darnay encounters when he first enters the prison of La Force.[8] The members of the aristocratic community are now themselves unwilling sacrifices demanded as restitution for the crimes of their class as well as their inability to fit within the new regime of the French Republic. While they may be mentally alive, Dickens describes how their physical bodies have already died, sacrificed for the good of the Republic:

> Charles Darnay seemed to stand in a company of the dead. Ghosts all! The ghosts of beauty, the ghost of stateliness, the ghost of elegance, the ghost of pride, the ghost of frivolity, the ghost of wit, the ghost of youth, the ghost of age, all waiting their dismissal from the desolate shore, all turning on him eyes that were changed by the death they had died in coming here. (265)

In this room are the last representatives of the abuses of the Aristocracy that sparked the revolution. Yet, these members of the aristocratic class refuse to surrender their customs and social practices, even in prison. They do acknowledge their impending sacrifice at the altar of Madam la Guillotine, but in the meantime, they attempt to subsist within a liminal space between life and death, the perimeter of which space is formed by the walls of the prison. This community, in a matter of a few swift strokes, becomes one corporate unwilling sacrifice. When Darnay reemerges from his cell on the way to his trial, he sees that the entire chamber of his aristocratic compeers is empty and knows that they have all been executed. In a chilling scene, Dickens observes, "Every one of those had perished in the massacre; every human creature had had since cared for and parted with, had died on the scaffold" (291). Here, Dickens

steps into his narrative, as he often does, and labels the unwilling sacrifices on the Madam la Guillontine's blood-soaked altar as an actual massacre.

The unwilling sacrifices of the aristocracy and those of the revolutionary class intersect in the character of Dr. Manette, who, partially executed in terms of his identity, is greatly affected by both (Reed 264). First, moral obligation made him an unwilling sacrifice of the aristocratic class. Dickens saw "the Revolution arising not only from social causes but as a process working itself out in moral terms" (Goldberg 119). Having tended to the death of the peasant girl and her brother, who died trying to defend her honor, Doctor Manette witnessed firsthand the abuses of the Evrémonde brothers. The younger had raped the girl and the elder was seeing to the quiet concealment of this shameful affair — shameful not so much for the death of the girl but for the fact that his brother had to contest with girl's brother.[9] According to Doctor Manette's personal account from prison,

> I always observed that their pride bitterly resented the younger brother's (as I call him) having crossed swords with a peasant . . . . The only consideration that appeared really to affect the mind of either of them was the consideration that this was highly degrading to the family, and was ridiculous. (341)

With a clear sense of right and wrong, Doctor Manette endeavors to report this criminal behavior to the local authorities, even though he "expected the matter would never be heard of; but, [he] wished to relieve [his] own mind" (342). In fact, he refuses the financial compensation, the hush-up money, for his time at the Evrémonde Mansion, just like the citizens at the fountain threw back the gold coin callously proffered to Gaspard (342). However, his attempt to report the crime leads to his sudden and unfair imprisonment in the Bastille. Reed explains that "[a]s a witness to the truth, he becomes the memory they want suppressed, the secret they want hidden" (264). His incarceration erases his identity and transforms him into a mechanical shoemaker, who forgets his family and his place in society and becomes only a number ("One Hundred and Five, North Tower" (44)) for eight years. Imprisonment, especially an unjust one, erases his autonomy and his existence (Rosen 180).

The structure of prisons, as Foucault explains, is a "mechanism" that "automatizes and disindividualizes power," including the power over oneself (202-03). Only with the help of the faithful Mr. Lorry and the tender care of his own daughter, Lucie, does Doctor Manette recover his identity, though never entirely (48-53). Of course, his unjust treatment rightfully causes him to censure the aristocracy: "But, now I believe that the mark of the red cross is fatal to them, and they that they have no part in His mercies. . . . I denounce them to Heaven and to earth" (344). Because of his sincere

probity, Doctor Manette is sent to his "living grave" in the Bastille, for all intents and purposes dead to society, to his family, and to himself. In short, Doctor Manette becomes a living unwilling sacrifice. As an unwilling sacrifice to the secret pleasures and subsequent mistreatments of the aristocratic class, Doctor Manette cannot help but inveigh against their "immunities" and damn their unpunished iniquities (342).

Doctor Manette's unjust imprisonment is not the end of his sacrifice. His own vituperative report is used against the defense of his son-in-law, who is the son of the elder Evrémonde brother. Using his status as a relic to unwilling sacrifices of the aristocracy, Doctor Manetter enhances his credibility with the fickle jury at the Conciegerie, and in front of the whole mob of France, Doctor Manette is able to successfully advocate for a verdict of not guilty in the first trial and pacify the rabble. Stone describes this mob as always "rapidly grown and rapidly escalating," which is "both nightmarishly terrifying and wildly exhilarating" (171). [10] But, in the second trial, Doctor Manette's unwilling sacrifice is reconstituted as his own words are mobilized for the prosecution of Charles Darnay. The Republican jury make Doctor Manette an unwitting purveyor of unwilling sacrifice. His story so infuriates the jury (and the mob) that Charles would, without a doubt now, be sentenced to an immediate death at the foot of Madam la Guillotine: "The narrative called up the most revengeful passions of the time, and there was not a head in the nation but must have dropped before it" (344). Doctor Manette must therefore face the reality that he will have to unwillingly sacrifice his family, which he had just saved from certain death. Once again, his family — the only thing which he holds dear in his second life — will return to oblivion, along with his sense of self. Upon hearing Charles's sentence, Doctor Manette, starts to revert to the mechanical existence he had in prison and begins to think about mending shoes once again (Tambling 142). To be sure, this sacrifice of family is one that the revolutionary class tries to label as willing: first, because it is "a capital crime, to mourn for, or sympathize with, a victim of the Guillotine" (358), and second, because the complete annihilation of aristocratic families, regardless of their innocence, guilt, goodness, or wretchedness, is one of the major objectives of the Reign of Terror. The president supervising the trial of Charles Darnay remarks to Doctor Manette that the

> good physician of the Republic would deserve better still of the Republic by rooting out an obnoxious family of Aristocrats, and would doubtless feel a sacred glow and joy in making his daughter a widow and her child an orphan, there was wild excitement, patriotic fervour, not a touch of human sympathy. (345)

However, no amount of ideological apostrophizing will compel Doctor Manette

to make this sacrifice, either to abandon his son-in-law or renounce a lifetime of happiness, for his daughter and his granddaughter for the cause of the Republic. With this single character, Dickens demonstrates that the demand for unwilling sacrifices — whether they are insisted upon by force or renamed by law — can only lead to the end of familits and, by extension, the end of society.

France's revolutionary society itself becomes corrupted by its excessive insistence on death: "So used are the regular inhabitants of the houses to the spectacle, that in many windows there are no more people, and in some the occupation of the hands is not so much as suspended, while the eyes survey the faces in the tumbrils" (385). These are not the extravagancies of the aristocracy, but the thirst for blood of the people, drank up by Madam la Guillotine, which thirst has the same depleting effect on society. For Dickens, the revolutionary citizens "[s]ow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression ever again," which "will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind" (385).

Retribution is just as enervating to France as Inxurious living: both contribute to the downfall of society equally enervating, contributing to the fall of society.[11] The executors must not be the only ones who change — the nature of their sacrifices must change as well. Real change, then, is brought about by willing sacrifices like the one Sydney Carton makes on behalf of his friends Lucie Manette and Charles Darnay.[12] In Sydney's own words, "Many lives must inevitably be sacrificed," with the implicit understanding that they are to be willing sacrifices (359).

Unwilling sacrifices, as Dickens presents them, manifest the darker, more primitive aspects of humanity. Sumptuous lifestyles and oppressive legislation may superficially convert unwilling sacrifices into necessary propitiations. Such relabeling, however, does not change how they crimp the development and prosperity of society. Rather, unwilling sacrifices coarsen society, make quotidian spectacles of executions, and destroy human life as though such spectacles of death can make civilization flourish.

Dickens believed otherwise, and his novel is not so much a formal history but a commentary directed at contemporary English society (Goldberg 102).[13] It urges caution against England's making the same mistakes as those bloody instances that came to define the French Revolution. It warns his audience that requiring unwilling sacrifices from citizens will only bring about society's degeneration into a mob of thoughtless murders (Alter 96).

The dialogical structure of the novel leaves it to readers to realize that what society needs are the willing sacrifices of everyday heroes to fight for far better things and a far better place in which to live. In a certain sense, Dickens offers himself as a willing sacrifice for society as he seeks to cure English society's diseased state by

means of his creative faculties, to write not for the sake of entertainment but for the sake of preservation.

Notes

1. One of Christ's commandments to his disciples is "to love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you" (John15.12-14). For more on Sydney Carton's self-sacrifice, see Jennifer Ruth's "The Self-Sacrificing Professional: Charles Dickens's 'Hunted Down' and *A Tale of Two Cities*," 283-99 and Beth F. Herst's chapter on Carton, "The 'Dandy' Vindicated," in *The Dickens Hero: Selfhood and Alienation in the Dickens World*, 145-150.

2. Here, I am engaging with and applying Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, which originally applied to the dialogue between works of literature but which Bakhtin extended to systems of language and thought. Bakhtin's theory asserts that all aspects of language, as expressed in ideas, operate in dynamic relationships in which these aspects are contrasted with previous uses of language. In this essay, I am most concerned about the dialogic relationship of concepts of willing and unwilling sacrifices. See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*.

3. For more on Dickens's formulation of society and its urban setting in *A Tale*, see Andrew Sanders's *Dickens and the Spirit of the Age* and Myron Magnet's *Dickens and the Social Order*.

4. For more on the Carlyle's effect on Dickens's writing, see William Oddie's *Dickens and Carlyle: The Question of Influence*.

5. Stone was not the first scholar to recognize the references to cannibalism made by Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Michael Goldberg also notes that this concept derives from Carlyle's history, *The French Revolution* (1837), in which Goldberg intimates an analogical relationship between cannibalism and the voracious desire for death during the French Revolution, a desire is later individualized by Dickens (112). What Stone's study does, however, is to illustrate the full extent of this analogy in Dickens's work. For more information on the effect Carlyle's history had on *A Tale of Two Study* and other works by Dickens, see William Oddie's *Dickens and Carlyle: The Question of Influence*. For an argument that attempts to lessen Carlyle's influence on Dickens, see Gareth Stedman Jones's "The Redemptive Power of Violence? Carlyle, Marx, and Dickens."

6. Much of the details concerning the guillotine, including the transportation of prisoners such as Carton to the guillotine, derive from Carlyle (Oddie 68-70).

7. Cates Baldridge, in his article "Alternatives to Bourgeois Individualism in *A Tale of Two Cities*," elaborates on the social ideal of the Republic: "the Revolution's assertion that the group, the class, the Republic — and *not* the individual — comprise, or should comprise, the basic unit of society" (633).

8. For more on class conflict and in *A Tale*, see Albert D. Hutter, "Nation and Generation in *A Tale of Two Cities*."

9. For an analysis of the violence against the human body in *A Tale of Two Cities* see Jeremy Tambling's chapter, "*Barnaby Rudge*, *A Tale of Two Cities,* and *The Idiot*" in *Dickens, Violence, and the Modern State: Dreams of the Scaffold*, 131-146.

10. Stone elaborates on Dickens's use of mobs, "This paradoxical rendering is not surprising. Mobs were always frightening to Dickens — but they were . . . fascinating and liberating as well. Dickens's evocations of mobs usually exhibit this polarity and ambivalence" (171). Similarly, Oddie states that mobs represent one extreme of social order: "The mob, like the prison and the fireside, is a great centralising [sic] emblem, enacting in dramatic form and fusing together such Dickensian (and Victorian) preoccupations as the need for order and control; the fear of cruelty; the horror of anarchy and its converse; the belief in civilisation [sic] and the values of hearth and homes" (101).

11. As Reed asserts, "*A Tale of Two Cities* is a story of guilt and retribution, with retribution as its energizing core. While the narrative demonstrates that retribution operates at a historical as well as a personal level so that nations will eventually suffer for their crimes as individuals do, it must also denounce a retribution brought about by individuals motivated by hatred, vengeance, spite, and other unchristian emotions" (265).

12. Beth F. Herst affirms that the idea of love surrounds Carton's self-sacrifice: "Viewed in the light of his history of determined self-destruction, Carton's final sacrifice scarcely presents the sort of victory of life and love against the forces of darkness so many commentators have taken it to be" (150). For more on Dickens's belief in the power of willing sacrifice to save society, see Gareth Stedman Jones's article, "The Redemptive Power of Violence? Carlyle, Marx and Dickens."

13. John R. Reed comments that as a history, Dickens's novel is able to overlook mercy and downplay compassion, which further augments his warning to his contemporary audience: "Because history does not forgive, there is very little discussion of forgiveness, or even pardon or mercy, in this novel, which is overwhelmingly occupied with illustrating the consequences of unwise, unjust, and inhuman behavior" (257). Alter also notes that "Dickens was attempting something new, as he himself confesses in his letters, in treating this whole historical subject. The fact, on the other hand, that the general strategy of this novel differs from that of his other fiction has the effect of leaving certain regrettable conventional elements nakedly exposed which, in the more typical novels, are submerged in the great swirl of brilliant fascination that can only be called Dickensian" (93). On an archetypal level, Hornback asserts, "The French Revolution is Dickens's symbol, momentarily, for the chaotic present world, pushed to the moment of crisis. And the symbol quickly becomes myth, in Dickens's association of the Revolution as a crisis with calamity of the Deluge and the uncertain world of the Creation" (118).

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