

## Sydney Carton and “Quiet Heroism”<sup>1</sup>

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Readers of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) are left with a vivid and visual impression of the story, and of the mysterious, yet heroic character of the unforgettable Sydney Carton. That Dickens intended such an impression is clear from his famous letter to John Forster while writing the novel: “I set myself the little task of making a *picturesque* story,” he wrote,

rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express, more than they should express themselves, by dialogue. (*Letters* 9: 112)

Forster calls this new attempt “hazardous,” and even says that it “can hardly be called an entirely successful, experiment” (Forster 731). However, Dickens himself was very satisfied with this story,<sup>2</sup> and it has fascinated many readers since.

The above phrase is frequently quoted as it tells much of Dickens’s art in *A Tale of Two Cities*, and the purpose of this study is to reconsider how Dickens achieves his creative intentions in minute textual detail. The climax with which the novel ends assures us that the author contrived the whole story to attain Carton’s sacrifice. Readers agree with Michael Slater when he says,

the dominant, most persistently recurring figure in [*A Tale*], the one with which Dickens’s imagination seems to be most preoccupied [...] is that of a lover who [...] seems doomed never to have his bliss yet who must endure. (Slater 277)

Dickens attempts “the little task,” as he calls it in the letter, not only to depict the French Revolution with vividness, but to make Carton’s manner of dying impressive.<sup>3</sup> Carton’s death forms the climax of the story, and Carton reveals his virtuous nature when he attains the substituted sacrifice.

This essay analyzes Carton’s character and his death with the consideration of his process toward the end. The first section demonstrates how Sydney Carton embodies “quiet heroism” (362) at his death, which is in fact how his rival Charles Darnay hopes to meet his end when he waits to be

beheaded in his prison cell. Considering Carton as a “quiet hero,” the second section examines Carton’s recovery from profligacy and reveals his inner nature that remains hidden behind his outward carelessness. By dying with “quiet heroism,” Carton indicates his true character. Dickens therefore successfully accomplishes his intention in the characterization of Sydney Carton, whom “the story itself” expresses.

## I.

Before Carton presents himself as his substitute, Charles Darnay awaits death in his solitary cell. Beguiling the hours before the execution, he “hope[s] that he [can] meet the end with *quiet heroism*” (362, italics mine). Darnay hopes to die in a composed fashion, without any unsightly or useless struggle.

This “quiet heroism,” in fact, is embodied by his proxy, Sydney Carton. Dickens created Carton as a “quiet hero,” who dies secretly for the sake of a woman he loves. He retains his quiet character, not only at the moment of his self-sacrifice, but consistently throughout the story. Carton’s nature itself embodies “quiet heroism.”

Despite his heroic end, Sydney Carton first appears in the novel as a “reckless” (79) and “insolent” (81) profligate. He seems more disreputable when he is contrasted with the commendable and “well-looking” (65) Charles Darnay, who is his “Double” (87).

Obscurity signifies secrecy in this novel. The characters are brought forth from obscurity to be interwoven in the story. Arriving in Dover, Mr Lorry comes out of the mail coach and “its obscurity” (19); when he goes to see Lucie in her apartment, she awaits him also in the “obscurity” “so difficult to penetrate” (23); Doctor Manette’s garret in Paris is alike “dim and dark” (41), and he is found in “obscurity” (41). As the story proceeds, they are brought in sight of people, and their mutual

relationships and private affairs come to be revealed in public. The same thing happens with Charles Darnay, though he is placed at the center of people's attention from the beginning. He is later encompassed by the "universal watchfulness" (255), and his birth and reason for emigration are publicly disclosed despite his will.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, Sydney Carton remains in an "obscure corner" (347) until the end of the story. Neither his birth nor past is fully made known, and the reason and the process of his corruption remain hidden. They are only suggested in his vague words. Why does he "[resign] himself to let [the blight] eat him away" (95) when he is still in the prime of life? What does he mean by "the abandoned fight" (157)? It is hinted in his expression, "I am like one who died young" (156), that something that led him to profligacy and corruption has taken place in the past. However, he mentions no more about them except that he didn't have "any luck" (91).

The mysteriousness in Sydney Carton derives from this secrecy. Richard Wardour in *The Frozen Deep* and Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*, although they both have the same starting point as antiheroes, are distinguished in this aspect.<sup>5</sup> The word "luck" used by Carton, quoted above, is also used by Wardour, but in a very different context. Wardour declares his disappointment and his will to avenge in his speech. When he says, "I had met with a disappointment which had broken me for life" (Brannan 133), he apparently means his loss of love by the word "disappointment." It is evident to all the spectators of the play that when Wardour says, "I've done with luck" (Brannan 130), he talks of losing Clara. In Carton's dialogue, however, the substance of what he means by "luck" remains ambiguous. There is no knowing what he had unluckily lost. When he talks about Charles Darnay, he says, "I thought I should have been much the same sort of fellow, if I had had any luck" (91), but the cause for his corruption remains unclear in the book.

In the Prologue to *The Frozen Deep* written by Dickens, there is the following passage: "But, that the secrets of the vast Profound / Within us, an exploring hand may sound" (Brannan 97). The play uncovers Clara's secret fear, by making her confess it to Lucy in Act I, and also Wardour's secret

vengeful aim, by making him tell it to Crayford in Act II. The spectators know that the reason for Wardour's corruption originates in his disappointment in love. Secrets in *The Frozen Deep* are sought for and disclosed as the play proceeds, as Dickens says in the Prologue.

On the other hand, Carton is shadowy and "unsubstantial" (216) till the end. Although he first attracts people's attention at the Old Bailey for a moment, he "silently" (85) retreats to "where [the wall's] shadow [is] darkest" (85) soon after the trial, and stays there as a secretive character. When he arrives in Paris following Lucie and Doctor Manette, his arrival is merely implied mystifyingly, and neither his figure nor voice is shown, to say nothing of his name: "Who could that be with Mr. Lorry - the owner of the riding-coat upon the chair - who must not be seen?" (290). He then appears "as negligently as he might have stood at the Old Bailey itself" (309), and he obstinately attaches himself to the "shadow" (354), even after he decides on his sacrifice. Carton's consistent attachment to the darkness demonstrates his abandonment of self-expression. Therefore we will never know of his "secret mind" (310), until he translates it into action.

Carton's quiet and secretive character presents an interesting contrast to the noisy character of Jerry Cruncher. When Jerry first comes into the story, we do not see his figure but only hear his "voice" (11). From the beginning, Jerry is a very vociferous character. He habitually talks to himself, calling his own name, and always speaks very rowdily to Mrs Cruncher. Jerry is one of the characters who "talk themselves alive" (Wagenknecht 123) as Edward Wagenknecht describes Dickensian characters. He, in the end, with his "openness of character" (318), confesses his blameworthy secret wholly to Mr Lorry. This contrasts amazingly with Carton's final attitude when he dies secretly, not revealing his brave intention to anyone.

Carton is a taciturn character from the beginning. When he comes into the story for the first time, he is anonymous: "another wigged gentleman with his hands in his pockets, whose whole attention [...] seem[s] to be concentrated on the ceiling of the court" (64). He remains in this attitude

throughout the trial, and his indifference contrasts clearly with the strong curiosity of people around him, so eager to “see every inch of” (65) the prisoner. His reticence is conspicuous in the loquaciousness around him. The passage describing the trial consists of long arraignments spoken by the Attorney-General. His eloquence is followed by the Solicitor-General’s examination of John Barsad, and the questions put by Stryver. Then the statement is made by Roger Cly, and after that, the Attorney-General calls other witnesses one by one: Mr Lorry, Lucie, and Doctor Manette. The whole passage is composed of dialogues, and the voices and whispers of the spectators are figuratively expressed as the “buzz,” “as if a cloud of great blue-flies were swarming about the prisoner” (69). Amid all this, Carton remains voiceless. It is when Lucie faints, that Carton raises his voice for the first time.

Carton’s taciturnity and silence portends his quiet sacrifice.

Philip Collins and Ruth Glancy affirm that the germ of *A Tale of Two Cities* can be traced back to a Christmas story, written in 1846, called *The Battle of Life*. Glancy states that “the novel [*A Tale of Two Cities*] was in some ways a rewriting of the Christmas book” (Glancy 19), and regards “The Wreck of the Golden Mary” (1856) and “The Perils of Certain English Prisoners” (1857) also as the origins of *A Tale* with heroic characters. Yet, there is a specific point in the novel that stands alone in all the stories of self-sacrifice. That is the theme of “quiet heroism,” embodied in Carton, and it characterizes him as the most memorable hero of all.

In *The Battle of Life*, Marion confesses at the end how she determined to sacrifice herself for her beloved sister. Marion vanishes suddenly, but she returns later and gives an account of her action directly to her sister Grace. In “The Wreck of the Golden Mary,” the main narrator is Captain Ravender, the hero, who gives an eloquent description of himself, though he says that he is not “in the habit of holding forth about number one” (“The Wreck” 117). He and the other narrator, John Steadiman, fully demonstrate the Captain’s heroic nature. Marion and Captain Ravender are

conventional heroes. They are kind and generous, and they sufficiently explain their inner feelings and motives for their actions.

Antiheroes like Gill Davis and Richard Wardour also describe their own deeds.<sup>6</sup> In “The Perils of Certain English Prisoners,” Gill Davis, the narrator and the hero, improves himself through his love, though unrequited, for Miss Marion Maryon, who marries another man socially suitable to her. In the narrative, Davis gives an account of his birth and growth, and expresses his feelings openly, saying “I loved her’,” and even confessing “I suffered agony – agony” (“The Perils” 181). Due to his illiteracy, furthermore, Miss Maryon dictates his story. As a result, Davis conveys his full inner emotions directly to his loved one. Richard Wardour in *The Frozen Deep* also explains, at the last moment of his life, how he struggled with his dilemma, and speaks his last words directly to Clara:

“Should I have been strong enough to save him, if I could have forgotten you? [...] Nearer, Clara – I want to look my last at *you*. My sister, Clara! – Kiss me, sister, kiss me before I die!” (Brannan 160)

Sydney Carton, however, does not proclaim his inner motives, determination, or mental conflict. His attitude is in marked contrast to that of Wardour, who wishes to look at Clara at the last moment of his life. Carton says,

‘Don’t speak of me to her. As I said to you when I first came, I had better not see her. I can put my hand out to do any little helpful work for her that my hand can find to do, without that.’ (321)

He never sees Lucie again, and drives her and her family out of Paris.

The reticence of Carton’s character is manifest at a glance when we compare it to the eloquence of Charles Darnay in their confessions of love. When Darnay makes a clean breast of his love for Lucie to Doctor Manette, he confides his “fervent admiration, true homage and deep love” (137) and says, “I love your daughter fondly, dearly, disinterestedly, devotedly” (137). Darnay’s eloquent and

passionate language occupies a whole paragraph, and he shows great eagerness to gain Lucie. He repeats “I love her” (139), and emphasizing with “I know” (138) and “I understand” (140), he appeals for Doctor Manette’s favor.

Carton, on the other hand, confesses his love to Lucie when she is alone at home. In contrast to the prolix speech of Darnay, his words are far from enthusiastic. He says, “I know very well that you can have no tenderness for me; I ask for none; I am even thankful that it cannot be” (156). He even tells her it is due to “the weakness” (157) in his heart that he wishes her “to know” (157) his feelings. This is the only moment when he gives vent to his emotions. After that, “he never mention[s] Lucie’s name” (357). At the Paris trial, Lucie is just identified as “she” (327).

Awaiting death in prison, Darnay writes “a long letter” (361) to Lucie. He entreats her, beseeches her, and adjures her to care for her father, and gives her his love and blessing. He also writes to Doctor Manette and Mr Lorry. Carton, by contrast, only leaves a short and an imperfect letter.

There is another quiet and enduring hero in the novel, and that is Doctor Manette. The mysteriousness hanging over his past and his selfless love for Lucie accords with those of Carton. He suffers flashbacks of the agony, which he experienced in the prison, related to his beloved daughter’s husband, Charles Darnay, but he keeps the relationship between them a secret. He is a very quiet character as his domicile demonstrates; he lives in “quiet lodgings [...] in a quiet street-corner not far from Soho-square” (95). The mystery of his past is not betrayed until it is forcibly disclosed by the reading of his hidden paper, which is perused in the “dead silence and stillness” (330) of the court. This silence among the auditors makes an effective foil to the fiery eloquence and power of speech in the Doctor’s paper. In his statement, Doctor Manette forcefully indicts the Evrémonde family and reveals the core of the novel. He is driven to eloquence against his will, and this exposure violates Doctor Manette’s quietude and deprives him of his heroic quality; later, he experiences his nervous

breakdown in despair.

Doctor Manette's document contrasts with Carton's last mystifying message. Carton leaves nothing behind, except for his short, unfinished letter to Lucie, and that dictated by Darnay in the prison. The dictation signifies indirectness. His almost negligent letter is antipodal to Doctor Manette's fervent writing with "scrapings of soot and charcoal" "mixed with blood" (331), and also to Darnay's emotional farewell note. Carton does not even write his last letter to tell Lucie that he was dying for her sake. He does not open his heart twice. Thus, Carton sacrifices himself quietly in the end, without appealing to Lucie, or to anybody else, to appreciate his heroic deed. In fear of being discovered, he cuts the conversation with the seamstress short, without telling her his name. Carton meets his end quietly and anonymously, with determination and confidence. This is Carton's "quiet heroism."

## II.

Sydney Carton is a man of few words, and he does not reveal his character in conversation. Therefore, our judgement of him depends a lot on actions. However, though he seems to persist in conducting himself with carelessness and recklessness throughout the novel, textual examination discloses Carton's inconstancy.

The word "outwardly" (158) repeated in the description of Carton implies that profligate Carton is his "outward" (216) self, and that his inner and outer characters contradict each other. Charles Darnay indicates this point after the Old Bailey trial, when Carton acts very insolently to him. When Carton asks him, "Do you think I particularly like you?," Darnay comments, "[y]ou have acted as you do; but I don't think you do" (88). Carton's words are often at variance with his action.

The inconsistency in Carton displays the duality of his character. As John R. Reed asserts, "Carton has only one ostensible identity, but is, nonetheless, two men" (Reed 307), what he outwardly

shows, profligacy, corruption, and carelessness, is only the bad side of him; he also has a “better side” (321). In fact, it is implied from the beginning that he has a good nature hidden behind. He shows it when he saves Darnay at the Old Bailey and works hard throughout the night at Stryver’s house. He says to Mr Lorry, “‘I have no business’,” and even if Mr Lorry suggests that if he had, he “‘would attend to it’” (86), he denies it completely; he calls himself a “‘disappointed drudge’” (89). These words of his, however, contradict his action. As a matter of fact, he works “‘double tides’” (142) for many nights, and his “‘anxious gravity’” (92) proves his devotion to his work. Though Carton submits himself to being Stryver’s jackal, he, in reality, has enough earnestness in his profession, as he imagines Lucie’s child bearing his name and becoming “‘a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was [his]’” (390). In spite of his words to Mr Lorry, he does care about his business, just like the other male characters in the novel.

Moreover, when he calls Lucie “‘a golden-haired doll’” (94), it is evident that he does not mean what he says. Carton discloses his true feelings behind his ostensible character. His whole reckless behaviour is deceitful.

In his depravity, Carton consigns his natural goodness to oblivion. As suggested previously, he is not a natural villain. Carton’s change for the better, therefore, is practically an act of recollecting his hidden goodness. As he changes, he comes to remember and regain his “‘better side.’” The process takes him back to his past when he was benign and good.

Accordingly, Carton’s improvement corresponds with the recovery of his past. Various parts in the text suggest that his life before the depravity, when he was “‘a youth of great promise’” (325), was marked with love, hope, and goodness. He has learned, however, to hate, as he “‘hate[s]’” (89) Darnay at first sight, to despair, and to corrupt. He resigns himself to the unsatisfying status quo, and this resignation originates in his incapability in putting out of his mind an irrevocable past occurrence, not disclosed in the story, that has led him to his present state. As Stryver ambiguously calls him “‘Memory’” (91), Carton has a retentive memory which keeps recalling to him his past offence. He

complains, “[t]he curse of those [drunken] occasions is heavy upon me, for I always remember them” (214-15). Admitting that “oblivion is not so easy to [him]” (215), he is not able to suppress bitter and regretful memories. Even when he recalls his boyhood, it is the negative remembrance of himself as “[t]he same Sydney, with the same luck” (93).<sup>7</sup>

Carton regains memories of his benign past through his love for Lucie Manette. The emotion of love, which has existed in him before, is brought back when he sees Lucie, and it stimulates and revives his other virtues. Lucie is to Carton, as to her father, “the golden thread that unite[s] him to a Past beyond his misery, and to a Present beyond his misery” (83). He confides to Lucie that she stirs “old shadows that [he] thought had died out of [him]” and “old voices impelling [him] upward, that [he] thought were silent for ever” (157). They are the remains of his past goodness, and by being reminded of them, he gains strength to exert himself for his aim and end.

Carton’s recovery of his virtuous past is shown in his conversation with Mr Lorry. When Mr Lorry hears of Darnay’s second imprisonment and learns that he is almost certainly going to be executed, he sinks into deep despondency and distress. Carton, seeing this, shows a strong sympathy for him and says, “I could not see my father weep, and sit by, careless” (320). When we remember that Carton once told Darnay, “I care for no man on earth, and no man on earth cares for me” (89), and that carelessness has been the basic defect in Carton’s character, we observe his evident improvement in these words of his.

Evoking the recollection of his father who died long before, he also calls to mind the sympathy and compassion that he had in those days. As he talks with Mr Lorry, he recurs to his distant past. Albert Hutter remarks that in this scene, Carton regains the “paternal figure” (Hutter 451) in Mr Lorry. What Carton actually regains, however, is his own past figure, before he became a profligate. It is patently obvious that Carton experiences the return to the past when he declares approbation of Mr Lorry’s words:

[...] as I draw closer and closer to the end, I travel in the circle, nearer and nearer to the beginning. It seems to be one of the kind smoothings and preparings of the way. My heart is touched now, by many remembrances that had long fallen asleep, of my pretty young mother (and I so old!), and by many associations of the days when what we call the World was not so real with me, and my faults were not confirmed in me.’ (323)

When Carton exclaims, ““I understand the feeling!”” (323), in response to this remark, he admits that he himself feels as if he is going back to the past, while he has secretly made up his mind to sacrifice himself and therefore knows that his life is drawing near to its end. He remembers his mother’s death and his father’s funeral, and the words he heard then arise in his mind:

‘I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.’ (325)

Carton’s recovery of the past is synchronized with his recovery of sight. As he retrieves his past benign self, he simultaneously recognizes his present blindness. With the sense of sight that he recovers through his improvement, he sees a prophetic vision at the moment of his death.

As many critics comment, there are numerous eye-motifs in *A Tale of Two Cities*.<sup>8</sup> The internal alterations of reticent Carton are shown not through his words but through his optical activities, especially through the changes in his view. Examining Carton’s night walk scenes in chronological order will demonstrate his transformation. The scenes are composed of his sight, and they reflect his state of mind. His inner changes are involved in the varying depictions of his perspective. By measuring the differences between them, we notice the three phases he passes through.

The first scene, after Carton leaves Stryver’s house on the day of Darnay’s Old Bailey trial, is described as follows:

When he got out of the house, the air was cold and sad, the dull sky overcast, the river dark and dim, the whole scene like *a lifeless desert*. [...] Waste forces within him, and *a*

*desert* all around, this man stood still on his way across a silent terrace, and saw for a moment, lying in the *wilderness* before him, a mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial, and perseverance. In the fair city of this vision, there were airy galleries from which the loves and graces looked upon him, gardens in which the fruits of life hung ripening, waters of Hope that sparkled in his sight. A moment, and it was gone. (95, italics mine)

Ruth Glancy suggests that this scene shows Carton's "potential of rebirth" (Glancy 82). Yet, what is strongly emphasized here is barrenness and despair. For Carton, who leads a "wasted" (156) life, even the great city of London is nothing but a barren and sterile desert. His eyes will not perceive things as real but merely imaginary; and the illusion disappears at once.

In the next nocturnal scene, he loiters around Lucie's house, alone:

And yet *he did care* something for the streets that environed that house, and for the senseless stones that made their pavements. [...] many a dreary daybreak revealed his *solitary* figure lingering there [...] when the first beams of the sun brought into strong relief, *removed* beauties of architecture in spires of churches and lofty buildings, as perhaps the quiet time brought some sense of better things, else forgotten and *unattainable*, into his mind. (155, italics mine)

This is the first indication of Carton's inner improvement: he overcomes his primary defect, his carelessness. It foreshadows his words to Mr Lorry, quoted above.<sup>9</sup> Carton's recklessness over his surroundings is got rid of as he comes to care about her. He even cares for the streets and the inanimate stones related to her, however slightly.

Still, Carton is in utter solitude. The break of day is not welcomed. It brings him the strong images of beauty, loftiness, and aspiration, based, particularly, on the sight of the "spires" pointing upward, but they are discouragingly beyond his reach. He sees substantial and real things now, but they are yet limited to those in the far distance, even though his good nature arises within him now and

then.

After making arrangements for his last deed, he saunters along the streets of Paris, again at night.

He responds to the scene:

*With a solemn interest* in the lighted windows where the people were going to rest[...];  
*with a solemn interest* in the whole life and death of the city settling down to its short  
nightly pause in fury; Sydney Carton crossed the Seine again for the lighter streets. [...] A  
trading-boat, with a sail of the softened colour of a dead leaf, then glided into his view,  
floated by him, and died away. As its silent track in the water disappeared, the prayer  
that had broken up out of his heart for a merciful consideration of all his poor *blindnesses*  
and errors, ended in the words, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' (326-27, italics  
mine)

In the paragraphs encompassing my quotation, Carton's eyes light on numerous and various objects. When we compare this section with that of his first nocturnal walk in London, in which he sees only the desert-like barrenness, his change is obvious. He sees images fundamentally connected with death, yet he, undeniably, no longer finds the dwellings of people sterile. He cares for people resting in the house, and he is attentive to his social milieu. He permanently dismisses his carelessness, when he carries the little girl across the street, and the haunting refrain, "I am the resurrection and the life" (325), diminishes his solitude. The sympathy he feels towards the "eddy" (327) in the stream seems to verify his capacity of attachment for the world.

The "glorious sun" (327) regains its brightness. In contrast to the fragile phantom of a fair city he saw in London, which disappeared in an instant, he now sees a bridge of light "span the air between him and the sun" (327). This confirms his belief and confidence in the justness of his determination.

In this scene, he finally recognizes his "blindness." He becomes aware of his ignorance, and he recovers his sense of sight. This substantial progress steers him to his last soliloquy, in which he repeats "I see" (389).

In the Paris court where Charles Darnay is to be judged, Carton again hides himself in an “obscure corner” (327). Nevertheless, he keeps his eyes on Lucie and Darnay. In the Old Bailey, when Darnay had been put to the bar, he retained his gaze at the ceiling while everybody else stared at the prisoner: “Everybody present, except the one wigged gentleman who looked at the ceiling, stared at him” (64). In Paris, however, the narrator puts stress on the “[e]very eye” (328) turning to the jury, the judges, and the crowd, firmly intent on the trial. The “[e]very eye” here includes Carton’s eyes.

Carton is beheaded without saying anything. However, the narrator expresses Carton’s inner feelings, in the subjunctive mood and with the preliminary remark: “[i]f he had given any utterance to his [thoughts], and they were prophetic, they would have been these” (389). In the soliloquy thus given, Carton counts up what is shown in his sight. He is bestowed with prophetic vision, and with the repetition of “I see” (389), reveals the future of each character:

*‘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.*

*‘I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see Her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name. [...]’* (389, italics mine)

Carton, awakened to his past faults and weakness, now possesses clear eyesight. The prophetic vision, in which he enumerates things with calmness, is full of certainty. The view of the “beautiful city” (389) that lay before him is no more momentary as it once had been in his eyes.

Sydney Carton, in attaining the “sublime” (389) deed, detaches himself from the world, and reaches the loftiness that once seemed unattainable. Yet, the ending of the book, the last soliloquy showing Carton’s prophetic vision, is told in the subjunctive mood by the narrator, which implies that they are not really spoken by Carton himself. Carton, in fact, dies quietly, without uttering a word, only repeating the prayer in his head. His final quietude is to be accounted for in relation to Dickens’s aim to let Carton embody “quiet heroism” (362).

Dickens in fact characterized Carton as a quiet hero, by making him a taciturn character with less dialogue, and letting him die secretly in self-sacrifice for the happiness of a woman he loves. In this context, the “quiet heroism” is embodied in Carton’s nature itself.

Dickens designed Sydney Carton to be a secret hero. Therefore, although this book culminates in his self-sacrifice, Dickens does not disclose Carton’s inner thoughts and emotions. He does not give Carton the chance of accounting for his true quality. Yet, by the end of the novel, readers are convinced that he possesses a virtuous nature behind his profligacy and carelessness. His past history and present behaviour remain mysterious, but there is no need to explain his natural goodness in words since his heroic attitude works as its adequate proof, as he takes the seamstress’s hands and encourages her in the tumbril, and actually dies in the end for Charles Darnay. When Dickens intended to reveal the nature of a character in the process of the story, he made the story itself show convincingly that Carton has a nature fundamentally good.

As the narrator says that “an emotion of the mind will express itself through any covering of the body” (65), Dickens believed that true nature will express itself of its own accord. Thus Dickens’s aim was to show the heroic quality of a man not through dialogue but through his behaviour and action; and he succeeded in attaining it in the character literally dying with “quiet heroism.”

The last line of this book is very well-known:

‘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.’ (390)

With this last sentence, we know enough about Carton. Considering his character, we believe that this last vent for his emotions is not the narrator’s mere fancy, but the true and honest feelings of our hero, Sydney Carton.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was first presented at the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the English Literary Society of Japan: Kansai Branch, Osaka University, Osaka, on December 16, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Dickens wrote in his letter to Philocles Régnier, “I hope it is the best story I have written” (*Letters* 9: 132).

<sup>3</sup> John Forster writes, “Dickens speaks of his design to make impressive the dignity of Carton’s death, and in this he succeeded perhaps even beyond his expectation” (Forster 732).

<sup>4</sup> Forster comments that this is a novel,

in which the domestic life of a few simple private people is [...] knitted and interwoven with the outbreak of a terrible public event. (Forster 732)

<sup>5</sup> In the preface of *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens wrote: “When I was acting, with my children and friends, in Mr WILKIE COLLINS’s drama of *The Frozen Deep*, I first conceived the main idea of this story.” (397)

Two years before he started to write *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens collaborated with Wilkie Collins on the play, *The Frozen Deep*. In the performance, Dickens acted the principal role of Richard Wardour, who saves his rival, Frank Aldersley, in the end. Although Wardour at first plans to murder Frank, who is the fiancé of Clara Burnham, whom he also loves, he eventually saves him at the sacrifice of his own life. Robert Louis Brannan, in his close examination of Dickens’s participation in the play not only in the performance but also in the script writing, states that Wardour in *The Frozen Deep* has the characteristics of the “natural” (Brannan 84) hero, for whom Dickens had a strong sympathy at the time. Richard Wardour is regarded in general as the prototype of Sydney Carton.

<sup>6</sup> Critics who find the prototypes of Sydney Carton in Gill Davis and Richard Wardour include Philip Collins, Michael Slater, and Ruth Glancy.

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Collins states that Doctor Manette is one of the “characters imprisoned in their own past” (Collins 345) in Dickens’s novels. I consider that Sydney Carton, resigned to his present condition, is also a character, in a way, haunted by his own past.

<sup>8</sup> They include Albert Hutter, Garrett Stewart, and Mark M. Hennelly.

<sup>9</sup> ““I could not see my father weep, and sit by, careless”” (320)

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