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Olivia Huizar Conner  
*Azusa Pacific University*

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# “Recalled to Life”: Unearthing the Resurrectional Structure in *A Tale of Two Cities*

Olivia Huizar Conner

*Azusa Pacific University*

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## **Abstract**

For many readers, *A Tale of Two Cities* is a story about the best of times, the worst of times, and the French Revolution. Beneath the surface of the novel, however, there lies another tale—a tale of resurrection. Following the scholarship of Linda M. Lewis in *Dickens, His Parables, and His Reader*, this paper offers an in-depth analysis of Charles Dickens’s use of resurrectional motifs in *A Tale* in order to unearth the resurrectional structure hidden within the work.

Through the lens of structural analysis and biblical allegory, this paper reveals that the climax and final salvific act of the novel are far greater than the result of one character’s actions—they are the culmination of a narrative driven by resurrection. From the foreshadowed introduction of Doctor Manette with the words “Recalled to Life” to Sydney Carton’s final moments quoting, “I am the resurrection and the life,” resurrection is much more than something that happens to the tragic hero at the end of the novel—it is a motivational force that slowly crescendos from the beginning to the ending of the storyline.

*Keywords:* *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens, Resurrection, Structure, Motifs

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## **Introduction**

For many readers, *A Tale of Two Cities* is a story about the best of times, the worst of times, and the French Revolution. Beneath the surface of the novel, however, there lies another tale. Throughout *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens uses motifs such as “Recalled to Life,” “I am the resurrection and the life,” and the grave-robbing Resurrection-Man to point readers to the underlying theme of resurrection within the narrative. Tracing these motifs throughout the course of the novel allows readers to unearth the hidden resurrectional structure in *A Tale* and understand how resurrection shapes the novel’s storyline, action, and ending. Uncovering the resurrectional structure in *A Tale of Two Cities* not only informs the audience of how resurrectional themes drive the narrative, but it also allows readers to fully understand the significance of the novel’s sacrificial ending. A structural reading of the novel reveals that the climax and final salvific act of the novel are far greater than the result of one character’s actions—they are the culmination of a narrative driven by resurrection.

### **Introducing Resurrectional Motifs**

The hidden resurrectional structure in *A Tale* is largely comprised of resurrectional motifs woven throughout the novel. These motifs are specific, repeated phrases or situations that are tied to certain characters. The first motif is the phrase “Recalled to Life,” which is connected to Doctor Manette and Charles Darnay. The second motif is Jerry Cruncher’s dubious occupation as a Victorian-era Resurrection-Man. The third motif is Sydney Carton’s repetition of the biblical phrase, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Through the repetition of each motif, characters weave resurrection into the very fabric of the novel. Dickens uses these motifs to link the theme of resurrection to the plot, and he thus creates an underlying narrative of resurrection through the individual stories told within *A Tale*.

**Book the First: Recalled to Life**

<u>BOOK I - RECALLED TO LIFE</u>			
<u>INTRO</u>	<u>RISING ACTION</u>	<u>CLIMAX</u>	<u>FALLING ACTION ± CONCLUSION</u>
"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."	<b>Mysterious letter; "Recalled to Life"</b>	Dr. Manette introduced as "The Shoemaker"	Dr. Manette, Lucie, and Mr. Lorry Leave France; Return to England
Similarities Between England + France	Mr. Lorry + Lucie Introduced	<b>Doctor Manette is "Recalled to Life"</b>	
	French Peasants Introduced		

Figure 1: Abridged Plot Outline of Book I

Book I is set in the year 1775, which is fourteen years prior to the start of the French Revolution. The first book of *A Tale* introduces both English and French society and the characters from both countries. It also introduces the first resurrectional motif of the novel, "Recalled to Life." This portion of *A Tale* begins with a famous commentary on the time period:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all doing direct the other way.<sup>1</sup>

Though this quote shows explicit paradoxes, it also underlines that England and France are in many ways one and the same. In both England and France, it was the best of times; in both England and France, it was the worst of times. The opening comparison leads into a commentary on social structure where the narrator compares the monarchs reigning on the

<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, first edition, ed. Robert Douglas Fairhurst (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020), 9.

thrones of England and France. He explains, “There were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face on the throne of England; there were a king with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face on the throne of France.”<sup>2</sup> Since the monarchs of England and France are depicted in the same sentence, readers are forced to envision the sociopolitical structures of both countries alongside one another. This comparison nudges readers toward the conclusion that there are far more similarities between the two countries than a proud English audience may care to believe.

After his famous opening, Dickens begins his story in England with a dark and brooding scene surrounding the Dover mail carriage. Jarvis Lorry, one of the passengers, receives a mysterious note from the messenger Jerry Cruncher; Mr. Lorry offers Cruncher the mysterious reply, “Recalled to Life.”<sup>3</sup> This carriage scene provides the first introduction of a resurrectional motif in the novel, and it causes the audience to anticipate the resurrection of an unknown character later in the work. After the “Recalled to Life” motif has been established, Mr. Lorry stops in Dover to pick up his ward, a young woman named Lucie Manette, before continuing on his journey to France. As the pair crosses the English Channel into Calais, the novel transitions its focus from England to France.

In the rising action of Book I, the French class system is illustrated through its poorest members. These peasants live in constant hunger and want. The narrator illustrates, “The children had ancient faces and grave voices; and upon them, and upon the grown faces, and

<sup>2</sup> Dickens, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Dickens, 15.

ploughed into every furrow of age and coming up afresh, was the sign, Hunger. It was prevalent everywhere.”<sup>4</sup> Alongside the peasants, French Revolutionaries are portrayed through the characters Monsieur and Madame Defarge. Monsieur Defarge, in a conversation with fellow Revolutionaries, draws attention to an ex-prisoner living in a small garret room and working as a shoemaker. Soon afterward, Mr. Lorry and Lucie join Monsieur Defarge to meet this mysterious man. This introduction of the French characters is important because it introduces the brewing tensions and dire conditions that ultimately led to the French Revolution.

The climax of Book I occurs during Mr. Lorry and Lucie’s encounter with the mysterious shoemaker. After a brief moment of suspense, the reader learns that the shoemaker is in fact Lucie Manette’s long-lost father, Doctor Alexandre Manette, who was believed to be dead. This man who was presumed dead was “Recalled to Life” upon being reunited with his daughter. This reunion of father and daughter fulfills the expectations of revival brought about by the “Recalled to Life” message. Doctor Manette is discovered alive, and he is able to return to his position as a father and family man. After Lucie and her father are reunited, the falling action and conclusion take place as the entourage leaves France and returns home to England.

### **Motif I: “Recalled to Life”**

Book I is named after the first resurrectional motif in the story—“Recalled to Life.” Even before the name Doctor Alexandre Manette is mentioned in the novel, a single phrase is presented in connection with his character: “Recalled to Life.”<sup>5</sup> Though the audience does not

<sup>4</sup> Dickens, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Dickens, 15.

yet know of the doctor’s long prison sentence, Dickens foreshadows the character’s resurrection through this phrase. This incorporation of the “Recalled to Life” motif highlights the importance of resurrection in Doctor Manette’s character arc. Though physically alive, Doctor Manette is described as but a ghost of a man who had “so entirely . . . lost the life and resonance of a human voice, that it affected the senses like a once beautiful color, faded away into a poor and weak stain.”<sup>6</sup> It is only through the reintroduction of his daughter, Lucie, into his life that Doctor Manette becomes more than a withering figure left for dead. As a result of Lucie’s love, he is revived from a decaying political prisoner to a skilled doctor and beloved father.

**Book the Second: The Golden Thread**

<u>BOOK II - THE GOLDEN THREAD</u>			
<u>INTRO</u>	<u>RISING ACTION</u>	<u>CLIMAX</u>	<u>FALLING ACTION + CONCLUSION</u>
Tellson’s Bank + England Comparison	<b>Darnay Acquitted  (“Recalled to Life”)</b>	Lucie + Charles Darnay Marry	Storming of the Bastille
Trial Scene 1 (Old Bailey)	<b>Jerry Cruncher as  “Resurrection Man”</b>	Darnay’s True Identity Revealed	French Revolution Begins
			Darnay Returns to France

Figure 2: Abridged Plot Outline of Book II

Book II is significant to the novel’s main structure as it focuses on the portrayal of English life and society. In terms of motivic structure, this portion of *A Tale* builds upon the first resurrectional motif, “Recalled to Life” while developing a second motif through the character

<sup>6</sup> Dickens, 36.

of Jerry Cruncher, the Resurrection-Man. This part of the novel takes place beginning in 1780—five years after the conclusion of the previous book and nine years prior to the start of the French Revolution.

The second book begins with a social commentary on England by comparing it to the institution of Tellson's Bank, which has offices in both England and France. The narrator describes the English branch of Tellson's Bank as an "old-fashioned" bulwark of tradition that was "proud of its smallness, proud of its darkness, proud of its ugliness, proud of its incommodiousness."<sup>7</sup> After setting a critical tone, the focus quickly shifts to England, and the narrator continues, "In this respect the House was on par with the Country; which did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable, but were only the more respectable."<sup>8</sup> This snide comment directly mocks rigid English traditionalism, and the scene as a whole criticizes England's reluctance to change outdated social structures.

After this scene, the characters Charles Darnay and Sydney Carton are introduced to the story through an English trial for treason, which is a matter of life and death. During this trial, Charles Darnay is acquitted of his charges on the grounds of reasonable doubt—he looks so much like the barrister, Sydney Carton, that he cannot be arraigned. At the end of this trial scene, Dickens recreates the "Recalled to Life" scenario from Book I:<sup>9</sup> Charles Darnay, who

<sup>7</sup> Dickens, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Dickens, 44.

<sup>9</sup> Dickens, 65.

faced certain death, fulfills the resurrection imagery presented by being “Recalled to Life” with an unexpected acquittal.

After the trial scene, Dickens depicts brewing events that lead to the French Revolution and an uprising of the French peasantry. The climax of Book II takes place when Lucie Manette and Charles Darnay marry. On their wedding day, Doctor Manette (but not Lucie) learns Darnay’s true identity as Charles Evrémonte, a member of the French aristocracy. The falling action of this chapter builds tension as the French peasants prepare to storm the Bastille, and this book concludes in 1789 right at the beginning of the French Revolution. The ending of the second book mirrors the ending of the first book as it transitions the action from England to France. Charles Darnay heads to his native France, but unbeknownst to him, he heads towards certain death once more.

### **Motif I (Second Iteration): “Recalled to Life” Revisited**

Though “Recalled to Life” is initially associated with Doctor Alexandre Manette, the events of Book II develop the motif to be strongly associated with Charles Darnay as well. After the introduction of Book II, the “Recalled to Life” motif is revisited in a trial scene set at the Old Bailey courthouse. During this trial for high treason, the defendant Charles Darnay is acquitted on the grounds of reasonable doubt through his resemblance to the barrister, Sydney Carton. At the end of this trial scene, Dickens recreates the “Recalled to Life” scenario from Book I.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Dickens, 65.

Jerry Cruncher and Mr. Lorry hurriedly discuss the outcome of the trial in the following dialogue:

Mr. Lorry handed him a paper through the throng.

“Quick! Have you got it?”

“Yes, sir.”

Hastily written on the paper was the word “ACQUITTED.”

“If you had sent the message, ‘Recalled to Life,’ again,” muttered Jerry, as he turned, “I should have known what you meant, this time.”<sup>11</sup>

This first trial scene is significant to the novel for two reasons: it is the first instance in which Charles Darnay is “Recalled to Life” by being spared from a death sentence, and it foreshadows how Darnay will be spared from the guillotine at the end of the novel through his resemblance to Sydney Carton. The direct reference to “Recalled to Life” in this trial scene links the motif to Charles Darnay, and it emphasizes how Charles Darnay was brought back from death to life—he is saved by Sydney Carton “convincing the court that—because of an uncanny resemblance . . . the witness cannot identify the alleged spy.”<sup>12</sup> Charles Darnay, who faces certain death, fulfills the resurrectional imagery of the motif by being “Recalled to Life” with his unexpected acquittal.

### **Motif II: Jerry Cruncher—Resurrection-Man**

<sup>11</sup> Dickens, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Linda M. Lewis, *Dickens, His Parables, and His Reader* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 207, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Jerry Cruncher, the novel's comic relief, plays a key role in tying the theme of resurrection to the plot of the novel. To make extra money for his family, Cruncher resorts to digging up bodies to sell as cadavers. Through his work as a Victorian Resurrection-Man, he physically embodies resurrection by robbing bodies from their graves. Before he is exposed as a Resurrection-Man, Jerry Cruncher is introduced as an odd-job man at Tellson's Bank who runs various errands for its patrons.<sup>13</sup> His coarse demeanor and lowly position fool the reader into undervaluing his significance as a character. However, Jerry Cruncher is far more significant to the resurrection narrative than he appears.

The reader is first exposed to Cruncher's true profession in a scene following the funeral procession for the spy Roger Cly. Jerry Cruncher tells his son that he is going fishing in the small hours of the morning. At the appointed hour, Jerry "rose up from his chair, took a key out of his pocket, opened a locked cupboard, and brought forth a sack, a crowbar of convenient size, a rope and chain, and other fishing-tackle of that nature."<sup>14</sup> Young Jerry, expecting to witness a different kind of catch, observes "the 'resurrectionist' Jerry Cruncher 'fishing' for bodies."<sup>15</sup> Through this scene, Jerry Cruncher reveals that his special power as a Resurrection-Man is none other than grave-robbing.

The Resurrection-Man motif in *A Tale of Two Cities* is purposely understated through the use of humor. Though the digging up of bodies is a clear parody of the resurrection theme,

<sup>13</sup> Dickens, 46.

<sup>14</sup> Dickens, 124.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, 206.

it is an important motif in the novel. Cruncher’s “grave robbing activities parody Carton’s anticipated resurrection.”<sup>16</sup> In a humorous way, Cruncher’s role as a Resurrection-Man who digs up bodies prepares readers for Carton’s ending sacrifice. Though readers do not realize it, Cruncher’s illicit profession prepares them to anticipate resurrection throughout the novel. He sets the stage for Carton’s final sacrifice under the guise of comic relief.

**Book the Third: The Track of a Storm**

<u>BOOK III - THE TRACK OF A STORM</u>			
<u>INTRO</u>	<u>RISING ACTION</u>	<u>CLIMAX</u>	<u>FALLING ACTION ± CONCLUSION</u>
Darnay Travels From England to France	Dr. Manette as La Force Prison Doctor (“Recalled to Life”)	Carton Arrives from England	Manette/Darnay Family Escapes France
Darnay is Arrested in France	Trial Scene 2 (La Force); Darnay Acquitted (“Recalled to Life”)	Cruncher Helps Carton Blackmail Prison Spy (“Resurrection Man”)	Carton's Sacrifice (“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”)
	Darnay Rearrested; Lucie and Little Lucie in Danger	Carton Takes Darnay's Place in Prison (“I Am the Resurrection and the Life”)	

Figure 3: Abridged Plot Outline of Book III

Book III is significant to the main structure of the novel because it turns the novel’s focus away from England and towards France. It also brings together the motifs of “Recalled to Life” and Jerry Cruncher the Resurrection-Man from the previous books while developing the final resurrectional motif of “I am the resurrection and the life.” This final book is entitled “The Track of a Storm,” and it begins in the year 1792, right at the birth of the First French Republic.<sup>17</sup> The exposition begins as Charles Darnay travels from England to France and is

<sup>16</sup> Lewis, 208.

<sup>17</sup> Dickens, 85.

immediately arrested as an emigrant. The Manette family rushes to France while the accused man awaits his trial at La Force prison for one year and three months.<sup>18</sup>

The rising action of this chapter takes place as Charles Darnay is released from prison and suddenly rearrested on the grounds of a mysterious note. Darnay's true identity as Charles Evrémonte is fully unearthed following his second arrest, and the generational sins of the Evrémonte family are exposed. His father and uncle were responsible for the rape and death of a young peasant woman, and they were also responsible for the murder of her brother. Both of these people are later revealed to be Madame Defarge's siblings. Furthermore, this same uncle is revealed to be the man who condemned Doctor Manette to a life of unjust imprisonment.<sup>19</sup> Tension builds in the story as death seems imminent for Darnay once again, and the shadow of death hangs over the heads of his wife, Lucie, and their daughter, little Lucie. When the situation seems hopeless, Sydney Carton arrives from England and devises a plan to save the condemned man. Carton goes to the prison of La Force and swaps clothes and places with Darnay; he sets Darnay free in order to stand in the doomed man's stead at the guillotine. The climactic ending of the novel occurs as Sydney Carton, disguised as Charles Darnay, goes to his death while the Manette/Darnay family safely escapes from France.<sup>20</sup> *A Tale* concludes with Sydney's sacrifice, and the novel leaves readers with a final glimpse into the tragic hero's thoughts.

<sup>18</sup> Dickens, 206.

<sup>19</sup> Dickens, 238-47.

<sup>20</sup> Dickens, 264.

### Motif I (Third Iteration): “Recalled to Life” Reemphasized

The “Recalled to Life” motif is emphasized in Book III through Doctor Manette’s involvement in his son-in-law’s French acquittal and through Darnay’s ultimate escape from death. Charles Darnay faces a similar situation to his Old Bailey trial when he is captured by French forces upon his arrival and held at the prison of La Force. Fortunately, Doctor Manette has a special immunity amongst the Revolutionaries; the narrator notes, “He was not suspected or brought into question, any more than if he had indeed been recalled to life some eighteen years before, or were a Spirit moving among mortals.”<sup>21</sup> Due to his status as a former Bastille prisoner, Doctor Manette is able to gain the trust of the Revolutionaries and work as a prison doctor at La Force; his unique position allows him to intercede with French revolutionaries on behalf of his son-in-law. Even when Darnay is released and suddenly rearrested, he is still spared from death. Charles Darnay is “Recalled to Life” once and for all as he is pulled from his prison cell, mere hours before his execution, and swept away to England.

In the context of *A Tale* as a whole, “Recalled to Life” can be traced through all three books of the novel, and it is tied to both Doctor Manette and Charles Darnay. Each iteration of this specific motif accompanies an instance in the novel where either Doctor Manette or Charles Darnay is brought back from the brink of certain death. In an analysis of this motif’s use, Linda M. Lewis explains,

The “recalled to life” theme . . . is many times enacted: in Doctor Manette’s liberation from the Bastille tomb . . . and Darnay’s record of a numerically significant three resurrections—acquittal at Old Bailey of charges of collusion with the French and the Americans, liberation from La Force after the Tribunal

<sup>21</sup> Dickens, 206.

fails to convict him as a traitor, and escape from the Conciergerie as Sydney drugs him, has him spirited away, and dies in his stead.<sup>22</sup>

Because he was “Recalled to Life,” in the first book of the novel, Doctor Manette is able to advocate on behalf of his son-in-law. Through his advocacy, Doctor Manette convinces the prison tribunal to spare Darnay from certain death. Just as he was spared from death while on trial in England in Book II, Charles Darnay is spared from death while on trial in France in Book III. Even after he is rearrested, Darnay is saved from the guillotine as Sydney Carton takes his place instead. Thus, the “Recalled to Life” motif shows how Doctor Manette is fully resurrected from a position of weakness as a Bastille prisoner to a position of strength as the prison doctor at La Force, and it also shows how Charles Darnay is continually spared from certain death.

### **Motif II (Second Iteration): The Importance of Jerry Cruncher**

Though Jerry Cruncher’s resurrectional motif was used as a source of comic relief in Book II, his profession as a grave-robbing Resurrection-Man proves to be indispensable in Book III. Because of his profession, Cruncher is solely responsible for the identification of the spy Roger Cly; though the man was presumed to be dead, only Jerry Cruncher knew for a fact that Cly was not in his coffin. Cruncher tells the spy’s partner, John Barsad, “I tell you . . . that you buried paving-stones and earth in that there coffin. Don’t go and tell me that you buried Cly. It was a take in. Me and two more knows it.”<sup>23</sup> After Jerry Cruncher reveals this secret knowledge, Sydney Carton is able to blackmail Barsad into helping him trade places with Charles Darnay in prison. As a Resurrection-Man, Jerry Cruncher is crucial in enabling the final salvific act of the

<sup>22</sup> Lewis, 206.

<sup>23</sup> Dickens, 228.

work. Without Jerry Cruncher, Sydney Carton would not have been able to swap places with Charles Darnay in prison. Despite the humorous air about Cruncher's profession, his work is absolutely vital to the plot and the execution of Sydney Carton's ending sacrifice.

### **Motif III: "I am the Resurrection and the Life"**

The third resurrectional motif of the novel traces Sydney Carton's final moments from wandering the streets of Paris and contemplating death to his last breath under the blade of La Guillotine. When Charles Darnay is condemned to death mere hours after his acquittal, his demise seems certain, and his family is put into grave danger. As death seems most imminent, Sydney Carton chooses to give up his life so the members of the Manette/Darnay family may live. On his last night alive, Carton echoes the solemn words of John 11 while wandering the streets of Paris. As Carton wanders, "These solemn words, which had been read at his father's grave, [arise] in his mind as he [goes] down the dark streets, among the heavy shadows, with the moon and the clouds sailing on high above him. '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.'"<sup>24</sup> By reciting these words originally taken from the Gospel of John, Dickens's tragic hero reveals himself to be a Christ-like figure. This quote, often found in the Book of Common Prayer, is very intentional. As Carton recites the words of John 11 over and over, he quotes the very man he is emulating—Christ. Through biblical reference, this resurrectional motif shows that Sydney Carton's death is far, far more significant than saving

<sup>24</sup> John 11:25-26 (King James Version).

the Manette/Darnay family. Carton's sacrificial death alludes to the crucifixion of Christ, and his actions point readers to the mystery of a life-giving death.

Dickens illustrates the paradox of a life-giving death through Carton's interaction with a fellow prisoner just before facing the guillotine. In the hours prior to his death, a young seamstress discovers Carton's identity swap and realizes the sacrifice he is about to make. Because of Carton's sacrifice, she is given the courage to face her own death and holds his hand all the way to the guillotine.<sup>25</sup> The seamstress thanks Carton in her last breath and says, "But for you, dear stranger, I should not be so composed . . . nor should I have been able to raise my thoughts to Him who was put to death, that we might have hope and comfort here to-day."<sup>26</sup> With his final act of death, Carton leads this woman to remember the sacrifice of Christ and gives her the hope of an everlasting life. Through the life and death of Sydney Carton, Dickens illustrates the resurrectional mystery of death leading to life.

In addition to saving the lives of Lucie and her family, Sydney Carton seems to provide resurrection for his own life through his sacrifice. For most of the novel, Carton is characterized as a man of self-loathing who escapes the harshness of life through drunkenness. Immediately after securing Darnay's acquittal in England, a drunken Carton moans to himself, "Why should you particularly like a man who resembles you? There is nothing in you to like; you know that. Ah, confound you!"<sup>27</sup> Carton is a dark and troubled character, and he sees himself as wholly

<sup>25</sup> Dickens, 263.

<sup>26</sup> Dickens, 276.

<sup>27</sup> Dickens, 69.

unredeemable. However, a hint of his possible redemption occurs in a momentary confession to Lucie Manette. He cries to her, “In the hour of my death, I shall hold sacred the one good remembrance—and shall thank you and bless you for it—that my last avowal of myself was made to you, and that my name, my faults, and miseries, were gently carried in your heart.”<sup>28</sup>

Though Carton sees himself as worthless, he finds a glimmer of hope for a life redeemed and resurrected through sacrifice. In parting with Lucie after his confession, he exclaims to her, “O Miss Manette . . . when you see your own bright beauty springing up anew at your feet, think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you!”<sup>29</sup>

As the end of the novel approaches, Carton finds a new purpose in life by fulfilling this vow. In his final moments before the guillotine, Carton thinks to himself, “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.”<sup>30</sup>

Through his sacrifice, as Linda M. Lewis notes, “Carton himself is resurrected from lethargy to action, from hate to love, from despair to faith, from a sterile wilderness to heaven. He will be resurrected on earth (in the memory of the Darnays and in the illustrious future of his yet-unborn namesake, Sydney Darnay) as well as in heaven.”<sup>31</sup> Carton’s very last thoughts reflect the importance of laying down his life. Though he physically dies at the guillotine, Carton’s legacy will live on in the people he saves, and he is given the hope of eternal rest through his sacrifice.

<sup>28</sup> Dickens, 118.

<sup>29</sup> Dickens, 119.

<sup>30</sup> Dickens, 278.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, 206.

## Allusion in *A Tale*

The three motifs analyzed above show one way that resurrection is incorporated throughout *A Tale of Two Cities*. Through the use of these motifs, Charles Dickens reveals a hidden structure of resurrection that drives the action of the narrative. The hidden structure of *A Tale* also draws from another resurrectional tale that the author was intimately familiar with: Christian scripture. Dickens alludes to Christian scripture in the structure of his novel in order to further emphasize resurrectional themes.

## Dickens and Dogma

Dickens portrayed religion to his readers by showing them what he believed to be authentic rather than preaching orthodoxy. In reference to the author's views on religion, Hai Na explains, "In most of Dickens's fiction, genuine religious experience is seldom found in churches, nor do clergymen usually exemplify religious principles."<sup>32</sup> For Dickens, religion is "embedded in the characters' choices at every moment of every day."<sup>33</sup> Dickens's wariness of Christian institutions is best illustrated in a scene that shows cruel punishment inflicted in the name of religion. The narrator of *A Tale* recalls, "Under the guise of her Christian pastors, [France] entertained herself, besides, with such humane achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, because he had not kneeled down in the rain to do honour to a dirty procession of monks . . . at some

<sup>32</sup> Hai Na, "Grammar of Choice: Charles Dickens's Authentic Religion," *Dickens Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2018): 128, doi:10.1353/dqt.2018.0012.

<sup>33</sup> Na, 132.

distance of fifty or sixty yards.”<sup>34</sup> Though Dickens does not expressly denounce monastic life, the reader can imply that scenes like this are heavily influenced by the author’s own disillusion with clerical institutions. Consequently, it is the everyday characters, and not the clergy, in *A Tale* who exemplify true religion.

Because of Dickens’s complicated relationship with Christianity, redemptions in *A Tale* stem from sources outside the church. Redemption is an important part of the novel, but it comes from the actions of ordinary characters like Doctor Manette, Jerry Cruncher, and Sydney Carton instead of the clergy. The author was quite familiar with the tenets of Christianity and held the faith in high esteem. However, he was reputedly wary of institutionalized religion. In a biography of Dickens, G.K. Chesterton comments on Dickens’s religious perspective, “The tone of Dickens towards religion, though like that of most of his contemporaries, philosophically disturbed and rather historically ignorant, had an element that was very characteristic of himself.”<sup>35</sup> This complicated attitude towards faith became recognizably Dickensian, and it evolved into a key feature of the author’s incorporation of religious elements in his writing.

### **Dickens, John, and Resurrectional Structure**

Though the characters in *A Tale* are a main source of biblical allusion, another key reference to Christianity in the novel occurs through structural parallels that Dickens draws from the Gospel of John. The influence of the Gospel of John is apparent in Dickens’s work on a foundational level. The very introduction of the novel parallels the structure and opening

<sup>34</sup> Dickens, 10.

<sup>35</sup> G.K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (United Kingdom: Halcyon Press, 2011), 75, Kindle.

contrasts of John 1. The opening contrast of *A Tale*, in which the “best of times” and the “worst of times” are held together reflect the opening contrast of the Gospel of John, where “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>36</sup> The paradoxical openings in both works anticipate later paradoxes, notably those of resurrection and life-giving death. To this point Kenneth M. Sroka notes,

Chapter 1 of John and Book I of *A Tale* function as overtures for their respective works. Both begin with poetic prose riddles which tease the reader into paying attention to the importance of paradox and mystery in the narratives which are to follow. Both overtures then develop their initial paradoxes in the remainder of the works through a wealth of paradoxical images which reiterate the mystery—death and resurrection, tigers and lambs, doubles, and food. Echoing Genesis, the verbal worlds created by John and Dickens evolve over and over again from darkness and lifeless mud to light and a transfigured vitality.<sup>37</sup>

In concurrence with its opening words, the characters within *A Tale of Two Cities* also bear similarities with the Gospel of John. The novel is centered on an ensemble of characters and their interwoven stories during the time of the French Revolution much like the Gospel of John is centered on the tale of Jesus and his disciples. Though many characters go through the redemptive process over the course of these stories, one person in each work embodies resurrection: Sydney Carton and Christ. Thus, the deliberate creation of *A Tale's* resurrectional structure guides the events of the novel to take a certain shape that mimics the salvation narrative of Christ as displayed in the Gospel of John.

<sup>36</sup> Dickens, 9; John 1:1 (KJV).

<sup>37</sup> Kenneth M. Sroka, “A Tale of Two Gospels: Dickens and John,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 27 (1998): 148, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44371949>.

## Sydney Carton the Scapegoat

Carton's sacrifice at the end of the novel is dictated by more than his own resurrectional motif, "I am the resurrection and the life." His actions at the end of the novel are heavily influenced by his characterization as a scapegoat figure, which stems from early Jewish tradition. Father Donal Dorr notes on this ancient practice, "Once a year the Jewish high priest presided over a solemn ritual in which the sins of the community were symbolically loaded on to a goat. The animal was then driven out into the wilderness, to carry the evil away and leave the people free to resume their everyday lives with 'a clean sheet.'"<sup>38</sup> In this ancient ritual, an innocent animal was killed as a punishment for another's sins. As Sydney Carton pays the ultimate price for the sins of Charles Darnay and the Evrémone family, he can be characterized as a scapegoat figure.

In literary practice, the implementation of a scapegoat figure is similar to the original ritual. Mark M. Hennelly notes that "Leviticus's classic representation of the scapegoat ritual . . . especially emphasizes motifs of *substitution* and *sacrifice*."<sup>39</sup> The key word in this description is substitution. Sydney Carton, through substituting his own death for Charles Darnay's, embodies the scapegoat figure. Chad May comments on this ending sacrifice,

In the context of Sydney's willing sacrifice of his own life for that of Charles Darnay, we have a secular repetition of the central sacrifice of the New Testament. And like Christ's death which, in traditional Christian interpretations, offers meaning and redemption for the whole of human history, Sydney's sacrifice not only redeems his wasted life, but also allows the novel to end with a

<sup>38</sup> Donal Dorr, "The Scapegoat," *The Furrow* 61, no. 2 (2010): 92, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27808993>.

<sup>39</sup> Mark M. Hennelly, "'Like or No Like': Figuring the Scapegoat in *A Tale of Two Cities*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 30 (2001): 218, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44372016>.

prophetic and redemptive vision that encompasses both the nation and the individual.<sup>40</sup>

*A Tale* would have ended as a story of vengeance rather than resurrection if Darnay had died at the guillotine instead of Carton. If Carton did not die as a willing sacrifice for Lucie and her family, then he would have broken the pattern of resurrection in the novel. In regards to this point, Kevin Rulo explicitly states,

In Sydney Carton's triangular relationship with Darnay and Lucie, he seeks an imitation of Darnay . . . In this, his imitation of Darnay . . . leads to his ultimate imitation: that of Christ . . . who gives himself in sacrificial renunciation. Carton's sacrificial act therefore mimics Darnay's self-giving love of Lucie and her father, even while it mimics Christ.<sup>41</sup>

Through Sydney Carton's death, Charles Dickens reinforces his archetype as a scapegoat figure. He gives up his life as a meaningful and willing sacrifice for the sake of another. Thus, Carton bears the mark of the scapegoat; he suffers the ultimate punishment to atone for a crime he never committed.

In addition to his role as a scapegoat figure, Carton also takes on another archetype as a Christ-like figure. As previously mentioned, Carton's resurrectional motif "I am the resurrection and the life" connects Carton to Christ through biblical allusion. This allusion is further reinforced through the careful connection drawn between the cross and the guillotine. Dickens hints at the connection between the cross and the guillotine throughout the novel, and in one

<sup>40</sup> Chad May, "Resurrecting the Past: Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens," *The Dickensian* 114, no. 506 (Winter 2018): 271-72, <http://0-search.proquest.com.patris.apu.edu/docview/2163339124?accountid=8459>.

<sup>41</sup> Kevin Rulo, "A Tale of Two Mimeses: Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and René Girard," *Christianity & Literature* 59, no. 1 (Autumn 2009): 19, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/738012/pdf>.

instance he writes, “It was the sign of the regeneration of the human race. It superseded the Cross. Models of it were worn on breasts from which the Cross was discarded, and it was bowed down to and believed in where the Cross was denied.”<sup>42</sup> Like the Roman cross, the guillotine was an instrument created as a ghastly means of execution. Though this allusion is not referenced in direct correlation to Sydney Carton, Dickens’s method is clear. He is deliberately placing the guillotine alongside the cross in readers’ minds. By associating the replacement of the cross with the guillotine, he creates a scenario at the end of the novel in which his main character gives his life on an object that carries the same significance of a cross in Christianity, fulfilling Carton’s role as a Christ-like figure in the final moments of the novel.

## **Conclusion**

*A Tale of Two Cities* is a novel driven by its underlying narrative of resurrection. Resurrection is not merely something that happens to the tragic hero at the end of the novel—it is a motivational force that slowly crescendos from the beginning to the ending of the storyline. From the foreshadowed introduction of Doctor Manette with the words “Recalled to Life” to Sydney Carton’s final moments quoting, “I am the resurrection and the life,” resurrectional motifs propel the action of the novel from cover to cover. Even the famous opening of *A Tale* bears the mark of resurrection through its allusion to the Gospel of John. Most importantly, due to the combination of resurrectional motifs and Carton’s archetype as a scapegoat figure, the sacrificial ending of *A Tale of Two Cities* is shown to be the product of its underlying resurrectional structure.

<sup>42</sup> Dickens, 205.

Over one hundred and fifty years after the creation of *A Tale*, resurrectional elements work throughout the structure like intricate harmonies. This constant refrain of resurrection draws readers to ponder the importance of being “Recalled to Life” far beyond the conclusion of the work. Long after Carton has given up his life for his loved ones and the events of the French Revolution have become history, resurrectional elements still resonate with readers to this day.

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