

## SYDNEY CARTON: A STUDY OF UNREQUITED LOVE

**Dr. Vivek Chauhan**

Associate Professor

Department of English

Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning

Bangalore -67

### Abstract

The present paper is concerned with a study of Sydney Carton, not as a hero of the novel 'A Tale of Two Cities' but as a lover who does not find his love reciprocated and who therefore decides to do the best for Lucy even at the cost of sacrificing his life towards the end of the tale. This he does so that Lucy is able to live her married life in comfort with Charles Darnay her husband. He carries to the grave the strong desire to be wept for and to be remembered and pitied by Lucy long after he is dead and gone. Once Carton discovers that his love cannot be returned in the same measure as are his feelings towards Lucy, he begins to drink more than is good for a young Barrister of his age and who, with his talents could have made enormous amounts of money. He not just drinks and goes late to bed but carries about him an air of careless insolence which he actually uses to display his envy for the well-favored Darnay whom he has succeeded in getting buried of the charges of treason. The fact that both Carton and Darnay are look-alikes helps Carton to save Lucy's husband and go to the gallows in his stead.

**Key words:** Charles Darnay, Sydney Carton, Lucy Mannette, unrequited, love, Two Cities, Tale, Sacrifice, jail, gallows, guillotine.

Among the plethora of works of Charles Dickens , *A Tale of Two Cities* is a unique historical romance combining the power of racy narration with the skill of potent character development. The reader, after having gone through the pages vividly illuminating French history of the time of the great revolution, is all set to discover the rare gems of personae so well defined and rounded. Sydney Carton is one of the brilliant characters to live in the pages of this great romance; and he lives to endue the book with the freshness that has lasted even to this day. The book leaves a lasting impression on sensitive natures who have already found a connect with the hero who relinquishes his very mortal garb to serve a worthy cause that he has lived for. No less a critic than Richard Grant White has these words to offer in honor of this great creation of Dickens

Richard Grant White, a writer who has wandered over a Wide field of criticism, —from an intelligent scrutiny of the text of Shakespeare to the minutest questions springing up from the popular use or misuse of common words, —was the first critic who called attention to the singular beauty, the exceptional sublimity, of the character of Sydney Carton. After weighing his words, which at first seem exaggerated, one is impelled at last to agree with him, that Carton stands out as one of the noblest characters in the whole literature of fiction.  
(Dickens, 1894, p. xiii)

Sydney Carton is different from all other heroes of Charles Dickens; and he certainly is not the typical hero who marries the heroine towards the end of the book and lives happily ever

after. On the other hand, he is a hero in the true sense of the word “because his work in the story is to be the deliverer and champion, who gives without receiving for himself, and makes the happy termination of the tragedy possible by his own sacrifice.”(Townsend,1893,p.83)

We are introduced to Sydney Carton as a barrister lounging absentmindedly at the court, eyeing the ceiling off and on abstractedly to the neglect of the proceedings. Mr. Stryver, his voice, is vociferating in defence of Mr. Charles Darnay who has been convicted as a spy. In the meanwhile, Carton passes a slip to Stryver concerning the likeness between Darnay and Carton. When Stryver draws the attention of the court to the likeness between the two gentlemen, asking the witness if he might not have seen the person seated at the court taking him to be the prisoner; people look from one to the other and the court is thrown into confusion which ultimately results in Darnay’s acquittal for lack of strong evidence favoring his conviction. This is what Dickens has to say about the likeness of Darnay and Carton. “Allowing for my learned friend's appearance being careless and slovenly if not debauched, they were sufficiently like each other to surprise, not only the witness, but everybody present, when they were thus brought into comparison.” (Dickens,1859,p.91)

The psychologist who studies the features of Carton in the seemingly absentminded attitude of the lawyer would gauge beyond what is obvious; his looking at the ceiling constantly shows he is avoiding his secret from being scanned. This seemingly awkward lawyer Carton has a lot of cunning and calculation hidden within, notwithstanding his deeply emotional nature. His love for Lucie Manette been observers would say, love at first sight despite the fact that Darnay, handsome and dashing, is her suitor. is to be guessed in his discovery of an ingenious method of saving the object of her affections, who is obviously the handsome Charles Darnay. He knows his own worthlessness as a suitor to a beautiful girl like Lucy and therefore he takes

refuge in the action of saving her would-be husband; trying his level best to become at least the object of her pity if not her affection.

In Spite of the fact that the whole court was so lively on account of the excitement that the events of the day had created, this man, Carton was as still as if nothing mattered to him. He was, as if immersed in some meditative task, unmindful of his untidy appearance amidst this clamour for attention. This is what Dickens has to say: “

this one man sat leaning back, with his torn gown half off him, his untidy wig put on just as it had happened to light on his head after its removal, his hands in his pockets, and his eyes on the ceiling as they had been all day. Something especially reckless in his demeanour, not only gave him a disreputable look, but so diminished the strong resemblance he undoubtedly bore to the prisoner (which his momentary earnestness, when they were compared together, had strengthened), that many of the lookers-on, taking note of him now, said to one another they would hardly have thought the two were so alike. (Dickens 1859,p.93)

Sydney Carton, with his dreamy and unkempt look, appeared to be heedlessly projecting an aura of dishonesty. Even a casual observer like Jerry Cruncher commented on Carton observing that a person like him could hardly get any work to do. Though people were under a strong impression of Carton's obvious neglect of the case and the environs of the court; but this clever man Carton, had been observing much more than all the gentry assembled in the court conceive of. When he observed that the young Lady Lucie was disturbed and had put her head on her

father's chest, he called the attention of the individual in charge of looking after the state of things in the court. He said, quite audibly, "Officer! look at that young lady. Help the gentleman to take her out. Don't you see she will fall!" (Dickens,1859,p.94)

There was a lot of sympathy that went the rounds when Lucie Mannette was being taken out of the court; and the spring of affection for Lucie that flowed in the blood of Carton could not find any outlet and so this man appeared more curious to know the state in which she was outside the court. Carton could not hold himself back any longer and he walked to where Mr. Jarvis Lorry was and enquired of the gentleman the state in which Lucie was. On enquiry Jarvis Lorry informed him that since Lucie was greatly distressed her father was comforting her to bring her to her normal self.

Carton took this opportunity of gaining favour in the eyes of Charles Darnay and so he told Lorry that it would not be respectable on the part of Mr. Jarvis Lorry, an honourable banker, to inform the prisoner in public of the state in which Lucie was. Instead, he, Carton, would take that office upon himself and convey to Darnay the state of affairs with Lucie. Carton, inch by inch, wanted to gain a sound ground on which to tread to gain the attention, if not the affection of the one whom he had started to adore passionately in his heart of hearts.

Carton approaches Darnay and addressing him asks him to quell all anxiety regarding the well being of Miss Mannette assuring him that the worst of her agitation was over. Darnay replies that he felt sorry to have been the cause of her anguish and requests Carton to inform her that he was acutely distressed on her account. Carton replies in a careless and almost in an insolent manner that he would do it if Darnay asks him to. Though Carton has saved the life of Darnay, he wishes to conceal the fact from his rival; frightening him with what might have been if the case had gone against him. Carton is a puzzle to most people and most are not even aware

of the fact that Carton was the individual who was instrumental in the rescue of Darnay from the jaws of death. Carton always desires to keep men in dark about his engagements and therefore when Jarvis Lorry confronts him and wants to know what Carton's role is in all that is related to Darnay, Carton dodges him and talks besides the point in order to keep him in confusion.

Carton had been drinking more than what was good for him and in this state of intoxication he laughed and turned to address Darnay saying, "This is a strange chance that throws you and me together. This must be a strange night to you, standing alone here with your counterpart on these street stones?" (Dickens,1859,p.101)

Darnay is unable to give credence to the fact of his having received a new life after his providential escape from the hangman's noose. Carton acquiesces and displays concerns about Darnay's fatigued manner and consequently invites him to dine at a tavern where he had regaled himself while the case had been in progress.

Noteworthy is the term 'numskulls' (Dickens,1859,p.101) Carton employs for the lawyers engaged in arguing the case involving Charles Darnay; and it speaks volumes for his sense of superiority over them;and intellectually, at least, he considers himself more accomplished than them.

Conversing in the state of intoxication, Carton guides Darnay to his oft-frequented tavern with the twin purpose of dinner for his rival and a bottle or two of his choicest drink for himself. Soon they are observed in a little room at the tavern; Darnay consuming a plain supper with a glass of wine; and Carton with his insolence, seated opposite with a bottle of port wine and a glass on the table.

For want of a better subject, Carton, while drinking, casually asks Darnay if he has

regained his mental equipoise and the usual grasp of time and place. The next expression of Carton , “It must be an immense satisfaction!” (Dickens,1899,p.101) is quite suggestive of the envy he has had for Darnay since he first saw him with Lucie. And the expression “said it bitterly” (Dickens,1899) used for him subsequently shows how cut up he feels in the reunion of the two that is soon to take place.

Carton’s greatest desire is to forget that he belongs to this earth and therefore takes recourse to “wine like this” (Dickens,1859,p.101) And therefore, he observes to Darnay, they both are not much alike; particularly in their attitude towards life which appears to differ greatly. Both confused and dreamy on account of the occurrences of the day, Darnay was at a complete loss to answer the awkward ideas that Carton was throwing out at him; and further Darnay did not like Carton on account of his uncouth demeanor in general.

Darnay’s dinner being over, Carton requested him to call a health and give a toast. When questioned by Darnay about what health and what toast, Carton says that the name is already there on his lips and thus the two of them drink a toast to the health of Miss Lucie Manette. Carton eyes Darnay as he drinks his toast and subsequently he flings his glass over his shoulder to the effect that the glass hits the wall and shivers to pieces. Carton then asks the waiter to bring another glass. What made Carton violently pitch the glass across to the wall ? Was he angry? The obvious answer is no; and to understand Carton’s position we are already aware that he has been drinking more than what is good for him and now when he observes that Darnay and Lucie are to meet again, the fire of envy starts to rage within and the outcome is the violent act of breaking the glass. Now Carton brings in a direct reference to Lucie in the form of the expression ”a fair young lady to hand to a coach in the dark” and “a fair young lady to be pitied by and wept for by”(Dickens,1894,p.80) Darnay does not answer to this sensitive issue and wishes to peacefully

end the meeting with this disagreeable companion. When Carton tells Darnay that Lucie was very pleased to have received his message Darnay realises that he has to thank Carton for the help which he does. Carton, on the other hand, carelessly rejoins that he did not desire thanks and that he himself did not know why he did such an act.

Carton's tipsiness gets the better of him; and he questions Darnay whether he thinks that Carton likes him? Darnay replies that Carton's actions till then have been in affirmation of his amiability. Carton, on the other hand, makes it clear that he does not like Mr. Darnay. Darnay does not wish to create any further unpleasantness and he wants to part on good terms with Carton; and, therefore paying the waiter the bill, he plans to depart. Carton meanwhile has ordered another bottle of wine and asked the waiter to wake him up at ten. Darnay wishes him goodnight; and Carton rises with a threat of defiance and asks Darnay if he thinks that Carton is drunk. When Darnay replies in the affirmative, Carton further justifies his intemperance with a profound but sad utterance, "I am a disappointed drudge, sir. I care for no man on earth, and no man on earth cares for me." (Dickens, 1859, p.103)

When Carton was left to his own meditations, he stood before a glass; and surveying himself closely asked if he liked the face of Darnay. He imagined the consequence of changing places with Darnay to enjoy being looked at by the blue eyes of Lucie and to be pitied by the beautiful face; and it gave him great satisfaction to believe that he actually hated Darnay. Resorting to his wine for consolation, Carton fell asleep laying his head across the table with the candle dripping down upon him.

Sydney Carton was ever drawn towards Lucie as a piece of iron is drawn towards a magnet. "It was by no means a strange thing that Sydney Carton had also come under her spell,



and although he professed the most elaborate indifference, nevertheless he was obliged to confess to himself the sweetness of her charm.” (Pillsbury,1914,p.231)

We now shift our focus to the house of Dr.Manette where we find Darnay on a visit to Miss.Manette and Carton also seem to be there. All of them, including Dr.Manette are seated in the drawing room.It has been a hot sultry day and dark clouds seem to be threatening a thunderstorm which appears to be approaching fast. Carton is standing close to the window ;and soon the wind blows about the white curtains that are whirled towards the ceiling.Great footsteps are heard rushing through the streets, finding shelter before the storm broke in all its fury. Sounds of feet rushing towards them seem to be increasing in intensity. Lucie says she is ready to receive the crowd coming into her life ; and Carton says he will take upon himself the whole crowd coming towards them. In another instant, a flash of lightning illuminates the place throwing Carton into a clear silhouette. Soon it starts to pour down torrentially and the voice of Carton is drowned in the sound of the crashing rain. This scene is symbolic of the great sacrifice that Carton makes towards the close of the great narrative.

Stryver, Carton’s colleague at the bar, one day opens his mind to Carton to have the secret out of him;and he rebukes Carton for hanging around the house of Dr.Manette and loitering about the streets for no reason. He says,“I’ll have this out with you. You’ve been at Doctor Manette’s house as much as I have, or more than I have. Why, I have been ashamed of your moroseness there! Your manners have been of that silent and sullen and hangdog kind, that, upon my life and soul, I have been ashamed of you, Sydney!”

The moroseness that Stryver talks about is the sadness of a lover whose love is unrequited. The restlessness of Carton compels him to roam the streets with no care for his reputation or for his poor health that is sapped everyday through the effect of large quantities of

liquor that flows down his throat. The fact that Carton was love-struck is clearly stated by Dickens in the following statement: “If Sydney Carton ever shone anywhere, he certainly never shone in the house of Doctor Manette.”

Carton had often been a morose loungee at his house; but when he cared to talk he spoke very well. The darkness of caring for nothing overshadowed him to such an extent that it never allowed the light within him to shine forth. At the same time, when he was near the home of Lucie Manette, he did care for the streets around her house and he worshipped the stones that paved those lucky streets that were always near her house. It is during one of his restless moods that he makes his way to the house of Dr. Manette, with a keen desire to express his heart to Miss Lucie.

He was shown upstairs and when he entered he found Lucie at work. The scene that followed is best expressed in the words of Dickens, the master craftsman, who tells the tale of a lover and we are compelled to read and cry. Let us read what Dickens has to say about Carton, the best of lovers who loses all, having lost Lucie:

She had never been quite at her ease with him, and received him with some little embarrassment as he seated himself near her table. But, looking up at his face in the interchange of the first few common-places, she observed a change in it.

“I fear you are not well, Mr. Carton!”

“No. But the life I lead, Miss Manette, is not conducive to health. What is to be expected of, or by, such profligates?”

“Is it not—forgive me; I have begun the question on my lips—a pity to

live no better life?"

"God knows it is a shame!"

"Then why not change it?"

Looking gently at him again, she was surprised and saddened to see that

there were tears in his eyes. There were tears in his voice too, as he

Answered: "It is too late for that. I shall never be better than I am. I shall

sink lower, and be worse."He leaned an elbow on her table, and covered

his eyes with his hand. The table trembled in the silence that

followed.(Dickens,1859,p.180 )

## References

Dickens, Charles.*A Tale of Two Cities*. London:Collin's Clear-Type Press,

1859,pp.91,93,94,101,103,180

Dickens, Charles.*The Writings of Charles Dickens*. Introduction and notes by

Whipple,Edwin Percy; Pierce,Gilbert Ashville.Boston:

Houghton,Mifflin and Company,1894,p.xiii,80

Pillsbury, Hervey Gorham.*Figures famed in fiction, drawn from the original sources*.

New York:Rand McNally & Company,1914

Townsend, Mary.E.*Great Characters of Fiction*. London:Darton & Co, 1893,p.83