

**The Queer Heroism of a Man of Law in *A Tale of Two Cities***

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<1>Among the most beloved heroes of Victorian fiction, Sydney Carton is likely the most heroic lawyer in all of English literature, rivaling Shakespeare's Portia, who, after all, merely passes as a man of law. Motivated by his love of Lucie Manette, Carton goes to the guillotine in place of her husband, a sacrifice extraordinary in Victorian fiction and made iconic by Ronald Coleman's portrayal of Carton in the 1935 film adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*. What difference would it make if Sydney Carton were queer? Literary critics have not proposed Carton as one of Dickens's queer characters and film critics have assumed that Coleman played Carton straight. Yet, as later film adaptations reflect, Carton can be played queer. Indeed, that is precisely how Dirk Bogarde played the role in the 1958 film, generally considered the more faithful rendering of Dickens's text (Barr 184). Clearly, queering Carton troubles the plot of *A Tale of Two Cities*, but Carton is trouble for straight readings, as well. A.D. Hutter notes that Carton "assumes too many meanings and is required to connect too many threads of the novel . . . he becomes more strained as he becomes more important" (101). Carton troubles the novel's other characters, the law, professional culture, the family, heterosexual desire, and, therefore, the politics of plotting historical change as romance. Dickens raises more questions with Carton than his novel is able to resolve. But this is just to say that Carton preeminently demonstrates that Victorian masculinities are fraught with contradictions and tensions, becoming more strained as they become more important to connecting the many threads of liberal democratic social fabric. The multiplicity of meanings Hutter associates with Sydney Carton also situates him at the focal point of various lines of inquiry into literature, law, gender and history. Carton invites a conversation between queer scholarship on Dickens (e.g., Edelman, Dellamora, Furneaux) and the interdiscipline of literature and law, in which Dickens has been a central figure. That conversation sheds light on *A Tale of Two Cities* within Dickens's body of work, as well as the ambiguous legacy of Victorian queer heroism to strategies of LGBTQ advocacy linking military service, marriage, and adoptions rights.

<2>A comprehensive treatment of contemporary LGBTQ legal advocacy lies beyond the scope of this essay; however, I hope to encourage further cross-disciplinary engagements with *A Tale of Two Cities* and its hero, Sydney Carton, to elaborate a queer historical narrative jurisprudence. The conclusions I draw from a queer reading of Carton are these: (1) Carton represents Victorians' anxious recognition of patriarchy's dependence upon sexual outlaws. (2) In an effort to contain—while continuing to exploit—these outlaws, Dickens produces a narrative of queer heroism, ennobling the sacrifice queer subjects make to a culture organized by patriarchal laws in a fashion closely related to mid-century defenses of "redundant women." (3) The complex

relationship between literature and law in this process troubles simplistic accounts of the politics of either discourse, and is crucial to contemporary struggles for LGBTQ rights. I will first explain historical jurisprudence and the queer historical contexts of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Next, I read passages of the novel illustrating Carton's queer sexuality as a facet of his saliency in Dickens's critique of law. Finally, I will briefly suggest the legacy of this form of queer heroism for legal reform, setting film adaptations in the context of Lee Edelman's concept of "reproductive futurism."

### **Queering Historical Narrative Jurisprudence**

<3>In *Reading for the Law*, I argued for a practice of historical narrative jurisprudence as a corrective to oversimplifications in the practice of the Law and Literature movement. Focusing on gender, I noted that the disconnect among historical legal scholarship, literary and cultural criticism of legal themes, and narrative legal theory represents a missed opportunity to produce a nuanced account of the politics of literature and law in the nineteenth century, with consequences for all forms of outsider jurisprudence. I challenged a binary construction of law and literature wherein the first is critiqued as oppressive, unfeeling, and masculinist, and the latter, celebrated as liberatory, empathic, and feminist. These ahistorical characterizations are particularly unhelpful for a history of queer advocacy. Just as the heteronormative binary of two opposing genders occludes queer sexualities, its alignment with law and literature forecloses a stance critical of both. As I argued regarding the 1871 trial of Bolton and Parks for conspiracy to commit sodomy, queer advocacy requires the subversion of representation through cover stories and tacit recognitions, in contrast with the revelatory capacity of literature typically celebrated by Law and Literature scholars.

<4>Dickens's novels have frequently been used to constitute the law versus literature binary. Indeed, it may be no exaggeration to say that Dickens significantly contributed to the Law and Literature movement *avant le lettre*. Dickens's contemporary, the juvenile penal law reformer Mary Carpenter, credited *Oliver Twist* with exposing conditions breeding child criminals and promoting legislation to improve the lot of "at risk" children (Krueger 2002). Based on Dickens's critique of the Court of Chancery in *Bleak House*, William S. Holdsworth deemed him a legal historian (Holdsworth). Richard Rorty and Martha Nussbaum praised Dickens for his representations of the disenfranchised in *Hard Times* (Rorty xvi and Nussbaum xvi). Yet, *A Tale of Two Cities* has received relatively little attention from the interdiscipline. In *Poethics*, a founding work of the Law and Literature movement, Richard Weisberg promoted literary texts as a source of crucial insight into the private motives of lawyers. While he devotes a chapter to *Bleak House* and its villainous lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn, he mentions *A Tale of Two Cities* merely to point out Carton's status as a junior barrister (Weisberg 64). What reader of *A Tale of Two Cities* would not wish to know more about Carton's private life? Examining that life allows us to queer historical narrative jurisprudence.

<5>*A Tale of Two Cities*, with its gothic representations of abuses of legal power, has been read in a manner consistent with a central premise of much literature and law scholarship, *viz.*, that literature is an antidote to law (Ackroyd 127; Ledger 75; Schramm 137, 139). Indebted to *The French Revolution* by Thomas Carlyle, another legal skeptic, Dickens takes the demonization of

the law to a murderous level in *Tale of Two Cities*, making his attack on Chancery in *Bleak House* or debtors' prisons in *Little Dorrit* pale by comparison. Literary critics and historians have analyzed Dickens's denunciation of revolutionary politics and warning to 1850s Englishmen that their intransigence courted violent revolutionary change (Jones; Ledger). The novel includes depictions of both English and French trials gone awry, and Sally Ledger remarks on the bloodthirst shared equally by French and English crowds in the novel's trial scenes (Ledger 84). Dickens's critique, however, realigns gender in the paradigmatic contrast of law and literature. Madame Defarge embodies vengeful passion given vent in the law when political conditions are ripe. She seals Charles Darnay's conviction before a French revolutionary court with her testimony denouncing Darnay's uncle, the Marquis St. Evremonde, for the rape of her sister, the deaths of that sister and her brother-in-law, and the imprisonment of Dr. Manette, to silence his knowledge of the Marquis's crimes. By contrast, though a man of law, Carton represents the triumph of the literary imagination over the legal, of the unhistoric acts of private individuals—representable only in fiction—over the state-sanctioned violence of powerful institutions and the great men of history. However just Madame Defarge's desire for revenge, Carton counters the exploitation of trial procedure for a personal vendetta with an entirely personal sacrifice motivated by an empathetic identification with community figured in the patriarchal family. Beyond the dramatic power of his sacrifice, even Carton's courtroom talents consist less in his command of law and trial procedure than in his powers of imagination as a performer and satirist, through which he thwarts legal injustices. He stands in queer relation to masculine professional culture, law, and literature.

<6>Holly Furneaux has convincingly argued for Dickens's "career long dedication to the positive representation of same-sex desire and other non-heterosexual life choices" (3). Furneaux sensibly argues that Dickens could at once promote marriage as well as other forms of intimacy (9-10). Significantly, she builds her case with legal evidence: Dickens's "A Visit to Newgate," published in *Sketches by Boz* (1836), which alludes to his encounter with the last two men to be executed for sodomy in England, James Pratt and John Smith (1). Though Dickens demurs from naming their crime, Furneaux quotes his sympathetic remark that they "had nothing to expect from the mercy of the crown; their doom was sealed; no plea could be urged in extenuation of their crime, and they well know that for them there was no hope in this world" (2-3). The pathos of this scene of condemned men, standing "dejectedly at the far end of the room" (1), calls to mind Sydney Carton and the seamstress in the Bastille awaiting execution. Although Furneaux discusses Carton at some length, she does not draw this connection. I would argue that juxtaposing Carton's stoicism as he awaits an unmerited execution in order to save Lucie's family with Dickens's encounter with Pratt and Smith reveals his translation of these martyrs to the law into queer heroes.

<7>Viewed in light of scholarship on queer masculinities in the emergence of liberal democracy, Carton takes on new significance for a queer historical narrative jurisprudence. Richard Dellamora asserts that "Victorian writers were passionately engaged in the attempt to connect personal intimacy in friendship with the experience of democracy" (2). Surveying Foucault's account of male friendship from the Greeks to the nineteenth century in *The History of Sexuality*, Dellamora emphasizes the thin "line between ardent friendship and sexual relation," which "was indistinct enough to be crossed with relative ease" (3). Even in Christian England, with its taboo on male-male sexual relations, such friendship was likely to be denounced as "sodomitical"

largely on political grounds, albeit couched in moral terms. “Friendship,” Dellamora notes, “was both necessary and potentially dangerous to the existing order” (3). His evidence comes from both prominent figures in the British establishment (e.g., Benjamin Disraeli and his friend William Beckford) and characters of the literary canon (e.g., the homosocial triangulation of Daniel, Mordecai and Mirah in Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*). Space precludes me from summarizing Dellamora’s argument in detail. Suffice it to say, while few of these friendships are overtly sexual (and Dellamora notes that the laws criminalizing male desire were more capacious than a prohibition on male-male anal sex), they all testify to the import of male friendships in negotiating politics, law, and social order. Never is this more apparent, as Dellamora documents, than when the order created through such relationships is attacked by its enemies on the grounds of its effeminacy or degeneracy. This was the tack Gladstone took against Disraeli at mid-century, and would prove so catastrophic in the trials of Oscar Wilde at century’s end.

<8>Charges of “effeminacy” and sodomy were politically effective because, in the emerging liberal democratic state, contested power relationships between men were managed through a sexual economy (Sedgwick, *Between Men*; Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*; Adams; Cohen). At their most extreme, as in the homoerotic qualities of Fagin’s gang in *Oliver Twist* (first noted by Steven Marcus), Dickens’s own depictions of male homosociality can verge on paranoia; as Dellamora points out, the early chapters of *Oliver Twist* are “full of ominous warnings about the sexual abuse of children” (29). Adams draws attention to more subtle nuances in Dickens, claiming that his satirical portraits of masculine self-fashioning, such as Uriah Heep, reveal “how powerfully programs of masculine self-fashioning may arouse the pervasive suspicion of hidden designs. That suspicion becomes especially pronounced when regimens of virtuoso masculine discipline assume collective forms, which are frequently denounced as priesthoods or masonic brotherhoods—social forms always exposed to attack as ‘unmanly’ because they seem to be hiding something” (14). In many respects the anti-Carton, “humble” Heep caricatures the heroic self-discipline promoted as the bourgeois antidote to aristocratic effeminacy. Indeed, Uriah Heep might be read as an epebe in search of a pederast. But Adams’s account also points to a more pervasive skepticism about the disciplines of rising professional cultures in Dickens’s fiction and ties effeminacy with secrecy—or, the closet.

<9>As for Sydney Carton, Adams interprets his “progress toward his glorious end” as “reenact[ing] the historical displacement of an aristocratic (or dandiacal) idleness by a distinctively bourgeois heroism” (55). Yet, Dellamora’s evidence invites an alternative argument about Dickens’s reading of history, one engaging the queer politics of male friendship. Carton troubles Carlyle’s progressive model of historical change: though Carton prophesies a happier future at the novel’s close, he also affirms Dickens’s contention in the novel’s famous opening paragraph that the dandiacal past was a “period so far like the present” (1). Dickens transports Carton to a “dandiacal” age to represent the persistence of queer masculinities—and their persecution—across time. Whatever Carton’s associations—with lawyers or “low companions”—he is pre-eminently friendless, at least until he is befriended by Lucy Manette. Placing his queer hero in the context of the French Revolution, and representing him as bereft of male friendship, Dickens critiques the limitations of *liberté, fraternité, égalité* as well as the disciplines of bourgeois professional culture.

<10>While Dickens was not immune to the anxieties generated by male friendships, then, his hostilities are directed not at queer sexuality, but at the professional cultures, exploitative economics, and legal strictures which preclude queer men from democratic friendship. These include the mentor-ephebe relationships on which advancement in professional culture depended, notably in law and politics, as well as laws criminalizing same-sex desire and driving queer subjects into the closet. In his cogent analysis of professional culture in Dickens, Simon Petch focuses on the complex critique mounted through Carton. On the one hand, the dissolute Carton is a foil throwing into relief the selflessness of Mr. Lorry as a man of business. On the other, as a martyr to the familial social order, Carton reveals the petty self-interest of his consummately professional senior barrister, Mr. Stryver (Petch 33-4). Petch's analysis can also suggest that Carton's heroic status isn't conferred only after his martyrdom. Contrary to Adams's reading of Carton, cited above, I would argue that the very qualities which enable Carton to act heroically are those which make him an outsider, including his contempt for disciplines of professional masculinity which exploit and distort friendship as Stryver has exploited and deformed him. Carton doesn't become a hero in the act of sacrifice. He is a queer hero, doomed to self-loathing — by the law and the legal profession — until history provides him with the opportunity to reveal himself.

<11>Yet this form of narrative advocacy has its drawbacks. Dickens treats Carton much as other Victorian authors of the time, notably Elizabeth Gaskell, dealt with redundant women. Even before the 1851 census revealed a "surplus" of women relative to men, female fiction writers were insisting on the social utility of unmarried women. As nurses, care givers for the elderly and infirm, child minders, and governesses, non-reproductive women were shown to be crucial to the reproduction of patriarchy. Dickens's own Miss Pross is a prime example, willing to defend her beloved Lucie's family to the death. While Carton is martyring himself to save Charles Darnay, Miss Pross is confronting Madame Defarge, who has come to murder Lucie's daughter, and in their struggle, Madame Defarge is dispatched with her own gun. What has been less noticed is the extensive cast of non-reproductive male characters in Victorian fiction which enable women and the patriarchal family to thrive against the obstacles of law. A host of avuncular characters appear at crucial plot points to sweep away women's legal disabilities as well as barriers to marital bliss. On her own, Jane Eyre gets only so far in her rebellion against women's legal disabilities; the death of her childless uncle provides her with the independence crucial to entering into marriage as a free agent. Similarly, the avuncular Mr. Bell in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* supplies the impoverished Margaret Hale with the resources to rescue Mr. Thornton from his financial catastrophe, paving the way to their marriage. Roger Carbury stands aside to allow Hetty to marry Paul in Anthony Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*, as does Mr. Farebrother in *Middlemarch*, acting on behalf of Fred Vincy to woo Mary Garth, the woman Farebrother loves. In Dickens's novels, John Jarndyce relinquishes his claim on Esther Summerson and sets his beloved up in a bower of domestic bliss with Mr. Woodcourt. As Lee Edelman notes, the "crypto-queer" Scrooge repudiates the laws of political economy to take upon himself the maintenance of another man's family (Edelman 41-52). *A Tale of Two Cities* provides Mr. Lorry, who sacrifices personal interests to his business: protecting the Manettes from the laws of England and France. While these characters play key roles in achieving the closure of marriage and/or family life in their respective novels, many are minor characters, and none achieves the heroic stature of Sydney Carton. Nor is any of them marked by their sexuality as outlaws to the degree Carton is. Still, all these characters highlight patriarchal dependence

upon non-reproductive men to overcome legal obstacles (broadly understood) in order to achieve their authors' domestic ideals. Carton, in particular, reveals the power and limitations of this strategy in recuperating queer masculinities.

### **Coming out of the Carton**

<12>With Sydney Carton, Dickens renders a complex instance of the dynamics of the closet in enabling queer outlaws to underwrite the patriarchal social order. Carton's dissolute life is an open secret, obvious to men of the world, but even vaguely apparent to the innocent Lucie Manette. The real secret, then, is less his transgressive behavior than his unrequited capacity for democratic friendship. A notorious alcoholic and frequenter of "low companions" (183), an aimless flâneur with "degraded" tastes (181), an apparently desultory legal professional, Carton harbors the secret of his true nobility, from his associates, his intimates, and himself. In what I read as a version of coming out, Carton's interview with Lucie Manette merely states the obvious, insofar as it acknowledges the profligacy for which he is known, but is the first inkling readers get of his true character. Dickens proposes that the deeper closet is not the queer desires of proper gentlemen, but the noble desires of queers. The analysis of passages of *A Tale of Two Cities* which follows draws attention to the largely tacit recognition by other characters of Carton's queer nobility and, by extension, the tacit acceptance of queer heroism in support of patriarchy, which Dickens seeks from his readers.

<13>In gratitude for his role in exonerating Charles Darnay from a trumped up treason charge, Carton is welcomed into the Manette household. Chapter XIII, entitled "The Fellow of No Delicacy," opens with a description of Carton as a "morose" habitué of the house in Soho. Despite his taciturn demeanor within the home, "he did care something for the streets that environed that house, and for the senseless stones that made their pavements" (179). The narrator continues:

Many a night he vaguely and unhappily wandered there, when wine had brought no transitory gladness to him; many a dreary daybreak revealed his solitary figure lingering there, and still 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. Of late, the neglected bed in the Temple Court had known him more scantily than ever; and often when he had thrown himself upon it no longer than a few minutes, he had got up again, and haunted that neighborhood. (179)

Carton, the aimless flâneur, has been drawn from his queer habits into the orbit of domesticity—literally the street outside the Manette home. Like spring flowers, Dickens writes, which "had some waifs of goodness in them for the worst, of health for the sickliest, and of youth for the oldest" (180), the Manette's home attracts him and draws out desires long drowned in alcohol, "low companions and low habits" (183), and work. "From being irresolute and purposeless, his feet became animated by an intention, and, in the working out of that intention, they took him to the Doctor's door" (180).

<14>What is it that Carton desires from proximity to the Manette home? The exchange between Lucie and Sydney, which is the climax of this chapter, reads like a marriage proposal, or, more accurately, an antiproposal, in that Sydney at once declares his love for Lucie and the impossibility of his candidacy as her suitor. That, and the sexual tension Dickens builds into this scene, invites a straight reading in which Lucie is the object of Sydney's heterosexual desire. But that is not the only way to read this scene. Indeed, Sydney's excessive production of reasons he excludes himself from marriage, and emphasis on the shameful mysteriousness of those reasons, cannot be contained within the boundaries of conventional scenes of romance and render this an "interview unlike any other that could have been holden" (181). If we re-read this queer interview with an eye to evidence of Carton's queer sexuality, the conventional declaration of romantic love becomes a coded confession of a secret desire to a sympathetic confidante ending in a pledge of loyalty to Lucie's domestic bliss 'til death parts them—and beyond.

<15>Dickens describes Lucie as having "never been quite at her ease" with Carton and receiving him "with some little embarrassment as he seated himself near her table" (180). Nonplussed by Carton's demeanor, Lucie expresses concern for his health, and his reply contains the first of many statements implying his queer condition. "'The life I lead, Miss Manette,'" Carton responds, "'is not conducive to health. What is to be expected of, or by, such profligates?'" (180). "'God knows it is a shame!'" he answers, when Lucie declares it a "'pity'" that his life is no better. Her entreaty that he change is met with Carton's tears. But he cannot change his nature, he asserts. "'It is too late for that. I shall never be better than I am. I shall sink lower, and be worse.'" And then he "covered his eyes with his hand. The table trembled in the silence that followed. She had never seen him softened, and was much distressed. He knew her to be so . . ." (180). Carton begs Lucie to forgive his emotion, explaining that he "'break[s] down before the knowledge of what [he] wish[es] to say,'" but, with Lucie's sympathetic response, he is encouraged to go on. Declaring "God bless you for your sweet compassion," Carton "unshaded his face after a little while, and spoke steadily" (181).

<16>Opening with the plea "Don't be afraid to hear me. Don't shrink from anything I say. I am like one who died young. All my life might have been" (180), Carton's confession proceeds through a litany of coded phrases, punctuated by Lucie's entreaties that he reform, and be "recalled to life" (181). Out of the "'mystery of my own wretched heart,'" Carton describes himself as "'self-flung away, wasted, drunken, poor creature of misuse as you know him to be.'" Were he to win Lucie's love, Carton knows "'he would have been conscious this day and hour, in spite of his happiness, that he would bring you to misery, disgrace you, pull you down with him. I know very well that you can have no tenderness for me; I ask for none; I am ever thankful that it cannot be" (181). Dickens registers the implications of "wasted" and "poor creature of misuse" with Lucie's tacit recognition that Carton may be confessing to more than mere drunkenness. "'I know this is a confidence,'" she modestly said, after a little hesitation, and in earnest tears, 'I know you would say this to no one else. Can I turn it to no good account for yourself, Mr. Carton?'" (181).

<17>Shaking his head, Carton continues with a speech which emphasizes his "degraded" condition of "sloth and sensuality" and asserts its ineluctability, but will culminate in a pledge of heroic friendship:

“If you will hear me through a very little more, all you can ever do for me is done. I wish you to know that you have been the last dream of my soul. In my degradation I have not been so degraded but that the sight of you with your father, and of this home made such a home by you, has stirred old shadows that I thought had died out of me. Since I knew you, I have been troubled by a remorse that I thought would never reproach me again, and have heard whispers from old voices impelling me upward, that I thought were silent forever. I have had unformed ideas of striving afresh, beginning anew, shaking off old sloth and sensuality, and fighting out the abandoned fight. A dream, all a dream, that ends in nothing, and leaves the sleeper where he lay down, but wish you to know that you inspired it.” (181-82)

Significantly, it is the Manette household, not Lucie alone, which has prompted Carton to imagine that one such as himself might enjoy the pleasures of domesticity. By admitting it is a dream which cannot be realized, not without causing Lucie pain, Carton acts honorably. Whatever “remorse” he might feel, his is not a condition to be reformed. Lucie, he confesses, “kindled me, heap of ashes that I am, into fire—a fire, however, inseparable in its nature from myself, quickening nothing, lighting nothing, doing no service, idly burning away . . . you would have reclaimed me, if anything could. You will not be the cause of my becoming worse” (182). Though becoming “worse” is precisely what Carton believes to be inevitable, despite Lucie’s influence.

<18>Still, the opportunity to come out to one sympathetic friend proves to be the inspiration for Carton’s heroism. “The utmost good that I am capable of now, Miss Manette, I have come here to realise,” Carton declares. “Let me carry through the rest of my misdirected life, the remembrance that I opened my heart to you, last of all the world; and that there was something left in me at this time which you could deplore and pity” (182-83). Of course, as the close of Carton’s speech foreshadows, Lucie’s pledge to honor his confidence, his assurance that the “last avowal of myself was made to you, and that my name, and faults, and miseries were gently carried in your heart” (183), is what enables Sydney’s queer heroism to come out. He has been transformed in Lucie’s eyes by this disburdening: “He was so unlike what he had ever shown himself to be, and it was so sad to think how much he had thrown away, and how much he every day kept down and perverted, that Lucie Manette wept mournfully for him as he stood looking back at her” (183). And then comes the promise, which in its fulfillment culminates the novel:

“Try to hold me in your mind, at some quiet times, as ardent and sincere in this one thing. The time will come, the time will not be long in coming, when new ties will be formed about you—ties that will bind you yet more tenderly and strongly to the home you so adorn—the dearest ties that will ever grace and gladden you. O Miss Manette, when the little picture of a happy father’s face looks up in yours, 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!” (183)

Convinced of the “impassible space” between them, Carton promises never to speak of these matters again. Declaring “Farewell. . . . God bless you” (184), Carton leaves Lucie’s home to return to his closeted existence.

<19>Perhaps the most erotically charged scene Dickens ever wrote, this unconventional interview puts intense pressure on Sydney's rationales for denying to us what a straight reading makes us want—a conventional fulfillment of heterosexual desire. If, having raised the possibility, the novel won't provide a happily ever after for Sydney and Lucie, we want to know why. And the reasons offered seem insufficient and vague, prompting a search for better answers.

<20>Juxtapose the queer interview between Carton and Lucie with Carton's prophecy of the consequences of his heroic sacrifice as he approaches the guillotine. After envisioning a new and better social order in France emerging after the violent destruction of the old, Sydney turns his thoughts to Lucie's family, for whom he lays down his life. They will be "peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I will see no more" (465). He sees Lucie "with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name" (465). He then imagines Dr. Manette restored to his role as a healer, dying peacefully and leaving his fortune to Lucie's family. And when Lucie and Charles go to their final rest, Sydney will lie with them:

"I see that I hold a sanctuary in their hearts [Lucie's and Charles's], and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence. I see her, an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day. I see her and her husband, their course done, lying side by side in their last earthly bed, and I know that each was not more honoured and held sacred in the other's soul, than I was in the souls of both." (465)

Charles Darnay is a vague presence in this vision, embodied only in his death. In death, however, Sydney effectively is laid to rest between Lucie and her husband in their "earthly bed," insofar as his memory is shared between them.

<21>What is more, Sydney's sacrifice makes him reproductive. It should be remembered that Carton's final words to Lucie are literally written through Darnay's body as he takes Carton's dictation before succumbing to the anesthetic that allows Carton to take his place in the Bastille. In his vision, the new Sydney—Lucie's imagined son—will make Carton's name "illustrious" (465) by his legal career, becoming an honored judge. Carolyn Dever cleverly terms this a "subjunctive birth," a "virgin birth," and the child "doubly fathered" (230). As if that were not enough, Sydney's legacy will thrive into the third generation. Sydney Darnay will bring a son, "a boy of my name," thinks Carton, "with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place—then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement—and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and faltering voice" (465-66).

<22>The truly astonishing nature of Carton's prophecy may be overshadowed by the now iconic lines, "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" (464). But its excessive triumph, to say nothing of its suggestion of near necrophilic desires, bursts the boundaries of conventional novel closure as much as Sydney's interview with Lucie generated readers' desires for romance. If Dickens can be said to narrate history as romance in *Tale of Two Cities*, it is the queer romance of Sydney-Lucie-Charles, which associates resolution of political conflict with the happily-ever-after generations of sons produced by this trio. It reminds us how Charles's courtship of Lucie pales in comparison

with the emotional pitch of either the interview or the closing prophecy. First in pledging his life to Lucie's family, and then laying down his life, Carton shows more passion for the family and patriarchy as the foundation of the bourgeois social order than Darnay ever does. Indeed, it should be recalled that Darnay's sacrifice is made for another man—his tutor, M. Gabelle—and at considerable risk to his wife and children. Read together with the Sydney-Lucie interview, Carton's prophecy suggests the features of queer heroism in *Tale of Two Cities*. Ennobled by his dream of domesticity, Carton, the redundant man, contributes to domestic well-being, both personally (in saving Lucie's husband) and nationally (in advancing the bourgeois ideal in England and France). His dream of democratic friendship is fulfilled by the sacrifice of his queer body.

<23>Juxtaposing these scenes—of the interview and the prophecy—establishes the basis for a queer reading of Carton throughout the novel, prompted by the questions these scenes raise about Dickens's vision of a social order dependent upon the sacrifice of a redundant man. Let me now pursue those questions, starting with the prophecy, itself.

<24>First, oddly absent from this prophecy is Lucie's daughter, with whom Carton had an affectionate bond, replaced here by the golden thread of Lucie Manette's reproduction of Sydney Carton's lineage of beautiful young men, honored by other men and living unblighted lives. Nevertheless, the child's instinctive attraction to Carton is further evidence of his desire for domesticity as the motive for his sacrifice. Significantly, though Carton promised at the close of his interview to stay away from Lucie, his confession does not result in his final exclusion from the home she "adorns" (183). Once she presides over it as wife and mother, not only is he once again a habitué of Lucie's home, but he is the favorite of her children. Dickens describes this relationship as emanating from the "strange sympathy" instinctively felt by children for the man who loved—and still loves—their mother, with "a blameless though an unchanged mind" (258). Carton was "the first stranger to whom little Lucie held out her chubby arms, and he kept place with her as she grew" (258). And, the dying words spoken by Lucie's and Charles's son are "'Poor Carton! Kiss him for me!'" (258). This child's death, Carolyn Dever contends, is "redeemed" by the birth of Sydney Darnay, through whom "Dickens posits a break to the cycle of revenge and tragedy—posits, indeed, a happy, healthy, golden, just, and quite distinctively Victorian future for the assimilated Carton-Darnays" (230). He is Sydney Carton's legacy to a future, happier England, but also his enduring place in Lucie's domestic unit, if only in death. In short, Carton relishes domesticity and all it entails—notably, children—and Lucie gladly welcomes his place in her home and her children's lives.

<25>Second, is Jarvis Lorry's tacit recognition of Carton as kindred spirit once Lorry comprehends Carton's plan to save Charles, and thereby, Lucie's family. As we have seen, the tension between Lorry and Carton reflects on the rise of professional culture, epitomized by the former and sullied by the latter. Lorry sees Carton's dissolute behavior as an affront to the sacrifice required of men of business. Rebuking Carton for his cavalier remarks on business following his role in securing Darnay's acquittal for treason in an English court, Lorry reminds him, "'We men of business, who serve a House, are not our own masters. We have to think of the House more than ourselves . . . business is a very good thing, a very respectable thing. And, sir, . . . business imposes its restraints and its silences . . .'" (95-6). In speaking of his service to a

“house,” Lorry refers to Tellson’s bank. But he is much more than the Manette’s banker; in his avuncular protection of Lucie, he is the servant of her domestic happiness. Instrumental in reuniting Lucie with her father, he becomes as much a part of their family as does Carton. And, like Carton, he endures “restraints” and “silences” in order to participate in that family. What may nettle Lorry, then, is that Carton compromises the serviceability of all queer men by failing to restrain his private behavior thoroughly, to act “professionally” in all facets of his life. It may be less that Lorry fails to recognize Carton as a kindred spirit than that he recognizes him all too well. If so, that recognition is tacit, coded in the language of professional ethics. As I have argued elsewhere, tacit understanding is a hallmark of queer culture in the nineteenth century (Krueger, “Naming Privates in Public”; Krueger, *Reading for the Law*). Lorry’s acknowledgement of Carton’s proposed sacrifice on behalf of Lucie is tacit as well.

<26>Dickens only implies Lorry’s change of heart towards Carton, since Carton does not explicitly state his plan to take Darnay’s place in the Bastille, nor does Lorry explicitly respond. Carton simply describes Darnay’s hopeless case and his intention to visit him in the Bastille. Lorry remarks that visiting Darnay will do nothing to save him, and Carton replies, “I never said it would” (381). For the first time, Carton’s nobility begins to dawn on Lorry, who finally recognizes Carton as a kindred spirit:

Mr. Lorry’s eyes gradually sought the fire; his sympathy with his darling, and the heavy disappointment of this second arrest, gradually weakened them; he was an old man now, overborne with anxiety of late, and his tears fell.

“You are a good man and a true friend,” said Carton, in an altered voice. “Forgive me if I notice you are affected. I could not see my father weep, and sit by, careless. And I could not respect your sorrow more, if you were my father. You are free from that misfortune, however.”

Though he said the last words, with a slip into his usual manner, there was a true feeling and respect both in his tone and in his touch, that Mr. Lorry, who had never seen the better side of him, was wholly unprepared for. He gave him his hand, and Carton gently pressed it.” (381)

Carton warns Lorry to say nothing to Lucie of his plan, and once again, the two men exchange a tacit understanding. Lorry “looked quickly at Carton to see if it were in his mind. It seemed to be; he returned the look, and evidently understood it” (382).

<27>The ensuing interview between these professional men is as fraught at that between Sydney and Lucie. Thinking of Lucie, Carton emits “a long grieving sound, like a sigh—almost a sob,” which “attracted Mr. Lorry’s eyes to Carton’s face” (382). He takes “note of the wasted air which clouded the naturally handsome features” (383). The men exchange a few words and then “they were both silent” (383). Wistfully remarking on Lorry’s many years of service, Carton says:

“How many people will miss you when you leave it empty!”

“A solitary old bachelor,” answered Mr. Lorry, shaking his head. “There is nobody to weep for me.”

“How can you say that? Wouldn’t She weep for you? Wouldn’t her child?”

“Yes, yes, thank God. I didn’t quite mean what I said.”

“It *is* a thing to thank God for; is it not?”

“Surely, surely.”

“If you could say, with truth, to your own solitary heart, to-night, ‘I have secured to myself the love and attachment, the gratitude and respect, of no human creature; I have won myself a tender place in no regard; I have done nothing good or serviceable to be remembered by!’ your seventy-eight years would be seventy-eight curses; would they not?”

“You say truly Mr. Carton; I think they would.” (383-84)

Again, the two fall silent. Then Sydney asks Lorry if his childhood, sitting at his mother’s knee, seems present to him. “Responding to his softened manner,” Lorry describes his vivid recollections of sitting at his mother’s knee in “‘days when what we call the World was not so real with me, and my faults were not confirmed in me.’” “‘I understand the feeling!’ exclaimed Carton, with a bright flush” (384). Both men revert to a blissful time when their status within a family was not purchased on the “World’s” terms: “restraint” and “silence.” Hinting at Carton’s chance to reform, much as Lucie had done, Carton agrees that he is young, “‘but my young way was never the way to age. Enough of me’” (384). With that, Carton offers to walk Lorry to Lucie’s gate: “‘You know my vagabond and restless habits. If I should prowl about the streets a long time, don’t be uneasy; I shall reappear in the morning’” (384-85).

<28>Just as he had assured Lucie that his habits of roaming were incorrigible, Carton reminds Lorry of his “vagabond and restless habits.” But Lorry now understands that they are not incompatible with the selflessness with which he has restrained his own desires. Rather than a ramble through the darkened streets of Paris, Carton’s walk is purposeful, setting in motion his plan to rescue Charles. It is also, literally and figuratively, a walk down memory’s lanes. Early in the novel, Carton’s senior, Mr. Stryver, reminded his junior of the promise he showed when they were students together in Paris. Dickens recalls this fact when Carton “passes” as a Frenchman to a Parisian native, owing to his perfect French. “‘I was an old student here,’” he explains. “Then, traversing with the decided step of one who remembered the way well, several dark and dirty streets,” Carton arrives at the chemist’s shop to procure the drugs necessary to render Charles unconscious (386). Having done all he can to set his future course, Sydney wanders on with “the settled manner of a tired man, who had wandered and struggled and got lost, but who at length struck into his road and saw its end” (387). Only now, with Carton’s heroic end in sight, does Dickens provide the back story which bears the burden of explaining the origin of Carton’s wasted life. Alone in the dark alleys of Paris, Sydney recalls the time “long ago, when he had been famous among his earliest competitors as a youth of great promise” when “he had followed

his father to the grave. His mother had died, years before” (384). Into his mind come the words read at his father’s gravesite: “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” (387).

<29>The promise of John 2:25-26, spoken by another childless man martyred to save others, is meant to supply Sydney’s inspiration, but can overshadow a piece crucial to the puzzle of his character. Carton, motherless from an early age, loses his father in his youth. His father’s tears, which he recalls in his exchange with Lorry, were doubtless tears shed over his mother’s death. Carton’s misfortune was to fall in with Stryver, rather than find a father figure such as Mr. Lorry might have been. Mr. Lorry (whose name connotes a vehicle bearing burdens) might have led Sydney into a life of restraint and selflessness, which “the World” would repay with a modicum of honor, at least. Stryver, as his name signals, represents professional competition for personal gain. It was precisely lawyers’ willingness to sacrifice the truth in favor of professional self-interest which, as Jan Melissa Schramm argues, turned so many Victorian novelists, Dickens included, against the law (Schramm 137, 139). In light of Stryver’s venality, it is possible to re-read the senior barrister’s own account of his relationship with Carton.

<30>Again, Petch’s analysis of the professional relationship between Stryver and Carton can be read in terms of queer sexuality. Glossing Dickens’s description of Stryver as the “jackal” to Carton’s “lion,” Petch cites Darwin’s remark that the jackal is “an animal not destined by nature to exist[,] & carrying with it the provision for death” (Petch 28). Stryver abets Carton’s drinking at the same time he berates his junior barrister for his professional failures, and urges him to marry as a remedy for his fecklessness. This corrosive relationship has persisted since schooldays at Shrewsbury, described by Stryver:

“The Old Sydney Carton of old Shrewsbury School,” said Stryver, nodding his head over him as he reviewed him in the present and the past, “the old seesaw Sydney. Up one minute and down the next; now in spirits and now in despondency!” “Ah!” returned the other, sighing: “yes! The same Sydney, with the same luck. Even then, I did exercises for other boys, and seldom did my own. . . . Before Shrewsbury and ever since Shrewsbury,” pursed Carton, “you have fallen into your rank, and I have fallen into mine. Even when we were fellow-students in the Student-Quarter of Paris, picking up French, and French law, and other French crumbs that we didn’t get much good of, you were always somewhere, and I was always—nowhere.”

“And whose fault was that?”

“Upon my soul, I am not sure that it was not yours...” (105)

What we know in retrospect is that the boy at Shrewsbury was motherless and, like the young Scrooge, the son of an inconsolable father. In the homosocial culture of English public schools, the emotionally wrought Sydney served as other boys’ “fag,” a term which in the nineteenth century referred to a subordinate student, used and abused by his classmates. Though the term did not acquire its meaning as a sexual slur until the 1920s, the reason it did so lay in the

notorious public school practice. What “French crumbs” Stryver and Carton picked up, which “they didn’t get much good of,” invites speculation, especially since the English referred to sodomy as the French disease, while the French called it the English disease. Whatever Stryver’s sexual proclivities, he does not allow them to interfere with his professional success, gained by fagging Carton, now his junior barrister, as he once fagged Carton, the schoolboy. Indeed, Stryver briefly contemplates proposing to Lucie Manette, a plot detail made more meaningful when we consider how it reflects on Carton’s honorable eschewal of that possibility.

<31>Among the reasonable interpretations of Carton’s excess of meanings should certainly include the queer reading I have advanced here. But Carton’s queer identity is also tied to his identity as a lawyer. Petch remarks that “the narrator handles Carton with figurative delicacy” (27). He notes that after a night’s work with Stryver, Carton is “‘rumoured to be seen at broad day, going home stealthily and unsteadily to his lodgings, like a dissipated cat,’ a simile which intrigues because of the indirection with which it is approached (‘rumoured to be seen’), and which tells precisely because Carton is not returning from a night on the tiles, but from a working night that has set his partner up for the day’s legal battles, and which therefore hints at Carton’s own problematic involvement with his work” (Petch 27-8). Carton is Stryver’s creature, but he is also a genius at forms of legal work which comport with his queer experience. Petch quotes Dickens’s friend Thomas Noon Talfourd describing the lawyer’s need to “penetrate[ ] the maze of precedents and authorities to search after the leading principle of his subject, and traces its application in the succession of decisions with strenuous care . . .” (32). Talfourd’s account of the unacknowledged labor necessary to achieve just legal decisions, labor generally undertaken by juniors (like Carton) to prepare senior barristers to argue cases and achieve professional glories, precisely corresponds with the closeted work Dickens describes Carton as doing:

The faculties which would else be relaxed and dissipated among various exciting pursuits are braced and strengthened by the silent toil; the very remoteness of the subjects of inquiry from the ordinary aspects of business imparts a certain elevation and refinement to the study which masters them; while the habit of continuous exertion, frequently piercing through the accumulated illustrations and distinctions of ages to the same ancient principles of law, though in different directions, invests life itself with the consistency which belongs to singleness of purpose and aim. (qtd. in Petch 32)

The very practice of wandering the streets of London and Paris, which is the mark of Carton’s “perverted ways,” is also the habit of mind which makes him a useful man of law, “penetrating the maze of precedents and authorities” just as he penetrates dark alleys in search of his “low companions.”

<32>What is more, his experience with being misread enables him to unmask Barsad’s false testimony against Darnay by placing his own body in evidence. On the one hand, familiarity with a culture of “posers,” queer men posing as straight and as women (recall that the term “pose” figures prominently in Oscar Wilde’s trial), renders Carton expert at countering Barsad’s pretense of honesty with a pose of his own—standing before the court without his wig, looking for all the world like Charles Darnay. A moment after successfully passing as Charles Darnay, Carton resumes his “disreputable look” which “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” (88). The importance of being earnest, indeed.

<33>On the one hand, Dickens’s treatment of Carton as man of law is consistent with his other critiques of the profession (Schramm; Krueger, *Reading for the Law*). Lawyering is queer work. On the other, Carton’s queer attitude towards the law is what makes him Dickens’s most heroic lawyer. He is a man of the law as Dickens’s would want it to be. Parentless, he is exploited in undemocratic “friendships,” but he instinctively responds to true friendship when, at last, he finds it in Lucie. Contemptuous of a legal culture pretending to serve patriarchy, he is genuinely a devoted family man. In a time of crisis, this man—more sinned against than sinning—is the salvation of the family and of the social order. This is the version of Carton we need to recover in order to appreciate Dickens’s significance for queer jurisprudence. As I will argue below, twentieth-century adaptations of *A Tale of Two Cities* demonstrate the link between Dickens’s novel and LGBTQ advocacy.

### **Carton as Victim No More**

<34>It may be impossible for readers of a certain generation not to hear Ronald Coleman’s voice intoning the final lines of *A Tale of Two Cities*: “it is a far better thing I do, than I have ever done before . . .” Less likely is that we hear the voice of Dirk Bogarde, who played Carton in the 1958 film, which, as I noted, is generally regarded as a more faithful rendering of the novel. Charles Barr claims that whereas Coleman’s portrayal is relentlessly heterosexual (a claim, I would argue, the coded text precludes), Bogarde’s characterization is explicitly homosexual (183). This, if I am right about the novel, is merely further evidence of the film’s faithfulness to Dickens’s text. Making this film at the height of the Cold War raised more concerns about revolutionary than sexual politics. Under the cover of the film’s political conservatism, Bogarde could bring to *A Tale of Two Cities* what he had to so many other films: a sensitivity to queer nuance, which made him both a matinee idol and a gay icon. Three years after *A Tale of Two Cities*, Bogarde would star in *Victim* (1961), a film engaging in a very different form of queer advocacy.

<35>*Victim* was a piece of legal reform advocacy made in response to the 1957 report of the government committee on homosexual offences and prostitution, chaired by Lord Wolfenden. The Wolfenden report called for the decriminalization of homosexual acts between adults. In *Victim*, Bogarde plays a closeted gay barrister, Melville Farr. This character does far, far better things than Dickens allowed Carton to do. Farr defends clients charged under the Gross Indecency Act, the same by which Wilde had been convicted. This law, known at its passage in 1885 as the “blackmailer’s charter,” is still living up to its name in 1961. Farr is blackmailed with photographs of himself and a young gay client, who is himself being blackmailed. Farr must come out to his wife, who reacts with a realistic combination of hurt and loyalty (hinting, perhaps, that this revelation doesn’t come as a complete surprise). But when the young man commits suicide, Farr goes on the offensive. With the help of a police detective, who considers the law pernicious, he finds other victims of his blackmailer, who, in solidarity, expose the blackmailer. Culminating in the blackmailer’s trial, which leads to a conviction, the film depicts Farr’s testimony, revealing his own sexuality to bring a criminal to justice. The heroic lawyer

Farr incurs social death not as a martyrdom to heteronormative domesticity, but to protest legalized homophobia. It would take another six years, until 1967, for the law to change. Significantly, Bogarde's career thrived, in roles both straight and gay (including von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*). And, in 1989, Carton would be played in a television adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities* by James Wilby, whose first leading role was as the gay eponymous protagonist in a 1987 adaptation of E.M. Forster's *Maurice* (Barr 184).

<36>Dickens's characterization of Sydney Carton, whatever its virtues, is a straight fantasy of the redemption of queer subjects. It posits an etiology of queer sexuality in childhood trauma and abuse. It returns queer sexuality to the closet, while recuperating queer democratic friendship for patriarchal domesticity. This is, at best, an argument for tolerance rather than difference and tolerance only because queer men—like redundant women, victims of circumstance—can turn their desires towards the heteronormative good. Nevertheless, Dickens must be credited with producing counternarratives against the mid-nineteenth-century trend towards increased legal sanctions against homosexual men (Weeks). Not only should Sydney Carton be added to the list of Dickensian homophobic characters identified by Furneaux, but critics should also bring queer theory to bear on a wider list of redundant men in Victorian literature. Perhaps it would be productive to “read beyond the ending,” as Hilary Schor has recommended regarding the fate of fallen women in the closures of Gaskell's novels, to ponder whether Dickens invites readers' impatience with the fates of his queer men, such as Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood (Schor 74). That exercise lies outside my focus on literature and law. Still, in my view, even if such readings could be sustained, they could not negate a critique of Dickens's accommodations of heteronormativity as an influential Victorian legacy to queer historical jurisprudence.

<37>Though we recognize features of Dickens's strategies as pernicious, the ennoblement of queer sexuality in terms of sacrifice for family and country has proven durable. The major prongs of LGBTQ advocacy in recent decades have been rescinding bars to LGBTQ military service, gay adoption rights, and gay marriage. Each positions LGBTQ persons inside the logic of liberal politics rather than critiquing that logic from a queer perspective. LGBTQ persons make great soldiers, parents, and spouses, a strategy which assumes the value of each of these subject positions to the liberal democratic state. Of course, this is not to say that the inclusion of openly LGBTQ persons in military services, or full marriage and adoption rights for LGBTQ persons should not be priorities of legal reform advocacy. Rather, as Lee Edelman has provocatively argued, it is to note that these advocacy agendas leave undisturbed the reproductive logic of liberal politics subsuming queerness into the social consensus that we should all be “fighting for the children” (3). Like Carton's own “reproductive futurism” (to apply Edelman's term to Sydney's prophecy), they blur the lines of alterity on which Derrida argued friendship must, paradoxically, be based (Dellamora 21-2). Carton may lose his efficacy as a critical vantage point for Dickens—and for us—when he steps over the Manette threshold. As Edelman argues, “queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it . . . accept[s] its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting in the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure” (3). Even for those who consider this a claim too far, one might query more modestly why what has not been seriously contemplated as a legal reform agenda is getting the state out of marriage all together. Nor has a critique of the ban on LGBTQ service been linked with the exploitative ideology of an “all-volunteer” military wherein death is

rationalized as “fighting for the children.” Democratic friendship, it would appear, remains a work in progress.

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