Business and Terror in Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*

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> 'And indeed, sir,' pursued Mr. Lorry, not minding him, 'I really don't know what you have to do with the matter. If you'll excuse me, as your very much elder, for saying so, I really don't know that it is your business.'
> 'Business! Bless you, I have no business,' said Mr. Carton.
> 'It is a pity that you have not, sir.'
> 'I think so too.'
> 'If you had,' pursued Mr. Lorry, 'perhaps you would attend to it.'
> 'Lord love you, no!—I shouldn't,' said Mr. Carton.
> (*A Tale of Two Cities* 86)

In 1855, Charles Dickens wrote to A. H. Layard comparing the festering state of contemporary England with pre-Revolutionary France: "I believe the discontent to be so much the worse for smouldering instead of blazing openly, that it is extremely like the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first Revolution, and is in danger of being turned by any one of a thousand accidents [. . .] into such a Devil of a conflagration as has never been beheld since"[1] (to Austen Henry Layard, 10 April 1855, *Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 7, 587). The mid-century Victorian English society to which Dickens refers in his letter bears little ostensible similarity to the political and economic structures of feudal, pre-Revolutionary France; it is a free-market, capitalist society in the full throes of industrial development. Nevertheless, Dickens finds in the iniquities, divisions, and abuses of late eighteenth-century French feudalism, reflections of his own time and culture. The publication of his great novel about the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities,* occurred in 1859, four years after the writing of that letter; inchoate in the novel is the capacity for radical political and social upheaval in Dickens's own time, for the "conflagration" Dickens anticipates in his letter.

A Tale of Two Cities is saturated with violence: execution, mutilation, rape, and mass slaughter abound; broken, discarded, forgotten, nameless bodies are everywhere. Dickens's narrator, as the title teaches us, recounts one tale about two cities; as the novel progresses, it emerges as a single (and singular) tale of state-sanctioned violence and torture with the horrors and brutalities that occur on one side of the channel functioning as a kind of distorted mirror for those happening on the other. From the outset of the novel, the connective tissue between the two worlds of the novel (London and Paris) is Tellson's Bank whose representative Jarvis Lorry functions as the intermediary between them. The novel opens with Lorry on a "secret service" (29) between France and England to rescue an old customer of the French branch of the bank who has been imprisoned in France for the last eighteen years; as the plot winds its intricate way forward, the bank is not only ubiquitous but also frequently instigative of and responsible for the turn of crucial events in the novel. The violence in *A Tale of Two Cities* has been extensively discussed,[2] as has its connection to the revolutionary impulse in the novel; as early as 1937, for example, Thomas A. Jackson states that in this novel, Dickens "gets nearer than ever to a positive assertion of revolution as the only road to hope, to justice, to peace and to general happiness" (173).[3] What has not been addressed, however, is the bank's role as the representative of the prevailing economic system in

England and its complicated and subterranean relationship to the terrible violence in the novel.[4]

As an historical novel of the years 1757 to 1793, of the horrors of pre-Revolutionary feudal France and the post-Revolutionary Reign of Terror, *A Tale of Two Cities* does not initially appear to concern itself with the depredations of the nineteenth-century industrial capitalism of Dickens's contemporary England, as do the novels that both precede and follow it—*Hard Times* (1854)*, Little Dorrit* (1857), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). However, as the narrator informs us in the famous opening paragraph, the atrocities of feudal France and of the Reign of Terror, as well as those of late eighteenth-century English society, are indeed "like the present period" (5); slowly and inexorably, these atrocities come to function as a lens through which the brutalities of Dickens's own mid-nineteenth-century capitalist society are brought into focus. The monetary worlds of France and England emerge as disturbingly interconnected, principally through the machinations of Tellson's Bank, "a French House, as well as an English one" (21); in turn, as the bank manoeuvers its way through the perilous terrain of French politics between 1757 and 1793, through a France that is rolling with "exceeding smoothness downhill making paper money and spending it" (6), it is difficult not to see in the novel a reflection of the financial crisis of 1857, a crisis that David Morier Evans characterized in 1859 as "most severe that England had ever encountered" (v). J.R.T. Hughes suggests that the 1857 crisis has been called "the first world-wide commercial crisis in the history of modern capitalism"[5] and Norman Russell comments on the culpable role of the banks, arguing that the "massive failures of well-respected banks revealed much gross mismanagement and fraud" (140-141). The bank in *A Tale of Two Cities* does not fail, but it is a ubiquitous presence with its economic interests consistently determining its political and ethical affiliations. Indeed, not only are the iniquities of banking and of laissez-faire capitalism refracted through the representations of the French Revolution, but the novel also lays bare the functioning of what Naomi Klein calls "disaster capitalism" (6), the sinister and repetitive pattern of orchestrated capitalist exploitation that occurs in the "wake of catastrophic events" (6). Through the novel's representations of the secret workings of the bank as it makes use of a desperate historical crisis to further its own ends, the inherent savagery of capitalism itself is exposed. *A Tale of Two Cities* is thus arguably the only one of Dickens's novels to deal with the economic predicament of Europe in history, as well as in his own time.

The novel's critique of capitalism rests on the fact that death is a business in *A Tale of Two Cities* and that human bodies are the fundamental form of exchange, the essential currency of an economy of hideous violence. The central plot of the novel turns on the idea of exchange; Sydney Carton saves Charles Darnay from the guillotine at the end of the novel by replacing Darnay's body with his own. But this crucial act of substitution is only the last in a series of exchanges in which almost all human bodies appear fungible. When the Marquis St. Evrémonde, the evil aristocrat and supreme representative of his class in pre-Revolutionary France, runs over and kills a child, he simply pays for him; this episode is extended and explored in the next scene where the Marquis, having arrived home at his devastated and starving village, is stopped by an unnamed woman bearing a petition. The Marquis assumes that the petition pertains to the fact that the subject of her petition, her husband, "cannot pay something"; she enlightens him: "He has paid all, Monsieur. He is dead." (122). These two episodes are early examples of the nature of the relationship between money, value, and flesh. Indeed, it is through this trope (bodies for money and money for bodies) that Dickens collapses the distinctions between feudal France and capitalist England; dead, unnamed human bodies are essential currency on both sides of the channel. Paradoxically, however,

the exact equation of bodies with money ultimately functions in the novel to convey its diametric opposite: the utter separation of value from flesh. [6] The outlandish literality of such an exchange merely underscores the worthlessness of any one, individual body; bodies can be bought and sold precisely because they have no value and are infinitely replaceable. The ugly materiality of useless, dead bodies in the novel is a signification of the bizarrely abstract nature of the system in which they are hopelessly entangled: an inhuman capitalist market economy which functions with ruthless disregard for the human subjects whom it presumably should be designed to serve.

This inherent paradox of capitalism (it survives off the labour of bodies which hold no value for it) is one of the central subjects of Slavoj Žižek's recent analysis of the 2008 financial melt-down and the role played in it by the banks. In contrast to "the reality of production" (by which Žižek means the real world of actual human labour), capitalism exists in a world of its own creation, its own "dimension of the Real," with its only verity, a "self-propelling and self-augmenting financial circulation" (14). Yet even as Žižek elucidates the increasing abstraction of capitalism from the real world, he returns to its fundamental "paradox"—that the "circulation of Capital is not a closed loop which can fully sustain itself—that it presupposes an absent reality where actual goods that satisfy people's needs are produced and sold" (14-15). The converse, however, is also true; if we (actual people with needs) are capitalism's absent reality, then it is also ours: "Capital is the Real of our lives, a Real whose imperatives are much more Real than even the most pressing demands of our social and natural reality" (80). In this sense, as Žižek explains using twenty-first century shorthand, Main Street truly cannot survive without Wall Street (14). Žižek's comments crystalize the complexities of capitalism's mysterious relationship with the real world of actual human bodies. Capitalism is the Real of our lives, and we are its Real, yet it functions in its own dimension without apparent reference to those bodies that make such functioning possible.[7]

These paradoxical workings of capitalism are represented in *A Tale of Two Cities*, not only through the depictions of the literal exchange of bodies and flesh discussed above, but also through the growing level of abstraction in the novel, an abstraction that eventually comes to function as a formal imitation of that which it thematizes: the worthlessness accorded to any one individual human body. Thus, while critical responses to the death of Sydney Carton range from the Christian to the political, the ethical to the generic,[8] this paper contextualizes Carton's death within a transnational capitalist system, arguing that his death is an integral aspect of a carefully calibrated political critique, an inevitable and terrible consequence of an apparatus of commercial enterprise supported by state machinery that reproduces itself on both sides of the channel. The most powerful representative of the economic system is the ostensibly benign banker—Jarvis Lorry; its clearest victim is Sydney Carton, the man, as he himself says, "of no business" (86) who consequently is doomed from the outset of the novel and in whose story and destruction is figured all that modern capitalist economy represses and denies.

The political economy of bodies

Contemporaneous with Dickens's investigation of the relationship between bodies, wealth, and value in *A Tale of Two Cities* is John Ruskin's *Unto This Last* (1860), a passionate attack on the inhuman abstraction at the heart of political economy and its dire effects on affective human social and political bonds. Searching for, as Claudia Klaver remarks, an economics that would constitute itself "not as an abstract positive science, but rather as a normative social and ethical project" (167),[9] Ruskin explores the frightening moral and social consequences of an increasingly reified, abstract and amoral economic system. In order to

demonstrate the absurdities of political economy, Ruskin develops in "The Roots of Honour" an analogy between it and a putative science of gymnastics predicated, bizarrely, upon a human being lacking a skeleton. Were students lacking skeletons, he reasons, one might be able "to roll [them] up into pellets, flatten them into cakes, or stretch them into cables"; "the reasoning might be admirable, the conclusions true, and the science deficient only in applicability." Similarly, he says, political economists predicate their arguments on the converse, equally absurd, supposition—that human beings are "all skeleton" lacking either "affection" or "Soul" (168). Ruskin's analogy insists upon the terrible distortions that such a system inflicts upon the individual human subject. He ridicules the ruthless logic of modern economic theory by foregrounding in his analogy the deformations of the human body that it instantiates and presumes. Seemingly comic, his analogy actually exposes the deadly violence that lies behind the theories of political economy. Modern capitalism here is not only ludicrous, but also murderous, a "death's-head" (168) that kills all that essentially constitutes us as human. For Ruskin there can be no connection between human affections and the calculations of the political economists: "the affections only become a true motive power when they ignore every other motive and condition of political economy" (171).

While Ruskin's claims may seem distant from Dickens' representations in *A Tale of Two Cities,* in a long footnote to his essay, Ruskin himself makes a suggestive connection between his own political and social preoccupations and those of Dickens. In a discussion of *Hard Times,* he links Dickens's political acumen to his formal methods, simultaneously praising the political breadth and importance of Dickens's work (subjects of "high national importance") and regretting that his "brilliant exaggeration" and the "colour of caricature" might serve to prevent "many thoughtful persons" from "unwisely los[ing] sight of" or grasping "the essential truth and value" of his writings (171). Ruskin's comments about Dickens's work translate the political and social concerns expressed in his essay into aesthetic terms. Just as abstraction of thought militates against and eschews human affective bonds, so he fears that Dickens's tendency towards aesthetic abstraction (the use of "caricature," of flat, stock, generalised characters) might undermine the efficacy of his investigation of subjects of "high national importance."

The peculiarly doubled nature of Ruskin's observations—that he believes himself able to grasp the "essential truth and value" of Dickens's work in spite of the ostensible obstacles produced by his formal methods—anticipates a fundamental debate underpinning the Dickens' critical tradition: the putative link between the flatness of his characters and a corresponding lack of political and historical depths. Henry James, in an 1865 review of *Our Mutual Friend* written five years after Ruskin's essay, treats Dickens's use of the "fantastic," that is, his propensity to create "figures" rather than "characters" as testimony to "the limits of Mr. Dickens's insight" and as rendering him the "greatest of all superficial novelists" (*The Nation* 21 December 1865). George Henry Lewes writing in 1872 also comments on Dickens's reductionism, his substitution of "mechanisms for minds, puppets for characters" (65), linking these remarks on his formal methods to the notion that "[t]hought is strangely absent from his work" and to—a particularly strange pronouncement three years after the publication of *A Tale of Two Cities*—Dickens's lack of a sense of history: "one sees no indication of the past life of humanity having ever occupied him" (69).[10] In contrast is a long critical tradition, instantiated by E. M. Forster and George Orwell,[11] that essentially "redescribes an aesthetic failing as a political critique" (Stout 30), that finds Dickens's use of type and caricature to be in fact essential to his political and social analysis. For Daniel Stout, for example: "Dickens does not so much represent flat characters as represent their flattening" (30); Stout sees "in Dickens's exaggerated—and correlatively flat—characters,

the signs of the struggle to retain humane depths in a modern world bent on their discipline" (29-30).[12] In such a reading, Dickens's caricature and flattening are crucial to his enterprise; characters are reduced and fragmented in order that they may represent the ways in which they are controlled by systemic forces that frequently succeed in destroying them, breaking them into flattened bits and pieces of their former selves. In one of the most heart-wrenching scenes in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens himself investigates this very issue at both a formal and political level.

Trapped in France and awaiting news of her imprisoned husband, the terrified Lucy Manette begs Mme. Defarge, as a wife and mother, for the life of her husband Charles Darnay, doomed by a Revolutionary Tribunal to execution. Madame Defarge answers: "We have borne this a long time [. . .] Judge you! Is it likely that the trouble of one wife and mother would be much to us now?" (279). While the scene ostensibly pits the heartless, cruel, vengeance-driven, even crazed Mme Defarge against the idealized, maternal, golden-haired Lucy Manette, the reader has seen enough of pre-Revolutionary suffering in France for Madame Defarge's words to be at least momentarily compelling. While the novel clearly does not endorse the mass executions, mindless killings, and the irrationalities of mob-action so graphically presented in the text (and so enthusiastically endorsed by Madame Defarge herself), Madame Defarge's statement is certainly evocative of the larger political enterprise that underlies *A Tale of Two Cities*. Why should the suffering of one Englishwoman weigh in the balance? Indeed, Lucy Manette herself acknowledges the truth of Madame Defarge's position when, on the night that her husband is miraculously released, she feels too oppressed by the wide-spread horror to truly rejoice for the salvation of one man, even the one she particularly loves:

> the innocent were so constantly put to death on vague suspicion and black malice, it was so impossible to forget that many as blameless as her husband and as dear to others as he was to her, every day shared the fate from which he had been clutched, that her heart could not be as lightened of its load as she felt it ought to be. (298)

In the context of the mass violence in which both the women are swept up, Lucy can only agree with Madame Defarge about the diminished importance of any individual human fate, since all have been flattened by the mass-violence to which they are subject.

Questions surrounding the value of the individual human life are central to the ethics of Dickens's novel. Georg Lukács criticizes *A Tale of Two Cities* for its sentimentalized, idealized treatment of the characters who comprise its main story-line—the Manettes, Darnay, and Carton—regarding it as a manifestation of Dickens's "petty bourgeois humanism and idealism" (49). Far from this being the case, however, the comments of both Mme. Defarge and Lucy resonate powerfully as meta-fictional comments about the main story-line itself, pointing to its diminishing relevance and indicating (from the opposite sides of the political and emotional spectrum) the ways in which specific concerns about the individual subject are subsumed into the larger political and economic concerns of the novel. The novel ultimately abstracts the Carton, Manette, Darnay story-line into the same economy of violence that rules the lives of the faceless, nameless individuals that form the background of the novel.[13] Many of the central characters are simply split-off figurations of their lost, destroyed pasts, of what they might once have been, but can never be; the crazed Dr. Manette, the exterminating Mme Defarge, the dead, broken mother of Charles Darnay are simply absorbed into the vast violent economy that destroys all of them. By the end of the

novel an eager population keeps count of the number of heads that fall to the guillotine, but as bodies are counted (dismembered into constituent parts), their individual value becomes less and less significant. The more bodies we see, the less they matter.

While the formal abstraction of *A Tale of Two Cities* functions as a representation of the novel's thematic concern with the violent diminution of individual human bodies on one side of the channel, France, it is equally representative of the same process on the other side of the channel, England, where it is linked by Dickens to the growing dissociation between capitalist theory and human affective bonds. Through the representation of the bank in the novel, Dickens investigates the increasing abstraction and reification of the prevailing systems of exchange, a shift that is, as satirized by Ruskin in his essay, a product of the changes in political economy that took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Regina Gagnier points out that during the 1870s, the "labor theory of value which had seen the human body and human labor as the ultimate determinants of price, was abandoned in favor of human demand" (Gagnier 4). This fundamental shift in economic focus from production to consumption, that is, the untethering of political economic theory from the actual human bodies to which it had been tied since its inception, resulted in the increasing abstraction and mathematization of the discipline of political economy. [14] This growing dissociation of the economic system from the human beings that it is purportedly designed to serve is exposed in *A Tale of Two Cities* through the machinations of Tellson's Bank, whose political conniving and connection to state violence lays bare the abstractions of a system that simply disavows the bodies on which it builds its business.

The role of the bank

Book II of *A Tale of Two Cities* opens in the second city, London, with a slightly comic account of Tellson's Bank as a seemingly benign English institution, its Englishness residing in its capacity for inconvenience and mustiness. The comic tone shifts, however, as the narrator informs us that "putting to Death was a recipe much in vogue with all trades and professions and not least of all with Tellson's" (56), and is further undermined by the revelation of the violent history that appears to account for Tellson's rise to prominence: "Tellson's in its day like greater places of business, its contemporaries, had taken so many lives that, if the heads laid low before it had been ranged on Temple Bar [. . .] they would probably have excluded what little light the ground floor had, in a rather significant manner" (57). The bank's current connection to "putting to Death" is played out in the ensuing scene in the novel—the bogus trial of Charles Darnay who is accused of treasonous involvement in the American War of Independence. If Book I revolves around the iniquities and brutalities of the legal system of feudal France where a youth is sentenced 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" (6) and where Dr. Manette has been incarcerated in solitary confinement for eighteen years—"buried alive" (19)—the beginning of Book II demonstrates that the extremities of legal violence and degradation represented in pre-Revolutionary France replicate themselves here in the heart of London. Darnay's anticipated punishment for treason is recounted by an expectant and excited spectator:

> he'll be drawn on a hurdle to be half hanged, and then he'll be taken down and sliced before his own face, and then his inside will be taken out and burnt while he looks on, and then his head will be chopped off and he'll be cut into quarters. (64)

However, as the trial gets underway, even the vile punishment and the bloodthirstiness of the spectators are dwarfed by what underpins them and allows them to flourish: the utterly

chaotic, arbitrary nature of the justice itself. The judge is biased, the witnesses are criminals and liars, and the lawyers seem uninterested in the pursuit of truth. Indeed, Darnay's own lawyer Stryver—Carton's predatory employer—is not only a bully, but also a cheat whose rise to prominence is a result of his unacknowledged parasitism of Carton's talent and intellect. It is to this trial that the bank's fortunes are mysteriously connected. The exact nature of the bank's interest in the trial is never spelled out, but its seeming pecuniary interests in its outcome, and in the success or failure of the American Revolution,[15] are manifested both in the fact that Mr. Lorry has a messenger standing by throughout the trial to relay its outcome back to Tellson's and in the desperate urgency with which Mr. Lorry eventually sends the message of Darnay's acquittal. Even more significant perhaps is Mr. Lorry's own involvement in the trial. Mr. Lorry is subpoenaed as a witness against Darnay; although he is certainly an extremely unwilling one, his testimony against Darnay is an early indication of the ways in which the demands of business for "neutrality" can begin as amoral disinterestedness and then shade over into immoral complicity. Mr. Lorry's compromised position is drawn attention to first by the rapacious Mr. Stryver hailing him as one of his own—"'You are a man of business too'"—and then twice by Sydney Carton, first when he states sarcastically: "'[it] won't do for a respectable bank-gentleman like you, to be seen speaking to him publicly, you know'" (81), and subsequently, once Darnay has been acquitted: "'So Mr. Lorry! Men of business may speak to Mr. Darnay now?'" (83, 85).

Mr. Lorry's attempts to maintain the appearance of neutrality in this trial speak to the larger function of the bank in the novel as a whole, where it consistently attempts to naturalize its presence, to claim for itself status as the non-ideological subject. Much later in the novel, Mr. Lorry perceives himself as "safe enough" when he plans a trip to France engulfed by revolution, even though he anticipates a Paris that may be "set afire to-day, or sacked tomorrow" (244-5). His belief in his own safety is predicated on the idea that he "belongs" everywhere, but this belief is itself the signifier of a troubling heterogeneity, and the double-edged nature of his position is frequently in evidence. For example, at the beginning of the novel, even as he compassionates with Lucy Manette when he breaks the news to her that the father she presumed dead is alive, he himself points out to her that he has not seen her once in the intervening fifteen years since he brought her from France, even though she had "been the ward of Tellson's House" all that time (26). Similarly, while he seemingly expends his best efforts to help Charles Darnay and his family while they are trapped in France, these efforts cannot be dissociated from the fact that it is at Tellson's that Darnay receives the letter that lures him back to France. Indeed, Tellson's (and therefore Mr. Lorry's) utter lack of neutrality is conveyed by the fact that Mr. Lorry's anticipation of safe passage through Revolutionary France exists in conjunction with Tellson's function as the meeting place for desperate and disenfranchised French aristocrats, where it extends "great liberality to old customers who had fallen from high estate" (244). In aligning itself with both the old regime and the new one, Tellson's embodies Žižek's observation that "the very notion of capitalism as a neutral social mechanism is ideology [. . .] at its finest (23); Tellson's aligns itself with money and power (wherever it may find them), advancing its interests precisely through its implicit claim that it has no special interests and no ideological commitments.

The anti-ideological or non-ideological stance advanced by Tellson's and its representative engenders an extremely complicated role for Mr. Lorry in the novel. His even-handedness, his neutrality, his accommodation, come to signify what Žižek, in reference to capitalism's capacity to "accommodate itself to all civilizations," calls the "*detotaliz[ation of] meaning*" (25). In belonging everywhere and fitting in everywhere, Mr. Lorry is actually emptied out of all meaning. Thus, while he is frequently depicted as courageous, loyal, and compassionate,

his beneficence is ultimately contextualised by his total and complete identification of himself with Tellson's "whose bread he has eaten this sixty years" (246). His fetishistic identification with the institution he serves governs all of Mr. Lorry's interactions, resulting in claims of an abnegation of self that are quite chilling. In his early encounter with Lucy at Dover on the way to rescue her father, he avers (and continues to do so throughout the novel) that he has "no feelings," that "all the relations [he holds] with [his] fellow-creatures are mere business relations . . . [with] no friendship in them," that he is a "mere machine," and that he passes his whole life "turning an immense pecuniary mangle" (25-6). The sense here of a diminished being, both controlled (by his imbrication within his institution) and controlling (since it is he who turns the machine) foregrounds the destructive, sinister element in Mr. Lorry's relationship with his own institution, an element that belies the notion of the relationship as endearing or charming.[16] Thus when he states much later in the novel that he was a "man of business when a boy" (322), the comic tone has been replaced with a sense of loss which speaks to the blighted childhood, the reduction of a human being. His belief in his complete congruence with the institution he serves, particularly one described as "very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious" (55), ultimately conveys a terrible inner vacuity.

That Lorry's involvement with Tellson's is not simply harmless and eccentric is powerfully conveyed when he returns to France during the September Massacres. In one of the most bizarre and uncanny scenes of the novel, Mr. Lorry, ensconced in a delightfully Frenchified version of Tellson's Bank including orange trees in boxes and a Cupid over the counter (268), watches the Revolutionaries sharpen their knives on a grindstone in the courtyard of the bank, which is eventually soaked with blood. But even as Mr. Lorry abhors the violence of the new regime, he subliminally prepares to do business with it, just as he did business with the old one; a reign of terror is for Tellson's still a place of business. Staring at the bloody grindstone, Mr. Lorry contemplates the lost French aristocratic riches and secrets that will remain with Tellson's after the massacre he is encountering; indeed, in preceding scenes we have seen how Tellson's of London does a roaring trade with the refugee or émigré French aristocrats who haunt its precincts.

Tellson's maintains its veneer of neutrality and keeps a safe distance from the "many lives" that it has "taken" in order to rise to greatness. Mr. Lorry can keep the blinds closed as murderers sharpen their weapons in the yard (271); for Tellson's, it is always death at a distance. The bank is able to remain entirely dissociated from that which it destroys in order to function; the actual destroyed human bodies that lie behind its vast assets, its plate, jewels, and bonds are utterly disavowed. However, the violence with which Tellson's is associated and which it helps to maintain is acknowledged by the novel itself, and Tellson's disavowed bodies resurface in the comic-subplot that revolves around Jerry Cruncher, the bank's messenger and odd-jobs man.

Jerry stands outside the bank all day as the "live sign of the house" (57). This somewhat peculiar status between inanimate object (bank sign) and living human being foregrounds not only Jerry's own remarkable relationship with dead bodies, but also the sinister connections between this comic sub-plot and the bank itself. Actual human bodies are Jerry's business; he is a resurrection man and his main source of income is trafficking in cadavers. For Jerry, bodies *are* money. The literality of exchange upon which Jerry's livelihood rests conveys what Tellson's system of circulation is designed to repress: the bank's business is dependent upon its severance from the original objects which once nourished it—actual human bodies. In short, to return to the narrator's fanciful description, "the heads laid low before it" never

will be "ranged on Temple Bar" (57) since the bodies for which Tellson's is responsible will never be acknowledged; Jerry's livelihood, however, is a metonymic reminder of the bank's culpability. Indeed, Jerry himself makes the connection for Mr. Lorry. When Mr. Lorry, Jerry, and the Darnays are trapped in France during the Reign of Terror, Jerry decides to renounce his trafficking in dead human flesh, even as he makes evident the indissoluble connections between his business and that of the bank. Mr. Lorry angrily accuses Jerry of using the "respectable and great house of Tellson" as a "blind" (318). But as Jerry explains it to Mr. Lorry the bank is not a "blind" but is a sign of Jerry's own endeavours. He explains:

> Ther'd be two sides to it. There might be medical doctors at the present hour, a picking up their guineas where a honest tradesman don't pick up his fardens—fardens! No, nor yet his quarter—a banking away like smoke at Tellson's, and a cocking their medical eyes at that tradesman on the sly, a going in and going out to their own carriages—ah! equally like smoke, if not more so. Well that 'ud be imposing too, on Tellson's. For you cannot sarse the goose and not the gander. (318-19)

Jerry insists that rich people "banking away like smoke" are as culpable as he is. Indeed, the very simile he employs twice in the passage—"like smoke"—conveys the obfuscation employed by the bank as it constructs its own "blind." Dead bodies are the result of the vast, powerful network of economic circulation; Jerry's job merely exposes briefly the rotting and exploited flesh that also lies beneath the riches of the wealthy clients at Tellson's. Jerry's financial logic—you cannot "sarse the goose and not the gander"—is impeccable as he elucidates the system of circulation which Tellson's simultaneously lives off and repudiates. Jerry goes on to provide a long list of profiteers from his business; the medical doctors, the undertakers, the parish clerks, the sextons, the private watchmen are all part of the system of circulation that is Jerry's business (319). Indeed, while Jerry's decision to turn from illegal grave-robber to law-abiding grave-digger is partially motivated by his moral repulsion over what he has witnessed in France, it is also seemingly motivated by the basic laws of supply and demand in the market-place. So many subjects without heads, he says, are "plentiful enough" (320) to bring the price down.

In emphasising the literal relationship between bodies and systems of exchange, the sub-plot stresses what the abstractions of capitalism consistently deny. The word "blind" itself signifies both what Jerry seeks to keep unseen (buried) and what the bank wishes people to remain blind to. Mr. Lorry is angry at the bank's being implicated in Jerry's trade in actual bodies precisely because the abjection, filth, and disgust of Jerry's illegal trade impinge briefly upon the bank's capacity to appear uncontaminated and inviolate. Jerry's bodies function as a brief and extremely unwelcome reminder to Mr. Lorry that there is an absent world of actual human bodies, labour, and production that the bank repudiates, but on which it survives. The materiality of Jerry's bodies is set against the abstractions of capitalism that simply does not count the bodies for which it is responsible.

Paradoxically enough, the body in the novel which is most symptomatic of the abstractions of the exchange system is that belonging to Sydney Carton; his, the only live body in the novel not associated with the bank simply becomes part of the vast system of circulation and exchange that the bank represents. Thus while Dickens's biographer, Edgar Johnson, complains that the "truth of revolution and the truth of sacrifice are made to appear in conflict" (981-2) and Lukács, that the "limitations of Dickens's social criticism" inhere in "the "essential defect in the entire composition" (49) of the novel (namely the split between

the domestic and the political plot), Carton's sacrifice, when contexualised by the prevailing economic system (which is the ultimate determinant of the value of his body) appears startlingly consistent with the major political events of the novel.[17] For almost the whole novel, Sydney Carton is a peculiarly absent presence hovering on the edge of the narrative. To be found where the "shadow is darkest" (85), Carton himself foregrounds his peculiarly liminal status: he tells Darnay that his greatest wish is to forget that he belongs to "this terrestial scheme" (87) and to his rapacious boss, Stryver: "you were always somewhere, and I was always—nowhere" (94). When Sydney Carton, the man from "nowhere" finally does become central to the narrative, it is only as a dead man in a system of exchange where he dies as someone he is not. Much earlier in the narrative, Carton tells Lucy that he is "like one who died young. All my life might have been" (156). This strange shift between time periods where the future and even the present are already lost to the past anticipates Carton's vision at the end of the novel where he sees past his own death into a future, where now that he is dead, he finally has a place. All of this has the uncanny effect of placing Carton in a zone outside of the narrative time of the novel; Chris Vanden Bossche points out that in Carton's final speech, the narrator "cites only what Carton would have written '*if*' he had given utterance to his thoughts and '*if*' they had been prophetic (211). Carton's final prophecy is thus essentially framed as a fantasy, rather than as part of the omniscient narrative proper, with the narrative use of the subjunctive functioning to destabilize the potential authenticity of his vision. Thus while Carton's act of substitution provides narrative closure—Carton substitutes himself in order that the Darnay Manette story-line may attain its happy ending—the full purpose of his sacrifice is not quite contained by the narrative itself. What *is* directly represented in the novel is that violence is so utterly pervasive that Carton's seemingly supreme sacrificial death becomes as meaningless as the death of the nameless seamstress who accompanies him; he dies in Darnay's place in order that the tally of fifty-two can be met (366). His story is lost in or repressed by the ruthless, mechanized system in which all are trapped. The implacable logic of exchange is highlighted on the way to his execution. His death as himself, as Sydney Carton, is witnessed by only one person who could bear testimony to who he really is: the criminal and spy John Barsard who helped Carton execute his plan by smuggling him into the prison and Darnay out. Watching the tumbril carrying Carton pass, however, Barsard is incapable of bearing testimony to Carton's act of heroism; his concern is only "Has he sacrificed me?" (386). Thus while Carton gazes attentively at Barsard, Barsard himself can only imagine a ruthless logic of sacrifice that repeats a process of infinite substitution.

Carton's last true human communication before his execution is with Jarvis Lorry as he finalises his plans to save Darnay. The scene between the two men united in their grief and helplessness is extremely moving; the "caricature" Lorry evolves into a grieving old man; in his full humanity, Carton now sees him as a father:

> "You are a good man and a true friend," said Carton, in an altered voice. "Forgive me if I notice that 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." (320)

Lorry, in turn, sees Carton humanise and "unflatten" in front of his eyes (quite literally develop more than one side); having "never seen the better side of him," Lorry now notes, "true feeling and respect both in his tone and in his touch" (321).[18] The parallels between the two men are suddenly very clear. Both are extremely isolated, both are bachelors, and both are childless; for both men, the Manette-Darnay family has always been the full object of

their devotion. That they should suddenly commune with each other appears extremely fitting. Nevertheless, the two men, the man of "business" and the man of "no business," play out their roles to the bitter end, and it is with Mr. Lorry that Carton makes the final arrangements for his own end. Mr. Lorry remains content *not* to understand the last conversation he has with Carton, allowing his own questions to go unanswered. Carton's arrangements and instructions to Lorry constitute the dissolution of his own self as he instructs Lorry to "wait for nothing but to have my place occupied" (358). Carton's body only belongs in the story when he no longer is; it is Mr. Lorry who will hold that place open for re-occupation.

The Manette-Darnay family story closes as it opens: Mr. Lorry once again in a coach, this time on the final nightmarish flight from France. This second coach-ride may at one level testify to the development of Lorry from machine to human being. His isolated internal ruminations over the bank have given way to a sense of full community; united by terror, the members of the coach are as one. Nevertheless, however unwillingly, Mr. Lorry has been entirely collusive with the final act of substitution in the novel: he takes Darnay and leaves Carton behind. If Stryver is always "somewhere" and Carton "always—nowhere" (94), Mr. Lorry might be said to be always everywhere. If the inhabitants of the two cities are essentially conjoined in a common fate, as the novel suggests, Mr. Lorry, ineluctably caught up in the violence of both cities, is the force that binds them together.

Thus, it is only as a dead body and for his abstract value that Sydney Carton can enter the economy of exchange in the novel. Even as he fantasizes a line of children named for him, it is a fantasy framed by his anticipated execution. Always already dead, it is *his* body, more than any other in the novel, that carries the full signification for the ruthless system of circulation and exchange that functions precisely through its denial of value. *A Tale of Two Cities* is a powerful critique of a ruthless, mechanized, abstract transnational capitalist economy; through the diminution and deaths of Carton and countless others, it demonstrates that the market requires, as Žižek points out, "a good deal of extra-market violence to establish and maintain the conditions for its functioning" (79). Dickens's representation of the revolution foregrounds the economic forces that underlie both late eighteenth-century France and mid-nineteenth century England. At the heart of this representation of political economy is the transnational Tellson's Bank; beneath the veneer of neutrality and civility that characterizes Tellson's lies the ruthless, pitiless machine that is capitalism. Throughout the novel, Dickens demonstrates that where hideous state violence is to be found, so is successful, unyielding commercial enterprise.

Notes

[1] Letter to Austen Henry Layard, 10 April 1855, Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. 7, 1853–55, ed. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, Angus Easson, 587.

[2] Critics have analyzed the violence of the novel in domestic, legal, and political terms seeing it as expiatory, as a rational political reaction, as a displaced response to repressed trauma. John Kucich, for example, reads the novel as dramatizing a "pressing fundamental human need for liberating change of the most extreme kind," seeing the violence as a ritualistic expiation of desires for "irrational extremity"; the novel becomes "a staging of acceptable—as opposed to cruel—violence" ("Purity" 134). Jones sees the violence as a central aspect of Dickens' political analysis where violence is "rationally explicable," a coherent and inevitable response to extreme physical and mental suffering and oppression (16); he

contrasts Dickens' view of history with Carlyle's stating that Carlyle has a providential conception of history, that history possesses "a redemptive and purgative function because it was made into a manifestation of divine justice" (1) while Dickens's vision, in contrast to Carlyle's is deeply political (15). Christopher Herbert's reading of the violence of *A Tale of Two Cities* is most significant for the purposes of this paper; Herbert reads the violence in the novel as a symptom of the repressed violence of contemporary English culture, as a manifestation of the widespread repressed trauma suffered by English society as a whole in response the hideous brutality of the Indian Mutiny. While this paper does not concern itself with the Indian Mutiny, the idea of the violence in the novel as a displacement for the contemporary violence of Dickens's own society is fundamental to the argument of the paper.

[3] For other commentaries on the revolutionary overtones of *A Tale of Two Cities*, see Jones who states that "Dickens's language for the description of the crowds and the violence of the French Revolution was not that of Burke and Carlyle . . . but of the radicals of the 1790s" (16); Avrom Fleishman who states that the novel ascribes "personality to the mass" and is "one of the first historical novels to characterise and dramatize social groups as major carriers of the action" (122); and Morton Zabel who comments that *A Tale of Two Cities* brings to "an explicit climax the great subject that taxed him [Dickens] throughout the last twenty years of his life—the crisis in English and European history in the Nineteenth Century" (50).

[4] Kucich does state that "order is accomplished through institutional violence" and links this to Mr. Lorry "whose name is an ominous pun on the tumbrils of Paris," but essentially regards Mr. Lorry as one of the novel's "principal heroes" and as a "kind of international reconciler" (*Excess* 115-17). His point about Lorry's name appears somewhat dubious since lorries are not the same as tumbrils. Cates Baldridge discusses *A Tale of Two Cities* as a text that manifests Dickens's "deep dissatisfaction" with "his own acquisitive and aggressively individualist society." But while Baldridge states that Dickens understands the Revolution as offering at some level "stark alternatives to the social relations undergirding those aspects of Victorian England that he also thoroughly despises" (634), he does not regard Dickens as essentially critiquing the prevailing economic system (namely, classical liberalism). Baldridge does comment on the "ambivalence with which the novel views Lorry's position" (644), but nevertheless states that, in spite of "the novel's repressed desire to escape the constraints of its own prevailing ideology," that Dickens's "sincere allegiance to the commonplaces of Classical Liberalism forces him to displace [these desires] in two directions: towards the comic and toward the private" (453). Ruth Glancy finds parallels between Tellson's Bank and the A*ncién Regime*, but ultimately sees Lorry as transforming through the course of the novel (45-7). Other critics have discussed Dickens in relation to nineteenth-century political economy, but not in relation to *A Tale of Two Cities*; see, for example, Norman Russell on Dickens's relationship with the commercial events of the 1850s. For broader accounts of the relation of fiction to political economy, see Catherine Gallagher, The Body Economic; Claudia Klaver, *A/Moral Econcomics*; Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property*; Susan Walsh, "Bodies of Capital."

[5] The crisis began in the United States and spread to England; Hughes points out that because of the international component, "the speed at which the 1857 catastrophe spread was unprecedented" (194).

[6] See Catherine Gallagher for an extensive analysis of the complexities of the relationship between value and flesh in Ruskin's Unto This Last and Dickens's Our Mutual Friend. Working with her theory of "bioeconomics," Gallagher finds in both Ruskin and Dickens surprising similarities to the classical political economists, stating, for example that "Malthus was the originator of the very sentiments that Ruskin thought of as anti-Malthusian when rhetorically connecting economic and bodily health" (88). Gallagher's study yields the

paradoxical result that "the very attempt to put the human body at the centre of economic concerns, to rewrite economic discourse so that it constantly referred back to the body's well-being, paradoxically itself tended to do what it accused unreconstructed political economists of doing; separating value from flesh and blood and relocating it in a state of suspended animation" (87-88).

[7] See also Theodor Adorno for a discussion of the fundamental abstraction of capitalism who states, that the "first objective abstraction takes place, not so much in scientific thought, as in the universal development of the exchange system itself. [. . .] Above and beyond all specific forms of social differentiation, the abstraction implicit in the market system represents the domination of the general over the particular, of society over its captive membership" ("Society" cited Jameson 41). Jean-Joseph Goux also addresses abstraction in his psychoanalytic sociology of the modern capitalist system of exchange. For Goux, banks adhere to the "the order of the mechanical symbol" (130) in contrast to, for instance, the older system of barter, where there is a "harmony of desires and a reciprocity of ties" (123). In capitalist monetary economies, he says, we observe a "disaffected, depersonalized, asignificant relation between abstract individuals" (123). By "abstract," Goux means that the signifying system of exchange—money—has essentially parted from its object, from all that originally invested it with meaning. Thus in modern capitalist economies, for "the first time, the economic value of a commodity can be conceived and fixed as an abstract exchange-value, apart from the subjective appreciation of its meaning" (125).

[8] Critics have ranged from seeing Sydney Carton's death as a manifestation of the "essential nobility and goodness of man" (Timko 189) to a suicidal "act of despair" (Herbert 220). Albert Hutter regards Carton's death as an aesthetic failure seeing it as an "unrealistic solution" (451), while Kucich sees Dickens' use of melodrama generally as a staging of "acceptable—as opposed to cruel—violence" ("Purity" 134). Jackson argues that Carton "achieves a triumphantly redeeming escape" from a dreary life of "failure and frustration" (174); Zabel regards the "heroism of Carter" as "the hope of the regenerative capacity in the moral personality of humanity" (68-9).

[9] See Claudia Klaver for an extended analysis of Ruskin's essay (165-7).

[10] See also Humphrey House who claims that Dickens is not interested in history and that of all of his novels *A Tale of Two Cities* is the one "which can "least be read for historical reasons" (34).

[11] Orwell follows Forster in regarding Dickens's aesthetic as part of his genius, defending the political realism that underlies Dickens's use of caricature: "[that] Dickens is always thought of as a caricaturist, although he was constantly trying to be something else, is perhaps the surest mark of his genius" (165). Forster states: "Part of the genius of Dickens is that he does use types and caricatures" (79).

[12] The generalising tendencies of *A Tale of Two Cities* have been commented on by a number of critics, all of who highlight the submergence of the individual to large, impersonal, systemic forces that ultimately destroy people. John Gross, for examples, states that "Dickens recognizes the ways in which a period of upheaval can obliterate the individual personality" (239); Robert Alter points out that there is "ultimately, a peculiar impersonality about this novel, for it is intended to dramatize the ways in which human beings become the slaves of impersonal forces, at last are made inhuman by them" (138). More recently, Baldridge argues that "Dickens' deep dissatisfaction with the social relations fostered by his own acquisitive and aggressively individualist society leads him at times to explore with sensitivity and even enthusiasm the liberating possibilities offered by an ideology centred elsewhere than upon the autonomous self" (633). Herbert comments on the way in which the main storyline is marginalised as though "its role were merely to provide a narrative pretext for the evocation

of another phase of modern experience, one wholly estranged from potentialities of love and redemption, which otherwise would lie just for that reason beyond the reach of novelist representation" (215); Daniel Stout discusses the novel as one whose "interest in groups produced its thoroughgoing indifference to individuals" (30) and sees the Revolution as a conflict between "two versions of naturalized citizenship according to which identity is inherited and who you are is a matter of who you represent" (31). This paper, by contrast, connects the abstraction of *A Tale of Two Cities* to Dickens's critique of capitalist enterprise.

[13] In his Preface to *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens himself used the term "picturesque" to describe his novelistic technique ("Preface" 397). He also uses the term in a letter to John Forster where he describes his intentions in relation to *A Tale of Two Cities*:

> But I set myself the little task of making a picturesque story, with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express, more than they should express themselves, by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I have fancied a story of incident might be written, in place of the bestiality that is written under that pretence, pounding the characters out in its own mortar, and beating their own interests out of them" (Letter to John Forster, 25 August, 1859, Letters vol. 9, 111-113).

Dickens encapsulates here the distancing, pictorial qualities of his characterisation that I am calling "abstraction" and the idea that character is subordinated to the pattern of story.

[14] Describing how the discipline of political economy was transformed in the 1870s by what came to be called marginal utility theory, Gagnier traces the shift from "Economic man as a producer" (a notion common to thinkers as diverse as Smith, Ricardo, Mill, and Marx) to "Economic man as a consumer," from the "social relations of population growth, landlords, workers and so on to the individual's demand for goods" (2-3). Gagnier dates this shift from 1871 with the publication of William Stanley Jevons's *Theory of Political Economy*, but Claudia Klaver, who also investigates the growing reification of political economy throughout the nineteenth century as it slowly separates itself from "the domains of morality and ethics, as well as politics and the social" (183-5), identifies the split as occurring much earlier in the century. She points out, for example, that David Ricardo, in an attempt to establish a "scientific" model of political economy "isolated a discrete set of concerns that he defined as 'economic' and then created a self-enclosed discursive model of those terms" (xii). This same split is also commented upon Philip Rosenberg who states that the "perception of the fact that economic modes of functioning were replacing the categories of social and political life stands as one of the characteristic features of nineteenth-century consciousness" (171). See also Timothy Albourn who points out that Jevons's attempt to treat the economy as a "Calculus of Pleasure and Pain" resulted in a theory that converted "consumer choices into mathematical functions that could be mapped out against marginal changes in supply" (76) and the collection of essays edited by Woodmansee and Osteen.

[15] This may be an implied reference to the financial panic of 1857 which originated in the United States before spreading world-wide, and the part played in it by the Banks whose loans, investments, and speculations undertaken in the prosperous years leading up to 1857 played a large role in the crisis.

[16] Baldridge comments on the fundamental ambiguity of Mr. Lorry but tends to read him ultimately as a manifestation of the displacement of the comic (640): his subsumption of his self into the Bank "endows his life with a beneficient purposefulness" (642); Albert Hutter also regards Lorry as a comic figures stating that the satire that Dickens directs against Lorry as "comparatively gentle" arguing that he imbues him with a "mercantile nobility" (453); Chris Vanden Bossche calls him a "minor character" with a "comic" function (216).

[17] For other critics who read Carton's death as consonant with the major political events of the novel, see Rignall who states that Carton's death cannot "be seen simply as the ultimate

expression of altruism, since it is obscurely rooted in the same values that have significantly contributed to Carton's estrangement in the first place" (584), Fleishman who states that Carton is "most of all satisfied by his release from history" (124), and who argues that Carton's death is integral to the larger project of the novel--an important manifestation of the "dissociative fictive texture of this novel" (221).

[18] See Hutter for a discussion of the ways in which these two men become father and son to one another: "once he decides to sacrifice himself, Carton becomes something like an ideal son and rediscovers his father in Lorry" (451).

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