

Synthesis essay on the theme of sacrifice



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Western literature, sacrifice is often regarded as a noble act because it invokes the powerful image of Christ's death. Many writers throughout history have used this familiar association to reprimand the prevalence of selfishness in the human society. As a whole, mankind sees sacrifice solely as a giving and selfless deed. In truth, the act of sacrifice often procures unexpected and valuable rewards in return, as observed in the masterful works of Bronte, Shakespeare, and Dickens. In *Jane Eyre*, Bronte commends Jane for renouncing desires to protect principles by rewarding the heroine generously at the end. Meanwhile, the prince's martyrdom in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* acquires the tragic hero clarity of sight in return. And lastly in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens entirely elevates the ideal of sacrifice in Sydney Carton's Christ-like death as a noble means to achieve life.

By sacrificing her only love in the name of her principles, Jane Eyre is rewarded with a family and her independence. Prior to the anticipated wedding, Rochester reveals his crafty plan for Jane after their marriage, "...I shall seek a cave in one of the white valleys among the volcano-tops, and mademoiselle shall live with me there and only me" (Bronte 272). Rochester wants to take his innocent bride far away from the world to his perceived heaven. The image of volcanoes here invokes certain association with religious human sacrifice. Often in these rituals, the gift-bearer desires either assistance or blessings from the gods; here in Rochester's case, he desires peace and forgiveness, so much that he is willing to offer Jane to the flame of temptation. Understanding her master's corrupted intentions, the astute and proud Jane must look within herself and choose her own path. Jane, in order to protect her integrity, decides to sacrifice her burning love for Rochester

even though it pains her deeply. In return for her virtuous act, as Jane later finds out, the heroine is rewarded with the two gifts that any doleful orphan would yearn for, her autonomy and familial love.

After losing the dominant member of his family, his father, Hamlet's sacrifice of his life to save Denmark acquires the prince an all-seeing eye. After learning of his father's ghastly murder, the prince finds himself stuck atop a ledge of indecision, looking down into the abyss of nothingness. Upon facing this terrifying sea and the reality of his death, Hamlet is presented with a difficult decision, "To be, or not to be" (Shakespeare 53). Should he sacrifice his life to save the collapsing state of Denmark? Or should he continue a gilded life in which conniving criminals and misguided fools are the masters, in which deceits and corruptions proliferate? Hoping to cleanse away the sins in his beloved kingdom, the prince accepts and embraces the reflection of his doom, unknowing that he is now bestowed with an extraordinary gift, sight. Unlike "Fortune's" commoners, Hamlet now can perceive life more clearly than anyone else in the court of Denmark. Comparing Polonius to Jephthah and anticipating Claudius's treacherous plans, Hamlet is now able to discern through people's beguiling masks and see in plain sight their true natures. And through those lenses, Hamlet can now see himself and his life's mission of saving Denmark clearly as well.

By saving his love rival's life, Sydney Carton, in *A Tale of Two Cities*, finally attains life through his death. As he stands atop the scaffold, Carton is awarded with divine visions which enables him to see life beyond the moment of his Christ-like death. "I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it,

faded away” (Dickens 381). Through the anaphora “ I see...”, Carton’s prophetic visions reveals his lifelong desire, to seek meaning from his aimless life. A talented but crestfallen lawyer, the jackal Sydney Carton has submerged his life in endless drinking and cynicism. In his exhausted self-searching quest, Carton finally realizes that it is only through his self-sacrifice that he can redeem and ascend himself. Not only cleanses his sinful existence, Carton’s selfless act also enables him to live in a way that he otherwise could not, for it assures Carton a respected and meaningful life, or after-life. His name shall be endowed with the eternal glory that he could never enjoy had he continued living as Stryver’s disaffected and drunken assistant. His legend shall be “ made illustrious” and be honored for generations. His memory shall live on in the hearts of many others. Through his sacrificial death, Carton finally achieves his wish to live.

Concerned with the paucity of altruism in the society, writers like Bronte, Shakespeare, and Dickens continue to explore the rewarding aspect of making sacrifices. Although attaining different tokens for their sacrifices, all three protagonists also receive a common and priceless gift- an opportunity to be in touch with their souls. Despite the incentives, all three characters, at the moment of their self-sacrifices, must look into their deepest cores with an honest eye and question whether they can forfeit a part or even a whole of themselves to preserve the better good. To the heroes and heroines, sacrifices are their tests of morals and courage. Without the sacrifices, they would never able to see themselves with a fidelity to the truth and a purity of conscience. Heroes and heroines must constantly make sacrifices to ensure

that they are advancing in life. They need to make sacrifices in order to grow.