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LITTLE DORRIT

By

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INTRODUCTION

This paper was planned originally as a critical exercise to determine the extent to which a graduate student could understand and evaluate a novel without turning to secondary sources. I chose Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, having no critical preconceptions about the novel and only the vaguest notions about Dickens generally. Part One of this paper is, then, my reaction to the novel, my understanding and evaluation of it free from any influence of Dickens critics. I have tried to express and define my response to the novel by giving a detailed analysis of it. My thesis in Part One is that *Little Dorrit* possesses a technical brilliance that is perhaps unexpected. It is a tightly constructed and unified novel in which every element works to create the sense of a society in which life is bleak and blighted. The elaborate plot, the many characters, the varied strands of imagery—all are woven around the central image of the prison.

As the second step of the exercise, I consulted various Dickens critics and compared their reactions to *Little Dorrit* with my own. The idea was simply to see what I could learn from other readings of the novel, to show the sort of criticism the novel had received and how
it compared with my own work. Part Two presents the results of this research. Of necessity, I have had to limit my appraisal of the critics to a selection. Critical comment on the one novel alone would seem to be unending. I have, however, outlined the various critics' views and interpretations in considerable detail because I thought it might be valuable to other students to have a detailed account of _Little Dorrit_ criticism contained in one paper.

Since I was, on the whole, ignorant of the social and political background behind the novel, I included a third section which was to supply relevant background which might contribute to an understanding and evaluation of the novel. Here I depended on critics who dealt directly with Dickens and his age. The end result was to be a paper which would offer a close reading of the novel, as well as an awareness of the various qualities of a work and various approaches to it.
PART ONE

LITTLE DORRIT

"A prison taint was on everything there."
(Chapter I.)

The first impression the reader receives of Little Dorrit is of the complexity of its plot and of the multitude of characters which fill its pages. Dickens balances and counterbalances the many plots and sub-plots until he creates a complex society within the novel. Though the people in the novel come from different strata of his society, their lives touch in such a way as to cause an elaborate interrelation between the major and minor threads of the story. Whether they realize it or not, all of the characters of the novel, all of the members of the created society, are affecting one another's lives. They may do it as individuals meeting individuals or they may do it as members of the society that is molding the individual. And this society that Dickens creates is not one whose effect on the individual is beneficial. It is a society that is narrow, restricted, and oppressing, a society whose symbol is the prison.

Little Dorrit originally was to have been entitled Nobody's Fault, a curiously negative title for a book that
appears to attack very positively certain aspects of Dickens' society and to place the blame for these faults in the society very squarely. Dickens does, for example, attack a society that could ever have produced such an institution as a debtors' prison; he does expose the inefficiency and corruption of the government through the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office; he does condemn the society for its religious worship of money—but the end result of Little Dorrit would justify the original title. Dickens really blames no individual or single group for this prison-world; it is a disease of the society that is a reflection of its inherent decay. Dickens suggests that such imprisonment is a condition of life in this world, that human existence is life in a prison.

A sense of gloom and confinement pervades Little Dorrit. The physical scenes are described in terms of either darkness and ruin or narrowness and stagnancy. The characters of the novel are weary and restless travellers on the "pilgrimage of life," and this pilgrimage is a wandering in a complex and desolate wilderness, a journey through mazes in the midst of ruin and death. To live in the society is to live in a prison-world.

Dickens has evolved a plot which deals with four intertwining groups of characters; each of these groups demonstrates a different form of criticism of the society, another aspect of the imprisonment theme. There is the heroine Little Dorrit and her father William Dorrit and
the characters surrounding them; the hero Arthur Clennam and his mother and their circle of characters; the Barnacle clan and the other members of the society concerned with the Circumlocution Office; and those characters surrounding the capitalist Merdle. The setting of the novel is London, and the most important single setting is the London debtors' prison, the Marshalsea.

At this point, and before I begin to discuss the characters as they are used as part of this intricate pattern, it seems imperative to take a look at the plot of the novel. It requires some courage even to attempt a paraphrase, but basically *Little Dorrit* is the story of the family of a man who has been in the Marshalsea debtors' prison for twenty-three years. The children of the family have grown up in the prison and one child, Amy or Little Dorrit, has been born there. The first half of the novel, Book One, "Poverty," concerns the Dorrits' life in the prison. At the end of Book One, Little Dorrit's friends secure Mr. Dorrit's release by their discovery that he is the heir to an unclaimed fortune; in Book Two, "Riches," the Dorrits undertake an extensive continental tour to try to erase the effects of their prison background. Mr. Dorrit, however, never succeeds in forgetting and before his death, his mind fails and he believes himself to be back in the Marshalsea. His devoted daughter Little Dorrit also remembers the past and longs for her friends. The other daughter Fanny attempts to escape her background and
further her social aspirations by marrying Edmund Sparkler, the son of the wealthy Mr. Merdle.

The novel also tells the story of Arthur Clennam. Clennam is the son of parents who have ruined his life with their materialism and their severe religion. At the beginning of Little Dorrit Clennam is returning to London after a twelve-year exile in China where he has managed the family business. On his return he finds that the mystery which has always surrounded his invalid mother has deepened, and he is disturbed by her association with a sordid adventurer Blandois. An important part of the plot concerns the resolving of the secrets of the Clennam family; the end of the novel reveals that Clennam is actually the son of a young singer whom his father had loved and that Mrs. Clennam had taken him from his mother, driving the young girl insane and later robbing her heir, Little Dorrit, of an inheritance. Blandois, who has been blackmailing Mrs. Clennam, is killed in the collapse of the Clennam house at the end of the novel.

Arthur is also associated with the Meagles, a wealthy middle-class family he has met while travelling. It is Mr. Meagles who introduces Arthur to his business partner Doyle, and it is Pet, the Meagles' daughter, with whom Arthur falls in love. Pet, however, to the disappointment of her family and Arthur, marries an artist, Henry Gowan. The Meagles also have a maid, Tattycoram, who leaves the family in anger and goes to live with Miss Wade, a
vindictive and suspicious young woman who had once been in love with Henry Gowan. At the end of the novel Tattycoram returns to the Marshalsea, however, bringing with her papers Miss Wade had been keeping for Blandois, papers that reveal Mrs. Glennam's crimes.

Another part of *Little Dorrit* centers around the capitalist Mr. Merdle. The fame of Merdle is based solely on his money, and this fame becomes disgrace when he commits suicide after having lost all his money and that of countless others in his unsound speculations. Glennam is one of the people who lose their money in Merdle's investments, and he is forced to go to debtors' prison until released by his partner. The Dorrits also lose their inheritance in the speculations.

Among those who cluster around Merdle are the Barnacles, the family that controls the Circumlocution Office of the government. It is the Circumlocution Office that has lost the records of the debts which put William Dorrit in the Marshalsea, and it is the Circumlocution Office and the Barnacles who, with their policy of *How Not To Do It*, are preventing the inventor Doyce from giving his invention to the service of his country. Arthur Glennam unsuccessfully tries to jolt the Circumlocution Office into action on both cases.

At the end of the novel the various mysteries have been resolved. The story began with Blandois in a Marseilles prison and ends in the Marshalsea prison where *Little Dorrit*
nurses Arthur Clennam back to health. They are married at the church just outside the prison and Little Dorrit and Arthur go "down into a modest life of usefulness and happiness."

I will discuss in some detail later in the paper the use Dickens makes of his opening and closing chapters and the way in which he manipulates plot and develops imagery. Since, however, Dickens' success in Little Dorrit is closely involved with his creation of character, an analysis of the way in which the characters are used in connection with the central image of the prison might provide good results. (As I shall try to show, the characters themselves seem almost to generate their own atmosphere and imagery.) Just as Dickens creates a complex plot, he also gives a sense of the real complexity and intricacy involved in the relationship of the individual and the society. Characters are not, except for Little Dorrit and Blandois, just victims and oppressors. Though his characters are reflections of the blighting effect of the society on people, they are also portrayals of the way in which people contribute to the restriction and oppression of themselves and of their society.

William Dorrit is the character who is most clearly at the center of the prison theme. He has suffered physical imprisonment by oppressing institutions in the society—the debtors' prisons—and he also suffers the self-imprisonment of a weak and vacillating mind. Dorrit's
story is a study of prison decay, a study of a man who has been marked and destroyed by prison life and by his own character so that even in the midst of riches and good fortune, he remains "a captive with the jail-rot upon him, and the impurity of his prison worn into the grains of his soul." He is a victim of his society and of himself, but he also contributes to the limitations of the society and oppresses others with his selfish gentility.

Dickens takes great care to present a detailed psychological picture of Dorrit. In Chapter 6, "The Father of the Marshalsea," Dorrit's history from the time he enters the prison is recorded. When he enters the Marshalsea, he is a helpless young man who does not even know why he has been imprisoned—but who is very sure he will be out soon. His chief concern is the effect of the prison on his wife. Dickens describes his weakness and inability to handle his situation, his growing adjustment to prison life, and his gradual degeneration:

Crushed at first by his imprisonment, he had soon found a dull relief in it. He was under lock and key; but the lock and key that kept him in, kept numbers of his troubles out. If he had been a man with strength of purpose to face those troubles and fight them, he might have broken the net that held him, or broken his heart; but being what he was, he languidly slipped into this smooth descent, and never more took one step upward.

Dorrit's attitude toward his prison life is complex. He is proud of his title, "the Father of the Marshalsea," and feels that by gaining this recognition, he has provided his
family with a genteel position in the prison. He is even vain of the number of years he has spent in the Marshalsea, and he constantly compliments himself on the way in which he has remained a gentleman, despite his surroundings. Dorrit refuses to see his own degeneration and fools himself into pompous self-esteem. His final ignominy is his acceptance of "testimonials" from his visitors, a form of charity which he pretends is a tribute to his position. His carefully nurtured complacency does give way, however, when he occasionally is shocked into his former sense of values. When a departing debtor presents him with a copper, the smallest sum he has ever received, he momentarily realizes his own degradation. After he has urged his daughter Little Dorrit to encourage John Chivery, the son of the turnkey, so that her father might continue to enjoy special privileges, he is ashamed and for a moment aware of what he has done:

"Look away from me, don't listen to me, stop me, blush for me, cry for me—even you, Amy! Do it, do it! I do it to myself! I am hardened now, I have sunk too low to care long even for that.

Even as his daughter comforts him, his violent self-condemnation diminishes to a "miserable whining" and their usual relationship is resumed. Since her childhood, Little Dorrit has assumed the burdens of the family and has protected her father: "She knew well—no one better—that a man so broken as to be the father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children." Mr. Dorrit accepts her
complete devotion and self-sacrifice and even adds to her difficulties with his gentility which refuses to permit any reference to be made to the fact that his family must work. Though she is completely devoted to him, Little Dorrit understands her father's weakness and his position in the prison. When his possible release is discussed, Little Dorrit replies:

I have often thought that if such a change could come, it might be anything but a service to him now. People might not think so well of him outside as they do here... he might not be so fit himself for the life outside.

The first mention of Mr. Dorrit after his release comes in Chapter 37, "Fellow-Travelers." The Dorrits are among a group of travellers at a convent on a mountain in the Alps. Mr. Dorrit is referred to as the "Chief of the important tribe," and he is lofty and dignified in manner. Little Dorrit finds a satisfaction in observing her father in his new role:

Handsomely clothed in his fur and broadcloths, rich, free, numerousily served and attended, his eyes roving far away among the glories of the landscape, no miserable screen before them to darken his sight and cast its shadow on him.

Mr. Dorrit still retains the effects of the prison upon him, however:

He had a sense of his dignity, which was of the most exquisite nature. He could detect a design upon it when nobody else had any perception of the fact. His life was made an agony by the number of fine scalpels that he felt to be incessantly engaged in dissecting his dignity.

He suffers this same uneasiness with servants and gradually Little Dorrit regretfully concludes that she will never really
see her father as he was before his imprisonment. The shadow of the Marshalsea wall is still upon him, even though it has altered its effect.

The relationship between Little Dorrit and her father has now changed. Mr. Dorrit no longer needs her protection and help, and he considers her almost as a painful reminder of his prison life. He is always cautioning her to act according to her new position, and in Chapter 41 he tells her:

Amy, you—ha—habitually hurt me. . . . There is a—hum—a topic, . . . a painful topic, a series of events which I wish—ha—altogether to obliterate. This is understood by your sister, who has already remonstrated with you in my presence; it is understood by your brother; it is understood by—ha hum—by every one of delicacy and sensitiveness, except yourself—ha—I am sorry to say, except yourself. You, Amy—hum—you alone and only you—constantly revive the topic, though not in words. . . . I deserve a return. I claim a return. I say, sweep it off the face of the earth and begin afresh. Is that much?

Though his plea to escape the past is a sympathetic one, this scene emphasizes Dorrit's inability to face reality. He refers to himself as a "gentleman unspoiled, unspotted," though, in his treatment of his daughter, he is even then revealing the effect of his background. Dickens' tone toward him is contemptuous; Dorrit is described during the scene as uneasy and rambling, and though he is upset by the conversation, Dorrit remembers to speak in a "carefully suppressed voice, lest the valet should hear anything."

During his period of good fortune, Dorrit has many dreams for the future, dreams which Dickens refers to as
a "Castle" which he is building. One of his dreams is to secure his place in society and to assuage his uneasiness by marrying the very proper and socially correct Mrs. General; another is to increase his wealth through his investments in the Merdle enterprises. Dorrit's reliance on the conventions of his society, as represented by Mrs. General, and on the importance of money, as shown in Merdle, fails him, however. Before he dies, he loses all knowledge of the present and believes himself back in prison. At his death, Dickens says:

All the lines of the plan of the great castle melted, one after another. Quietly, quietly, the ruled and cross-ruled countenance on which they were traced, became fair and blank. Quietly, quietly, the face subsided into a fair younger likeness of her own than she Little Dorrit had ever seen under the grey hair, and sank to rest. As his prison experience has thrown a shadow upon him, so his own character, his dreams and aspirations, have marred him. Dickens' personification of Dorrit's dreams as a castle which he is planning fits in with the careful picture Dickens has drawn of the dilapidated and ruined castles the Dorrits have seen and stayed in during their Italian trip. Dickens describes Dorrit's death as a passing "far beyond the twilight judgments of this world; high above its mists and obscurities." Only in death can Dorrit escape the prison of his society and the self-imprisonment of his own mind.

After William Dorrit, Mrs. Glennaam is the character through whom Dickens most clearly presents his theme. She does not so much illustrate the blighting effect of the
society on the individual, as the way in which people contribute to the restriction and oppression of themselves as well as others. Mrs. Glennam has ruined the lives of those around her with her harsh and stern Calvinistic religion and with her own desire for power. Her son describes his parents' religion:

*Professors of a stern religion, their very religion was a gloomy sacrifice of tastes and sympathies that were never their own, offered up as a part of a bargain for the security of their possessions. Austere faces, inexorable discipline, penance in this world and terror in the next—nothing graceful or gentle anywhere.*

Mrs. Glennam is almost a projection of this religion. She is often pictured reading from the Bible, which Dickens merely calls "a book," which is "bound like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards." Mrs. Glennam has committed her crimes—robbing Arthur's real mother of her child and of her inheritance and thus contributing to the girl's insanity—because of her feeling that she is justified religiously. She defends herself:

*When, within a twelvemonth of our marriage, I found my husband, at that time when my father spoke of him, to have sinned against the Lord and outraged me by holding a guilty creature in my place, was I to doubt that it had been appointed to me to lay the hand of punishment upon that creature of perdition? Was I to dismiss in a moment—not my own wrongs—what was I but all the rejection of sin, and all the war against it, in which I had been bred? I was but a servant and a minister. What power could I have had over them but that they were bound in the bonds of their sin, and delivered to me?*
As Dickens has criticized the society's debtors' prisons through Dorrit, he is attacking the Calvinistic religion through Mrs. Glennaam. But as he has made it clear that Dorrit's own weakness and self-imprisoning mind has also caused his shadowed life, Dickens is careful to show that it is Mrs. Glennaam's own desire for power that has twisted her crimes into religious appointments. Her self-imprisonment is literally true. Mrs. Glennaam for fifteen years has not left her room, supposedly because of illness. In speaking of her confinement, however, she refers to it as her "visitation," and when Arthur speaks of his father's remorse during his last hours, Mrs. Glennaam replies:

But let him look at me, in prison, and in bonds here. I endure without murmuring, because it is appointed that I shall so make reparation for my sins. Reparation? Is there none in this room? Has there been none here this fifteen years?

In describing the Glennaam house, Dickens further develops Mrs. Glennaam's character. She is constantly spoken of as maimed, and the house is also maimed, supported by beams that act as crutches. She exists in a sort of living death, and her house and her room are invariably described in terms of death imagery:

Arthur followed him up the staircase, which was panelled off into spaces like so many murmuring tablets, into a dim bed-chamber, the floor of which had gradually so sunk
black bolster, like the block at a state execution in the good old times, sat his mother in a widow's dress . . . there was no colour in all the house . . . the dead-cold hearths showed no traces of having ever been warmed.

Like Dorrit, Mrs. Glencora is always pictured in a shadowed atmosphere, the shadow a symbol of her self-imprisonment. The house also casts a shadow over the entire neighborhood, and at the end of the novel when the old house collapses, Mrs. Glencora suffers the same sort of collapse. As they stand watching the tumbling fragments of the ruin, Mrs. Glencora drops "upon the stones; and she never from that hour moved so much as a finger again, or had the power to speak one word." Mrs. Glencora's fate is to be permanently and inescapably imprisoned within herself.

But she has also permanently damaged her son Arthur. His life has been shadowed by his background. His parents' austere household and their strict religion have caused him to have an unhappy childhood; though he wants to have a closer relationship with his mother, she sets up a barrier between them that rejects him. Arthur is a dreamer and a romantic who would like to enjoy the pleasures of life, but his training has guided him into an unnatural graveness and sense of inferiority. When he falls in love with the young and pretty Pet Meagles, he is never able to tell her of his love and instead establishes a friend-of-the-family relationship with her.

Arthur thinks of Little Dorrit as "my child," and he treats
her as a father would treat a daughter. When they discover their mutual love, his attitude toward her still remains very paternal; there is no sex involved in their love, no sense of passion or force. Arthur describes himself as a man who has no will:

Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.

Arthur is a victim of the blighting effect of the society; there is little sense of him as a person who is self-imprisoned or who causes additional oppression in the society himself. The only way in which Arthur takes a role in the oppressing activities of the society is when he invests his firm's money in the merdle speculations. Even then, he is merely infected by an "epidemic" sweeping through the society, and he acts with the best of intentions. When Arthur is imprisoned in the Marshalsea for his debts as a result of these speculations, Dickens has another opportunity of showing the oppressive institutions of the society at work. Arthur, like Mr. Dorrit, is affected by the shadow of the wall. "His dread and hatred of the place became so intense that he felt it a labour to draw his breath in it." Arthur's plight is never really serious, however; when he is imprisoned, there is never any doubt but that he will be there only temporarily.
Arthur finds a certain happiness and an escape from the narrowness of his life in his love for Little Dorrit. Their life together is treated by Dickens as an oasis of quietude and order in the midst of the maze and turbulence of their society. But the happiness allotted to them is not a glorious escape out of the imprisoning society; they merely go down to a "life of modest usefulness," and there is the feeling that even this much of an escape is rare.

Dickens evidently felt that his novel was primarily the heroine's story as he entitled it *Little Dorrit*, but the prison theme does not center in her. She has lived in the prison-world and in the actual Marshalsea prison and has remained completely unmarred by the life because she possesses a goodness, almost a saintliness, that immunizes her from the effects of the experience. Little Dorrit has escaped the blighting effects of the society, and she is also free from any form of self-imprisonment or oppression of others. Dickens continually emphasizes her essential goodness and virtue. Like many of his other heroines—Little Nell comes to mind—Little Dorrit is child-like, delicate, and retiring, but despite her delicate appearance, she is given great strength of character and a large capacity for caring for others, almost to the point of martyrdom. From childhood on, she has managed the affairs of her family and has assumed the burden of responsibility. Though she is accused by her father and by her sister of showing the mark of her prison-birth
upon her, Little Dorrit is actually the only member of her family who has not been twisted by the shadow of the Marshalsea prison. Dickens only once permits her to exhibit any effect of her environment. When her father is released from the prison, Little Dorrit tells Arthur:

It seems to me hard . . . that he should have lost so many years and suffered so much, and at last pay all the debts as well. It seems to me hard that he should pay in life and money both... The prison, which could spoil so many things, had tainted Little Dorrit's mind no more than this. Engendered as the confusion was, in compassion for the poor prisoner, her father, it was the first speak Glennam had ever seen, it was the last speak Glennam ever saw, of the prison atmosphere upon her.

And as she is free of the Marshalsea prison, Little Dorrit is also free from the society in which she lives. She is not caught up in its mazes or in its restrictions because she is, in her goodness, outside the society.

The same comment might be applied in reverse to the novel's villain, Blandois, who represents an undisguised brute evil which is largely independent of the society. Dickens has one of his characters remark about Blandois:

There are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race... who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts and cleared out of the way.

And again in Chapter 50, "The Word of a Gentleman," Dickens describes him:

On this man, with his moustache going up and his nose coming down in that most evil of smiles, and with his surface eyes looking as if they belonged to his dyed hair, and had had their natural power of reflecting light
stopped by some similar process, nature, always true, and never working in vain, had set the mark, Beware! It was not her fault, if the warning were fruitless. She is never to blame in any such instance.

Dickens endows Blandois with the traits of the stock theatrical villain; he is dark and of a foreign appearance, clad in the traditional heavy cloak; he has a thick mustache, a high hook nose, eyes that are set too closely together, and a swaggering, false air. Dickens even speaks of him in terms of serpent imagery; he coils himself in chairs, his cold white hands "lithely twisting about and twining one over another like serpents." Animals and innocents instinctively fear and despise him.

He redeems Blandois from being strictly a type, however, by characterizing him in other, more subtle ways. His hands are emphasized; they are "unusually small and plump; would have been unusually white, but for the prison grime." Blandois' actions symbolize his personality:

Here, in dry clothes and scented linen, with sleeked hair, a great ring on each forefinger, and a massive show of watch-chain, Mr. Blandois is waiting for his dinner, lolling on a window-seat with his knees drawn up. ... His avaricious manner of collecting all the eatables about him, and devouring some with his eyes, while devouring others with his jaws, was the same manner. His utter disregard of other people, as shown in his way of tossing the little womanly toys of furniture about, and crushing delicate coverings with his big body and his great black head had the same brute selfishness at the bottom of it.

Though Dickens is not blaming society for its Blandoises, even with him Dickens jabs at society. Blandois insists that he is a gentleman and that he is like any of the
other gentlemen in the society who live by their wits.

In Chapter 64 he tells Arthur:


In his insistence on his gentility, he is like William Dorrit; in his emphasis on the importance of commercialism, he is like the artist Henry Gowan, and when Blandois confronts Mrs. Glenna with her history, there is the constant suggestion that she is equally as bad as he, despite her claim to be acting piously. Though Blandois' evil is evil undisguised, it can find its twin camouflaged but present in the society.

The capitalist and speculator Merdle is, however, a more pivotal character in the microcosm of society that Dickens has worked out than either the hero, heroine, or villain. He is as much imprisoned in the maze of society as any of his victims, but if Dickens has been most approving with Little Dorrit, he is harshest with Merdle. His name, a derivation of the word *merde*, makes this clear enough. And in condemning Merdle, Dickens is equally condemning his society, for Merdle is no real villain, no imposing evil, but only a reflection of the values of the people who worship him. The society pictured in *Little Dorrit* is one which gravitates around money, and Merdle is famous throughout England solely because he controls a large amount of money. In discussing Merdle's great
prestige, Dickens consistently uses religious language. He is not only condemning the materialism of the society, but also the religion which has become identified with material success. Dickens says of Merdle’s fame:

Nobody knew that the Merdle of such high renown had ever done any good to anyone alive, or dead, or to any earthly thing . . . nobody had the smallest reason for supposing the clay of which this object of worship was made, to be other than the commonest clay, with as clogged a wick smouldering inside of it as ever kept an image of humanity from tumbling to pieces. All people knew (or thought they knew) was that he had made himself immensely rich; and, for that reason alone, prostrated themselves before him, more degradingly and less excusably than the darkest savage creeps out of his hole in the ground to propitiate, in some log or reptile, the Deity of his benighted soul . . . Merdle! O ye sun, moon, and stars, the great man! The rich man, who had in a manner revised the New Testament, and already entered into the kingdom of Heaven. The man who could have any one he chose to dine with him, and who had made money! As he went up the stairs, people were already posted on the lower stairs, that his shadow might fall upon them when he came down. So were the sick brought out and laid in the track of the Apostle—who had not got into the good society, and had not made the money.

In worshipping Merdle, the English society is, in effect, worshipping a “log or reptile,” or filth. For a man who possesses so much power, who is the “mastermind of the age,” Merdle is completely colorless. Dickens stresses his self-effacement; he has nothing to say for himself, never appears to enjoy himself, and is “mostly to be found against walls and behind doors.” Merdle is always dismally strolling through his mansion trying to avoid the butler, his “oppressive retainer.” He is bullied by his own butler, his wife complains of his actions, her
parrot bites him, and he is even constantly convicting himself. Dickens emphasizes "that constabulatory manner of his," his habit of standing "with his hands crossed under his uneasy coatcuffs, clasping his wrists as if he were taking himself into custody."

There is a shadow over the figure of Merdle, too, a shadow which represents his own knowledge of his guilt. With his suicide and the exposure of his guilt, his former admirers cry, "he had been, after all, a low ignorant fellow," and the worship of his name becomes a "heavy muttering of the name of Merdle, coupled with every form of execration." The shadow of the Merdle greatness that the people are eager to have fall upon them is the shadow of crime, for Merdle "the shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by wise men bring gifts . . . was simply the greatest Forger and the greatest Thief that ever cheated the gallows."

If Merdle is only a reflection of the values of the society, when there is some danger that these shaky values will entirely collapse; for just as Mrs. Glennam's house falls to ruin, the edifice of speculations built around Merdle collapses with his suicide. Dorrit, Mrs. Glennam, and Merdle are all characters through whom Dickens criticizes some aspect of the society—debtors' prisons, Calvinism, speculation—but they are also people who are products of the society, contributing to its restrictions and equally restricted themselves.
The Barnacles as representatives of stupid and self-interested government are attacked as a part of the English society that is helping to destroy it. The Barnacles not only give England a corrupt and mediocre government; in their tight grasp onto all government posts and departments, they "fan the flame" of the Muddle epidemic and they prevent any progress or healthy change in the society. Dickens stresses their family partisanship and their unquestioning reliance on family prerogative. Their parasitical attachment to the ruling positions in England is resulting in a strangulation of the society which increases the narrowness and bleakness of the lives of the people and promotes oppressing institutions like the Circumlocution Office and the Marshalsea prison.

Dickens approaches the Barnacles in a broadly satiric way with his image of the "Barnacles sticking tightly to the ship of England." He takes care, however, to choose members of the Barnacle family to depict as individuals; for example, Young Barnacle, Tite Barnacle, Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle, Ferdinand Barnacle. Young Barnacle is characterized by his foolishness, by his astonishment that Arthur should actually demand to know facts, and by his eye-glass which he is constantly dropping and having to retrieve. Tite Barnacle seems always to be "sitting for his portrait to Sir Thomas Lawrence." Lord Decimus at Pet and Gowan's wedding is:
The windiest creature here: proposing happiness to the bride and bridegroom in a series of platitudes, that would have made the hair of any sincere disciple and believer stand on end; and trooping, with the complacency of an idiotic elephant, among howling labyrinths of sentences. . . .

Ferdinand Barnacle is the engaging and agreeable Barnacle who is "likely to become a statesman and make a figure" because he fully understands that the government is a "politico-diplomatic hocus pocus piece of machinery."

It is Ferdinand who obligingly explains the mazes of the Circumlocution Office to Arthur:

Our place is the most inoffensive place possible . . . we only ask you to leave us alone, and we are as capital a Department as you'll find anywhere. . . . It is there with the express intention that everything shall be left alone. . . . It's like a limited game of cricket. A field of outsiders are always going in to bowl at the Public Service, and we block the balls. . . . Believe me, Mr. Wiennam, our place is not a wicked Giant to be charged at full tilt; but, only a windmill showing you, as it grinds immense quantities of chaff, which way the country wind blows.

Ferdinand also tells Arthur that there will always be men like Merdle to swindle the public because "human bees will swarm to the beating of any old tin kettle."

Passages like these not only show Dickens' resentment of the control of the government by the gentry families like the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings, but also his belief that their ability to keep such prerogatives is owing to the complacency of the British people who tolerate the Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office. Dickens warns the English of the dangerous results that may occur from
the Barnacle rule. In speaking of the slum section of
Bleeding Heart Yard, Dickens says:

Bleeding Heart Yard was no inappropriate des-
tination for a man who had been in official
Correspondence with my lords and the Barnacles . . .
Britannia herself might come to look for lodging
in Bleeding Heart Yard, some ugly day or other,
if she overdid the Circumlocution Office.

The Bleeding Heart Yard inhabitants allow themselves,
however, to be "escorted to the poll in droves by Lord
Decimus Titus Barnacle, with colours flying and the tune
of Rule Britannia playing."

Dickens attacks the Circumlocution Office and con-
trasts Britain unfavorably with other countries when he
describes the treatment of Doyce, a talented inventor and
Arthur's business partner. Doyce, who has been seeking
recognition for an important invention, has been treated
by the Circumlocution Office almost as a public offender
and felon, and so he has finally given up hope of ever
being able to utilize his invention. He wishes to remain
in England, but he receives so many offers of important
positions in foreign countries and he is so poorly
-treated in his own country, he accepts a job with a
foreign nation:

This Power, being a barbaric one, had no idea
of stowing away a great national object in a
Circumlocution Office. . . . With characteristic
ignorance, it acted on the most decided
and energetic notions of How to do it; and
never showed the least respect for, or gave
any quarter to, the great political science,
How not to do it. . . . Accordingly, the men
who were wanted, were sought out and found;
which was in itself a most uncivilized and
irregular way of proceeding. Being found, they were treated with great confidence and honour (which again showed dense political ignorance), and were invited to come at once and do what they had to do.

Boyce receives many honors from the foreign power, but his friend Mr. Meagles explains to Arthur: "We mustn't talk about that over here... Britannia is a Britannia in the Manger—won't give her children such distinctions herself, and won't allow them to be seen when they are given by other countries."

Boyce is an important character in *Little Dorrit* because he is one of the few people of whom Dickens completely approves. Though Boyce suffers from the limitations of the society, he is not defeated. He in no way contributes to the oppression, and, in fact, manages to find a way to escape the imprisoning mazes of the society. It is significant, however, that this way involves leaving England. The society, in losing such men as Boyce, is losing its chance to remove the entangling net that covers it.

Another character connected with the Barnacles, Henry Gowan, is used to show the break-down of the system of family prerogative. Gowan is related to the Barnacle family and so is, according to the rules of the family bureaucracy, entitled to be "provided for." When his family connections with the gentry fail to provide him with a position befitting his rank, he spites the Barnacles by marrying Pet Meagles, who is without genteel
connections but who does have a wealthy father. Gowan is an isolated figure in his society; he has left his own class, but he retains a feeling of contempt for the lower middle-class into which he has married and for the artistic career he has chosen. As a result of the disappointment of his "great expectations," Gowan has become cynical, criticizing everything and everyone and stripping away all values:

Everybody whom this Gowan knew was either more or less of an ass, or more or less of a knave; but was, notwithstanding, the most lovable, the most engaging, the simplest, truest, kindest, dearest, best fellow that ever lived. . . . While he seemed to be finding good in most men, he did in reality lower it where it was, and set it up where it was not. . . . To be in the halting state of Mr. Henry Gowan; to have left one of two rowers in disgust, to want the necessary qualifications for finding promotion with another, and to be loitering moody about on neutral ground, cursing both; is to be in a situation unwholesome for the mind, which time is not likely to improve.

Gowan is himself a poor artist and he attempts to drag all art to his level by always proclaiming, like Blandois:

What I do in my trade, I do to sell. What all we fellows do, we do to sell. If we didn't want to sell it for the most we can get for it, we shouldn't do it. Being work, it has to be done; but it's easily enough done. All the rest is hocus-pocus.

In his bitterness about his condition in the society and yet his refusal to condone change, Gowan is suffering another form of self-imprisonment. The collapse of family prerogative illustrated through him is not a sign of progress or healthy change, but a sign of degeneracy, another warning like the crash of the Ullemann house and the Merdle investments.
The Meagles family represents the healthy element in the Little Dorrit society. They are thoroughly English, possessing all of the virtues of the English business class, with, for the most part, only its lovable limitations. Mr. Meagles is in particular the bluff, hearty, good-natured English business man. He is described upon his first appearance as a man "with a whimsical good humour on him all the time . . . taking up a determined position by putting his hands in his pockets and rattling his money." He has many decisive opinions which he readily expresses; for example, he believes English is the only worthwhile language, refuses to learn any other, and addresses all foreigners in English whether or not they speak it. He is constantly proclaiming that he and Mrs. Meagles are "practical people," producing their acts of kindness as evidence of their practicality. Mr. Meagles' wife and his daughter Pet share the family characteristics; they are homely, frank, and kind.

Though the Meagles are characters of whom Dickens approves, Mr. Meagles does have faults that mark him as part of the prison-world. He patronizes Boyle, and he is impressed by family connections:

His good friend had a weakness which none of us need go into the next street to find, and which no amount of Circumlocution experience could long subdue in him. . . . In its [the Barnacle family] presence, his frank, fine genuine qualities paled; he was not so easy, he was not so natural, he was striving after something that did not belong to him, he was not himself. What a strange peculiarity on the part of Mr. Meagles, and where should we find such another case.
When Pet married Henry Gowan, of whom he disapproves, Mr. Meagles' only comfort is that Gowan is "well connected and of a very good family." Dickens comments: "It was the only comfort he had in the loss of his daughter, and if he made the most of it, who could blame him?" In his awe for the Barnacles, however, Mr. Meagles, like the Bleeding Heart Yard inhabitants, is contributing to the Barnacle power and thus the narrowness of the society.

Dickens constantly uses the image of the shadow to suggest imprisonment, and when Mr. Meagles confronts his problem of Pet's love for Gowan, it is described as a shadow that is over him. With the Meagles, Dickens also again uses his device of describing their home by identifying it with the family:

It stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the Year, as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees and spreading evergreens, as Pet was by Mr. and Mrs. Meagles. It was made out of an old brick house of which a part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so there was a hale elderly portion to represent Mr. and Mrs. Meagles and a young, picturesque, very pretty portion to represent Pet.

Pet is not an important character in the novel, but her futile attempt to unite her father and Henry Gowan suggests the impossibility of reconciling those two elements in the society.

There is no point in trying to rank the various other characters in terms of importance to the plot or the imprisonment pattern. One might pull out any one of
the characters from the web of relationships and find him part of the pattern of people, events, images circling around the central image and theme of the prison. One of the most curious characters in the novel, Miss Wade, is intimately bound into the imprisonment pattern. Dickens calls her a "self-tormentor," and in order to point out more dramatically her warped personality, in Chapter 47, "The History of a Self-Tormentor," Dickens inserts a letter to Arthur from Miss Wade narrating the story of her life. She is not a victim of society; she is a victim of her own perverted view of life. Dickens has criticized many of the characters for their willingness to be led, for their uncritical attitude toward their society. Wade offers the other extreme; every kind action is to her one that is instigated by selfishness; every act of benevolence is "swollen patronage." While Dickens is warning against the uncritical trust that nourishes people like the Patriarch Gasby, he also wishes to caution against the extreme suspicious distrust of a person like Wade. Wade's attitude stems from the fact that she is an illegitimate child, but her unhappy background does not justify her bitterness. In her constant suspicion, Wade isolates herself completely from other people and is locked within her own perverted world.

Like the other characters, Wade is associated with Dickens' shadow imagery. In Chapter 2 she is described as:
A handsome young Englishwoman, travelling quite alone, who had a proud observant face, and had either withdrawn herself from the rest or been avoided by the rest—nobody, herself excepted perhaps, could have quite decided which. . . . The shadow in which she sat, falling like a gloomy veil across her forehead, accorded very well with the character of her beauty.

Simply in the course of analyzing the way in which Dickens uses his characters, we can begin to see certain characteristics of his style and certain techniques which he uses to create the atmosphere of the novel. With Wade, Dickens again employs his device of describing her surroundings in terms of her personality, allowing her characteristic state of mind to be reflected in the houses in which she stays. Like Mrs. Glennam's, Wade's houses are associated with death. Her house in Calais is a "dead sort of house, with a dead wall over the way and a dead gateway at the side . . . an attempt had been made to train some creeping shrubs, which were dead. . . ."

Her rented houses are dingy and dark, apparently empty; her living quarters are in "a stifling little apartment." Even her mirror is so clouded "that it seemed to hold in magic preservation all the fogs and bad weather it had ever reflected."

Wade's warping effect does not stop with her gardens or with herself, but extends into the lives of the people around her. She maliciously withholds information from Arthur about Blandois, and she tries to harm Pet. In what seems to be a Lesbian relationship with Tattycoram,
she tries to twist the young girl's life as she has her own. She sees in Tattycoram's passionate anger a reflection of her own repressed rage. Mr. Meagles denounces Miss Wade to Tattycoram:

I don't know what you are, but you don't hide, can't hide, what a dark spirit you have within you. If it should happen that you are a woman, who, from whatever cause, has a perverted delight in making a sister-woman as wretched as she is (I am old enough to have heard of such), I warn her against you, and I warn you against yourself.

Miss Wade is a slave of her own temperament, but Mrs. Merdle, in her role as the high priestess of society, one "who represents and expresses Society so well," becomes a slave to society, merely parroting its dictums and patterning her life completely to its exactions until she becomes incapable of any real human feelings. In describing Mrs. Merdle, Dickens says:

The lady was not young and fresh from the hand of Nature, but was young and fresh from the hand of her maid. She had large unfeeling handsome eyes, and dark unfeeling handsome hair, and a broad unfeeling handsome bosom, and was made the most of in every particular.

When Fanny and Little Dorrit visit Mrs. Merdle, the first thing they notice on entering her drawing-room is a "parrot on the outside of a golden cage holding on by its beak with its scaley legs in the air, and putting itself into many strange upside-down postures. This peculiarity has been observed in birds of quite another feather, climbing upon golden wires." Dickens identifies Mrs. Merdle with the parrot; as the parrot has a cage of gold, she composes herself "voluptuously in a nest of
crimson and gold cushions"; as the parrot periodically shrieks, "as if its name were Society," Mrs. Merdle is identified with Society. Dickens uses the correspondence between Mrs. Merdle and the parrot to suggest the ruthlessness involved in "moving in Society." When he describes the parrot's "cruel beak and black tongue," its seeming to "mock with a pompous dance," he suggests Mrs. Merdle's real attitude. She contributes to the cruelty and restriction of her society, and at the same time, makes herself into an unfeeling "parrot" of society.

Another society matron, Mrs. General, is an expres-
sion of Dickens' disgust with conformity and ridiculous propriety. Like Mrs. Merdle, she oppresses others but she also destroys her own humanity, becoming with her "prunes and prism" philosophy a "Ghoul in gloves--scratching up the dry little bones of antiquity and bolting them whole without any human visitings." She, too, is completely unnatural:

A chalky creation altogether. . . . If her eyes had no expression, it was probably because they had nothing to express. If she had few wrinkles, it was because her mind had never traced its name or any other inscription on her face. A cool, waxy, blown-out woman, who had never lighted well.

Her name suggests that the desire to exclude all impropriety and all that is disagreeable, to varnish everything over, is all too general in the society. Though Dickens treats Mrs. Merdle and Mrs. General comically, it is comedy that is brutal and often bitter.
Fanny Dorrit represents another reaction that can come from the blighted background of prison life—driving ambition. She is a Becky Sharp sort of character who manipulates the restrictions within which she finds herself in the society to advance herself. In Book One she tends to serve mainly as a foil to Little Dorrit, her selfishness contrasting with Little Dorrit's unselfishness, her laziness contrasting with Little Dorrit's dutifulness. She is unable to recognize Little Dorrit's goodness, and, like her father, fools herself about the family status, pretending that their background is superior to that of the people they know, and refusing to recognize the ignominy of their position. Like Gowan and Blandois and so many others, she rests her faith on the importance of money. When Little Dorrit chastizes her for accepting a bribe from Mrs. Merdle, Fanny replies, "Would you let her put her foot upon your family and thank her for it? . . . Then make her pay for it, you mean little thing. What else can you make her do? Make her pay for it, you stupid child; and do your family some credit with the money."

In Book Two Fanny becomes more of an individual and less the selfish older sister. Fanny has some degree of intelligence and a capacity for self-examination and for considering the motives and actions of others. One of the major goals in her life is to defeat Mrs. Merdle in society. She explains to Little Dorrit Mrs. Merdle's changed attitude now that the Dorrits are wealthy: "Don't
you see that I may have become a desirable match for a
doddle?" Fanny is able to recognize Mrs. Merdle's
insolence and falseness as her father, for example, can-
not, but she is so molded by her background and by the
society around her that instead of wishing to escape
such people as Mrs. Merdle, she wants only to emulate and
overcome them. When she contemplates marriage to
Edmund Sparkler, Mrs. Merdle's son, she analyzes her-
sel to Little Dorrit:

It wouldn't be an unhappy life, Amy. It would
be the life I am fitted for. Whether by dis-
position or whether by circumstance, is no
matter; I am better fitted for such a life
than for almost any other. . . . I am impa-
tient of our situation. I don't like our
situation, and very little would induce me
to change it. Other girls, differently raised
and differently circumstanced altogether,
might wonder at what I say or may do. Let
them. They are driven by their lives and
characters; I am driven by mine. . . . I
know that I wish to have a more defined and
distinct position, in which I can assert
myself with greater effect against that in-
solent woman.

Fanny begins her "moving in Society" recognizing to some
degree the restrictions and limitations of such a life,
but unable because of her own limitations even to con-
ceive of escaping. Instead she eagerly desires, like her
father before her, to acquire a prominent position in the
prison-world.

Tip, Fanny and Little Dorrit's brother, remains in
the stock role of the ne'er-do-well brother through both
Books One and Two, but Frederick Dorrit, "the ruined
uncle in the family group," is an interesting creation. Though not imprisoned in the marshalsea, the effect of the family's business collapse has been to cause him to become a ruin himself; his decrepit appearance and his wandering and broken mind show the effects of his life in the society. In Book One Dickens pictures the old man at his work as a clarionet player in a small music-house. As he sits in the orchestra pit, it is as if he were at the bottom of a "great empty well," an apt image for his vacant mind:

The old man looked as if the remote high gallery windows, with their little strip of sky, might have been the point of his better fortunes, from which he had descended, until he had gradually sunk down below there to the bottom. He had been in that place six nights a week for many years, but had never been observed to raise his eyes above his music-book, and was confidently believed to have never seen a play. . . . The carpenters had a joke to the effect that he was dead without being aware of it.

Even though his appearance makes him, as Fanny says, "not presentable" in society, Frederick Dorrit is able to recognize and appreciate Little Dorrit's goodness.

On the other hand, the source of Christopher Casby's benevolent reputation lies in his very presentable appearance. His long, silky grey hair and his shining bald head, plus his benign expression, have earned him the name the Patriarch. Casby is the owner of Bleeding Heart Yard, and though in appearance and manner, he is benevolent and virtuous, in reality he is ordering his rent collector, Mr. Pancks, to "be sharper with the people . . . you must squeeze them." With Casby, Dickens is not only
denouncing another restricting element in the society—the hypocritical benevolence that is actually entirely self-concerned, but he is also attacking the public who is taken in by it. The Bleeding Heart Yard tenants universally dislike Gasby’s grubber Pancks and worship the owner Mr. Gasby. When Pancks finally exposes Gasby before the Bleeding Heart Yard populace, Dickens has Pancks say:

You're one of a lot of impostors that are the worst lot of all the lots to be met with. Speaking as a sufferer by both, I don't know that I wouldn't as soon have the Merdle lot as your lot. You're a driver in disguise, a screwer by deputy, a wringer and squeezer, and a shaver by substitute. You're a philanthropic sneak. You're a shabby deceiver. I tell you, good people—Gasby! . . . If you want to see the man who would flay you alive—here he is! Don't look for him in me at thirty shillings a week, but look for him in Gasby, at I don't know how much a year.

Then, carrying out a threat that he has earlier made, Pancks snips off the Patriarch's hair, mutilates his hat, and leaves him a "bare-polled, goggle-eyed, big headed lumbering personage" who, his benevolent appearance stripped away, is only then recognized by Bleeding Heart Yard as its real oppressor.

Besides using Pancks as the instrument of Gasby's exposure, Dickens uses him as a means of showing a prevalent attitude in England. Though Pancks will not suffer the Patriarch forever, his philosophy and his mind have been cramped by his environment and he continues to spread oppression himself, despite personal kindness. It is he who persuades Arthur to invest in the Merdle
enterprises and he tells Arthur:

I like business... What else do you suppose
I think I am made for? Nothing... Keep me
at it, and I'll keep you at it, you keep some-
body else at it. There you are with the whole
Duty of Man in a Commercial country.

Dickens chooses one family from among Casby's Bleeding
Heart Yard tenants to individualize, the family of
Plornish the plasterer. Mrs. Plornish is a young woman
who, like Little Dorrit, is devoted to her father, Old
Mandy; she is "so dragged at by poverty and the children
together, that their united forces had already dragged
her face into wrinkles." Plornish is pictured as "one
of those many wayfarers on the road of life, who seem to
be afflicted with supernatural corns." The Plornishes
are proud to know the Dorrits as "people of such distinc-
tion," and Mr. Plornish admires William Dorrit's gentility,
"his manners, his polish." Like so many other people in
the novel, Plornish's mind is misty. Dickens describes
him as he ponders the reason for his own and the Bleeding
Heart Yard inhabitant's difficulties: "Thus, in a prolix,
gently-growling, foolish way, did Plornish turn the tangled
skein of his estate about and about, like a blind man who
was trying to find some beginning or end to it." When the
Plornishes achieve good fortune in Book Two, benefiting
from the Dorrits' inheritance, they soon find themselves
entangled again by their engaging in a minor way in the
speculative fever present.
As a sign of their temporary good fortune, however, Mrs. Plornish has redecorated her parlour, painting the wall:

To represent the exterior of a thatched cottage; the artist having introduced (in as effective a manner as he found compatible with their highly disproportioned dimensions) the real door and window. The modest sunflower and hollyhock were depicted as flourishing with great luxuriance on this rustic dwelling while a quantity of dense smoke issuing from the chimney indicated good cheer within, and also, perhaps, that it had not been lately swept. . . . To come out into the shop after it was shut, and hear her father sing a song inside this cottage, was a perfect Pastoral to Mrs. Plornish, the Golden Age revived.

While the Meagles can afford to have their country cottage, the Plornishes must be content with a counterfeit pastoral. (Little Dorrit's chivalrous suitor, John Chivery, also takes refuge from his misery at his rejection by Little Dorrit in a "grove of sheets," his mother's laundry hanging on the line.)

All this is, of course, intended for comic effect, but Dickens is also making his point. There are a number of minor characters in the novel who seem to have little importance in the plot and who are primarily comic figures, but nevertheless each one of them is in some way involved in the central pattern of the novel. Edmond Sparkler, for example, is continually being depicted in comic situations—with his one eye peering out of a carriage at Fanny, falling from his gondola; but despite Sparkler's stupidity and his complete unfitness for the position, he is made one of the high officials of the Circumlocution
Office, simply because of the mere drudgery money and influence.
The demented girl Maggie, who is always thinking longingly of the comforts of hospitals, is intended primarily to dramatize Little Dorrit's goodness as her "Little Mother," but she has been allowed to wander in the society, homeless, with no protection except that afforded by Little Dorrit. Affery and Jeremiah Flintwinch, Mrs. Glennam's employees, are amusing characters, but they also fit into Dickens' interweaving pattern. Flintwinch, who is as mechanically hard and cruel as his name indicates, always looks as if he has just been hanged. Affery, in her complete sujection to the "two clever ones," her fears, and her habit of being caught with her apron over her head, illustrates the self-imprisonment of a weak nature. Her "dreams" in which she gradually discovers the secrets of the Glennam past are used as a tie-in with the misty atmosphere that surrounds the entire novel. Affery's dreams offer an ironic contrast to those of the other characters. She calls the reality of what she sees a dream, while the others see their illusions, their dreams, as reality. The most entertaining character of the novel is probably Flora Finching, Casby's daughter and Arthur's childhood sweetheart. Her change from a charming lily to an embarrassingly silly peony is another source of disillusionment for Arthur on his return home, but in her incoherent and loquacious speech, she again illustrates the confusion in which all of the people find themselves. Her
strange charge, Mr. F's Aunt, described always as a battered wooden doll or a mechanical clock, is not human enough even to have a name.

In discussing character, I have necessarily discussed the atmosphere and the imagery of the novel, but a more direct working out of some of the major image patterns should show the way in which Dickens develops his total design. One of his major strategies for the organization of *Little Dorrit* is his use of travel imagery. He suggests that the characters are travellers in life who are destined to meet and to affect one another's lives. In Chapter 2 he has Miss Wade state this idea:

In our course through life we shall meet the people who are coming to meet us, from many strange places and by many strange roads, and what it is set for us to do to them, and what it is set to them to do to us, will all be done . . . you may be sure that there are men and women already on their road, who have their business to do with you, and who will do it. Of a certainty they will do it. They may be coming hundreds, thousands of miles over the sea there; they may be close at hand now; they may be coming, for anything you know or anything you can do to prevent it, from the vilest sweepings of this very town.

Miss Wade is intentionally trying to frighten Pet with this speech, but Dickens suggests this idea of fate uniting people over and over again. Chapter 1 has already emphasized that Marseilles is a refuge for travellers from many lands, and Dickens has shown Blandois and Baptist in the Marseilles prison, thus creating an expectation that they will appear again, somehow involved with Arthur, the Meagles, and Miss Wade.
At the end of Chapter 2 Dickens says:

The caravan of the morning, all dispersed went their appointed ways. And thus ever, by day and night, under the sun and under the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travelers through the pilgrimage of life.

Dickens picks up the motif again in Chapter 15 when he describes the fire in Mrs. Glencora's room:

Strange, if the little sick-room fire were in effect a beacon fire, summoning some one, and that the most unlikely some one in the world, to the spot that must be come to. Strange, if the little sick-room light were in effect a watch-light, burning in that place every night until an appointed event should be watched out! which of the vast multitude of travellers under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely to meet and to act and re-act on one another, which of the host may, with no suspicion of the journey's end, be travelling surely hither.

In keeping with this pattern Dickens sets up in such passages, the characters are continually engaged in travel. At the beginning of the novel, Arthur, Wade, and the Meagles are just returning from a sea voyage; Blandois and Baptist travel from Marseilles to London. In Book Two the Dorrits undertake their continental tour through Europe, and Pet and Gowan, and again Blandois, also travel to Italy. Wade is constantly moving from place to place, and Arthur travels about in search of information about Blandois.

Two chapters in the novel are entitled, "Fellow-Travellers," the second chapters of Books One and Two.
In the chapter in Book Two Dickens is again presenting a group of travellers who have come together in the course of their journeyings. Though the characters are now all known to the reader, Dickens treats them anonymously until the end of the chapter. He is once more trying to give the effect of lives accidentally, but fatefuly, coming together. Dickens introduces the characters in this chapter as if they were strangers to the reader; he uses this device repeatedly throughout the novel with Blandois. Each time he reappears, he is described as if he were a new character. Dickens uses this device to embue Blandois with an added air of mystery and to create the effect of his being an evil, ever ready to sweep down unexpectedly upon the others.

The use of this traveller strategy enables Dickens to evolve an elaborate set of relationships between his characters and to use coincidence plausibly. Another advantage it has is that it allows him to extend the implications of his story. He is suggesting that he is not merely narrating a story of one group of lives that mysteriously come together, but that he is using this story as an example of the way life brings people together. With allegorical statements such as "the travellers to all are on the same high road . . . only Time shall show us whither each traveller is bound," Dickens suggests a panorama of life of which the Little Dorrit story is only a part.
Another way in which Dickens creates this effect is by always stressing the complexity of life, its turbulence. He will, for example, write of a river:

_Within view was the peaceful river... Let the heart swell into what discord it will, thus plays the rippling water on the prow of the ferryboat ever the same tune... nothing uncertain or unquiet, upon this road that steadily runs away; while you, upon your flowing road of time, are so capricious and distracted._

Or when he describes Mr. Dorrit's trip to Rome, he speaks of his party having "thence scrambled on to Rome as they could, through the filth that festered on the way." Dickens ends his novel with Little Dorrit and Arthur stepping out together "down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the forward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar."

Working with the emphasis on the turbulence and complexity of life are Dickens' repeated mist and maze images. The London streets are spoken of as narrow mazes; the neighborhood of the Gwennam house is a "labyrinth"; the trip up the St. Bernard mountain is a trip through mazes of mist and cloud. Beside this maze imagery in connection with the setting, the people, as I have already noted, are caught up in labyrinths or mazes. Mrs. Gwennam's face is a "gloomy labyrinth of her thoughts"; Gowan has a net about Pet; Frederick Dorrit is lost in a "labyrinthian world." The entire trip through Italy seems a misty
dream to Little Dorrit, and when William Dorrit dies, he leaves "this ignorant life full of mists and obscurities." Again, Dickens wishes to suggest that the people in his society are "travellers" through a complex and desolate life with restrictions which they do not even perceive nor, of course, understand.

Dickens' two most important chapters technically are Chapter I of Book One, "Sun and Shadow," and the chapter in Book Two that I have been discussing, "Fellow-Travellers." Both chapters differ in tone from the rest of the novel in that Dickens is emphasizing the physical scene and setting up a mysterious atmosphere and a tone almost of foreboding—there is the sense of a blank stage about to be filled with action; for example, in "Sun and Shadow" Dickens is describing in great detail a hot day in Marseilles:

There was no wind to make a ripple on the foul water within the harbour, or on the beautiful sea without. The line of demarcation between the two colours, black and blue, showed the point which the pure sea would not pass; but it lay as quiet as the abominable pool, with which it never mixed.

Dickens then switches to a description of the shadowy and unhealthful Marseilles prison. In "Fellow-Travellers" Dickens is describing the mountain pass of the Great Saint Bernard Mountain in the Alps. The scene is a lonely one dominated by a cold whiteness and by mists and shadows. Dickens uses death imagery and imagery that suggests broken and ruined things:
A craggy track, up which the mules in single file, scrambled and turned from block to block, as though they were ascending the broken stair-case of a gigantic ruin, was their way now. No trees were to be seen, nor any vegetable growth, save a poor brown scrubby moss, freezing in the chinks of the rock. Blackened skeleton arms of wood by the wayside pointed upward to the convent, as if the ghosts of former travellers overwhelmed by the snow haunted the scene of their distress. Icicle-hung caves and cellars built for refuges from sudden storms, were like so many whispers of the perils of the place; never-resting wreaths and mazes of mist wandered about, hunted by a moaning wind; and snow, the besetting danger of the mountain, against which all its defences were taken, drifted sharply down.

Again, Dickens turns from a description of the physical world of nature to center in on the convent, which has the atmosphere of a prison and which even looks like a prison. It is significant that the first chapter that deals with the Dorrits after they are away from the Marshalsea pictures them again in a prison atmosphere. The mystery and sense of foreboding that Dickens wishes to establish for these introductory chapters to Book One and Two is a presage of the plight of the characters. Established as they are in such a society and with their weaknesses nourished by the society, there is little hope that they can achieve any sort of fulfillment or happiness.

The chapters illustrate the tight construction of the novel and the careful manner in which Dickens is working to achieve an organic unity. The first chapter establishes imagistic and thematic patterns which appear over and over throughout the novel. The title of the chapter, "Sun and Shadow," and the contrast between the "staring sun" of
Marseilles and the shadow of the Marseilles prison immediately emphasize one of the important images in the novel. The shadow is the shadow of the prison, and throughout *Little Dorrit* the sign of imprisonment is a shadow falling over the person. Even the sun of the opening is an unfriendly sun that is glaring and aching, too intense to withstand. The first scene takes place in a prison that is dark and repulsive, a place like a tomb or vault. The jailer's innocent little daughter feeding the "jail birds" foreshadows the figure of *Little Dorrit*. There is the water imagery which Dickens will continue to use. Light clouds of mist are rising from the sea, and as Jean Baptist listens within the prison, he hears outside "a raging swell of sound," immediately establishing the image of the turbulency and uproar of life. Blandois' speech insisting he is a gentleman even though he is a prisoner anticipates William Dorrit, as well as the theme of gentility which runs through the novel. Dickens ends the chapter with a paragraph which sets the whole novel in the context of the universal panorama of life:

The wide stared itself out for one while; the sun went down in a red, green, golden glory; the stars came out in the heavens, and the fireflies mimicked them in the lower air, as men may feebly imitate the goodness of a better order of beings; the long dusty roads and the interminable plains were in repose— and so deep a hush was on the sea, that it scarcely whispered of the time when it shall give up its dead.

Dickens can then go on and bring all of these motifs into his design.
All of the settings of the novel center around the idea of the society as a prison-world. Images of ruin and darkness dominate, and there is always a sense of narrowness, confinement. It is nearly always a rainy day in London. The streets are narrow and choked with soot. Chapter 3, "Home," describes Arthur's impressions of London when he first returns from China:

It was a Sunday evening in London, gloomy, close and scale. Maddening church bells of all degrees of dissonance, sharp and flat, cracked and clear, fast and slow, made the brick-and-mortar echoes hideous. Melancholy streets in a penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows, in dire despondency. In every thoroughfare, up almost every alley, and down almost every turning, some doleful bell was throbbing, jerking, tolling, as if the Plague were in the city and the dead-carts were going around.

When Little Dorrit and Maggy spend the night in the London streets, they experience "the shame, desertion, wretchedness, and exposure, of the great capital; the wet, the cold, the slow hours, and the swift clouds, of the dismal night." The city is everywhere ugly, confining, and cruel. The various sections of London from the elite Harley Street where the Merdles reside to the slum district of Bleeding Heart Yard are all described as narrow and dead. Even on the Dorrits' journey they pass through squalid villages with houses whose gardens are choked with weeds. Rome is dirty and diseased; their house in Venice is mouldering and withered.

Besides his use of imagery and theme to organize Little Dorrit, Dickens constantly manipulates the plot;
he will deal with one plot for several chapters, reach an interesting point or climax, and then switch his attention to one of the other sub-plots for a few chapters. Utilizing this technique of the serial writer, Dickens creates interest and suspense and is able to hold the attention of his readers through the course of a really long novel; for example, he will be dealing with the Patriarch and Bleeding Heart Yard, and then will switch the story to Little Dorrit, then to Mrs. Flintwinch's dreams, then to Gowan and the Meagles. Dickens makes little attempt to provide transitions between these plot switches; he merely drops one story and concentrates on another. He is able to do this because of his traveller device and because he has already established his network of images uniting everything in the novel.

These plot switches are often accompanied by abrupt tone switches; for example, following Chapter 1 which has set up the mysterious, anti-human tone of the Marseilles prison is a chapter which contains a great deal of good-humored action and conversation, rather than a lyric passage of description. In the same way the first chapter of Book Two which describes the gloomy climb up the mountain is followed by a facetious description of Mrs. General. Dickens also creates interest by making the reader wait for various characters to appear again or for certain things to be explained; for example, the reader is always waiting for Blandois' reappearance and for the puzzle of Pancks' fortune-telling to be solved.
Dickens does not leave various loose ends of the plot to be wound up hastily at the end of the novel. He unfolds his plot gradually and carefully, making preparations for events that are to occur. Pancks does not just happen to trace the Dorrit family history; following the notices of estate advertisements is his hobby; the collapse of the Glenna house is prepared for when Dickens mentions in the early chapters that it has had to be propped. There are really three major climaxes in the novel. The first climax occurs at the end of Book One when the Dorrits receive their inheritance and they leave the Marshalsea; the second, when the Merdle speculations fail and Mr. Merdle commits suicide; the third, at the end of the novel when the mystery surrounding Mrs. Glenna is revealed, Blandois is killed, and Little Dorrit and Arthur are married. With the end of Book One there is a feeling of finality, an almost theatrical pulling down of the curtain over an era: "The attendant, getting between Glenna and the carriage-door, with a sharp 'By your leave, sir!' bundled up the steps, and they [the Dorrits] drove away." The second climax also leaves the reader with this feeling of finality. The exposure of Mr. Merdle serves as a prologue to the concluding activities of the novel. It is significant that both of these climaxes involve money, and that Dickens has entitled his two books, respectively, "Poverty," and "Riches." Regardless of whether the people are poor or rich, they are living in a state of spiritual and moral bleakness.
If the first impression the reader receives of *Little Dorrit* is of the length and complexity of the plot and the huge cast of characters in the novel, the final impression is of the brilliancy and the craft with which Dickens has ordered all those pages, the way in which he has ingeniously concentrated all the force of his art on his central concept of the prison, which is at the same time theme, image, and symbol. There is a satisfaction in seeing the rich variety of the novel and yet its organic unity.

The novel is not, however, perfect in its working out of its central design. Dickens is sometimes too anxious to make sure the reader does not miss out on effects he has arranged. I have discussed the way in which Dickens uses imagery and symbolism to develop his characters and to make them work on two or three levels. With Mrs. Clennam, for instance, he has succeeded in condemning the religion she represents and in giving her force as a personality. The shadow imagery which he uses to suggest imprisonment works especially well with William Dorrit in showing the prison decay which has destroyed him. Such devices as identifying Mrs. Merdle with the parrot are excellent in their implications and the way in which they sum up the character and the point Dickens wishes to make. But, unfortunately, Dickens often overdoes these symbols or spoils his technique by explaining his own effects away. The shadow falls too often and too frequently over various characters. At first Dickens makes the identification
between Mrs. Merdle and the parrot subtly and cleverly, but in Chapter 33, "Mrs. Merdle's Complaint," he feels obliged to interpret for the reader and say directly, "the parrot on a neighbouring stem watching her with his head on one side, as if he took her for another splendid parrot of a larger species." Again, Dickens will characterize Blandois by showing the way in which he mistreats furniture as he mistreats people. But instead of allowing the reader to read his symbol, Dickens explains it to him by commenting on Blandois' "utter disregard for other people, as shown in his way of tossing the little womanly toys of furniture about." When he introduces Gowan, he shows him tossing stones into the river with his foot, "spurning them out of their places with his heel, and getting them into the required position." Rather than merely describing Gowan's actions and allowing the reader to make the necessary inferences, Dickens goes on to say:

There was something in his way of spurning them out of their places with his heel, and getting them into the required position, that Glennaam thought had an air of cruelty in it. Most of us have more or less frequently derived a similar impression, from a man's manner of doing some very little thing: plucking a flower, clearing away an obstacle, or even destroying an insentient object.

The usual Dickens character is created through the use of the tools of satire—exaggeration, caricature, mockery. His characters appear vividly real and individual, but they are sometimes exaggerated and given identifying traits that are too emphatic, too picturesque. It is fine when Mr.
Merdle is always nervously playing with his coat cuffs, when Edmund Sparkler continually exclaims, "A fine woman with no nonsense about her," when Mrs. Merdle is spoken of as The Bosom. With other characters, however, these distinguishing traits are so emphasized that they become heavy-handed and the passage is marred. With the Young Barnacle, for example, Dickens overworks his techniques and Barnacle's constant astonishment, his habit of continuously losing his eyeglass become tiresome. Another example of this same heavy-handedness is revealed in Dickens' treatment of Pancks. Dickens sets up a nautical image for Pancks which he uses extensively:

He had dirty hands and dirty broken nails, and looked as if he had been in the coals; he was in a perspiration, and snorted and sniffed and puffed and blew, like a little labouring steam-engine... As an unwieldy ship in the Thames river may sometimes be seen heavily driving with the tide, broadside on stern first, in its own way and in the way of everything else, though making a great show of navigation, when all of a sudden, a little cooly steam-tug will bear down upon it, take it in tow and bustle off with it; similarly the clumsy Patriarch had been taken in two by the shorting Pancks, and was now following in the wake of that dingy little craft.

The imagination that can see a man in these terms is one of genius, but whenever Pancks is mentioned, even briefly, Dickens feels obliged to use this imagery. Pancks cruises Bleeding Heart Yard, "sending a swell of terror before him"; he launches "the tide of the yard"; he acts as if "he were coming," and on and on.

Though they are the heroine and hero of the novel, Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam are probably the most
ineffective characters in *Little Dorrit*. Despite the fact that their realization of their mutual love is one of the chief resolutions of the plot and that Arthur is the character with whom the reader is to identify himself and Little Dorrit the character given the title role, they remain flat and only types. The reason they are so colorless is, I suppose, that with them Dickens is not using his satirical or comic devices. He treats them entirely seriously and makes them prototypes of a basic goodness who behave according to the set patterns of approved actions. As Dickens' work is best when he is attacking his society, it is worst when he is fitting his story to its sentimentality—as in the Arthur—Little Dorrit love story, in his extolling of Little Dorrit's goodness. The other incidents in which Little Dorrit is involved in melodramatic or sentimental scenes work out because they usually involve a character who is subject to Dickens' satirical effects; for example, when she plays the dutiful daughter to William Dorrit, Dickens focuses our attention on Dorrit's nervous gentility and self-deception, and Little Dorrit's goodness merely provides a background against which his weaknesses stand out. Her scenes with Arthur, however, become unbearably sentimental. The scene in which Little Dorrit announces to Arthur that she has lost her fortune and the scene in which she asks him to burn his letter to Pet are hard to take. In Book Two, Dickens has Little Dorrit write two letters to Arthur. These letters are intended to reveal artfully Little
Dorrit's love for Arthur and to express the goodness inherent in her. Her excessive modesty in the letters, however, and her habit of referring to herself as "your Little Dorrit" or "Little D." are offensive to the modern reader. The name itself is, as Flora Finching complains:

Of all the strangest names I ever heard the strangest, like a place down in the country with a turnpike, or a favourite pony or a puppy or a bird or something from a seed-shop to be put in a garden or a flower-pot and come up speckled.

Little Dorrit is her most unappealing in the novel when Mr. Meagles preaches to Tattycoram:

You see that young lady who was here just now—that little, quiet, fragile figure passing along there, Tatty? Look. The people stand out of the way to let her go by. . . . I have heard tell, Tatty, that she was once here, and lived here many years. I can't breathe here. A doleful place, to be born and bred in, Tattycoram? . . . If she had constantly thought of herself, and settled with herself that everybody visited this place upon her, turned it against her, and cast it at her, she would have led an irritable and probably an useless existence. Yet I have heard tell, Tattycoram, that her young life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service.

This is Dickens at his worst. In addition to his priggish attitude toward Little Dorrit (and Tattycoram), in his failure to create in his heroine a more vital figure, he is ignoring a possibly highly effective way of expressing his theme. The reader is inclined to agree with Fanny that Little Dorrit is "flat." Surely goodness is not necessarily colorless.

If Little Dorrit and Arthur are too good to be interesting, Blandois as unrelieved evil often appears
melodramatic and stagey. He is too much the villain, and even as a villain he continually disappoints the reader's expectations. Blandois signs his name in the convent registry along with those of the Dorrites and Gowans in "a long lean flourish, not unlike a lasso thrown at all the rest of the names"; Little Dorrit and Pet both feel Blandois has some peculiar power over them. These details make the reader believe, perhaps melodramatically, that Blandois will exercise his power in some virulent manner, but this expectation is never fulfilled. For all the build-up he is given, Blandois really doesn't do much. Dickens is also melodramatic with his dark hints of Wade's lesbianism in connection with Tattycoram. Wade supposedly exerts some strange control over the girl, a control which "twists all good into evil."

On the other hand, Dickens does many times pass up conventional expectations; Pet does marry Gowan; Fanny, Edmund Sparkler. As I have said, Dickens' criticism of the Barnacles is balanced by his acknowledgment of the readiness of the English people to accept such leaders; his warning to the British to be more suspicious of such benefactors as Casby is set against his warning against the perverted suspiciousness of Miss Wade. Mr. Meagles is kind and good, but he also "rattles his money."
"Give me a good book, or a good newspaper, and sit me down afore a good fire, and I ask no better, Lord! when you do come to a J and a O, and says you, 'Here, at last, is a J-O, Joe,' how interesting reading is!" 

(Joe Gargery in Great Expectations)

To an accusation that readers were tired of Dickens and Thackeray from having read them too much, Edward Burne-Jones, a famous Dickens admirer, is supposed to have replied, "No, they haven't read them too much, but they hurry through them and don't see how good they are." 

Certainly this is not true now for Little Dorrit, which has been read and evaluated by recent critics in an amazing variety of ways. Though it is not one of the popularly known Dickens novels, it has received careful and detailed treatment at the hands of the critics. In this section of my paper I want to supplement my own work on the novel by showing the sort of criticism Little Dorrit has received from its critics. I have included some critics who do not deal specifically with Little Dorrit because what they said about Dickens' other novels or his work in general could be applied to Little Dorrit, but I have not attempted to include all his critics. I have also left out one important aspect of Dickens criticism, the influence of his life on his writing, since I felt that this was beyond the scope of this paper.
I first discuss those critics who for the most part agree with my analysis, but who differ or offer further ideas on some points. Next are the critics who offer valuable new interpretations of Little Dorrit or who offer completely different approaches to the novel, and they are followed by the critics who comment on other novels or Dickens generally. I had intended to give a sample of what I considered bad or mediocre criticism of the novel, but, finally, I have decided to follow the precept of Dickens' Cheap Jack, the hawker who is improving his command of his calling:

I have worked at it. I have measured myself against other public speakers—Members of Parliament, Platforms, Pulpits, Counsel learned in the law—and where I have found 'em good, I have took a bit of Imagination from 'em, and where I have found 'em bad, I have let 'em alone.  

Criticism which deals specifically with the social and political background of the novel is presented in Part Three.

This arrangement has precluded my classifying the critics into schools of criticism with any consistency; for example, several of the critics who support my analysis arrive at their conclusions through quite different approaches. And, obviously, just as Dickens cannot be fitted neatly into any one category, his most perceptive critics defy any rigid classification. I have been more concerned with what could be learned from the critics than with what methods of criticism they are following. I have noted what I thought to be obvious weaknesses of the
different critics, but I have not argued at any length against the various approaches.

I would like at this point to make a rather large digression. Though certainly this section of my paper is not a history of Dickens' reputation or of Dickens criticism, it might be well to sketch out briefly the various reactions to Dickens. Criticism of Dickens generally would seem to go something like this. His earliest readers and critics either idolized him as a great entertainer and moral writer or, more rarely, scorned him as "Mr. Popular Sentiments." Early critics like George Gissing recognized Dickens' great abilities as a craftsman and tried to fit him into the boundaries of realism, seizing what they considered to be good about Dickens and ignoring the rest. Others like G. K. Chesterton and John Forster praised him as a great mythologist and creator of fantasy, thinking of his novels chiefly as showcases for his characters, with all of the individual novels interchangeable and almost formless. For a period after his death Dickens' work generally fell into disrepute with the literary critics, though of course retaining its popularity with general readers as the Dickens of Christmas and good cheer.

Then in 1941 Edmund Wilson published his now famous essay, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," which sought to show Dickens in an entirely different light, as a powerful
symbolic writer whose work was a severe criticism of his time by an artist profoundly dissatisfied with his society. Wilson was influenced in his view by such earlier critics as Gissing and by critics like George Bernard Shaw and T. A. Jackson who saw Dickens almost as a Marxist, a revolutionary sympathetic to the working class. At around the same time, in 1939, George Orwell wrote an essay, also highly praised, which reworked Chesterton's view of Dickens, dispensing with the idea of Dickens as a savior of the people and emphasizing that Dickens' genius lay in his creative fertility not in his craftsmanship. Other critics and literary historians like Humphry House followed these leads and attempted to place Dickens in his social and cultural setting. Wilson's work also ushered in many other books and essays treating Dickens as a writer whose works were symbolic structures of great poetic force. Edgar Johnson's definitive biography of Dickens published in 1952 takes this approach.

With such essays as Lionel Trilling's on Little Dorrit, another aspect of Dickens began to be emphasized—his position as a mythological writer whose works were also organic structures with powerful archetypal reverberations, most rewardingly approached not with realistic methods but with insights from anthropology and from psychoanalysis. Along with this trend, still in full swing, a group of critics have come forth now to reconsider Dickens once more, to correct what they feel to be the
excesses of the symbolic and mythological critics and to view Dickens with some "common sense." These various reactions to Dickens generally, then, might be kept in mind in looking at the critics' views of the one novel Little Dorrit.

One of the best, if not the most complete, criticisms of the novel is contained in Edmund Wilson's essay which traces Dickens' interest in prisons and prisoners and his opposition to institutions from the beginning of his work. If, at times, Wilson in his use of biographical and psychological insights overstates his case, he nevertheless offers an interesting and sound analysis. Wilson observes that in his later novels:

Working always through the observed interrelations between highly individualized human beings rather than through political or economic analysis—Dickens sets out to trace an anatomy of that society. . . . For this purpose Dickens invents a new literary genre . . . the novel of the social group. . . . Now he is to organize all his stories as wholes, to plan all the characters as symbols, and to invest all the details with significance. He stresses, however, that in Little Dorrit there is something more than merely social criticism: Dickens extends the main symbol of the prison with the Dorrits and the other characters until he creates the sense of a prison-world:

The implication is that, prison for prison, a simple incarceration is an excellent school of character compared to the dungeons of Puritan theology, of modern business, of money-ruled Society, or of the poor people in Bleeding Heart Yard who are swindled and bled by all of these.
Wilson differs slightly at this point from my analysis as he does not discuss the responsibility that the Bleeding Heart Yard people bear for their own condition.

Wilson develops the idea that Dickens is presenting the theme of Little Dorrit from the point of view of imprisoning states of mind just as much as from oppressing institutions, and he points out that "The History of a Self-Tormentor" is "with remarkable pre-Freudian insight . . . a sort of case history of a woman imprisoned in a neurosis which has condemned her to the delusion that she can never be loved."^7 Wilson praises the delicacy of the restraint with which Dickens handles the scene in which Mr. Dorrit becomes insulted at being offered a copper halfpence, and he praises the characterization of Dorrit as the best of Dickens' studies of the effect of bad institutions on men. He sees William Dorrit's rise in the world not as a fairy tale rescue, but as a mockery of the possibility that he could escape. Wilson calls Little Dorrit "the devoted and self-effacing little mouse, who hardly aspires to be loved,"^8 and he points out the lack of passion in the love of Arthur and Little Dorrit and the feeling of resignation and near sadness in the ending Dickens gives the novel. The Barnacles and the Circumlocution Office satire are to him:

Perhaps the most brilliant thing of its kind in Dickens' great satire on all aristocratic bureaucracies, and indeed on all bureaucracies, with its repertoire of the variations possible within the bureaucratic type and its desolating picture of the emotions of a man being passed on from one door to another.^9
Wilson offers an interpretation of the Meagles family which I failed to emphasize enough. Though Mr. and Mrs. Meagles appear to be the only characters in the novel who are unblemished by their society, Wilson points out that in their treatment of Tattycoram, they have made her feel her inferior position in a way that is capable of becoming offensive to the reader, and he says they also carry a sense of "smugness and insularity, even . . . vulgarity." He calls Blandois "the official villain" of the novel, but denies him any organic connection with the story, except as a mockery of social pretense.

Wilson speaks of Dickens' symbolism as "of a more complicated reference and a deeper implication" than has been attributed to him, and says that in this respect even the great Russian writers appear to have learned from Dickens. There is a "familiar Dickens of the lively but limited stage characters, with their tag lines and their unvarying makeups," but in Little Dorrit there is a great deal more interest in the psychology of the characters than in earlier works since the reader is told how the characters think and feel and even a little about how they change. Wilson believes that in Little Dorrit the comic, or specifically "Dickens" characters "stick up in an unnatural relief from a surface that is more quietly realistic."

Though his enthusiasm for Dickens of . . . approaches hero-worship, Edgar Johnson's biographical and critical
study of Dickens, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, offers a good analysis of Little Dorrit. Johnson devotes to an exploratory criticism of the novel an entire chapter, which he entitles, "The Prison of Society," in which he speaks of the pervading prison image and traces this back to Dickens' lifelong preoccupation with prisons. Johnson sees the theme of Little Dorrit in much the same terms as Wilson and as my analysis. He describes Dickens' plans to make the novel a story that would symbolize the condition of England and portray the corrupt social whole of the country, its vast system of impersonal wrong which baffled attempts to fasten responsibility. Johnson, too, calls Little Dorrit "an anatomy of modern society," and he says that it "paints this entire system as a vast jail imprisoning every member of the society, from the glittering admirers of Mr. Merdle to the rack-rented dwellers in Bleeding Heart Yard."

Johnson explains the way in which all of the members of the society are imprisoned, and he emphasizes that the imprisonment is not just oppressive institutions or mental states of imprisonment brought on by the institutions, but imprisoning states of mind in the characters. He cites miss Wade as a striking example of the way in which individuals create their own prisons. Mrs. Glennam, who represents "the harsh Puritan conscience and the relentless business morality of a monetary society," is a jailer as well as a prisoner in her funereal house, since she has
made their home a place of confinement for her husband and his son. He speaks of Merdle as a prisoner who carries "solitary confinement with him into the most glittering of scenes," and he points out the "besmeared and odorous associations" around the name of Merdle, in its resemblance to the French word merde. 16 To Johnson, the Circumlocution Office is the ultimate symbol of the restrictions of the society:

All the forces of petrification that interpose barriers against every generous and fruitful and creative impulse are symbolized in Little Dorrit by the Circumlocution Office . . . It has a deadening hand on everything . . . It is the imprisonment of habit, custom, convention, established forms swollen to more importance than the uses for which they were invented, and confined by inertia, profit, selfishness, and privilege. It is rigidity grown supreme. 17

Johnson discusses two points which were not mentioned in my analysis. He believes that although Dickens has been careful to show the way in which bonds constrain everyone in the society, there are heavier limitations placed on the upper-class members of the society, such as Gowan, the Merdles, the Barnacles, than on the Bleeding Heart Yard and Marshalsea inhabitants, since there is more generosity and kindness displayed in the lower classes. At the same time, however, Johnson notes the parallelism Dickens is using, the way in which the members of the lower classes mirror the same traits as the members of the higher classes. For example, the social pretensions and snobbery of William Dorrit pathetically echo the pretenses and snobbery of the aristocracy; his begging for
"testimonials" is no different from the Barnacle and Stiltstalking privilege seeking; his contempt for old Nandy parallels Mrs. Gowan's contempt for the Meagles; his son's uselessness is only a less polished and less corrupt version of Gowan's idleness. Like Wilson, Johnson admires Dickens' characterization of William Dorrit:

Mr. Dorrit's helplessness, his humiliation, his snobbery, and his shame are instead an amazingly brilliant feat of independent character creation. . . . In the entire range of his work Dickens never drew a character with more delicate subtlety and psychological penetration. Innumerable touches of wonderful sensitivity reveal Mr. Dorrit sinking to greater and greater depths of spurious pride and moral self-abasement.18

The Dorrit scene that Johnson finds most admirable is the scene in which he attempts to persuade Little Dorrit to accept John Chivery, the turnkey's son, as a suitor in order to insure him privileges.

Johnson reads Dickens' ending in which Little Dorrit and Arthur go down "into a modest life of usefulness and happiness" somewhat differently from my analysis. He sees this ending more optimistically as a symbol of Dickens' continuing faith in the decency and goodwill of humanity to overcome the confinement of society, and he says that Dickens "without closing his eyes on evil and unhappiness . . . believed that goodness could win a modest victory."19

Besides the happy ending, there are other indications that Little Dorrit is not "in its entirety as gray a book as it is in its major themes." He sees a "great deal of delightful comedy" in John Chivery, in Mrs. Plornish's attempts to speak
Italian, in Flora Finching and Mr. F's aunt, in Pancks and Sparkler, and at times in Mr. Dorrit. Johnson praises Dickens' poetic undertones, "pregnant with the weighted symbols of allegory, dwelling often within the dark and mysterious region of myth," and he calls *Little Dorrit* and Dickens' later novels, "masterpieces of his maturity... dark and tremendous symphonic structures almost epic in magnitude and impressiveness." Another good biographical and critical study of Dickens, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction* by K. J. Fielding, also develops the idea that the main core of the novel *Little Dorrit* is the prison and that the chief figure is William Dorrit. According to Fielding:

He represents everything that exasperated Dickens in his smug, self-satisfied fellow-countrymen, who were content to be imprisoned within old ways by their government, or shut up in a set of their own stupid conventions, as long as they could preserve an appearance of genteel respectability.

Fielding also mentions the intricate way in which all of the characters of the novel are linked. To him, the important part of the novel is not the plot, which he believes is too involved and full of too many mysteries; what is important is that in the novel Dickens "discovered how to manipulate a vast range of characters, and to bring them into relation with one another so as to reveal how the greater part of society was a colossal sham." Fielding is primarily trying to place Dickens in his social and intellectual context and so he does not give a detailed analysis of the novel, but the points he does make are in agreement with mine. He notes that the unity of the novel is achieved...
by the consistency in style and by the interrelating images:

The collapse of Mrs. Clennam's house, the crash of the financial 'house' of Merdle, and the ruin of the rather obviously contrived symbol of William Dorrit's 'castle in the air' are all part of a plan. The imprisonment of Dorrit in the Marshalsea, of society within the bounds of convention, of enterprise under state slackness, of those in quarantine at the beginning of the book, and those in the prison at Marseilles, all likewise have their place in a scheme.29

Fielding calls Little Dorrit Dickens' "greatest social satire," and he believes the chapters on the barnacles and the Circumlocution Office among the best things he ever wrote. He points out that the Merdle story is not an attack on capitalism, which would require satirizing a successful swindler, but an exposure of the "Mammon-worship of the public and the Government."26 Besides praising the Circumlocution Office chapters, Fielding likes the Bleeding Heart Yard inhabitants, finds Casaubon amusing, and Pancks and Vassby well-done, and Flora, "ever memorable." Little Dorrit, however is "only slightly portrayed, in fact she is rather tiresome, there is such a want of reality in her," and he believes Blaunds, Flintwinch, and Tattycoram "are nothing but dummies from the Dickens' waxworks."27 He says Dickens' successful comic characters, such as Flora, are "worth wonder," and their success lies in their dialogue:

They all live in their speech. Every natural turn of phrase is caught up, turned and arranged in a glorious succession of sparkling inanities and wit, nonsense and telling shrewdness, and phrases that we at once recognize as our native speech transformed into dialogue past man's 'tongue to conceive or his heart to report'.28
Though John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson intend their study, *Dickens at Work*, chiefly as an analysis of the effect of Dickens' working conditions on his novels, they do provide a brief but helpful analysis of *Little Dorrit*.²⁹ Like the other critics discussed, they support my analysis, tracing the prison theme in the novel and finding evidence of both physical and spiritual imprisonment. They discuss Dickens' original plan to call the novel, rather than *Little Dorrit: Nobody's Fault*, as an ironic comment on the current tendency in England to shrug off the social corruption and government inefficiency as "nobody's faults." Despite the fact that Dickens shelved the original title, Tillotson and Butt find that it survives in the novel:

*Its meanings are multiple. Beginning as irony, a comment on the tendency to shift responsibility, it becomes a gloomy truth pervading all parts of the novel, as a ground-tone of despair about society. As in Bleak House, the calamities of the novel spring, not so much from a single evil will but from the corruption of the whole condition of things: Mr. Merdle and Mrs. Glencora are themselves victims. The Marshalsea is more than a prison; it is a microcosm of the world.*³⁰

They differ from my interpretation when they note that individual happiness is possible for a few in the society; for the Flornishes in their "Happy Cottage," despite their poverty; for Doyce as the selfless servant of the society; and for Arthur and Little Dorrit in their love. They do, however, mention that the end of the novel leaves the reader, not with the happiness of Arthur and Little Dorrit, but with the picture of the crowds in the street,
"the prisoners of society." Butt and Mills also strongly emphasize a point that I only mentioned. They believe that one of the leading ideas of the novel is "the strength and indestructibility of natural, innocent virtue" in an almost allegorical sense. They also add the idea that the diminutiveness of Little Dorrit is essential to the plot; it is her smallness that makes Arthur misunderstand his feeling for her, and her diminutiveness is "picturesque and symbolic—the small frail figure who is nevertheless the font of moral strength; the protectoress, the neglected, loved by all, and, until the end, understood by none."

The critics discussed thus far have for the most part agreed with my analysis of Little Dorrit. Though they may have disagreed with me or among themselves on minor points—for example, the question of whether the ending is basically happy or unhappy, the importance of Little Dorrit—they do not offer any extensively different readings of the novel. The next few critics, Monroe Engel, J. Hillis Miller, John Wain, and Lionel Trilling, do suggest interpretations of the novel that are different from my own. Miller, Engel, and Wain support a large portion of the analysis, but present important new points; Trilling disagrees with the reading and offers an interesting substitute interpretation.

Monroe Engel's study, The Maturity of Dickens, is an important aid to an understanding of Little Dorrit for he formulates another major theme existing in the novel, a theme mentioned only briefly by the other critics.
and in my analysis. Though he acknowledges the importance of the imprisonment theme, working out its implications in much the same way as the other critics, he sees as "only less general and perhaps more complicated and even more meaningful," the theme dealing with the "ambiguous distinction between reality and illusion." He believes Dickens is saying the great reality that lies behind genteel illusion in his society is the misery of the society. He explains that Dickens' "elaborate playing on the complex and obscure distinctions between illusion and reality lends power and vitality to the over theme of imprisonment. . . ." Engel supports this theme by pointing out the way in which the various characters fail to view life realistically. He emphasizes Little Dorrit's inability to find her life in Venice substantial. William Dorrit cannot see that he is in reality a "mock-upper-class parasite" because of his illusion of his own "disinterested character and good breeding." Casby does not choose to see the misery his rack-renting causes; Mrs. General's rule that "nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at" is one of the self-protecting illusions cultivated by gentility. The Circumlocution Office is gentility institutionalized. Henry Gowan poses as a painter, but admits that he is only posing. Alanois justifies his evil by claiming that he was born to be a gentleman, and does what he must to live like one. Flora Finching reveals the theme in her "wierd stream-of-consciousness
language in which appearance and reality are hopelessly muddled." The aura that surrounds money is unreal and money is illusory—Merdle turns out not to be a rich tycoon, but a fraud. Engel believes that the whole meaning of what Dickens is trying to say is expressed in the experiences of Mrs. Glanman's maid Affery, "whose dreams, as she thinks or calls them, turn out to be not dreams at all but glimpses of a reality too dreadful to admit."

The prime reality that Dickens is showing is, according to Engel, misery, and it is only in coming to terms with misery that there can be any happiness. Glanman achieves reality in Marshalsea suffering after he has lost his money; Little Dorrit can only return to Arthur and reality after she has lost her money. Engel points out that death is treated as the teacher of truth and the destroyer of illusion, as in William Dorrit's death. Though my analysis does discuss the failure of various characters in the novel to face reality and the way in which they suffer from their genteel illusions, it fails to connect these points with the idea that the gentility of the society is only a mask for the real misery.

The most comprehensive study of Little Dorrit and the study that offers the fullest discussion of the image patterns of the novel appears in J. Hillis Miller's Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels. He begins his analysis with a recognition of the major points that were discussed in my analysis. He emphasizes the images that Dickens uses to create his "somber unity of tone."
sees the prison as Dickens' most important image in the novel, and he emphasizes the "sense of shadowed, suffocating enclosure" that is found throughout the novel, "the way in which the interiors of all the residences described mirror the Marseilles prison that appears in the first chapter of Little Dorrit." He notes that the entire city of London has this same atmosphere:

Dickens, then, has found for this novel a profound symbol for the universal condition of life in the world of his imagination: imprisonment. . . . Imprisonment has, we can see, a religious or metaphysical meaning for Dickens as well as a psychological or social one. To be in this world at all, whether one is good or bad, rich or poor, a lord of the Circumlocution Office or a debtor in the Marshalsea, is to be in prison, and this condition will apparently persist as long as life itself.

Miller also points out that most of the forms of imprisonment in the novel are spiritual rather than physical; for example, Flora Wasby's imprisonment within "the mad sequences of her own involuntary mental associations and the perpetual reenactment of her lost past"; Blandois' imprisonment in the idea of himself as a gentleman; John Chivery's constant anticipation of his own death. He also notes the way in which the major characters of the novel suffer spiritual imprisonment—Dorrit, Glenam, Mrs. Glenam, Merdle. The central event in the novel—the Dorrits' inheritance and release from prison—also demonstrates that imprisonment is not exterior, but inner and permanent.

Miller discusses two other image patterns which are nearly as important as the prison imagery—the image of
a labyrinth and the image of life as a journey:

If the symbol of imprisonment expresses Dickens' sense of human life as enclosed and limited, whether by physical or spiritual walls, and if the image of life as a labyrinth expresses his sense that human beings are all lost inextricably in a maze without beginning, end, or pattern, the recurrent image of "travellers on the pilgrimage of life" expresses the idea that people are fatefully intertwined in one another's lives, often without knowing it or intending it. It also expresses Dickens' sense that a human life is not motionless but is perpetually flowing on with the river of time toward its destined adventures and toward the ultimate ocean of death. . . . It reinforces the others by suggesting that this world is a lonely place where man is a stranger passing continually on in search of a haven which is not to be found anywhere in the "prison of this lower world." Taken all together, these three images, the basic symbolic metaphors of the novel, present a terrifyingly bleak picture of human life.42

Miller's explanation of the way these patterns interact is invaluable for a complete understanding of Little Dorrit.

Miller also notes that many of the characters, in their confusion and in their state of continual restlessness, "exist in a nightmare of unreality," incapable of escape. The term "shadow" is used to link physical imprisonment and imprisoning states of the soul, and the words "shadow," "gentleman," and "secret," appear again and again. Although my analysis also discusses the way in which the term "shadow" is used, and, to some extent, the way in which the word "gentleman" is used, I failed to see the implications of the word "secret." Miller explains that as shadow is used to indicate imprisonment, the word "gentleman" defines the "ambiguities of Society,"
and the word "secret" expresses the "isolation of the characters from one another, either in their intertuned selfishness or in their self-effacing goodness." Miller maintains that Little Dorrit "has at its center a recognition of the inalienable secrecy and otherness of every human being." Little Dorrit, in the mystery of her goodness, exemplifies this secrecy or otherness. Miller sees this isolation of the characters as an insight into Dickens' methods of characterization:

A sense of the grotesque idiosyncrasies of people, their incommensurability with one another, is a central element in Dickens' vision of the world. . . . Indeed, the vision of people as wholly unlike one another and locked in the distortions of personal eccentricities is one of Dickens' most powerful ways of dramatizing the theme of isolation, and the inexhaustible power to bring into existence large numbers of comic or melodramatic grotesques, each alive with his own peculiar intensity of life, is perhaps Dickens' most extraordinary talent as a novelist.

Besides his discussion of the secrecy and isolation of the characters, Miller mentions two other points which are new. There is one part of the world of Little Dorrit which is peaceful and not restless and turbulent. In the country both Little Dorrit and Arthur have a sense of peace and freedom. This restful peace is not an escape from the restricting society, however, for the same peace is to be found in "the false quiet of the prison and its easy path downward into deeper and deeper moral disintegration . . . only a horrible parody of the divine calm." Arthur Clennam, for example, feels an unnatural peace when he first enters the Marshalsea, and the prison doctor
speaks of the peace and freedom from responsibility to be found in the prison. This peace is "the dangerous peace of acquiescence." 47

The second new idea is Miller's insistence that Dickens does offer a solution from the restrictions of the society in his portrayal of Little Dorrit. In the novel the one stage of life which escapes the prison shadow is childhood; for example, William Dorrit returns to childhood and peace at his death, and Little Dorrit, who is childlike, remains unlighted. She possesses a miraculous goodness which transfers into her adult life the purity of childhood and gives her the power to help those around her. If the other characters are able to reestablish contact with goodness, they may escape their limitations; Mrs. Gllennam saves herself by confessing to Little Dorrit; Pancks, by unmasking the fake Patriarch. Wholly evil people are powerless against the good, as is evidenced by the crushing of Slandois in the collapse of the Gllennam house. Though he possesses the seeds of goodness, Arthur has had his will paralyzed and so is incapable of escaping. The central dramatic action of the novel is Arthur's search for some means to reconstitute his will by testing various means of relating himself to society. They all fail until he finds himself in his love for Little Dorrit. Without her, Gllennam would be lost in a maze like the other members of the society.
In Little Dorrit's position as "the mystery of incarnate goodness," however, Dickens expresses the complications of good and evil, for though she possesses the innocence of childhood, she is, after all, an adult "with an adult's knowledge of evil and an adult's need to combine sexual and spiritual love." The scene in the novel when Little Dorrit is approached by the prostitute—a scene which Miller calls "one of the most poignant scenes in Little Dorrit—perhaps in all Dickens"—dramatizes the ambiguities of her position. Since she is an adult and can realize the evil of the prostitute, the woman cannot find the peace she would gain from a child. Arthur, too, is unable at first to recognize his love for her, identifying her goodness with childhood. It is only when he realizes that she is both good and adult that they can be happily married.

Miller believes that the end of Little Dorrit is a "firm assertion that their happiness is limited to themselves alone and leaves the selfish, restless, and deluded multitudes still locked in the prison of the world." In her voluntary refusal to exert her own will, Little Dorrit has succeeded in dominating a world in which everyone who selfishly attempts to exert his will fails. Miller says that with Little Dorrit, "Dickens has reached one of the peaks of his own artistic success in being able to persuade us to accept so completely the mystery of divine goodness incarnate in a human figure."
I have discussed Miller at considerable length because he is one of the few critics who give a detailed examination of the novel and because his interpretation, particularly his excellent discussion of the image patterns, is important in a full understanding of it. In my estimation, however, in his analysis Miller ignores the side of Dickens I discussed in the last part of my paper. Reading Miller, the reader would never suspect the presence in the novel of such scenes as Mr. Meagles' lecture to Tattycoram or Blandois' theatrical threats. Certainly his point that Dickens has persuaded us to accept completely Little Dorrit as the mystery of divine goodness is debatable.

Lionel Trilling, in his introduction to the Oxford edition of Little Dorrit, offers a reading of the novel that is quite different from mine. He acknowledges the importance of the prison imagery and the imprisonment idea, but he does not see it as the center of the novel. Trilling says that though Little Dorrit is the least established of Dickens' later novels with modern readers, its real theme, the relation of the individual will to society, should make it particularly valid for us:

At no point, perhaps, do the particular abuses and absurdities at which Dickens directed his terrible cold anger represent the problems of social life as we now conceive them. . . . Yet this makes Little Dorrit not less but more relevant to our sense of things. As the particular seems less immediate to our case, the general force of the novel becomes greater, and Little Dorrit is seen to be about a problem which does not yield easily to time.
Trilling emphasizes the importance of the prison symbol for the theme because of the prison's very real connection with the will. The prison, before it is ever a symbol, is an actuality as the practical instrument contrived by the will of the society to curb the individual's will. According to Trilling, the master passion of the characters of Little Dorrit is their will to status, to be recognized and deferred to, and he sees even their desire for money as subordinated to this desire for deference. Blandois is an important character for Trilling's theme because Blandois, in his insistence on his right to be served and to be deferred to, reflects the beliefs of the entire group surrounding him. His justification of his demand to be served is his claim that he is, after all, only what society has made him. Blandois is an important character for another reason. In his role as the personification of evil, Blandois reminds the reader of the reason for prisons and deprives him of "the comfortable, philanthropic thought that prisons are nothing but instruments of injustice."

Like Blandois, all of the characters justify the demands of their own will with self-pity; they "rely on the great modern strategy of being the insulted and injured." For example, Ranny Dorrit damns herself entirely by marrying Sparkler in order to torture Mrs. Merdle, who has once questioned her social position; Wade lives a life of self-torture, which gives her license to turn her hatred on
others; Mrs. Gowan represents "the unquestionable right-
ness of wronged gentility."^54

Though Glennam proclaims, "I have no will," Trilling sees in him an example of a "bitter, clenched will," which has kept him from responding to his mother's will and which has aided him in helping others. His determination in the presence of the Circumlocution Office, his persistent "I want to know," illustrates his actual ten-
acity, but Trilling also sees in this incident a reminder of Melville's hero Bartleby, with his, "I prefer not to," a symbol of "will in the ultimate fatigue."^55

Another major idea in the novel that Trilling notes is the remarkable number of "false and inadequate parents."^56 William Dorrit in his role as the Father of the Marshalsea is unable to perform any paternal function for his own children: he accepts any sacrifice from Little Dorrit and succeeds in corrupting Fanny and Tip with his illusions of gentility. Casby, the "Patriarch," is actually any-
thing but fatherly in his attitude toward the Bleeding Heart Yard dwellers. Trilling makes an interesting point about Pancks' exposure of Casby: "The primitive appropri-
ateness of the strange, the un-English, punishment which Mr. Pancks metes out to his hollow paternity will be under-
stood by any reader with the least tincture of psychoanalytical knowledge."^57 Henry Gowan's corruption is rooted in his mother's rearing of him, and of course the center of the unnatural parent theme is in Mrs. Glennam's harsh rearing of Arthur, an instruction which has blighted his life.
Trilling closes his introduction to *Little Dorrit* with these remarks:

In a novel in which a house falls physically to ruins from the moral collapse of its inhabitants, in which the heavens open over London to show a crown of thorns, in which there are characters named nothing else than Bar. Bishop, Physician, we are quite content to accept the existence of a devil Blandois. And we do not reject, for all our inevitable first impulse to do so, the character of Little Dorrit herself. Her untutored goodness does not appall us or make us misdoubt her, as we expect it to do. This novel at its best is only incidentally realistic, its finest power of imagination appears in the great general images whose abstractness is their actuality, like Mr. Merdle's dinner parties, or the Circumlocution Office itself, and in such a context we understand Little Dorrit to be the Beatrice of the Comedy, the Paraclete in female form. Even the physical littleness of this grown woman, an attribute which is insisted on and which seems likely to repel us, does not do so, for we perceive it to be the sign that she not only is the Child of the Marshalsea, as she is called, but also the Child of the Parable, the negation of the social will.

Though the theme Trilling suggests is not to me the basic theme of the novel, it is helpful for a full consideration of Dickens' meaning in *Little Dorrit*. His discussion of the parent-child relationships is even more valuable. Like Miller, Trilling seems to me to exaggerate the importance of Little Dorrit. Just as it is difficult to accept Little Dorrit as the mystery of divine goodness, Blandois in the role of the devil is more amusing than terrifying.

I have placed the next critic, John Wain, somewhat out of context in order to present his comments on Trilling's essay. Like Miller, Wain's interpretation of the novel agrees with my analysis for the most part, but adds valuable new ideas. A champion of *Little Dorrit*—he believes it is
one of the nineteenth century's greatest novels as well as Dickens' masterpiece—Wain agrees with Trilling's high estimation of the novel, but he complains that Trilling deals in generalizations, that he doesn't say why he has responded to the force of the novel. The statement that the novel is about "society in relation to the general human will" is not specific or clear; the wantean and Paraclete terms which Trilling uses seem to Wain false to the specific and literal quality of *Little Dorrit*, which is tightly organized around the two symbols of the prison and the family. He agrees with Trilling that there are examples of the dislocated family everywhere in the book, but the important point for Wain is the way the two symbols interact: "Nobody ever gets out of prison, because the family is the prison, and the family is England, and England is a prison."  

The plot of the novel is unimportant; "its development is by means of outward radiation, rather than linear progression," and everything radiates around the two symbols. Wain comments that Dickens was determined that the most careless reader would not miss his imprisonment theme, as he mentions it over and over, and in the same way, he builds the whole novel around a pattern of twisted family relationships. Though *Little Dorrit* and Arthur marry at the end, *Little Dorrit* is "left in a permanently disabled psychological state in which the relationship of father and daughter is the only one she can think of as real."  

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is also a victim of society and family; Mr. and Mrs. Meagles spoil her chance of happiness by protecting her so much that she knows no better than to marry Gowan; she is "offered up by her tearful parents on the altar of snobbery, which is seen consistently as a perverted form of family sentiment." Casey is a false "Patriarch"; the Plornishes' Patriarch is in the workhouse; Magby's only mother is Little Dorrit.

Without deserting the thesis of his earlier novels, that all crime is crime against the child, Dickens here enlarges the theme to include the whole of society. Snobbery, personal unhappiness, and social malorganization—these are shown as the fruits of a wrong family relationship; men like Daniel Doyce, instead of being the archetypal "creative mind" for whom Dickens makes a "Dantesque Claim". Trilling's terms are simply the useful members of the family whose usefulness is squandered by others.

Wain praises the opening scene of the novel which shows the "achingly real physical contrast between the blistering heat of Marseille and the dank rottenness of the prison," and which also shows the crippling social relationships which create prisons, with such details as the different food for Blandois and Jean Baptist. Even the sun is a brigand, and the little girl is obviously an emblem for Little Dorrit. With the next scene Dickens immediately gives us another sort of prison, the Marseille quarantine barracks, and Wade, another person "suffering from a disease engendered by imprisonment, on the psychological level." In the same way, the third chapter with Arthur Clennam on a rainy Sunday in London emphasizes that
one of the qualities of imprisonment is repression, the festering of emotions away from the sun. Every setting in the novel is either actually or potentially a prison.

Maid also points out that the sympathetic characters are presented in pastoral terms, while the unsympathetic characters are opposed to the spontaneous and natural. Mrs. General is a military warden to Fanny and Little Dorrit; Mrs. Merdle is only a Boosa to display jewelry; the chief butler robe even Mr. Merdle's death of any humanity with his 'I should wish to give a month's notice.'

His argument is that Little Dorrit's excellence is not just in its poetic qualities, but in its superb craftsmanship:

that this essay has been trying to do is simply to present the evidence for claiming that Little Dorrit has a balance and logic sufficient to avert that loss of energy which is so evident in Dickens's early novels. Everyone now realizes that Dickens was a great novelist, and that his greatness lay in his inexhaustible imaginative fertility, his prospertness with dabs of unforgettable detail, and his stream of human sympathy... when we come to make distinctions of merit among Dickens's novels, we shall, I think, be driven to the conclusion that the best ones are those which show not only more poetic qualities but novelistic ones besides: to me, Little Dorrit is the most satisfying of his books because it is both grand and apocalyptic, setting out a vision of human society that includes nearly everything of importance, and also livingly shaped, his most solid attempt at solving the specific problems of long fictional narrative.67

Maid's essay was published in 1952 along with a series of essays that take "a popular view of Dickens for the non-specialist reader"58 and that focus on Dickens as a moral writer and not as a writer of nightmare and fantasy.
Though these essays were intended to correct the view of critics like Wilson and Johnson, as well as Trilling, nothing that Wain says is seriously different from my analysis, except his point that the family metaphor is equally as important as that of the prison and except such minor points as his view of the Meagles, or of the importance of the plot.

There are a number of critics who agree with Trilling that Dickens' works are "at best only incidentally realistic," and that he should be treated as a writer of fantasy. Before I go on to discuss these critics, however, I want to discuss another approach to the novel that is quite different from mine, that of the Marxist critics who see the novel as a mirror of the class struggle. I will then discuss the critics who give interpretations based on depth psychology, and then critics who have worked out special theories to explain Dickens. As I said at the beginning of this section, obviously none of these groupings is rigid.

George Bernard Shaw was the prototype for the Marxist reaction to Dickens. In his introduction to *Hard Times*, he says that the England of Thackeray and Trollope has gone, but the England of Dickens, of the Barnacles and the Mardles, "is revealing itself in every day's news as the real England we live in." Though he says, "There is no 'greatest book' of Dickens; all his books form one great life-work, a Bible, in fact . . . all are magnificent,"
he prefers the later social novels. He emphasizes Dickens' great influence on his own satiric technique, and he writes of Little Dorrit:

Little Dorrit is a more seditious book than Das Kapital. All over Europe men and women are in prison for pamphlets and speeches which are to Little Dorrit as red pepper is to dynamite. . . . Fortunately, for social evolution, governments never know where to strike.71

T. A. Jackson develops this idea at length in his analysis of Little Dorrit in his book, Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical,72 which is interesting primarily as an example of the variety of ways in which Dickens can be read. Jackson sees Little Dorrit as a potentially revolutionary novel that closely approximates "the proletarian standpoint," and he reads the novel as an allegory. The actual villain is none of the characters who represent wickedness in the novel, but is, instead, merely "Riches." We get indications of the villain in the shadows of the Marshalsea, in the Circumlocution Office, and in the gloom of Mrs. Glennam's theology.

In the first half of the novel, "Poverty," the Dorrits live restricted within the debtors' prison. For all of its imprisonment, however, the Marshalsea harbours courage, compassion, and kindliness within its walls. In Book Two, "Riches," when the Dorrits journey into Good Society, they find that, despite their wealth, they again feel imprisonment, and this time it is imprisonment accompanied by the heartlessness, self-seeking, and greed of their upper-class companions:
In contrast with the world of wealth and fashion the Marshalsea and its society of imprisoned debtors stands out as light to darkness, or as heaven to hell. The released prisoners—the Father and the Child of the Marshalsea—find, each in a different way, that they have only changed one prison for a worse. And there is Mrs. Glumm and her victim, Arthur, to prove to them that worse, even, than the Hell of Riches, is the hellishness of orthodox theology, which turns the universe itself into one huge, inescapable Marshalsea, whose jailer is a fiendishly vengeful God. . . .

Only when their riches crash to ruin in the Merdle speculations and when the theology of Mrs. Glumm has collapsed, can the prisoners be set free to try to take their slender resources and make the best of what is left of their life.

Dickens shows all of the vices of the characters and of society flourishing under the rule of "Riches," and all of the corresponding virtues flowering under the rule of "Poverty." All of the virtuous people are victims and are made to suffer acutely, while the vicious characters all suffer considerably less. Jackson finds Little Dorrit, therefore, heavily pessimistic, especially since the worst villain of all, the Circumlocution Office, does not suffer at all and shows no signs of being overthrown. He sees signs of hope, however, in the crash of the Glumm house, which gives the sense of a similar fate in store for the Circumlocution Office.

The errors in the Jackson analysis are easy to point out. The villain of the novel is not simply "Riches," for the villainy lies in the faults of the individual characters as well as in the society, an obvious example
is Miss Wade. Virtues have not flowered under the rule of "Poverty"; William Dorrit and his son and daughter Fanny have, in fact, been corrupted by their poverty as well as their wealth, while Little Dorrit has remained virtuous rich or poor. Nor do all of the virtuous people suffer more intensely; Little Dorrit and Glennam finally achieve a happiness that is denied to characters like Gowan, Wade, or Fanny, while both Blandois and Mrs. Glennam are certainly punished. Nevertheless, though Jackson ignores much of Dickens in order to work out his allegory, he did, writing in 1938, focus attention on a side of Dickens that had been neglected.

Jack Lindsay in Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study takes a similar view of Dickens. He says that the novel represents Dickens' "mature and epical presentation of Victorian society," and the theme of the book is self-deception. Dickens wishes to show the way the entire system works "to deceive everyone with a maddening method for the evasion of responsibility which worked out as masking all the evils in society and government." Lindsay explains that Dickens wished to show the link between all levels of society, between government, high society, and finance. The theme of deception is carried out most clearly in William Dorrit who is "a symbol of the Victorian bourgeoisie, living on a lie, afraid above all of having to face up to origins, afraid of the reality behind the fine words." Dickens wishes to strip away all the masks—Dorrit is exposed as a
jailbird; Merdle, as a swindler; Mrs. Glennam, as a creature of greed and hate; Casby, as a ruthless hypocrite.

Again, though Lindsay makes some good points about the novel, in working out his theme of self-deception, he neglects the more obvious theme of the prison and most of the important images. He takes a Freudian as well as a Marxist approach, and he sometimes becomes carried away with his psychological insights in tracing various characters to people in Dickens' personal life.

Recently a number of critics have examined Little Dorrit from a psychoanalytic perspective, extending the idea that the novel is most rewardingly approached not as a study of society but as myth or dream. R. D. McMaster in a recent essay says that Trilling is "the only critic in one hundred years to mine its riches substantially." McMaster discusses the archetypal patterns in Little Dorrit and he explores the way in which Dickens uses myth to determine imagery and style. His view of the novel excuses Blandois' "flamboyantly theatrical villainy," and Little Dorrit's "angelic purity" as necessary parts of a "vision full of sombre religious suggestion." Little Dorrit is like Una in the Faery Queen or Beatrice in the Divine Comedy, and as a symbol of spiritual purity in a fallen world, she obliterates Blandois' evil and rescues Arthur from the Cave of Despair in the Marshalsea. McMaster believes that Dickens consciously used the inferno myth to provide a moral commentary on contemporary history. Like Joyce, he blended reality and myth. Arthur's return
to London from the land of the plagues is "one of the clearest and most sombre depictions of the City of Dreadful Night in Victorian literature, a labyrinth of dim and secret streets," and his journey through the labyrinth of London is the traditional quest of the hero journeying through the wasteland, enduring a death struggle, and finally accomplishing his quest.

This approach to Little Dorrit could be valuable, but McMaster's article is disappointing. His discussion is too brief to develop his argument convincingly and to give a detailed exploration of Dickens' working out of such patterns. In particular, he does not give enough attention to Dickens' style, the way in which he transfers his mythic vision to the reader.

A more rewarding variation of this approach suggests that Dickens' novels be treated as fairy tales in which Dickens presents his own experiences in mythic form. Such readers see the novels as "subtle and endlessly ramifying fables...they embody deep and profoundly attractive (or frightening) human fears and hopes." Harry Stone and Dorothy Van Ghent develop such ideas in their essays on Great Expectations, tracing the way in which Dickens' art has its roots in folk tradition and showing how these fairy tale patterns are part of the structure of Dickens' novels. Though no critic has yet analyzed Little Dorrit in this way, such an approach would seem to be natural to the novel, which, after all, has its own interpolated fairy tale.
Another essay takes an unusual viewpoint, producing an analysis that is interesting, if unsound. Alan Wilde, in an article "Mr. F's Aunt and the Analogical Structure of *Little Dorrit,*" maintains that despite her seemingly minor position in the novel, Mr. F's Aunt is "at the heart of the book; she is the analogical center of the chaotic forces for and of evil." Wilde acknowledges that Mr. F's Aunt is partly humorous, but she is also something more sinister. She is herself only a mechanical thing and by refusing to acknowledge others, she robs them of life. Directing her hostility at Arthur, she is "all the irrationality of the world, all its aggression and hostility breaking out under the mask of eccentricity, the human id thinly disguised in a dreamlike phantasmagoria." The meaning of "Nobody's Fault" is inherent in Mr. F's Aunt; the disease in the world of *Little Dorrit* is not in the organization of the government but in the "very nature of things." Mr. F's Aunt is like many of the other evil people in the novel; as Casby dominates Pancks; Blandois, Cavalleto; William, Frederick; she exploits Flora.

As an "anti-human horror" and a symbol of Arthur's guilt, Mr. F's Aunt is the direct opposite of Little Dorrit, who is like Christ in *Paradise Regained.* Little Dorrit is identified with the sun and is the center of the forces of good; she is, however, not strong enough to destroy Mr. F's Aunt, but can only temporarily overpower
her. The final confrontation with Mr. F's Aunt comes in the pastry shop scene at the end of the novel, and only when she is gone, can Little Dorrit and Arthur marry.

Mr. F's Aunt is a perhaps more modish devil than Blandois, but Wilde seems to me to give her an importance not justified by Dickens' attitude toward her nor by the form of the novel. His article does point out some image patterns that even the very thorough Millis Miller missed; for example, the disease imagery which is used to show "that the world of Little Dorrit is sick and that the sickness is a moral one."86

Recent critics have also attempted to deal with the central problem of Dickens criticism—the presence in the same work of material that is excellent and of material that is seriously flawed—by developing theories that either solve this problem or try to reconcile the two elements. An interesting critic who takes off from work done by Millis Miller and from Freudian psychology is Taylor Stoehr in Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance.87 Stoehr works out an elaborate analogy between Dickens' novels and Freud's explanation of dream work, interpreting six novels as if they were dreams, not to expose Dickens as a neurotic but in order to show the reader how Dickens' dream manner creates a "world with infinite possibilities."

According to Stoehr, Dickens both gave himself up to his dream and at the same time imposed upon it a logical structure. As older critics failed to appreciate Dickens'
conscious control, recent critics have exaggerated it. Stoehr would establish a new class for Dickens between realism, naturalism, and symbolism, what he calls the "dream manner" or "super-naturalism." Dickens would be the head of this school as Defoe is of realism, "neither realist or fantast, but something in between."88

In the first two chapters of his book Stoehr presents an excellent analysis of Dickens' style, which he sees as characterized by both a fondness for intricate detail and for carefully controlled order:

The seemingly needless details form part of a meticulous weaving... a world in which all seemingly trivial, unrelated objects, people, and events finally mesh in an intricate and self-contained pattern... Everything is relevant, even necessary to the total design... Artificial as Dickens' rhetoric may sometimes seem, it allows him to command effects which are out of the question for most writers, at once realistic in kind and in quantity of detail, and almost allegorical in the schematization and intensity of rendering. The blend is dream-like, hallucinatory, super-real.89

Because of personal and cultural pressures, Dickens narrated his stories as if they were dreams, and, like dreams, they simultaneously conceal and reveal their basic subject, which is always some sort of sexual transgression which must be punished. Stoehr shows how this pattern appears in Little Dorrit. The sexual transgression at the root of this novel is Arthur's illegitimacy. This sin of his illegitimacy has caused his strict rearing, which in turn has caused his sterility and lack of will. Because of his inherent guilt, he succumbs to the social
guilt of the contagion of the Merdle speculations and
thus to the "stultifying institutions" of the society
which are imprisoning the people. His imprisonment,
however, punishes his guilt; he undergoes atonement and
then a rebirth with his marriage to Little Dorrit.

Part of Dickens' dream work is to have other charac-
ters act as surrogates for Glencaven; for example, Blandois,
who is like Arthur an outsider, serves as a sacrificial
victim for him. Just as Blandois represent Arthur, so
does Miss Wade. Her revulsion from others is another
form of Arthur's lack of will; both are illegitimate and
aware of class rank, and both fear no one can love them.
Her story is a "dreamlike displacement and condensation
of all the elements of Arthur's story suppressed and
scattered cryptically." This is the reason for Dickens'
curious emphasis on Miss Wade's interpolated story, "The
History of a Self-Tormentor." Reading Miss Wade's story
is the nearest Arthur comes to understanding his own pre-
dicament.

Again, with the collapse of the Glencavens' house,
Dickens' "dream logic is perfect," for throughout the
novel houses and the people in them have been magically
related. Since the people consistently make their houses
prisons, the theme of the rotting house is also related
to the larger motif of the prison house. At the end of
the novel nothing in the society has changed, but Dickens
seems to warn that if humans continue to work against
nature with imprisoning institutions, "Nature itself will
revolt, with destructive violence . . . and the whole unnatural edifice will fall in upon itself." 31

Little Dorrit is pictured as a flower blossoming in the prison-house, carrying with her the freedom of nature. Stoehr finds Dickens' treatment of Little Dorrit unsatisfactory, however. Her story is "peculiarly empty," as she is pushed out of the center of her half of the plot by her father. As with so many of his other novels, in Little Dorrit Dickens uses structural elements for the dream work by creating a dual plot, with both plots containing stories of men imprisoned by the past and by their own developing knowledge of what imprisonment means. One of the faults of Little Dorrit is, however, that the plots have too little to do with one another. Dickens tries to bridge this gap with such devices as Little Dorrit's letters to Glennam in Book Two, but the novel suffers from a "split in structure." The secret wrong the Glennams have done to the Dorrits seems surprisingly small to the reader, and even the marriage provides only a "superficial unity." 32

Though Stoehr's theoretical criticism is excellent, his practical criticism with Little Dorrit is not as successful. The sexual transgression here—Arthur's illegitimacy—is not firmly enough at the root of the novel to justify Stoehr's thesis. As Stoehr has pointed out, it is unrelated to one of the central events of the novel, William Dorrit's imprisonment. Stoehr's theory does show
how Dickens' work satisfied the unconscious emotional needs of his audience and himself, and in his attention to form and style, Stoehr is able to show how Dickens transmitted his dream to his readers. Stoehr says that when Dickens fails to tie his fantasies to concrete instances which are apparently realistic, "the way to belief in the fantasy is blocked," and since the facts have been passed by, sentimentality, feelings in excess of the facts, appears in the very "smell of insincerity and pretense" in the language being used.  

Robert Garis concentrates on the theatrical element in Dickens and the way in which it causes what he calls the "Dickens problem," which creates confusion in criticism and leads to what he believes is "grave distortion" in saying that the most significant part of his work is "symbolic and prophetic . . . an exciting but seriously misleading view." Garis argues against the "new orthodoxy," the recent view of such critics as Wilson, Miller, and Trilling which goes against the traditional criticism that Dickens was weak in coherence and structure and strong in energy, vitality, and creativity. Dickens is a writer of genius, but Garis denies that his novels are complete, coherent organisms that are properly termed symbolic, and feels that though these critics have sent readers back to Dickens, their distortions will eventually work against Dickens' reputation. Garis believes that Dickens
worked in a mode not suitable for "high art," and that his working out of symbols and patterns is much less valuable and powerful than his new critics suggest. He explains the way in which Dickens' theatrical method is different from the work of such traditional novelists as Eliot, Tolstoy, and James in order that we may escape the "Dickens problem" and learn how to respond to Dickens' performance:

Readers who are troubled by the fact that it is a performance are experiencing the Dickens problem . . . a device which to readers accustomed to non-theatrical art seems artificial must have seemed the most natural thing in the world to the master of the Dickens theatre.95

In order to show what he means about Dickens' theatrical manner, Garis analyzes the opening chapter of Little Dorrit, the description of Marseilles under the burning sun. According to Garis, "Dickens' art thrives on a state of affairs that would be a vice in other novels."96 From the first:

The insistent voice all but totally fills our consciousness. . . . Two illusions are being created in this description: the illusion of Marseilles, a "fact to be strongly smelt and tasted," and also the illusion of "seeing" the skill of the describer itself, almost palpably present to us as he goes about his professional work . . . not as a personality . . . but as a performer, as a maker and doer.97

The whole description is contrived, with all of the machinery visible in Dickens' insistent and assured rhetoric which offers the description to us with "confidence and pride." When Dickens moves from the description of
the prison, he makes an "ingenious transition" but not an organic one; it only clears the stage for the new performance of the prison atmosphere. Garis says that we could go on to make analogies, to say, for example, that even the burning sun cannot penetrate the prison darkness, or that, ironically, the prisoners wish for the sun even though outside it is glaring; or that the people in Marseilles are just as much imprisoned as Blandois and Jean Baptist, but we would not be reading Dickens. The atmosphere created is not an environment for the characters but a stage setting. "The chapter is rounded off with a little moralization of the setting itself, which has no specific relation to the particular travellers we have seen."98

Even though Little Dorrit has some good individual performances in it, they are mostly performed in isolation. Dickens has new and complex ideas about his world, but he is unable to express these concepts with his familiar, old techniques and so Little Dorrit is not successful. "A note of strain" enters the performance. "The habits of the Dickens theatre itself begin to seem a kind of prison, almost as life-destroying as the habits engendered in the Marshalsea."99 For example, since Flora Finching is the "star" of the show, the story and the characterization of Arthur must give way to her. Dickens pushes Arthur's depression aside and prepares for the "production of Flora's comic side-kick, Mr. F's Aunt."100 Again, Arthur's spiritual sterility is an important theme of the novel, yet
Dickens chooses to present it with the "arch ironies" of the chapter "Nobody's Rival." "We are almost offended by what seems now the crude exhibitionism of the theatrical artist, so busy finding a way of playing the scene, so proud of the silly device he has invented."

Again with the Meagles Dickens' techniques are not equal to the complex moral situation he has created. We never learn why Pet marries Gowan and although Dickens suggests that the Meagles' benevolence is not enough, he is unable to express his feeling. The scene between Mr. Meagles and Tattycoram is a pointed "official moral of Tattycoram's story, sponsored by the management," and the whole story of Tattycoram and Wade is expressed by a too "limited and conventional theatrical stock-company."

This same thing is true with Little Dorrit. Though Dickens may have intended to make Little Dorrit a symbolic force, he did not achieve his goal. Garis says Trilling's defense of Little Dorrit is a "bold one" with his argument that those who object to Little Dorrit are using "crude principles of verisimilitude," but the idea is not sound. Little Dorrit does not exist as a paraclete in an allegorical realm, but she is honored for her social behavior:

She is the complete embodiment of the Victorian domestic and social virtues, and one's objection is not that the Victorian virtues are less than in the highest degree admirable but that they belong to just that social world to which according to Mr. Trilling Little Dorrit does not belong.
The ending when Little Dorrit comes to Arthur is one of Dickens' worst scenes, for unfortunately he substitutes his child-woman antithesis for a rich-poor one, bringing in financial and class standards and identifying Glencora's financial ruin with moral disgrace. Again, Garis says, Dickens may have intended to show Glencora's moral questioning, but his scruples against marrying Little Dorrit are theatrical and artificial.

Essentially, Garis is presenting again, with variations, traditional views of Dickens. As early as 1872 with George Lewes, Dickens was criticized for similar reasons. Garis' view is more convincing, however, because he does acknowledge that Dickens is working with a great deal of consciously exercised control and order, even though this order is artificial and gives us not a "self-developing organism" but a theatrical performance. Garis, also following traditional criticism, believes Dickens' genius is best expressed in his brilliant inventiveness; his "deepest and most interesting meanings are unconscious." Great Expectations is Dickens' masterpiece because in it he found material perfectly adapted to his theatrical manner.

I have summarized Garis' case in some detail—in fact with some reluctance—because it is so damaging a rebuke to critics who see the novel as a symbolic structure and to critics who ignore Dickens' limitations. As with Stoehr, however, Garis's theory is excellent, but his examination of individual novels is not always satisfactory.
Despite his argument, an analysis like Waist's of the opening scene seems closer to what Dickens is doing. And as I spent much of my essay trying to show, I believe that the setting in Chapter 1 has every relation to the travellers Dickens is showing. If critics like Trilling and Miller ignore Dickens' limitations, Garis ignores much of Dickens' richly controlled artistry. Also, although his book is intended to explain Dickens' theatrical methods in order to help us appreciate his particular kind of craftsmanship, Garis seems always to keep looking wistfully toward other novelists that are more satisfying to him, to demand that "imaginative contact with inner life" that Dickens' genius does not offer.

Garis' work is obviously closely related to that of George Orwell, whose essay on Dickens in 1939 reconsidered Dickens as a representative of English popular culture. Though Orwell does not discuss Little Dorrit, he does make some interesting comments on Dickens generally. His description of Dickens' style is often quoted:

Dickens is obviously a writer whose parts are greater than his wholes. He is all fragments, all details—rotten architecture, but wonderful gargoyle. . . . The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens' writing is the unnecessary detail. . . . Everything is piled up and up, detail on detail, embroidery on embroidery.

He sees the early novels as Dickens' best work and later novels like Little Dorrit, "a form of art for which he was not really suited." For Orwell, Dickens' greatness is in his ability to create a character so vivid that it
is never forgotten, and in his ability "to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable form the native decency of the common man."110

Several critics deal perceptively with the "Dickens problem" even though they do not discuss *Little Dorrit* directly. R. C. Churchill says with a refreshing bluntness:

Now I believe that in some respects Dickens is the greatest genius in English Literature; but I also believe that no writer of any distinction at all has ever produced so much rubbish. And unfortunately the genius and the rubbish exist side by side in the same novels. . . . He is the one great novelist whom, even at his best, it is necessary occasionally to skip.111

While Churchill of course acknowledges that the good overwhelmingly predominates over the bad, he finds an "extraordinary difference in intelligence between the mind that produced Tom Pinch and Pecksniff."112 In his essay "Dickens, Drama, and Tradition," which centers around *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Churchill tries to explain why Dickens' comic parts are usually so good and his serious parts sometimes so bad. He believes that with his comedy Dickens was influenced by his predecessors, Fielding, Smollet, Sterne, Defoe, and Jonson, that in Dickens, "the tradition of English comic writing is taken up by another master."113 In his serious writing, however, Churchill finds evidence that he was influenced by the contemporary English drama, which had sunk to its lowest level in Victorian England. Churchill says:
The things that did not arouse either his righteous indignation or his sense of the ridiculous slipped through his guard unobserved. The sentimentality and vulgarity of the age he accepted with open arms. 114

Churchill points out, as I did, Dickens' love of exaggeration and overemphasis and his desire to enforce points already driven home. He believes that these traits lead to many scenes in his novels which are "border-line achievements"; he gives as an example of a scene which is almost but not quite successful, the description of the Dorrits bidding farewell to the Marshalsea in Little Dorrit.

Churchill concludes his essay by remarking that Dickens could write seriously and with restraint, and that when he did, he sometimes achieved the ideal sentimentality.

To Churchill, the important thing about all of Dickens' work is his insistence on the personal and his hatred of institutions.

Another valuable point that Churchill considers and that my analysis did not emphasize enough is the way in which Dickens' language creates his characters:

It is always the language of Dickens that is so important, his genius was essentially dramatic. . . . The deliberate and necessary distortion of language in which these characters move and speak fits their deliberately exaggerated forms; they are all several sizes larger than life, but the distortion is to scale. 115

At this point I might mention another writer who discusses Dickens' use of his own literary tradition. In The Flint and the Flame Earle Davis traces the way Dickens developed artistically, examining his literary models and
the influences for his various techniques. His work substantiates my argument that Dickens was a painstaking, conscious craftsman:

If the critic begins to examine the methods by which Dickens got his narrative effects, he immediately finds overwhelming evidence of careful craftsmanship. . . . He seems never to have forgotten anything he read, and he attempted to duplicate or improve upon almost every technique which had been used by his predecessors. Along with Smollett and Fielding came the sentimental novelists, the Gothic novelists, the humanitarian writers like Holcroft and Godwin, the historical novelists like Scott; and after the novelists came the plays he loved and borrowed from, the farces, the tragedies, the melodramas—even the special mannerisms of certain actors. Dickens tried every narrative device which had worked in the past, and the circumstances surrounding the creation of his first five novels forced him to try all these conglomerate techniques rather experimentally.

Dickens of course also worked out his own techniques, and he brilliantly amalgamated all of the writing he imitated to make his own style, inventing the "panoramic pattern with an accompanying and suffusing symbolism" and also his method of revealing "inner realities by outer oddities." Davis believes that the cult for Henry James has pushed aside Dickens' panoramic approach to the novel. He does agree with Churchill, however, that Dickens was occasionally influenced by a tradition which encouraged sentimental and melodramatic effects.

Dickens' earliest critics do not have much to say about Little Dorrit, but their work on Dickens establishes high standards for later critics. Foster's Life of Dickens is helpful for some information it gives about Little
Dorrit. Forster tells us that Dickens originally intended a different title, Nobody's Fault, and he quotes a letter from Dickens which describes his first thoughts about the novel:

It struck me that it would be a new thing to show people coming together, in a chance way, as fellow-travellers, and being in the same place, ignorant of one another, as happens in life; and to connect them afterwards, and to make the waiting for that connection a part of the interest.\textsuperscript{119}

Forster quotes another letter in which Dickens writes, "Society, the Circumlocution Office and Mr. Gowan are of course three parts of one idea and design."\textsuperscript{120} Dickens also wrote Forster that he intended the chapter "The History of a Self-Tormentor," as a way of presenting the main idea of Little Dorrit in capsule form:

In Miss Wade, I had an idea, which I thought a new one, of making the introduced story so fit into surroundings impossible of separation from the main story, as to make the blood of the book circulate through both.\textsuperscript{121}

Such comments indicate that Dickens understood very clearly what he was about with Little Dorrit.

Another of Dickens' critics, however, G. K. Chesterton says that Dickens was "not quite himself when he did it," that Little Dorrit is "not a good novel," that it is "out of tune with the main trend of Dickens' moral feeling."\textsuperscript{122} Chesterton is the chief exponent of the early novels of Dickens. The later novels are less great even though they have "less of what annoys us in Dickens."\textsuperscript{123} Chesterton believes that in these novels Dickens sought to practice realism and to write more carefully and in so doing began
to approach the merits of other writers. At the same time, however, as he became "less a caricaturist," he became "less a creator," too.\footnote{124} In order to understand and appreciate Dickens, we must realize that he has created a world of his own, a world that is mythological:

Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the mythologists, and perhaps the greatest. He did not always manage to make his characters men, but he always managed, at the least, to make them gods. . . . It was his aim to show character hung in a kind of happy void, in a world apart from time—yes, and essentially apart from circumstance. . . . they do not exist for the story; the story exists for them; and they know it.\footnote{125}

Chesterton explains Dickens' villains by saying that they are not supposed to be actual characters, but to serve as representatives of the danger of evil, "a ceaseless, ruthless, and uncompromising menace, like that of wild beasts or the sea."\footnote{126} Chesterton's criticism of Dickens is weak in that he fails to see beyond the "jolly Dickens" but his conception of Dickens' comic world as being chiefly a mythological world offers a valuable insight in understanding Dickens' comedy, a side of Dickens which is still being neglected in the sixties.

George Gissing is an excellent critic of Dickens, but his \textit{Charles Dickens: A Critical Study}, written in 1898, offers little help with \textit{Little Dorrit}, which he sees as a novel whose "moral theme is the evils of greed and vulgar ambition."\footnote{126} He praises Fanny Dorrit as an excellent portrayal of the London "shopgirl," judges William Dorrit to be among Dickens' finest pieces of characterization, but considers Little Dorrit's moral perfection as "optimism
of the crudest kind." Unlike Chesterton, however, Gissing can see and appreciate Dickens' mature artistic power and craftsmanship, and he was one of the earliest critics to try to resolve the "Dickens problem" of the mixture of good and bad work, a problem with which critics are still struggling.

In the same way critics are just now coming again to see things about Dickens that critics like H. A. Taine had pointed out from the first. Taine in his History of English Literature in 1879 examines Dickens' habit of embodying objects with the personality of his characters: "he will make a sort of human being out of the house, grimacing and forcible, which attracts our attention, and which we shall never forget"; or again, "The imagination of Dickens is like that of monomaniacs. To plunge oneself into an idea, to be absorbed by it, to see nothing else, to repeat it under a hundred forms. . . . These are the great features of his imagination and style." Taine also seems to anticipate archetypal criticism:

When a talented writer, often a writer of genius, reaches the sensibility which is bruised or buried by education and national institutions, he moves his reader in the most inner depths, and becomes the master of all hearts.

It is easy to let the poorer Dickens critics alone, but not so easy to make any sort of judgment of the more skillful critics. All of the criticisms of Little Dorrit were incomplete in some way, and even taken together, they do not cover every aspect of the novel. Rereading Little
Dorrit, I find motifs and connections not mentioned by any of the critics—the bird imagery, for example, or the emphasis on ledgers and balance books, the many pictures and mirrors. The novel does have inner depths, and though I dislike critics who speak of "mining the riches" or "working the vein," Dickens' world is truly inexhaustible. But obviously there is no "final reading" or "correct approach" to the novel. At some point the background and personality of the individual critic enter, and the Little Dorrit who seems to one "the Child of the Parable, the negation of the social will" becomes to another that "self-effacing little mouse." As George Ford comments in Dickens and His Readers, each critic is under the impression that "his Little Dorrit is the Little Dorrit." 131

Ford's book is an informative and well-written study of the way Dickens' novels have been received by his readers, and in it he includes a chapter "The Uncommon Reader," which contains an account of all of the criticism of Dickens' work by professional critics or important literary figures from 1836 to 1955. While there is only an occasional reference to Little Dorrit, Ford does very successfully for the whole of Dickens' work what I have tried to do for one novel. He includes a summary list of seven points on which Dickens is most criticized:

1. that Dickens' criticism of society is childish, misinformed, and based upon a fatuous optimism;
2. that his novels violate the canons of The Novel by their emphasis upon sensationalism, by their improbabilities and general failure in realism;
3. that his novels fail to explore the inner lives of the characters;
4. that his novels violate the canons of The Novel because they must have been written without due attention to art;
5. that his novels fail to deal with sexual realism;
6. that because he was self-educated, his writing can have nothing to say of interest to educated readers;
7. that when he resorts to sentimentality, his style is unbearable.132

I tried to show in my essay on Little Dorrit that the fourth point is simply not true. The last point is, unfortunately, valid, but most of the others are largely resolved by not asking Dickens to be another kind of writer than he is, by keeping in mind the main precept of criticism—to try to decide where the power in a work is rather than to demand what is not there. Since Little Dorrit is centered around Dickens' criticism of society, however, I would like to discuss the first point in Part Three, with this variation: with Little Dorrit the charge is not that the novel is based on a fatuous optimism but that the criticism of society in the novel is misinformed and based upon an unjustifiable pessimism.

According to Ford, the most encouraging aspect of recent Dickens criticism is the evidence that his novels do flourish under analysis in a way which even his admirers at one time thought impossible, and he says that his study could have been called "The Variety of Dickens" not only for the variety of ways he has been read, but for the actual variety to be found in his work. Dickens' great popularity and his literary immortality lie in the fact that, like
Shakespeare, he does have something for everyone. Ford goes on to say that it is difficult to assess Dickens because of the variety of ways in which his books have been read:

An awareness of this variety may sometimes make the task of synthesis seem too overwhelming a challenge for criticism, because it may increase the difficulties to the point of discouragement. Yet the risk is worth taking. To be suspicious of the critical arrogance which finds in one phase of Dickens' novels the whole of Dickens is an essential step towards synthesis. . . . What seems to be needed for future discussions of Dickens is the capacity to apply an awareness of the various qualities of his work to a further close reading of individual novels.
PART THREE

"Now all common things become uncommon and enchanted to me."
(Christmas Books)

The question of the relationship between a writer's created world and the actual society around him cannot be easily answered. Certainly, however, in a novel which deals as extensively as *Little Dorrit* with society, some knowledge of the social and political background behind the novel is essential. The criticism Dickens makes of people in society—that they imprison themselves and others—is obviously not just true for nineteenth century England, but, as Trilling points out, bears on the universal problem of the relationship between the individual and society. Nevertheless, Dickens' novel is closely connected with his period. He makes references to actual events and details of the era, and he also reflects Victorian attitudes and emotions. A look at the background behind the novel, then, may illuminate, if not solve, certain critical problems and is therefore a logical final step of the critical exercise I am following. Here again I am concentrating on what can be learned from the various Dickens critics, particularly those who deal specifically with Dickens' view of his society and the validity of that view.
Apparently Dickens' pessimism was justified and the condition of the English society of the 1850's was bad enough to provoke serious criticism from many quarters and to cause a widespread despair over the state of the country. Edgar Johnson's biographical and critical study of Dickens gives an explanation of the conditions which motivated Dickens to begin *Little Dorrit* in December of 1855. He had been led to his view of the state of English society by the events of the twelve months before he began *Little Dorrit*. In 1854 the Crimean War had begun, a war whose causes were never satisfactorily explained and a war which was so grossly mismanaged that it led to disaster for the British Army. By the end of 1854, *The Times* was writing of the failure of the war as a result of the inefficiency of the government and the military system, and the public was angrily demanding administrative reform. Johnson writes of Dickens' desire to write a book which would expose "the vast impersonal system of inefficiency, venality, and wrong, baffling all endeavor to fasten responsibility anywhere," and he goes on to explain Dickens' feeling for the plight of his society:

From the hideous lazar houses where England's defenders had suffered and died in the Crimea to the gloomy labyrinths of the War Office and the Civil Service and all the government departments of Whitehall and Westminster, obstructing every endeavor at improvement, what was society but one huge house of bondage? What were the red tape of administration and the entangling forms of Parliamentary procedure but yokes binding men's limbs? What were the mills and mines of the Black Country and the dank homes of the workers but jail cells filled with the clanking machinery and the odor
of hot oil, hemmed in by bars of smoke and the overshadowing pall of dark fog between them and the sunlit sky? Finally, what else were those fettering constraints upon men's very thoughts that made them servile to their oppressors and that left those oppressors themselves close-locked within the imprisoning conventions that mired them?

According to Johnson, Dickens wanted *Little Dorrit* to emphasize the obstructionism of a bureaucracy that entangled justice and prevented progress, the alliance between political leadership and unscrupulous financial interests, and the rack-renting of the poor for the profit of their exploiters. Johnson reads Dickens' novels almost as social histories, and sees his later novels as accurately representing the condition of England at the time.

Monroe Engel in *The Maturity of Dickens* discusses Dickens' view of social and political issues. He describes Dickens' attack in his periodicals on the "speculative 'boom and bust' of the fifties and sixties," and Dickens' concern with the limited liability speculation that was causing the number of companies in England to multiply drastically. Dickens felt this expansion was dangerous and unreal and he realized,

the difficulty of exercising the control and supervision necessary to keep the joint-stock banks honest and stable; and any instability or failure could of course touch off a loss of public confidence that in a credit economy creates panic and disaster.

Engel also explains that Dickens had conducted an all-out war against the Poor Law of 1832, which inaugurated a new method of dealing with the poor. This method, based on Bethamite principles, was to make the condition of
pauperism so unpleasant and so much less desirable than the condition of a laborer that the working classes would accept any work rather than become paupers. Under the law, the only relief obtainable was through workhouses, and as a result the workhouses became overcrowded and characterized by unbearable conditions. Engel, too, apparently finds Dickens' social criticism reliable.

Not unexpectedly, George Bernard Shaw is another who praises the accuracy of Dickens' social criticism. He says that Dickens' "description of our party system, with its Coodle, Doodle, Foodle, etc. has never been surpassed for accuracy and for penetration of superficial pretense." He goes on to say that Little Dorrit is far more seditious than many of the pamphlets and speeches for which others have been imprisoned:

Barnacle and Stiltstalking were far too conceited to recognize their own portraits. . . . Mr. Sparkler was not offended; he stuck to his sinecure and never read anything. . . . The mass of Dickens readers, finding his politicians too funny to be credible, continued to idolize Coodle and Doodle as great statesmen, and made no distinction between John Stuart Mill in the India Office and Mr. Sparkler. In fact the picture was not only too funny to be credible; it was too truthful to be funny. . . .

K. J. Fielding in his study of Dickens includes a chapter, "Political Views and 'Little Dorrit,'" in which he attacks the idea that Dickens' analysis of Victorian society was satisfactory or complete and says that critics such as Shaw and Johnson have made too much of Dickens as a social critic. He quotes the Boodle-Noodle satire
in *Bleak House* and comments:

This is tremendously good fun. But, unfortunately, some critics have attempted to take it perfectly seriously. ... It has been built into a conception of Dickens as a profound social prophet, attacking 'the forces of greed and privilege spinning their labyrinthine web of corruption ... modern England ... the world of an acquisitive society'. If one merely substitutes the names of the ministers of the day who held the actual offices coveted for Noodle and Co. (Palmerston, Gladstone, Sir George Grey, and Lord John Russell) one can see that it is better to enjoy it as a burlesque than to pretend it is a serious and accurate analysis of the party system.9

Fielding goes on to say that Dickens' social criticism could be unfair and his political views wrong. The Circumlocution Office "as a satiric exposure of some of the realities of government at that particular time" was completely justified, but it was a "fantastically simplified" version of actual conditions.10

Fielding notes that Dickens fully believed that conditions in England were such that a revolution might break out at any time and that he continued to fear this all of his life:

He was completely mistaken; and he was mistaken because his analysis of society was mistaken. It was not an accident. He was wrong because he left too much out of his consideration.11

Fielding also discusses the conditions which motivated Dickens to begin *Little Dorrit*. He says that Dickens had been, unfortunately, thinking more and more of politics in 1854 and 1855, and that the more he thought, the more he despaired of parliamentary government. This was not,
Fielding claims, due just to his impatience with the bungling of the Crimean War, but also to his political views, which "were beginning to be affected by his private troubles. His growing radicalism was due not only to his observation of the changing state of the country but also to his own changing attitude to life." Fielding complains that Dickens seldom tried to explain what he would put in the place of the institutions he deplored, and he says: "His limitations may have helped to make him more effective as a satirist, but it is time his own presumptions as a social prophet were exposed." Robert Garis also believes that Dickens' view of his society was colored by his private troubles. He explains that the attack in the later novels on Dickens' society came from Dickens' way of looking at the world. As a writer who was a mimic, who saw only the outward aspect of things, Dickens gradually came to find the world not as interesting as it had once been. The people he mimicked and the routines with which he mimicked them began to seem "mechanical, lifeless, determined, unfree." Unable to develop any introspection or sense of the free life in other people, "Dickens developed a view of the world as almost totally in the grip of a gigantic conspiracy which takes myriad forms but of which the sole effect is to thwart and stifle human freedom and the free contact between free spirits." Dickens began to see the world as one imprisoned by System.
George Orwell's essay on Dickens is often recommended as essential reading for an understanding of Dickens' social criticism. Orwell tells us that although Dickens was a rebel, he was not a revolutionary, but was very much a product of his own age, a "nineteenth century liberal" whose interests were firmly identified with those of the middle and lower-middle class. Orwell believes that Dickens had no clear grasp of the society he was attacking; his work shows "only an emotional perception that something is wrong".

At the back of his mind there is usually a half-belief that the whole apparatus of government is unnecessary. Parliament is simply Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle, the Empire is simply Major Bagstock and his Indian servant, the Army is simply Colonel Chower and Doctor Slammer, the public services are simply Bumble and the Circumlocution Office—and so on and so forth. What he does not see is that Coodle and Doodle... are performing a function which neither Pickwick or Boffin would ever bother about.

Despite the savagery with which Dickens attacked English society, his criticism seldom offends anyone—"one knows without needing to be told that lawyers delight in Sergeant Buzfuz and that Little Dorrit is a favourite in the Home Office." This is because Dickens was mainly a moral writer; he did not want to overthrow society but instead wanted to change human nature: "All he can finally say is, 'Behave decently,'" which, Orwell says, "is not necessarily so shallow as it sounds."

Humphry House's study, The Dickens World, is helpful for this section of my paper, for House states in his
preface that his purpose is to show the connection between what Dickens wrote and the times in which he wrote it.

House says that Dickens was not a pioneer in discovering social abuses:

He was only giving wider publicity in "inimitable" form to a number of social facts and social abuses which had already been recognized if not explored before him. He shared a great deal of common experience with his public, so that it could gratefully say, "How true!"; he so exploited his knowledge that the public recognized its master in knowing ... and caught exactly the tone which clarified and reinforced the public's sense of right and wrong, and flattered its moral feelings.22

House clears up one slightly puzzling point in regard to Little Dorrit. He cautions that although Dickens makes it clear that the novel is a story of the 1820's, two of the events in the story, the details of the Marshalsea prison and the satire on the Circumlocution Office and Merdle, stem from the 1850's when Dickens was writing Little Dorrit. The Circumlocution Office chapters were grafted on to the story as a result of the administrative muddles of the Crimean War. House states that these parts of the novel were substantially fair. No preponderating blame was ever fastened on any individual; the whole system failed and its members with it. Dickens took up one of the main points that had been made very clear by the war—that division of responsibility between various departments was an effective check upon getting anything done ... . The utter breakdown of the Commissariat and Medical Service, though partly due to sheer ignorance of what the campaign involved, was due more to the cumbersome machinery which seemed to exist only for the purpose of delaying orders.24
House goes on to explain that Dickens was involved in the push for reform of the Government, that he belonged to the Administrative Reform Association, and that he had been connected with the need for reform even before the war. The character of Merdle was modelled upon the failure and suicide of a John Sadleir, a Tipperary banker in 1856, or possibly from Hudson the Railway King. House explains that all of the sections of the book which deal with Merdle and speculation belong to the crisis of the 1840's, and he notes that the years between 1850 and 1866 were marked by a great increase in the number of small investors and by the growth of a system of finance companies.  

Besides explaining some of the references to current events that Dickens uses in *Little Dorrit*, House also discusses some of the Victorian attitudes Dickens is demonstrating in the novel. Certain forms of extreme Protestantism which placed the Old Testament on a par with the New Testament and which accepted the whole Bible as being the exact word of God had become dominant in the Victorian society. This made it possible for those who wished to do so to draw their morality from the sternest part of the non-Christian books, and thus use the Old Testament literally in order to justify any action and to identify personal desires with the will of God. House points out that this process is used by Dickens
He also mentions that there was a current idea of a "conservative Providence, concerned to maintain the existing social divisions and distribution of property," and he notes the "current exaltation of the advantages and blessings of poverty as a means of allaying discontent." 27

Much of Dickens' social benevolence was a protest against the alliance between Nonconformity and Malthusianism. Malthus was literally believed; the Poor Law was itself a triumph of Malthusianism in practice. House explains that it is important to understand that Dickens' "Christmas attitude" was not valuable for what it set out to teach, but for what it was meant to counteract. To show why his idea of personal benevolence was so popular, House discusses the way in which Utilitarianism was filtered down to the public through such people as Harriet Martineau. She wrote of the "necessity and blessedness of homely and incessant self-discipline," 28 and House explains this philosophy:

Let the poor live hard lives, sober, celibate, and unamused; let them eat the plainest food, pinch to save, . . . then "civilization" might win through. And how aptly it fitted the gloomier Christian virtues . . . "Homely and incessant self-discipline" was, for the poor, a necessary consequence of a natural law, and blessed by a perversion of the Scripture. . . . Set against this background a great deal in Dickens which might otherwise look merely wayward and sententious, becomes intelligible. 29

Another reason for the popularity of this benevolent
sentiment with the middle-class was the fear of revolution, which was a common fear with the Victorians, and the fear of epidemic of cholera, etc. "Every subscription to a benevolent scheme was in part an insurance premium against a revolution or an epidemic."  

Dickens had probably read very little of the economists themselves, but, like his readers, took his opinion of them from the ideas of Malthusian and laissez-faire principles that were current everywhere. House says that "his originality was not in his moral and sociological subjects themselves, but in the fact that he conveyed familiar topics of every kind into fiction."  

George Ford's book contains a chapter, "The Critic of Society," which is also useful in a discussion of the validity of Dickens' criticism of his society. As usual, Ford stresses the various interpretations and the complexities of Dickens' role as a critic of society. He says that in his attitude toward society, one finds the "typical ambivalence." At one time he sides with Macaulay, "chanting the praises of industrial progress"; at another, "he deserts Macaulay and sides with Ruskin in evoking a happier, more picturesque past." Ford says that there is one consistent point in Dickens' position, however. "It was the heartless hardness of both Utilitarianism and Victorian puritanism that stimulated his typical criticism," and part of the despair of Dickens' later novels resulted from his realization of "how strong
and pervasive were the forces which his novels were exposing.”

Ford’s discussion of the way in which well-known contemporaries of Dickens received his social criticism is important in deciding whether or not Dickens presented an accurate view of the conditions in the society. Carlyle exercised a great influence on Dickens, and though he disliked the novel as an art form, three of Dickens’ novels came close to pleasing him—Tale of Two Cities, Hard Times, and Little Dorrit. The Circumlocution Office satire was almost exactly what Carlyle wanted. Ford notes that Carlyle “was the embodiment of the explosive forces of dissatisfaction underlying the complacent exterior of Victorian life, forces of which Dickens’ novels were also the embodiment.”

Ford says that Ruskin welcomed Dickens as an ally at first. “The Carlylean slant of the later novels delighted him, and Hard Times, especially, seemed a welcome blast against the hard, laissez-faire code.” Later when Ruskin felt that Dickens had fallen too much into agreement with Macaulay, he complained that Dickens should use “more accurate analysis” when taking up subjects of “high national importance.” Matthew Arnold in his later years greatly admired Dickens, as he too felt he had found an ally in him. Ford points out that Dickens’ social criticism has much in common with Arnold’s—"the mutual
target of their satire was the intolerable dullness and hardness of middle-class life rather than its wickedness.\footnote{The target of their satire was the intolerable dullness and hardness of middle-class life rather than its wickedness.} One of Dickens' severest contemporary critics, Fitzjames Stephens, who disliked Dickens for his satire of the civil service, complained that Dickens appeared "to get his first notions of an abuse from the discussions which accompany its removal."\footnote{One of Dickens' severest contemporary critics, Fitzjames Stephens, who disliked Dickens for his satire of the civil service, complained that Dickens appeared "to get his first notions of an abuse from the discussions which accompany its removal."} Anthony Trollope believed that Dickens' social and political criticism was irresponsible. As a conscientious civil servant, Trollope was horrified by Dickens' "fearless and explosive haste" in demanding reforms. \textit{Little Dorrit} inspired him to write a defense of the civil service in \textit{The Three Clerks}.\footnote{Trollope was horrified by Dickens' "fearless and explosive haste" in demanding reforms. He was so inspired by \textit{Little Dorrit} that he wrote a defense of the civil service in \textit{The Three Clerks}.} Ford quotes a number of Dickens' obituaries as evidence of the feeling of Dickens' contemporaries that he "had served as England's conscience."

Benjamin Jowett said at Dickens' death:

\begin{quote}
We can hardly exaggerate the debt of gratitude which is due to a writer who has led us to sympathize with these good, true, sincere, honest English characters of ordinary life, and to laugh at the egotism, the hypocrisy, the false respectability of religious professors and others.\footnote{Benjamin Jowett said at Dickens' death: We can hardly exaggerate the debt of gratitude which is due to a writer who has led us to sympathize with these good, true, sincere, honest English characters of ordinary life, and to laugh at the egotism, the hypocrisy, the false respectability of religious professors and others.}
\end{quote}

Ford concludes that contemporary readers generally valued Dickens' criticism, but he does caution of the danger of reading Dickens' novels not as novels but as social history.

Part of the problem of Dickens' melodrama can also be explained if not extenuated by cultural historians like Ford and House. As the most popular writer of the age, Dickens reflected its fondness for sentimentality. Ford
stresses the great difference between the sensibility of the Victorian Age and our own. Not only was Little Nell applauded by the public, but leading critics were moved to tears, men like Carlyle, Landor, Thomas Hood, Lord Jeffrey. Ford comments, "To account for the fact that Nell seemed a Cordelia to one generation and a Little Orphan Annie to another, one can try the resources of explanatory criticism."42 He suggests that this sentimentality might have stemmed from a guilt-complex of the entire society, a form of penance for such crimes as child labor, or the final culmination of a cult of sensibility which had begun in the late eighteenth century. House also tries to explain the popularity of Dickens' death scenes, with their "pleasurable self-indulgence," by pointing out that a religion changing from "supernatural belief to humanism is very poorly equipped to face death, and must dwell on it for that very reason."43 House believes that Dickens' reticence to say anything that might be offensive to his readers seriously mars his social criticism, but he suggests that this Victorian attitude might have been a protective blind against some of the evils the industrial society was generating.44

Raymond Williams in Culture and Society discusses several leading Victorians—Mill, Carlyle, Newman, Pugin, Ruskin, Morris, Arnold—and their comments about their industrial society. Many of these statements by other Victorians about their age are remarkably similar to
Dickens' views of the society in *Little Dorrit*. Williams says that even Mill saw the danger of the Industrial Revolution twisting natural life, and though he believed in the value of Benthamite reform, he was also convinced that "the newly reformed industrial civilization was narrow and inadequate."  

Williams notes Carlyle's labelling of his age as "the Mechanical Age." Carlyle saw the "Condition-of-England":

with a terrible clarity, the spiritual emptiness of the characteristic social relationships of his day, "with Cash Payment as the 'sole nexus' between man and man"... and there are so many things which cash will not pay."  

Williams mentions Matthew Arnold's characteristic emphasis on what he called "the great evil of England the unhappy situation in which the poor and the rich stand towards each other."  

Arnold, like so many other Victorians, feared the working class movement would cause a breakdown into violence and anarchy.

Williams also discusses Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris's comments on art and society. Pugin said, "The history of architecture is the history of the world," and he went on to use the art of the period to judge the quality of the Victorian society producing it in the same way that Dickens used his architectural descriptions to comment on society.  

Ruskin, too, went from art criticism to social criticism in a reaction to industrialism. His lecture on the Town Hall in Bradford is in a similar vein to some of Dickens' satire. He says the only appropriate
style for their new building would be one

built to your great Goddess of "Getting-on" . . .

I can only at present suggest decorating its
frieze with pendant purses; and making its
pillars broad at the base, for the sticking of
bills.49

Wiliams includes William Morris' statement of his oppo-
sition to his times, commenting that "this kind of
opposition is by now very familiar, and we can see in it
elements of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Pugin, and of the popu-
larization of these ideas in Dickens."50 Morris wrote:

Apart from the desire to produce beautiful
things, the leading passion of my life has
been and is hatred of modern civilization. . . .
What shall I say concerning its mastery of and
its waste of mechanical power, its commonwealth
to poor, its enemies of the commonwealth so
rich, its stupendous organization—for the
misery of life! . . . The struggles of mankind
for many ages had produced nothing but this
sordid, aimless, ugly confusion; the immediate
future seemed to me likely to intensify all
the present evils by sweeping away the last
survivals of the days before the dull squalor
of civilization had settled down on the world.51

The six industrial novels Williams discusses—Mrs.
Gaskell's Mary Barton and North and South, Dickens' Hard
Times, Disraeli's Sybil, Kingsley's Alton Locke, and
George Eliot's Felix Holt, offer a common criticism of
industrialism, with their recognition of the evil of the
industrial society and their fear of becoming involved in
violence. As in most of Dickens' novels, the protagonists
of these novels can only find happiness by withdrawing
from society, by emigrating to Canada or by "that device
of the legacy which solved so many otherwise insoluble
problems in the world of the Victorian novel. The actual industrial squalor of the homes and cities, the idea that England is two nations composed of rich and poor, the fear of working class violence—these ideas turn up in all of the novels. In *Felix Holt* George Eliot describes her own society as "vicous," and her "favourite metaphor for society is a network; a 'tangled skein'; a 'tangled web'; 'the long-growing evils of a great nation are a tangled business'," all of these terms for the society similar to those Dickens used in *Little Dorrit*.

In his discussion of *Hard Times*, Williams says Dickens had John Stuart Mill's *Political Economy* in mind in his condemnation of the theories which built Coketown. Williams explains Dickens' social criticism in a way similar to Orwell:

We are missing Dickens's point if we fail to see that in condemning Thomas Gradgrind, the representative figure, we are invited to condemn the kind of thinking and the methods of enquiry and legislation which in fact promoted a large measure of social and industrial reform. . . . For Dickens is not setting Reform against Exploitation. . . . His positives do not lie in social improvement, but rather in what he sees as the elements of human nature—personal kindness, sympathy, and forbearance. It is not the model factory against the satanic mill, nor is it the humanitarian experiment against selfish exploitation. It is, rather, individual persons against the System.54

Because Dickens does not offer any social alternatives to Bounderby and Gradgrin, Williams believes that "Dickens's social attitudes cancel each other out," and that Dickens'
air of having "seen through" society and of having found everyone else out is an adolescent attitude. He sees Hard Times "more a symptom of the confusion of industrial society than an understanding of it." 55

In demanding solutions for the ills of society from Dickens, several of these writers seem to forget that Dickens is not a politician or an administrator, but an artist. Edmund Wilson points out that Dickens' political novels are not always clear and satisfactory because Dickens was not really interested in politics. In his early life as a court reporter, Dickens acquired a contempt for Parliament and politicians which he did not alter during the course of his life:

Dickens was sometimes acutely stupid about politics. His lack of interest in political tactics led him, it has sometimes been claimed, to mistake the actual significance of the legislation he was so prompt to criticize . . . Macaulay complained that Dickens did not understand the Manchester school of utilitarian economics which he criticized in Hard Times. But Dickens' criticism does not pretend to be theoretical; all he is undertaking to do is to tell us how practising believers in Manchester utilitarianism behave and how their families are likely to fare with them. 56

Wilson goes on to say that this distrust of politics is actually part of Dickens' basic hatred of institutions. Whenever Dickens deals with Parliament, laws, courts, public officials, the Church, etc., "he makes them either ridiculous or cruel, or both at the same time." 57

R. C. Churchill should probably have the final word on this subject. For Churchill, Dickens' insistence on
the personal and hatred of institutions is part of his particular genius, for he can "always put his finger on the social evil which hurt the sufferer the most." Any exaggeration Dickens uses in considering people rather than theories or institutions is "the necessary exaggeration of art, the necessary 'fine excess'." Churchill continues his defense of Dickens by pointing out that:

Any appreciation of Dickens which restricts itself merely to the aptitude of his writing to the immediate social background is giving us a very small part of the real Dickens, no more than we should get of Shakespeare if we took Falstaff to be simply a commentary on the reign of Henry IV.

Although there is a great deal of truth in House's statement that Dickens was not a pioneer in his social criticism, it is not the whole story. In some ways, Churchill believes, Dickens was in advance "of the most advanced opinion of the age":

But he is not less of a novelist because he is concerned so directly with social issues; on the contrary, he gains in stature as a writer, as an artist, by the manner in which he presents his criticism. If this were not so, such parts of his work would be as dead now as other nineteenth-century "novels with a purpose." The gift, the gift of an artist, for perceiving the fundamental beneath the particular, saves him.

Dickens supplements his picture of the society in Little Dorrit in his other later novels. A common feature of Dombey & Son, Bleak House, Hard Times, Great Expectation, and Our Mutual Friend is a criticism of Victorian society as a possessive and acquisitive society in which all of the people—"the highest and the lowest—"
are connected and enslaved by the power of money. As several critics suggest, Dickens' own personal difficulties undoubtedly intensified the darkness of these later novels, but they did give a valid picture of an important part of his society.
CONCLUSION

The effort to cite the results of this exercise and to evaluate my own criticism of the novel poses another almost Dickensian problem of point of view—am I to congratulate or flail myself? The general aim of the exercise still strikes me as useful. The trouble with this type of scheme in a thesis, however, is that one is then stuck with the first part of the exercise, and student writing stacked up against the full resources of professional critics can seem impoverished, as I. A. Richards' Practical Criticism has so graphically shown. I was handicapped in not being able to place Little Dorrit in the body of Dickens' work, and my essay in Part One operated under a disadvantage in not being able to compare and contrast the novel with other Dickens' novels or to gain insights from any detailed knowledge of the Victorian period or Dickens' life.

On the whole I did well, though like many of the other critics, I neglected certain points and certain aspects of the novel. This is, of course, a matter of emphasis and of basic critical approach. The original question around which the thesis was planned—how well a graduate student could understand and evaluate a novel
without turning to secondary sources—is perhaps best answered merely by the juxtaposition of my essay and the discussion of the various critics' views. I find that the Dickens of my analysis has emerged as what the most recent Dickens critics are fond of calling the "gloomy symbolist." Reservations about this point may be very well for other, earlier Dickens novels, but surely not for Little Dorrit, which even Chesterton admitted was carefully written and pessimistic. It now seems to me, however, that my analysis was too narrowly concentrated on the prison symbol. A serious naivete might be in my failure to give Dickens his full due as a mythological novelist; I also might have concentrated more on the qualities of Dickens that have gained him his immense popularity and power over his readers, the energy and vitality in his work. I wonder if I may have underrated Little Dorrit. Several critics regard it as Dickens' masterpiece, though I would think that Great Expectations or Bleak House might be considered more powerful novels. Certain other sections of my paper require no apology.

From the recent criticism of Dickens I would single out as indispensable for a knowledge of Dickens in relation to his period, Humphry House's The Dickens World; for an approach to Dickens generally, George Orwell and Edmund Wilson's essays complement one another nicely;
for *Little Dorrit* particularly, Lionel Trilling and John Wain's essays; and for Dickens' style, Taylor Stoehr, *Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance* and Robert Garis' *The Dickens Theatre*. Essentially, with Dickens we are still back in the controversy between his early critics, Gissing and Chesterton. The question, "what is fantasy, what is reality?" continues to tease the critic. I would like to see for *Little Dorrit* work similar to Dorothy Van Ghent's essay on *Great Expectations* in her book *The English Novel*, one which would use with facility and skill textual analysis, cultural history, biographical data, anthropology, psychology.

The critic-judging-critic-judging-critic round might seem to smack a bit of the Circumlocution Office itself, but essentially the critical practice suggested in this paper seems to be valuable—to do intensive work on the work of art itself as an organic entity, then to turn to scholars and critics, and learn from them. Hopefully, having performed this exercise, a student might then be able to teach the novel with some dispatch or in some way to combine the three sections and produce an essay on *Little Dorrit* that might be a contribution to Dickens criticism.
FOOTNOTES

PART TWO


5 Wilson, pp. 37-38.

6 Wilson, p. 53.

7 Wilson, p. 54.

8 Wilson, p. 55.

9 Wilson, p. 54.

10 Wilson, p. 54.

11 Wilson, p. 40.

12 Wilson, pp. 61, 51.

23. Fielding, p. 147.
27. Fielding, pp. 147, 145.
33. Engel, pp. 126-127.
34. Engel, p. 132.
35. Engel, p. 129.
36. Engel, p. 131.
37. Engel, p. 130.
39 Miller, p. 227.
40 Miller, pp. 228-229.
41 Miller, p. 231.
42 Miller, pp. 234-235.
43 Miller, pp. 236, 230.
44 Miller, p. 243.
45 Miller, p. 330.
46 Miller, p. 237.
47 Miller, p. 237.
49 Miller, p. 247.
50 Miller, p. 243.


52 Trilling, p. 578.
53 Trilling, p. 583.
54 Trilling, p. 584.
55 Trilling, pp. 586, 587.
56 Trilling, p. 585.
57 Trilling, p. 586.
58 Trilling, p. 590.


60 Wain, p. 172.

Wain, "Little Dorrit," Twentieth Century, p. 175.


Wain, Review, p. 172.

Wain, "Little Dorrit," Twentieth Century, p. 183.


Shaw quoted in Johnson, p. 1139-40.

Shaw quoted in Johnson, p. 883.


Jackson, p. 166.

Jack Lindsay, Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study (New York, 1950).

Lindsay, p. 328.

Lindsay, p. 328.

Lindsay, p. 329.


McMaster, p. 533, 537.

McMaster, p. 533.


In Chapter 24 of Little Dorrit, "Fortune-Telling" Little Dorrit tells Maggy a fairy story.

85 Wilde, p. 37.

86 Wilde, p. 38.


88 Stoehr, p. viii.

89 Stoehr, pp. 10, 32.

90 Stoehr, p. 178.

91 Stoehr, pp. 194, 193.

92 Stoehr, pp. 173, 182, 184.

93 Stoehr, p. 266.


95 Garis, p. 256.

96 Garis, p. 10.


98 Garis, pp. 9, 12, 14.


100 Garis, pp. 171.


102 Garis, pp. 180, 179.

103 Garis, pp. 181, 182.

104 Garis, p. 183.

105 Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 233.


109 Orwell, p. 70.

110 Orwell, p. 74.


117 Davis, p. 12.

118 Davis, p. 309.


120 Forster, p. 136.

121 Forster, p. 139.


123 Chesterton, p. 138.

124 Chesterton, p. 138.

125 Chesterton, p. 84.

126 Chesterton, p. 87.


129 Taine, p. 124.
130 Taine, p. 162.
131 Ford, *Dickens and His Readers*, p. 257.
132 Ford, *Dickens and His Readers*, p. 229.
133 Ford, *Dickens and His Readers*, p. 275.
134 Ford, *Dickens and His Readers*, p. 259.
PART THREE

1 Johnson, p. 829.
2 Johnson, p. 846.
3 Johnson, p. 885.
4 Engel, p. 61.
5 Engel, p. 63.
6 Shaw quoted in Johnson, Charles Dickens, p. 802.
7 Shaw quoted in Johnson, Charles Dickens, p. 883.
8 Fielding, p. 141.
9 Fielding, p. 125.
10 Fielding, p. 150.
11 Fielding, p. 151.
12 Fielding, p. 152
13 Fielding, p. 152
14 Garis, p. 96.
15 Garis, p. 96.
16 Garis, p. 97.
17 Orwell, p. 75.
18 Orwell, p. 71.
19 Orwell, p. 27.
20 Orwell, p. 3.
21 Orwell, p. 74.
23 House, p. 41.
25. House, p. 29.
27. House, p. 122.
29. House, p. 75.
30. House, p. 43.
31. House, p. 42.
33. Ford, p. 63.
34. Ford, pp. 63, 83.
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