

# Reviving Spirit: “Illth” and Health

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The healthy know not of their health, but only the sick: this is the Physician’s aphorism . . . it holds no less in moral, intellectual, political, poetical, than in merely corporeal therapeutics. . . . Thus too . . . is the state of health well denoted by a term expressing unity; when we feel ourselves as we wish to be, we say that we are *whole*. . . .

Remarkable it is, truly, how everywhere the eternal fact begins again to be recognized, that there is a Godlike in human affairs; that God not only made us and beholds us, but is in us and around us; that the Age of Miracles, as it ever was, now is.

—Thomas Carlyle (“Characteristics” 3, 27)

**L**ittle *Dorrit* (1857), Charles Dickens’s largest canvas, his eleventh of fifteen novels, is a meticulous anatomy of commercial Victorian England.<sup>1</sup> Its achievement, however, goes beyond social satire to a

<sup>1</sup>I wish to thank sincerely Ms. Emina Tuzlak, an undergraduate major in German and English at Canisius College, for her excellent research assistance.

diagnosis of spiritual disease, a mythic rendering of the human danger of creating and succumbing to a spiritual wasteland where wealth and social class have replaced the union of spirit and the world, the sense of all creation as divine participants. In this mythic dimension, the novel extends its examination of nineteenth-century England to the rest of the world and to a timeless and challenging human condition. The novel's prescription for such spiritual malaise does not promise a cure but affirms instead the power of caring to enable the spirit to survive in its human vessel and to cope with the human condition of continuous remission.

In its dark social landscape and in the individual lives of its central characters—Arthur Clennam and Amy Dorrit—*Little Dorrit* offers readers in every age a look at themselves and their own threatening world by way of a literary fun-house mirror. The reflection readers see is exaggerated but also real because Arthur and Amy function both as individuals and as representative types beneath their Victorian dress and the novel's setting. They become mere examples of persons who, at least temporarily, succeed in surviving their wasteland and in making themselves whole again, symbolically through individual psychic integration and literally in their marriage. In their mutual love Arthur rediscovers the life of spirit in Amy, and Amy complements her selfless angelic nature in her physical love for Arthur. The healing they experience thus comes without the expense of either body or soul.

As a number of studies have illustrated, *Little Dorrit* depicts the world as a vast physical and psychological prison—from the literal prisons of Marseilles and the Marshalsea to various kinds of mind-forged manacles: obsession with or denial of the past, failure to acknowledge guilt, and belief in the necessity of class superiority, all symptoms of individual and social spiritual disease.<sup>2</sup> *Little Dorrit* asks a perennial and essential question: how can individuals free and heal themselves, realize their

<sup>2</sup>Edgar Johnson says that in *Little Dorrit* “[i]ts fundamental structure made society a vast jail . . . in which the people and their governors were captives and wardens dwelling within the same confining walls” (883); A. O. J. Cockshut begins his study of the novel with the reminder that “the idea of prison domi-

genuine selves, lead meaningful lives, and appreciate the sacredness and wonder of the world when the world's power imprisons them in and infects them with its demand that they favor appearance over reality, inertia over action, and profit over poetry?

In 1854, a year before he began *Little Dorrit*, Charles Dickens dedicated *Hard Times* to Thomas Carlyle, and in 1859, two years after he completed *Little Dorrit*, Dickens praised Carlyle's *The French Revolution* (1837) in his "Preface" to *A Tale of Two Cities*. It is not surprising, then, to find Carlyle's influence in *Little Dorrit*, the middle novel of Dickens's work between 1854 and 1859. In fact, several essential Carlylean ideas contribute significantly to what one can call the larger mythic character of the novel. *Little Dorrit* echoes Carlyle's belief in the dignity and sacredness of "Work," in the immanence of the divine in the world, and in the strength of the human spirit to recover from the sickness of fragmentation to the wholeness of health, to grow from denial (the "Everlasting No") to indifference (the "Center of Indifference") to affirmation (the "Everlasting Yea"). Indeed, Carlyle provides the reader of *Little Dorrit* with an introductory vocabulary for understanding how the novel realizes its larger mythic achievement, its graceful weaving of these broader patterns into the texture of its contemporary social concerns.<sup>3</sup>

### I. WEALTH AND PARALYSIS: A SOCIAL EPIDEMIC

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whole" (143); and Fred Kaplan relates the novel's comprehensive imagery to the turmoil in Dickens's personal life at the time: "The image of imprisonment appealed to him strongly these days. He felt trapped in a cell whose bars were made by personality and history. He struggled with his sense of being imprisoned in himself. . . . The image was inseparable from shifting and uncertain self-portraiture" (338).

<sup>3</sup>Mildred C. Christian discusses Carlyle's influence on Dickens, showing Dickens to be a "true disciple" of Carlyle's pre-1850 social theory. Janet Larson focuses on the echoes of Carlyle in *Little Dorrit* and meticulously reveals what she calls Dickens's "uneasy literary discipleship" to Carlyle, particularly relating to ideas about the power and function of art and literature (139). Her analysis of the novel's "iconography" and its concern with "artists" and "fiction" reveals Carlyle's parallel concerns in his *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850):

Carlyle suggests that human dignity is realized in honest labor, however humble: “For there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work. Were he never so benighted, forgetful of his high calling, there is always hope in a man that actually and earnestly works” (*Past* 76). Furthermore, he elevates work and equates it with prayer: “Laborare est orare, Work is Worship” (282). Finally, Carlyle says that work signals the essential divine presence within humanity, the authentic character of being human: “Labor is Life: from the inmost heart of the Worker rises his god-given Force, the sacred celestial Life-essence breathed into him by Almighty God” (278). Carlyle’s “Gospel of Work” is the foundation of meaningful human action, the means by which people realize their divine origins and the sacredness of the world. He argues, however, that contemporary England had devalued Work by focussing on wages, a disease which threatens the divinity of humanity:

man has lost the soul out of him. . . . This is verily the plague-spot; center of the universal Social Gangrene, threatening all modern things with frightful death. . . . Aristocracy has become Phantom-Aristocracy, no longer able to do its work, not in the least conscious that it has any work longer to do . . . careful only to clamour for the wages of doing its work,—nay for higher, and palpably undue wages. (193, 197–98)

For disciples of the “Gospel of Mammonism,” Heaven is “Success,” “Hell” is redefined as “not succeeding,” and “Reality” is reduced to “the

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vision of the arts in a doubting century” (181), a reiteration of Carlyle’s failed quest for a new faith promulgated by the hero-poet in the Gospel of Work. Finally, Edwin B. Barrett acknowledges Dickens’s specific debt to Carlyle and to *Sartor Resartus* (1838): “[Arthur] Clennam’s malady is truly the *mal du siecle* as Carlyle diagnosed it. . . . And to *Sartor Resartus* Dickens seems to have owed not only the conception of *Little Dorrit* as a process of salvation but many details of the architectonic as well. Carlyle had described the psychic anguish of his hero in complementary metaphors of sickness and imprisonment and had described the salvation which his hero finally achieves in

making of money” (206). The “Gospel of Mammonism” and the “Gospel of Dilletantism” have replaced what Carlyle elsewhere calls “Natural Supernaturalism,” the belief that beneath the clothing of Time, Space, and our material world and bodies, “this fair Universe . . . is in very deed the star-domed City of God . . . through every star, through every grass-blade, and most through every Living Soul, the glory of a present God still beams” (*Sartor* 194).

In “Midas” from *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle calls attention to the paradox of English wealth and the simultaneous lack of work for millions of skilled workers: “England is full of wealth . . . yet England is dying of inanition” (3). Reliance on wealth alone, Carlyle suggests, brings national “enchantment” or “paralysis”:

Fatal paralysis spreading inward, from the extremities in St. Ives workhouses, in Stockport cellars, through all limbs, as if towards the heart itself. Have we actually got enchanted, then; accursed by some god?—

Midas longed for gold, and insulted the Olympians. He got gold, so that whatsoever he touched became gold,—and he, with his long ears, was little the better for it. Midas had misjudged the celestial music-tones; Midas had insulted Apollo and the gods: the gods gave him his wish, and a pair of long ears, which also were a good appendage to it. What a truth in these old Fables! (3–4)

Twelve years later in *Little Dorrit*, Dickens takes up these concerns of Carlyle in his portrait of a sick nation in the throes of spiritual inertia, worshipping the gods of Profit and Success. At the center of the public world of *Little Dorrit*, Midas in the person of Mr. Merdle, whose vast wealth is accumulated through speculation, is King and Deity: “Mr. Merdle was immensely rich; a man of prodigious enterprise; a Midas without the ears, who turned all he touched to gold” (254). Dickens deifies Merdle as the new savior, “the shining wonder, the new constellation to be followed by the wise men bringing gifts” (737), the “rich man, who had in a manner revised the New Testament and already entered into the kingdom of Heaven” (635). The specific nature of Merdle’s business is unknown, “except that it was to

coin money . . . the last new polite reading of the parable of the camel and the needle's eye" (407). Yet Merdle's wealth is a curse, an "enchantment," not a measure of the health of the nation, the commonweal, but paradoxically the cause of what John Ruskin, another of Dickens's contemporaries, calls its "illth":

Many of the persons commonly considered wealthy, are in reality no more wealthy than the locks of their own strong boxes are, they being inherently and eternally incapable of wealth; and operating for the nation, in an economical point of view, either as pools of dead water . . . or else . . . acting not as wealth but (for we ought to have a correspondent term) as 'illth,' causing various devastations and trouble around them in all directions. (72-73)

This unnamed, unspecified illness evident in Merdle himself is spreading to the impoverished, deluded, morbid world around him. Merdle's physician claims,

"I can find nothing the matter with Mr. Merdle. . . . How such a man should suppose himself unwell without reason, you may think strange. But I have found nothing the matter with him. He may have some deep-seated recondite complaint. I can't say. I only say that at present I have not found it out." (261)

As Carlyle says, "The healthy know not of their health, but only the sick" ("Characteristics" 6).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Barrett shifts the focus of attention from the "prison" as the central metaphor in *Little Dorrit* to Dickens's ordering "his larger vision, his dominant imagery, and his language on the new theory of infection . . . and on the inferences about psychological, moral, social, and spiritual malady which he drew from that theory": "The accumulation of rotting matter, darkness, and the close crowding of men and animals, which were the conditions of urban life by the middle of the nineteenth century, generated noxious gases that might be invisible or that might appear as miasmas, and therefore the great epidemic diseases—plague, typhus, and cholera—were believed to be of the nature of *malaria*, blown about in London's fogs, smokes, and clouds of dust" (200-01). The literal diseases of *Little Dorrit* are signs of a universal spiritual malaise: "The disease that Dickens diagnoses in Arthur Clennam

Merdle's deep-seated illness surfaces when his finances collapse and he commits suicide: "the late Mr. Merdle's complaint had been, simply, forgery and robbery" (737). Merdle's disease had infected the countless others who invested with him, even a relatively innocent person like Mr. Pancks, who in turn influences Arthur to invest:

Of whom Mr. Pancks had taken the prevalent disease, he could no more have told than if he had unconsciously taken a fever. Bred at first, as many physical diseases are, in the wickedness of men, and then disseminated in their ignorance, these epidemics, after a period, get communicated to many sufferers who are neither ignorant nor wicked. Mr. Pancks might, or might not, have caught the illness himself from a subject of this class; but in this category he appeared before Clennam, and the infection he threw off was all the more virulent. (603)

Merdle's bankruptcy and the losses of all his investors are the result of his being "simply the greatest forger and the greatest thief that ever cheated the gallows" (737). What is now familiarly called "insider trading" appropriately describes the sham innocence Merdle employs to lure potential speculators. When William Dorrit, the rags-to-riches father of Amy (the "Little Dorrit" of the title), asks Merdle to help him invest his new money, Merdle replies,

"I do generally retain in my own hands the power of exercising some preference—people in general would be pleased to call it a favor—as a sort of compliment for my care and trouble. . . . Of course . . . there must be the strictest integrity and uprightness in these transactions; there must be the purest faith between man and man; there must be unimpeached and unimpeachable confidence; or business could not be carried on." (638)

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and the other sufferers is the 'Condition of England'; the cure is to be effected by moral, social, and spiritual means; the sick fancies are to be made well by the inspired imagination" (212). A dark Puritan ethic, the dream of power conveyed by riches, speculation, and an overblown estimate of the superiority of personal independence, are the major infections of a general social disease.

The failure of the House of Merdle is a failure of the nation, a misplaced belief in Profit as the greatest good which in fact reduces its citizens to debtors. In more modern times, the Gospel of Success, the credit economy, the collapse of giant corporations because of the greed and fraud of their executive officers, and the subsequent losses to millions of their shareholders bring Merdle's spiritual and financial bankruptcy even closer to the world of the twenty-first century.

The other side of the public world of *Little Dorrit* is filled with unemployed, idle debtors whose existence the idle rich, in their Do-Nothing positions of political power, ignore. In Bleeding Heart Yard, for instance, Mr. Plornish, a rarely employed plasterer, informs Arthur that "[t]here was people of pretty well all sorts of trades you could name, all wanting to work, and yet not able to get it. There was old people, after working all their lives, going and being shut up in the workhouse" (146). Similarly, Carlyle points out that in 1843 two million skilled workers live in "the workhouse Bastille . . . [i]n workhouses, pleasantly so named, because work cannot be done in them. . . . They sit there . . . glad to be imprisoned and enchanted that they may not perish starved" (*Past* 4).

In *Little Dorrit*, however, unemployment and imprisonment for debt eventually breed the self-deluding fantasy among the Marshalsea debtors that not paying one's debts is a normal condition to be accepted, that insolvency is health: "It was evident from the general tone of the whole party, that they had come to regard insolvency as the normal state of mankind, and the payment of debts as a disease that occasionally broke out" (91). The debtors of Bleeding Heart Yard are Merdle-worshippers who "prostrated themselves before him" (575), "patients" infected by the national epidemic. Such delusion infects William Dorrit with a snobbish dilettantism about being the "Father of the Marshalsea," the debtor who has been imprisoned longest and has thereby earned a kind of gentility that entitles him to "do nothing." When Dorrit later learns of his inheritance, he instantly shifts his allegiance to the camp of the idle rich: "We owe it as a duty to them [his children], and to ourselves, from this moment, not to let them—hum—not to let them do anything'" (432). For the whole

spectrum of society—Merdle, the unemployed, and the pauper-turned-prince William Dorrit—the sacredness of Work has been undermined, appearance has supplanted reality, and the resultant ennui contributes to the nation's spiritual paralysis.

This national paralysis is evident as well in the lack of action in the highest levels of government, what Dickens in *Little Dorrit* calls the Circumlocution Office, “the most important Department under Government” and the most practiced in the art of “How not to do it” (107). Those in the Circumlocution Office, led by the generic Barnacle family of incompetent public leeches, pride themselves on doing a “quantity of business (for the prevention of business). . . . [T]he more the Circumlocution Office did, the less was done, and [the] greatest blessing it could confer on an unhappy public would be to do nothing” (535–36):

It is true that How not to do it was the great study and object of all public departments and professional politicians all round the Circumlocution Office. It is true that every new premier and every new government, coming in because they had upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it. (108)

Merdle's stepson, the foppish Edmund Sparkler, is expert at doing nothing, “his usual occupation, and one for which he was particularly qualified” (518), and so is a perfect candidate for a post at the Circumlocution Office, incompetently in charge of all that was of national value. Sparkler earns some of Dickens's most acerbic satire:

The land of Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Newton, Watt, the land of a host of past and present abstract philosophers, natural philosophers, and subduers of Nature and Art in their myriad forms, called to Mr. Sparkler to come and take care of it, lest it should perish. Mr. Sparkler, unable to resist the agonised cry from the depths of his country's soul, declared that he must go.

(626)

When Sparkler is awarded the post through the alliance of Lord Decimus Barnacle and Merdle, Lord Decimus's toast is heavily ironic: "when he said, 'Your health, Sir!' all around him was barrenness and desolation" (587).

Like Carlyle, Dickens depicts the national illness as a moral infection that has reached epidemic proportions:

That it is at least as difficult to stay a moral infection as a physical one; that such a disease will spread with the malignity and the rapidity of the plague; that the contagion, when it has once made head, will spare no pursuit or condition, but will lay hold on people in the soundest health, and become developed in the most unlikely constitutions; is a fact as firmly established by experience as that we human creatures breathe an atmosphere. (591)

Nor is the tenacity of the Do-Nothing Barnacles limited to London but extends beyond England to its empire:

wherever there was a square yard of ground in British occupation, under the sun or moon, with a public post upon it, sticking to that post was a Barnacle. No intrepid navigator could plant a flag-staff upon any spot of earth, and take possession of it in the British name, but to that spot of earth, so soon as the discovery was known, the Circumlocution Office sent out a Barnacle and a despatch-box. Thus the Barnacles were all over the world—despatch-boxing the compass. (412)

In such a widely diseased and godless world, a guarded hope for recovery is realized in the story of Arthur and Amy, who survive but do not overcome what Carlyle calls "[o]ur Wilderness . . . the wide World in an Atheistic Century" (*Sartor* 138), the dour and mechanistic worship of self and money.

## II. THE PROGRESS OF ARTHUR CLENNAM

At age forty Arthur returns to his mother's house in London after

twenty years as a businessman in China and finds England the wasteland Dickens and Carlyle portray: "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" (30). The city rain develops "only foul stale smells," and a church Arthur passes is merely a "mouldy hall" and "Congregationless" (34). Mrs. Clennam's house is tomb-like, airless and funereal, a miniature of the nation's dreary and morbid condition: it is "dingy," "rank," and "rusty" (34); its furniture includes framed pictures of the "Plagues of Egypt, much the dimmer for the fly and smoke plagues of London," and an empty wine cabinet "lined with lead, like a sort of coffin" (36). Mrs. Clennam herself sits on a "bier-like sofa," partially paralyzed (36): "I have lost the use of my limbs. I never leave my room" (37).

By extension the gloom of the house reflects Mrs. Clennam's distorted religious faith which professed that "this scene, the Earth, is expressly meant to be a scene of gloom, and hardship, and dark trial for the creatures who are made out of its dust" (369). Instead of finding God in a good world, she makes her image of a fallen world her god: she had "reversed the order of Creation, and breathed her own breath into a clay image of her Creator" (803). Mrs. Clennam's idolatry rejects the world as valueless, much like Merdle's worship makes the world the *only* value. Paradoxically, Mrs. Clennam still controls the family fortune and wields its power despite her puritan rejection of the world. Like Merdle's worship of "the Goddess of Getting On," Mrs. Clennam's "faith" is an individual symptom of the nation's general idolatry: "no human eyes have ever seen more daring, gross, and shocking images of the Divine nature than we creatures of the dust make in our own likenesses, of our own bad passions" (803). The physical condition of the house, which is on the verge of collapse, is a Poesque premonition of its and its owner's eventual fate: "Many years ago, it had had it in its mind to slide down sideways; it had been propped up, however, and was leaning on some half-dozen gigantic crutches: which . . . appeared in these latter days to be no very sure re-

<sup>5</sup>See Larson's discussion of Mrs. Clennam as an abuser of art whose surroundings, dress, and rhetoric paradoxically expose her gloomy religion of re-

liance" (34-35).<sup>5</sup>

Upon his return, Arthur knows he is dissatisfied with his personal past—the memory of his mother's stern upbringing, his father's wealth, and his own twenty-year pursuit of a life of business. What he does not know are his family's numerous deep secrets: that his parents' loveless marriage was arranged by an uncle; that Mrs. Clennam's tyranny over his father drove him to China; that Mrs. Clennam is not his real mother; that Arthur's birth mother was actually a young singer his father had met and fallen in love with; and that Mrs. Clennam, "a female Lucifer in appetite for power" (810), vengefully drove the girl to madness and death "to purchase her redemption" (805), while withholding the financial support the uncle's will had provided for both her and Amy, who now works for Mrs. Clennam as a seamstress. Now that his father has died, Arthur faces and leaves his past by abandoning the business still run by his mother:

"I cannot say that I believe my forty years have been profitable or pleasant to myself or any one; but I have habitually submitted. . . . I have seen so little happiness come of money; it has brought within my knowledge so little peace to this house, or to any one belonging to it; that it is worth less to me than to another." (49, 51)

After forty years of wandering in his personal wilderness, Arthur begins his deliverance. In rejecting the Gospel of Mammonism, he has, in Carlyle's terms, proclaimed his "Everlasting No," the painful beginning of "a state of crisis, of transition" from "Mechanical Profit-and-Loss Philosophies," religious doubt, and unbelief in oneself (*Sartor* 120, 123). By resigning the business and leaving his mother, Clennam also faces and rejects his own religious upbringing, which had turned his youth into "the dreary Sunday of his childhood" and "the interminable Sunday of his nonage" (33), and which, according to Mrs. Clennam, was intended "to bring him up in fear and trembling, and in a life of practical contrition for the sins that were heavy on his head before his entrance into this condemned world" (805). As the first step of his

new freedom, Arthur rejects the Puritan ethic that links the power of money and the religion of retribution.

However, having cast off his old life, Arthur is adrift spiritually; he has moved into what Carlyle calls the "Centre of Indifference," a period in which the old unacceptable life has been "now pretty well extirpated and cast out, but next to nothing introduced in its room; whereby the heart remains, for the while, in a quiet but not uncomfortable state" (*Sartor* 135). In his new neutral state, a kind of mid-life crisis, he becomes more self-conscious. His brief one-sided affection for young Pet Meagles and her subsequent marriage to Henry Gowan make him feel older, beyond the possibility of love and the hope for a better future. In bidding farewell to Pet, Arthur bids farewell to his own life thus far and indulges in a sad moment of realization of the irrevocability of youth and dreams:

he put his hand in his breast and tenderly took out the handful of roses . . . [and] launched them on the flowing river. Pale and unreal in the moonlight, the river floated them away . . . and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas. (349)

To move beyond his spiritual ennui, he must look further into the past to unlock the family secrets, make reparation for what he suspects might be some great family guilt, and act to give meaning to what now seems to him his useless life. He needs "to break the spell of secrecy that enshrouded the house" and to "shake off the paralysis of which every hour that passed over his head made him more acutely sensible" (704). In trying to unravel the secrets of his past, Arthur's intentions, unlike Mrs. Clennam's, are noble. He seeks redemption through forgiveness, what he believes his father wished, whereas Mrs. Clennam reads the "D. N. F." ("Do Not Forget") inscription on Arthur's father's watch as a call to obsessive and perpetual revenge. Ironically, Arthur's search fails, in part because Amy, the novel's "soul," has not yet entered his life to make him whole. Only after Mrs. Clennam's death and at the novel's end does Amy, by then Arthur's wife, selectively reveal

his past to him, withholding still the truth about Mrs. Clennam's injustice to his birth mother and to Amy herself. Like Lucy Manette in her symbolic role as the "golden thread" and healer in Dickens's next novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, Amy, the seamstress, mends Arthur's spirit in keeping with her metaphorical function as the sole thread holding her family together with something other than wealth.

Arthur's early efforts "to do," to move beyond his private neutrality and public do-nothingism, are hardly more successful than his forays into his past because they all still depend on money as the means to his intended good. In an attempt to reverse the general tendency of "Not to do it," Arthur pays the ungrateful Tip Dorrit's debt to free him from the Marshalsea, he buys a partnership in Daniel Doyce's engineering firm to help him with the accounting, and he is instrumental in Amy's being employed as a seamstress by his fiancée of twenty years before, the changed but sympathetic Flora Finching. Finally, Arthur nobly, though fruitlessly, fights the dragon of the Circumlocution Office in an effort to forward the patent for Doyce's invention. When Arthur invests Doyce's money against his advice, however, and the Merdle bubble bursts, Doyce loses his capital, and Arthur is arrested for debt. The long illness that he subsequently suffers in the Marshalsea seems to suggest the limited power of individual action and the certain failure of money alone as a means of redeeming oneself.

The impotence of money as a cure illustrates a younger Dickens's shift in faith from the ideas he promulgated in *Oliver Twist* (1838), for example, in which he suggests that simply being good defeats evil and earns oneself clean money. Arthur's arrest and illness are positive, however, in functioning as a symbolic "death" experience of the self, the pathos of the quest romance that necessarily precedes any genuine self-discovery and return to life. Like Pip's experiences in *Great Expectations* (1861), Arthur's illness and arrest for debt detach him from the bondage of wealth, make him "poor in spirit," and prepare him to inherit "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3), the revival of the divine in his life. In "The Everlasting Yea," Carlyle explains how such suffering is the prelude to spiritual health:

By benignant fever-paroxysms is Life rooting out the deep-seated chronic Disease, and triumphs over Death. On the roaring billows of Time, thou art not engulfed, but borne aloft into the azure of Eternity. . . . This is the Everlasting Yea, wherein all contradiction is solved. (*Sartor* 143)

The end of Arthur's illness coincides with Amy's appearance in his Marshalsea cell, the same cell her father had once lived in. Amy enters Arthur's life as an ameliorator, friend, and beloved whose edenic effect on Arthur, in the image of the flowers in his cell, rejuvenates him and replaces both Flora, the fiancée of his youth, and the surrendered roses of Pet Meagles that made him feel old at forty:

some abiding impression of a garden stole over him—a garden of flowers. . . . Nothing had ever appeared so beautiful in his sight. He took them up and inhaled their fragrance, and he lifted them to his hot head . . . and opened his parched hands to them, as cold hands are opened to receive the cheering of a fire. (783–84)

Little Dorrit's tears drop "on him as the rain from Heaven had dropped upon the flowers" (784).

To this point Amy has acted on the periphery of Arthur's life. She has been in the background at Mrs. Clennam's, at Flora's, and at the Marshalsea, alive and at work, but unnoticed. Amy's interest in Arthur has continued to grow, but she has remained only a curiosity to him rather than a potential romantic interest. Though Arthur's wandering in the desert of stern religion and political economy ceases early in the novel, the remainder of his story slowly unfolds in his quest for health and wholeness through the agency of Little Dorrit, the animating power of selflessness and the means by which Arthur sees what Carlyle calls the world's "Natural Supernaturalism." Like the novelist in his effect upon the reader, Amy performs an artist's function as well in helping Arthur understand his past and the lesser importance of money as a measure of success. At the end of the novel, she and Arthur marry, though both have lost their money in the Merdle crash. Literally, Arthur's marriage to Amy Dorrit resolves the major plotline of the novel, but their union also dramatizes figuratively the psychic integra-

tion of the person and the establishment of a new basis of hope for those forced to carry on in a world that remains hostile and mechanical.

### III. AMY DORRIT AS ANIMA

Generally, most critics consider Dickens a failure at creating female characters because they seem psychologically ineffective stick figures who echo the prevalent Victorian attitude toward women, which diminishes them in size, freezes them in childhood, and reduces them to passivity, mediocrity, or domestic sainthood. The oft-repeated adjective "little" in Dickens's female characters' names (Little Nell, Little Emily, Little Dorrit) links him with the club of nineteenth-century male authors who viewed women as perpetual children or psychological dwarves incapable of adult rational judgment or responsibility, negative creatures whose lack of physical stature reflected the real social and psychological diminishment women themselves generally experienced during the Victorian era.

So narrow a view of Dickens's young female characters, however, ignores the possibility of their functioning symbolically. Much like the positive figure of the "child," who is both literal and symbolic in the works of such nineteenth-century writers as William Blake and William Wordsworth, the "young woman" in Dickens often appears as a modification of the "child" figure, a representative of imagination, instinct, and innocence, i.e., an "anima figure," a female projection of a part of the human unconscious linked to imagination and emotion.<sup>6</sup> Dickens's

<sup>6</sup>C. J. Jung describes the "anima" as a psychological image embodying "all outstanding characteristics of a feminine being." The anima enables humans, male and female, to realize "that in the realm of his [her] psyche there exists an image of the mother and not only of the mother, but also of the daughter, the sister, the beloved, the heavenly goddess. . . . Every mother and every beloved is forced to become the carrier and embodiment of this omnipresent and ageless image which corresponds to the deepest reality in a man [woman]" (de Laszlo 11-12).

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Campbell offers the best explanation of the metaphor of the "virgin birth": "The mythic image of the virgin birth refers to the birth of the spiritual life in the human animal. . . . We can live with the same interests as

women at times function symbolically as rare and valuable vessels of artistic power, especially the power of the poet-novelist to resuscitate the human spirit. As anima figures, such females also illustrate a variation of the myth of the “virgin birth,”<sup>7</sup> which, in its independence of the agency of a human male and its suggestion of a divine (not human) father, personifies the birth of the spiritual life in the human animal, a potential medium to raise human consciousness beyond the material, rational, and explainable to the sacred. In *Little Dorrit* Amy functions both as “real” character and as a symbol. In part, she is one of Dickens’s anima figures, a child-adult, a segment of the psyche incomplete herself and bringing completion to another, more symbolic than real. Her literal role as Arthur’s potential wife and companion complements her symbolic role. Recognizing Amy’s double function makes her a more complex and interesting character.<sup>8</sup>

Dickens’s “adult children”—like Oliver Twist, Little Nell (*The Old Curiosity Shop* [1841]), and Paul Dombey (*Dombey and Son* [1848])—are children who, for various reasons, seem older than their years indicate. Oliver is a miracle child of sorts whose innate goodness and intelligence keep him immune to the evil of Fagin and his gang. Nell acts as a mature parent to her irresponsible grandfather, whose addiction to gambling has made him childish. An overanxious and insensitive father who wants him to grow up quickly and assume his place in the family business forces Paul into adulthood. Little Dorrit, however, is more complex: she combines the adult-child with the child-adult. In physical stature she resembles a child, and several characters in the novel repeatedly refer to her as “little” and “child.” But at twenty-two years old, she is the oldest of Dickens’s adult children, a literal adult, a

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animals: clinging to life, begetting future generations, and winning our place in the world. But then there can open the sense of the spiritual quest and realization—the birth of the spiritual life. And this essentially is the virgin birth” (*Open* 23). The act of the virgin birth is the discovery and realization of the anima.

<sup>8</sup>Ronald Librach discusses Amy’s multiple symbolic functions as representative of the “life-giving power of the mythological female” and symbolic mother and child, “the agent of Arthur Clennam’s redemption” (545–48).

“mother” who supports both her father and her siblings by her work outside the Marshalsea. Yet in her unqualified selflessness and innocence, Little Dorrit is more symbolic than realistic. Like other of Dickens’s central female characters, notably Little Nell earlier in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Agnes Wickfield later in *David Copperfield* (1849–50), Little Dorrit functions as a female persona of the imagination who, by her actions, has the potential to transform even the most wooden people around her into real human beings by tempering their excessive reliance on the rational and the practical and reintroducing them to their spiritual nature.

Amy moves freely between the Marshalsea and the outside world, caring for her imprisoned father, whose obsession with money and social status imprisons his spirit as well as his body. When she first appears in the novel, Amy is ironically absent from the text. Readers are unaware of Amy’s presence at Arthur’s first meeting with Mrs. Clennam until he later asks the servant, Affery Flintwinch, “‘what girl was that in my mother’s room just now . . . almost hidden in the dark corner?’” Affery answers, “‘Oh! She? Little Dorrit? *She’s noth-ing*’” (43). Though Amy appears only slightly, almost insignificantly, in the background, her modest entry into the novel nevertheless serves as a fitting symbolic reality in Arthur’s life at the very moment when he gives up his old business life. Amy represents the reappearance of an almost buried part of his psyche, a small light of hope that will grow from “nothing” to an invaluable means of progress in his search for love and spiritual renewal.<sup>9</sup>

Later, Arthur observes that Amy “was so little and light, so noiseless and shy . . . that she had all the manner and much of the appearance of a subdued child” (56). Amy’s childlikeness, which will contribute eventually to Arthur’s rejuvenation, contrasts with Arthur’s premature sense of already being old. Moreover, though Amy is childlike, she is also a “mother.” In the Marshalsea Amy quietly provides for her family’s

<sup>9</sup>Sherri Wolf discusses Little Dorrit’s “minimal” but powerful function as “nobody” in the novel. She sees Amy’s initial appearance as the first indication of how Amy’s “size and manner enable Little Dorrit to penetrate and circulate in spaces without being seen; it [sic] also gestures toward the powerful influence she wields—not despite—but because of her inconspicuous appearance” (227).

basic needs, shields her father, excuses his behavior, and turns the other cheek to his taking advantage of her love and devotion to him. While William prides himself on his empty title, "Father of the Marshalsea" (59), Amy herself is a genuine mother to all, including the orphan Maggy, who calls Amy "Little Mother" (92). As both child and mother, Amy takes on two unusual roles, becoming both the source and the embodiment of nurturing innocence, a child-adult living and working in the prison of the world, but immune to its harsher forces. She is, as both innocent child and selfless adult, a "great soul of fidelity" (100).

Another part of her complexity lies in the tension between her figurative role as selfless caregiver and her literal role as partner for Arthur. Symbolically, Amy lives in an unchanging "now" wholly for others, at ease with her past and unconcerned about her future except to continue to serve her family and Maggy. When she is forced one night to sleep at nearby St. George's church, the sexton first shows her the birth registry with the entry of Amy's birth; then, he offers her the burial volume as an improvised pillow, "and Little Dorrit was soon fast asleep, with her head resting on that sealed book of Fate, untroubled by its mysterious blank leaves" (182). But in her role as a real character, her excessive devotion to her father has put her own life on hold, to the point that she prefers staying with him when the possibility of marriage is suggested: "Let me stay with you. I beg and pray that I may stay with you! I want nothing but to stay and take care of you!" (632). Like Arthur, who had to overcome his past by redefining his relationship with his mother, Amy must redefine herself by acknowledging the role her father plays in her life, now that she has become a young woman. In doing so,

<sup>10</sup>Alison Booth argues that Amy and George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke (*Middlemarch* [1872]) exemplify a new brand of complementary heroism: "Dickens and Eliot follow Carlyle in adapting the form of spiritual biography to illustrate . . . what might be called everyday heroism . . . a heroine at once ideal, comic, and sinister, a kind of projection of man's ambivalence. . . . The ideal and the real clash in these heroines as they try to instill life in a present deadened by the past. . . . We need both the 'spiritual' and the 'carnal' reading. Little Dorrit is both practical young woman and ministering angel" (191, 196, 200, 215).

she affirms the value of her own physical life and redefines her symbolic role and her spiritual nature as valuable because they are grounded and inherent in instead of aloof from the everyday world.<sup>10</sup> Amy is the novel's soul and ideal, but in Carlyle's natural-supernatural sense: "Yes here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy Ideal: work it out therefrom; and working, believe, live, be free" (*Sartor* 145).<sup>11</sup>

Arthur complicates Amy's character because he adds to it a human tension between her platonic loyalty to her father and her increasing interest in Arthur himself as lover and husband. In the early days of their relationship, Arthur views Amy as she sees herself: "his adopted daughter, his poor child of the Marshalsea" (194). He starts the clock moving in Amy's life, however, forcing her to write a new chapter in the book of her life other than her static and, for the reader, symbolic role of selfless angelic spirit. When Arthur later takes the place of Amy's father, literally imprisoned in the same cell where William Dorrit once lived, Amy cares for Arthur as she once had for her father. But Amy's progress from Carlyle's "Nay" to "Yea" complements Arthur's: she tempers her angelic spiritual nature by realizing her physical human nature in her love for him.

When Amy marries Arthur at St. George's, where she had been baptized, the sexton's comment suggests her progress, her personal authorship of her own life as someone loved as well as loving:

"this young lady . . . has come now to the third volume of our Registers. Her birth is in what I call the first volume; she lay asleep on this very floor, with her pretty head on what I call the second volume; and she's now a-writing her little name as a bride, in what I call the third volume." (853)

Symbolically, the marriage fittingly occurs at the church of St. George,

<sup>11</sup>According to Librach, to leave their respective prisons of self, Amy and Arthur must not simply "escape" but be "released": "As Dickens conceives it, release must be effected in the 'immanent' world—the world which a man in-

the dragon-slayer and patron saint of England. When the dragons of the past, money and distorted religion, are slain, the virgin is freed to complete herself and transform the world. In one sense, then, Arthur and Amy begin their life together as archetypal heroes who complement each other, but not as a fairy-tale couple who will necessarily live happily ever after. Instead, they are fictional stand-ins for realistically hopeful readers. They are new members of a small minority of individuals who might embody the dream of a new nation, strengthened in their union to meet and survive the still imperfect and threatening real world pictured at the end of the novel: "They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and in shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar" (855).

Arthur and Amy's union appropriately follows the figurative and literal collapse of both William Dorrit's "dream castle" and Mrs. Clennam's house. The wasted landscape outside of Rome, itself a reminder of a fallen empire, mirrors the mental and physical collapse beginning in William Dorrit:

fragments of a ruinous enclosure, yawning window-gap and crazy wall, deserted houses, leaking wells, broken water-tanks, spectral cypress-trees, patches of tangled vine . . . where everything was crumbling away from the unsightly buildings to the jolting road—now these objects showed that they were nearing Rome. (660)

William Dorrit's death makes him and his castle one with the ruins of Rome around him: "Quietly, quietly, 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" (675). Similarly, following Mrs. Clennam's confession of the injustice she had done to Arthur's birth-mother and to Amy, her house literally falls: "the old house was before them . . . ; another thundering sound, and it heaved, surged outward, opened asunder in fifty places, collapsed and fell" (822). The rubble of both private houses in turn

mirrors the fall of the public house of Merdle. Their triple collapse also signifies the failed pasts and false values that both Arthur and Amy have faced and, at least temporarily, purged. The internal and external wasteland of the parent-past contrasts markedly with the spiritual health and wholeness symbolized by the union of Arthur and Amy.

To do justice to the complexity of the novel, however, one needs also to remember that, like Arthur before her entrance into his life, Amy has failed as well. Despite her constant presence, her father dies in his delusions of grandeur, her sister Fanny hopelessly clings to “society for ever and a day” (853), and her brother Tip dies in debtors’ prison still enchanted by “the Marshalsea and all its blighted fruits” (855). Amy’s mixed and precarious victory suggests the limited power of the artist magically to slay the dragon of personal and public paralysis and parallels Dickens’s own decreased faith in the power of art to help animate the world.

#### IV. THE BALM OF “CREATIVE ENDEAVOR”<sup>12</sup>

In her biography of Dickens, Jane Smiley offers a relevant capsulation of the busy but troubled life he led during the time he wrote *Little Dorrit*, experiencing a “restlessness” that “infected” him:

Dickens’s restlessness infected every facet of his life. In the two years between June 1855 and June 1857, he had bought two new houses, lived at Folkstone, Paris, Boulogne, and London, and traveled besides for speeches and business. His level of activity, with writing, editing, reading in public, and managing the lives of his children, was higher than ever. His enthusiasm for amateur acting and play production was immense; he supervised the production of, and took roles in, six plays and farces, all of which were put on in the small theater at Tavistock House. The evi-

<sup>12</sup>Susan Vreeland’s novels on painting and painters, *Girl in Hyacinth Blue* (1999) and *The Passion of Artemesia* (2002), were inspired in part by her serious illness: “Creative endeavor can aid healing because it lifts us out of self-

dence of his writings, his frenzy of activities, and his letters about both personal and political subjects show that he was approaching a crisis and that he himself had identified the crisis as a domestic one. Dickens's life continued to look strangely modern, ruled by a need for freedom of all kinds and increasingly impatient with the typical patterns of his Victorian world. (130)

*Little Dorrit* constitutes, in part, a dream record of Dickens's personal and public worries at the time of its writing, his domestic "crisis" as well as his social duties during this crowded time in his life. Dickens was himself enjoying wealth and fame, but, like Arthur Clennam, he was also questioning their worth and experiencing his own private "illth." In creating *Little Dorrit* Dickens formulated his own prescription for recuperating from his anxieties, a personal "time-out" from his immersion in the bustle of external activities, during which "the novelist bodies them forth, comments upon them, reacts to them" (Smiley 133). As Smiley observes, "Art that has a revelatory effect upon the reader had its first revelatory effect upon the writer. . . . Authors live in a dialogue with their work, and their work is their inner life made concrete" (134-35).

When Dickens began *Little Dorrit*, he had been married to Catherine Hogarth almost twenty years, the same amount of time Arthur pursued a career which he finally rejected, the same amount of time William Dorrit remained imprisoned in the Marshalsea. Perhaps in the marriage of Arthur and Amy, Dickens projects his own wish for ending his increasingly unhappy married life and his growing awareness of the limited satisfaction of success. He met and fell in love with Ellen Ternan in 1857, coincidentally two months after completing the novel. In May 1858 he decided that he and Catherine should separate. The union of Clennam and Dorrit, of "C" and "D," which first links Arthur and William Dorrit in the old life of metaphorical and literal imprisonment and then becomes the redemptive marriage of Arthur and Amy, is a dramatization of Dickens's own search for healing and fulfillment. The union of "C"lennam and "D"orrit echoes "C"harles "D"ickens's own search for wholeness. His search would continue for the rest of his life.

In addition to his secret and imperfect relationship with Ellen Ternan, Dickens's continual efforts to reconcile his obsession with material success with his belief in the sacredness and mystery of life are evident in his remaining four novels in the love Sydney Carton and Charles Darnay (another "C" and "D") have for Lucy Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*, in the longings of Pip for Estella in *Great Expectations*, in the marriage of Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), and in the failure of John Jasper to realize his love for Rosa Bud in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). The art of *Little Dorrit*, indeed of all Dickens's novels, incorporates private and public healing, reviving spirit in the artist himself, in his contemporary readers, and in readers in subsequent ages. *Little Dorrit* exemplifies how the art of the novel works as bibliotherapy for both novelist and reader, healing each by imaginatively reviving spirit, helping each to face and care for an essential human disorder.<sup>13</sup>

As Barrett so well puts it, "The physician to the diseased age is Dickens himself. . . . He detects the stinks and the stale airs and traces the operations of their poisons upon men's physical and social bodies, upon their moral and spiritual natures. And with inspired compassion proposes the cure" (215). *Little Dorrit* is most appropriately titled after Amy Dorrit because she functions as the whole novel does, as a real but limited vehicle for the re-animation of self and as a metaphor for the genuine but tempered power of art to help people rediscover and reconcile their mixed nature.<sup>14</sup>

## V. ART AND SPIRIT

<sup>13</sup>Nicole S. Urdang, a psychotherapist in Buffalo, New York, comments that "[b]ibliotherapy, the suggestion of specific readings for people in counseling to do on their own time, is a frequently used technique. It may reinforce what the therapist is trying to do—help someone see things from a different point of view, show them they are not alone in their pain—as well as teach useful coping strategies" (B2).

<sup>14</sup>Barrett also comments on the novel's "setting forth [Dickens's] own philosophy of the fancy, its powers and the abuses of these powers, in its diseased and in its healthy state" (204ff).

In *Little Dorrit*, art and artists are an important part of the novel's texture: portraits, painters, singers, and musicians abound. But Dickens generally portrays the world of art negatively, as either unrealistic, immoral, hypocritical or self-serving. For instance, Flora Finching offers a rambling criticism of the unrealistic portrait of her deceased husband: "very clever . . . portrait of Mr. F behind the door and very like though too much forehead and as to a pillar with a marble pavement and balustrades and a mountain I never saw him near it nor not likely in the wine trade" (290–91). Mrs. Clennam associates "those accursed snares which are called the arts" with the theatre and with her husband's singer/lover (807). Dickens links painters with society's imposters, sycophants caught up in the game of class, money, and surface appearance:

many people select their models much as the painters . . . select theirs; and . . . whereas in the Royal Academy some evil old ruffian of a Dog-stealer will annually be found embodying all the cardinal virtues, on account of his eyelashes, or his chin, or his legs (thereby planting thorns of confusion in the breasts of the more observant students of nature), so, in the great social Exhibition, accessories are often accepted in lieu of the internal character. (152–53)

Henry Gowan, a distant do-nothing relative of the Barnacle family, is the most notable money-grubbing artist in the novel. Gowan becomes a painter in part because of his resentment toward the Barnacles for not advancing his social status and in part because "he had always had an idle knack that way" (213). He flatly claims that painters are deceivers who "pass the bottle of smoke," and he prides himself on honestly admitting that art for him is money: "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. . . . All the rest is hocus-pocus" (415). When William Dorrit commissions Gowan to paint his portrait, Gowan confesses that he is a charlatan:

"Sir . . . I am new to the trade, and not expert at its mysteries. I believe I ought to look at you in various lights, tell you you are a capital subject, and consider when I shall be sufficiently disen-

gaged to devote myself with the necessary enthusiasm to the fine picture I mean to make of you. I assure you . . . I feel quite a traitor in the camp of those dear, gifted, good, noble fellows, my brother artists, by not doing the hocus-pocus better. . . . Now, the fact is, I am a very bad painter, but not much worse than the generality. If you are going to throw away a hundred guineas or so . . . I shall be very much obliged to you, if you'll throw them away upon me. I'll do the best I can for the money; and if the best should be bad . . . you may probably have a bad picture with a small name to it instead of a bad picture with a large name to it." (525-26)

There is a touch of Gowan in Dickens, who valued his own writing talent in part as his key to wealth and social advancement. Gowan's presence in *Little Dorrit* is Dickens's modest and realistic admission that art and the artist's role as seer can die in a Midas culture.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to Gowan and others, the more genuine artists and art appreciators—like the Plornishes, Frederick Dorrit, Daniel Doyce, and Amy—in *Little Dorrit* appear infrequently among the humble and the poor in spirit. The potential power of art as a healer and rejuvenator appears in these modest agents, outnumbered and threatened by their culture in general. Thus, the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard prefer the romantic to the practical fiction of the derivation of the neighborhood's name, namely, the story of a young woman who pined to death for her true love rather than marry someone chosen for her by her father. They wish to retain "the one little golden grain of poetry that sparkled in it" (139). For Mrs. Plornish the "vapid little songs" of her father, Old Nandy, are a source of immense pleasure: "there was no such music at the Opera, as the small internal flutterings and chirpings wherein he would discharge himself of these ditties" (377). The Plornishes' shop-parlour is painted to represent a thatched cot-

<sup>15</sup>Larson sees Gowan as "the utter antithesis of Carlyle's ideal" of the artist seer and a "relection of Dickens' anxieties in the mid-fifties about his culture

tage, which they name "Happy Cottage," "a little fiction in which Mrs. Plornish unspeakably rejoiced," despite its falling short of the real thing (594):

This poetical heightening of the parlour consisted in the wall being painted 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. . . . No poetry and no art ever charmed the imagination more than the union of the two in this counterfeit cottage charmed Mrs. Plornish. (594)

After his inheritance, William Dorrit orders his brother Frederick's clarinet confiscated as a "low instrument" unbecoming the family's new status, so Frederick substitutes visits to art galleries in Venice for his lost music:

He had insensibly acquired a new habit of shuffling into the picture-galleries . . . and of passing hours and hours before the portraits of renowned Venetians. It was never made out what his dazed eyes saw in them. . . . But he paid his court to them with great exactness, and clearly derived pleasure from the pursuit. (498)

Daniel Doyce, the inventor, modestly views his own genius as a God-given art, "as if the Divine artificer had made it, and he had happened to find it" (534). Even the nameless surgeon treating John Baptiste Cavalletto's injured leg pursues his work "with the thoughtful pleasure of an artist contemplating the work upon his easel" (168).

Among the many storytellers in the novel who offer their own pieces of autobiography, Amy alone capsulates her life condition in the shape of a fairy tale, the story of the Princess, the spinning woman, and the shadow, which she tells to her childish friend Maggy. In a special way, her story dramatizes her role as animator of Arthur, the restorer of his imaginative soul, in the same manner that *Little Dorrit* itself works its restorative power on Dickens and the reader. Amy tells Maggy the story of a "poor tiny woman" spinning at her wheel in her cottage near a

princess's palace (301). The woman reveals to the princess her secret treasured possession of a "shadow," as a remembrance of someone special: "the shadow of Someone who had gone by long before: of Someone who had gone on far away quite out of reach, never, never to come back" (303). The woman believes in the shadow and that when she died, the shadow "would sink quietly into her own grave, and would never be found" (304). As in many story-telling occasions, Amy here stations Maggy in a chair by a window, and when Amy finishes the story, she says, "let us come away from the window" (305). Like Jane Eyre reading her book in the window seat, Oliver reading his book at a desk facing a window, or Peter Pan entering and leaving Wendy's house through the window in search of his shadow, Amy's story functions as a threshold, a temporary bridge between the real and the imaginary. The reader can easily see that the "poor tiny woman" is Little Dorrit herself and that the shadow is her unrealized love of Arthur. Amy's story allows her both to face the sorrowful reality of her belief that she and Arthur will not marry and to make the hard truth palatable for Maggy, her simple listener. Moreover, the "shadow" is, in Jungian terms, Amy's own hidden self, the part of her self that must acknowledge her own physical needs and temper her ideal selflessness.<sup>16</sup> The imagery of Amy's story further signals the need of spirit and body to merge as part of the healing process.

The images of the tiny (undeveloped, incomplete, still-a-child) woman and the substanceless shadow of the man signal the incom-

<sup>16</sup>In Jung's terms the shadow in Amy's tale describes her own incomplete self: "The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge" (de Laszlo 7). Campbell discusses the "shadow" as "the you you don't know you are" which allows one to "find relationship to the world outside and to live a rich life in full play," a definition that aptly describes Amy Dorrit ("Society"). The shadow image in Amy's story also functions as one of the many "secrets" of the novel. As Robert J. Heaman states, "Little Dorrit falls in love with Arthur. But this 'secret' of hers ironically prevents the possibility

pleteness of the major characters, Amy and Arthur, without each other. Amy may be a selfless soul, but she is incomplete in her solitude and, as a "spirit," shadowless. Conversely, Arthur spent his childhood in the grip of a vindictive religious upbringing followed by a career of acquisition, and now, a shadow of a man, he searches for his lost spirit. Shadows anchor individuals in time, in the world of the sun. Without a shadow, a being is unworldly, a timeless perpetual child like Peter Pan or Amy Dorrit. When Amy marries Arthur, she revises the shadow story, for she does not die, nor does Arthur go away.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the novel, one finds a final window at Amy and Arthur's wedding, "with the sun shining on them through the painted figure of Our Saviour" (853). The scene appropriately links art, the sun, conventional religion, and the newly united couple in an image that parallels Carlyle's description of the "Everlasting Yea":

the thing thou seekest is already with thee, 'here or nowhere,'  
couldst thou only see! . . . it is with man's Soul as it was with Na-  
ture: the beginning of Creation is—Light. Till the eye have vision,  
the whole members are in bonds . . . instead of a dark wasteful  
Chaos, we have a blooming fertile, heaven-encompassed World.  
(*Sartor* 145–46)

<sup>17</sup>Larson views Amy's "Tale" as an instance of the novel's many "tableaux" of art: "a form of arrested narrative" that "signals the desire to halt one's life story, to fix social and moral relations at safe distances, and sometimes to preserve a mystery, to keep a truth from unfolding" (151), a view that resembles Jung and Campbell's description of the self's "shadow." Further, Larson sees Amy's fairy tale as both enabling and limiting for her, allowing Amy "to flirt with despair and with hope," with the supposed loss of Arthur and her sense of "a Dutiful Girl who has renounced all personal dreams for the sake of the Family." In the end, however, the story's power falls short, offering only "a rather modest capacity for hearing pain confessed," while "the mystery of the pain remains—what it was" (175–78). Consistent with *Little Dorrit* generally, the power of art here is limited but real, precarious but valuable. Larson's overview offers a realistic balance: "*Little Dorrit* communicates its artist theme as a quiet but fateful wrestling between faith in the nobility and thaumaturgic power of art, and doubt of the modern artist's continuing

## VI. CONCLUSION

Forty years after the publication of *Little Dorrit* and twenty-five years after Dickens's death, H. G. Wells published *The Time Machine* (1895) and Oscar Wilde published *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), two variations on Dickens's concern in *Little Dorrit* with the survival of spirit in a material world. In *The Time Machine* the sole female character, Amy Dorrit's counterpart, four feet tall and named (ironically enough) "Weena," joins the scientist Time Traveler after he loses his Time Machine. Weena eventually perishes in a fire as the Time Traveler struggles to regain his machine at the cost of letting her slip away from him. Despairing of a cure to contemporary complacency and lack of wonder, Wells's scientist-protagonist also vanishes at the end of the novel to become an escapist, unlike Dickens's stoic heroes Amy and Arthur, who survive to face their uncertain world. The Time Traveler is a dubious hero whose rational superiority and dependence on the mechanical come at the cost of his animating spirit. Wells's vision is therefore less optimistic than Dickens's.

Similarly, with a double-edged pen in *Earnest*, Wilde satirizes the do-nothingism of the idle rich, a new generation of Barnacles and Merdles, but also targets the excessive seriousness and futility of action primarily performed in the name of success and wealth. The childish dandy Algernon Moncrieff says, "It is awfully hard work doing nothing" (Wilde 271), yet Gilbert, one of the speakers in Wilde's "The Critic As Artist," maintains that the purpose of Art is to be "unpractical":

The aim of art is simply to create a mood. Is such a mode of life unpractical? Ah! it is not so easy to be unpractical as the ignorant Philistine imagines. It were well for England if it were so. There is no country in the world so much in need of unpractical people as this country of ours. . . . The sure way of knowing nothing about life is to try to make oneself useful. (177)

Like Dickens and Carlyle before them, Wells and Wilde show that "[t]he healthy know not of their health, but only the sick." They speak

to the timeless danger of excessive pragmatism at the cost of the imaginative spirit, the misunderstanding and secularization of "work," both in its absence in idleness and in the workaholic obsession with it. All four writers thus become prophets of contemporary "illth."

Charles Dickens's novels are not conventionally "religious," but they are concerned with the absence of wonder and a sense of the divine, as are Carlyle's parable-essays. In *The Life of Our Lord* (1934), a retelling of the New Testament story of Jesus for his children, Dickens values the teachings of Christianity as an ethical and imaginative perspective on the divine nature of creation. Two of the most important words in the book are "miracle" and "parable," words that emphasize the wonder of life and the role of story in capturing and spreading it:

I shall tell you more bye and bye . . . [of] the miracles of Christ. I wish you would remember that word, because I shall use it again, and I should like you to know that it means something which is very wonderful and which could not be done without God's leave and assistance. . . . He taught His Disciples in these stories, because He knew the people liked to hear them, and would remember what He said better, if He said it in that way. They are called Parables—THE PARABLES OF OUR SAVIOUR; and I wish you to remember that word. (23–24, 62)

Like Dickens, Carlyle too created a new vocabulary to convey old truths because of what he believed to be the failure of conventional religion in a post-Darwinian and materialistic age.

Both Dickens and Carlyle are myth-makers for their age; both sense the need for new ways to retell old stories, to link truth to new realities: "in the absence of valid symbols possessing numinous power, the artist turns for subject matter to the process of making art" (Leeming 54). They are also the prophets and forerunners of the witnesses to the condition of the modern age. The language and vision of Dickens and Carlyle reappear in the voices of their successors, not only in Wells and Wilde but also in James Joyce's portrait of paralysis in Ireland (*Dubliners* [1914]) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), a powerful chorus that

still speaks to and for the twenty-first century, amidst the “roaring streets” and the “usual uproar.”

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