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Stephen E. Tabachnick, Ph.D.
Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend
its acceptance:

Carey J. Mickalites, Ph.D.

Jeffrey Scraba, Ph.D.

Accepted for the Graduate Council:

Karen D. Weddle-West, Ph.D.
Vice Provost for Graduate Programs

“THE LEPROSY OF UNREALITY”:
THE CAPACITY OF SUFFERING TO DEFORM OR REDEEM IN DICKENS’S
GREAT EXPECTATIONS, A TALE OF TWO CITIES, AND LITTLE DORRIT

by

Kathryne M. Hoyle-Brown

A Thesis

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the ramifications of suffering in Dickensian transformation. Ideally, suffering should reveal the best aspects of human nature, and this thesis suggests that while it is possible to have pain without heroism, it is impossible to have heroism without pain. Couched within Dickens’s discourse on suffering and redemption are both overt and covert messages to his Victorian audience as Dickens urges them to strip away their masks of pretense, “the leprosy of unreality” that enslaves them. Dickens delights in blurring apparently dichotomous boundaries as he paradoxically seeks reality through his fiction. For him, redemption is a discursive structure that invites provocative search and debate. Shadows able to shed light, fiction able to engender reality, suffering able to inspire redemption, prisons (both literal and metaphorical) able to contribute to the freeing of their inmates, and doubt able to impart hope, are the primary aspects of Dickens’s redemptive reconciling of opposites that this thesis explores.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Suffering and redemption are defining features of Charles Dickens's writing. All his characters encounter struggles in some form, and whether these characters choose to engage productively with hardship or succumb despairingly to misfortune determines whether these stories will ultimately be redeemed. Which characters will wrestle, and which characters will surrender? As Dan Allender posits, "more than anything else, tragedies shape our identity..." (*Told* 74). Indeed, it is adversity that unveils true character. C.S. Lewis expands upon this notion when he observes that "Pain provides an opportunity for heroism; the opportunity is seized with surprising frequency" (*Pain* 162). Ideally, suffering should reveal the best aspects of human nature. Suffering sets the stage for that pivotal moment of agency where each character must choose to either transcend trials or wallow in wretchedness. I argue that while it is possible to have pain without heroism, it is impossible to have heroism without pain. Pain is a powerful catalyst that either propels Dickens's characters to *deformation* or *reformation*. Suffering inevitably transforms; whether magnificently or disgracefully depends upon the characters' reactions to it. This thesis will explore the ramifications of suffering and redemption in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and *Little Dorrit*. Specifically, I will focus on the significance of prisons—both literal and metaphorical—in Dickensian transformation. I will also examine Dickens's fascination with shadows; this paradoxical realm where light and dark converge poignantly represents the hope/despair dichotomy so pivotal to his stories of redemption.

1.1. Critical Commentary

Critics have long battled over whether Dickens's writing is "brilliant or banal" (Rosenberg 145). Often Dickens has been dismissed as the creator of overly sentimental, melancholy mush whose love talk is wearying at best and repulsive at worst. His male heroes are deemed doddering wooden archetypes while his female characters are depicted as either raging revolutionaries or insipid angels, and the chasm separating extreme vice from extreme virtue inevitably swallows any spark of unadulterated veneration for Dickens's ladies. The trademark Dickensian coincidence has been labeled a contrived, "violent connection of the unconnected" (Dorothy Van Ghent qtd. in Neil Forsyth 163), and his plots are often ruled unconvincing. As Tom Linehan states, "Criticism has rarely been in more agreement about a Dickens novel than in the common opinion that plot in *Little Dorrit* can be dismissed as unimportant" (116). Fortunately, Dickens's characters are not the only ones who experience growth as the result of struggling; their author also sedulously strives to redeem his previous (literary) mistakes.

For example, Neil Forsyth's article "Wonderful Chains: Dickens and Coincidence" counters Van Ghent's and Linehan's assertions as Forsyth chronicles Dickens's augmentation from an author employing "merely sensational" (158) coincidences in *Oliver Twist* to an author able to "preserve that delight [in coincidence] even as he comes to emphasize more solemnly the pleasures of design" (152). Dickens's maturation into an author able to simultaneously intrigue and instruct partially accounts for his ongoing popular and critical acclaim. Moreover, as critic Brian Rosenberg outlines, "it seems fair to say that once the anti-Victorian backlash of the Modernist period began to diminish, Dickens's reputation as a major (not just popular) novelist

began steadily to grow, and that his stature among critics has never been greater than at the present moment” (145). Rosenberg goes on to posit that a major contributing factor in this change is the recent critical fascination with Dickens “as a novelist of doubt, conflict, and contradiction” (145) skilled in depicting “interesting forms of doubt” (147).

1.2. The Significance of Suffering and Struggle

Indeed, Rosenberg’s trio of “doubt, conflict, and contradiction” are three aspects of the human condition this paper will explore. I will explicate the seemingly contradictory relationship between doubt and hope and discuss how this relationship also ties to the significance of conflict in Dickens’s work. Elaine Showalter remarks that for Dickens, “Tranquility reminds him of death. To be still is to sink into despair, to surrender to the moral rot of apathy. Dickens approves of an active anxiety...the resistance to transformation is futile, self-deceptive, and finally deadening” (27-28). Showalter’s observation relates to the pivotal moment of agency in Dickens’s novels; characters must be motivated through the transforming “active anxiety” of suffering. They are encouraged to either struggle valiantly—and thus participate in the redemption of their stories—or to shun redemption in favor of embracing despair or enacting revenge.

Dickens’s primary concern is that his characters persevere even in the face of continued adversity. Some characters do not enjoy complete restoration within their own stories—Miss Havisham and Sydney Carton are key examples—but the redemption of their stories is nonetheless suggested through the legacy of hope they impart to future generations. Dickens was profoundly influenced by Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle, who

observed that “The Old has passed away, but alas, the New appears not in its stead; the Time is still in pangs of travail with the New” (*Norton* 981). One of the primary obsessions of the Victorian Era was this struggle between the old and the new, and a dread of regression marks much of the fiction of the day. Victorian authors such as Carlyle and Dickens were engaged in the “pangs of travail,” but this very travail inspired glorious literature as these writers forged ahead in anticipation of the “New.” Progress in the face of distress is of primary importance in the Dickensian novel, and pitfalls are fortuitous providing the characters eventually move forward again.

Dickens’s work consistently attests to the arduous nature of the journey from pain to promise. Conflict has the capacity both to render us real and to instruct us—if we will allow it to enact this assiduous endeavor. It is not enough to wrap everything up neatly in the end; rather, we as readers must engage with the characters’ turmoil and triumph on a plane that transcends the page. Venerated authors are able “to delight the world and to change it” (*Norton* 1354), and Edwin Barrett christens Dickens “the physician to the diseased age...[who] with inspired compassion proposes the cure” (215). Masterfully, Charles Dickens puts into words those nebulous yet vital truths regarding perseverance in the face of pain that lurk in the back of our minds. Trials have the potential to become tragically beautiful when the ultimate purpose is revealed as redemptive. The danger of trials, however, transpires when characters become so bogged down that doubt threatens to spill over into deadly despair.

Nonetheless, doubt—while often denigrated as a dark and dangerous mindset—actually possesses great redemptive power. Incidentally, doubt is a critical component of hope: “The truth is that there can strictly speaking be no hope except where the

temptation to despair exists” (Gabriel Marcel qtd. in Dan Allender, *Path* 151). Doubt is also a by-product of humanity and of suffering; the ability to analyze inevitably engenders a certain measure of doubt, which is healthy providing it does not traverse the boundary into utter despair. This pivotal interplay between doubt and hope intrigues Dickens, and we see this fascination depicted in many of his characters. Some characters—such as William Dorrit—have succumbed to despair and refused redemption, while others—including William Dorrit’s daughter Amy—have wrestled with their doubt and been transformed through this rigorous refinement. Productive doubt propels us forward in the struggle against stagnation, but true despair rejects all hope of redemption.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky—an ardent admirer of Charles Dickens—writes in *Notes From Underground* that “Man is sometimes extraordinarily, passionately, in love with suffering....Why, suffering is the sole origin of consciousness” (28-29). Here again, suffering is heralded as an invaluable agent, responsible for both awakening and refining us. We must taste suffering in order to relish redemption; otherwise, there is nothing to desire redemption *from*. Moreover, moments of misfortune and transgression often set the stage for future triumph. The potential pitfall lies in becoming too enamored of suffering to the point that personality either stagnates or becomes warped. Suffering is not good for its own sake—its merits lie elsewhere. As Steven Tudor explains, “Though suffering is in itself worthless, it would, nonetheless, be a misconception to think that it can never, in some way or on certain occasions, be understood to be worthwhile by reference to something beyond it” (585). The “something beyond” suffering encapsulates the hope of redemption. Pain awakens us to the possibility of something greater than ourselves, but

when sorrow remains with an individual rather than spurring him or her on toward the hope of redemption the consequences are devastating.

Miss Havisham is a prime example of this danger. She initially refuses to move past her past, thus allowing it to taint her present. Miss Havisham has so clung to her anguish that she now embodies it and seeks to impress this same despair upon others. The line between temporary, worthwhile doubt and irrevocable, true despair is precarious. There is a balance between denying pain and worshipping it, and one aim of this thesis is to distinguish the differences between redemptive and non-redemptive suffering. The former inspires joy and hope for the future while the latter verges on masochism. Mourning is a critical—and even precious—component of the redemptive process, but remaining in unquenchable sorrow should be shunned. Dickens’s Victorian audience would have recognized the relationship of the following Biblical passage to Dickens’s discourse on the deforming and reforming aspects of suffering: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance” (*Reformation Study Bible*, Ecclesiastes 3:1;3b-4). There is a season for mourning, but there also must come a season where the mourning is put aside lest it become deforming rather than reforming suffering.

Trials and suffering are critical components of this shift from despair to hope because they refine character and elicit acknowledgement of true strength and purpose. Ideally, recognizing the potential perils of despair’s grasp should prompt a renewed search for beauty, hope, and truth as characters are transformed from *hopeless* to *hopeful*. Francis O’Gorman expands upon this concept when he writes, “An ability to suffer

sorrow...was implicitly to be reminded that modernity had failed to crush entirely the natural sympathies still surviving in human nature” (255). Tragedy need not be the end of the story; rather, it can become a poignant and powerful stepping stone.

1.3. Why Story?

“We are in the midst of a story war....Not a day passes that is not entangled in story” (Allender, *Path* 119; 209). Jonathan Culler concurs with this sentiment when he writes that “narrative is not just an academic subject. There is a basic human drive to hear and tell stories” (83). Dickens recognizes the truth of these statements; the travails and triumphs of his own personal life are mirrored in his characters’ tales. Specifically, Dickens’s story is interwoven with that of his famous literary doppelganger David Copperfield (whose initials are the inversion of Charles Dickens’s own). Dickens, in the first person narrative voice of David Copperfield, begins the novel by musing: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show” (13). Edgar Johnson’s Afterword to *David Copperfield* relates that Dickens’s working notes on the novel deem Agnes “the real heroine” (872). However, only through his tales of tribulation does David come to understand and embrace Agnes’s redemptive love.

Later in the text, David outlines his struggle with despair as he recalls “the sense I had of being utterly without hope now” (163). Grappling with despair remains a key theme in David’s life, and many of his ruminations on the subject echo Dickens’s own personal revelations. In particular, Dickens writes in his autobiography that he “suffered exquisitely” (qtd. in Johnson 34), and David echoes compellingly that he too “suffered

exquisitely” (169). Similarly, Dickens—the consummate wordsmith—reflects upon the inadequacy of words to relate his deep devastation: “No words can express the secret agony of my soul” (qtd. in Johnson 34). In *David Copperfield*, the protagonist ponders “That slow agony of my youth” (176). Through story, both David’s and Dickens’s lives assume significance that transcends their trials. Despite seemingly hopeless moments, they nonetheless inch forward in their shared struggles against the dangers of despair.

Arguably, Dickens would not have been inspired to write so searchingly if he had not suffered so during his childhood. William Faulkner once proclaimed that “a book is the writer’s secret life, the dark twin of a man” (qtd. in Gillman and Patten 452). Undoubtedly, writing affords Dickens the unique opportunity of struggling with his demons (Dickens’s doubles) via his literary creations, and his characters consequently become shadowy extensions of his own persona. Stephen Wall refers to Dickens’s autobiography as “an abandoned fragment” wherein Dickens wrestles with the “desolating episode” (xi) of his father’s imprisonment in the Marshalsea Debtors’ Prison. The thoughts Dickens cannot completely communicate through his own fragmented and forsaken autobiography he ultimately conveys through his characters’ stories. Through the pen, Dickens seeks vindication, purpose, and renewal. Indeed, the theme of redemption is woven throughout his novels as he provocatively probes the varying shades of redemption and reformation through his characters’ stories.

1.4. Redemption and *Reality*

For the purpose of this thesis, *redemption* is defined as “The action of saving, delivering, or restoring a person or thing; deliverance or restoration” (*OED*). While there

is certainly a religious connotation associated with redemption (which often equates it with salvation) this thesis focuses primarily on the reformation and redemption of Dickens's characters' earthly lives. To this end, *reformation* is defined as "The action or process of bringing about an improvement or advancement in an existing state of affairs, institution, practice, etc.; an instance of this, *esp.* a radical change for the better in political, religious, or social matters" (*OED*). Dickens lived and wrote in a culture that was well aware of the tenets of Christianity, so his novels do reflect aspects of the Christian religion (such as Sydney Carton's role as a literary Christ figure). However, this thesis will examine Carton's earthly transformation rather than debate whether or not his soul is eternally saved or damned. Redemption then is the ultimate outcome of a character's deliverance from either sin or stagnation; the overarching concern entails whether or not a character is redeemed. Reformation is the process whereby stories are redeemed and humans rendered real, and suffering is a necessary component in this process.

Indeed, writers have concurred for decades that without pain, redemption is impossible. In 1900, George B. Gow proclaims that evil "exists for man's redemption" (747) while shortly thereafter G.K. Chesterton echoes that "This world can be made beautiful again by beholding it as a battlefield...When evil things have become evil, good things, in a blazing apocalypse, become good" (211). Nearly a century later, Dan Allender contends that "Redemption touches us more deeply than tragedy. But without tragedy there could be no redemption" (*Path* 128). The reality is that we live in a broken world. Redemption offers us something more poignant than perfection. As previously discussed, tragedy and suffering are not good in and of themselves, but they are vital

instruments to reveal truths that would otherwise have remained unnoticed. One of these pivotal truths is that humans are “called to be real” (Allender, *Told* 68). To illustrate his point, Allender quotes Margery Williams’s *The Velveteen Rabbit*: “When you are Real, you don’t mind being hurt” (67). Indeed, it is impossible to be real without having experienced the pain which inspires the desire for redemption and generates that purposeful sorrow which lends depth, significance, and vitality to life.

The opposite of being real is being in disguise. Disguises intrigue Dickens, and he toys with the consequences of lifting characters’ masks to reveal their true natures. The villainous Monseigneur, a man “with a face like a fine mask” (Dickens, *Tale* 83) is so metaphorically diseased that he has even contaminated those around him: “The leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature in attendance upon Monseigneur” (Dickens, *Tale* 81). Suffering can either lift these masks and reveal characters’ true natures, or it can harden them and incite them to retreat. William Dorrit’s refusal to acknowledge reality prevents him from being truly redeemed. He insists on remaining in his dream world, both within the Marshalsea Prison and without it. Redemption not only entails a realization of the need for rescue, but it also requires action.

For Dickens, redemption and reality are themselves modes of discourse in that they are representative of his wrestling with words. Writing lends reality and perspective as Dickens examines and redeems his struggles of life via the pen. Paradoxically, Dickens seeks reality through his fiction. Moreover, this search is manifested as an ongoing discourse involving the ramifications of reconciling opposing realms:

Probably the strongest element that held together the large and socially diverse audience that Dickens carved out for himself was his idealized rendering of middle-class domestic values as ones around which all classes could unite....Certainly, in Dickens’s fiction the spirit of domestic conviviality proves

to be a transcendent category, capable of containing the intense anger that so often goes into his depiction of poverty...Dickens's novels formally incorporate a popular sphere—a discursive space capable of generating a discussion or an argument from the point of view of the excluded about not just a range of topical problems but also the great institutions of the state. (Sen 949; 950)

Dickens strives to fuse differing perspectives as he creates middle ground through his portrayals of the middle class. Ideally, his writing engenders an edifying realm for both the excluded and the included. One way he conjoins realms is through his exploration of suffering—a reality of life from which no one is excluded.

Furthermore, struggle in the Dickensian novel is depicted as an ongoing discourse between suffering and redemption. Therefore, to struggle is to explore the space between the refusal to relent to suffering and the realization of redemption. Dickens struggles with and through his characters as he wrestles to reconcile the realms of suffering and redemption and the plights of the wealthy and the impoverished. As these seemingly opposite realms converge, the resulting space provides the potential for understanding and growth. This space is anything but static, and these very undulations inspire provocative search and debate.

The same world birthed both the financially comfortable and the inhabitants of the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison. Poignantly, Dickens's primary audience (i.e. main source of income) was also the group he most stridently sought to instruct regarding the hypocrisy of Victorian society and the role money played in society. The prison of Victorian hypocrisy, repression, fear of failure, and private internalization of public punishment and pretense enslaved many supposedly liberated individuals, and Dickens urged society to strip away these deforming masks and be reformed through vulnerability and struggle. He

challenged them to think outside the four walls of their parlors to consider the four walls of the prisons and realize that sometimes these walls converge.

Moving from the realm of prison and parlor to the romantic realm, we witness Dickens often utilizing pain to unite lovers incapable of entering into a healthy relationship pre-suffering. As Maja-Lisa von Sneidern points out, “the redemptive value of matrimonial bliss is legendary in Dickens” (86). By using the word *legendary*, von Sneidern reminds readers that this is *fiction* and as such it inevitably assumes an aura of artificiality. From one perspective, Dickens’s penchant for happily uniting couples at the end of his novels is supremely unrealistic. However, from another standpoint the merit of a joyous conclusion highlights the very real—albeit often faint—hope inherent in the heart of humanity. Dickens further validates his happy endings by preceding them with tales of travail. For instance, it is often through relational *brokenness* that *completion* is brought to fruition. Arthur Clennam’s suffering frees him from literal and metaphysical prisons and ultimately unites him in marriage with Amy Dorrit. Similarly, Estella Havisham discovers her heart through anguish. It is only through pain that Estella’s mask—her veneer of indifference—is lifted, and she confesses to Pip that “suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape” (Dickens, *Expectations* 358). Unlike her adoptive mother, Miss Havisham, Estella allows suffering to refine rather than restrict her. Arguably, Estella thus redeems Miss Havisham’s mistakes and thwarts her adoptive mother’s attempts to twist Estella into a vengeful vixen wreaking havoc on men.

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, Sydney Carton's sacrifice sets the stage for his redemption and the salvation of the Darnays. His famous mantra at the end of the novel reflects his rise from wretchedness to redemption: "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known" (293). Carton is a Dickensian redemptive archetype, who—like Amy Dorrit—is exemplary of "figures neither preeminent nor manly who yet redeem the common experience of a burdensome past" (Booth 191). Consequently, Carton and Amy Dorrit are admirable for their heroic strength and relatable in their legendary weakness. According to Alison Booth, Dickens mirrors "Carlyle in adapting the form of spiritual biography to illustrate this middle ground, what might be called everyday heroism" (191). Dickens deftly illustrates this "everyday heroism" by focusing on the reality of hardship and its associated struggles, doubts, and fears. He does not depict these characters as superhuman individuals capable of effortlessly enacting heroic feats; rather, Carton and Amy Dorrit must confront their inadequacy and failure in order to revolutionize their respective realms. Even though Carton's heroism plays out on the grand scale of the French Revolution, his unobtrusive status as the anti-hero renders him relatable to the masses even after he propels himself to greatness. Similarly, Amy Dorrit's heroism is inconspicuous yet liberating: "Through suffering, she learns how to escape her narrow sphere" (Booth 203).

1.5. The Shadow of the Prison

Sometimes, Dickens's most powerful writing on redemption explores the interplay between spheres of darkness and spheres of light. The light that pierces this

darkness creates shadow realms. This intersection is particularly noteworthy when it also coincides with the familiar Dickensian image of a towering prison. Critics are captivated by the implications of the shadow cast by the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison in *Little Dorrit*. As Edwin Barrett reports, it has become "commonplace in criticism to note that the dominant metaphor of *Little Dorrit* is the prison" (200), and Alexander Welsh argues that "If the shadow of the Marshalsea wall falls upon many who have never been near the place, then the prison has become something like a metaphor for life itself" (1239).

Dickens labored within the confines of this looming prison metaphor throughout his career, for it affected him personally. His father, John Dickens, spent time in the Marshalsea for debt, and the experience crushed John to the point of becoming "tremulously tragic" (Johnson 35). John's reaction to imprisonment is reflected in "his last words to the sorrowing lad [Charles] as he entered the gates were that the sun had set upon him for ever, and they stabbed the boy with anguish. 'I really believed at the time,' Dickens said many years later, 'that they had broken my heart'" (Johnson 35). John's struggles defeated him, but fortunately Charles learned from his father's failure. Although Charles's childhood struggles wounded him, they also contributed to his restoration and to his haunting commentary on the impact of imprisonment. Like John Dickens, some characters are utterly ruined by their imprisonment. Suffering is supposed to have set them free, but often characters choose to remain in bondage—whether physically or metaphorically. They must decide to become real and face the shadows of their pasts, or else the farce continues.

Paradoxically, it is in the darkness of shadow seasons that characters often experience the most magnificent redemption. The Marshalsea Prison is repeatedly

referred to as a shadow world, but it is here that the love of Amy Dorrit and Arthur Clennam—their “treasured shadow”—burgeons beautifully. Moreover, Sydney Carton’s redemptive sacrifice emerges from beneath the shadow of the guillotine. Through the narratives he creates, Charles Dickens explores the haunting capacity of varying types of shadows, from evil shadows that taint those who have encountered them to foreshadowings that suggest future hope.

Additionally, Victorian authors are renowned for their fascination with doubling: “Not only institutions but also people have their shadows—doubles who enact their repressed roles and desires. For Dickens, the subtle techniques of shadow provide a way to create a three-dimensional fictional world, with depth as well as surface” (Showalter 21). Showalter further suggests that Dickensian shadows allude to the prison of hypocrisy enslaving Victorian society. Dickens delights to blur dichotomous boundaries, and the merging of light and dark to create purposeful shadows rife with significance is merely one example of Dickens’s penchant for the paradoxical. Shadows able to shed light, suffering able to inspire redemption, prisons able to contribute to the freeing of their inmates, and doubt able to impart hope are the primary aspects of Dickens’s redemptive reconciling of opposites into which this thesis will delve.

Chapter 2: *Great Expectations* and the Suggestion of Redemption

Given that this thesis is so focused on the aforementioned redemptive reconciling of opposites, it is perhaps ironic that there can be no middle ground regarding the impact of suffering. Suffering must *either* deform *or* redeem; it is impossible to encounter suffering and remain unchanged. However, while a character's interaction with suffering results in either deformation or reformation, Dickens occasionally leaves the ultimate outcome of his or her story—whether or not he or she is truly redeemed—open for debate. Miss Havisham's story is a classic example of this ambiguity. Miss Havisham begs Pip's forgiveness at the end of *Great Expectations*—and he readily grants it. However, she perishes before her story can fully reflect her reformation of character. Thus, Miss Havisham's story demonstrates quasi-redemption; redemption is *suggested* through Miss Havisham's double, Estella, but it is never fully realized in Miss Havisham's own life.

Like Dr. Alexandre Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities* and William Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*, Miss Havisham is a character who initiates redemptive strides toward freedom but is ultimately unable to completely shake off the confines of imprisonment. A certain measure of suffering enters everyone's life at some point, and whether this tribulation becomes deforming or redemptive depends upon how it is accepted. A life focused *exclusively* on past defeats will be a life held hostage, but when life's disillusionment is channeled into the relentless, hopeful pursuit of liberation then life is rendered dynamically redemptive.

2.1. Miss Havisham's Self-Imposed Imprisonment vs. Magwich's Escape from Prison

Although Alexandre Manette and William Dorrit both waste away in literal prisons—Manette in the Bastille and Dorrit in the Marshalsea—Miss Havisham's self-imposed imprisonment is just as destructive. Rather than propelling her to pursue good at any cost, Miss Havisham's sorrow enslaves her. She refuses to move past her pain, choosing instead to wallow in wretchedness. Worse still, Miss Havisham's thwarted desires, so long held captive, become caustic instruments to enact revenge upon those around her. She tells Pip that “sharper teeth than teeth of mice have gnawed at me” (73). Miss Havisham's internal agony has done more damage than any external suffering ever could, because her pain manifests itself in the tangible evil she inflicts upon others. C.S. Lewis writes:

Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: it is easier to say “My tooth is aching” than to say “My heart is broken.” Yet if the cause is accepted and faced, the conflict will strengthen and purify the character and in time the pain will usually pass....Some by heroism overcome even chronic mental pain. They often produce brilliant work and strengthen, harden, and sharpen their characters till they become like tempered steel. (*Pain* 161)

Pip also references his struggle with mental pain in *Great Expectations* when he writes that “This pain of the mind was much harder to strive against than the bodily pain I suffered” (301). Indeed, the impact of productively managing mental pain is often momentous, but all too often this opportunity is overlooked. Lewis notes the resultant damage of refusing to admit the presence of pain or deal with its subsequent ramifications: “if the cause is not faced or not recognised, it produces the dreary state of the chronic neurotic” (*Pain* 161). Miss Havisham's life is definitely dreary. She

acknowledges her pain but initially denies the existence of a hopeful future outside her agony. Pain encompasses her entire life, and imprisonment defines her.

After being jilted at the altar, Miss Havisham's life stops both literally and figuratively. Herbert relates her tale to Pip: "The day came, but not the bridegroom....at which she afterwards stopped all the clocks....she laid the whole place waste, as you have seen it, and she has never since looked upon the light of day" (143). Instead of mourning her loss for a season and then allowing her hardship to strengthen her, Miss Havisham *remains* in her despair. Moreover, she continually projects this aching hopelessness onto others. She adopts Estella and fashions her into a coquette who will wreak vengeance upon men for the sake of her benefactress. Miss Havisham commands Pip to worship Estella: "Love her, love her, love her! How does she use you?...Hear me, Pip! I adopted her to be loved. I bred her and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!'...but if the often repeated word had been hate instead of love—despair—revenge—dire death—it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse" (184). In Miss Havisham's warped mind, love and hate have been rendered synonymous.

When Pip reveals to Miss Havisham that her mission to torment him has been successful for "I am as unhappy as you can ever have meant me to be" (268) the elderly lady refuses to assume responsibility, demanding "who am I, for God's sake, that I should be kind?" (269). Miss Havisham has spent decades pondering devastation while ensconced in her macabre environment, and "her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker" (297). Miss Havisham's energy has been focused on consummate revenge rather

than complete redemption. Pip tells Estella that “I think in the endurance of her own suffering, she forgot mine” (270). Miss Havisham’s selfish suffering has sealed her against renewal rather than awakening her to the possibility of redemption.

“Tragedy asks: ‘Are you willing to do battle with what has broken your heart?’” (Allender, *Told* 87), and Miss Havisham’s initial response is “Absolutely not.” If “adversity introduces us to ourselves” (qtd. in Allender, *Told* 16) then Miss Havisham has met herself going rather than coming; she chooses to flee rather than to fight. Consequently, she remains imprisoned within her gloomy house so laced with cobwebs, themselves glistening reminders of “this heap of decay” (Dickens 72). Lamentably, Miss Havisham invites devastation: “‘When the ruin is complete,’ said she, with a ghastly look, ‘and when they lay me dead in my bride’s dress on the bride’s table—which shall be done, and which will be the finished curse upon him—so much the better if it is done on this day!’” (73). Ruin rather than redemption is Miss Havisham’s mantra, and it keeps her consensually locked within the literal and metaphorical confines of her ironically named Satis House.¹

Conversely, the convict Abel Magwich reacts to tragedy and imprisonment by refusing to be defeated. Pip observes that Magwich “was regarded as a determined prison-breaker” (338) which has a double meaning in that Magwich has both physically escaped confinement and mentally strives to shake off the metaphorical shackles of meanness. He swears to Pip that despite serving time in the basest of prison conditions, “I

¹ When Pip learns that the name of Miss Havisham’s house translates to “enough,” he muses, “Enough House...that’s a curious name miss” (49). Estella responds that the name “meant more than it said, it meant, when it was given, that whoever had this house could want nothing else. They must have been easily satisfied in those days, I should think” (49). Ironically, Miss Havisham cloisters herself within her “Enough House,” an act which both reveals her satisfaction with her suffering and marks the gaping loss that initiated her misery.

ain't a going to be low" (325). Indeed, Magwich repeats this mantra multiple times. Earlier in the text, Magwich, "stretching out his hand towards me said, in a reassuring manner, 'I aint's a going to be low, dear boy!'" (263). Magwich accepts the reality of his situation but demurs to let it ruin his life. Moreover, he uses his resources for good by serving as Pip's secret benefactor. Magwich's imprisonment and resources are reforming while Miss Havisham's imprisonment and resources are deforming. These two characters are exemplars of the fundamental difference between productive and destructive anguish. Miss Havisham's pain poisons her life—and the lives of those around her—while Magwich's pain calls him to something greater than himself. Magwich tells Pip he's been "In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail. There, you've got it. That's *my* life pretty much...." (258). Regardless, Magwich refuses to allow his situation to brand him as a consummate criminal. Redemption is more about choice than about circumstances.

However, circumstances do play a pivotal part in the redemptive process. In *Great Expectations*—as in *Little Dorrit*—the male protagonist must be humbled by captivity in order to fully cherish freedom or identify with fellow sufferers. Initially, all Pip can see when observing Magwich is the latter's vile association with the prison. Pip is blinded to the dignity lurking beneath the surface of Magwich's hardened exterior. Pip reflects how "I had tried to rid myself of the stain of the prison before meeting her [Estella] at the coach office" (264). Even though Estella has rarely afforded Pip anything other than absolute agony, he still exalts her over Magwich in his own mind. It is not until Pip's critical captivity near the end of the novel that his eyes are opened to the strength of

Magwich's character. After Pip is freed from the house where he has been held captive for several days, his attitude toward bondage, liberty, and Magwich has changed:

For now, my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted wounded shackled creature who held my hand in his, I saw only a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (332)

The benefits of Pip's confinement and liberation are manifold. First, the reconciliation between Magwich and Pip is made complete by the humility Pip has learned during his captivity. Second, Pip realizes how shamefully he has treated his stepfather Joe, and he is thus motivated to eventually reconcile with Joe. Third, Pip understands that Magwich deserves to discover that Estella is his daughter. This liberating revelation fittingly transpires in prison; the refining capacity of imprisonment has traveled full circle from Magwich's escape to Pip's captivity and escape to Magwich's recapture. Now at last Magwich is ready to hear and Pip is prepared to share:

“Dear Magwich, I must tell you, now at last. You understand what I say?”
A gentle pressure on my hand.
“You had a child once, whom you loved and lost.”
A stronger pressure on my hand.
“She lived and found powerful friends. She is living now. She is a lady and very beautiful. And I love her!” (342)

Pip's confession allows Magwich to die in peace. Although Magwich is not afforded the opportunity to fully embrace his own redemption, his family is eventually redeemed through the union of Estella (his daughter by literal blood) and Pip (his son through figurative adoption). Yet again, the physical and metaphysical realms are melded through the union of literal daughter and figurative son. Similarly, Miss Havisham is granted a second chance at redemption through Estella (her daughter through figurative adoption) *after* Miss Havisham at last admits her own guilt.

2.2. Completely Broken or Broken Completely?

Dickens delights in demonstrating overarching themes through his minor characters. For instance, Dickens describes Mr. Wemmick as a man “whose expression seemed to have been imperfectly chipped out with a dull-edged chisel. There were some marks in it that might have been dimples, if the material had been softer and the instrument finer, but which, as it was, were only dents” (135). The capacity for beauty and redemption is referenced, but unfortunately the “instrument” and “material” (i.e. suffering and the pivotal moment of agency) are avoided. Instead of sporting reforming dimples, Wemmick is instead saddled with deforming dents.

In addition to Wemmick, *Great Expectations* is fraught with other references to brokenness; hearts in particular must be shattered before they can be restored. The first time Pip meets Miss Havisham, she rests her hands upon her bosom and demands of Pip:

“What do I touch?”

“Your heart.”

“Broken!”

She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it. (50)

Even the choppy manner in which Dickens presents this verbal exchange alludes to the theme of brokenness. Moreover, Miss Havisham’s morbid pride in her pain disconcerts Pip—and rightly so! Her brokenness has become her identity, and she seeks to break others as well. Miss Havisham confides to Estella: “Well? You can break his heart” (51), and Estella does as her benefactress commands. Pip refers to Estella as “the theme that so long filled my heart” (226) but recognizes that she “held my heart in her hand because she willfully chose to do it, and not because it would have wrung any tenderness in her, to crush it and throw it away” (206). Amazingly, Pip remains faithful to his love for

Estella despite her demeaning treatment of him. His suffering at her hands strengthens his hope for her to one day care for him in return: “When should I awaken the heart within her, that was mute and sleeping now?” (187). Pip is eventually granted the opportunity to answer this question in that his constant, compassionate treatment of Estella eventually awakens in her an interest toward him and his character, but it is not until later suffering transforms Estella that she can finally return Pip’s friendship and love.

The first inkling of Estella’s capacity for love occurs after Pip pleads with her not to throw herself away on an unworthy man as per Miss Havisham’s instructions:

Estella, dearest dearest Estella, do not let Miss Havisham lead you into this fatal step. Put me aside for ever—you have done so, I well know—but bestow yourself on some worthier person than Drummle. Miss Havisham gives you to him, as the greatest slight and injury that could be done to the many far better men who admire you, and to the few who truly love you. Among those few, there may be one who loves you even as dearly, though he has not loved you as long, as I. Take him, and I can bear it better, for your sake! (271)

Pip’s petition is Estella’s first encounter with real love, and he notices that his “earnestness awoke a wonder in her that seemed as if it would have been touched with compassion, if she could have rendered me at all intelligible to her own mind” (271). This wonder is the critical first step; there is a stirring within her soul to learn more of what motivates Pip to care so much for her even in the face of losing her forever to another man. Prior to Pip’s supplication, Estella tells him, “When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there” (270). This is not the first time Estella has professed to be heartless. Earlier in the novel she reveals to Pip, “You must know...that I have no heart....” (183). Consequently, Estella’s wonder at Pip’s true love for her—her incredulity at his willingness to see her happy despite her perpetual harshness toward

him—is a turning point in her life. This is Estella’s moment of epiphany, when it at last dawns on her that love and hate are not always synonymous as Miss Havisham has insisted she believe. Moreover, love transcends a mere “form of words” as Pip demonstrates his love for her through *action*.

Without action, love is incomplete, and without brokenness, redemption cannot come full circle. During Miss Havisham’s confession to Pip at the end of *Great Expectations*, she assures him “‘But Pip—my Dear!’ There was an earnest womanly compassion for me in her new affection. ‘My Dear! Believe this: when she first came to me, I meant to save her from misery like my own. At first I meant no more’” (298). Unfortunately, whatever Miss Havisham’s initial intentions, her upbringing of Estella has been wickedly warped. Pip admonishes Miss Havisham, “Better...to have left her a natural heart, even to be bruised and broken” (298). Indeed, it is through brokenness and suffering that Estella becomes human. The vacant place in her bosom where Pip could “touch nothing there” (270) is at last filled when suffering creates in Estella the capacity for relational fulfillment. At the end of *Great Expectations*, Estella confides to Pip that “suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but—I hope—into a better shape” (358). Estella thus echoes Pip’s earlier sentiments that being “bruised and broken” is preferable to being a vapid shadow incapable of embracing life. Suffering has granted Estella the ability to both feel and to remember: “There was a long hard time when I kept far from me, the remembrance of what I had thrown away when I was quite ignorant of its worth. But...I have given it a place in my heart” (358). This revelation stands in stark

contrast to Estella's earlier assertion "that I have no heart—if that has anything to do with my memory" (183).

Jerome Meckier attests that "Without an understanding of failure, Dickens warned, it was impossible to view life whole" (553). In *Great Expectations*, it is only through brokenness—seeming failure—that completion can come to fruition. Even Dickens is afforded a second chance in *Great Expectations*, and his authorial intentions are vicariously redeemed through his characters:

In the first ending, Pip and Estella go separate ways. When Dickens entertains second thoughts, however, they just help each other; friendship and forgiveness, co-operation and unselfishness, become more imperative than self-help, which is made to appear self-centered, as if one could improve one's character without relating to the needs of others. (Meckier 545)

The novel thus concludes redemptively for both Dickens and his literary doubles as they grow through tribulation, reflection, and revision.

Throughout the novel, Pip chronicles his struggles with doubt when he writes, "all my expectations are in a heap" (204) and he fears he is "fit for nothing" (256). However, it is through this very struggle that Pip's heroism emerges. As Ankhi Mukherjee points out, "In Dickens's *Great Expectations*, the hero is systematically stripped of his fortunes and dreams, but as Raymond Williams observes, this deprivation of identity is a kind of liberation 'in which the most fantastic and idiosyncratic kinds of growth could come about'" (115). Verily, suffering exalts Pip and humbles Estella; they are both rendered real and taught to truly love through tribulation. Rather than being completely broken, Pip and Estella are broken completely in order to be redeemed. She initially insists that "We shall never understand each other" (272). Indeed, it is not until she has tasted his sorrow that she can relate to his hope. Without Pip's faithfulness and quiet resolve,

Estella would most likely have been doomed to repeat Miss Havisham's story rather than serving as the suggestion of Miss Havisham's redemption.

Even so, redemption cannot commence until a character first professes the *need* for redemption. Until the end of the novel, Estella has denied her need of love or redemption while Miss Havisham has shunned redemption in favor of seeking revenge. It is not until they understand their need for forgiveness that redemption can truly come into play. As C.S. Lewis argues, "forgiveness needs to be accepted as well as offered if it is to be complete: and a man who admits no guilt can accept no forgiveness" (*Pain* 124). Forgiveness necessarily involves judgment, but the power that comes with offering forgiveness cannot create completion on its own. Even the term "offering forgiveness" attests to the duality of forgiveness which entails both the offering and the accepting.

Pip offers forgiveness to Estella even in the midst of his pain: "in this separation I associate you only with the good, and I will faithfully hold you to that always, for you must have done me far more good than harm, let me feel now what sharp distress I may. O God bless you, God forgive you!" (272). However, Pip's forgiveness is not complete until the end of the novel, when "these broken words" (272) Pip proffered years before are at last treasured by Estella. Likewise, Miss Havisham cannot be forgiven or redeemed until she admits her sins. Contrast the Miss Havisham who cries, "who am I, for God's sake, that I should be kind?" (269) with the Miss Havisham who begs, "If you can ever write under my name, 'I forgive her,' though ever so long after my broken heart is dust—pray do it!" (297) and the Miss Havisham who declares, "You made your own snares. I never made them" (269) with the Miss Havisham who sobs, "What have I done! What

have I done!” (297) and who beseeches Pip to “tell me how to do something useful and good” (295).

Assuredly, it is the moment that Miss Havisham weeps repentantly that she is at long last restored to humanity and her story is (arguably) redeemed. She longs to show Pip “that I am not all stone. But perhaps you can never believe, now, that there is anything human in my heart?” (295). Miss Havisham’s tears do more to convince Pip of her humanity than mere words ever could, particularly since earlier in the text he reflects that “Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts. I was better after I cried, than before—more sorry, more aware of my own ingratitude, more gentle” (124). Indeed, these tears mark “THE END OF THE FIRST STAGE OF PIP’S EXPECTATIONS” (125) as “the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me” (125). Cleansing tears can both calm and clarify. Dan Allender notes the significance of “faces redeemed with tears” (*Path* 170), and both Pip and Miss Havisham have certainly experienced this phenomenon.

The theme of passing from darkness to light often transitions Pip from one stage of expectations to the next; the mists chronicle his growth. He must traverse the dark shadows in order to salute the light. Pip’s first stage of expectations ends with tears, and his second stage of expectations ends with darkness, for “the candles were wasted out, the fire was dead, and the wind and rain intensified the thick black darkness” (244). His final stage of expectations also ends with a shadow, but it is a shadow paradoxically infused

with light and hope. Moreover, Pip's third² and final epoch of expectations welcomes light as "the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well" (322). Dickens often uses misty shadow seasons to grow his characters as they grope through the semidarkness.

2.3. The Shadows of Satis House

Miss Havisham has been depicted as withered, faded, and shadowy from the outset of the novel, but she is only one of the many shadows of Satis House. Both she and her surroundings are faded, and Pip observes that "everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its luster, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers...." (50). Miss Havisham's body, home, and hopes have all become mere shadows of what they *could* have been. Her existence encompasses a glimpse of the future she sought but that never materialized, and this glimpse of future hope combines with the memory of past disappointment to create the present shadow realm of Satis House.

Miss Havisham's surroundings represent her rot and the ghostly shadows that haunt her. Material and immaterial meld in her home, for her bridal clothes are the physical representations of doubly immaterial dreams (doubly immaterial because the intangible dreams never materialized into tangible reality). Instead, her bridal clothes have withered and turned to shadowy reminders of her loss that perpetually assault her:

² In addition to suggesting completion, the three stages of Pip's expectations arguably allude to the union of the trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The trinity is enveloped in the shadow holy mystery, and Pip's expectations also end with an enigmatic—albeit welcome—shadow.

“Without this arrest of everything, this standing still of all the pale decayed objects, not even the withered bridal dress on the collapsed form could have looked so like graveclothes, or the long veil so like a shroud” (52). The “standing still” attests to Miss Havisham’s lamentable lack of agency. There is “a dead lull upon her; altogether, she had the appearance of having dropped, body and soul, within and without, under the weight of a crushing blow” (52-53). Miss Havisham’s pain has thus far proven deforming rather than reforming because she refuses to rise above it. She stands shrouded in shadows, “in the midst of the dimly lighted room beside the rotten bride-cake that was hidden in cobwebs” (123). Although Pip “miserably dreamed” of playing “Hamlet to Miss Havisham’s Ghost” (198) Miss Havisham’s story seems more akin to Macbeth’s: “Out, out, brief candle! / Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more: it is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing” (Shakespeare 5.5.25-30). Undeniably, Miss Havisham’s life is cold and ghostly, infiltrated with cobwebs and characterized by “the distinct shadow of the darkened and unhealthy house in which her life was hidden from the sun” (Dickens 229). However, unlike Macbeth’s life, Miss Havisham’s existence eventually transforms from that of “a walking shadow” to a life that signifies something rather than nothing.

Nevertheless, in the interim light rarely infiltrates the confines of Miss Havisham’s Satis House. Pip reflects, “Daylight never entered the house as to my thoughts and remembrances of it, any more than as to the actual fact. It bewildered me, and under its influence I continued at heart to hate my trade and to be ashamed of home” (100). This enigmatic abode, so shrouded in darkness, profoundly impacts Pip’s search

for identity, and his feelings toward the house vacillate between hopeful and hateful. At one point, he has “brilliant” visions of a future in which he would “restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin—in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess” (179). Pip views the house both as a site of splendor and as a site of suffering; it represents “a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero” (179). The house, with its *mists* and *mysteries*, represents for Pip the dichotomy between sorrow and hope. At one juncture he worries that his suffering cannot be redeemed, and that he has “suffered in Satis House as a convenience” (243) and at another he “went out to the memorable old house that it would have been so much the better for me never to have entered, never to have seen” (268). However, Pip refuses to lose hope despite the looming shadows of disappointment, and his reconciliation with Estella fittingly transpires on the grounds of Satis House.

Previously, Pip has a nightmare where the mantra “Don’t go home” becomes “a vast shadowy verb which I had to conjugate. Imperative mood, present tense: Do not thou go home, let him not go home, let us not go home, do not ye or you go home, let not them go home” (274). Although Pip references a different home here, the parallels to the alluring aversion the shadowy Satis House holds for him are remarkable. It is at Satis House—the home Pip’s spirit haunts and where he at last finds refuge—that Pip and Estella are finally fulfilled through relationship with one another. Satis House is now worthy of being termed “Enough” House.

Nevertheless, even Satis House is first refined by fire. Miss Havisham literally goes out in a blaze of glory, and she takes her house down with her:

I [Pip] saw a great flaming light spring up. In the same moment I saw her running at me, shrieking, with a whirl of fire blazing all about her...I dragged the great cloth from the table...and with it dragged down the heap of rottenness in the midst, and all the ugly things that sheltered there...I still held her forcibly down with all my strength, like a prisoner who might escape; and I doubt if I even knew who she was, or why we had struggled, or that she had been in flames...Though every vestige of her dress was burnt, as they told me, she still had something of her old ghastly bridal appearance; for, they had covered her to the throat with white cotton-wool, and as she lay with a white sheet loosely overlying that, the phantom air of something that had been and was changed, was still upon her. (299-300)

Miss Havisham's redemption is suggested even in her demise, as Pip senses the ghostly presence of past and present mingling and transforming within the "phantom air." When he is fittingly reunited with Estella on the ashes of Satis House, "A cold silvery mist had veiled the afternoon" (357) and he recognizes "a solitary figure" (357) among the shadows who turns out to be Estella. Dickens juxtaposes light and dark in this scene to mirror the relationship between sorrow and hope. Now, after many years of sorrow, Estella at last reflects a "saddened softened light" (357) in her eyes. Estella has long been the bright spot in Pip's life, a guiding light Pip aspires to be worthy of. Incidentally, Estella's name means star, and immediately before Pip glimpses her, he notices that "the stars were shining beyond the mist, and the moon was coming, and the evening was not dark" (357). When viewed in light of this passage, the earlier passage where Pip is on his way to Satis House for the first time serves as a foreshadowing: "I could at first see no stars from the chaise-cart. But they twinkled out one by one, without throwing any light on the questions why on earth I was going to play at Miss Havisham's, and what on earth I was expected to play at" (45).

Pip's expectations converge at Satis House. Here he suffered and hoped, and now it belongs to him after so many "wretched years" (357) during which "the unquiet spirits

within me haunted that house when Estella lived there! Let my body be where it would, my spirit was always wandering, wandering, wandering, wandering about that house” (227). In the end, Pip meets Estella both bodily and spiritually on the grounds of this pivotal house that has long been their foundation. Estella inquires, “Is it to be built on?” and Pip responds, “At last it is” (357). As Pip and Estella commit to build upon the ashes of Satis House, they “went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge, so the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw the shadow of no parting from her” (358). Even though loving Estella has made Pip’s heart “ache and ache again” (235) at last that memory is but a shadow. The dark shadows of past pain meld with the light shadows of future promise, as Pip glimpses the illuminating shadow of future union with Estella. Shadows form when light and dark intertwine, so it is only fitting that Dickens demonstrates their capacity for both the extremes (i.e. hope and despair) within this novel.

Souls as well as shadows can converge, and C.S. Lewis maintains that “the possibility of pain is inherent in the very existence of a world where souls can meet” (*Pain* 86). The final shadow of *Great Expectations* suggests redemption even as Estella poignantly suggests the final redemption of Miss Havisham, who earlier pled with Pip to believe that despite all the suffering she had inflicted upon him and her warped upbringing of Estella, she initially craved redemption: “I wanted a little girl to rear and love, and save from my fate” (298). Although Miss Havisham’s warped lifestyle prevents her from relishing redemption herself, the culmination of this desire is suggested through

Estella's story. Earlier, Pip has been haunted by a shadowy, ghostly glimpse of Estella's capacity to redeem even Miss Havisham's revenge:

What *was* it that was borne in upon my mind when she [Estella] stood still and looked attentively at me? Anything that I had seen in Miss Havisham? No. In some of her looks and gestures there was that tinge of resemblance to Miss Havisham....And yet I could not trace this to Miss Havisham. I looked again, and though she was still looking at me, the suggestion was gone. What was it?...again the same dim suggestion that I could not possibly grasp, crossed me....Instantly the ghost passed once more, and was gone. What *was* it?...What *was* that nameless shadow which again in that one instant had passed? (183; 202)

These encounters with the "nameless shadow" foreshadow the final scene of *Great Expectations* when Pip and Estella at last envision a happy future together, and Estella thus serves as the suggestion of Miss Havisham's redemption. Pip previously sees this suggestion, but he is perplexed because he cannot directly link such a nebulous correlation to Miss Havisham. Only at the end of the novel does this "trace" (in itself a shadowy word) at last make sense. Estella has been inextricably intertwined with all Pip's existence, and he recalls "all those visions that had raised her face in the glowing fire...In a word, it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or in the present, from the innermost life of my life" (182). From the outset, Pip is accosted by shadows of what *could* be with Estella, but it is not until their separate sufferings unite them in travail and in triumph that Pip sees "the shadow of no parting from her" (358). Finally, the shadow transitions from Pip's past remembrance and present existence to at last suggest future hope.

Chapter 3: *A Tale of Two Cities* and the Significance of Redemption

Charles Dickens's Victorian audience would have been familiar with the Christian story of redemption, the crux of which centers around Christ's death and resurrection. Indeed, Charles Dickens once stated that "The New Testament is the best book the world has ever known or will know" (qtd. in Phillips 211). It is in this context that Sydney Carton's redemptive sacrifice at the end of *A Tale of Two Cities* is most significant; Biblical typology allows Dickens's discourse on redemption to operate on both religious and political planes. By aligning his novel with a revered text like the Bible, Dickens ensures his audience's attention while also provocatively deviating from the familiar New Testament account. From one perspective, Carton is overtly a literary Christ figure, and the words he repeats after determining to lay down his life for the Darnays are Christ's words from John 11:25: "I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (Dickens 292). As a literary Christ figure, Carton thus "brings a kind of hope, a kind of redemption, to this fallen world..." (Foster 121). Dickens expects his readers to be encouraged by the Christ-like heroism stemming from Carton's weakness and suffering. However, Dickens also utilizes Carton's character as a political platform, not to undermine his value as a savior character but rather to use that very allure to critique aspects of Victorian culture in dire need of reformation.

As such, Carton is also covertly a commentary on the function of internalized punishment as a deforming paradigm. Dickens lived during an era when England was transitioning from "visible authority" to "anonymous" authority as a means of discipline (Cordery 72). This political shift coincided with the deadening hypocrisy of Victorian

society; together these maladies translated to a ubiquitous system of decorous damage. Gone were some of the medieval tortures, but the ensuing self-inflicted suffering—often enacted under the guise of humane treatment of prisoners or polite societal interaction—was often far worse. Ironically, it is when Carton directly confronts the instruments of political punishment such as prison and the guillotine that he is released from the captivity of his self-chastisement. Carton is redeemed when he transitions from internal suffering to external suffering. He embraces the physical pain of death as a means of escape from the pain of his mind.

Kathleen Blake remarks that Dickens “hardly ever wrote a novel without attacking an abuse” (1), and “[a]ccording to Foucault, punishment becomes hidden and not displayed, and its site is no longer the body but the mind and soul” (Cordery 72). The tendency during the Victorian Era was to disguise anything unpleasant as a more appealing alternative. Consequently, disingenuities ranging from insults couched as compliments to factories masquerading as havens of reform were staples of life in Victorian England. Presented with the truth that “facing an irresolvable conflict of values, the culture can deal with it only by resolutely ignoring it” (Herbert 195), Dickens determines to awaken his readership to the artifice and agony of life in a world where both punishment and pretense are internalized. After all, “the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society” (Foucault, “Author” 1628). Dickens draws his readers into a discourse that both calms them with the easily recognizable Christian story of redemption and provokes them to parse the “pattern of disciplinary surveillance” (Cordery 76) lurking beneath the

surface of Victorian politics and society. By yoking England with revolutionary France in this novel, Dickens draws parallels between problems shared by both nations. He also warns his British readers that France's terror from the previous century is not as distant as perhaps perceived. Regardless, redemption comes at a price; it is not easily attained. And it is often through weakness and suffering that triumph transpires.

3.1. Carton Casts Shadows

Shadows surround Sydney Carton. Immediately prior to forlornly acknowledging his failure as a man, Carton glimpses the shadow of the man he *could* be, but for now this potential is merely "a mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial, and perseverance. In the fair city of this vision, there were... gardens in which the fruits of life hung ripening, waters of Hope that sparkled in his sight. A moment, and it was gone" (68). Later in the novel, Dickens dedicates a chapter entitled "The Fellow of No Delicacy" to Carton's shortcomings. Dickens commences the chapter by noting Carton's cloudy nature:

If Sydney Carton ever shone anywhere, he certainly never shone in the house of Doctor Manette. He had been there often, during a whole year, and had always been the same moody and morose loungers there. When he cared to talk, he talked well; but, the cloud of caring for nothing, which overshadowed him with such a fatal darkness, was very rarely pierced by the light within him. (114)

Despite being overshadowed by such an ominous title and introductory paragraph, this chapter concludes with a prophetic allusion to Carton's future redemption as he urges Lucie to "think now and then that there is a man who would give his life, to keep a life you love beside you!" (117). Even though (in the preceding block quotation) Dickens states that Carton is overshadowed by "the cloud of caring for nothing," Carton obviously cherishes one care: Lucie Manette Darnay. Moreover, it is this very love for Lucie that

inspires Carton's sacrifice on behalf of Lucie's husband, Charles Darnay. As Carton sets his fateful plan into motion, the plan which involves taking Charles Darnay's place at the guillotine, Dickens notes Carton's "grave smile of earnestness" (268) and his encounter with the "dying embers" (268). Both these subtle references to death foreshadow Carton's future demise.

The shadows surrounding Carton are not all sinister, however. Shadows form when opposites converge, and the dark aspects of Carton's character colliding with his capacity for brightness signify the clash between evil and good, despair and hope. At the end of the block quotation above, Dickens pointedly references Carton's inner light. Although this light is rarely visible, it is there nonetheless, and suffering *purposefully* enables it to shine strongly. Previously, Carton has been weighted down by a lackadaisical, bleak lifestyle, and this suffering is non-redemptive. Conversely, when Carton resolves to suffer on behalf of the Darnays, he redeems both his story and theirs as his inner light finally pierces the darkness enveloping the French Revolution. Dickens records that when Carton slips into the prison to switch places with Darnay, the latter mistakes Carton for a ghost: "There was something so bright and remarkable in his look, that, for the first moment, the prisoner misdoubted him to be an apparition of his own imagining" (272). Carton's current luminosity of character stands in such stark contrast to his previous nature that Darnay initially relegates his savior to the realm of the supernatural.

Furthermore, Carton's eventual triumph is rendered even more remarkable given the shocking nature of his heroism. He has been portrayed as the anti-hero from the outset, the disposable fellow continually existing in Charles Darnay's shadow. Brian

Rosenberg posits that Dickens delights in “expressing character through images of doubleness or inversion, such as twins, mirrors, and shadows” (149). Additionally, Dickens often deepens the mystery shrouding certain characters by “generating a tension between the role a character seems designed to play in the novel and some deeper purpose that character appears to serve” (149). Carton’s early struggles, self-loathing, and the disparity between the potential Dickens alludes to and the life Carton actually leads all conflate to create a more scintillating savior figure. Dickens’s overarching purpose in molding Carton into a savior is not to create an exact replica of Christ but to demonstrate that epic achievements can be enacted by an everyman. If Carton had been depicted as the hero from the outset, then his triumph would be expected rather than extraordinary.

Dickens thus depicts depth through the shadows—both those flickering with darkness and those brimming with life—enveloping Carton. His initial, non-redemptive suffering yields to redemptive, sacrificial suffering as his love for Lucie instills in him a desire to see her happy regardless of the cost. As Charles Darnay is sentenced to die, it is Carton who emerges—fittingly from the shadows of “the obscure corner” (260)—to comfort Lucie. “His arm trembled as it raised her, and supported her head. Yet, there was an air about him that was not all of pity—that had a flush of pride in it” (260). Carton is at last alive with strength of purpose. Formerly he has existed as a mere shadow of a man, an alcoholic wretch deemed “The idlest and most unpromising of men” (65). Now, however, he manifests a “manner so fervent and inspiring” (267) that those around him marvel at his transformation. Sydney Carton has perpetually played second fiddle to the dashing Darnay, but ultimately it is only Carton who wields the power to save the supposed hero.

As Susan K. Gillman and Robert L. Patten argue, Dickensian doubles “become ways of expressing the spectrum of possibilities for character and of enacting alternative futures for the protagonist” (444). Carton’s uncanny physical resemblance to Darnay is outlined at the outset of the novel when this very resemblance saves Darnay from being convicted of treason in England. Carton is Darnay’s doppelganger, his physical double who also doubles the number of times he saves Charles Darnay’s life. Moreover, the doubling continues as Dickens himself identifies with Sydney Carton’s plight. Charles Dickens may have christened the more overtly heroic character with his first name, but it is the anti-hero-turned-savior struggling in the shadows whose story the author truly cherishes. Hesketh Pearson maintains that Charles Dickens personally related to Sydney Carton’s plight of struggling with the damaging effects of self-loathing. Consequently, Pearson asserts that Carton’s character:

was the direct outcome of Dickens’s emotional life at a time when he had fallen in love, believed himself to be shamefully used and wrongfully abused by people who owed everything to him, experienced the open criticism and implied disapproval of many friends, and felt the loneliness of being generally misunderstood. As a defense against this seemingly hostile outer world, and to comfort his conscience, he dramatized himself both in fact and in fiction, saw himself as a much-wronged deeply-suffering but heroic soul, and produced a work the wide popularity of which shows how many much-wronged deeply-suffering but heroic souls there must be in the world. (qtd. in Johnson 981)

Here again the dangers of internalized punishment are manifested in the text as Carton is depicted as a character accustomed to assuming the mantle of superfluous black sheep (or “jackal”). In prison, Darnay “never thought of Carton. His mind was so full of the others, that he never once thought of him” (270). After Lucie Manette and Charles Darnay are married, Lucie urges her husband to “remember how strong we are in our happiness, and how weak he is in his misery!” (161). However, it is Carton’s misery—coupled with his

love for Lucie—that fuels his transformation. Rather than fleeing from the pain of prison and death, Carton pursues these avenues with a passion never before evinced. This resolve resonates with a fellow captive doomed to die, and she queries:

“Are you dying for him?” she whispered.
“And his wife and child. Hush! Yes.”
“O you will let me hold your brave hand, stranger?” (276)

For the first time in his life Carton is heralded as courageous, and it is through suffering that his heroism transpires. Carton’s early pain tempts him to despair, but his later pain calls him to embrace his capacity for valor.

Like Miss Havisham, Carton does not experience complete redemption in his own life, but his redemption is nonetheless suggested in the confidence that he will “hold a sanctuary in their hearts, and in the hearts of their descendants, generations hence” (292).

He sees the shadows of future stories honoring his heroism, and he also envisions a child:

who bore my name, a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him, foremost of just judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place—then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day’s disfigurement—and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and faltering voice. (292-293)

Carton imagines his story being redeemed by an honorary lineage of Darnay boys bearing his name and commemorating his sacrifice on their behalf. Even though his life will end, his legacy will be immortalized: “I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more” (292). This is a definitive contrast with the man who previously staggered under the weight of a burden too heavy to bear, who feared his life was worthless and his story incapable of

redemption. Instead, his archetypal transcendence secures a legacy of hope as his story is forever linked with the Darnays through the commonality of redemption.

Greg Laughery urges us to “reflect on the past with a present-redemptive memory” (149). We must recognize the need to live in the present and anticipate the future in the context of what has happened in the past. The mistakes and regrets of the past should not be ignored or maligned; rather, they should be regarded as purposeful epochs that exist to be redeemed. Indeed, Carton’s shadowy, shameful past will henceforth be irrevocably associated with his sanctifying sacrifice. The season of life that Sydney might prefer to forget now adds significance to his story; he is not defined merely by his former failure. When the Darnays reflect upon Sydney Carton, it will be with ongoing gratitude and admiration. Both Carton and the Darnays are in dire need of salvation. The Darnays afford Carton the opportunity for heroism, and he emphatically embraces it—both for their redemption and for his.

3.2. Deformation *or* Reformation: Monstrous Madame and Sublime Sydney

Dickens’s fellow Victorian writer, Oscar Wilde, maintains that “[b]ehind every exquisite thing that had existed, there was something tragic” (51). Indeed, Dickens records that as Carton contemplates the significance of his sacrifice in the shadow of the guillotine, he “looked sublime and prophetic” (292). Yet again, Carton is depicted as a literary Christ figure whose strength in sacrifice imparts a radical hope for his people. Moreover, it is in Christ’s consummate weakness upon the cross that His redemptive sacrifice is enacted, and the Lord tells Paul in 2 Corinthians that “My strength is made perfect in weakness,” and Paul responds, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (*RSB*,

2 Corinthians 12:9b; 10b). Paradoxically, weakness sets the stage for transformative strength. Carton has perpetually been plagued by weakness; after all, he is the “jackal” to Stryver’s “lion.” Now, however, his affliction has been transformed into an exquisite existence. Rather than marking him as a wretch, Sydney’s struggle imparts profundity to his story. His suffering provides the resolve for him to act heroically. The final words of the novel are his: “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known” (293).

This email excerpt from Shannon Ford illustrates humanity’s fascination with the pivotal interplay between suffering and redemption: “Without wanting to overplay suffering, there is something about it that can certainly help build real character. There often seems to be a quality lacking in those people who haven’t experienced genuine suffering of some sort. Of course, the flipside is that suffering can also embitter a soul.” Ford goes on to ponder the “crucial difference” between those whom suffering has strengthened and those whom suffering has destroyed. Moreover, his observation regarding suffering’s impact upon character is inspired by a critical passage where Dickens describes the inner turmoil of Sydney Carton: “Sadly, sadly, the sun rose; it rose upon no sadder sight than the man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight on him, and resigning himself to let it eat him away” (69). Were the novel to end here, Sydney Carton would be deemed one of the most desolate characters in all of literature. Fortunately, this glimpse into Carton’s character is not definitive of his entire story. Once he confronts the “blight” of deforming, internalized self-punishment, he shifts from non-redemptive, self-loathing suffering to redemptive, self-sacrificial suffering. Additionally,

Carton's acute awareness of his condition ultimately proves advantageous. Dickens specifies that Carton is "sensible of the blight on him" (69) which relates to the first step in struggle. Characters who refuse to acknowledge their shortcomings cannot subsequently transcend them. Carton's initial resolve to allow his affliction to consume him is reminiscent of Miss Havisham's conscious choice to remain in her despair. Carton later awakens to his ability to enact good and overcome his blight.

As previously discussed, Dickens periodically alludes to Carton's potential. Carton is a "man of good abilities and good emotions," but the tragedy is that he is also "incapable" of productively channeling this potential. Consequently, at this juncture Carton's quiescent capabilities are actually flaws due to his stagnation of character. Carton thus epitomizes both Dickens's aversion to apathy and the Victorian fear of failure. Victorian poet Matthew Arnold observes that the Victorian middle classes were "not so much wicked as ignorant, narrow-minded, and suffering from the dullness of their private lives" (Norton 1353). Dullness carries the deadly shadow of despair until "tragedy in some form breaks through and awakens us" (Allender, *Told* 73). It is within this framework that suffering proves so vital; it possesses the power to enliven us and rescue us from the rot of lethargy. Even in its discomfort, pain is useful. Francis O'Gorman posits that Dickens challenges his readers through scenes of sorrow: "Dickens was testing them [his Victorian audience], setting a moral challenge of self-knowledge that aimed to defy the arresting power of social decay" (255). Pain thus fundamentally attests to our humanity; better to struggle than to decompose.

In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis mulls over the relationship between exhaustion and stagnation:

“to travel hopefully is better than to arrive.”
“If that were true, and known to be true, how could anyone travel hopefully?
There would be nothing to hope for.”
“But you must feel yourself that there is something stifling about the idea of
finality? Stagnation, my dear boy, what is more soul-destroying than stagnation?”
(487)

The boundary between inspiration and resignation is precarious. While arduous toil can be dangerous when it tempts us to despair, Dickens argues that languishing away is a far worse fate: “Tranquility reminds him of death. To be still is to sink into despair, to surrender to the moral rot of apathy” (Showalter 27). Carton contemplates desolation early in the novel, but fortunately his suffering ultimately inspires him to action. When he pursues physical suffering rather than resigning himself to mental suffering his reformation begins.

Indeed, Carton demonstrates the capacity for suffering to mark a character as heroic, a truth C.S. Lewis supports when he writes that “I have seen great beauty of spirit in some who were great sufferers” (*Pain* 108). When Carton voluntarily assumes Darnay’s death sentence, this promise of future pain paradoxically reveals the best in his character as the “light within him” (114) finally renders Sydney “sublime” (292). Even though Dickens’s famed biographer John Forster dismisses *A Tale of Two Cities* as “a hazardous and not entirely successful experiment” (qtd. in Shannon 286) he nonetheless praises “the picture of the wasted life saved at last by heroic sacrifice” (qtd. in Shannon 285). Carton’s saga thus redeems the novel even for Forster.

Madame Defarge, on the other hand, demonstrates suffering’s power to deform a character. Affliction uncovers the worst in her, and her struggles render her a raging revolutionary without a glimmer of compassion. Indeed, the haunting hatred smoldering

within Madame Defarge—her misanthropic vendetta against anyone standing in her way—brands her fiercely antagonistic character disreputable at best. When readers discover the heinous crimes committed against Madame Defarge’s family, there is evanescent sorrow. However, Dickens quickly reminds readers of how agony and hatred have molded Madame Defarge into a monster. Lucie beseeches Madame Defarge: “‘I implore you to have pity on me and not to exercise any power that you possess, against my innocent husband, but to use it on his behalf. O sister-woman, think of me. As a wife and mother!’ Madame Defarge looked, coldly as ever, at the suppliant, and said . . . ‘Judge you! Is it likely that the trouble of one wife and mother would be much to us now?’” (208). Madame Defarge’s rampant thirst for revenge is blatantly obvious in this interaction. Lucie attempts to bridge the gap between them by relating to Madame Defarge as a “sister-woman.” Nonetheless, Madame Defarge cruelly rejects both Lucie’s appeal and any hope of redemption. Later, Dickens observes that Madame Defarge is “absolutely without pity. If she had ever had the virtue in her, it had quite gone out of her” (281). Carton seeks redemption while Madame Defarge shuns it. Revolution elicits extreme emotions—whether positive or negative. The extremities of the Revolution reform Carton even as they deform Madame Defarge. She plunges wholeheartedly into the revolutionary chaos, and it drives her to her death.

3.3. Buried Alive

Situated amidst the emotion of the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities* is brimming with the fervor of change. Grahame Smith notes Dickens’s captivation by captivity, and Smith surmises that:

The intensity of living through the imprisonment of a beloved and respectable family seems also to have made an indelible impression which, again, was objectified in action as well as in creativity....Prisons are broken into, and their inmates released, most notably in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). (5)

Indeed, many characters in *A Tale of Two Cities* are freed from the captivity of both literal and metaphorical prisons.

Paradoxically, Sydney Carton's voluntary imprisonment allows him to escape the confines of his miserable life by dying so another man can live. His redemption commences the moment Charles Darnay is condemned to die and Carton resolves to assume the captive's affliction. Eugene Thomas Long premises:

We may be led to say, for example, that although we would not have sought suffering we are better persons for having undergone the experience of suffering. Here we find at the experiential level the truth of traditional theodicies in both secular and religious forms that argue that humans are not ready-made but are the result of a long process of self-transcending, of soul-making to use the traditional language. (141)

Carton's suffering undoubtedly renders him more human, for his affliction eventually transforms him from a shadow to a viable man. However, this is not always the case in the novel. Carton's captivity proves liberating, but Dr. Manette struggles to shake off his shackles. The doctor's dilemma is further complicated by the working title of the text: *Buried Alive*. Cates Baldrige suggests that portions of this novel "blur the distinction between life and death" (637). Carton's potential lies dormant (i.e. buried alive) until necessity compels him to substitute his life on the Darnays' behalf, but Dr. Manette's life post-prison plays upon the Victorian fear of regression. He has been physically liberated, but he occasionally slips back into his prison habits of shoemaking and mental disorientation.

Dr. Manette also represents Dickens's own exploration of the ramifications of imprisonment. Dickens continually searches for the redeeming aspects of imprisonment, but he also confronts the vileness of imprisonment, where even the comforting courtesies of everyday life are warped. When Charles Darnay arrives at the La Force Prison, he is aghast at the inmates who welcome him with:

Every refinement of manner known to the time, and with all the engaging graces and courtesies of life. So strangely clouded were these refinements by the prison manners and gloom, so spectral did they become in the inappropriate squalor and misery through which they were seen, that Charles Darnay seemed to stand in the company of the dead. Ghosts all! The ghost of beauty, the ghost of stateliness, the ghost of elegance, the ghost of pride, the ghost of wit, the ghost of youth, the ghost of age, all waiting their dismissal from the desolate shore, all turning on him eyes that were changed by the death they had died in coming there. (197-198)

These inhabitants now exist as mere whispers of the individuals they used to be. Darnay escapes this fate, but through his eyes Dickens allows us a glimpse of the madness Dr. Manette is recovering from and why he initially exhibits "a steadfastly vacant gaze" (30) wherein "No human intelligence could have read the mysteries of his mind, in the scared blank wonder of his face" (36). The doctor has been "Recalled to life" (7) after serving eighteen years buried alive in the Bastille. Dickens describes Dr. Manette as "the buried man who had been dug out" (37). Despite his physical liberation and subsequent intermittent displays of great strength, the shadow of Dr. Manette's past imprisonment continually clouds his existence. The doctor's initial reaction to freedom is similarly shrouded in ambiguity: "I hope you care to be recalled to life?" And the old answer: "I can't say" (37). Dr. Manette has spent nearly two decades living as a shadow, and family friend Jarvis Lorry wonders "what subtle powers were for ever lost to him, and what were capable of restoration" (37). From the outset of the novel, Dickens outlines the

interwoven themes of imprisonment, death, and renewal. Once imprisoned, life will never be the same—be it for better or for worse.

As previously argued in this thesis, imprisonment is often an invaluable agent in the redemption process. However, Dickens demurs to clearly correlate imprisonment and redemption. This relationship—like the relationship between life and death in this novel—is necessarily blurred due to its complexity. Yes, redemption can transpire through imprisonment, but Dickens does not denigrate the very real horror of prison. I suggest that Dr. Manette is the manifestation of Dickens’s attempt to discover *some* good amidst the evil of imprisonment while also signifying the merit of valiant struggle. Dr. Manette refuses to succumb to his suffering. O.C. McSwite observes that we “express refusal through the venue of *discourse* rather than confrontation” (184). Discourse suggests an ongoing engagement, and Dr. Manette’s interaction with his past suffering is indeed continual. Yes, his suffering in prison has left an indelible impression on his life, and it will forever haunt him. At times it seems to conquer him—when he lapses periodically into spells of disorientation and resumes his prison habit of shoemaking—but he continues to wrestle with the aftereffects nonetheless.

In a letter to friend—and fellow Victorian author—Wilkie Collins, Dickens hints at the purpose of the ambiguous prison vapor enveloping Dr. Manette:

My dear Wilkie,—I do not positively say that the point you put might not have been done in your manner; but I have a very strong conviction that it would have been overdone in that manner—too elaborately trapped, baited, and prepared—in the main anticipated, and its interest wasted. This is quite apart from the peculiarity of the Doctor’s character, as affected by his imprisonment; which of itself would, to my thinking, render it quite out of the question to put the reader inside of him before the proper time, in respect of matters that were dim to himself through being in a diseased way, morbidly shunned by him. I think the business of art is to lay all that ground carefully, not with the care that conceals itself—to shew, by a backward light, what everything has been working to—but

only to *suggest*, until the fulfillment comes. These are the ways of Providence, of which ways all art is but a little imitation. . . . I am very glad you liked it so much. It has greatly moved and excited me in the doing, and Heaven knows I have done my best and believed in it. Ever affect'ly yours, C.D. (95-96)

Dickens unveils the consequence of his authorial subtlety in relating Dr. Manette's ongoing discourse with redemption. The narrative of hope meticulously embedded within the threads of Dr. Manette's story is significant for its gradual ascent and continued struggle. Dr. Manette's character has undeniably been traumatized by his imprisonment, but his story does not end there. He refuses to lose hope or to retreat from his pain; rather, he attempts to utilize his past for good. At Charles Darnay's trial, Dr. Manette assures Lucie that "My old pain has given me a power that has brought us through the barrier, and gained us news of Charles there, and brought us here" (202). After confronting his imprisonment for his son-in-law's benefit, the doctor "was happy in the return he had made her [Lucie], he was recompensed for his suffering, he was proud of his strength. 'You must not be weak, my darling,' he remonstrated; 'don't tremble so. I have saved him'" (223). Of course, the tragic irony here is that Dr. Manette's own words—written years before while imprisoned within the Bastille—ultimately condemn Charles. Then again, if the doctor's redemptive efforts had not fallen short, Sydney Carton's heroism would never have been required.

James R. Kincaid muses that Dickens strives to draw his readers outside themselves, for this very tension elicits growth: "we have constructed our Dickens this way expressly so he can make us squirm. Who knows but that by squirming we might find a posture that will allow us to see and think in more radical—even more hopeful ways" (87). Struggling—or squirming—is of paramount importance to Dickens. As long as there is bold, courageous struggle, there is life and hope. Indeed, the paradox of

productivity through peril is alluded to from the enchanting first lines of *A Tale of Two Cities*: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair....” (1). Light, darkness, hope, and despair wage a complementary war; one cannot exist in a fallen world without the other. When they clash, the shadows that form often shed more light than pure light itself, which can prove too blinding. “A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other” (Dickens, *Tale* 8). Indeed, characters like Sydney Carton and Doctor Manette are compelling in their very enigmatic complexity. Carton seems like a hopeless case of internalized punishment leading to self-inflicted suffering, but Dickens uses him as the novel’s gloriously redemptive Christ figure. Dr. Manette leaves the Bastille in near corpse-like conditions, but he continues to fight against his past despite relapses into crazed cobbling. Dickens’s point is that these characters *continue to struggle* in the face of seemingly insurmountable opposition, and they exist as reminders that to wrestle valiantly is to fuel the hope of redemption.

Chapter 4: *Little Dorrit* and the Shadowy Shackles of Redemption

4.1. The Lurker is Charles, or, Dickens's Fascination with Story

We have witnessed Dickens's penchant for positioning himself squarely within the pages of such novels as *David Copperfield* (the story of Dickens's literary doppelganger) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (where Dickens dramatizes his personal suffering through the plight of Sydney Carton). Interestingly, in the Preface to *Little Dorrit*, Dickens states that "I became Little Dorrit's biographer" (6), and his immersion in her story is played out through the insight of Arthur Clennam who weds Amy Dorrit at the end of the novel. In this sense, Arthur is a double for Dickens in the text. Dickens is devoted to accurately depicting Amy's story, so he positions himself within the novel as the character who is more committed to Amy than any other. Indeed, Dickens allows Clennam to christen Amy "Little Dorrit," the "name much dearer...than any other" (578). Arthur Clennam's authorial (or Arthurial) status is affirmed through his naming the heroine and investing in her story.

Early in the novel, Arthur Clennam "resolved to watch Little Dorrit and know more of her story" (72), and Dickens intermingles his perspective with Clennam's when he writes: "This was the life, and this the history, of Little Dorrit; now going home upon a dull September evening, observed at a distance by Arthur Clennam" (93). Up to this point, there has been a marked separation between Amy and Arthur. He watches her "at a distance" and does not fully participate in her story until he is accidentally locked into the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison and forced to spend the night with the Dorrit family. During this long night, Clennam wonders "what chances there were of escape?" (103) which alludes to metaphoric as well as physical escape. Clennam's life outside prison is little

more than a living death, and he must confront his metaphysical shackles within the confines of prison. Although he does not realize it at the time, Clennam's accidental imprisonment foreshadows the forced imprisonment he must endure later in the novel after his business fails and he loses nearly everything.

Suffering and imprisonment force Arthur Clennam to recognize his need for Amy Dorrit's influence in his life; her faithfulness and compassion enable him to weather this season and ultimately taste redemption. Compassion is a key theme in their story. Clennam is intrigued by Little Dorrit's compassion for others to the extent that it touches his "inmost heart" (97). Shortly thereafter, Dickens relates that Clennam "was so moved by compassion for her, and by deep interest in her story as it dawned upon him, that he could scarcely tear himself away" (101). However, it is not until Clennam has confronted his own misery and his own need that Little Dorrit can completely express her compassion for him. "Remove anguish, and you remove mercy" (Allender, *Told* 171). Their circumstances are leveled as Clennam is forced to identify with the imprisonment that has so shaped Little Dorrit's life. Redemption is possible even within the prison walls; indeed, sometimes the prison walls actually facilitate the redemption process. Worlds apart socially, it is Amy Dorrit's and Arthur Clennam's shared pathos that unites them. Their tales converge in captivity, "that beginning of the destined interweaving of their stories" (Dickens 114). Paradoxically, the prison is the barren wasteland that becomes their place of renewal. True connection transpires during incarceration, as Arthur Clennam at last allows compassion to be both given and received.

4.2. The Mask is the Malady

From the outset, Dickens denotes *Little Dorrit* as a novel laced with paradoxes and dichotomies. The first book is entitled “Poverty” and the second “Riches,” while the first chapter is christened “Sun and Shadow.” By first clearly delineating between these opposites, Dickens can subsequently explore the blurred boundaries where things are *not* always as they seem:

In this darkest of Dickens’s novels, with its pensive imagery of labyrinths and prisons, we see the underside of Victorian authority, the shadows behind the sunny promise of bourgeois self-help, parliamentary democracy, and private charity. It was for this reason that Shaw called *Little Dorrit* “a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*” and a book which challenged the inertia, elitism, hypocrisy, and morbidity of the Victorian state. (Showalter 21)

During Dickens’s era, the Victorian prison of pretense and hypocrisy was enslaving multitudes of supposedly liberated individuals. Behind the upright façade of Victorian propriety existed a seedier truth, one that involved prostitution, poverty, and disease. Standing in stark contrast to the lavish lifestyles of the wealthy, the impoverished labored in deplorable working conditions. Dickens’s account of his tenure at a factory reads much like his descriptions of prisons. In a society where appearance was of paramount importance, hypocrisy, lies, and double standards abounded. Consequently, Dickens finds freedom in calling things what they are. “If optimism means a general approval, it is certainly true that the more a man becomes an optimist the more he becomes a melancholy man. If he manages to praise everything, his praise will develop an alarming resemblance to a polite boredom” (Chesterton 211). Optimism and change cannot come until the problem has been acknowledged and the mask stripped away, and often pain is the catalyst to enact this change. Agony—the great revealer—demands our attention.

Intriguingly, Miles Ogborn's research on the Victorian prison system reveals that "the prisoners' isolation was preserved in their passage through the prison by masks which hid their faces. These conditions, it was argued, would lead to a reformation of each prisoner's character and conduct" (295). Power and reformation were thus interconnected with a subversion of identity. However, according to Daniel Pool, "the Marshalsea and Newgate were characteristic of a cruder, more haphazard approach to punishment that sought only to confine and not to 'correct' or 'reform'" (139). A discrepancy existed even among Victorian authorities as to whether or not the prison confinement could reform. Regardless, by concealing each inmate's character, no cross-contamination could transpire; evil could supposedly be contained by repression. A prison inspection from the late 1830's states that "It is not in human nature that the mind should be stationary; it must advance in vice or in virtue" (qtd. in Ogborn 301). Consequently, solitary confinement punishes the vile and protects the (comparably) virtuous.

Once again, the Victorian fixation upon the relationship between stagnation, progression, and regression is evident. Ironically, Victorian prisons—like Victorian parlors—were places where masks should be kept firmly in place. Vulnerability was to be shunned: in prison because the more heinous criminals might contaminate the less offensive criminals and in parlors because reputation was valued above all else. Dickens attacks this conception in *A Tale of Two Cities* when he writes that "the leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature in attendance upon Monseigneur" (81). *Inside* these people are dying, but *outside* they present a spectacle of ghastly refinement. Moreover, when the Monseigneur is murdered, his "stone face...was like a fine

mask....” (Dickens, *Tale* 98-99). The disease has been his downfall; in life and in death he has been “handsomely dressed, haughty in manner, and with a face like a fine mask” (Dickens, *Tale* 83). Dickens demands that society strip away the mask of hypocrisy and remedy this malady by honestly categorizing good and evil, power and inequality. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens wryly quips:

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 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. A blessing beyond appreciation would be conferred upon mankind, if the tainted, in whose weakness or wickedness these virulent disorders are bred, could be instantly seized and placed in close confinement (not to say summarily smothered) before the poison is communicable. (597)

Through dark humor, Dickens draws attention to the intensely subversive nature of repression, which thwarts attempts to strictly standardize protocol. Perhaps the surface appears smooth enough, but beneath the façade lurks a dire dilemma. Disease attests to the true brokenness of society and the futility of power sans identity. Like repression, disease resists regulations; the difference is that disease outwardly manifests its ravages.

In “Discipline and Punish,” Michel Foucault discusses how “the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion” (553). Disease provides an excuse for division:

Against the plague, which is a mixture, discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis. A whole literary fiction grew up around the plague...individuals unmasked, abandoning their statutory identity and the figure under which they had been recognized, allowing a quite different truth to appear. But there was also a political dream of the plague, which was exactly its reverse: not the collective festival, but strict divisions; not laws transgressed, but the penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power; not masks that were put on and taken off, but the assignment to each individual of his “true” name, his “true” place, his “true” body, his “true” disease. (552)

For Dickens, the “true disease” is the “leprosy of unreality” which maims all who come into contact with it. The mask is the malady. Enslaving hypocrisy both within the prison walls and without it was warping the Victorian world. “It is Dickens’ almost unique genius to tell us not only how it feels to be alive in a class society but also how people shape their own character under the spell of inequality” (Fleishman 575). Dickens is not advocating an abandonment of order; rather, he challenges conventional notions of propriety that claim the visible is all that is viable while also checking the admiration of ignorant, faceless power.

Therefore, Dickens delves into problems of power to demonstrate that freedom does not necessarily entail autonomy. In a chapter of *Little Dorrit* aptly entitled “The Lock,” Dickens denotes the marked difference “between the free city and the iron gates” (93). Intriguingly, the typically dichotomous relationship between the free and the imprisoned is often conflated in *Little Dorrit*. According to Alexander Welsh, “By such comparisons Dickens begins to generalize his theme. If the shadow of the Marshalsea wall falls upon many who have never been near the place, then the prison has become something like a metaphor for life itself. A profound irony resides in the contrasting titles of the two halves of the novel, ‘Poverty’ and ‘Riches’: these two words may signify a distinction without a difference” (1239). Indeed, Amy Dorrit observes the striking similarities between her life within the Marshalsea and her life of relative post-prison refinement: “It appeared on the whole, to Little Dorrit herself, that this same society in which they lived, greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea. Numbers of people seemed to come abroad, pretty much as people had come into the prison; through debt, through idleness, relationship, curiosity, and general unfitness for getting on at home”

(536). If the Marshalsea is a “living grave” (Dickens 249) then life in the Victorian middle class is grave living. Furthermore, many characters in the novel who are physically unshackled—such as Arthur Clennam and Miss Wade—are more metaphysically confined than Amy Dorrit, who lives in the Marshalsea Prison. Granted, Little Dorrit technically has the freedom to enter and exit the prison as she pleases, but her identity has nonetheless been shaped within the prison walls.

4.3. “Do you mean that a prisoner forgives his prison?”

Miss Wade, one of the most sinister characters in the novel, incredulously utters the above words (serving as this section’s subheading) in response to Mr. Meagle’s assertion that “I dare say a prisoner begins to relent towards his prison, after he is let out” (36). How characters view their captivity—whether physical or metaphysical—dramatically impacts whether or not their stories are redeemed. Miss Wade’s disillusionment with life has erected a metaphysical prison of the mind. In a chapter entitled “The History of a Self-Tormentor,” Miss Wade relates how previous pain and betrayal fashioned her resolve to avoid vulnerability at all costs. “Imprisonment, as the novel abundantly shows, can be unfairly imposed from without; it can also be, as Miss Wade’s story shows, perversely self-imposed....Miss Wade is a self-tormentor in the sense that she cannot ever allow herself to be the recipient of benevolent words or actions” (Duckworth 111). She has insulated herself against love and compassion to the point her character is perpetually veiled. When we first meet her, there is a shadow “falling like a gloomy veil across her forehead” (38). Later, Dickens describes how Miss Wade’s outer composure suggests “(as a veil will suggest the form it covers), the

unquenchable passion of her own nature” (348). Miss Wade is a prime example of the mask being the malady. She is “scornful,” “repressed,” (347) and steeled against the reality of redemption. Dickens is leery of repression, because the darkness being hidden often resurfaces in mangled manifestations far worse than the original secret. When secrets are unveiled and masks lifted, the issues can subsequently be acknowledged and dealt with constructively. Only then can healing begin.

Standing in stark contrast to Miss Wade is Little Dorrit, a character born and bred within a physical prison. Amy Dorrit has also experienced pain, but for her it has proven reforming rather than deforming. Edwin B. Barrett suggests that “liberation through selfless devotion” (214) is Little Dorrit’s secret to escaping the confines of the Marshalsea. “For this reason Amy can nurse the Marshalsea sufferers and can drink of the Marshalsea waters without imbibing their taint. The prison is no prison to her; it is her home and her freedom” (Barrett 214). I suggest that the good which transpires within the Marshalsea—Little Dorrit’s quiet heroism in particular—is another instance of Dickens’s quest to wring something worthwhile from the devastation of imprisonment. Marisa Sestito postulates that often in Dickens’s work, “hope and dejection, sun and shadow, are woven into the same pattern” (42). She seems to see this tendency more as a weakness; Dickens’s writing is thus perpetually overshadowed by implausible divisions. However, I read these Dickensian dichotomies as rife with paradoxical potential. As previously discussed, ugly and evil things are purposeful in revealing the merit in their beautiful and good counterparts. Similarly, captivity serves to magnify the joys of freedom; without bondage there can be no liberty. However, to truly be freed, the imprisonment must eventually be overcome. Arthur Clennam’s captivity is a necessary but *temporary* ordeal.

Clennam must contend with three separate imprisonments. First, he is confined within the metaphysical prison of his mind. Second, Clennam is accidentally imprisoned overnight in the Marshalsea, which affords him the opportunity to become better acquainted with Amy Dorrit at the outset of the novel. Finally, at the end of the novel he is imprisoned in the Marshalsea for his own debt after his business partner commits grievous errors leading to their financial ruin. These imprisonments impress Clennam with his need for redemption. After the woman he fancies himself in love with—Minnie “Pet” Meagles—tells him that she is marrying another man, Clennam decides that he is too old for love and happiness, and “he thought—who has not thought for a moment sometimes—that it might be better to flow away monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensibility to happiness with its insensibility to pain” (218). This moment is the crux of Clennam’s story. He can either choose to relinquish hope and allow his life to stagnate, or he can search for renewal. Dan Allender cautions against the dangers of abandoning hope in the face of adversity: “They did not protest; they did not despair. Instead, they died a deeper death and gave up desire” (*Path* 156). Even though Clennam momentarily contemplates the relative bliss of insensibility, he never *completely* relinquishes his resolve to keep moving—at least crawling—ahead with his life. Often, Little Dorrit fuels this desire, although Clennam cannot acknowledge her impact upon his life until he completely identifies with the imprisonment that has shaped her but not crushed her.

Shortly before Arthur Clennam begins his second tenure in the Marshalsea, he is “fast subsiding into despair” (719). Despair and hope have continually battled within Clennam, and his nature “had been disappointed from the dawn of its perceptions, but

had not quite given up all its hopeful yearnings yet” (48). Unlike Miss Wade, devastation has not hardened Clennam against vulnerability. He is tempted to despair, yes, but he does not *remain* in this despair. T.N. Grove maintains that “Clennam forces himself into a kind of psychological prison” (751) after Pet Meagles rejects him. However, this disappointment is necessary to open Clennam’s eyes to the even deeper love he eventually shares with Little Dorrit. “The word *passion* comes from a Latin root that means ‘suffering’” (Allender, *Told* 74), and it is through their shared suffering that Clennam comes to understand his potential and Little Dorrit’s love.

Upon learning that his failed business will result in his incarceration, Clennam names the Marshalsea his prison of choice: “‘I would rather,’ said Clennam, ‘be taken to the Marshalsea than to any other prison’” (750). In selecting the Marshalsea, he also aligns himself with Little Dorrit as he reminisces about her life within those very walls. Indeed, “it is Clennam’s willingness to experience the confining illness of the Marshalsea...that releases him from his paralysis. In the prison he studies himself, and meditates upon his suppressed feelings for Little Dorrit” (Showalter 39). Clennam confronts his metaphysical shackles in the same prison where Amy searches for significance. Her quest has perpetually been to find purpose, and it is in prison that Arthur needs her most.

When Arthur transitions from viewing Amy as a child to viewing her as a viable romantic partner, he participates in both his redemption and in hers as he at last allows her to freely demonstrate her love for him. Amy Dorrit is “freed through a kind of hermeneutical faith: that the meaning of the past is redeemable in the present, and that there is a spiritual reading of obscure lives...Rushing to the aid of the fallen, the heroine

finds her place” (Booth 196; 209). As Amy is liberated through helping others, she can in turn free them. However, she can only assist them through their consent. Previously, Clennam has been so committed to aiding Amy and to “smoothing her rough road” (Dickens 205) that he is blinded to her capacity to help him. The Marshalsea Prison has paradoxically contributed to their freedom, and Amy pledges that “I am rich in being taken by you, I am proud in having been resigned by you, I am happy in being with you in this prison....O if poor papa may only know how blest at last my heart is, in this room where he suffered for so many years” (850). Consequently, Clennam and Little Dorrit are wed within the Marshalsea, but they leave the prison behind them at the end of the novel. By all accounts they have indeed proven prisoners who have forgiven their prison as “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 forward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar” (859-860). Imprisonment has proven redemptive for them—indeed it is a vital component in their union—but ultimately they *leave it behind*.

Conversely, Amy’s father William Dorrit cannot shake the prison shackles even after his release. Little Dorrit is melancholy at times, but she nonetheless seeks to understand her situation. She neither ignores nor berates her past, and this healthy acknowledgement eventually allows her to move past her past. William, on the other hand, embraces the “prison taint” to the point that it becomes a fixed aspect of his identity as he is “drawn into the inmate culture” (Showalter 39). While William Dorrit takes several strides toward redemption, ultimately he fails to initiate the pivotal moment of agency. As Stephen Wall notes in the Introduction to *Little Dorrit*: “It is possible to

maintain, or invent, one's character, as Mr. Dorrit so conspicuously does. Being inside can even seem preferable to life outside, once you get used to it...Freedom comes too late to change Mr. Dorrit's nature; for him the Marshalsea wall is never down" (xii; xiv). Even after being released from prison, William cannot move forward because he either forbids his family to speak of his past imprisonment or else he retreats behind the delusional façade he has erected regarding his life story.

Dickens does note that Amy Dorrit's "love alone had saved him to be even what he was" (249), but unfortunately Amy cannot save William on her own. He must choose to embrace redemption, but whenever William nears this point he turns back in fear: "O despise me, despise me! 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" (246). William has convinced himself that he is incapable of redemption, so he fashions a faux world for himself wherein he is the heralded "Father of the Marshalsea." Later in this same scene Dickens writes that William "went on in the same wild way, though it was gradually breaking down into a miserable whining" (246). Immediately thereafter, William cries, "And yet I have some respect here. I have made some stand against it. I am not quite trodden down.... Well then. Amy! Amy! Is your father so universally despised? Is there nothing to redeem him?" (246). Dickens deems this outburst of William's supremely selfish as he weeps "tears of maudlin pity for himself" (246). Ultimately, this scene depicts William's inability to accept the reality of his situation. "Thus, now boasting, now despairing, in

either fit a captive with the jail-rot¹ upon him, and the impurity of his prison worn into the grain of his soul, he revealed his degenerate state to his affectionate child” (246-247). Amy patiently bears with William’s tantrums and eventually her father acquiesces to her, “suffering her to embrace him” (246). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the meanings of “suffering” is “to submit patiently to.” William thus suffers to submit to his daughter’s embrace in prison, although he cannot symbolically embrace the redemption that his suffering could entail were he to completely comprehend the reality of his situation.

Imprisonment brings out the best in Amy as it provides an arena for her compassion to thrive. Conversely, her sister, Fanny, reacts to imprisonment by becoming snobby while William Dorrit becomes delusional. William refuses to face his imprisonment either during or after his incarceration:

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. (Dickens 79)

William has given up; rather than calling him to fight for his freedom, his reaction to imprisonment has rendered him frightfully eccentric.

Indeed, William Dorrit proudly flaunts his title as he welcomes Clennam to prison in a manner much like a free man would have welcomed a guest into his home: “You are welcome to the Marshalsea, sir. I have welcomed many gentlemen to these walls. Perhaps you are aware—my daughter Amy may have mentioned—that I am the

¹ The endnote in *Little Dorrit* explains that jail-rot was “Traditionally a wasting disease or infection resulting from confinement in jail. Here moral rather than physical” (947). Dickens thus highlights the internal origins of William’s external suffering.

Father of this place” (97). William Dorrit adheres to Mrs. General’s wretched wisdom that “Nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at” (501) and it warps him into perpetually presenting “the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall. It took a new shape, but it was the old sad shadow” (501). The Marshalsea shadow sinisterly blankets William, because he has done nothing to arrest the shadow’s capacity for evil or attest to the shadow’s capacity for good. Consequently, he perpetually dwells in the shadow realm where light and dark converge. “If we refuse to face the damage, the dysfunctional patterns set in motion to handle it will continue to exacerbate the wound” (Allender, *Path* 15). Deeply wounded—“crushed”—as Dickens says, by imprisonment, William Dorrit continues to flounder because he never fully faces what has crushed him. When he does reference his pain, he is enamored of his suffering, and the rest of the time he fails to recall his pain at all. Neither scenario provides a healing, redemptive, liberating path. The first option exalts his imprisonment in a twisted, masochistic manner while the second option seeks to blot out his past entirely, thus leaving no foundation upon which to build.

Both “Poverty” and “Riches” prove restricting for William Dorrit in that “much of the same pattern of mutual displacement connects the two halves of the book, in which the Dorrits’ lives, even though their fortunes are reversed, are closely connected by transposals and denials with those led in the Marshalsea” (Edgecombe, “Displacements” 377). After being physically liberated from prison, William reproofs Amy:

I have suffered. Probably I know how much I have suffered, better than any one—ha—I say than any one! If I can put that aside, if I can eradicate the marks of what I have endured, and can emerge before the world a—ha—gentleman unspoiled, unspotted—is it a great deal to expect—I say again, is it a great deal to expect—that my children should—hum—do the same, and sweep that accursed experience off the face of the earth! (503)

Rather than impart to his children a legacy of valiant struggle and hope culminating in redemption and thanksgiving, William continues to waste away in the deadening shadow of the prison. Were William to confront the pain of his past in light of his present hope, his whole world would change dramatically. Moreover, his family would also be allowed to explore the purpose of their time in the Marshalsea without whining or despairing.

In addition to laboring in the looming shadow of the Marshalsea, William is haunted by another shadow: his brother, Frederick Dorrit, a phantom of a man who is “dead without being aware of it” (Dickens 255). Earlier in the novel, Frederick confesses: “I am merely passing on, like the shadow over the sun-dial” (95). Both Frederick and William are wasting away as they delusionally drift through life. They depict opposing aspects of the same dilemma of being shackled by *something*: “Frederick the free, was so humbled, bowed, withered, and faded; William the bond, was so courtly, condescending, and benevolently conscious of a position; that in this regard only, if in no other, the brothers were a spectacle to wonder at” (238). Through the doubling of the Dorrit brothers, Dickens displays the festering futility of life—whether in prison or out—lived as a shadow. Both have been broken by suffering. Ironically, William says about Frederick, “Misfortune crushed him. He had not power of recoil enough, not elasticity enough....” (243) which echoes (shadows) Dickens’s own description of William’s plight as previously discussed in this paper.

4.4. Light and Life, Misery and Magnificence

After leaving the Marshalsea Prison midway through the novel, Amy wrestles with the paradox of the physical freedom from prison which has left her feeling trapped

and useless. There she had her work, but here idleness exhausts her: “To have no work to do was strange, but not half so strange as having glided into a corner where she had no one to think for, nothing to plan and contrive, no cares of others to load herself with” (Dickens 488). Amy derives her purpose from helping others, and here everything she sees seems to reflect the paradox of a free life spent wasting away. Everywhere she sees “misery and magnificence wrestling with each other” (489) and the “splendid rooms” and “heaps of wonders” are contrasted with the “squalid villages” where “there seemed to be nothing to support life, nothing to eat, nothing to make, nothing to grow, nothing to do but die” (490). She searches for some middle ground where there is purpose. In Amy’s eyes, both the ridiculously rich and the devastatingly destitute lead lives devoid of significance. The wealthy have nothing to do but bore themselves to death while the poor have nothing to build upon. Amazingly, she misses the Marshalsea where at least she was needed.

Little Dorrit is the light in the Marshalsea, and her “capacity to lighten its darkness” (Wall xvii) dispels the dark shadows around Arthur Clennam. Clennam’s conversation with Mr. Meagles at the outset of the novel serves as a foreshadowing of his future interaction with Little Dorrit. Clennam tells Mr. Meagles that “Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words” (35), and Mr. Meagles responds, “Light ‘em up again!” (35). Mr. Meagles’s philosophy about pain is, “If I am grave about it, I am not at all sorrowful” (34). Ironically, he is referring here to his daughter’s death. Mr. Meagles is sometimes grave himself, but dealing with his daughter’s going to her grave has imparted him with the strength to encourage others. The source of strength that inspires Clennam to rekindle his hope is Little Dorrit, a

character “inspired to be something which was not what the rest were, and to be that something, different and laborious, for the sake of the rest” (86). Amy’s sacrificial existence brightens the lives of those around her. Clennam sees her as “a strong heroine in soul; and the light of her domestic story made all else dark to him” (404). Suffering opens his eyes to see her in a new light.

Clennam has restricted himself to viewing Little Dorrit as a child; consequently, he cannot see her as anything else until their circumstances converge in captivity when he recalls their previous interaction: “The time came when he remembered it well, long afterwards, within those prison walls; within that very room” (406). His imprisonment is a pivotal role reversal for them. Previously, he has come from society to visit her in prison, and he misses her when she exits the prison to enter society: “He sadly and sorely missed Little Dorrit. He had been prepared to miss her very much, but not so much. He knew to the full extent only through experience, what a large place in his life was left blank when her familiar little figure went out of it” (543). Similarly, she misses him during her introduction to society. She fondly recalls the Marshalsea and pens Clennam a letter confessing that “I suffer from homesickness. . . . So dearly do I love the scene of my poverty and your kindness. O so dearly, O so dearly!” (580). Everywhere she looks, Little Dorrit sees “ruins of the old Marshalsea—ruins of her own old life—ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it—ruins of its loves, hopes, cares, and joys. Two ruined spheres of action and suffering were before the solitary girl often sitting on some broken fragment; and in the lonely places, under the blue sky, she saw them both together” (639). The site of their sanctification is the Marshalsea; Clennam unwittingly goes to prison to

be set free. In prison, in his pain, Clennam comes to understand his relationship to Little Dorrit:

how much the dear little creature had influenced his better resolutions. None of us clearly know to whom or to what we are indebted in this wise, until some marked stop in the whirling wheel of life brings the right perception with it. It comes with sickness, it comes with sorrow, it comes with the loss of the dearly loved, it is one of the most frequent uses of adversity. It came to Clennam in his adversity, strongly, and tenderly. (752)

Little Dorrit's love allows those around her to be vulnerable. For William Dorrit, Amy's love is a welcome respite from his charade as the Father of the Marshalsea, but her love cannot impart him with the pivotal moment of agency. For Clennam, however, this vulnerability is his healing and also his freedom. "The lack of a creative relationship with a woman has impelled him into all the prisons he has found for himself, and a woman must now extricate him from his isolated state of mind" (Grove 753). Clennam's tenure in prison reverses his and Little Dorrit's roles and provides her with the purpose she craves and him with the hope he needs: "He roused himself, and cried out. And then he saw, in the loving, pitying, sorrowing, dear face, as in a mirror, how changed he was;...Little Dorrit, a living presence, called him by his name" (789). This reflection is reminiscent of earlier in the novel where she can see his potential, but he is as yet unable to cherish this significance: "He never thought that she saw in him what no one else could see. He never thought that in the whole world there were no other eyes that looked upon him with the same light and strength as hers" (403). Clennam struggles to hope, and Little Dorrit sees the best in him; he is tempted to despair, and she returns to comfort him.

William Dorrit may profess himself to be the "Father of the Marshalsea," but Dickens deems Little Dorrit "the head of the fallen family" (87). Indeed, at one juncture

of the novel, “Little Dorrit sat down in a golden chair” (254). Fittingly, her (symbolic) throne is characterized by brightness, and her existence is characterized by perseverance:

No matter through what mistakes and discouragements, what ridicule (not unkindly meant, but deeply felt) of her youth and little figure, what humble consciousness of her own babyhood and want of strength, even in the matter of lifting and carrying; through how much weariness and hopelessness, and how many secret tears; she drudged on, until recognised as useful, even indispensable. That time came. (86-87)

She refuses to relinquish her hope despite the bleakness of her situation. Suffering sanctifies her, and her “light” step alludes to more than just her slightness of figure. She is her sister Fanny’s “Anchor” (616), and her Uncle Frederick Dorrit professes, “We should all have been lost without Amy” (108). Even her father’s pitiful condition is somewhat sanctified by her compassion: “how true the light that shed false brightness round him [William]!” (112). Little Dorrit desires a purpose; poignantly, her mere existence provides a purpose for Arthur Clennam. Dickens describes Clennam as a man of depth despite—even because of—his past disappointment:

He was a dreamer in such wise, because he was a man who had deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without. Bred in meanness and hard dealing, this had rescued him to be a man of honorable mind and open hand. Bred in coldness and severity, this had rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart. Bred in a creed too darkly audacious to pursue, through its process of reversing the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his Creator in the image of an erring man, this had rescued him to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and to have hope and charity....A disappointed mind he had, but a mind too firm and healthy for such unwholesome air. Leaving himself in the dark, it could rise into the light, seeing it shine on others and hailing it. (180-181)

Dickens pointedly names suffering as the instrument that has “rescued” Clennam from meanness while also cultivating his inner light. Arthur Clennam is reformed through his discursive struggle with suffering. We witness him confess to Mr. Meagles that he fears his inner light has been extinguished, but Dickens demonstrates otherwise. Yes, Arthur is

tempted to despair, but—unlike William Dorrit—he does not remain in his despair. Clennam confronts his demons and identifies his dreams. In Little Dorrit’s family life, Clennam sees a “sunken wreck he had a dream of raising;...his purpose of helping her” (113). Suffering softens Clennam’s and Little Dorrit’s characters and cultivates their compassion.

In this novel so inundated with paradoxes, Dickens seeks to wring some reformatory reconciliation from supposedly disharmonious opposites. Arthur Clennam is metaphysically imprisoned in society until he finds redemption in prison, and Amy Dorrit is productive in prison but despondent in society. The Marshalsea crushes William Dorrit’s spirit, but the site of his damnation becomes the site of Clennam’s and Little Dorrit’s redemption. Dickens was a novelist “beset by a sense of impotence. He witnessed a society that ‘hourly strengthened...[his] old belief that our political aristocracy and our tuft-hunting are the death of England,’ a society that offered not ‘a gleam of hope’” (Edgecombe, “New Morality” 489).² Dickens, appalled at the apathy and self-indulgence of Victorian society, determined to create characters who could offer this “gleam of hope” society was so sorely lacking. Writing is thus a means of grappling with despair for Charles Dickens, and his struggle with suffering and redemption is truly discursive as he pens the paths of redemption for his characters.

Another of Rodney Stenning Edgecombe’s articles discusses Dickens’s frustration with the religious realm where “the church has nobody to unify, conducting its services in an epistemological void....Only at the wedding of Little Dorrit and Clennam does a church window confirm the redemptive force of a sacrament based on love and union”

² The quotation marks within the quotation denote Edgecombe’s citing John Holloway’s reference to Charles Dickens’s letter to John Forster dated February 3, 1855. *Little Dorrit* was published two years later, in 1857.

(“Reading through the Past” 67). Redemption for Amy Dorrit and Arthur Clennam has transpired—paradoxically—in prison. Nonetheless, they exit the prison—and the novel—to return to the society that had previously proven so oppressive. Prison was a place of purpose and renewal for them, but they cannot remain there. Society has hampered them as well, but they return to this realm “looking at the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun’s bright rays, and then went down...into a modest life of usefulness and happiness” (Dickens 859). At the end, the light and life, misery and magnificence converge to create a new era.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

For Charles Dickens, redemption is a discourse in that it is both an ongoing struggle (or conversation) with suffering and that Dickens seeks redemption through his words. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens writes that “I wallow in words” (625). Yet again, this intensely autobiographical novel reflects the conflation of protagonist and author as they reel in the realm of language. One of the most famous paintings of Dickens is Robert Buss’s “Dickens Dream” where Dickens sits in his study surrounded by his characters. Nina Auerbach pinpoints the significance of this painting which depicts “Dickens dreaming the characters who give him life” (202). Paradoxically, Dickens claims reality through his dreams and his fiction. Writing is both laborious and glorious for Charles Dickens; it is his ultimate attempt to reconcile the disparate realms that so intrigue him.

Indeed, the literary character dichotomously yet harmoniously “grafts the divine to the human, the timeless to the changing” (Auerbach, *Demon* 201). Struggling via the pen enables Dickens to engage with the shadows of his past that still sometimes haunt him. By sculpting literary creations, he seeks to make sense of his personal tragedy, highlights the horrors of prison, uncovers the redeeming aspects of incarceration, comments on the hypocrisy of Victorian society, delineates the deforming internalization of punishment, and above all reflects the truth that pain is an unavoidable aspect of living in a broken world. “It thus ‘fits’ with the story we tell about ourselves and the world that texts and authors should point to realities in the world, to entities beyond themselves” (Wright 62). Dickens simultaneously issues a warning and imparts hope to a multitude of fellow strugglers: suffering *will* transform. Will it prove deforming or reforming?

Fittingly for novels so focused on the significance of shadows, there are also varying shades of redemption in Dickens's novels. Part of Dickens's determination to reconcile opposing realms necessitates shadowy middle ground where ambiguity abounds. Is Miss Havisham truly redeemed? She does beg Pip's pardon, but she dies before she has the chance to prove whether or not her repentance is real. Is Dr. Manette redeemed, or do his relapses into the crazed cobbling reminiscent of his imprisonment sinisterly overshadow his quest to shake of the shackles of the Bastille? I suggest that for Dickens's purposes, the answer to both these broad questions is emphatically yes; both Miss Havisham's and Dr. Manette's stories reflect redemption in that they at last initiate the moment of agency and choose to struggle despite the odds. There are relapses (in Dr. Manette's case) but these relapses testify to the genuine agony of his imprisonment. Were he to completely relinquish his struggle and relent to the temptation to despair (thus allowing his past imprisonment to define his current existence) the suffering he endures would be deforming. Fortunately, his continued struggle in the face of adversity brands his suffering as reforming. Redemption's mission is to render those it encounters real. Therefore, it is appropriate that Dickens depicts his characters' ongoing interactions with their struggles, thus making them more relatable. This continual struggle is a pivotal part of the discourse of reformation; if redemption were easy or simplistic, it would scarcely be worthwhile.

Moreover, different characters have undergone varying levels of suffering, so it makes sense that some characters struggle with shadows of the past more than other characters. Sydney Carton is spared the affliction of past demons since he exits the novel by achieving the most magnificent act of his life. Arthur Clennam and Little Dorrit

transition from the literal Marshalsea Prison to the metaphoric prison of Victorian society, but now they have the knowledge of the past and the hope of a future together to guide them. Other characters experience some measure of reformation in their lives; they thus encounter one shade of redemption. William Dorrit occasionally initiates redemptive strides, but he never *fully* engages with the reforming capabilities of his suffering. Overall he remains detached and delusional, and his story never truly reflects the reality of redemption. The temptation among characters like William Dorrit is to “wear a guise of normalcy, a veneer of acceptability” (Allender, *Path* 105). However, in order to experience redemption, characters must remove their masks. Likewise, Dickens wields the pen in an attempt to make sense of the pain in his own life that through his literary vulnerability others might come see more clearly.

As Edvard Munch surmises, “Art grows from joy and sorrow, but mostly from sorrow. It grows from man’s life—I do not believe in an art which has not forced its way out through man’s need to open his heart. All art, literature, as well as music must be brought out with one’s heart’s blood” (qtd. in Stillion 289). Consequently, Dickens must embrace his suffering to an extent in order to benefit creatively from it. The danger for him—as well as for his literary characters—would be to acquiesce to the temptation to despair rather than continuing to productively struggle. Other authors, such as Marcel Proust, concur:

When a great artist can speak in his art of his suffering, and other human beings can recognize in that statement something that is true of humanity in general, this is, in itself, an act of partial redemption for Proust. The spark of art leaps the gap of exile and solitude that, in everyday life, separates us from our fellowmen and threatens our experience with eternal solipsism. (Rivers 437)

Pain can prove liberating, and Dickens's discourse with suffering is an enduring example of struggling as a means of redemption. Amanda Anderson notes "Dickens's acute interest in the reformation of character" (16). Heroism and pain go hand in hand; while it is possible to have pain without heroism, it is impossible to have heroism without pain. According to Dickens, suffering should drive us to discover our best, most heroic qualities as we strip away the deforming masks "the leprosy of unreality" has made. Likewise, redemption promises something more magnificent than never having made mistakes or experienced suffering, because redemption contributes to a more meaningful reality.

Authorship also contributes to reality by affording the author—and his readers—new perspectives on perplexing issues. The very process of writing renders events real even as "we are entranced by the human side of literary texts and their creators" (Dooley 138). Witnessing narrative in black and white validates experience and lends perspective. As Jonathan Culler explains:

stories also have the function, as theorists have emphasized, of teaching us about the world, showing us how it works, enabling us—through the devices of focalization—to see things from other vantage points, and to understand others' motives that in general are opaque to us. The novelist E.M. Forster observes that in offering the possibility of perfect knowledge of others, novels compensate for our dimness about others in "real" life. (91)

Engaging with literary characters—whether through creating them or reading about them—results in refreshing epiphanies. A keen observation regarding a character's motivation often provides critical insight into a similar real-life situation. Stories move us because we can relate to the truth glimpsed through our literary doubles. Nina Auerbach attests that "Like his scandalous successor Oscar Wilde, Dickens luxuriates in the spectacle of his own martyrdom" ("Performing Suffering" 15). Indeed, Dickens does

embed many personal aspects within his novels, but that is precisely one reason they have remained such powerful pieces of literary scrutiny. Oscar Wilde—Dickens's named partner in "martyrdom"—once wrote that "the way of paradoxes is the way of truth" (55). Reflecting the truth of the human condition yet concurrently imparting hope is the ultimate act of reconciling conflicting realms. After all, "The very definition of hope is its difference from certainty" (Booth 214). Paradoxes provide a captivating space both for investigating the similarities in supposed opposites and for reveling in the surprises couched within this very struggle. Embedded within the discourse of suffering is the remarkable hope of redemption.

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